

Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy

Women and the Church

By

Eva Catafygiotu Topping

Light and Life Publishing Company
Minneapolis, Minnesota
1987

Acknowledgements

The Greek Orthodox Theological Review

The Church Woman

Journal of Modern Greek Studies

Hellenic Chronicle

Greek Accent

Greek Star

Some of the chapters of this book have appeared in print in the above magazines or newspapers. We cordially acknowledge their permission to reprint.

Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy.....	iv
Reflections of an Orthodox Feminist.....	vi
Thekla the Nun: In Praise of Woman.....	xv
Kassiane the Nun and the Sinful Woman.....	xxviii
Blame It on Eve.....	xxxvi
Saint Febronia: Equal or Second Class?.....	xxxix
Patriarchal Prejudice and Pride in Greek Christianity, Some Notes on Origins.....	xli
Saint Photeine, the Woman at the Well.....	xlix
Orthodox Women Face Challenges.....	li
Belittling Eve.....	liii
March 25, 1985.....	lviii
The First Christos Anesti (Christ is Risen).....	lx
St. Mary Magdalene.....	lxii
Heroines and Halos.....	lxiii
In Defense of the Men of a Certain Parish.....	lxx
Make a Joyful Noise!	lxxii
Women Hymnographers of Byzantium.....	lxxii
St. Katherine: Glorious and All-Wise Martyr.....	lxxxiv
Three Outstanding Byzantine Women.....	lxxxv
Martyrs and Apostles: Saints for February.....	lxxxviii
Orthodox Eve and the Royal Priesthood.....	lxxxix
Orthodox Women and the Iconic Image of Christ.....	cv
At Forty Days.....	cvii
At Forty Days – A Postscript.....	cix
December Gifts.....	cxi
In Their Own Write.....	cxiii
Philothei the Athenaia.....	cxv
Demonstrating for Orthodoxy.....	cxvii
Oh Susanna.....	cxix
Women Bearing Myrrh.....	cxxi
St. Paul and the Women in Romans 16.....	cxxiii
St. Elizabeth and the Dragon.....	cxxv
Notes.....	cxxvii

To the Reader

The book in your hands consists of thirty-two articles and lectures. Each is an organic whole, independent of the others. Thus each can be read separately and understood.

Nevertheless, all are concerned with the history and the present status of women in the Orthodox Church. They were written over a period of seven years, from 1980 to 1987.

All the essays are based on my research in the Scriptures, particularly the New Testament, in the writings of the church fathers, in Byzantine hymnography and hagiography. I read the relevant sources and texts in the original Greek. (Hence the appearance of some key words in Greek.) In this way I tried to come as close as possible to Orthodoxy's tradition relating to women - its origins and development.

Before being assembled in this volume, these articles and lectures were addressed to a variety of audiences. Sometimes the audience was exclusively Orthodox, at other times completely non-orthodox. The lectures were delivered either at my parish church, or at Hellenic College, or at a diocesan assembly banquet, or at an ecumenical convocation of 3000 church women from all parts of the world. Some of the articles were published in scholarly journals, others in magazines and newspapers.

As a result, there is a variety of style. It may be scholarly, journalistic, and even personal. Also, some repetition inevitably occurs. Unintended though they may be, these repetitions serve a useful function. A life-long student, I have long since come to appreciate the importance and necessity of repetition in learning and understanding a subject, no matter what it is. From this prospective this collection of essays can be viewed as a work which, like a symphony, includes major and minor themes, repeated in variations. What is major in one essay may appear as a minor theme in another.

Whether major or minor, variations or not, all contribute to the book's subject, the history, roles and status of Orthodox women in our church. Today no one can doubt the significance and complexity of this subject. It concerns not only Orthodox women, but Orthodox men as well, laity, clergy and hierarchy.

Therefore, serious discussion of women's place and participation in the life and ministries of our church is needed in order to understand and meet the changes and challenges of the times in which we find ourselves. More importantly, prejudice-free study of this issue is crucial if we are to achieve the new creation inaugurated by Christ, in which the divine image present in Orthodox women is at last recognized and accepted as reality.

Eva Catafygiotu Topping

May 5, 1987

The Feast of Saint Eirene the Great Martyr

Fredericksburg, Virginia

Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy

It is well known to all that the Orthodox Church has "fathers." We are constantly reminded of their presence and power. For example, every Divine Liturgy ends with the familiar prayer, "Through" the prayers of our fathers..."

Much less well known is the fact that our church also has "mothers." Reminders of their existence and influence come very few and far between. Our "mothers" do not appear in the liturgical petitions of the Divine Liturgy. Yet Orthodoxy has thousands of "mothers." They are the women saints whose names are inscribed on almost every single day of our liturgical calendar. With the notable exception of the Theotokos and a handful of major figures, however, our women saints are generally ignored

More glorious and powerful than all the angels and saints, Mary is, of course, the first "mother" of the Orthodox Church. Her *presbeia* (intercession) forms a dominant theme in countless hymns and prayers in which Orthodox Christians sing Mary's praises and appeal to her maternal love for help and protection.

In addition to the Theotokos, the church also has many other noble "mothers." The four evangelists record the discipleship of loyal women like Saints Mary Magdalene, Martha and Mary of Bethany and the Myrophoroi. According to the Gospels, women were first at the Cradle and first at the Cross.

Likewise, the Book of Acts and the Epistles furnish evidence of women's activities and leadership in the early church. They served as founders of churches, as deacons, apostles, teachers, preachers and prophets. Thus, our church commemorates among others, St Hermione, healer and prophet; Saints Thekla, Apphia, Iounia, Priscilla, Mariamne and Photeine, apostles who spread the word of Christ in a pagan world; Saints Olympia and Suzanne, deacons in Constantinople and Palestine, respectively.

Martyrs constitute the largest category of holy "mothers." By their sacrificial deaths these theophoroi (godbearing) women insured life for the church. Along with hundreds of their sisters, the Great Martyrs Katherine, Barbara, Marina, Eirene, Christine and Euphemia "imitated the death of Christ" and paid blood tribute to their church. From the first prosecutions of Christians and in every crisis women have defended Orthodoxy with their lives; Saints Anna, Theodosia, Maria and Anthousa in the religious straggles of Byzantium during the eighth and ninth centuries; Saints Philothei, Chryse, Kyranna, Akylina and Argyre during the four hundred years of Turkish rule in Greece.

Like the "fathers," the "mothers" enjoy rights of intercession in heaven. With confidence, therefore, Orthodox faithful may address prayers and petitions to female saints, our "mothers." Likewise, many "mothers" possess miraculous powers, and are distinguished as thaumatourgoi (miracle-workers). To mention a few examples, Saints

Zenais, Sophia, Asklepias, Athanasia, Elizabeth, Potamia, and Sebastiane are called thaumatourgoi. The synaxaria recount their many miracles. The existence and significance of “mothers” in the church should surprise no one. Christ not only welcomed women to equal discipleship, He also commissioned a female disciple, Mary Magdalene, to be the first apostle, the first to proclaim the Resurrection. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit baptized with fire both the women and the men.

In fidelity to Christ’s teaching and praxis, the primitive Christian Church recognized no inequalities or discrimination on the basis of national origin, of social condition, or of sex. The church governed itself according to the baptismal creed quoted in Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for you all are one in Christ Jesus.”

It seems, therefore, that there is no tradition or theological reason for excluding our “mothers” from liturgical prayers. Why can’t we say, for example, “Through the prayers of our fathers and mothers, Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us.”

Reflections of an Orthodox Feminist

God is spirit and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24). Christ spoke these words to a Samaritan woman by the well. It was an extraordinary encounter and conversation. At that time Jewish and Gentile men thanked God that they were not women. Jewish rabbis never talked to women in public. They certainly never discussed theology with a member of the sex generally assumed to be inferior. No wonder then that the male disciples were astounded (John 4:27) when they saw their teacher openly talking with a woman who also belonged to a despised religious minority, instructing her how to worship God, and revealing for the first time that he was the Messiah (John 4:26) promised by the prophets.

In our church the woman by the well is known as St. Photine (Feb. 26) and is recognized as an apostle. For, in fact she brought Christ his first converts, according to the Gospel of St John. The woman acted on her own initiative and out of her own faith. This remarkable episode is important for my views on women and the church.

Now let me backtrack. Some years ago-quite by accident, or was it providence?-I began to study Byzantine hymnography, that is, the hymns of the Orthodox Church. This study has proved exciting and rewarding. First, as a philologist, a lover of language, especially Greek, I have delighted in exploring the use of post-classical Greek in Byzantium's sacred poetry. Unique in world literature, Orthodox hymnography gains grace and strength from this ancient language. Secondly, from these hymns this birth-right Orthodox woman came to appreciate the ideals and spirituality of her church. Someone has called these Greek hymns a poetical encyclopedia. But they are more than that. The hymns go straight to the heart of Orthodox faith, encouraging the spirit to have hope in the new creation where there will be no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, between slave and free, between male and female. What I read in the hymns confirmed this vision of a new order and ekklesia.

Let me briefly explain what I mean. The inspired poets of the hymns present a single, dominant image of God, Christ Philanthropos. God is portrayed as humankind's friend, forever patient and forgiving, always loving unconditionally and without exclusions. Who else would have dined with sinners and talked theology with a Samaritan woman? In thousands of Orthodox hymns divine love or philanthropic recurs like a glorious refrain. Related to this is a second major theme of Orthodox theology and hymnography, theosis or deification. Regardless of sex, race or social class, every person can realize the divinity within him or herself. Through many centuries, theologians and hymnographers of Eastern Christendom have proclaimed that we can all become gods. In this teaching of the Greek Church lies more hope for progress from error to truth, from bondage to freedom, from the old to the new earth that was inaugurated when God was born of a woman.

In conjunction with the hymns, in order to understand them I had to read constantly the Scriptures and the writings of the Greek Church Fathers. Read together, the Scriptures, the Fathers and the hymns led me to appreciate an Orthodox tradition that was dynamic, creative, and inclusive, and open-ended for spiritual growth.

More recently my hymnographical studies took an unexpected turn, opening up a new area of investigation. During Lent I was reading one day the Lenten hymn *On Fasting* written in the sixth century by Christendom's greatest liturgical poet. St Romanos the Melodos. In it there is a miniature "paradise lost," Romanos presents the all too familiar story of Genesis 3 in very lively and dramatic fashion. The wily serpent persuaded Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. She, in turn, persuaded Adam. So both disobeyed God and were punished by exile from Eden. As had the author of I Timothy 2:13, the Byzantine hymnographer piles all the blame on Eve. In addition, he expresses sympathy for innocent Adam, woman's first victim. The drama concludes with two verses in which Romanos calls Eve "a snake more dangerous and snakier than the snake" (M-T, # 51, 'Iθ' 3-4). The hissing sounds of these verses effectively turn Eve into a snake. The vehement attack on Eve shocked me, as well as the American translator of Romanos' hymns.

At that point I began to wonder about the anti-woman prejudice of my favorite hymnographer, the singer of Christ Philanthropos. Was sexist prejudice an aberration on his part or did he reflect a tradition of the church? Thus from my hymnographical studies was born a new research interest that was not merely academic.

I began to take notes whenever in the hymns or the Fathers I ran across mention of Eve, women, or references to woman, the female sex. Without I any effort on my part, the cards rapidly multiplied. Very soon the accumulated notes indicated that Romanos was far from being a lone voice. I had on my desk evidence of a widespread, fully developed anti-woman theology, complete with selected texts, appropriate imagery and exegesis. Common also to other branches of Christianity, androcentrism, patriarchal prejudice and pride lie deeply imbedded in Orthodox tradition. For almost two millennia this sexist theology has determined the attitudes and praxis of the church. Set down in the ecclesiastical books and inscribed in the experience of women as well. Its existence cannot be denied any longer. Nor can we dismiss such a powerful and ancient tradition as either flights of rhetorical hyperbole or as all incidental current of monastic influence. Surely the time has come to discuss it seriously and openly.

Since the authority of the Fathers is often invoked in defense of women's subordination in and outside the church, it is instructive to review briefly their position. The proper place of women was succinctly stated in the fifth century by the influential dogmatic theologian, St Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria. This fervent champion of the Theotokos expressed patristic consensus with these words: "the male must always rule; the female must everywhere remain in second class" (PG 68. col. 1068C). No Father then or Orthodox theologian now disputed the view that cosmic order, taxis in society and

church, requires second class status for women. Yet the Fathers knew and sometimes quoted Genesis 1:27 and Galatians 3:28, texts which affirm women's creation in the image of God, and the equality of the sexes in the ekklesia of Christ. In constructing their theology of women they ignored these affirming texts in favor of those that sentenced the entire female sex, with only one exception, to segregation, silence and subordination. The preferred texts of androcentrism are well known from repeated use through many centuries; from the Old Testament, the second and third chapters of Genesis: from the New Testament, passages such as Ephesians 5:24, Colossians 3:18, I Peter 3:7, I Timothy 2:11-15. 1 Corinthians 11:1-3. It is significant that no sexist proof-text comes from the four Gospels.

The learned and brilliant Greek founding fathers of Christianity justified women's subordination on two grounds. First, women possessed a special nature, divinely ordained. "Female nature" appears repeatedly in Greek patristic writings and in Byzantine hymnography. Weakness is said to characterize "female nature." Scriptural sanction for this description is provided by I Peter 3:7, where woman is called the "weaker vessel". Unlike males who reflect the glory of God (1 Corinthians 11:7), females, descendants of a spare rib, are considered derivative, secondary beings without autonomy. Thus, "female weakness" forms a fundamental premise of traditional theology of woman.

Consider this example of patristic proof of female inferiority. St Clement of Alexandria (ante 215) wrote that by removing a rib from Adam to create Eve God forever purged males of all weakness. Therefore he concludes that males are whole and perfect, females fractured and imperfect. The fact that man's beard is older than Eve further proves his 'superior nature' (PG 8. col. 581A-B).

The Fathers spelled out in great detail the various weaknesses of woman's alleged flawed nature. St John Chrysostom (ob. 407) had a low opinion of women's intellect and capacity for reason. Hence, he declares, it is wise for women to be confined to the home, performing unimportant, undemanding domestic chores (PG 62. col. 500). The golden-tongued archbishop of Constantinople described the female sex as emotional, fickle, superficial, garrulous and servile in temperament (PG 47. cols. 510-511; 61. col. 316; 62. col. 548). Chrysostom held these conventional sexist prejudices despite his own personal experience of women. His mother was renowned in pagan as well as in Christian circles. In Constantinople he had enjoyed the company of cultivated women deacons, who proved to be his most loyal supporters. St Epiphanius of Cyprus (ob. 403) attributed these defects to the second sex: instability, weak-mindedness, frenzy and vanity (PG 42. cols. 740D, 745B). St Gregory the Theologian (ob. c. 390) believed that by nature women are "ostentatious and self-indulgent" (PG 35. col. 800A).

These and similar characterizations are repeated over and over in prose and poetry, in sermons and hymns. They created a demeaning and negative image of women. This

monolithic caricature denies women individuality and autonomy, the plausibility of growth and maturity.

By naming Eve as the source of sin and evil the Fathers further bolstered their sexist theology. Because of woman Eden fell to grief. Scapegoating Eve and her daughters did not begin with my poet Romanos. Originally descriptive, the folktale of Genesis 2 and 3 became for the church prescriptive. Therefore, women deserve their fate, pain in childbirth and subservience to husbands (Genesis 3:16). Female subservience to males is divine punishment for the crimes committed by the first woman. Thus St Gregory of Nyssa (ob. 394) sees the hand of God in the unequal relationship of husband and wife. It is, he writes, by divine commandment that a wife is "not mistress of herself," Without her husband the wife has no existence. Her dependence on him is total: "if she is separated from him even briefly, it is as if she has been deprived of her head" (PG 46. col. 332C).

Second in the order of creation and first in the order of sin, women were doomed to inferiority and subordination in a patriarchal culture and church. This sexist theology sanctified patriarchal institutions and structures that oppressed women. It would be impossible to measure or to exaggerate the effect of this ideology on the lives of countless generations of women. To deny its existence or influence is an attempt to deny history, to stonewall. Acknowledged or not, it survives, surfacing in contemporary discussions of women's "special ministries" befitting their "special gifts" and in drawing distinctions between "masculine" and "feminine" vocations. If indeed God is spirit and must be worshiped in spirit, one has to ask what gender has to do with Christian vocations, liturgy and service.

The daughters of Eve, the first sinner, have, nevertheless, been part of the church from the beginning. Before Pentecost a woman, St Photeine, brought Christ the first converts. The record of women's contributions can be read in the lives of Orthodoxy's galaxy of female saints. Across the centuries many women have proved faithful unto death, from St Thekla, the first woman martyr, St Paul's *mathetria* who preached and baptized, to the neo-martyr Chrysa (October 13), martyred in the eighteenth century. Our haloed heroines are listed in church calendars and their lives are recounted in the synaxaria. They include apostles, deacons, evangelists, prophets, missionaries, church mothers, ascetics, miracle-workers, builders of churches and convents conveners of ecumenical councils, confessors as well as martyrs and great-martyrs. Because of their sex however women saint are less known and receive less honor than their brother saints. This was brought home to me dramatically when my parish church was dedicated. During the consecration (enkainia) the female saint whose name the church bears was barely mentioned. No relics of a female saint were included among those placed in the altar of St Katherine's Greek Orthodox Church. And there was no female participation in the dedicatory ceremonies.

Orthodoxy's women saints, moreover, did not entirely escape the stigma attached to their sex. The hymns written in honor of women saints document the vigor and durability of our sexist tradition. In the corpus of Greek hymns to women saints there is hardly one that did not denigrate the female sex. They contain innumerable references to "female weakness" the "shame of women" the "rotteness" of "female nature." In their hymns the church poets faithfully echoed orthodox androcentric teachings and dogmas.

Like the Fathers, the hymnographers never fail to connect the female saints with their first mother who is also the first sinner. Adam and his delinquencies, however, are not mentioned in hymns to major saints. From hundreds of available examples one will suffice. The long hymn by Demetrios in honor of "Our Holy Father Andronikos and his wife Athanasia" (October 9) will illustrate how sexist prejudice tempers praise. The hymnographer praises Athanasia for being a good wife. She is not a bad wife like Eve, whose disastrous advice led Adam astray. Next Demetrios compliments her for not allowing the "emptiness" of her nature to weaken her determination to achieve holiness. Finally, he commends Athanasia for dressing like a monk. Male grab will aid her liberation from her female nature (MR I, 368, 371). Backhanded compliments like these are a predictable feature of hymns to female saints, the most glorious and obscure alike.

The highest compliment which the hymnographers can bestow on saints of the inferior sex is that they have succeeded in transcending their femininity and become men. In his hymn to St Mamelchtha (October 5), a Persian convert who was stoned to death, an anonymous poet honors her as *theophoros* and *staurophoros*. At the same time he vividly evokes the standard pejorative image of women. Addressing Christ, he exclaims, "How great are your works, O incomprehensible Savior. For you gave her strength to escape completely from her rotten and weak nature." (AHG II, 31).

St Zenais (October 11), a kinswoman of St Paul, did not get better treatment in the hymn by St Germanos I (ob. 733), Patriarch of Constantinople. Zenais was a skilled physician, an apostle who "taught the word of truth" and an ascetic. Her eulogist congratulates her for success in "masculine struggles" and for victories won by the "masculinity of her mind" (AHG II, 90, 100). Apparently only males were blessed with minds.

In the androcentric scheme of things humanness meant maleness, spirit, sanctity and goodness were identified with males; with females, body, corruption and sin. To be female was somehow to be less than human to lack human wholeness. And so a desert mother, the Abbess Sarah took offense when a desert father called her a woman. She responded to the insult, "A woman I am in sex, but not in spirit" (PG 65, col, 420D). Another time she returned the insult, calling the desert fathers women.

From Eve's oppressive legacy to women only one of her daughters was excluded. Mary, the human mother of God, escaped the "disfiguring shame" of her sisters. She is

exalted above all creatures on earth and in heaven. Greek theologians and church poets form a single choir to sing her superiority, especially to all other women. She is likewise unique among women. In hundreds of hymns to the Theotokos she is proclaimed to be “beyond nature,” “above women,” “alone among all the generations of women.”

In Eastern Christendom the Theotokos enjoys semi-divine honor. She is celebrated on five major holy days. Byzantine hymnographers strain language and symbols to describe her “divine glory”. Hymns and prayers to Mary occur in all of our liturgies. Icons and churches testify to her omnipresence in the Orthodox *oikoumene*. Sermons in praise of Mary, preached by emperors as well as patriarchs, fill thick volumes.

Orthodoxy’s unlimited veneration of the Theotokos, it is true has given the church a “feminine face.” It is equally true that veneration of the Theotokos has not brought honor of full dignity to women. History shows that the “trickle down” theory does not work. Mary’s “divine glory” has, in fact, isolated her from the rest of womankind. The chasm that separates the Mother of God from God’s daughters is visible and palpable in the architecture and *praxis* of our church.

In the apse of many Orthodox churches a majestic and beautiful Theotokos occupies sacred space. The entire congregation, male and female, worships in her presence, conscious of her grace and power. The sacred space around the Theotokos and close to her is, however, accessible only to males. It is strictly off-limits to all women. Altar boys serve in the *hieron*, but no altar girls. Because of our sex, women are prohibited from serving and worshipping God at the altar. As a result of this separation and exclusion, women experience alienation from the body of Christ. The shadow of Eve has not vanished in the brightness of Mary’s “divine glory.”

Where can we look for a model to bring about a change, to turn away from the traditional sexism of the institutional church? Where else than to the founder of Christianity and to the community he gathered around him? The oldest of the four Gospels, Mark opens a window to the past, enabling some light to shine into the present.

In unvarnished prose St Mark reveals Jesus’ liberating vision of community and service. By word and deed the Son of Man challenges outworn creeds, conventions and rituals. Rejecting ancient regulations for fasting Jesus advised against the futility of band-aid solutions and compromise: “but put new wine in new skins” (Mark 2:22). Traditional religious observances were less important to him than the physical and spiritual welfare of people. “The Sabbath was made for the sake of people, not people for the sake of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Jesus warned the religious establishment against confusing man-made traditions with divine laws. “You put aside the commandment of God to cling to human traditions... How ingeniously you get around the commandment of God in order to preserve your own tradition” (Mark 7:8-9).

When he lived among us, taboos never hampered or restricted Christ's ministry. Ritually unclean and untouchable for twelve years, the woman with the issue of blood was cured, restored to her community, when she touched Jesus' garment (Mark 5:25-34). The dead were also ritually untouchable. Contact with death caused defilement. But Jesus touched the dead daughter of Jairus, took the girl by the hand and restored her to life (Mark 5:39-42).

The iconoclasm of Jesus' life-style and ministry made him as he bitterly remarked a prophet without honor in his own country among his own people (Mark 6:1-6). His relatives thought him crazy and once tried to take him into custody (Mark 3:21). Jesus, however, all the way to the cross based his diakonia on divine law, the two greatest commandments, love of God and love of neighbor as oneself (Mark 12:30-31).

Within the community gathered around Jesus, as described in the oldest Gospel, diakonia was the ruling principle, its only guideline. Leadership and discipleship depended on service to humanity and love of God. Christ himself exemplified diakonia selfless giving of love, acceptance of redemptive suffering and death. "For the Son of Man," he explains, "did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

The male disciples however, did not understand the meanings of these words. They did not comprehend leadership as service, as Mark makes clear. Thinking in conventional patterns of power and domination, the disciples quarreled about who should be first among them (Mark 9:33-35). The brothers James and John indeed asked for positions of privilege when Jesus should enter into glory (Mark 10:35-40).

Nor did Jesus' male disciples fulfill the requirements of discipleship. In the fourteenth chapter of his Gospel St Mark records their failure. Individually and as a group the inner circle of male disciples failed to follow and to serve their teacher at the time of his passion and death. Peter, James and John slept during Christ's agony in Gethsemane. Judas, another member of the twelve, betrayed him with a kiss. When Jesus was arrested, "abandoning him, they fled, all of them" (Mark 14:50). Finally, Peter denied him three times. With this demonstration of selfishness, lack of spiritual sensitivity, cowardice, to say nothing of perfidy, the paradigm of masculine superiority, of the stronger vessel, collapses. At the time of testing the male disciples proved not to be the Jesus' true disciples.

In the same bleak chapter St Mark begins to record the real discipleship of the female members of the community around Jesus. Their story begins with the anointing of Jesus by a woman disciple at the home of Simon the leper in Bethany (Mark 14:3-9). A contrast to the behavior of the male disciples is explicit.

Tradition has not preserved the name of the woman who alone had understood Christ's three prophecies of his death (Mark 8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34), as well as the meaning of his messianic mission and kingship. This unknown woman disciple by her "good deed" assumed a traditional male role. In ancient Israel male prophets anointed the heads of kings. In the new creation a woman anoints the head of the King of Kings, who was soon to die on the cross for the life of the world.

With the end of the fourteenth chapter the male disciples disappear from the oldest account of Jesus' death and resurrection. And the female disciples enter Christian history, the only witnesses to the pain of Golgotha and to the joy of the first Pascha.

As Jesus died a brutal death, forsaken even by God (Mark 15:34), a loyal group of women disciples stood by; watching. "Among them were Mary of Magdala. Mary the mother of James the Younger and Joset, and Salome. When he was in Galilee, they followed and served him" (Mark 15:40). The two important words are "followed and served" since they define Christian discipleship. The faithful group also included many other women who had come up to Jerusalem with Jesus.

Step by step the women followed the drama, to the cross and beyond. When Joseph of Arimathaea laid the body of Jesus in a tomb, "Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of Josef were watching and took note of where he was buried" (Mark 15:47).

Then early on Sunday morning Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of Joset, and Salome went to the tomb, saw that the entrance stone had been rolled away. And the angel told them that Jesus had risen (Mark 16:1-8). Women were thus the first to learn of the resurrection. According to the Gospel of Mark, eye-witness testimony for the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus comes from the lips of the women disciples. Hence in Byzantine sermons and hymns they are called *mathetriaí* and *euangelistriaí*, titles that were also assigned to the Samaritan woman by the well.

Thus women, not men, proved to be the true disciples. It was Salome, and not her selfseeking sons James and John, who was the real disciple of Christ. The so-called "weaker vessel" turned out to be the stronger. By demonstrating strength, faith, understanding and loyalty the women refute the sexist stereotype of "female nature." Yet the stereotype never lost its hold on the attitudes and praxis of the church. It survives, albeit in somewhat muted and coded forms.

St Mark also introduces into the history of the church a most remarkable woman disciple, Mary of Magdala, the first person to see and speak with the Risen Lord. "He appeared first to Mary the Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons" (Mark 16:9-11). Like the Samaritan woman, she went to tell what she had experienced. But Mary Magdalene was less successful. When the male disciples heard that Jesus was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe her. All four Gospels attest the prominence of Mary Magdalene in the intimate circle around Jesus and in the

primitive church. All except Luke acknowledge her apostolic primacy (Mark 16:9-11; Matthew 25:9-10; John 20:11-18).

At a time when women counted for little or nothing at all, Mary found dignity and freedom in the movement led by Jesus. Fearlessly she defied conventional domestic female roles. She walked with Jesus all the way from Galilee to Jerusalem, serving and being served, sharing a diatonic of love and liberation. To follow him was never easy and sometimes dangerous. And one day Jesus died on the cross. The male disciples deserted him. But Mary Magdalene, with other women, still followed him, grieving and watching.

On the third day grief turned to joy God exalted Mary Magdalene above all his followers, when He appeared and spoke to her by the tomb. Commanding her to proclaim the resurrection, God empowered a woman to become the apostle to the apostles. "Go to my brothers and tell them... Mary the Magdalene went and announced to the disciples; I have seen the Lord. And that he had said these things to her" (John 20:17-18). From a woman's experience and lips first came the *euangelion*, the good news of life and liberation for all of God's children, of love's triumph over evil and death. A true disciple and the first apostle, St Mary Magdalene wears the brightest of halos.

These remarks began with the Samaritan woman with whom Jesus discussed theology. They end with Mary Magdalene to whom he revealed the resurrection. In their names the Gospels record women's discipleship and apostolic leadership in the infant church.

It is my hope that in their memory women of faith will claim their heritage; that men and women together will turn away from androcentrism and sexist prejudices to equal discipleship and diatonic. God is spirit and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth.

Thekla the Nun: In Praise of Woman

In the prologue of the *Theotokarion* published in Venice in 1796 Nikodemos Hagioreites listed and described twenty-two holy and inspired melodies, the authors of the sixty-two canons in honor of the Theotokos included in his collection.ⁱ Beginning with the name of Saint Andrew of Crete, whom Byzantine tradition credited with the creation of the kanon this list included many of Byzantium's most illustrious hymnographers. Among them are named Saints John Damascene, Theodore the Studite, Joseph the Hymnographer and John Mauropus of Euchaita. In this thisasos of hymn-writing monks, abbots, and bishops, two figures stand out conspicuously: one emperor, Theodore II Laskaris of Nicaea (reg. 1254-1258), and one woman, Thekla. Nikodemos clads his list with her name: και Θεκλα η γλυκυτατη Ηχῳ.ⁱⁱ

Thekla the Nun, as she is most frequently identified,ⁱⁱⁱ survives in a single a hymn,^{iv} a kanon in honor of the Theotokos.^v Thanks to this hymn found in a number of manuscripts,^{vi} this ninth-century nun joins an exclusive group of Byzantine women hymnographers.^{vii} Three contemporaries, Kassia,^{viii} Thekla, and Theodosia,^{ix} along with Palaiologina, who probably lived in the fifteenth century,^x comprise this small group. All four composed kanons. All four were nuns. Kassia and Theodosia were 'pieuses abbesses' of convents in the imperial city of Constantinople.^{xi} It is probable that Thekla was also an abbess. Judging from the strong personality projected in her kanon, Thekla too might have governed a convent whilst composing sacred poetry.

In fact, Thekla's canon reveals that she was more than a sweet echo, the author of hymns. She was a self-confident woman, proud not only of herself, but also of her sex. In her encomium to the Theotokos the most exalted of all women, Thekla did not hesitate to praise other lesser women, the women martyrs and the consecrated virgins of the Church.

Women indeed, dominate Thekla's hymn. It was written by a woman, about women and for women. The few masculine figures who appear in it are related to the Theotokos: Joachim, her father;^{xii} Moses,^{xiii} Jacob,^{xiv} and Gideon,^{xv} whose experiences of the deity prefigured God's birth from a virgin mother; Christ, Mary's divine son.^{xvi}

From the first to the last verse the Theotokos is the principal figure, the object of Thekla's encomium. She is the "Thou" to whom the poet addresses all but three strophes.^{xvii} With a graceful image the encomiast introduces her subject at the beginning of the first ode. It is a ceremonial presentation to the Theotokos of Thekla's hymn:

Ἐγκωμιῶν σοι
αἰθαλὲς διαδημα
νυν ἐξυφαίνει πνευματι

Now, O Holy One,
The church spiritually weaves for you
an everlasting crown of praises.

η εκκλησια, σεμνη

vv. 1-4

The ekklesia (another feminine figure) formally presents to the Theotokos an everlasting crown of praise. Likewise, all six prayers of the canon are addressed to the Mother of God.^{xviii} Throughout the reader is aware of the benevolent power and presence of the Theotokos.

The second ubiquitous feminine presence is that of the sacred poet herself. Thekla stands always before the Theotokos, offering to her both praise and prayer.^{xix} Seldom does she withdraw from the foreground. Her voice is heard in the liturgical 'we' as well as in the first person singular. Thekla signs the kanon with her name in the acrostic. She also proudly pays homage to her patron saint, Thekla the Protomartyr.

In addition, women from the Scriptures and apocrypha are named in this canon. Ann, the mother of the Theotokos is mentioned once.^{xx} Thekla alludes to three episodes from the New Testament in which women are the protagonists. These allusions were undoubtedly immediately recognized by Thekla's congregation of nuns. In vv. 61-64 she echoes the acclamation of the unknown woman in Luke 11.27-28. The refrain of Ode Z', repeated four times, is derived from Elizabeth's salutation to Mary on the occasion of her visit after the Annunciation, recorded in Luke 1.46. Finally in a personal prayer Thekla likens herself and her hymn to the widow who gave her mite, as related in Mark 12.41.-44 and Luke 21.1-4.^{xxi}

Nor are references to women in general lacking. There are at least a half dozen references to the female sex. The word γυναικες and the phrase η φυσις του θηλεος each occurs three times.^{xxii} Nuns are specifically referred to twice.^{xxiii}

In several respects Thekla's kanon is unique in the extensive published corpus of Byzantine hymnography. I know of no comparable hymn. Although for a millennium male hymnographers in Byzantium sang the praises of the Theotokos, this hymn is the only one by a woman which has survived. Women martyrs were also hymned by male bards in Byzantium. Masculine prejudice and condescension, however, all too often marred their hymns. In Thekla's canon women are treated with the respect which was usually denied them in the sacred poetry of the Church.^{xxiv}

Thekla the Nun was fortunate in the time of her life. In the history of the ninth century, women figured prominently in various ways. Empresses, hymnographers, nuns, and lay women helped secure the victory of Orthodoxy over iconoclasm. A disapproving historian gave them due credit: (the idols, for such they were now held, were secretly cherished by the order and sex most prone to devotion; and the fond alliance of the monks and females obtained a final victory over the reason and authority of man.)^{xxv}

When the century opened, a woman ruled the empire in her own right, boldly signing herself *Basileus*. Athenian-born Eirene was Europe's first woman, monarch.^{xxvi} In 787 she had restored Orthodoxy and the veneration of icons, ending five decades of tumultuous conflict. Iconoclasm was finally liquidated by another empress in 843. After the death of her husband, Theophilos, Theodora returned Church and empire to the path of Orthodoxy.

Eirene and Theodora are both commemorated on the Feast of Orthodoxy when a grateful Church acknowledges its debt to two imperial Orthodox women. From the beginning of the iconoclastic controversy in the eighth century women of all social classes, nuns and laywomen alike, had proven themselves to be staunch iconophiles, loyal to the traditions of the Church. They endeared prosecutions and suffered martyrdom in defense of icons. Theodosia of Constantinople, a nun, was one of the first iconoclastic martyrs. When the first iconoclastic emperor, Leo the Isaurian, ordered in 729 the removal of the icon of Christ from the Chalke Gate, a "crowd of zealots and women"^{xxvii} led by Theodosia tried to prevent the desecration. Martyred for her faith, this activist nun quickly became the object of a popular cult in Constantinople.^{xxviii}

During this crisis women went beyond their conventional pursuits, whether private or religious, and participated publicly in the defense of traditional Orthodox beliefs and practices. It is no accident that three of the four women hymnographers of Byzantium belong to this period. Kassia, Thekla, and Theodosia all responded to the challenge and threat of iconoclasm. From the correspondence of Theodore the Studite we learn that Kassia suffered persecution because she assisted iconodule prisoners and exiles.^{xxix} Theodosia composed a canon in honor of Saint Ioannikios soon after the death of this iconophile champion.^{xxx} In her canon Thekla proclaims the triumph of Orthodoxy and honors the women of the Church who made it possible.

At the same time Thekla's kanon discloses her own autobiography. This Byzantine woman, typical of her time, was a devout Orthodox believer. She was also a sacred poet and nun, dedicating herself entirely to the ekklesia. Accepting the Christian vision of women and the position assigned to them. Thekla fulfilled herself. In the course of this essay we shall discover the woman behind the sweat echo described in Nikodemos' prologue.

Thekla's encomium is a conventional canon composed of nine odes (actually eight in number since the second ode is almost always omitted).^{xxxi} Set in the second tone, it was composed to be sung at vespers on Tuesday. Unlike Kassia who sometimes composed new melodies for her hymns,^{xxxii} Thekla used older well known heirmoi for the odes of her kanon.^{xxxiii} Together with the kathisma,^{xxxiv} the canon consists of one hundred ninety-eight verses, divided into strophes of varying lengths, the shortest being four verses long and the longest nine.

Twenty-seven of the thirty-two strophes appear to be original compositions by Thekla. The other five, the final strophes of Odes Γ', ΣΤ', Ζ', Η', Θ', are also found in a canon attributed to Klement, thus producing a difficult problem of authorship.^{xxxv} Formed by the initial letters of the strophe, the acrostic varies according to the arrangement of the strophes. In the text published by Eustratiades the name of Klement appears along with that of Thekla in the acrostic: 'Εγκωμιάζει την Θεοτοκον Θεκλα . Κλημεντος.^{xxxvi}

In the text of Nikodemos, however, the strophes are so arranged that only Thekla's name appears in the acrostic, formed by the initial letters of the last two odes.^{xxxvii} Despite the confusion and uncertainties which result from the inclusion of the five strophes attributed to Klement, there seems to be no reason to deny Thekla's authorship of the canon. A feminine point of view prevails throughout, distinctive and clear.

Although Thekla's voice is the only one heard, it does not become monotonous. She varies her voice by speaking sometimes in the liturgical 'we,' and at other times in the individual 'I'. Here, as in many Byzantine hymns, the liturgical and individual voices coexist harmoniously. Within a single hymn the sacred poet may speak both for the Church and for himself. To these two frequently heard voices Thekla adds a third, seldom heard in Byzantine hymnography. In the final ode she sneaks in behalf of a particular group inside the larger community of the Church, in behalf of women consecrated to God. Exceptionally, the Byzantine convent is heard in Thekla's canon. The same rare voice again is heard in Kassia's hymn for Holy Saturday.^{xxxviii}

Since Thekla composed her encomium to the Theotokos for use in the liturgy, she appropriately speaks most often in the first person plural, which embraces the sacred poet and the congregation. Thus 'we' the Church praise the Theotokos:

Μυστικῶς ἀνυμνοῦμεν σε
μητὲρ Θεοῦ, φωναῖς ὀρθοδοξίας

Spiritually we praise you,
O Mother of God, with voices of Orthodoxy.

vv. 65-66

From the frequent repetition of verbs of 'hymning' in the first person plural evolves a dynamic image of Thekla and the *ekklesia* singing the praises of the Theotokos.^{xxxix} The sacred poet accomplishes her *diakonia*, enabling the Church to sing with Gabriel.^{xl}

Likewise, the same communal voice of the Church is heard in three liturgical prayers, each addressed to the Theotokos.^{xli} In the first of these the people of the Church appeal to the Theotokos, their refuge and protector. This prayer expresses the unquenchable trust of the Byzantines in the Theotokos:

Καταφυγὸν
καὶ σωτηριὸν πόλιν σε

With faith we all beseech you,
the refuge and city of salvation,

παντεξ πιστως πρεσβευομεν^{ξλι}
 Μαρια μητηρ Χριστου
 και δεομεθα θερμως
 δεξαι τας δεησεις ημων
 των σων πιστων οικετον

Mary Mother of Christ.
 And we urgently beg you,
 accept these prayers
 of your faithful servants.

vv. 28-34

Byzantium's sacred poets, however, did not always conceal themselves within the solemn petitions which they pronounced for the corporate praying Church. Very often the poet prayed for himself alone. In these prayers he combined petitions for personal salvation with appeals for poetic inspiration. Faith such a prayer Saint Romanos the Melodos concluded one of his masterpieces, asking God to forgive his sins and to grant beauty and truth to his hymn.^{xliii}

Thekla includes two private or personal prayers in her kanon. The first appears as the kathisma, at the end of Ode ΣΤ'. Modeled on the heirmos *Ευσπλαγχνίας υπαρχουσα πηγη*, it is a penitential prayer.^{xliv} In contrast to the model which is a liturgical prayer, Thekla's prayer is intensely personal, concerned solely with the welfare of her own soul:

Ραθυμιαν φυχης μου την χαλεπην	The sad indifference of my soul and the
και καρδιας μου πωρωσιν, μητερ Θεου	hardness of my heart, O Mother of God

vv. 105-106

As an individual suppliant the poet addresses an intimate appeal to the Theotokos.^{xlv} Using the first person singular pronoun four times in the six verses, Thekla beseeches the Theotokos who is her only recourse,

ημονη ελπις μου και παρακλησις my only hope and prayer

v. 110

The tone of contrition which dominates the first prayer disappears completely from the second, with which the final ode begins. Here Thekla is the sacred poet bearing gifts of praise to the Theotokos. Notwithstanding the *topos* of modesty which is expressed in comparison to the widow and her mite, Thekla's words convey personal dignity and professional pride in her vocation as church poet:

Κλινον μοι το ους σου, Παρθενε
 Παναγια, ανυμνουση πιστως
 και ως δωρα χηριακα

Incline your ear, O All-Holy Virgin,
 to me who faithfully glorifies your Son
 with words of praise

τους υμνους των
χειλεων μου
προσδεχομενη αιτησαι
αμαρτιων μου την συγχωρησιν.

and receiving hymns
of my lips,
like the widow's gifts,
grant forgiveness of my sins.

vv. 171-177

At the beginning of the canon it was the *ekklesia* which offered the hymn. At the end it is the hymnographer herself who steps forward alone and offers the hymn created by her faith and talent.

Nor did Thekla hesitate to project herself as an individual Orthodox believer. Twice with her personal conviction she buttressed Orthodox dogma on the Incarnation. In the first instance she shifts within the same strophe from the first person plural of the apostolic *κηρυττομεν* to the pronoun in the first person singular, thus separating herself from the community to which she belonged:

Θρονον σε Θεου του Λογου	We proclaim you the throne of the Word of God,
κηρυττομεν, Θεοτοκε,	O Theotokos,
εν ω ως βροτος δ Θεος	on which God sits,
καθημενος οπται μοι	appeared as a human being to me.

vv. 74-77

What the Church teaches, Thekla confirms on the basis of her experience.

A similar insistence and reliance on her own religious experience marks the second passage. But here there is no shift from the corporate to the individual. With the poetic and visionary language of a mystic Thekla insists on the truth of the Incarnation and on Mary's part in it:

Ουρανος ουρανων υψηλοτερος
ωφθυς, Θεονυμφευτε, τη θεια δοξη σου.
εν σοι γαρ ο Θεος ημων
δλικως εποχουμενος οφθη μοι.

You were seen, O Bride of God,
O Theotokos, a heaven higher than
the heavens in your divine glory. For
wholly contained in you, our God was
seen by me.

vv. 93-96

These words express Thekla's deeply felt beliefs, the Orthodoxy which iconoclasm had endangered. Finally, Thekla speaks in her person as a nun. At the end of the canon the third voice is heard when she identifies herself and her congregation as nuns. Her

encomium was composed for performance in the convent. It contains hymns and prayers that belong to the world hidden behind the encircling walls of a convent.

From a rich hymnic and homiletic tradition Thekla borrowed the materials out of which she wove her 'crown of encomia' for the Theotokos. Orthodox theology of the Incarnation and of Mary's unique relationship to God provided the foundation of her canon. Although Thekla's veneration of the Theotokos borders, by her own confession, on worship, she nevertheless does not exaggerate Mary's power.^{xlvi} Nor does she isolate the mother from the son, being always careful to associate Mary with Christ. In the personal prayers Thekla explicitly appeals to the Theotokos for her mediation.^{xlvii}

The vocabulary and themes which Thekla employed in the ninth century already had a long lineage of Byzantine hymnography. They can be traced back through the *Akathistos Hymnos*, the most famous of all Marian hymns, to an anonymous primitive kontakion written soon after the Council of Ephesos (431 A.D.), and to fifth-century Marian sermons as well.^{xlviii} The same epithets, titles, images and typology used by Thekla are common to all the kanons found in the *Theotokaria*, whose dates of composition range from the eighth to the fifteenth century. From all these Marian hymns Thekla's canon is distinguished only by its feminine accent and perspective. From an unknown convent, probably in Constantinople, comes a woman's joyful song of praise to the Theotokos and her spiritual daughters, the women of the Church.

From the verses of Thekla's encomium a luminous icon of the Theotokos becomes readily visible. The canon begins with a reference to the Annunciation, when the angel appeared to Mary and she accepted her destiny, agreeing to become the mother of God.^{xlix} In the second ode two strophes are devoted to the Nativity of the Theotokos, the beginning of mankind's salvation.ⁱ Numerous references to the Nativity of Christ point to the cause of Mary's glory. Nowhere is it forgotten that her *doxa* derives from the great mystery or her motherhood. The noun *τοκος* and verbs "to give birth" occur frequently.ⁱⁱ Seven times Thekla uses the word Theotokos, Mary's most exalted title.ⁱⁱⁱ She is also called *Meter Theou* six times and once *Meter Christou*.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Thekla recalls that Mary's maternity had been prefigured in the Old Testament. Moses and the burning bush on Sinai, Jacob's vision of the ladder joining earth to heaven, and the dew on Gideon's fleece had all foreshadowed God's birth on earth from a virgin.^{lv}

The hymnodist claims. However, that nothing in past sacred history had ever equaled Mary's *doxa*.^{lv} To describe this unparalleled glory Thekla resorts to comparisons. The first of the three is the longest. At the beginning of the fifth ode the poet triumphantly proclaims Mary's superiority to the old dispensation embodied in the law and ark:

Νομου σε τιμιωτεραν
της κιβωτου ανυμνουμεν
τον γαρ παντων κτιστην και Θεον
ου πλακας εβαστασας,

We exalt you more illustrious than the Ark
of the Law. For you bore the Creator and God
of all, not the tablets,
worthy of all praise,

πανυμητε Θεοτοκε Μαρια

Theotokos Mary.

vv. 69-73

The second comparison, in the same ode, sets the Theotokos above the cherubim.^{lvi}
The third, in the sixth ode, declares Mary more sublime than the heavens.^{lvii}

Other hieratic epithets and titles elaborate the theme of Mary's majestic maternity: γη αγια (holy earth);^{lviii} θρονον Θεου (throne of God);^{lix} νεοσ παραδεισος (new paradise);^{lx} γεωργησασα αμπελον (having cultivated a vine);^{lxi} αγια and σεμνη (holy and sacred).^{lxii} Superlatives and theophoric compounds also occur: παναγια (all holy);^{lxiii} πανυμνητος; υπερενδοξος (worthy of all hymns); θεοχαριτωτος (supremely glorious); θεονυμφευτος (bride of God).^{lxiv}

Thekla praises Mary not only as the Mother of God but also as mankind's benefactor. Her generations are many and universal. By giving birth to God, she reconciled man to God.^{lxv} Reconciliation leads to salvation. Gratitude for salvation made possible by Mary fills the second strophe of the eighth ode:

Θελεται πασα η Χριστου
εκκλησια, Θεοτοκε, σου τω τοκω
οτι σωζονται παντες
αμαρτωλοι και πτωχοι
οι ποθω εν σοι καταφευγοντες

The whole church of Christ delights
in your birthgiving, O Theotokos,
because all sinners and poor in spirit
fleeing to you longingly are saved.
For like a good calm harbor you rescued
them from a harsh storm.

vv. 150-154

By means of a familiar nautical metaphor Thekla describes the protection which the Theotokos offers troubled humanity:^{lxvi}

λιμην ως ευδιος
διεσωσας ες ζαλης πικρας.

Like a calm harbor
Saved from a bitter storm

vv. 26-27

Byzantine hopes of security, collectively and individually, rested in the Theotokos. The Byzantine also looked to Mary as the source of eternal life,^{lxvii} joy,^{lxviii} and freedom.^{lxix}
The bright gifts of heaven came to them through the mediation of the Theotokos.

From the Theotokos' blessings to humanity in general Thekla singled out those which relate particularly to her sex. Our hymnwritng nun celebrates the Theotokos as the

liberator of women. A major theme of the canon and important to Thekla's love for the Theotokos it is introduced in the third strophe of the third ode. The verb *luw* which is associated with this theme appears first in this strophe.^{lxx}

Εξ Αννης η χαρα του γενουσ ηνθησας
και τικτεις, Παρθενε, τον βασιλεα
και συγγαιρουσι τω τοκω σου
αι γυναικες λυθεισαι δια σου της αρας.

From Anna blossomed the joy
of humankind. And you give birth
to the king, O Virgin. And women
by you from the curse, rejoice
together in your birth-giving.

vv. 45-48

Although Mary's birth heralded the advent of joy to the entire universe, her maternity brought special joy to women. The Theotokos released women from the grief to which they had been condemned ever since their first mother ate the fruit from the forbidden tree. By giving birth to God Mary freed her sisters from the sorrow inherited on account of Eve's disobedience.^{lxxi} The present tense of *συγγαιρουσι* surely reflects Thekla's experience of liberation and joy. She rejoices, with other women, in the new paradise opened to them when Christ was born.

This theme of joy restored to women is restated more emphatically in the final strophe of the seventh ode:

Νυν η φυσις του Θηλεος γεγηθε
νυν η λυπη πεπαυται χαρα δε ηνθησεν
διτι Μαρια ετεκεν
την χαραν τον σωτηρα και Κυριον.

Now the female sex rejoiced.
Now sorrow has ended,
and joy blossomed because
Mary bore joy, the Savior and Lord.

vv. 101-104

This strophe may have been composed by Klement and not by Thekla. If this is the case, we may credit him with sympathy and appreciation of women, an attitude which Theodore the Studite shared. In any case, the strophe accorded perfectly with Thekla's vision of woman's new improved status in the Christian dispensation.

In the fifth ode Thekla further expands her icon of the Theotokos as woman's liberator. As in the first passage discussed above,^{lxxii} she begins with a statement of Mary's benediction to mankind in general, and then turns to its specific application to women:

Ελυσας πιχρας δουλειας
το γενος απαν, Παρθενε,
και ελευθερια Χριστου
την φυσιν του θηλεος

You released the whole race from
bitter slavery, O Virgin and by the freedom
and by the freedom of Christ
you honored the female sex

ετιμησας εν τω θειω τοκω σου.

by your divine birth-giving.

vv. 79-83

When Mary a daughter of Eve, gave birth to God, she bestowed from and honor on her sex. Woman's disgrace was erased forever. The cause of woman's bondage and dishonor, Eve is mentioned twice in passing by Thekla.^{lxxiii} Unlike Byzantium's male hymnographers who could never resist blaming Eve for every ill that besets mankind, Thekla does not heap opprobrium on the first sinner. Instead of dwelling on the time of Eve which had now passed away Thekla emphasizes the time of Mary a new era for women. The Theotokos *theta doxa* reflected, inevitably honor on her sex.^{lxxiv} A woman, our poet felt herself freed from the primeval shame inherited from Eve. But even more, she felt herself graced with honor because of the Theotokos. We can imagine that Thekla was not alone in appreciating the new condition of women inaugurated by the coming of Christ.

Once liberated from inherited sorrow and shame, women assumed new roles in the broader world outside the domestic domain. Established by Mary's divine son, the ekklesia opened new opportunities for ability to women who heretofore had been confined to the home.^{lxxv} With obvious feminine pride and gratitude Thekla acclaims the Theotokos as woman's emancipator:

Ετεκεν υιον Παρθενος
και ευτολμουσι γυναικες
κατα του εχθρου εμφανως
και ταυτη ακολουθουσι
νεανιδες παρθενιαν ασκουσαι

The Virgin gave birth to a son
and women dare openly
to oppose the evil one.
And young women following her
practice virginity.

vv. 84-88

The virgin mother gave women courage to act and witness publicly for their Christian faith.^{lxxvi} Women heroically resisted the "enemy," whether Satan or an emperor. In the century before Thekla, Saint Theodosia had demonstrated against an iconoclastic emperor and disobeyed his commands. Already in the annals of Christianity were recorded the martyrdoms of countless women from the earliest days of persecutions to the most recent. Their history was well known to Thekla. She therefore pays them tribute in her encomium to the Theotokos.

In the third strophe of the seventh ode Thekla returns to the twin themes of woman's emancipation by the Theotokos and women martyrs:

Ελευθερονται δια σου
η προμητωρ, Θεοτοκε καταδικης

Through you, Theotokos,
The first mother is freed from condemnation.

και ιδου νυν γυναικες
υπεραθλουσι Χριστου
και χαιρει η φυσις του θηλεος
ως η πρωτομαρτυς
βοα παρθενος Θεκλα.

And behold, now women strive
on behalf of Christ.
And the female sex rejoices,
as the first martyr,
the virgin Thekla proclaims.

vv. 157-163

These seven verses constitute Thekla's memorial to women's sacrifices for the Church. The Theotokos freed women from Eve's sentence of guilt. In return women proved with their lives loyalty to their faith.^{lxxvii} All four verbs in this strophe are in the present tense, suggesting contemporary events in the empire, where women endured persecution and death in defense of Orthodoxy. The adverb νυν reinforces the present tense and emphasizes Thekla's point.

In Thekla's time women were continuing a tradition of active witness that stretched back to apostolic times when women accompanied the first Christian missionaries. Among these Saint Thekla has first place of honor. Our hymnographer openly takes pride in her name-sake, the virgin martyr whom Paul had converted in Iconium. Risking her life, Thekla followed Paul and shared in his mission of preaching the Gospel.^{lxxviii} Widely honored in the Christian East, "The First Martyr among Women and Equal to the Apostles," Saint Thekla was the subject of numerous legends and sermons, the inspiration and model of zealous Christian women.^{lxxix} To be called a "second Thekla" was to win the highest praise. Her cult flourished in Constantinople where several churches were dedicated to her, including a basilica built the Emperor Justinian.^{lxxx}

Imperial princesses of the ninth century bore her illustrious name. Thekla was the name of the eldest daughter of Theophilos (829-842), the last iconoclastic emperor.^{lxxxi} And it was the name chosen by our hymnographer when she took the veil and became a nun. Her hymn, along with her choice of a monastic name, testifies to deep personal devotion to Christianity's first woman martyr.

The monastic vocation, the possibility for a new way of life, was also a gift of the Theotokos to women. Venerated by women in the convents of Byzantium, Mary was the model to be imitated:

και ταυτη ακολουθουσι
νεανιδες παρθενιαν ασκουσαι.

And following her,
the young women practice virginity

vv. 87-88

Long restricted to private life, dominated by fathers, husbands and sons, women found in the convent an alternative that had never existed before.^{lxxxii} To serve the *ekklesia* as

nuns was to enter a spiritual world. Dedicating themselves completely to God, women had enrolled in the service of the Church. Nor did the monastic ideal of earlier centuries cease to attract women. In Thekla's day thousands of nuns lived in παρθενωνες, both in the capital city and throughout the empire.^{lxxxiii}

In the final ode of her canon Thekla the Nun admits us into the spirituality of the Byzantine convent, revealing its adoration of the Theotokos. Near the end comes the most lyrical strophe of the entire hymn, a panegyric to the Virgin who embodies the nun's ideal.

Λαμπει σου το χαλλος αστραπτει
της αγνειας η λαμπροτης αγνη,
και υπερστιλβει τουτων σου η γεννησις
ο Θεος γαρ ο ποιητης
ηλιου και της κτισεως
ουτος εχ σου γεγεννηται
διο σε παντες μεγαλυνομεν.

Your beauty shines, the brightness
of your purity is like lightning,
O pure one. And your birth
outshines there. For God the maker
of the sun and creation
was born of you.
Therefore we all magnify you.

vv. 178-184

As a nun Thekla extols the Theotokos, the epitome of the spiritual woman. Repeated images of dazzling light mark this paeon to the virginal beauty and perfection of the Theotokos.

Throughout the kanon Thekla never fails to allude to Mary's paradoxical virginity. A cluster of hallowed titles and epithets occurs again and again to fashion the virginal image of the Mother of God. Nine times she is invoked as Παρθενος (Virgin).^{lxxxiv} An equally prominent, related title is αγνη (pure), especially in the second half of the kanon.^{lxxxv} Αχραντος (immaculate), αιεπαρθενος (ever virgin), and αφθορος (incorrupt) further sustain this attribute of particular relevance for nuns.^{lxxxvi} The nuns not only hymn the Theotokos, they also pray to her, asking for strength to persist in the discipline of the monastic vocation. A nun's prayer, its invocation continues in the same exalted style of vv. 178-186. The first three verses betray the nuns' fervor, kindled by the immaculate purity of the Theotokos:

Ανθος σε αγνειας και ραβδον
Παρθενιας και μητερα Θεου
θεοπρεπος εν υμνοις εκθειαζουσαι

With hymns worthy of God venerating you,
the flower of purity and the staff of virginity
and the Mother of God

vv. 185-187

The prayer ends with an appeal to their guardian saint for support in their *askesis* (practice):

Θεοτοκε, μετα φωνης
αινεσεως δεομεθα
εν παρθενια οτηριξον
και εν αγνεια ημας φυλαξον.

O Theotokos, with words of praise
we pray,
support us in virginity
and guard us in purity.

vv. 188-191

Thus the "sweet Echo" whom Nikodemos heard ends her encomiastic kanon to the Theotokos.

Probably of aristocratic family this Byzantine hymnwright of the ninth century was an educated woman, a lady of poise and culture. The competence and grace exhibited in her canon indicate more than knowledge of the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church. She had been trained in letters and literature. The complex form of the kanon with its fugue-like variations on a central theme demanded not only talent but also literary skills acquired in a classroom.^{lxxxvii}

Thekla was a true Orthodox believer. A devout woman of her times, she cherished and defended Orthodox dogma and traditions. The Incarnation, the foundation of Christian belief, was a reality in her personal religious experience. She insisted on the value and validity of her convictions and experience.

Thekla the Nun valued the ideals and goals of her sacred vocation. The Theotokos was the focus of her monastic life, the main-spring of its spirituality. She honored Mary first as the Mother of God, secondly as the guardian spirit of women monastics, and thirdly as woman's emancipator.

Orthodox believer, hymnodist and nun, Thekla was above all a confident, strong-minded woman. She possessed in good measure self-esteem. She took pride in herself and in her sex. From her hymn emerges a positive image of Eve and her daughters, so long maligned by preachers and church poets in the Christian East and West. Rejecting the shame and guilt traditionally attached to her sex, she claimed for women respected and an honorable place in the Byzantine polity and Church.^{lxxxviii} Women had established a record that earned them recognition. Thekla salutes nuns and women martyrs, recalling that their history reached back to Christian beginnings, to the glorious deeds and death of her namesake Saint Thekla.

Thekla's joyful canon reflects her serenity. Secure in her faith, called to be a nun and hymnographer. Thekla accomplished her *dikonia*. The kanon to the Theotokos is her testament to a life spent in harmony with God.

Kassiane the Nun and the Sinful Woman

Two women, famous for different reasons, will be discussed here.^{lxxxix} Kassiane the Nun enjoys high honor in the history of Byzantine hymnography,^{xc} while the Sinful Woman, whom the Evangelist Luke introduced into Christian literature, is associated with shame. The Sinful Woman is the subject of the Byzantine nun's most celebrated hymn and, as a result, the bad name or notoriety of the subject has rubbed off on the hymnographer. An old tradition, unfortunately still widely accepted today, identifies Kassiane the Nun, as a fallen woman. Sexist prejudice is the likely source of this unfounded identification. It is my intent here to clarify and to end this misunderstanding.

Kassiane the Nun is Byzantium's most famous woman hymnographer. Her literary fame rests on her sticheron or troparion, formally known by its first line: Κυριε, η εν πολλαις αμαρτιας (Lord, she who had fallen in many sins). In the manuscripts medieval scribes entitled it: Εις την Πορνην (To the Harlot). To many generations of Greek Orthodox it is familiarly known as Το Τροπαριον της Κασσιανυς (The Troparion of Kassiane). Admired, popular and beloved, this hymn is universally acknowledged to be a masterpiece of religious poetry.^{xcj} Published in many anthologies of Greek verse, it was rendered into demotic Greek by Kostis Palamas (1859-1943) and later set to music by Dimitri Mitropoulos.

Originally composed for the Orthros of Holy Wednesday, Kassiane's troparion is now sung on the evening of Holy Tuesday.^{xcii} The text is included in the Triodion, the service book for the ten weeks preceding Easter. Sacred poets from the sixth to the sixteenth centuries contributed hundreds of Lenten hymns to this book. These include numerous monks and bishops, two emperors of Byzantium, and a single woman. Kassiane. Twenty-nine of these hymnographers are pictured in the front piece of a Triodion printed in Venice in 1601.^{xciii}

Kassiane the Nun was, in every respect, a worthy daughter of Byzantium. Born in the imperial city sometime before 805, she belonged to an aristocratic family. Her father held the high rank of *candidatus* at the imperial court. Kassiane was well educated. She received instruction in both sacred and profane learning, studying not only Scripture but also classical Greek authors. Saint Theodore the Studite, the erudite abbot and champion of Orthodoxy, praised Kassiane's learning and literary style as exceptional.

Saint Theodore also praised Kassiane's character and piety. When still a young woman, she defied imperial edicts forbidding the veneration of icons. She endured persecution, and for her defiance was beaten with the lash. Undaunted, however, the devout young woman continued openly to resist the emperor's policies by visiting imprisoned Orthodox monks, comforting Orthodox exiles and by writing letters and sending gifts to them. This crisis of the Church tested and proved Kassiane's faith and

zeal.

Kassiane's loyalty to Orthodoxy was not uncommon. for she belonged to a large company of women who defended the traditions and teachings of the Church during a turbulent period of religious crisis which lasted nearly a century and a half (729-843). At that time laywomen and nuns emerged from the safe seclusion of the home and convent to risk their lives in defense of Orthodoxy. In Constantinople within the shadow of the imperial palace they participated in demonstrations against iconoclastic edicts. Some of them were not only persecuted, but were also martyred for their Orthodox faith. One of the first martyrs of iconoclasm was a nun named Theodosia who led a group of nuns in an attempt to prevent the desecration of an icon of Christ at the Chalke Gate in 729. Theodosia knocked down the ladder and caused the death of the soldier trying to remove the icon. Martyred for her resistance, Theodosia soon became the center of a popular cult in Constantinople.^{xciv} Her heroic example provided Orthodox women with a model for activism.

Nor had Saint Theodosia of Constantinople died in vain. Modern historians credit the triumph of Orthodoxy to an alliance of monks and women.^{xcv} These women of iconophile sympathies came from all sections of Byzantine society. Two imperial Orthodox women played decisive roles in the struggle against iconoclasm.^{xcvi} Proudly claiming the title of *Basileus*, Athenian-born Eirene (797-802) reestablished Orthodoxy in 787. Five decades later, in 843, another empress, "the Blessed Theodora," engineered the final victory, which is annually commemorated on the Sunday of Orthodoxy.^{xcvii} In addition to the imperial women, countless other women of Byzantium proved themselves loyal to the faith of their mothers and father.

Early in life the learned and devout Kassiane had resolved to become a nun. Her religious vocation, however, could not be fulfilled until after 843. At that time she built a convent in the western part of the Queen City, near the old Constantinian walls, and was tonsured a nun. Until her death sometime in the second half of the ninth century, Kassiane lived in the cloister bearing her name.

The foundress of the cloister was its strict and energetic abbess. Within the walled peace of the convent Kassiane supervised the nuns and composed sacred and secular poetry. Her writings have survived in a number of manuscripts dating from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries.

The secular writings project Kassiane's forceful personality. A series of statements, all beginning with *Μίσω* (I hate), reflects her strong dislikes and convictions.^{xcviii} Mindful that "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10.34), Kassiane opposed discrimination: "I hate the judge who respects persons." Pretense aroused her scorn: "I hate the fool who acts the philosopher." She had contempt for all sham: "I hate the rich man who laments his poverty." Above all, Kassiane condemned lack of compartment and courage: "I hate silence when it is time to speak."

Kassiane's sacred poetry bears the stamp of the true poet and believer. She not only wrote hymns, but also composed musical settings for them. A gifted composer, Kassiane earned the title "Melodos." The nuns in her own convent were the first to sing Kassiane's hymns. These included longer compositions known as kanons, as well as the shorter troparia.

Twenty-three of Kassiane's hymns for various holy festivals and saints days have been admitted into the liturgical books of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Besides the famous troparion for Holy Wednesday, these include a canon for the dead; hymns for Holy Saturday, Christmas, Hypapante, the Synaxis and Nativity of Saint John Prodromos; and hymns in honor of the martyrs, Eustratios and Auxentios and the apostles, Peter and Paul. Thirty-seven other hymns in the service books are attributed to Kassiane the Nun, a few of which may be genuine.^{xcix}

Through these hymns Kassiane gained unique honor and distinction. She is the only woman represented in the vast corpus of hymns sung by the Orthodox Church. The hymns of other known Byzantine women hymnographers have been excluded from Orthodoxy's multi-volume treasury of liturgical poetry. Overshadowed by the fame and glory of Kassiane, they remain neglected names in catalogues of Byzantine hymnographers: Thekla and Theodosia, two hymn-writing contemporaries of Kassiane; and Palaiologina, an imperial princess of the fifteenth century who wrote hymns in honor of Saint Demetrios.^c

Despite the fact that her hymns are sung by the Church, Kassiane, unlike many other hymnographers, has not been canonized. The author of a masterpiece of liturgical poetry has been denied the saint's halo which encircles the heads of many Byzantine hymnographers, among them, Romanos the Melodos, Andrew of Crete, Kosmas of Maiouma, John Damascene, and lesser, uninspired hymnodists.

The hymn-writing nun does, however, possess a legend which, in addition to the anti-feminine bias of the Church, accounts for the Church's failure to canonize Kassiane. Within a century after her death, the legend of Kassiane began to circulate. Already in the tenth century, Byzantine chroniclers were narrating the romantic story of the beautiful, learned hymnographer who almost became the empress of Byzantium. Transmitted by pen and word of mouth, this Byzantine legend of Kassiane was inherited by Balkan and Modern Greek folklore and literature.

The earliest extant account of this legend was written by Symeon the Logothete.^{ci} Wishing to enable her step-son, Theophilos to find a suitable wife, the Empress Euphrosyne arranged a bride show.

She assembled maidens of incomparable beauty Among them was Kassia, an extraordinarily beautiful maiden. There was also another named Theodora. Giving

Theophilos a golden apple, Euphrosyne told him to give it to the maiden who pleased him most. Overwhelmed by Kassia's beauty, Emperor Theophilos said: 'From woman come evils.' She replied, though with modesty: 'But from woman spring many blessings.' Wounded to the heart by these words, Theophilos passed her by and gave the golden apple to Theodora, who came from Paphlagonia.

Theodora was crowned empress and then married to Theophilos in the palatine chapel of Saint Stephen. "As for Kassia" the chronicler concludes, "having lost out on an earthly kingdom, she built a convent, was shorn a nun, and until her death, led a philosophical life pleasing to God."

Kassiane's spirited defense of women cost her an imperial husband and the throne of Byzantium. Nevertheless, right was on her side. Theology and recent history justified Kassiane's reply to Theophilos' slur on women. The Theotokos had compensated for Eve's disobedience. The Mother of God had reopened Eden closed by Eve's transgression. Furthermore, the activist Kassiane had not forgotten the significant role of women in the defense of Orthodoxy. For Kassiane to have remained silent would have been to bring discredit to herself and to her sex.

Long before the time of Kassiane, the Sinful Woman had become a familiar, almost proverbial, figure in Eastern Christendom. Although an old tradition identified her with Mary Magdalene, she had no name. The story of the anonymous woman is told only in the Gospel of Saint Luke the Evangelist who, like Christ was "the friend of sinners" (Lk 7.34), always sympathizing with women, the lost and least.^{cii}

Luke 7.36-50 relates the story of the sinful Woman who anointed Christ at the beginning of His public ministry. A Pharisee named Simon invited Him to a meal. "When he arrived at the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table, a woman who had a bad name in the town came in. She had heard that he was dining with the Pharisee and had brought with her an alabaster jar of ointment. She waited behind him at his feet, weeping, and her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them away with her hair; then she covered his feet with kisses and anointed them with the ointment (Lk 7.36-38).^{ciii}

Shocked by the woman's intrusion, Simon wondered if his guest was indeed a prophet. Would a true prophet allow a sinful woman to touch him? But Christ reprimanded Simon, and He forgave the penitent woman her many sins, saying to her, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Lk 7.50).

With this Lukan story began the Sinful Woman's long career in Christian literature. Although Christ had promised a *mnemosynon* (Mt 26.13, Mk 14.9) to the good woman who anointed Him in Bethany just before the Crucifixion, the "memorial" fell instead to the bad woman the *hamartolos*, "sinner" (Lk 7.37, 39) of the third Gospel.

Together with the Publican and the Prodigal Son the Sinful Woman became a principal

paradeigma or "example" of Lenten metanoia or "repentance." Her story was elaborated by theologians, preachers and hymnographers, and repeated in the prose and poetry of countless sermons and hymns. Most of these, including Kassiane's hymn, were entitled: Εἰς τὴν Πορνὴν (About the Harlot), for it had early been decided that the woman whom Luke had simply designated as αμαρτωλὸς was a harlot. Consequently, the harsh condemnatory word, πορνὴ, appears prominently in Lenten sermons and hymns. Kassiane's hymn is a conspicuous exception. In the fourth century Saint Ephraim Syros preached a colorful sermon on the penitent harlot.^{civ} Two centuries later Saint Romanos the Melodos wrote a long hymn on the same interesting theme.^{cv}

In the course of centuries the repertory increased without interruption. The Orthros of Holy Wednesday includes a number of representative hymns on the subject of the Sinful Woman or harlot. Besides Kassiane's troparion it includes a triodion by Saint Kosmas of Maiouma (seventh century), a contagion and oikos, four stickers, several kathismata, and four aposticha. None of these possesses either the originality or the power of Kassiane's hymn. In none is the Lenten drama of melanoma more strikingly portrayed than in this hymn written by one woman about another.

Tradition and medieval manuscripts both attribute the troparion Κυριε, η εν πολλαις αμαρτιας (Lord, she in many sins) to Kassiane, the Constantinopolitan, hymn-writing nun of the ninth century. It bears the imprint of her poetic talent and profound religious faith. This troparion possesses both beauty and richness of meaning. One scholar/critic appreciated "The way in which dramatic and narrative elements are blended, and the final prayer, wherein the need of one sinner is absorbed into the cry of a whole suffering world..."^{cvi}

The language of the troparion is a mosaic composed of words, phrase, and echos from the Scriptures, especially the Psalter. Imagery minted by Kassiane unfolds the psychological inner world of the Sinful Woman at a moment of crisis. The hymn is concentrated, intense and brief, consisting of a little more than one hundred words. Yet the Byzantine nun-hymnographer portrays in it universal human emotions, the fundamental Christian drama of sin and salvation.

The structure and style of Kassiane's troparion are influenced by the seven Penitential Psalms (6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, 142), three of which (37, 50, 142) are chanted during the Orthros of Holy Wednesday. Like these psalms, the troparion is addressed to God, praises His mercy and contains confession and prayer. Kassiane, however, was no mere imitator of the Psalmist. Her troparion is more complex in structure, more subtle in its psychology and more dynamic in movement. Hers is a new song, a distantly Byzantine Lenten psalm, inspired by the prose of Saint Luke.

Kassiane's celebrated troparion consists of a single strophe in which two different voices are heard. First, the sacred poet herself speaks in a brief introduction. Then in

the longer dramatic portion we hear the voice of the Sinful Woman disclosing the pathos of her life. the change from *harmartia* (sin) to *soteria* (salvation).

Following the pattern of Psalms, this Byzantine psalm begins by invoking God with a single word, *Kyrie*. Addressing the Lord, the sacred poet presents her hymn to Him. At the same time she summarizes the story first told by St. Luke, all the while subtly refining and deepening it.

With a long dignified phrase Kassiane the Nun introduces her subject: εν πολλαις αμαρτιας περιπεσουσα γυνη (the woman who had fallen into many sins). More delicate and less cruel than the hymnographers who insisted on calling the sinner a πορνη. Kassiane, nevertheless, vividly describes the woman's utter degradation.

A second phrase, την σην αισθομενη θεοτητα (recognizing Your divinity), further describes an important facet of the sinner's personality. The Sinful Woman is unusually perceptive and intuitive. In contrast to Simon who doubted that Jesus was a true prophet, the woman had perceived God in His person. Burdened though she was by her multiple sins, the social outcast alone had recognized God and responded to His presence in Simon's house.

A third phrase advances and refines still further Kassiane's version of the traditional story of the Sinful Woman. By means of three words, μυροφορου αναλαβουσα ταξιν, the nun elevates the sinner to sanctity. By perceiving God and honoring Him, the Sinful Woman joined the holy ranks of myrrh-bearers, Christ's faithful women followers, who carried spices to anoint His body in the tomb and were the first to learn that He had risen from the dead.^{cvi} Thus, in Kassiane's interpretation of Saint Luke's story, the Sinful Woman becomes a saint and the first *myrrhophoros*. With her feminine insights and sympathies the Byzantine nun-hymnographer enriches an old familiar story. Thanks to Kassiane the Nun it acquires new dimensions of spiritual significance.

After this brief yet suggestive introduction, the second voice enters the troparion. From the lips of the Sinful Woman herself we hear her confession and prayer. In the inspired poetry of the Byzantine nun, the speechless woman of Saint Luke unburdens her soul in search for redemption. Kassiane translates the sinner's tears into passionate words. Through the device of the dramatic monologue the hymn becomes a poem of experience, enabling us to share the Sinful Woman's progress from sin to grace.

A piercing cry of despair is the Sinful Woman's first word. Οιμοι introduces a high pitch of emotion and intensity into the troparion. While the tragic pain-filled cry still rings, the sinner begins her confession. As all penitential prayers require. it begins with a confession of guilt. With a cascade of sharp. dark images she describes her spiritual desolation:

στι νυξ με συνεχει
οιστρος αχολασιας
ζοφωδης τε χαι ασεληνος
ερωσ της αμαρτιας

For night holds me in its grip
the goad of lust.
murky and moonless
the love of sin

The Sinful Woman admits responsibility for her transgressions, for her failure to control her passions. This passionate and unconditional confession is unmatched either in the Triodion or in the Psalter.

By her confession the Sinful Woman begins to emerge from the "moonless night" of her sins. She now pleads for God's mercy and pardon. Her tensions and anguish reduced, she speaks more calmly. Her three petitions mark the three stages of her Lenten journey of *metanoia* the "turning around" from darkness to light.

In the first petition the sinner invokes God, the Lord of nature who empties the clouds to fill the seas. To Him the Sinful Woman offers her tears, the outward visible sign of repentance. To symbolize the chasm which separates the sinful creature from the Creator, Kassiane draws a contrast between human tears and the vastness of the clouds and seas. Lesser hymnographers contented themselves with stock references to the "harlot's tears."

In the second petition the Sinful Woman moves inward from the visible and physical, to the invisible and spiritual. She asks God to "bend" toward her sorrowing heart. Instead of addressing God in terms of grandeur, transcendence and power, she appeals to God in terms of His humility and compassion, bending heaven to earth when He became man. Because Christ reconciled mankind and God, the Creator is no longer distant and beyond approach. Christ brought God to the Sinful Woman.

Confession, tears and prayer to a merciful God begin to heal the Sinful Woman to liberate her from her sin-filled past. Looking now to the future, she gratefully promises Christ to kiss His feet again and to dry them with her hair. Divine love has erased the "moonless night" of guilt and sin.

At this point Kassiane's Sinful Woman recalls Eve, the first woman who sinned. Her allusion to the episode related in Genesis 3.8-11 implies a contrast between the Sinful Woman and Eve. After Adam and Eve had eaten the forbidden fruit, they fled and hid at the sound of God's footsteps. Eve had run from God, the Sinful Woman *to* Him. Her trust had vanquished all fear.

Far from being a 'pedantic' intrusion in Kassiane's penitential troparion, Eve's appearance is natural, even inevitable.^{cviii} Early in the Christian era, Eve, not Adam, had been settled upon as the principal first sinner. Henceforth in sermons and hymns all women, good and bad alike, were destined to be tainted with the guilt of their first mother.^{cix} From this taint only the Theotokos was exempt. Therefore, it is not surprising

that the story of one sinful woman should suggest that of another, in this case the archetypal sinful woman. Eve and the repentant harlot appear together in many Lenten sermons and hymns, the disobedience of the first to be avoided, the *metanoia* of the second to be imitated.^{cx}

The troparion then concludes with the Sinful Woman's third petition. The final appeal is less formal than the preceding two petitions, its tone more direct and intimate. The Sinful Woman now addresses God as her personal Redeemer, φυχοσωστα, Σωτηρ μου (Savior of souls, my Savior). The final words of Kassiane's troparion are spoken by the Sinful Woman. They shine with confidence and trust in God's love and mercy:

Μη με την σην δουλὴν παριδῆς
Ὁ ἀμετρητὸν ἔχων τὸ μέγα ἔλεος.

Do not ignore me, your handmaiden
for You have mercy that is beyond measure.

Thus the prayers, which began with a cry of despair and guilt, ends with a statement of faith and hope. The hymn which began with an image of a lost soul ends with the image of that soul redeemed by God's infinite loving mercy.

In between this beginning and conclusion Kassiane traces the course of a Lenten pilgrimage from the murky night of sin to the brightness of salvation, the conversion of sinner to saint. To read this troparion with understanding is to experience the sinner's exodus from anguish to peace, the passover from death to life.

Across more than ten centuries Kassiane the Nun communicates her serene belief in the transforming grace of Christ's love. The Sinful Woman of her troparion embodies Kassiane's affirmation of Lenten hope and joy. It turns out that her Sinful Woman was a true saint.

Blame It on Eve

"Blame it on Eve. It's her fault." This, I recently discovered is a universal theme in Christian writings and thought of the first centuries. In my own research on Greek sermons and hymns I encountered this theme everywhere. Whatever was wrong with the world was charged to Eve, the first woman. From sin and death to heresies, with no exceptions, everything bad was Eve's fault. In a Lenten sermon St. Basil, the brilliant Cappadocian hierarch, attributed to her even the origin of fasting. "If only Eve had fasted," he exclaimed, "Then we would not have to fast now." An anonymous Byzantine church poet held her responsible for this catalogue of human woes: "hurts, sighings, and pains; labors, sorrows and premature death; cares of life and the sweat of much-burdened bodies." Nothing is left out. Like Pandora of classical Greek mythology, Eve has let loose a plague of ills to vex mankind.

Although this theme seems to have delighted Byzantine preachers and poets, they had not invented it. Its Scriptural basis lies in the folktale of Genesis 3:1-24, recorded almost three thousand years ago. The wily serpent persuaded Eve to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. She, in turn, persuaded Adam. Clearly, Eve and Adam both had disobeyed God. When God questioned Adam, he tried to excuse himself: "It was the woman you put with me. She gave me the fruit and I ate it." His excuse, however, did not convince God of Adam's innocence. Refusing to discriminate between His female and male creatures, God punished both, rather severely.

Neglected thereafter in the Old Testament, the theme burst into life in the New Testament. Reflecting an entrenched patriarchal culture, Christianity accepted Adam's excuse and made Eve the primary original sinner, responsible for fallen humanity's plight. The New Testament sanctioned and promoted this biased interpretation of the folktale in Genesis.

Absent from the Gospels which unanimously portray Christ as the compassionate friend of women, good and bad alike, "Blame it on Eve" appears conspicuously in the influential epistles of St. Paul. Although in Galatians 3:28 the Apostle to the Gentiles had proclaimed the spiritual equality of man and woman, elsewhere he consistently denied women their basic human rights and dignity. Sternly he ordered women to keep their heads covered and their mouths closed in church. Because Adam had been created first and because only Eve had been deceived by the serpent, Paul declared women unfit to be Christian teachers. And for these same reasons women should in everything be ruled by men.

Immediately Paul's sexist ideas encountered resistance and opposition from active church women. He was forced to speak bluntly to the women in the congregation at Corinth; "Women are to remain quiet at meetings since they have no permission to speak; they must be submissive, If they have any questions to ask, they should ask their husbands at home; it is shameful for a woman to raise her voice at meetings."

Paul's edict prevailed for two thousand years in Eastern and Western Christianity dooming Eve's daughters to silence and subservience. It was not until 1828 that a woman dared to speak in public. Frances Wright was denounced from every pulpit in Cincinnati, Catholic and Protestant.

Along with their brothers in the Latin west, the Greek Church Fathers adopted with enthusiasm the Apostle's view on women. In their voluminous writings, "Blame it on Eve" was repeated so often that it acquired the validity of sacred dogma rooted in the natural order and in God's will. The Fathers dealt gently with Adam. Either they exonerated him of guilt in the first disobedience or they sympathized with Adam as Eve's first victim. Eloquent preachers and learned theologians heaped guilt and responsibility on Eve alone. The powerful voice of St. John Chrysostom invested the theme with added authority.

The writings of St. Epiphanius (c. 315-403 A.D.) will illustrate the theme's vitality in Greek patristics. Bishop of Salamis in Cyprus for 36 years, this austere prelate contributed some variations of his own. In the mind of this heresy-hunting hierarchy, woman and heresy were comparable evils. "Every heresy," he asserted, "is a wicked woman."

Like St. Paul before him, St. Epiphanius imposed silence on the women of the church. Their silence was imperative, he explained, because their sex was "gullible, deficient, and slight in intelligence." By his own admission he never tired of blaming Eve for the appearance of death in the world. "For Eve is the cause of mankind's death. Because of her, death came."

Only once did this saint permit himself to speak a kind word about Eve. "Let Eve be honored; for she is our mother. And after all she was created by God." However, the bishop hastened to add a warning: "But let no one listen to her. For she will persuade her children to eat from the forbidden tree and to disobey God's command."

Through an entire millennium Eve's image in Byzantium was destined to remain tarnished.

Byzantium's hymnographers faithfully echoed the attitudes and teachings of the Church Fathers. From hundreds of liturgical hymns the faithful heard that paradise had been lost because of Eve. "Blame it on Eve" rings in an endless chorus chanted as though by a single voice. In this chorus there is no sound of a discordant note, whether in the elaborate kontakion or the simple troparion. Throughout the liturgical cycle, hymns were sung in which Eve was maligned. The sacred poets who blamed everything on Eve included not only mediocre hymnographers but also the genius, St. Romanos the Melodos. Romanos called Eve "more serpent than the serpent." Eve was fated never to find a friend either among the church's poets or its theologians.

In compositions spanning a thousand years the same hostile vocabulary and imagery is used. Always Eve is associated with sin, grief and evil. Certain words were attached repeatedly with Eve's name to create formulas that become inevitable: Eve the agent of death and corruption; Eve's curse; Eve's pains; Eve the deceiver and the transgressor. These harsh phrases project in the hymns an unfavorable, negative and prejudiced ikon of Eve and her sex. Except for the Theotokos, the Mother of God, all of Eve's daughters resembled their erring mother. Nor are woman saints and woman martyrs exempt from the shame of their sex. It is often said in the hymns that they are making up for Eve. But never is it said that a male saint or martyr is making up for Adam. The writers of Byzantine sermons and hymns-monks, abbots, bishops, archbishops, and patriarchs-unanimously branded our first mother with guilt and burdened her with responsibility for all of mankind's troubles. And at least one sacred poet has Eve abjectly confessing her guilt-to Adam.

Adam blamed Eve for the first disobedience. He was the first to place the blame, but unfortunately not the last. Too many Byzantine male voices took up the theme and blamed it all on Eve.

It wasn't fair to Eve. And it isn't fair to us.

Saint Febronia: Equal or Second Class?

From distant Mesopotamia comes the story of St. Febronia the Holy Martyr. Ever since the seventh century Eastern Orthodox Christianity has commemorated her on June 25. This is her feast day.

What I tell you about Febronia is based on a biography written thirteen hundred years ago by a nun named Thomais. Composed originally in Syriac. This life enjoyed immense popularity, and survives in Greek, Latin, Arabic, Armenian, and Georgian translations. I read the Greek and Latin versions.

St. Febronia was born in the ancient land that lies between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. When she was only two years old, her parents entrusted her to the care of a relative, Bryaina, the abbess of a convent. The aunt reared her niece strictly, according to the severe monastic discipline of soul and body.

Febronia proved to be a perfect pupil, intelligent, studious, and devout. By the time of her middle teens she had become a young woman of dazzling physical and spiritual beauty, and a charismatic teacher with a reputation for wisdom. She not only expounded the Scriptures to her sister nuns. The great ladies of the town also came to the convent, eager to learn from the beautiful young nun.

Febronia's life was short. At age eighteen she was martyred. That is, she gave her life in witness for her faith. About 304 A.D. the Roman Emperor Diocletian dispatched officials and soldiers to rid Mesopotamia of Christians.

To escape persecution and death the Christian population of Nisibis fled, including the bishop and clergy. Except for Febronia, her aunt, and another elderly nun, the other nuns of the convent joined the flight to safety. Thus when the soldiers broke into the convent, they found only three nuns. The two aged nuns were not harmed, but Febronia was carried away in chains to face interrogation and punishment.

Rejecting bribes, flattery, and threats, gladly submitting to cruel tortures, the young woman refused to deny her Christian faith. On June 25 Febronia was beheaded. Her body was found and buried in the convent. Soon her tomb became a place of miraculous dealings. From Nisibis, where later a church in her honor was built, the story of Febronia's heroic martyrdom spread throughout the East, reaching as far south as Ethiopia and as far west as Italy. In Constantinople patriarchs eulogized this woman martyr. Hymnographers sang the praises of Febronia "full of divine wisdom."

Febronia represents a type of saint, the virgin martyr. Numbering hundreds, even thousands. the catalogue of women saints includes not only the never deserted him. None of the fathers ever doubted that their own sex was superior to the other.

No church father hesitated to pronounce women physically, morally and intellectually inferior to men. Their presumably innate inferiority necessitated women's submission to the superior sex, in all spheres barring none. In the church she was sentenced to silence, forbidden to teach and to serve God at the altar. When a nun named Theodosia was caught preaching and teaching, she was told, "It happens that your body makes you a woman, whether you like it or not. So stop teaching men in the church. For the Apostle (Paul) made it clear that this is shameful..."

These brief remarks suffice to suggest what obstacles confront the Orthodox woman or man who wishes change in the status of women in my church. Of all Christian churches it is the Orthodox Church that most tenaciously clings to ancient traditions. Yet, if women are to acquire equal dignity in the church this two thousand year old tradition of discrimination against women must be examined and reassessed.

Above all, woman's traditional second class status needs to be reconsidered in the light of Christ's own affirmation of women. The Gospels all record how he broke the customs, laws and taboos of his time and culture in order to confirm woman's divine image. Nowhere is this proved more dramatically than by his healing of the woman with the hemorrhage; his conversation with the Samaritan woman by the well; by his choice of a woman, Mary Magdalene, to be the first apostle of the resurrection. It is worth noting that Orthodox tradition acknowledges Mary Magdalene to be the "first apostle" and the "first evangelist."

Surely the church ought to follow the example of her founder rather than to continue the tradition of patriarchal prejudice against women. For too long it has prevented women from taking their rightful place beside their brothers in the new creation.

Furthermore, it should also be recalled that in the apostolic church there was no discrimination between male and female. Evidence from the Book of Acts and the genuine epistles of St. Paul indicates that indeed women participated fully in the liturgical life of the primitive church and that they held positions of leadership.

To return again to St. Febronia. Our meditation on Febronia the Holy Martyr would have been neither complete nor honest without a reflection on the status of her sisters in the church, yesterday and today.

Words of praise and honor to women saints will remain hollow and meaningless until women are restored to equal dignity in Christ's church on earth.

Given at the Common Council meeting of Church Women United,
June 25, 1983, Stony Point, New York.

Patriarchal Prejudice and Pride in Greek Christianity, Some

Notes on Origins

Κατηγορει ο Αδαμ δε τη Ευα^{χξ1}

A recent article in The New York Times (September 13, 1981) states that the women of Greece are "statistically shown to be more socially and economically discriminated against than their counterparts in any other Western country." This conclusion could hardly surprise anyone who is familiar with the contemporary Greek scene. Still it is shocking to read in this report that 78 percent of the illiterates in Greece are women.

The article mentions several factors that contribute to this situation. Among them are "the heavily patriarchal nature of Greek society the traditionalist influence of the church and a social outlook that values a woman according to her subservience and housework abilities." The critical role of the Church, a powerful social institution in Greece, is barely suggested, although the article points out that "By law women are forbidden participation in the councils of the Greek Orthodox Church." The Church has, however, played a key role in defining the female image and bolstering the values incorporated in the social and economic structures which discriminate against women.^{cxii} By its centuries-old antifeminist attitudes and practices the Church has officially in effect sanctioned the patriarchal prejudices and pride which, when institutionalized, are responsible for woman's low estate in Greece. As elsewhere in the Western world, it is true also in Greece that "Christian ideology has contributed no little to the oppression of woman."^{cxiii} The "traditionalist influence" of the Greek Church on the status of women, moreover, rests on an antifeminist theology whose tenacious roots extend back into history for almost two thousand years and reflect the prevailing patriarchal structures of the early Christian centuries.

In this brief essay I wish to discuss the theological origins of the ideology in the Greek tradition. I must emphasize at once that the sexist theology of the Greek Church is neither a unique nor an isolated phenomenon. On the contrary it is shared by all branches of Christianity. Together the Greek and Latin Church Fathers appealed to the same Biblical texts, such as Genesis 2:7-3:24 or I Timothy 2:11-14, for proof of male superiority and female inferiority. From them they drew identical conclusions and produced the same negative derogatory image of woman. Christian theology concerning woman belongs to a single scriptural and patristic tradition.

My observations on this subject are based primarily on my reading in Greek patristic writings and on my studies in Byzantine hymnography. As much as possible in these notes I shall let the creators of this antifeminist tradition in the Greek Church speak for themselves.

By examining the teachings of the Greek Church Fathers of the first five Christian centuries we shall better understand the background of woman's second-class status in modern Greece. That this is woman's proper and natural place in the scheme of things has never been more plainly and bluntly stated than by one of Orthodoxy's most prestigious dogmatic theologians, St. Cyril of Alexandria: *ηγemonikōtaton δε το αρσεν αι και εν δευτερα ταξει το θηλυ πανταχη* (for most capable of commanding is the male always, and in second class the female everywhere).^{cxiv} This sweeping statement of woman's subordinate status assumes the force of immutable eternal law, a permanent ruler-subject relationship between man and woman. With teachings similar to this the Church ratified and sanctified existing social and economic structures that oppress women.

The Fathers' anti-woman theology was founded on their conviction that woman possesses a special nature, designed for her by the Creator. In the beginning, at creation, her inferiority was made explicit. Sexist selection and interpretation of Biblical texts buttressed this basic doctrine. Generally ignoring the account of creation according to which God created male and female in His likeness and image,^{cxv} the Fathers unanimously preferred the more primitive aetiological folk-tale according to which God created Adam first and then Eve.^{cxvi} Eve's creation from one of Adam's ribs therefore placed second in the order of creation. This was interpreted to mean that woman not only was woman different from man but also inferior to him. This belief presented no advance on the accepted Aristotelian theory that woman was a defective male.^{cxvii}

Influential Fathers like Sts. John Chrysostom and Basil of Caesarea occasionally did not hesitate to refer to and even to quote the text which affirmed woman's equality with man.^{cxviii} But they never utilized it in formulating their theology of woman. Instead they developed a complete ideological system on the basis of the text which could be accommodated to support patriarchal biases against women. This can be illustrated by a passage from St. Clement of Alexandria, the Christian philosopher of the second century. When God removed a rib from Adam to create Eve, Clement writes, He purged man of all softness and weakness. Consequently males are whole rather than emasculated, perfect rather than imperfect. The woman Eve was made to be man's partner in procreation and his helper in household management. Thus the female occupies a position of secondary worth. Finally, man's beard, which is "older than Eve," betokens his "superior nature."^{cxix} In this manner selected texts viewed exclusively from a male perspective served Greek Christianity's most influential teachers as incontrovertible proof of woman's God-given inferiority. A derivative, incomplete being, totally dependent on man, and created to serve his needs, she presumably having none of her own, woman was fated from the start for class in society and in the Church.

From the voluminous corpus of Greek patristic writings that survive in the form of sermons, letters, tracts and commentaries there emerges a sharply articulated image of woman's inferior nature. The description of woman as the "weaker vessel" in 1 Peter

3:7 provided the Fathers with a cornerstone for their theory of a γυναικεία φύσις (feminine nature). "Weakness" they declared, afflicts all women, affecting their moral as well as their physical qualities. Very rarely is woman mentioned without an accompanying reference to her inherited female liability. The Fathers lavished praise on women martyrs as much for their triumph over "female weakness" as for their heroism.^{cxx} Byzantine hymnographers later echoed this theme. There hardly exists a hymn in honor of a female saint (of whom there are many) in which a phrase like τῶν γυναικῶν τὸ ἀσθενές (the frailty of women) does not occur. The more disparaging phrase, τὸ χαυνὸς τοῦ θήλεος (the emptiness, of the female), frequently found in the hymns, accentuates the notion of "softness" which was attributed to the second sex. In the sexist vocabulary of theologians, preachers and liturgical poets alike, "woman" equals "weakness." Furthermore, even the most heroic and admired female saints did not escape the stigma of this stereotype. They had earned respect and honor because they had overcome the formidable obstacle of their "feminine nature."

This alleged female ἀσθενεία (weakness) also included woman's mental abilities. Compared to man's they were considered limited and inferior. Although St. Cyril of Alexandria was a contemporary and fellow townsman of Hypatia, the brilliant woman pagan teacher, philosopher and mathematician, he believed that woman's understanding was "defective."^{cxxi} Likewise, although St. John Chrysostom enjoyed the company of cultivated pious women disciples, he nevertheless had a low opinion of woman's mental capacity. Because of this incapacity for reason and thought he deemed it wise and necessary for women to be restricted to unimportant, undemanding domestic roles.^{cxxii} Exceptional women were praised by Chrysostom for possessing ἀνδρῶν φρονήματα (the will of men).^{cxxiii}

Always in patristic writings the male provides the sole measure of worth, virtue and excellence. Celibate women were lauded for their ἀνδρικοὶ πόννοι (manly labors), which often surpassed the ascetic attainments of males; holy women for their ἀνδρικός λογισμός (manly attitudes); women martyrs for enduring persecution and tortures ἀνδρικῶς (in the manner of men). To become like a man (ἀνδρίζεσθαι) represented for woman the only possible escape from the inferiority of her sex.^{cxxiv} This patriarchal standard prevailed universally and was accepted by women as well. The famous anchoress Sara, it is recorded, boasted to two monks that she was "a woman in body but not in spirit."^{cxxv} In fact, the words γυνή (woman) and θήλυς (female) acquired such pejorative connotations that in the eulogy for his remarkable sister, St. Macrina, St. Gregory of Nyssa confessed that he hesitated to call her "woman" since she had gone "beyond the nature of a woman."^{cxxvi}

The founding Fathers of the Church discovered and described other defects in "feminine nature." Despite the fact that the woman deacon Olympias proved herself Chrysostom's most loyal friend, the golden-tongued Archbishop of Constantinople characterized the female sex as fickle, superficial, lightheaded, and compulsively

garrulous.^{cxxvii} Woman's servile mentality also did not escape his notice.^{cxxviii} In the view of another theologian, the female creature is so base and imperfect that "God does not stoop to look at what is feminine."^{cxxix}

Other Fathers added refinements to this misogynist portrait of woman. St. Epiphany, Bishop of Constantia in Cyprus, attributed to the female sex instability, weakmindedness, frenzy, and vanity.^{cxxx} (The Fathers lavishly embroidered in their sermons the theme of female vanity.) To the mind of this vigilant episcopal defender of Orthodoxy, heresies and women constituted the two chief evils which endangered law and order in the world and in the church. Epiphanius connected the two because in paradise Eve had plotted the first "heresy."^{cxxxi} St. Gregory of Nazianzus, honored by the Church with the title "Theologos," believed that women were naturally "ostentatious and self-indulgent."^{cxxxii}

By their eloquent and often repeated axiomatic declarations of female faults and woman's innate inferiority the Greek Fathers, particularly the eminent Alexandrians and Cappadocians, created the negative image of woman that was to dominate in the Christian East. When the Greek Fathers were translated into the languages of the Slavs who had been evangelized by the Church of Constantinople, this image was transmitted beyond the Greek-speaking *oikoumene*. It is not difficult to recognize the theological ancestry of the well-known Russian proverb, "A chicken is not a bird; a woman is not a person." Many Greek proverbs are not less revealing.^{cxxxiii}

This Orthodox dogma of a special inferior "feminine nature" has not yet been relegated to the relics of the past. In the twentieth century a Russian Orthodox priest and theologian added his voice to those of the venerable Fathers when he declared that woman is a "vessel of infirmity" characterized by "inadequate self-control, irresponsibility, passion, blind judgments..."^{cxxxiv} The point of this description is identical to that which a popular preacher made in the fifth century. Using more picturesque language, Hesychius of Jerusalem proclaimed that every female who is born is "an unsound instrument, a weak vessel, a shattered pot."^{cxxxv} Firmly anchored in selected sacred texts and in the authoritative pronouncements of the Greek Fathers, this pejorative and degrading icon of woman seems to have survived in spite of science, socioeconomic changes and the passage of more than a thousand years.

The same primitive folk-tale which is recorded in Genesis 2:13-20 and which provided the prooftext and origin of Christendom's doctrine of woman's inferiority also furnished Biblical justification for her subjection to man. For her part in the first disobedience, God sentenced Eve to pain in childbirth and to subservience to her husband: "he will rule over you."^{cxxxvi} What was originally descriptive of the human condition in general and of woman's situation in particular became prescriptive for the Church early in its history, as is evident from the Epistles of the New Testament. On the basis of Genesis 3:16 the writers of these Epistles proclaimed woman's subjection to man as God's immortal design for the relationship between male and female. Because Eve was the first to eat

the forbidden fruit, women were doomed to "complete subjection." For, it is explained, "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor."^{cxvii} Concluding from this evidence that Eve was to blame for the appearance of evil in the world, the Fathers designated her the "mother" or the "author" of sin.^{cxviii} Thus is woman's enslavement to man justified, a consequence of Eve's disastrous misbehavior in Eden. Chrysostom imagines a scene in which God sternly tells Eve she must accept responsibility for her fate.^{cxix}

Already strictly enforced by ancient customs and law codes the suppression and debasement of half of the human race gained religious sanction at the hands of the Church. The Apostle commands all Christian women to be subservient to men "in all things."^{cxl} Υποταγή (submission) and υποτασσεσθαι (to be obedient) are the key words in the relevant passages.^{cxli}

With one accord the Fathers accepted and taught this oligarchic relationship as normative. Being the "head" of woman, the male commands, and the female submits.^{cxlii} Chrysostom describes woman's status as essentially subordinate υποτακτικός.^{cxliii} St. Gregory of Nyssa declares that by "divine commandment" a wife is "not mistress (κυρία) of herself." So complete is woman's subservience and dependence on her husband that Gregory concludes "if she is separated from him even briefly it is as if she has been deprived of her head."^{cxliv}

Woman's subordination to man further entailed unconditional silence in public. The Fathers quoted with approval^{cxlv} and rigorously enforced the mandate of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: "Women are to be quiet in church, for they have no permission to speak. They are to be submissive.... for it is a shame for women to speak in church."^{cxlvi} As a result, for almost two millennia women remained not only silent but illiterate as well. The few women who were educated and brave enough to defy this apostolic prohibition encountered harsh patriarchal disapproval. One such spirited woman was a nun named Theodosia who lived in the fifth century. To this bold nun St. Nilus, the prominent abbot of a monastery near Ancyra, wrote the following letter, "It happens," he reminds her, "that your body makes you a woman, whether you like it or not. So stop teaching men in the church. For the Apostle made it clear that this is shameful, even though you may say ten thousand times that you have transcended the female condition, and that you are more steadfast than men..."^{cxlvii} Because by her διδασκαλία (instruction) Eve had caused Adam to go astray women were forever barred from teaching in the Church.^{cxlviii}

Some Fathers nevertheless worried that women who had been deprived of their voices might circumvent the Apostle by resorting to the pen and the written word. Didymus the Blind, a learned Christian teacher in cosmopolitan Alexandria, voiced this fear when he wrote that women must not write books "without restraint and on their own authority."^{cxlix}

By the fifth century the Greek Fathers had established what has proved to be a durable orthodox theology of women. There is no comparable theology of men. Equipped with

appropriate sacred texts, exegesis, typology and vocabulary, all tilted against woman upon whom it enjoins silence segregation and subjection, this theology served not only subsequent generations of preachers, prelates, and teachers but the liturgical poets of Greek Christendom as well. From choir stalls and pulpits alike male voices formed a chorale, reiterating the traditional antifeminist icon of Eve and the female species. Because Eve is seen to be reincarnated in each of her daughters, all women are included in a single pejorative image.

The vitality and success of this sexist theology can be readily documented in Byzantine hymnography. In hymns throughout the liturgical cycle Eve appears as the most prominent symbol of womanhood. Whether monks, bishops, patriarchs, or hymn-writing emperors, the Byzantine hymnographers consistently disparaged women, Eve the "first mother" along with her female descendants. It was, in fact, the patent misogyny in the magnificent hymns of St. Romanos the Melodos that first attracted my attention to this aspect of Orthodox theology. Following the example of the Church fathers, Christendom's prince of liturgical poets absolves Adam of responsibility in the Fall, and expresses sympathy for him, Eve's first victim. In a particularly vehement passage, Romanos attacks Eve for being "more serpent-like than the serpent."^{cli} Elsewhere he accuses Eve of "teaching Adam how to disobey God."^{clii}

Named only once in the Hebrew Bible and twice in the New Testament,^{clii} Eve achieved stellar status in sacred poetry, a reflection of her prominence in the patristic discussions of women. In hymnic compositions spanning a millennium the same negative vocabulary and imagery is used to describe woman's nature and to validate her subjection to man. A survey of the words that are most frequently associated in the hymns with "woman" and with Eve will prove instructive. The terms that are mentioned below occur with the inevitability and regularity of the Homeric stock epithet, thereby establishing the characteristic features of the feminine ethos and condition.^{cliii}

Αἰσχος and ονειδος (disgrace) are used to remind women that they are creatures of shame. With the single exception of Mary, the mother of Jesus, all women are implicated in the "disgrace of Eve." Απατη (deceit) suggests the dangers of woman's seductive powers. Hosios Lazarus, a male saint commemorated on November 7, is lauded by the hymnographer for successfully resisting, unlike Adam, "Eve's guile." Καταρα and αρα (curse) convey the malignant influences of the female species. "The curse of the first mother Eve" is a stock phrase in the hymns. Very rarely do we find the word "curse" attached to Adam's name.

Declared by the Fathers to be the first cause and the origin of sin, Eve is over and over again connected with the word αμαρτια (sin). A favorite expression is "Eve the instrument of sin." In Lenten hymns she is presented as the principal paradigm which the faithful must avoid imitating. Thus in Orthodoxy's most famous penitential hymn, the Great Kanon of St. Andrew of Crete, the sacred poet laments that his soul "has become like Eve."^{cliv} In these Lenten hymns women sinners significantly outnumber the men,

repentant harlots being a favorite subject.^{clv}

Several words occur frequently to emphasize that Eve is the protagonist in the tragedy of Eden and the loss of paradise. Παράβασις (transgression), derived from 1 Timothy 2:14, marks woman as the first person to violate God's commandments. In a hymn sung on November 21 we read this verse: "from her came transgression long ago to the human race." Παράκοη (disobedience) described in a popular troparion as an illness transmitted by Eve, also connects woman with the first act of willful insubordination to God. The sacred poets always underline Eve's disobedience, forgetting to mention Adam's. Likewise, πτωσις and εκπτοσις (fall) are repeatedly attached to Eve's name. This motif appears most commonly in hymns to female saints. The martyrdoms of these daughters of Eve cancel the "fall of the first mother." These blessed females win haloes and hymns for not imitating their first ancestress, and for surmounting the handicaps of their sex.

The contrast between Eve and these exceptional women is further developed in these hymns. Ηττα (defeat) is tied to Eve's name', νικη (victory) to theirs. For example, this contrast appears in a hymn written by the patriarch Germanus in honor of the forty women martyrs whose memory is celebrated on September 1, at the beginning of the liturgical calendar.

The "defeat of Eve" is, however, most conspicuously canceled by her unique daughter, Mary the Theotokos. In a hymn honoring St. Bassa (August 21), martyred together with her three sons, we find a typical expression of this recurrent motif: "Now you have retracted the failure of the first mother Eve . . . O Mother of God, you who alone are blessed among women."

Repeating a popular patristic theme, the hymnographers charged Eve with responsibility for all the evils and troubles that afflict humankind. When Kassia, a spirited young lady in ninth-century Constantinople, rejected this doctrine of a Christian Pandora. She lost out in the competition for an emperor's heart and the imperial throne of Byzantium. Theophilus wanted a submissive wife, not an independent-minded champion of her sex. Kassia should have held her tongue in apostolic obedience.

Among the multitude of evils which Eve bequeathed to her children death is her most dreaded legacy. A woman, the first sinner, was blamed for the introduction of death into human experience. Initially stated in Ecclesiastes 25:24, "thanks to her we must all die," this charge haunts Eve in countless Byzantine hymns. One well-known hymn begins with those words- Θανατου μεν αιτια η Ευα (the cause of death is Eve). Named "Eve" by Adam because she was the mother of all those who live,^{clvi} she is transformed by Christian myth into the bearer of death.

Like other major themes associated with Eve this one figures conspicuously in the rich corpus of Marian hymns. For example, in the troparion whose first line was just quoted

above, the poet explains that the Theotokos is "deservedly hymned" because, in contrast to Eve who brought death into the world, she is the "agent (προξενος) of immortality and life."

Inaugurated by the Fathers, an intricately developed typology became the foundation of the antithesis between Eve and Mary, the "first mother" and "God's mother." This typology uniformly exalts the latter and degrades the former. Joy, life, redemption and incorruptibility are associated with Mary; with Eve, sorrow, death, condemnation and corruption.

Judicial metaphors, χαταδικη (condemnation) and κατακριμα (judgment) convey the idea of Eve's crime and punishment. An extensive vocabulary for "grief" describes her permanent condition: (δακρυα, λυπη, οδυνη, στεναγμος, σκυθρωπος, συντριμμα, ωδινες (tears, sorrow, pain, sighing, gloomy, ruin, pangs of childbirth). Used repeatedly they create an indelible image of woman bowed down by sorrow and bondage that, according to the Christian myth of Eve, she has brought upon herself.

From woman's perspective it is ironical that Christianity's antifeminist stance should manifest itself so dramatically in encomia and hymns to a woman. Mary is glorified in part at the expense of Eve and her other daughters. The unique destiny and glory of the Theotokos effectively separates her from her lesser sisters. In the phrases of numerous Marian hymns the Theotokos stands "above women;" above nature," "alone among women." While Mary is adored as the "only" good, pure, blameless and holy woman all other women continue to be oppressed by burdens of shame and inferiority which they have inherited on account of Eve. Although the Theotokos is hailed as woman's λυτρωσις (deliverance), history reveals otherwise. Woman still waits for her liberation from the restrictive bonds imposed upon her by patriarchal prejudice and pride which are perpetuated by the Church.

It is difficult, even impossible, to measure fully the cumulative effect of this sexist theology on Greek society and culture. Unchallenged since its formulation in the early centuries of Christianity and hence unreformed, it has exerted powerful pressures in support of patriarchal attitudes, practices and institutions in Greece. The statistical study to which I referred in the opening sentences of this essay, however, indicates one measure of its continuing effect. The "traditionalist influence" of the Church upon the condition of the female population of Greece apparently has not significantly diminished. To raise the issue of woman in relation to a religious system is by no means irrelevant to the problem of her struggle for equality and dignity. Rather it is to understand and to challenge fundamental assumptions and entrenched traditions that discriminate against Greek women.

Saint Photeine, the Woman at the Well

The Eastern Orthodox Church honors the Samaritan woman whom Christ met at the well as Saint Photeine. Celebrated on February 26 and again on the fourth Sunday after Easter, she entered Christian literature and history in the fourth chapter of the fourth Gospel, when St. John, writing around 90 -100 A.D., records as an extraordinary happening, Jesus' encounter with a woman from Samaria. This story does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament.

The encounter, the Evangelist relates, took place at high noon or the "sixth hour's" when a Jewish teacher or rabbi weary from heat and travel stops to rest by the ancient well of Jacob in Samaria. A woman, carrying a water jar, has come from a nearby village to draw water for her household. When the man asks her for a drink of water, the request surprises her. Something extraordinary was indeed taking place. She knows that Jews despise Samaritans and avoid all contacts with them. And, despite centuries old religious prejudices, a Jew was talking to a Samaritan, courteously asking for a drink of water.

Her great surprise notwithstanding, the Samaritan woman responds. Soon the two at the well are engaged in conversation, discussing Jewish and Samaritan theology. This was even more extraordinary. Jewish men did not talk to women in public, especially Jewish teachers or rabbis. Rabbis, moreover, never talked theology with a woman, either publicly or privately. No wonder, then, that when Jesus' male disciples arrived at the well from their shopping in the town they "were astonished to find him talking with a woman" (John 4:27). Had the disciples heard the remarkable conversation between their teacher and the woman, their astonishment would have increased.

In the course of the conversation, the weary traveler sitting by the well and talking about "living water" reveals for the first time that he is the Messiah: "I am he, I who am speaking to you now" (John 4:26). Thus, according to the Evangelist, the revelation of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah first is made to a woman. An important disclosure about God has taken place.

The woman immediately accepts the disclosure. She believes that Jesus is the Christ of God and runs eagerly to tell her fellow villagers the good news. On the strength of her witness, we are told by St. John, many Samaritans came to believe in Jesus. And so, it was a woman who brought Jesus his first converts.

Infuriated by Photeine's missionary zeal, Nero did everything in his power to destroy Photeine and her faith. But, when he sent his daughter and her hundred maidservants to persuade the saint to abandon Christianity, the results did not please him. Photeine converted and baptized the imperial princess and her attendants.

The tyrant then resorted to punishments and tortures of all kinds. He sent his most

powerful magician to poison the saint. But when she swallowed his most lethal poison, the magician became a Christian and was baptized by Photeine. On hearing this, Nero ordered his magician beheaded. All his attempts to break Photeine's faith had failed. For three years Photeine remained imprisoned in Rome. While in jail, she transformed it into a "house of God." A marvelous bright light and sweet fragrance filled her prison. Romans came in crowds to see and to hear her talk about Christ. Many were converted by her into Christians, "children of light." Finally when her five sisters had been put to death and Saint Photeine was left alone, Nero tried one last time to annihilate her. She was thrown into a very deep and dry well. When this cruel torture failed (as had all others), Photeine was returned to prison where she died peacefully.

Sad that she had not been "crowned with martyrdom" along with her sisters, Photeine had prayed for death. In answer to her prayers Christ appeared to the saint, blessing her with the sign of the cross. Some days later, while singing praises to God, Saint Photeine put her beautiful soul into the hands of the Savior.

The legend of Saint Photeine, the Samaritan woman, preserves the memory of Christianity's first valiant woman, who not only believed in the Word but also proclaimed it. In honoring Saint Photeine, the Orthodox Church pays homage to the first women apostles.

Orthodox Women Face Challenges

At the recent Clergy-Laity Congress, Archbishop Iakovos urged members of Philoptochos organizations to find their "missing sisters." This means that some Orthodox women are "lost to the church." This is discussed by Sonja Jason in her article "Orthodox Women in Crisis" (Hellenic Chronicle, Sept. 20, 1984). She refers to the "flight" of Orthodox women. Like Ms. Jason, I have received long distance calls from Orthodox women in distress, most recently one from a woman I have never met. At the beginning of our hour-long conversation (which cost her a pretty penny), she wept as she described her isolation and spiritual needs. A Philoptochos president and Sunday school teacher for 15 years, she nevertheless feels that women are denied opportunities for spiritual growth and for greater service to God and to God's people. Obviously a serious crisis exists that is just now beginning to be articulated.

Obviously, the crisis presents challenges for the church as a whole. It also presents special challenges and opportunities to which Orthodox women of faith must respond with all the courage and wisdom which we possess. To do this will not be easy. But the time has come for us to speak, to knock on closed doors and to open them, not only for ourselves, but even more for our daughters and granddaughters. Although no one can alter the past, Orthodox women, who constitute at least half of the church, can help shape the future, the "new earth" which Christ came to inaugurate.

We women can begin by voicing our concerns freely and honestly. Our retreats, meetings and organizations should become our own. Our panels and discussions should be organized by us. We should define our needs and goals as dictated by our experience. To do this, we need to create a grassroots network and to establish communications with our sisters scattered over our vast country. For this, a publication by women and for women seems essential. Furthermore, Philoptochos members should elect all their officers and boards on the local, diocesan and national levels.

Secondly, women need to discover and to know our history in the church. In the very beginnings of the Christian movement, women were there, active and faithful. Christ numbered women among his disciples and apostles. The first churches met in houses headed by women. Women were the first to proclaim the Resurrection, the first to say "Christos Anesti." We can learn much from the glorious lives of our female saints. These sacred heroines of Orthodoxy include apostles, prophets, deacons, preachers, founders of churches, ascetics and healers, to say nothing of the hundreds of female martyrs from the first century to the modern period. Our female saints provide incredibly rich and diverse role models to guide and inspire Orthodox women today. However, unless we know the true history of women in the church, we cannot claim it, and a noble tradition lies wasted.

What a pity it will be if Orthodox women do not accept the challenges and opportunities

before us. By expansion of our spiritual horizons, by expanded participation in the liturgical and ministerial life of the church, by obedience to the commandment of love that is supremely inclusive, we will end the "flight" of our sisters. At the same time, we will become true followers or disciples of Christ, like Saints Mary and Martha of Bethany, Mary Of Magdala, Photeine the Samaritan Woman, Thekla the first woman martyr, Katherine of Alexandria, and many more of our foremothers and sisters.

Many hands and hearts are needed to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. The gifts and talents of women should no longer be wasted, circumscribed by customs based on prejudice. The doors that have been closed to women must be opened. Otherwise, the list of our "missing sisters" will grow longer, the "flight" of Orthodox women greater.

Belittling Eve

The Eastern Orthodox Church possesses a magnificent treasury of hymns, which I have been studying for more than a decade. These hymns reflect the unique splendor and spirituality of Byzantine Christianity. At the same time they document many facets of Byzantium's historical, cultural and religious experience. As a result, this complex hymnic mosaic has proved to be an endlessly fascinating subject. Of particular interest to me as an Orthodox woman is the image of Eve and woman. It is a portrayal of woman that was shaped and inspired by patriarchal prejudice and pride. This sexist image of Eve and woman is too well articulated, too extensive and too deeply imbedded in the tradition of our church to be brushed aside lightly. It deserves our attention.

After my first rude encounter with this image of Eve I began to take notes each time I found mention of Eve and "woman" in the hymns. As I worked my way through the more than two dozen thick volumes of Greek liturgical poetry, my notes quickly accumulated, revealing a pattern and startling evidence of an entrenched ideology which put down Eve and her daughters. For one thousand years Byzantine liturgical poets composed hymns heaping opprobrium on Eve and denigrated the entire female sex-with a single exception, as we shall later see.

Members of a choir that was predominantly male (only four women hymnographers are known to us), hymnwriting emperors, patriarchs, bishops, monks, deacons and laymen composed hymns for the liturgies of the church. In their hymns these male hymnographers unanimously put down Eve and women. First in the order of sin, women were condemned to subordination, sorrow and silence. Second in the order of creation, according to the primitive folk-tale in Genesis 2, Eve and her sex were considered inferior to the male and therefore subject to his rule.

Such androcentric, anti-woman attitudes did not, however, originate with the composers of hymns. Credit belongs to Christianity's founding fathers, Greek and Latin. Their voluminous and authoritative writings furnished Byzantium's church poets with a sexist theology of woman, and provided them with Biblical proof-texts, typology and exegesis. When this theology was set to verse and music by hymnographers, choir stalls joined pulpits to project within the church a stereotyped image of Eve and woman. To this day this demeaning image remains intact, preserved in the liturgical books of the church.

Named only three times in the Bible, Eve achieved superstar status in the hymns, where she symbolizes her sex, half of the human race. Eve appears everywhere, in more hymns than can be counted. Even so, I was surprised to find her in a beautiful 7th century funeral hymn. An unknown poet blames Eve for the long list of ills that plague humankind. His accusation begins. "Eve transmitted the curse to everybody." She figures prominently in hymns sung on major holy days like Easter and Christmas. As the first sinner, Eve is inevitably present, along with reformed harlots, in the penitential hymns of Lent. For example, in the "Grand Canon" St. Andrew of Crete, a

hymnwriting hierarch, laments that, alas, his soul "resembles Eve" and, like her, has "tasted the deceptive food." That Adam too had tasted the forbidden fruit is overlooked. Like the theologians, the hymnwriters prefer not to implicate Adam in the disaster that occurred in Eden. Instead of rebuking Adam for his disobedience to God, one poet chastises him for "obeying his rib," an unforgivable lapse by the first representative of the superior sex.

It is, however, in hymns to women that we most frequently encounter Eve. Since Eve was believed to be reincarnated in every female, her dark shadow forever haunts women. No woman can escape the stigma of Eve's sinful past. Not even female saints are spared. Adorned by the church with halos and enrolled in the liturgical calendar, these heroines of Christianity nevertheless bear the onus of being Eve's daughters.

A few examples chosen out of many will illustrate my point. On September 1st the hymnographers praise forty brave women martyrs. They congratulate the women for reversing the "defeat of the mother" at the hands of Satan and for transcending the inherited "feebleness of the female nature." Hymns to female saints almost invariably refer to woman's innate inferiority implicit in the commonplace phrase "female nature." A church poet in his hymn to St. Ripsimia (September 30), a martyr who endured incredible tortures, reminds us that "female nature has been weak from the beginning in the first mother." St. Matrona (March 27), the slave-girl martyr, is praised because "neither the yoke of slavery nor the emptiness of the female nature" caused her to flinch in face of persecution. A more famous saint, Marina the Great Martyr (July 17), is hailed as "marvelous" for her "strengthening of female rottenness." In contrast to the linkage of female saints to sinful Eve and to inherited inferiority, Adam is seldom, if ever, evoked in hymns to male saints. Since males reflect the glory of God, Adam's delinquencies are buried in discreet silence. Eve's, on the other hand, are well publicized from pulpit and choir.

Within the same hymn a female saint is extolled as "all blessed," or as "all wise" and the "Bride of God," while her sex is harshly denigrated and her humanity denied. Hymns to female saints feature the phrase the "weakness of women." Admiring the spectacular ascetic feats of St. Euphrosyne (September 25), a hymnographer exclaims in surprise, "What an unusual sight! How did you conceal the weakness of women?" The identification of sanctity and spirituality exclusively with maleness often appears in hymns to women saints. The highest praise bestowed upon these women is that they have triumphed over the obstacles of their sex and become men. Liberated from femaleness, they exhibit "male" virtues, strength, courage; they also gain souls and minds which females naturally lack.

St. Eudokia (March 1), a reformed harlot, is eulogized for "preaching like a man. Similarly, St. Eugenia (December 24) wins praise for turning to "male activities" like "explaining to everyone the truth of the Scriptures." Since preaching and teaching in the church are still restricted to males, the existence in the past of women preachers

and teachers is good news. Orthodoxy's most glorious women saints, however, were generally denied female dignity and worth. According to her enthusiastic eulogist, St. Catherine the Great Martyr (November 25), a learned and skilled debater, triumphed over Alexandria's leading philosophers by "changing the weakness of female nature to masculinity."

Eve, our much maligned foremother, appears, however, most conspicuously in hymns to her unique and most exalted daughter. Byzantine Christians express limitless veneration for the Mother of God in churches, icons, sermons and a vast repertory of hymns. In Marian hymns Eve again functions as a foil. The archetypal embodiment of female imperfections, Eve sets off Mary's perfections. Like the church fathers, Byzantium's sacred poets ascribe evil and vice to the "first Eve," virtues and blessings to the "second Eve," Mary. Disobedience, death, sin and sorrow are associated with Eve; obedience (from the androcentric perspective and the cardinal female virtue), life, purity and joy with Mary. The constant juxtaposition of sinful Eve and sinless Mary exalts a single woman at the expense of all other women, and disparages an entire sex. Inevitably, Mary's immaculate shining image reinforces the negative image of her sisters. More than one scholar has in fact noted that Mary's glory grew brighter in inverse proportion to the downgrading of the female sex. Indeed, Mary stands alone in sublime isolation. In the hymnwriters' words, she is "above women," and "alone among all the generations of women." The celestial Mother of God occupies holy space in the apses of countless Orthodox churches, while no daughter of hers is permitted access to the altar. Her holiness has yet to trickle down to women of the church.

To fashion their sexist image of Eve and woman, the hymnographers employed a rich and colorful vocabulary whose orthodoxy the authority of the church fathers guaranteed. Stretching through the Greek alphabet from alpha to omega (from *amartia* to *odines*), these words are harsh, vivid, blunt. Their meanings are never obscure. Together they create a sharply defined monolithic sexist profile of Eve and woman.

The most important word in this distorted and negative profile is "sin" (*amartia*). Choosing in this instance to ignore St. Paul, who credited Adam with the origin of sin (II Corinthians 11:3, Romans 5:12), Orthodox theologians and hymnographers pin the blame exclusively on Eve. They further implicate all women in Eve's alleged crime against humanity. Thus, sin defines woman. And a poet, singing of Christ's birth, denounces all women as the "instrument of sin."

Likewise, responsibility for the existence of death (*thanatos*) is charged to Eve alone. Through many centuries Byzantium's sacred songs reverberate with the accusation, "Eve is the cause of death." One hymnwriter sadly names Adam as the first casualty of "death-bringing Eve." Another reflects on his own mortality, blaming his death on "Eve my first mother." Originally named Eve, the "mother of all the living" (Genesis 3:20), the first woman is ironically transformed into the "instrument of death." Even the life-bringing and nurturing functions of Eve and her daughters are impugned. Moreover,

the identification of woman with sin and death serves to justify man's domination of woman.

The agent of sin and death, and Satan's ally, Eve is turned from woman into a malevolent power or curse. Two words for curse (*ara*, *katara*) are repeatedly attached to her name. On account of Eve all women are doomed to suffer the curse of painful childbirth. Because of Eve, "chains of the curse" bind the human race. Haunted by the "ancestral curse," the composer of a hymn for Christmas rejoices that Christ is born "dissolving the curse of Eve."

The hymnographers further depict the first woman as a creature of shame (*aischos*, *aischyne*, *Oneidos*). Uninterruptedly they echo the phrase "the shame of Eve." St Romanos the Melodos, Christendom's greatest liturgical poet, presents a vivid image of abject Eve, overwhelmed by her disgrace. In a hymn for Christmas she says:

*I can no longer endure the reproaches and shame. I bend down my head until
you raise me up again. Mary full of grace.*

The hymnographers brand the whole female sex with Eve's "most burdensome shame," sparing only Mary. Other female saints are not exempted from this unfortunate legacy. A 14th century hymn to the Myrophoroi, the faithful women disciples who were the first witnesses and apostles of the resurrection, begins with these words: "The shame of their nature." *Aischos* (shame) is this hymn's first word.

Byzantium's hymnwriters followed the theologians in describing the many flaws and failings of Eve's "female nature." In Eden the first woman had displayed lack of understanding (*anoia*) as well as moral and spiritual instability (*to olistheron*). Eve's female progeny inherited these characteristics. Eve also bequeathed another female trait to her daughters--women are creatures of deception. Deceived by the serpent, Eve then deceived Adam. Her daughters, generation after generation, have done the same.

The hymnographers do more than just put down Eve. They dehumanize her. On the basis of the aetiological tale narrated in Genesis 2, the sacred poets not infrequently designate Eve and woman with the word "rib". The phrase "Adam and his rib" occurs in one hymn. The male is dignified with a name and recognized as a person. The female has no name. Eve's personhood is thereby effectively denied. Woman is reduced to a superfluous bit of anatomy. A fractured, flawed and derivative being, Eve depends on Adam for existence and identity. She has none of her own.

No wonder then that from our hymns Eve emerges a pitiful and wretched figure. For this facet of our first mother's image I have counted no less than nine synonyms for "sorrow." Phrases like the "tears of Eve," the grief of Eve," the "lament of Eve," or the "distresses of Eve" are endlessly repeated, creating the indelible image of women oppressed and depressed, forever weeping. It was of course understood that women

deserve this fate because "Eve planted sorrow in Eden." Behind this portrait in the Greek hymns lies the rabbinic teaching that Eve must forever mourn on account of her sins. That the founder of Christianity showed liberating sympathy for all women, as the Gospels record, seems not to have impressed the patriarchal-minded creators of the church's anti-woman ideology.

Clearly, the sexist image of Eve and woman which I have described is not a fleeting or incidental phenomenon in the history of the church. It cannot be dismissed as occasional flights of rhetorical hyperbole or of a few monks' overheated imagination. The sources fail to corroborate such claims. Byzantine hymns composed over a millennium document the vitality and durability of androcentric theology, the creation of church fathers who believed in woman's divinely designed inferiority.

Beyond the testimony of the written words in canon laws, patristics and hymnography there is also the eloquent witness of the church's praxis. On the basis of sex it discriminates against women, denying them full participation in the life of the *ecclesia*. Today it is no longer possible to conceal the existence and influence of patriarchal prejudice and pride. Nor is it possible to claim validity for appeals made to traditions which are founded on the androcentric premises of woman's inferior and sinful nature.

Surely the time has come for open, serious and informed examination of Orthodoxy's traditional attitudes and stance in regard to women. It is time at last to recognize Eve's dignity and humanity. She too was created in the divine image. Eve's Orthodox daughters know that they have names, and that they are people, not ribs.

March 25, 1985

For almost two thousand years Greek Orthodox have called the holy day of March 25th the EVANGELISMOS. Other Christians know it as the Annunciation. When I was a child growing up in a small Virginia town that had no Greek community or church, I knew March 25th as the "Greek Fourth of July." Years passed before I learned the many connections and multiple meanings of this ancient and joyous festival.

The origin of the Feast of the Evangelismos (Glad-tidings) lies in Luke 1 :26-38. In these few verses the Evangelist records the dramatic encounter between Archangel Gabriel and a young Jewish girl living in the house of Joseph, her fiancé. This story is so familiar that we fail to see how extraordinary it is, how significant for the historical and religious experience of Christendom. Sent by God to Nazareth, Gabriel brings a strange message of glad tidings to Mary. The angel tells the frightened girl that she will bear a child who is the Son of God. This announcement baffles Mary. And she asks how that can possibly be. Yet she does not, as a proper Jewish girl should, run to Joseph, her future husband, to ask for his permission and advice. Instead, relying on her faith in God's word, she decides for herself, independent of any manmade authority and tradition. Mary's decision is hers alone. Of her own free will, she accepts her unique destiny, consenting to lend her flesh so that God could become human. Thus by her act of faith and freedom, a young woman becomes the human agent through whom a divine revolution begins to unfold in the world, a process of change that will continue.

Mary's cooperation with God, her participation in the design of salvation, initiates a new era of liberation for humankind. In her ecstatic psalm of thanksgiving she expresses not only the spirituality of the new Christian order, but its political and social realities as well. "My soul exalts the Lord and my spirit rejoices . . . because the Mighty One has done great things for me . . . He has . . . scattered the proud . . . He has pulled down rulers from their thrones, and raised up the humble; He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1 :46-55).

Orthodoxy's beautiful hymns for the Evangelismos combine praises of the Theotokos with variations on the themes of her song-salvation, restoration, reconciliation, the end of injustice and oppression. Because God assumed human face and form in a woman's womb Satan is defeated, the old order of sin is vanquished. "Today come glad tidings of joy; it is the feast of the Virgin . . . Adam is made new, and Eve liberated from her ancient sorrow." Once again the gates of Eden are open. The new creation begins with the Evangelismos, with Mary's words, "Here is the servant of the Lord; may it happen to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38).

Also, Eve and Adam's alienation from God now ceases. Creator and creation are reconciled in Mary's child, the God-person (theanthropos). The Incarnate Logos restores the divine image and likeness in women and men. "Today is revealed the mystery that is from all eternity . . . Now God becomes human" in order to make us

God.

Through the long centuries of foreign rule and oppression Greeks celebrated the Feast of the Evangelismos, the beginning of the divine revolution that brought the God of love and life to dwell on earth, to show the way to freedom, justice and peace. The message of the Evangelismos illumined Greek minds and hearts, inspiring generations to hope and struggle for their human dignity and liberty.

March 25, 1821 . . . the Feast of the Evangelismos, the day of glad tidings. The heroic revolutionaries could not have chosen a more appropriate and auspicious day for proclaiming Greek Independence. When the Revolution ended eight years later, proud rulers had been humbled, and the humble subjects of the sultan had been exalted. At last the Greeks were free.

The First Christos Anesti (Christ is Risen)

Greek Orthodox Christians have been saying and singing Χηριστος Ανεστη for more generations than we can easily count. Familiar from our earliest childhood, these two words fall so naturally from our lips that we fail to appreciate their significance. In fact, this ancient paschal greeting proclaims Christianity's basic Kerygma and Orthodoxy's faith in the victory of life over death, in the triumph of love over evil.

From the very beginning these same two words have proclaimed the Resurrection of God who became human. Χηριστος Ανεστη was first spoken neither by pious priests and learned lawyers, nor by generals and rich merchants. Nor indeed did these words first fall from the lips of Jesus' male disciples. For, at the time of Jesus' arrest they had "left Him and fled away, all of them" (Mark 14:50). One of the twelve, Judas, had betrayed Jesus for a few silver coins, and another, Peter, would deny Him three times.

Scriptures record that women were the first to pronounce the words Χηριστος Ανεστη. All four Gospels tell an amazing story about the love and loyalty of Jesus' female disciples, and mathetria. The names of several survive: Mary of Magdala, Salome, Joanna, and Mary, the mother of Joset. Along with others, they formed a group of extraordinary women. By "following" Christ through town and countryside and sharing His ministry of teaching and healing, they had defied and broken religious laws and social customs which confined women to the home. Nevertheless, the women disciples never deserted. When the crunch came, unlike the male disciples, "weak" women proved to be Jesus' only true followers.

Standing and watching their friend's death on the cross, the women shared His pain. They watched again and followed when the body was laid in the tomb. According to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the Easter story is the story of Christ's female disciples.

They were the first to experience the Anastasis and its joy. When on the third day after the Crucifixion the women carried spices to the tomb, they found it empty and learned that Christ had risen from the dead. In the words of a paschal hymn, "The Women were first (πρωται) to see the Anastasis. They were also the first to proclaim it, running to tell the hidden male disciples the good news (Ευαγγελιον). The men, however, did not believe them, thinking that the women were talking nonsense (Luke 24:12).

Likewise, the Gospels relate that the Risen Lord first appeared and talked with the faithful women disciples. As Mary Magdalen and the "other Mary" walked away from the empty tomb that first Easter morning, Jesus appeared and entrusted them to carry the message of his Resurrection to the male disciples in hiding (Matthew 28:1-10). For this reason Orthodox tradition celebrates the Myrophoroi as the "first Evangelists."

Both Mark and John tell further the beautiful story of Mary Magdalene's encounter with

the Risen Lord. Mary of Magdala's tears and grief turned to joy when she heard her beloved Teacher call her by name (John 20:1-18). Commissioning Mary Magdalen to go and tell the frightened disciples about His return to heaven, Jesus made a woman the "first apostle" and the "apostle to the apostles." The male disciples, however, did not believe her (Mark 16:11), since traditionally women's witness was considered worthless. And yet, two thousand years later, Christian faith and belief in the Resurrection depends solely on the testimony of women, from whose lips fell the first ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ.

St. Mary Magdalene

July 22nd is no ordinary day in the Orthodox Church. It is holy because it belongs to an extraordinary woman. For over one thousand years, the name of St. Mary Magdalene has marked this day in the ancient calendar of our Church. Around the world Orthodox Christians in many lands celebrate this woman who stood with Christ at the cross and beyond.

The gospels record that she was a remarkable woman. Mary of Magdala claimed dignity and independence for herself at a time when women counted for little or nothing. Defying restrictive laws and customs, she walked, with Jesus all the way from Galilee to Jerusalem. In town and countryside, this fearless, loyal woman disciple shared His healing ministry of love and reconciliation. She stood with Jesus in the struggle against hatred and violence, against sexist, racist and religious prejudices.

The struggle was never easy. It was often dangerous. And one day Jesus died on the cross. thinking that the end had come, the male disciples ran and hid. Already one had betrayed and another had denied Him three times. But Mary Magdalene, with other women disciples, remained in Jerusalem, watching , waiting and weeping. Three days later joy replaced sorrow and tears when Mary of Magdala experienced the Resurrection. She was the first to see and speak with the Risen Lord. On that first Easter morning God exalted this woman above all the disciples. God commanded her to go and tell what she had witnessed, empowering her to become the apostle to the apostles. From a woman's lips first came the good news of love's triumph over evil and death, the good news of life and liberation for all of God's children.

Christianity's first apostle, a leader in the primitive Christian Church, a pioneer in the struggle to build a new earth, St. Mary Magdalene wears the brightest of halos. Let us honor the memory of our foresister by pledging ourselves to stand fast, securing justice for the weak and proclaiming liberty to captives; setting the downtrodden free and binding up hearts that are broken.

Most holy and glorious Mary Magdalene, on this your feastday, bless and strengthen us here and everywhere, now and forever and ever. Amen. Given July 22. 1984, Ecumenical Assembly of Church Women United, Purdue University.

Heroines and Halos

I was once asked what I do. The answer was brief, but not very informative--"I read and write." This did not sound like much, and there was no second question. Had there been I would have explained in this way. "For some time I have been reading and writing about Byzantine hymnography. More recently I also read and write about women in the Church." I would have added that both subjects are vast in scope and time, both interesting and important to understanding Orthodox traditions, history and spirituality.

Strange as it may seem, Byzantine hymns and women in the church are not unconnected subjects. Orthodox hymnography includes thousands of hymns to women, to the Theotokos and to women saints. In fact, what I read about women in the hymns of our church first turned my attention to the subject of Eve's daughters and the *ekklesia*. Until then it was entirely outside my research interests. Nor had I, a birthright Greek Orthodox woman, given any thought to the history and position of women in Eastern Christianity. As it has turned out, the study of Greek hymns in honor of females has proved most instructive. Not only do they reveal the grandeur of the church's heroines and the brightness of their haloes. They also reflect an ingrained tradition of negative and demeaning attitudes of church and society concerning women.^{clvii}

This complex challenging subject, can, of course, be studied from various perspectives, scriptural, historical, theological or sociological. To my great delight I soon discovered that the study of the lives and hymns to women saints illumined and enlivened this subject in many ways. In addition, from my reading in the relevant Greek sources I became acquainted with an Orthodox sisterhood that transcends time and place. I haven't been the same since.

These haloed heroines of Orthodoxy number in the thousands. Together they form an unbroken golden chain, binding the past, present and future. Needless to say, the centerpiece of this golden chain holds the most exalted position among all the saints. No female or male saint can match the divine glory^{clviii} of the Theotokos.

In every respect our female saints are the match of their brothers, sons or fathers. There is even a female counterpart to St George. Our Blessed Mother Elizabeth the Miracle-Worker (April 24)^{clix} also killed a dragon. But unlike St. George she did not use a weapon. When Emperor Leo I gave her convent a property inhabited by a dreadful dragon, this fifth-century Constantinopolitan abbess approached the monster, armed only with a cross. St. Elizabeth killed the dragon by spitting on his head and trampling on him with her feet^{clx} (What a marvelous icon this would make!) I am, however, still searching for a female double of Hosios David of Thessalonike who lived for years in an almond tree.

Like males, females achieved sanctity and haloes in different ways, there being no

single royal road that leads to God and holiness. Narrated in synaxaria, menologia and sermons, and praised in countless hymns, these saints provide endlessly fascinating, priceless documents of Christian women's history.

From these Greek sermons and hymns we quickly learn that from the beginning women have played crucial and creative roles in the church; that women of the church have not always been segregated, silent and subordinate. With admiration I often reflect on St. Theodosia of Constantinople (May 29).^{clxi} In the eighth century this brave nun led a group of women in a public demonstration against the emperor's religious policy. After preventing the removal of Christ's icon from the Chalke Gate the women continued their protest by marching on the patriarchate. For her fidelity to Orthodoxy Theodosia paid with her life. But immediately this woman-martyr became a powerful symbol of resistance and heroism.

Within the ever-expanding galaxy of Orthodox saints we find women who were disciples of Christ, apostles, evangelists, deacons, teachers, preachers, healers, prophets, founders of Christian communities, builders of convents and churches, and conveners of ecumenical councils. These holy women remind us, lest we forget, that God includes women in the divine image (Genesis 1:27), and that in the new creation inaugurated by Christ there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3: 27-28). They also remind us that the Holy Spirit calls females^{clxii} and males equally to be saints, to serve God and humankind. Contrary to the stereotype of female weakness, dependence and submission, our women saints are models of strength, self-determination and resolution, which patriarchal tradition assigned only to males.

These church mothers and heroines of ours do not, however, receive from their Orthodox daughters and sons the honor they deserve. With a few notable exceptions, most female saints remain obscure names inscribed in liturgical books. These remarkable women remain lifeless forgotten shadows, relics of the past. One summer in Athens, I asked a devout woman lawyer to name ten female saints. She was ashamed and surprised that she could not.

Therefore let us together on this occasion recall and honor the women saints of September, the first month of the ecclesiastical year, September has 30 days and at least 150 female saints. Their names enchant our ears and imaginations. Listen to these; Euanthia (Sept. 1, 11); Kalliste (Sept. 1); Vasilissa (Sept. 3); Vevaia (Sept. 4); Charitine (Sept. 4); Melitene (Sept 16); Thcopiste (Sept. 20); Epicharis (Sept. 27); Ia (Sept. 1); Myrsine (Sept. 9); Euphrosyne (Sept. 25). It is worth noting that on September 1, the first day of the new liturgical year, our church commemorates 5 male and 43 female saints.^{clxiii} September, moreover, is by no means exceptional in the number of women saints. The other eleven months are also richly graced with heroines and haloes.

Because the calling to sainthood never recognizes national or ethnic boundaries,

September's women saints constitute a strikingly cosmopolitan group. Wherever Christian communities existed women heard and answered the call to holiness, in ancient lands stretching eastward from the Pillars of Heracles in the west to the distant Tigris and Euphrates. Our holy women were born, lived and died in Spain, Italy, Greece, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, at Cappadocia, Arabia. Armenia and Persia.

Likewise, the calling to sainthood recognizes no social classes, or distinctions between rich and poor. Our women saints belong to all social strata, the highest, as well as the lowest. On September 17 and 18, 2 women martyrs are commemorated. Both were slaves. Agathocleia^{clxiv} was martyred at the hands of her pagan mistress. Without faltering in her faith the slave girl endured 8 years of daily harassment and persecution. Ariadne^{clxv}, a slave in the house of a Phrygian nobleman, died a martyr's death because she refused to participate in her young master's birthday celebration in a pagan temple. Many other women saints are described as belonging to the upper classes, from which indeed came a large number of the first women converts to Christianity (Acts 17:4, 12). The September calendar of saints also includes 3 women of royal blood, a Persian princess, the martyr Kasdoa (Sept. 29), and 2 empresses of Byzantium. The first wife of Theodosios the Great (reg. 379-395 A.D.), Spanish-born Plakilla (Sept. 14)^{clxvi} added a halo to her imperial crown by her zeal for the faith, her humility, and above all by her love for people. With her own hands this pious empress attended to the needs of the sick and poor in the hospitals which she had built.

St. Pulcheria (Sept. 10th)^{clxvii} imitated her grandmother's piety. Throughout her long career in imperial and church politics (414-453 A.D.) Pulcheria lived the austere life of a nun. Her exercise of power and her personal participation in the *ekklesia* are extraordinary, even for a Byzantine empress. Pulcheria's image was painted above the altar of Hagia Sophia. On Easter she entered the sanctuary of the *Megale Ekklesia* and took communion with the patriarch, two priests and her brother the emperor.

In 451 A.D. St. Pulcheria convened the Council of Chalcedon^{clxviii} in the basilica of a local female martyr, St. Euphemia. Hailing the empress as the "light of Orthodoxy" and "protectress of the faith," the 520 fathers of the council adopted Pulcheria's ecclesiastical policy. And although she was a female they allowed her to appear before the assembly of bishops. This epoch-making fourth ecumenical council had a "mother" along with "fathers."

Taken together, the women saints of September span at least 1800 years, that is, most of the Christian era. The earliest come from the New Testament: St. Elizabeth (Sept.5), the mother of John the Forerunner; the Theotokos, whose nativity is celebrated on Sept.8th^{clxix} St. Hermione (Sept. 4), a woman-prophet mentioned in Acts 21:7-9. The most recent is the Greek neo-martyr Akylina (Sept. 27)^{clxx}. When she was still an infant her father had apostasized. Just 2 centuries ago, in 1764, Akylina was martyred in Thessalonike. Encouraged by her mother to resist her father's pleas and to endure tortures by the Turks, this young woman, aged 18, chose death over betrayal of

her Orthodox faith.

Called "god-bearing", "brides of God", "gloriously victorious" and "all-most-blessed", martyrs formed by far the largest group of women saints not only in September but in the other months as well. This should not surprise us. For, from the beginning, whenever Christians were persecuted, women were among the martyrs. In the first recorded persecution, Saul, later to become Paul, arrested women along with men and dragged them off to jail (Acts 1-3). In every persecution women endured imprisonment, physical and mental tortures. Loyal unto death, many women have paid blood tribute to the church. Martyrdom is a great equalizer and recognizes no gender discrimination.

In the Greek sources female martyrs appear both as equals and as leaders.

"Imitating the cross, death and voluntary sufferings of Christ,"^{clxxi} 40 women (Sept. 1), shared martyrdom with their didaskalos, the deacon Ammon. Kasdoa (Sept. 29)^{clxxii} and Kalliste (Sept. 1)^{clxxiii} gained martyrs' crowns with their brothers. In a hymn^{clxxiv} to the latter the hymnographer emphasizes that Kalliste like a mother led her 2 brothers to martyrdom.^{clxxv} This trio is praised for being "firm of mind".^{clxxvi} But Kalliste, clearly the leader of the 3 martyrs, alone is called "all-wise".^{clxxvii} Wives and mothers shared martyrdom with male members of their families. Theopiste (Sept. 20)^{clxxviii} was martyred along with her husband an ex-general and their 2 sons; Dominata a Roman matron (Sept. 10)^{clxxix} along with her 3 sons. In other instances, mothers, daughters and sisters face martyrdom together: Sophia and her 3 daughters, Elpis, Pistis and Agape (Sept. 17)^{clxxx}, the 3 sisters Menodora, Metrodora and Nymphodora (Sept. 10).^{clxxxi}

The first woman martyr is celebrated by the Orthodox Church on September 24.

St. Thekla First-Martyr and Equal-to-the-apostles^{clxxxii} was perhaps the most revered heroine of the early church. She inspired generations of women in the Greek East. To be called a "second Thekla" was to receive the supreme compliment. In ninth-century Constantinople Thekla, a hymnwriting nun, boasted of the long catalogue of female martyrs, headed by her first-century namesake.^{clxxxiii} In Byzantium where imperial princesses bore her name, St. Thekla enjoyed high honor. Hymnographers sang her glories^{clxxxiv} and learned bishops recorded her many miracles.^{clxxxv} This one I like best. When an illiterate woman received a Bible as a gift St. Thekla miraculously granted her the power to read.^{clxxxvi}

St. Euphemia (Sept. 16)^{clxxxvii} Great-Martyr and Worthy-of-all-praise is the second most illustrious female saint celebrated in this month. A victim of Diocletian's persecutions in the third century, Euphemia was martyred in Chalcedon her hometown. Before long a magnificent basilica was built in the martyr's honor.^{clxxxviii} In 451 St. Pulcheria chose this church as the meetingplace for the fourth ecumenical council, confident that St. Euphemia, the local spiritual powerhouse, would assist her. The empress' confidence was not misplaced. And St. Euphemia the Great-Martyr gained renown as the guardian of Orthodox dogma and as Preacher-of-Christ.^{clxxxix} Thus the collaboration of two women, one in heaven and the other on earth, secured the success of the

Council of Chalcedon and the triumph of Orthodoxy over heresy.

The superior numbers and fame of martyr-saints should not however, overshadow the haloes of women who took other paths to sainthood.

Monasticism and asceticism offered women other routes to holiness. Behind convent walls and in solitary cells women found freedom to pursue spiritual perfection, to become "friends of God." The haloes of women who achieved sanctity as nuns, virgins, or ascetics shine no less brightly than those of martyrs. Such a saint is called "Blessed" and is recognized as "our Mother".

This group of women saints is well represented on the September calendar. Our Blessed Mothers include Martha (Sept. 1),^{cxc} mother of the Syrian fifth-century stylite, St. Symeon; Euanthia (Sept. I),^{cxc} about whom nothing is recorded except her floral name; Athanasia (Sept. 18 or Oct. 9),^{cxcii} the ideal wife who became a nun. Unlike Eve, she gave her husband good advice, persuading him to become a monk. Andronikos was luckier (more blessed?) than Adam. More dramatic are the lives of three women-monks who are commemorated this month. Our Blessed Mother Euphrosyne (Sept. 25),^{cxciii} an Egyptian female ascetic, lived for 38 years in a male monastery. Dressed like a man and calling herself Smaragdus, she surpassed her fellow-monks in ascetic austerities and virtues. Our Blessed Mother Theodora of Alexandria (Sept. 11)^{cxciv} was a married woman who left home, donned male garb and entered a male monastery in the desert. Repenting her sins and "making herself a gift to God," Theodora lived there the rest of her life. The true sex of Euphrosyne and Theodora was not discovered until after their deaths.

Susanna (Sept. 19),^{cxcv} our third woman-monk, is called "Blessed-Martyr" because she was both an ascetic and a martyr. The child of a mixed marriage, she was born in Palestine. Rejecting the religion of her pagan father and Jewish mother, Susanna became a Christian. She then cut her hair, put on male clothing, adopted the name John and entered a male monastery near Jerusalem. A few years later her true sex was discovered. She should have been punished for violating canon laws. Instead, the Bishop of Eleutheropolis ordained Susanna a deacon.^{cxcvi} Between 361 and 363 Deacon Susanna was martyred during Julian the Apostate's persecution of Christians in the empire.

Our Blessed Mothers Euphrosyne, Theodora and Susanna and other women monastics and ascetics received high praise from enthusiastic hagiographers and hymnographers. They are admired for their spiritual attainments which often outshone those of men.^{cxcvii} But most of all they are commended for having overcome the weakness and flaws inherent in their sex and for having become men. The holiness of females being traditionally considered inferior to that of males.^{cxcviii} This was a great compliment.

In September the Orthodox Church also pays tribute to women-apostles, remembering

the great actions of women in the days when the church was young, alive and spreading the *evangelion* throughout the *oikoumene*. This was the golden age for women in the church. In the new creation women assumed roles of leadership. The New Testament preserves the names of female apostles, deacons, prophets and teachers, women touched by the fire of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:3-4). As a matter of historical truth the Christian Church has founding mothers as well as fathers.

Since, according to Scriptures, the Holy Spirit bestows charismata without discrimination between female and male, the Orthodox Church recognizes as saints a number of women-apostles: Junia (May 17), hailed by St. Paul as "outstanding among the apostles" (Romans 16: 6-8); Priscilla (Feb. 13), praised by Paul for her inspired teaching (Acts 18:26); Photeine (Feb.26),^{ccxcix} converted by Christ at the well (John 4:1-42), the first apostle to the Samaritans; Mariamne (Feb 17), sister of the Apostle Philip and missionary in the cities of Asia Minor; Mary Magdalene (July 22), widely honored as the "apostle to the apostles;" Horaiozele (July 26),^{cc} converted by St Andrew the First-Called, the continuer of his *apostolikon ergon*.

During the first month of the liturgical year four women-apostles are commemorated. Saints Xanthippe and Polyxena (Sept. 23),^{ccci} aristocratic sisters from Spain, were converted by St. Paul. Xanthippe's apostolic career was confined to her native land, but Polyxena's extended from one end of the Mediterranean world to the other. The latter is associated with the apostolates of two males,^{ccii} St. Andrew who baptized her and St. Onesimos (Feb. 15), known from the New Testament.

St. Thekla the Great-Martyr (Sept. 24)^{cciii} is also honored for her apostolic life and work. She too was converted by St. Paul. Despite her mother's tears and her fiancé's threats, Thekla cut her hair, donned male clothing and ran away to join Paul. She was first his disciple and then his co-worker in the mission field. Then Christ, through St. Paul, commissioned Thekla to be an apostle. On her own she preached and baptized in the provinces of Asia Minor until her death. In many Byzantine hymns and sermons this woman who defied the ancient gender taboos of her time is given the exalted title and rank of *apostolos*.^{cciv}

In defiance of a patriarchal culture that inflicted silence on women and restricted them to private domestic roles, the woman-apostle of the first century led a public life whose success depended on her spoken word, the *logos*. It is hard for us in the twentieth century to imagine how revolutionary and unconventional this life-style was for a woman at that time. St. Hermione (Sept.4),^{ccv} prophet, healer, teacher and preacher, illustrates the public career of the woman-apostle. One of the four prophet-daughters of St. Philip the Deacon (Acts 21:8), she is vividly portrayed in a canon composed for her feast day by the ninth-century hymnographer Joseph the Hymnographer.^{ccvi}

Empowered by the Holy Spirit with many gifts, Hermione is a virtuoso healer.^{ccvii} the envy of her medical colleagues, presumably all male. With her "speaking-of-God

tongue"^{ccviii} she is able to heal sick souls. Like Christ and the male apostles St. Hermione used words to cure physical and spiritual ills. But in this case the healing words fall from a woman's lips.

An inspired teacher and preacher, Hermione relied on the right use of words to communicate a new faith to an unbelieving pagan world.^{ccix} The admiring hymnographer describes her words as full of wisdom, "shining like flashes of lightning in the dark"^{ccx} and winning many souls for Christ.

The divine Logos and the Holy Spirit indeed never deserted St. Hermione. A condemned Christian woman standing before Roman judges, Hermione "preached the incarnation of the Word".^{ccxi} And at the end, in the face of a martyr's death, this woman-apostle triumphs once more and "proclaims things divine".^{ccxii} The lives of Hermione and other women saints are more than interesting stories. To remember these daughters of light is to pay them deserved honor and at the same time to relive epic moments of Christianity's history. But beyond this, Orthodoxy's women saints pose a question that demands an honest answer. By what prejudices are Christian women in 1985 denied equal dignity and full participation in the life of the church? Finally, what do these heroines and haloes really mean to us Orthodox, for today and for tomorrow?^{ccxiii}

Chicago Diocesan Clergy-Laity Banquet September 26, 1985.

In Defense of the Men of a Certain Parish

In recent months writers of newspaper articles, editorials and episcopal letters have been unfair to the men who oppose the right of women to vote in a certain parish. These men have done nothing wrong. Nor have they violated any tradition, dogma or practice of our Holy Orthodox Church. Since this may sound strange, let me explain briefly.

Our church clings tenaciously and proudly to her venerable traditions, many of which enabled her to survive and indeed to triumph over long centuries of persecution, enslavement and even hostility from the rest of C'hristendom. Among her traditions there is one concerning the place of women in the church. It is this tradition that is involved in the present sad controversy at this parish. Our priests, theologians and hierarchs identify this particular tradition as one which "is spelled with a capital T." As such, they tell us, it cannot be discussed, much less challenged or changed.

This tradition spelled with a capital "T" is ancient, well-defined and enforced in the praxis of the church. A thousand times it has been proclaimed from pulpits and explained in theological treatises and commentaries written by the greatest preachers and theologians of the Orthodox Church. The magnificent hymns of our liturgy also reflect this tradition.

This tradition spelled with a capital "T" admits no ands, if's and but's. According to it, women are "unclean" during the menstrual period and for forty days after childbirth. Inherited from the Old Testament, this tradition denies all women at all times access to the altar. For example this explains why there are no altar girls, although surely little girls are as innocent as little boys in the eyes of God. In maintaining this tradition which discriminates against females the church forgets that Christ broke the gender taboos of his culture and faith.

Secondly, this tradition spelled with a capital "T" is based on the prejudiced premise that woman is first in the order of sin and second in the order of creation. Translated into concrete terms, this means that woman is more sinful than and inferior to man. Consequently, in both church and society she must willingly accept silence, submission and subordination as her proper place. Thus for almost two thousand years the Christian daughters of Eve have been denied equal dignity and full participation in the life of the church.

St. Cyril of Alexandria, a most eloquent and influential Greek father of the church, summed it all up in a nutshell: "in everything the male must rule and everywhere the female must remain in second class." This being the traditional teaching and practice of the church, clearly equality would upset the right order of relationships between female and male and create chaos in the church. The historical record shows that it would be unorthodox for the women of this parish to have the vote. (I am aware of the fact that in all other parishes women do vote.) Just as clearly, the majority of the men of this parish

are right in their opposition to votes for women. It is these men and not their critics and opponents who are loyally defending the tradition spelled with a capital "T". To criticize them is to be very unfair. All they have done is to kill in their parish the dragon known as equality for women.

Make a Joyful Noise!

Women Hymnographers of Byzantium

But let us also, like the young women, sing unto the Lord.

-Kassia

For one thousand years many men and a few women wrote hymns in Byzantium. Their contribution to world literature and to Greek letters constitutes a vast and priceless treasure of sacred poetry. It is impossible to exaggerate the value of this hymnography, since it expresses, as nothing else can, the spiritual riches, faith and beauty of Eastern Christianity. Some of these hymns are still sung today in many languages in Orthodox churches in every part of the world. Others remain unknown. Hidden in manuscripts stored in monastic libraries, they wait to be discovered.

We have the names of hundreds of Byzantine hymnodists. They came from all parts of the oikoumene, from Greece, Italy, Palestine and Syria, as well as from the islands of Cyprus, Crete and Sicily. Likewise they represented all classes of Byzantine society, from the obscure man who signed his hymn *o amartolos* (the sinner) to the Emperor Justinian (527-565), who wrote in imperial red ink the troparion "*O monoyenes yios*" and then ordered its insertion into the Divine Liturgy. The names of the hymnographers stretch through the alphabet, beginning with alpha (Avvas) and ending with psi (Psellos). Problems of identity rise when poets share a name. For example, at least thirty-six church poets are named Ioannis. One of them, St. John, an 11th century bishop of Euchaita, administered a diocese and wrote hundreds of hymns. These include hymns for the Feast of the Three Hierarchs (January 30), a holiday that he originated. Much less confusing are the eight hymnographers who share the name Nikolaos.

No comparable problem, however, troubles the investigator of Byzantium's women hymnographers. For the most recent and comprehensive catalogue contains only six feminine names: Grigoris, Martha, Theodosia, Thekla, Kassia and Palaiologina. Unless you are looking for them you are likely to miss them altogether.

From this short list two names must be eliminated at once: Grigoris, the first, the product of a Greek scholar's imagination, never existed. Martha, the second, did in fact exist in the 6th century and is a saint of the church (July 4). But there is no evidence that she composed hymns. Martha is mistakenly identified as a hymnographer because of her son, St. Symeon the New Stylite (521-592), who lived on top of a column near Antioch, performed miracles and wrote hymns. Thus only four women remain to be counted among the numerous monks, abbots, bishops, patriarchs and laymen who composed hymns for the Church.

Most of the typewriters belonged to monastic or clerical orders. Yet their life styles present interesting variations. One of the earliest Greek hymnwriters, St. Auxentius, led a hermit's life in Bithynia. He composed short easy to learn troparia which he then taught to the pilgrims who flocked to his hermitage. In contrast to him, St. Romanos the Melodos, Christendom's greatest liturgical poet, composed magnificent cathedral hymns while serving as deacon in a Church of the Theotokos in suburban Constantinople.

Sometimes the sacred poet belonged to a group of hymnographers located in a monastery. St. John Damascene, theologian and poet, belonged to such a group that flourished during the 8th century in the Monastery of St. Savas near the Dead Sea. During the 9th and 10th centuries the Stoudios Monastery of St. John in Constantinople became the center of a hymnographical renaissance, inspired by its hymnwriting abbot, St. Theodore the Studite (759-826).

Most often, however, hymnographers wrote as individuals wherever they lived, whether on column top, in a cave, palace or monastery. Monasteries, indeed, housed the majority of sacred poets, including our four women hymnographers in Byzantium. Theodosia, Thekla, Kassia and Palaiologina each lived and wrote her hymns in a convent. It is unlikely that a school or center of hymnwriting nuns ever existed since women writers were at all periods rare in Byzantium. Women were in fact discouraged from writing anything. Didymus of Alexandria actually forbade women from writing books "without restraint and on their own authority." Critics accordingly treated women writers with condescension. The Patriarch Photios judged the literary work of the Empress Eudokia to be "rather good for a woman and a pampered empress."

A single hymnographic tradition sustained all the sacred poets, the many men and the few women. Regardless of their ethnic origins, Latin, Greek, Slav or Semitic, their common language was Greek, prized as the idiom of classical antiquity and revered as the speech of the Bible. In the Bible, which they knew by heart, the hymnographers found their themes, plots, imagery and vocabulary. Therefore the hymns of the Orthodox Church are intensely scriptural. They are also rooted in the teachings and dogmas of the Church. Hymnographers were always required to sing the praises of God *orthodoxos*--in an Orthodox way, with correct belief.

In a variety of forms ranging from the short simple *troparion* of a single strophe to the long complex *kontakion* and *kanon* of multiple strophes, Byzantine hymnographers contributed to Greek letters countless thousands of new songs and hymns on Orthodox Christianity's major themes. With one voice they hymned the *philanthropia* of God, manifested in the incarnation, God become human. Kassia's famous *troparion*, for example, is a hymn to divine love extended to a fallen woman. Likewise, they sang with confidence of *theosis*, the deification of fallen humanity. One of our women hymnodists, Theodosia, proclaims that she herself is becoming like God. Furthermore, the hymnographers of Byzantium formed one harmonious choir to exalt the Theotokos, the woman from whom God took on human flesh. In that choir there exists one female

voice, that of Thekla. Finally, all the liturgical poets composed hymns in honor of the saints, filling volume after volume.

Faithful servants of God, Byzantium's men and women hymnographers dedicated their souls and talents to the Church enriching with their songs the services of all its liturgical cycles. In return, the Orthodox Church honors its sacred poets, enrolling many of them among the saints. To cite only a few, Saints Andrew of Crete (July 4), John Damascene (December 4), Kosmas of Maiouma (October 14), Romanos the Melodos (October 1). In icons and frescoes the canonized poets carry scrolls inscribed with verses from their hymns. Golden haloes encircle their heads.

Although the long list of poet-saints includes some minor and mediocre figures, no woman hymnographer appears in it. Even Kassia is excluded, despite the fact that the Byzantines recognized her as a hymnographer of the first rank, and despite the fact that her hymns, along with those of her sister hymnographers, are unimpeachably Orthodox.

Both the denial of canonization to Kassia and the disproportionately small number of women can be explained by the second-class status of women in Byzantine society and culture. One of Christendom's most prestigious dogmatic theologians, St. Cyril of Alexandria, had bluntly proclaimed that "the male must always be in command, and in second class the female everywhere." Thus women in Byzantium were discriminated against legally, socially, economically and ecclesiastically as well.

Women endured segregation in church standing apart from their fathers, sons, brothers and husbands. Because the Church strictly enforced the apostolic prohibition against women's voices being heard in church, women were sentenced to eternal silence. Confirmed by the dual authority of the Scriptures and the Church Fathers, ecclesiastical teaching and practice asserted and justified woman's inferiority and her subordination to man. Denied letters, learning and voices, women were confined to home and family. Illiteracy was inevitably the fate of the masses of Byzantine women.

Few women, those fortunate enough to be members of the aristocracy or imperial families, enjoyed the privilege of Greek letters and learning. Anna Comnena, the world's first woman historian, was the daughter of an emperor. The name of one of our four women hymnographers, Palaiologina, testifies to her imperial lineage. Kassia, according to the sources, belonged to an aristocratic family in Constantinople. We may assume that Theodosia and Thekla came from the same privileged social class. All four were educated privately at home by tutors.

Piety and mere literacy, however, did not suffice for the successful writing of hymns. In addition to thorough knowledge of liturgy and Scriptures, literary skills that could be attained only by careful education and practice were required. To write hymns one had to be *logios* or *logia* (educated, erudite). It is not therefore surprising that women constitute such a tiny minority among Byzantium's sacred poets.

Besides a common social and educational background, our quartet of hymnwriting women shared a common vocation. They were all nuns. Being *monachai*, they lived in convents that sheltered them from the distractions of life in the world. In the convents, furthermore, women gained freedom from the restrictions and obligations which ancient customs and laws imposed upon them as daughters, wives and mothers. Equally important is the fact that women in the religious community were liberated from the discriminatory restraints placed upon them by canon law and practices in parish chapels and churches. In Byzantine convents women regained their voices, to teach, sing and pray aloud. Elsewhere it was "decreed that woman shall not speak in church, not even softly or an undertone, nor should they sing along or take part in the responses. . . . " Only in nunneries could pious and talented women like our four hymnographers find opportunity and encouragement to add to the church's repertory of hymns.

Three of our women hymnographers were contemporaries living in the same city. Theodosia, Thekla and Kassia lived in convents located in Constantinople. From this "God-protected" capital with its seven hills crowded with palaces and churches, a monarch ruled the empire, while a patriarch governed the church. Thus our hymnographer-nuns dwelled close to the center of imperial and ecclesiastical power.

To some extent the lives of Theodosia, Thekla and Kassia must have overlapped. They were equally fortunate to have been alive in the 9th century. During these critical decades Byzantine women, especially those in Constantinople, assumed exceptionally prominent and activist roles in the affairs of government and Church. When the 9th century began, a woman ruled the empire in her own right. Athenian-born Eirene signed herself "Great Basileus and Autokrator of the Romans." Except for the army no one expressed outrage. Earlier in 787 Eirene had restored Orthodoxy and the veneration of icons. Revoking the restoration in 815, the iconoclasts ascribed her religious policies to "female simplicity." In 843 Orthodoxy was permanently restored by another woman, the Empress Theodora, who reversed the policies of her dead husband, Theophilos.

In the defense of Orthodox traditions these imperial women were not alone. Laywomen and nuns alike defied emperors and patriarchs, resorting to street demonstrations and acts of resistance. Women suffered persecution, exile and martyrdom. They were among the first martyrs in the long struggle to defend icons in Orthodox worship.

The surviving hymns of Theodosia, Thekla and Kassia are precious documents from this historic period, recording the spirit of Orthodox women and their participation in stirring events. Through them the rarely heard voices of Byzantine women at least reach our ears.

THEODOSIA MELODOS: For too long Theodosia has been a shadowy figure in the history of Byzantine hymnography. Her name first appears in 1661 in a work published

in Rome by Leo Allatius (1596-1669). This polymath scholar, a Chiote turned Catholic, mentions "Theodosia Melodos" and quotes three passages from her hymn to Hosios Ioannikios. From the start the name of an obscure nun is associated with the most celebrated Orthodox hermit of her day. In the Vatican where he worked for five decades, Allatius had seen a manuscripts containing Theodosia's hymn. Yet he does not include her in his catalogue of 71 Greek hymnographers. Her name does not appear in such a list until 1867, two hundred years later. Another hundred years passed before her hymn was finally published in 1972. Regardless of this publication ten years ago, hymn and author as yet remain in undeserved obscurity.

An elaborate canon of 220 verses, Theodosia's hymn is divided into 32 strophes. It was composed to be sung during the *orthros* of the Feast Day of Hosios Ioannikios the Great (754-846), who is commemorated on November 4. Theodosia wrote her hymn not long after the death of Ioannikios. Its preservation in four manuscripts which date from the 11th to the 17th century indicates that Theodosia's hymn enjoyed some popularity. Nevertheless, the Church preferred for the Menaion a hymn by Joseph the Hymnographer, Byzantium's most prolific hymnwriter and a contemporary of Theodosia.

It was written and first sung probably in the *Mone Klouviou*, a female monastery known only through references in the lives of Ioannikios. Located somewhere in the "environs of Constantinople," this convent had close contacts with the venerable holy man and ex-soldier who lived for half a century in the high mountains of Bithynia. From these facts we may conclude that Theodosia was a nun in this convent.

Of the hymn's authorship no doubt exists, although a note in the margin of the Vatican manuscript assigns it to Patriarch Ignition, another 9th century hymnodist. The hymn contains the nun's claim to authorship, authenticated by her signature *Theodosia*. She bears, it is worth noting, the name of the heroic activist nun who was martyred in 729 for resisting the sacrilegious destruction of Constantinople's most holy icon of Christ. (St.Theodosia instantly became the role model for many courageous Byzantine women.)

Although we know practically nothing about the life of Theodosia Melodos, through her hymn to Ioannikios we become acquainted with her personality and with the world in which this Orthodox woman lived and wrote her hymns eleven centuries ago in Byzantium.

Theodosia begins the hymn with a personal prayer. Introducing herself as a penitent, she asks for God's pardon. After confessing that "darkness of sins" surrounds her, she prays to the Sun of Righteousness:

make to shine upon me the light of forgiveness.

Awareness of her spiritual imperfections continues in a prayer to the Theotokos, whom Theodosia trusts as a "source of graces."

In a third prayer Theodosia no longer speaks as a private person, but rather in her capacity as a poet with a public and sacred mission to perform. Addressing the Savior, she petitions him for divine assistance in her liturgical tasks:

grant to me an outpouring of wisdom that I may glorify in hymns the sublime life of the saint.

Thus Theodosia believes that the private and public sides of her life are intimately related. Unless God forgives and inspires her, she cannot compose a hymn worthy of her subject. Since a holy man of God is her theme, she must strive for holiness.

Beginning with the second strophe the awesome figure of the hermit Ioannikios dominates the hymn. Theodosia addresses him with reverent admiration in 23 of the hymn's 32 strophes. She invokes him formally with such titles as *theophoros* (God-bearing), *theopnevstos* (inspired by God) and *theoleptos* (seized by God). More frequently she calls him "father," suggesting a personal relationship to the saint, the kind and wise teacher of all monastics.

Theodosia draws a vivid and sympathetic portrait of Ioannikios the ideal monk. To free his soul from the flesh he disciplined himself, leading an austere existence on the mountains, under the heavens. His virtues embodied the monastic ideals of *engrateia* (self-control) *apatheia* (freedom from passions) *karteria* (endurance) and *tapeinosis* (humility). In addition, Theodosia praises Ioannikios' compassion:

having showered generous mercy on the needy, O most blessed one.

Throughout Theodosia focuses on the hermit's inner world, describing the nobility of his soul, his communion with God. She does not hesitate to compare her contemporary with the spiritual giants of the past—with Abraham, the Prophet Elijah and St. John the Forerunner from the Scriptures, as well as with Saints Anthony and Euthymios from the 4th century, the golden age of the Desert Fathers.

An unsophisticated ex-soldier, knowing only thirty psalms, Ioannikios was for half a century the influential advisor of emperors and patriarchs and the fearless champion of Orthodoxy. A nun, responding appreciatively to his holiness, translated his life into poetry.

Hosios Ioannikios was fortunate in his female hymnographer. Theodosia was not only learned, imaginative and skilled in the use of language. She also shared Ioannikios' vision and faith. Theodosia too searched for God, confident that she was growing into the divine image.

A note of triumph rings throughout Theodosia's verses. She sings of victories. Ioannikios' defeat of Satan and of the iconoclast heresy. Above all, she celebrates the triumph of his spirit over matter. By writing a luminous hymn in honor of Hosios

Ioannikios, Theodosia Melodos, a Byzantine nun reveals that she valued and shared those victories.

THEKLA THE NUN: Next to nothing is known about Thekla the Nun, our second hymnographer. Evidence derived from her one surviving hymn suggests that she was a nun of the 9th century. Thekla's hymn was first published in Venice in 1796 by St. Nikodemos Hagioreites (1749-1809). In the prologue Nikodemos lists and describes the 22 hymnographers who are represented in his collection of 62 *kanons* in honor of the Theotokos. The list ends with the name of the only woman in it: *kai Thekla e glyketate Echo*--and Thekla, the very sweet Echo. Her name is not cited in any other general list of Byzantine hymnodists until our century.

Thekla's hymn consists of 198 verses, divided into 33 strophes. It is preserved in at least three manuscripts dating from the 13th to the 17th century. Thekla composed this hymn for the *esperinos* or vesper of Tuesday. It was most likely first sung by the author's sister nuns in an unknown convent.

Written by a woman, in honor of a woman, for and about women, Thekla's hymn is unique in the corpus of Byzantine hymnography. It is the only *kanon* we have that was composed by a woman in honor of the Theotokos. No other hymn is so completely dominated by women. The Theotokos appears in almost every line. The single voice heard in the hymn is feminine, that of the author. Other women are mentioned: Eve, the first woman; Anna, the mother of the Theotokos; and St. Thekla, Christendom's first woman martyr. There are also references to the female sex, nuns and female martyrs.

In striking contrast to Theodosia, whose vision extended beyond the walls of her convent to the larger monastic world, Thekla concentrates her vision on woman's experience and history, on life and worship within the convent. An exclusively feminine perspective prevails throughout her hymn.

At the same time, this unprecedented voice from within the Byzantine convent projects also a portrait of the hymnographer, distinctly a more forceful personality than Nikodemos' "very sweet Echo." Thekla contributes to Greek letters not only a graceful hymn to the Mother of God but also a unique spiritual autobiography of a Byzantine nun-hymnographer.

Thekla was, first of all, a true believer, committed to her Church, its doctrines and teachings. Relying as well on her own experience, this devout and pious woman proclaimed in her hymn the reality of the Incarnation. Thekla asserts that she herself has seen God incarnate. Like all other verses, her declaration is addressed to the woman who made the Incarnation possible:

We proclaim you, O Theotokos, the throne of God the Word, on which sat God whom I saw as a mortal being.

In a similar passage Thekla again insists on the truth and validity of her personal religious experience as an Orthodox believer.

Thekla valued equally her monastic vocation and its ideals. Source of spirituality in the convent, the Theotokos illumined Thekla's life as a woman religious. Into her hymn the nun-hymnographer weaves varied praises of Mary's "divine glory," of the mystery of her virginal maternity, along with homage to her as the nun's inspiration and model. Near the end of the hymn Thekla expresses her fervent devotion to the Mother of God, a devotion shared with the entire community of nuns. She also expresses vividly the nuns' dependence on the Theotokos in the pursuit of the monastic vocation.

exalting you in hymns worthy of God, O Theotokos, we beseech you with words of praise, strengthen and safeguard us in virginity and purity.

Thekla's words here reflect the Byzantine nun's dedication and piety, her adoration of the Theotokos. In Thekla's hymn we thus hear the songs and prayers of the women behind the walls of a Byzantine convent.

Secure in her faith and confident of her creative imagination, Thekla takes pride in her *leitourgia* as church poet. She therefore proudly offers her hymn to the Theotokos, whom, she says, she has "faithfully glorified." Comparing her gift to the two pennies of the poor widow in the Gospel story (Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4), Thekla asks the Mother of God to accept

the hymns of my lips.

Orthodox believer, nun and poet, Thekla is also the outspoken champion of her sex. In her encomium to Mary the most exalted of all Eve's daughters, Thekla also extolls lesser women, the heroic female martyrs and loyal defenders of the faith:

and behold women now strive gallantly for Christ's sake and the female species rejoices, as the first martyr, the virgin Thekla, proclaims.

Herself a witness of women's sacrifices and resistance to the iconoclastic enemies of Orthodoxy, Thekla expresses her immense pride and joy in their heroism. She knew too that this heroism was not peculiar to the women of the 9th century. The martyrdoms of countless women had been recorded in the annals of Christianity from its earliest days.

To symbolize the long record of women's active witness for Christ our hymnographer chooses Saint Thekla (September 24), her namesake. Converted by saint Paul in Iconium, Thekla had followed the apostle and shared his mission of preaching the Gospel. Held in high honor as "The First Martyr among Women and Equal to the Apostles," Thekla became a legendary model for Christian women, including our hymnographer. St. Thekla and her many imitators made it easy for Thekla the Hymnographer to claim for women a glorious place in the history of the Church.

Thus in her hymn to the Theotokos, Thekla the Nun reveals herself to be a fulfilled and

self-confident woman. A true daughter of the Church, called to be a nun and a sacred poet, Thekla offers to Greek letters not only a hymn to the Mother of God, but more importantly her testament to a woman's life spent in harmony with God.

KASSIA THE MELODOS: The fame of Kassia the Melodos, our third hymnographer, outshines by far all other women writers in both medieval and modern Greek letters. The romantic heroine of folklore, the inspiration of poems, novels and dramas, Kassia has been a household word among Greeks for a thousand years. Celebrated in her own time for her beauty, piety and learning, this 9th century nun-hymnographer is the only woman whose hymns have been admitted into the liturgy of the Orthodox Church. Known formally by its first words, *Kyrie, e en pollais amartiais*, (Lord, she who in many sins), and familiarly as *To troparion tes Kassianes*, her masterpiece has appeared in numerous anthologies, been translated into many languages, rendered into *demotike* by Kostis Palamas (1859-1943) and set to music by Dimitri Mitropoulos (1896-1960). Sung during the orthros of Holy Wednesday, no Orthodox hymn is more beloved.

Its author, Kassia the nun, was a worthy daughter of Byzantium. The child of a high-ranking court official, she was born and educated in the imperial city of Constantine. While Kassia was still a girl, Theodore, the erudite, influential abbot of the Stoudios Monastery, praised her learning and literary style, which he found remarkable for the time and for one so young. Few women could write at all in the 9th century, let alone write well.

Nor did Kassia's character and piety fail to match her literary accomplishments. Early in life she proved her devotion to the then embattled Church. This well-born young lady openly defied imperial policies against the veneration of holy icons. For her defiant activism in defense of Orthodoxy Kassia suffered persecution and was once beaten with the lash. She nevertheless continued her fearless resistance, visiting imprisoned Orthodox monks and comforting exiles with letters and gifts. Later this resolute woman condemned lack of courage and commitment, "I hate silence," she wrote, "when it is time to speak."

When Kassia penned these words she was a nun who had just missed becoming Byzantium's empress. According to the chronicler's testimony, Kassia's beauty had bewitched Theophilos, the crown prince in search of a suitable wife. Beautiful Kassia, however, had broken the spell when she answered sharply the prince's sexist slur against women. Wounded to the heart by her reply, Theophilos then gave the golden apple and half his throne to the maiden who had held her tongue in silence.

Having thus lost out on becoming the empire's first lady, Kassia built a convent on Xerolophos, Constantinople's seventh hill. There she took the veil and was tonsured a nun. Until her death sometime in the second half of the 9th century Kassia lived in this cloister which bore her name, "leading a philosophical life pleasing to God".

The foundress of the cloister was also the first lady, a strict, vigilant and energetic

abbess. The abbess governed her nuns, regulated life and worship in the convent and still found time to pursue her literary interests. Kassia's writings include both secular and sacred poetry. They survive in a number of manuscripts dating from the 11th to the 16th century.

The secular writings project the forthright personality of a woman wise in the ways of the world. A sharp-tongued observer of human frailties, Kassia had strong convictions and dislikes. These she expressed tersely in a series of seven statements all of which begin with *Miso*--I hate. Kassia scorned pretense of all kinds, "I hate the fool who acts the philosopher," she wrote, and "I hate the rich man who groans that he is poor." She despised time-servers: "I hate the person who is forever changing his ways." She condemns those who unlike God (Acts 10:34) discriminate among people: "I hate the Judge who is a respecter of persons."

Kassia's sacred poetry made her Byzantium's, and indeed Christendom's, only woman hymnographer of distinction. For centuries her name automatically has appeared on all lists of Byzantine liturgical poets. In the first such known list, drawn up in the 14th century by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, himself a hymnographer, Kassia is mentioned last, one of the eleven most distinguished Greek hymnodists. She enjoys such prestige that 37 hymns of uncertain authorship, including the *Akathistos Hymnos*, have been attributed to Kassia in manuscripts and liturgical books.

Likewise Kassia is Byzantium's best known woman composer. A gifted composer, this hymnwriting abbess wrote original musical settings for most of her hymns. She is therefore properly called *Melodos*. Later other church poets borrowed her music for their hymns.

The surviving 23 genuine hymns indicate Kassia's interest in many aspects of the Church's liturgical cycles. She provided the services of her convent with many new hymns. Signed by her name, Kassias, the *kanon* for the dead is her longest hymn. Its 32 strophes were composed to be sung in the convent's cemetery during memorial services held on Saturday. Her shorter hymns, *stichera*, represent her lyric and dramatic genius. These monostrophic compositions include hymns honoring the saints, some obscure like Saints Gurias, Samonas and Abibus (November 15), others more prominent like the Apostles Peter and Paul, or John the Baptist for whom she composed four *stichera*. In nine joyful hymns, including the majestic *Avgoustou monarchisantos* ("When Augustus ruled"), she celebrates Christmas, the coming of Christ into the world. She also wrote three hymns for the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (February 2) with which the Nativity cycle ends.

Kassia's reputation rests primarily on her *troparion* for Holy Wednesday. This penitential hymn for which Kassia composed the music, has been hailed by critics as a masterpiece of religious poetry, admired for its beauty of words and depth of feeling. A true poet, Kassia in this short hymn portrays profound human emotions and

experiences. In the figure of the sinful woman, whose story Luke (7:36-50) introduced into Christian literature, Kassia traces with feminine grace and sensitivity the Lenten journey of repentance, the soul's exodus from sin to salvation. The Byzantine nun does not condemn the sinner. Rather she sings a new song, celebrating the sinful woman's intuition, her recognition of Christ's divinity and her pursuit of holiness.

The abbess translates into poetry, into words of haunting beauty and truth, the speechless tears of the erring woman in the Gospel story. Except for a brief introductory passage, the *troparion* consists of an intensely dramatic monologue. It begins with the woman's confession, in which she admits guilt and responsibility for her moral degradation:

For night holds me in its grip, the goad of lust, a murky and moonless love of sin.

Then through passionate sequences of petitions to the Lord she moves towards redemption, led from darkness to light by Christ.

who has great mercy beyond all measure.

In the end the repentant sinner finds hope, forgiveness and peace. Across the more than ten centuries which separate us from the Byzantine nun, Kassia the Melodos communicates the reality of the Christian passover from death to life, as well as her serene belief in the transforming grace of divine *philanthropia*.

PAIAIOLOGINA: Palaiologina, our fourth hymnographer, is chronologically the last and most obscure. A nun connected with the imperial dynasty, she lived in Thessalonika during the 14th century, five hundred years after Theodosia, Thekla and Kassia. No hymn of hers has yet come to light. Palaiologina's first name is not recorded. Nor do we know whether she was an imperial princess by birth or by marriage. She died sometime before 1387.

This tantalizingly little information about this princess comes from a single source, the 15th century historian Georgios Sphrantzes (1401-1477). A courtier and diplomat, the historian faithfully served the last three emperors: Manuel II Palaiologos (1391-1425), John VIII (1425-1448), and Constantine XI, who died a martyr on the tragic Tuesday of May 29, 1453.

Writing on Corfu in his old age, Sphrantzes interrupts his history of the fall of Byzantium to pay tribute to "the most holy Thomais," his godmother. When Thomais was a young girl, her guardian, the sister of Neilos Cabasilas, Archbishop of Thessalonike, had brought her from Constantinople to Thessalonike, which at that time was the second city of the empire. There, Sphrantzes writes, the guardian and her ward "lived in the Convent of Saint Theodora with Palaiologina, a virtuous and learned lady about whom I often heard high praises from our memorable emperor Lord Manuel." Manuel II Palaiologos had known our Palaiologina during one of the two periods when he had been governor of Thessalonike (1369-1373) and (1383-1387), before he ascended the

throne in 1391. Years later the aged monarch, who had himself written hymns, reminisced about his hymnwriting kinswoman to his young attendant Sphrantzes.

The historian credits Palaiologina and the archbishop's sister with teaching his revered godmother "virtue and literature. This Sphrantzes must have learned from Thomais herself. On the death of her two teachers, Thomais and another nun inherited all their possessions. After the capture of Thessalonike by the Turks in 1387, Thomais returned to Constantinople.

Sphrantzes himself knew at first hand the hymns of Palaiologina, "I read her compositions, many hymns to Saint Demetrios and Saint Theodora and to other saints as well." Thus he informs us that Palaiologina wrote hymns for the two most popular saints of Thessalonike, the city's tutelary patron and the ascetic 9th century nun for whom Palaiologina's convent was named. Somewhere, perhaps in the palatine library of Manuel II Palaiologos, Sphrantzes had in his youth seen a manuscript containing Palaiologina's now lost hymns.

From nostalgic recollections of his youth in the days before the empire fell, Sphrantzes bequeathed to the history of Greek letters and hymnography the name of Palaiologina, a pious, learned and virtuous Byzantine princess who wrote hymns in the 14th century. Thanks to him we know that during Byzantium's last century the company of its hymnwriters included a woman.

With Palaiologina we have come almost to the end of Byzantium. We have also reached the end of our list of women hymnographers and the finishing line of this essay. But one final word is in order--a composite profile of Theodosia, Thekla, Kassia and Palaiologina, a quartet of Byzantine women. They belonged to the sex that did not enjoy equality and freedom. But as members of the elite and aristocratic social class and as women religious they transcended the restrictions and limitations imposed on their sex. They were pious and purposeful, as well as talented, intelligent and educated. Their monastic vocation enabled them to pursue holiness and at the same time to fulfill their *leitourgia* as sacred poets. Theodosia, Thekla, Kassia and Palaiologina, women hymnographers of Byzantium, deserve recognition and honor in the history of Greek letters.

St. Katherine: Glorious and All-Wise Martyr

Each year on November 25 the Orthodox Church honors the memory of St. Katherine. The city of her birth and the scene of her triumphant martyrdom was Alexandria, famous for its schools and libraries, its poets, scientists and philosophers.

When she was only 18 years old Katherine fulfilled her destiny and won immortality. An aristocratic and devout Christian, she was beautiful and very learned. All Alexandria admired erudition and wisdom. At a time when few women could read and write this girl had mastered the learning of classical antiquity, the cultural legacy of Greece and Rome. Katherine knew the epics of Homer and Virgil, the medical writings of Hippocrates and Galen, the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle.

In addition, she had been trained in rhetoric, the art of public speaking. She could express her thoughts in clear and expressive language. She not only spoke Greek but also the "languages and dialects of many peoples." Although Katherine belonged to the sex whose intellectual powers were thought to be limited at best, she had fortunately received the education which then was normally a male privilege.

Pagan learning and culture did not, however, in any way corrupt St. Katherine. Rather, it enhanced her Christian commitment. When pagan persecutors challenged her faith, she brilliantly defended it. Byzantine hymnographers praise her stunning victory over Alexandria's most eloquent and clever philosophers. In public view, the young scholarly woman silenced 150 pagan philosophers, convincing them of their errors. She also converted them to Christianity, along, it is said, with the Roman empress whose husband had ordered the persecution of Christians. These 150 converts suffered martyrdom with St. Katherine and are commemorated on November 25th. In the long catalog of Orthodox female saints no other saint bears her name. Unique in name, St. Katherine, the Wise Great-Martyr of Alexandria offers her sisters a unique symbol of Christian womanhood, spiritually and intellectually created in God's image and likeness.

Three Outstanding Byzantine Women

How appropriate it is to celebrate the Three Hierarchs and Greek letters in this church which is dedicated to a learned woman saint Katherine of Alexandria, Glorious and All-Wise Great Martyr. For a moment let us reflect on her significance for this celebration.

St. Katherine was born and martyred in a city famous for its schools and libraries, its poets, scientists and philosophers, including the martyred woman philosopher Hypatia. At a time when most women were illiterate, unable to read or write, this aristocratic Christian girl had mastered the rich cultural and literary legacy of ancient Greece. She had studied Homer, the medical writings of Hippocrates and Galen, the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Katherine had also been trained in rhetoric, the art of public speaking. She could express her thoughts clearly and persuasively. All Alexandria, we are told, admired her erudition and wisdom.

When she was just 18 years old, Katherine won the immortal crown of a Christian heroine. Bravely resisting pressures and persecution, she brilliantly and publicly defended her faith before giving her life in its defense. Far from corrupting her, a pagan Greek education had strengthened Katherine's Christian commitment and assured her triumph. This young girl scored a stunning victory by silencing Alexandria's most eloquent and clever Philosophers. She also converted them to Christianity. Her 150 converts then shared St. Katherine's martyrdom. Our patron saint, like the three Hierarchs, symbolizes the synthesis of Hellenism and Christianity. Likewise, she symbolizes Greek Orthodox womanhood, spiritually and intellectually created in God's image and likeness.

Because their sex was normally denied opportunities for education, the number of Greek Christian women intellectuals and writers is small. There are, however, three whom we should honor today.

The first of these is Eudokia, Empress of Byzantium from 421-460 A.D. She was born in Athens and died in Jerusalem. The daughter of a pagan professor, she was named Athena after the city of her birth. From her father Leontios and two of his colleagues Athena received a classical Greek education. Like St. Katherine she was also trained in the art of public speaking, despite the ancient belief that silence is woman's most sublime virtue.

Shortly before her marriage in 421 to the emperor Theodosios II, the pagan Athenais became a Christian. Baptized by Attikos, Patriarch of Constantinople, she was renamed Eudokia. Keenly interested now in theology, Empress Eudokia befriended monks, nuns and clergy. She built churches in Constantinople and Jerusalem. She used part of her great wealth to endow hospitals, rest homes and shelters for the poor, sick and homeless. For her *eusebeia* and *philanthropia* Eudokia was canonized and the

Orthodox Church commemorates her on August 13.

Proving herself a true daughter of Athens, Eudokia has an honorable place in the history of Greek Letters. This educated Byzantine *basilissa* championed Greek culture in the imperial city. When in 425 the University of Constantinople was reorganized Eudokia saw to it that its Greek curriculum was expanded. Always she was the enthusiastic patron of academics, poets and men of letters. Eudokia was herself a poet and woman of letters. She won fame as a public speaker. Seated on a golden throne, she delivered a brilliant speech in Antioch before the senate. Although women were not supposed to write books, even if they could, Eudokia wrote several. She composed a poetic version of the first eight books of the Old Testament, and of the Prophets Zechariah and Daniel. She is also the author of a long hagiographical poem on the martyrdom of St. Kyprianos, who, like the imperial poet, was a convert to Christianity. In another book written in Homeric verse Eudokia related the life and miracles of Christ. Thus in her writings St. Eudokia combined the old and the new, classical Greek culture and Christian teachings.

After this intellectual and literary *basilissa* four centuries passed before another important woman writer appeared in Byzantium. She is known to us all, Kassia, the ninth century nun-hymnographer. In the long tradition of Greek Letters she is by far the most beloved woman writer. Born into the aristocracy of Constantinople, Kassia, like Sts. Katherine and Eudokia, received a thorough classical Greek education. While she was still young, Kassia's learning and literary style were praised as unusual for one of her age and for the time. She was equally admired for her courage and loyalty to Orthodoxy in face of iconoclastic persecution.

Had not the spirited young woman defended women against Theophilos' sexist slur, Kassia would have been a second Byzantine empress-author. Instead, she built a convent on Xerolophos, Constantinople's seventh hill and became a nun. She lived there until her death in the second half of the ninth century. A stern, energetic abbess, Kassia governed her nuns and regulated life and worship in the convent. And she found time to pursue her literary interests, evidenced by the secular works and the sacred poetry preserved in a number of manuscripts.

Composed for and first sung in the liturgy of her convent, Kassia's hymns brought her fame as Orthodoxy's only woman hymnographer of distinction. Hers, moreover, are the only hymns by a woman that are included in the liturgy of our church. Likewise, having composed original musical settings for litany of her hymns, Kassia is Byzantium's best known woman composer.

Twenty-three genuine hymns survive from Kassia's pen. These include a long hymn for the dead; hymns for various saints; nine hymns for Christmas and three for the Hypapante (the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple). Her reputation rests mainly on her *troparion* which is sung on Holy Wednesday. Hailed by critics as a masterpiece of

religious poetry, Kassia's Lenten hymn is universally admired for its "beauty of words and depth of feeling." A true poet and believer, the hymnwriting abbess of Constantinople portrays profound human emotions, tracing with sensitivity and sympathy the sinful woman's exodus from sin, her journey to salvation.

More the one thousand years now separate us from Kassia the Melodos. Yet through her *troparion* she communicates the reality of Christian experience and her own serene belief in Christ's transforming grace.

Two hundred years after Kassia, Anna Komnene, the world's first woman historian, was born in Constantinople on December 2, 1083, the daughter and first child of Emperor Alexios 1. She died sometime after 1148 (and the appearance of Halley's Comet) in the convent Kecharitomene, where in enforced retirement from court politics she lived for over thirty years and where she wrote the *Alexiad*, the epic history of her father's long reign (1081- 1118).

Anna Komnene was probably the most intellectual and best educated woman in the Byzantine millennium. The importance of education and Greek culture form a major theme of the *Alexiad*, in which the author repeatedly thanks her parents for educating her properly. In fact, this imperial princess spent most of her life studying and learning. Her broad scholarly interests are reflected in the pages of her history, documenting her knowledge of the Bible, theology, philosophy, history, medicine, rhetoric, mathematics and classical poetry, especially Homer. She boasts of her great "zeal for learning." "I carried," she wrote in the preface, "my study of Greek to the highest pitch." And indeed the purity of her Greek was commented on. Anna looked down her nose at barbarians who did not know Greek and at Greeks who fell below her high standards.

Although she had failed in the attempt to become empress of Byzantium, Anna Komnene succeeded in becoming the "golden queen" of its intelligentsia. She turned her apartments at the convent into an institute for advanced studies. There the scholarly princess inspired and presided over a circle of the empire's most original theologians, philosophers and men of letters. One of them compared her to a bright comet appearing among fixed stars.

By any standards, Eudokia, Kassia and Anna Komnene were remarkable women. Anna has been called an "astonishing woman." All were gifted and fortunate in the circumstances of their birth into the privileged classes of Byzantine society. Thus they were able to cultivate their talents, to enrich their minds with the priceless heritage of ancient Greece and to write new books, expressing themselves and the Christian Greek ideals of their culture.

In our day books have been written about each of them. These remarks of mine are but brief tributes to three Byzantine women whose contributions to Greek Letters are worthy of our attention and admiration.

But admiration is not enough. Our patron saint Katherine the All-Wise Great Martyr, the Empress St. Eudokia, the hymnwriting nun Kassia and history writing Princess Anna Komnene challenge us to rid society and church of prejudice and discrimination against women.

St. Katherine's Greek Orthodox Church, Falls Church, Va. January 26, 1986.

Martyrs and Apostles: Saints for February

February may be the shortest month in our calendar. But, its list of Orthodox woman saints is far from short. I have counted at least 36 names. It is also an impressive list. Because they illustrate various significant roles of women in the church, these women saints deserve recognition and honor.

Most of them are martyrs, women like Fausta, Anatole, Asklepiodote, and Theodoule whose sacrificial deaths insured the founding and survival of Greek Christianity. Throughout the Christian era hundreds, even thousands of women have paid blood tribute to the church, from the holy martyrs Perpetua and Agatha (February 1st and 3rd, respectively) in the early centuries to the neo-martyrs of later times. Hosia Philothei, the aristocratic Athenian abbess died on February 19th, 1589, the victim of a brutal beating at the hands of Turks. Later, Holy Martyr Kyrana "the most virtuous," died for her faith in Thessalonike on February 28th, 1751. When the Turks kidnapped her, Kyrana's parents fled and hid. She endured prison and torture alone. Although no one questions women's equality in martyrdom, women have yet to enjoy equality in the life of their church.

During this month, however, the Orthodox Church also honors women other than the martyrs. For example, on the third, Anna the Prophet is commemorated; on the twenty-eighth, the ascetics Marana and Kyras; on the eleventh, Theodora the Queen "who established Orthodoxy." In 843 A.D. after the death of her husband, this Byzantine empress reversed his religious policy, called a council and restored the veneration of ikons in the church. Without the courage and loyalty of many women to Orthodox traditions and teachings during the religious struggles of the eighth and ninth centuries the triumph of Orthodoxy in 843 would not have been possible.

Furthermore the February honor roll of women saints is striking for the large number of women apostles which it includes. No less than six women apostles of the early church are listed: Priscilla (February 13th); Mariamne (February 17th); Apphia (February 19th); Iouia (February 22nd); Photeine (February 26th); Nympha (February 28th). Except for Saints Mariamne and Photeine the others are all identified by St. Paul as apostolic women who exercised leadership in the primitive church.

Named six times in the New Testament, Priscilla is the most important of these women. St. Paul, who claims for the apostle the highest place among church leaders (I Corinthians 12:27), identifies Priscilla as his able co-worker (synergos), a missionary and accomplished Christian teacher, and with her husband, the Apostle Aquila, the head of a church community in their house at Corinth (I Corinthians 16:19). There is no evidence that she

Orthodox Eve and the Royal Priesthood

Since this symposium deals with the expanding roles of women in modern society, we do well to include some consideration of women in the Greek Orthodox Church, I can think of no more important, relevant and complex subject. A week-long symposium would be needed just to begin to do it justice. One brief paper can do no more than introduce this challenging subject. Fully aware that my comments cannot touch upon all the problems inherent in this subject, I offer them in the hope that this paper will arouse serious interest, raise questions which must be answered, and above all simulate open-minded study and informed discussion.

Because I believe that we cannot cope intelligently with the present and plan wisely for the future without taking history into account, most of my paper is concerned with the past, the origins of the ideology and praxis of our church vis-a-vis women. Orthodox women today share the experience of their foremothers, an experience of almost two thousand years. And what St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, said about women in the fifth century A.D. is still pertinent to the discussion of women's status in the church at the present time.

Orthodox Eve has a long and proud history in the royal priesthood^{ccxiv} to which all Orthodox Christians are called. Less well documented and less familiar than the history of Orthodox Adam, hers is, nonetheless, equally significant spiritually, quantitatively, as well as endlessly fascinating.

To illustrate this point let me introduce St. Elizabeth Thaumaturgos, whom our church commemorates on April 24.^{ccxv} Everyone knows St. George, the young warrior on the white horse, who with his long spear killed a dragon. But who has heard of this fifth century abbess in Constantinople who also killed a dragon? On foot, armed only with a cross, Elizabeth approached the monster, spat at him and then trampled on him. Putting an end to the dragon's evil career, she liberated a Constantinopolitan suburb from terrorism.

Here I interject a plea. Orthodox women should study and claim their history in the church. After all, the daughters of Eve have been and are at least and very likely more than half of the royal priesthood for almost two thousand years. Just count the number of women mentioned by St. Paul in his letters and look around you the next time you attend a church service.

Orthodox Eve, the Christian woman, entered Christian history at its beginning. Following Christ with love and faith, she became a loyal *mathetria* (disciple). One of her names is Mary Magdalene (July 22).^{ccxvi} Contrary to customs and laws that confined women to the house and barred them from all public activities she and other women disciples walked with Christ, through country and town, sharing his public ministry on earth. Unlike the male disciples, all of whom deserted him at the time of his arrest, Mary

Magdalene never deserted her beloved teacher. Her loyalty was richly rewarded. Mary Magdalene was the first--as Byzantine theologians and hymnographers^{ccxvii} repeatedly remind us -- to the Risen Lord, the first to experience the joy of the Resurrection, and the first to receive the commission to go and tell the good news of Christ's triumph over death. The Orthodox Church honors this woman as the "apostle to the apostles."

At Pentecost, when the church was born, Orthodox Eve was present. Descending to earth, the Holy Spirit did not pass over souls housed in female bodies. Along with the male disciples women were also baptized with fire and filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:13-14; 2:1-4).

Women prophesied in the primitive Christian church.^{ccxviii} St. Hermione (September 4)^{ccxix} was a celebrated woman prophet, one of a quartet of prophesying sisters (Acts 21:7-9). Orthodox Eve was not only a prophet. She was also an apostle, travelling from town to town in the Roman Empire, teaching, preaching, healing and baptizing.^{ccxx} Eve *apostolos* has many names. She is St. Thekla (September 24),^{ccxxi} inducted into the apostolate by St. Paul; St. Mariamne (February 17),^{ccxxii} sister of St. Philip the apostle, and a successful missionary in Asia Minor; St. Photeine (February 26),^{ccxxiii} the Samaritan woman by the well (John 4: 4-30), who brought to Christ his first converts; St. Jounia (May 17),^{ccxxiv} praised by St. Paul as outstanding among the apostles" (Romans 16:7) and St. Priscilla (February 13),^{ccxxv} one of St. Paul's most able collaborators (Romans 16:3). The great apostle also mentions other women whom he regarded always as his *synergoi*, equal co-workers, and never as his subordinates.

In addition to the primary roles of apostle and prophet Orthodox Eve assumed various other leadership roles in the first Christian communities. She is St. Phoebe (September 3),^{ccxxvi} deacon of the church at Cenchreae, the sea-port of Corinth, St. Apphia (November 22), apostle and church leader at Colossae (Philemon 1-2). She is Mary the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12), in whose house the first Christian community in Jerusalem met and she is also St. Nympha (February 28), apostle and church leader (Colossians 4: 15). Women spread the gospel in a pagan world and their homes often served as the first Christian meeting place(I Corinthians 12:4-30) the body of Christ was neither hierarchal nor two tiered along gender lines. The vocations and charismata granted by the Holy Spirit were not gender related.

By the end of the second century, however, the situation had changed. The days of the egalitarian church had ended. Reaction against women's freedom and equality succeeded in limiting the royal priesthood of Eve's Christian daughters. When the church adopted a policy of cultural accommodation to prevailing patriarchal societal patterns, it forbade women from prophesying, preaching and teaching in the ecclesia. The unknown author of the two epistles to Timothy explicitly forbade women to speak and teach in the church (I Timothy 2:12). Since his prohibition evolved into a "divine law" it is worth noting his contemptuous characterization of women as "silly, loaded with sins, swayed by all kinds of desires, always trying to learn and never able to come to

knowledge of the truth" (II Timothy 3: 6-7).^{ccxxvii}

The total silence imposed on women effectively prevented them from again exercising leadership in the church. Christian women were thus reduced to the voicelessness and subservience experienced by their Greek and Jewish foremothers. There exists, however, an important difference between the pagan and Christian situations. Whereas the Greek philosophers had appealed to laws of nature in order to silence and oppress women,^{ccxxviii} the Christian theologians transformed the same prejudiced views of women into divine laws, the eternal and immutable word of God.^{ccxxix}

Ever since the second century this "divine law" has been strictly enforced. It takes a very self-confident and brave woman to challenge it. Brave women have not been lacking, as shown by the case of a fifth century nun named Theodosia. When St. Nilus, a stern abbot, heard that Theodosia was teaching and preaching, he ordered her to stop immediately. In a letter that has survived the good abbot reminded her of her proper role and "place." "It happens," he wrote. "that your body makes you a woman, whether you like it or not. So stop teaching in the church." Referring to the biblical authority^{ccxxx} for silencing women of the church, Nilus continued: "For the apostle made it clear that this is shameful, even though you may say ten thousand times that you have transcended the female condition and that you are more steadfast than men." (PG 79. 249D).

Since the days of the unfortunate nun Theodosia the status and roles of women in the Orthodox Church have not changed or expanded significantly. The royal priesthood does indeed include women. But because of biology they are less royal than men. That biology is what matters most was made clear long before St Nilus' time. On this point Origen of Alexandria (185- 255 A.D), the great theologian and teacher, could not have been more explicit. "It is not proper to a woman to speak in church, however admirable or holy what she says may be, *merely because it comes from female lips*."^{ccxxxi} (The underlining is mine.) Today theologians who defend the status quo speak more guardedly, although sometimes the voice of Origen and St. Nilus comes through distinctly. Nevertheless, in 1986 most Orthodox theologians insist on the same silence of women in the church, on the same restricted, gender defined, "special" roles for Orthodox Christians born with female bodies.

The lesser royal priesthood of Orthodox women begins early in life, forty days after birth, to be exact. When mother and child go to church for the traditional forty day blessing, the male infant is brought by the priest into the altar, the female only to the entrance of the altar. This overt discrimination between female and male violates two scriptural affirmations of equality of the sexes. Genesis 1 :27 confirms that God created both female and male in the divine image and likeness. Likewise, the ancient baptismal formula quoted in Galatians 3: 28 theologically proclaims the equality of men and women.^{ccxxxii} Furthermore, it denies the need for religious and sexually designated subordinating status and roles among those baptized in Christ.

Although at forty days the baby girl is unaware of sexist discrimination, she begins to experience it soon enough. A school girl, she sees her brothers, male cousins and friends become altar boys, participating in the liturgical life of her church. When she asks why she can't share in this *leitourgia*, the answer is "You are a girl." Who can deny that at this impressionable age the Orthodox girl will suffer ego damage? In contrast to that of the girl, the image of the Orthodox boy becomes early on more royal and priestly. One sympathizes with the little Roman Catholic girl who said, "Please show me where the Bible says that girls can't be altar boys."

Access and service to God at the altar is off-limits and prohibited at all times to all Orthodox women. This exclusion and subordinate status is experienced by women at various levels. But the experience lasts a lifetime. For example, a prominent Greek Orthodox woman has, for decades, bought flowers every week for the altar of her parish church. After arranging the flowers, she takes them to her church and hands them to the janitor to place on the altar. He is a Protestant; she is Orthodox. But he is male and thus has access to the altar, access denied her because she is female, even though she belongs to the royal priesthood of her church.

In liturgy after liturgy Orthodox Eve is reminded of her lesser status in the royal priesthood. She attends a liturgy celebrated by an all male clergy, assisted by all male acolytes. In addition, our liturgical language is not inclusive. Whenever the congregation is greeted as "brethren" or "brothers in Christ" the feminine half of the *ekklesia* is excluded, women's presence and existence ignored. Each Divine Liturgy concludes with the prayer that begins "Through the prayers of our fathers." From this patriarchal prayer one would never know that the church has "mothers" as well as "fathers." The fact is, moreover, that our church has literally thousands of "mothers." They are the female saints, the ascetics, holy women, confessors and martyrs, whose names grace our liturgical calendar.^{ccxxxiii}

Of this galaxy of saints the martyrs deserve special notice, the women who made God their absolute priority, even unto death. From the beginning women have paid blood tribute to their church. Orthodox Eve bears the names of martyrs too numerous to list here. She is, for example, Saints Katherine (November 25), Eirene (May 4,5), Euphemia (September 16), Marina (July 17), Christina (July 2,4), and Barbara (December 4), all haloed heroines and "Great-Martyrs."

The willingness of Orthodox women to die for their faith has never weakened. During the protracted iconoclastic struggles of the eighth and ninth centuries courageous women, nuns and laywomen alike, defied imperial edicts and patriarchal decrees and defended the sacred traditions of Orthodoxy. The first martyr in the defense of the veneration of ikons was a woman, St. Theodosia of Constantinople (May 28),^{ccxxxiv} whose example inspired other women. Yet on the Sunday of Orthodoxy only males, priests and laymen, carry ikons in the traditional procession. It is as if women did not contribute to

the victory of 843.

In times closer to our own, Orthodox Eve bears the bright names of the neo-martyrs Philothei (February 19), Akylina (September 27), Chryse (October 13). Kyranna (February 28) and Argyre (April 30).^{ccxxxv} These Greek women suffered martyrdom at the hands of the Turks. Philothei in the sixteenth century, the others in the eighteenth.

By a martyr's death these women achieved equality that was denied them in life. In selecting souls pure and strong enough for martyrdom the Holy Spirit never excluded women. Thus the supreme role of martyr has been open to women. The Holy Spirit has always called women to sanctity and martyrdom, a call accepted by countless Orthodox women. Yet we insist that the Holy Spirit does not call Orthodox persons who are female to serve God in the ordained priesthood.

Along with our "church mothers," countless generations of Orthodox mothers are equally forgotten, the women who preserved and perpetuated the faith of their mothers and fathers. These millions of Orthodox Eves rate no mention in this prayer from the Triodion, when the church prays for the souls of "our fathers and forefathers, grandfathers and foregrandfathers from the beginning and until recent times."^{ccxxxvi} Repeated again and again through many centuries, prayers like these erase women from the consciousness of the church, rendering invisible one half of the royal priesthood. Such exclusive, androcentric and patriarchal perspectives can only alienate more and more women from the church.^{ccxxxvii}

Furthermore, the contrast between the high honor paid to the Theotokos and the low estate of all other women deepens women's sense of alienation. It is true that Orthodoxy's exaltation of the Theotokos has given the church a "feminine face."^{ccxxxviii} On the other hand, it is equally true that veneration of the Theotokos has not brought honor or full dignity to women. The trickle down theory does not work any better in the church than it does in economics.

The architecture of our church as well its *praxis* makes palpable the stark contrast between the Theotokos' high visibility and Orthodox Eve's invisibility. Painted in the apse of many Orthodox churches, a majestic and beautiful Theotokos occupies and dominates sacred space. The sacred precinct around and close to her, however, is accessible only to males. None of her sisters and daughters are allowed to enter the sanctuary to serve and worship God at the altar in front of her. Thus Mary is isolated from womankind, an irony that is not lost on Orthodox women seated at a safe distance from the altar, aware of the male controlled sacred space from which all women are exiled because of their sex. This is one more painful reminder that within the royal priesthood to which all Orthodox Christians are called, the sons of the Theotokos, by virtue of their sex, are more royal and priestly than her daughters.

In 1986 the status and roles of women in the Orthodox Church remain essentially as

they were in the days of Origen and St. Nilus, determined by the anti-woman and androcentric ideology of the church fathers. According to the church fathers, both Greek and Latin, the female body defines woman, her "place" and roles within and outside the church. Antedating Freud by a millennium and a half, the fathers unanimously conclude that anatomy is woman's destiny no less in the church than in society. Moreover, history shows that gender based discrimination in Christian ideology and *praxis* has legitimized and sanctified attitudes and structures that discriminate against and oppress women in western society and culture.

An American historian once commented that the "best study of mankind is woman." For our present discussion it might be said that the "best study of Orthodox womankind is the Greek church father, be he Clement of Alexandria, or Saints Cyril, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa or Epiphanius of Cyprus. None of them dissented from or repudiated the pronouncement of St. Cyril, Orthodoxy's prestigious dogmatic theologian and fervent champion of the Theotokos. In a neat nutshell St. Cyril of Alexandria summarized the fathers' view of woman's proper "place": "the male must always rule; the female must be in second class everywhere" (PG 68. 1068C). The fathers ruled out the possibility of equality and mutuality between the sexes. Their theology recognized only a ruler-subject relationship between males and females, whether in the home or church.

The Orthodox Church has inherited from the fathers a dynamic spiritual and theological legacy. It is impossible to exaggerate the enormous authority and prestige of the Greek fathers, especially those of the first five Christian centuries. Saints Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzos and John Chrysostom not only laid the foundations of Christian philosophy, humanism and a new culture. They also developed two principles which distinguish Greek Christianity, faith in God *philanthropos*, the people-loving God who became human, and the corollary belief in *theosis*, the deification of humankind. For guidance on all issues, therefore, Orthodoxy looks to the fathers, whose thoughts and opinions fortunately survive in voluminous bulk in the form of letters, sermons, tracts, and commentaries.

Thus to understand Orthodox positions and teachings on the roles of women in the church one has to start with the fathers.^{ccxxxix} It is they who shaped the theology that has guided the church in permitting certain roles to women and forbidding others. They are the creators and the authorities for the "tradition spelled with a capital T" that assigned Orthodox Eve, to use St. Cyril's phrase, to permanent and universal "second class" status. Unlike the fathers, present day theologians deny the second class status of women in the church. Without examining its origins and strong anti-woman premises, they defend the "tradition spelled with a capital T". What the church fathers believed about women, they preached, wrote and practised. We should be grateful for their honesty. "I do not speak in riddles, but in plain, clear language," wrote St. John Chrysostom in his *Peri Hierosynes*.^{ccxli} He and the other fathers believed in male superiority and supremacy, in female inferiority and subservience and they said so

bluntly without obfuscation and obscurantism. Brilliant thinkers and theologians, often men of cultivation and learning, the fathers were men of their times, unable to transcend the mind-set of patriarchy, the prejudices against women that were entrenched in ancient Greek and Judaic cultures.

Having inherited and accepted this anti-woman tradition, the Greek and Latin church fathers prolonged its life. It has not yet been repudiated. Shared by other branches of Christianity, androcentrism, patriarchal prejudice and pride lie deeply imbedded in Orthodox teaching and practice. Powerful and durable, the influence of this tradition cannot be denied. Nor can it be casually dismissed either as rhetorical hyperbole or as a minor current of monastic influence. To defend it now with new and complicated arguments unknown to the fathers is to evade the issue, to distort history and to ignore the painful experience of women like the nun T'heodosia and of little girls who want to serve God at the altar along with their brothers.

By the end of the fourth century a complete theology of woman had been articulated and set in place. It was supported by selected proof-texts from both the Old and New Testaments, by typology paradigms and exegesis. Texts which affirmed women's equality and creation in the divine image were generally ignored. Genesis 1:27 and Galatians 3:28 sometimes occasioned uneasiness. But the uneasiness was removed by interpreting these texts in such a way as to postpone woman's equality and human dignity until the next world. Neutral or ambivalent texts were often given androcentric interpretations. Frequently commentaries involving women were less exegesis than eisegesis. To cite one out of hundreds of examples, in a twelfth century Annunciation sermon it is explained why Gabriel and not Michael was sent to the young girl in Nazareth. Gabriel, Philagathos wrote, was second among the archangels. Therefore he was sent to the "second species" (PG 132.9338). There being nothing in the Lukan account of the Annunciation to suggest such an interpretation, we can only conclude that the idea of females' second class status had a strong hold on the preacher's mind.

Long before Simone de Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex* (1949), the Greek fathers had defined males as primary and females as secondary. Their favorite texts were those that "proved" women's inferiority and their innate sinfulness. On the basis of passages like Genesis 2 and 3, Colossians 3:18, I Peter 3:27, I Timothy 2:11-15 and I Corinthians: 1-3 the fathers designed their anti-woman theology.^{ccxli} Patristic consensus justified woman's second class status in the church and society on two grounds: woman was second in the order of creation and first in the order of sin.

Writing in the tenth century B.C., the author of Genesis 2 described how God made Adam first and then fashioned Eve out of a rib which Adam could spare. Assuming that priority of creation implied superiority, the church fathers considered Eve and all her daughters, with one notable exception,^{ccxlii} inferior. By divine design, then, women are secondary creatures, not in the same class with men. Consequently women possess a special "female nature" and constitute a kind of sub-species. Adam represents the

human being, as do all his sons after him. The phrase "female nature" occurs repeatedly in patristic writings as well as in Byzantine hymns to female saints.^{ccxliii} No analogous phrase exists for men. Unlike women, they require no special definition because they were created first (I Timothy 2:4) and because they reflect God's glory, while women reflect man's glory (I Corinthians 11:7).

Congenital weakness, it was alleged, characterizes woman's inferior and flawed nature. Biblical sanction for this sexist theory comes from I Peter 3:7. After instructing wives to be submissive^{ccxliv} to their husbands, the writer reminds husbands to be considerate of their wives since they are the "weaker vessel". The use of the word "vessel" dehumanizes women, turning them into objects at the mercy of men. Likewise, whenever theologians and hymnographers designated women as "rib", they devalued her and reduced her to a piece of anatomy.

Appearing over and over in patristic writing and in Byzantine hymnography, the idea of "female weakness" never vanished from Orthodox theology of woman. Relying on the creation story in Genesis 2, Clement of Alexandria, the great Christian philosopher and teacher of the second century, explained female weakness" and male strength in this way. By removing the rib from Adam to create Eve God purged males of all weakness forever (*PG* 8: 581A-B).^{ccxlv} Therefore all males are whole, perfect and strong, all females fractured, derivative, Imperfect and weak. Sixteen hundred years after Clement, St. Nikodemos Hagioreites contrasted "weak woman" with "strong man" (I, 289).

In great detail the fathers spelled out, often in picturesque language, the many and varied weaknesses of "female nature." Female failings are not only physical. Women also suffer from moral, spiritual and intellectual defects. Commenting on John 20: 13-14, Mary Magdalene's failure to recognize the Risen Lord at once, St. Cyril of Alexandria,^{ccxli} fellow townsman of Hypatia, the brilliant woman philosopher and mathematician, declared that the "whole species of females is somewhat slow of understanding" (*PG* 74. 689B, 692C-D). Other theologians agreed with this assessment. St. John Chrysostom shared Cyril's low opinion of women's mental capacity. He therefore deemed it wise and necessary for women to be restricted to unimportant, undemanding domestic roles (*PG* 62. 500). The house was the appropriate sphere for the sex endowed with limited mental capabilities. It is worth noting that the fathers, so far as I know, did not compose paeans to the glories of motherhood and domesticity. In their view, based on Genesis 3:16, God punished Eve for her transgression by enslaving her to her husband and condemning her to the pains of childbirth. They did not view marriage and motherhood as ministries ordained by God for women.

Convinced that only males participate in the divine image, the golden tongued patriarch of Constantinople, whose most loyal friends were women, projected on to the "second sex" every conceivable human weakness.^{ccxlvii} The female sex, St. John Chrysostom

eloquently declared, is emotional, fickle, superficial, garrulous and servile in temperament (PG 47. 510-511); 59. 346; 61.316; 62. 548). Other fathers contributed details to this basic misogynist portrait of women. St. Epiphanius of Cyprus^{ccxlviii} attributed to women instability, weakmindedness, frenzy and vanity (PG 42. 740D, 745B). St. Gregory the Theologian believed that women are "naturally" ostentatious and self-indulgent (PG 35, 800).

Lest we think that such opinions and caricatures of women belong to the remote past, let us consider these lines written by a twentieth century Russian Orthodox priest and theologian. Women, he said, are guilty of "inadequate self-control, irresponsibility, passion, blind judgments. Scarcely any woman is free of the latter; she is always the slave of her passions, of her dislikes, of her desires."^{ccxlix} Such sexist stereotypes and reductionist images of women still exist, descending directly from Christendom's most influential and prestigious church fathers.

From Christendom's most celebrated preacher and pulpit comes this verdict on woman's fatally flawed weak nature. In a baptismal catechesis St. John Chrysostom applauds St. Paul, "the teacher of the oikoumene," who "knew very well the stupidity of female nature."^{ccl} Given this monolithic, negative and pejorative view of women, it is easy to understand the fathers' opposition to the ordination of women to the sacramental priesthood. Handicapped by moral, spiritual and intellectual weakness, women were judged unfit for sacramental roles. To their credit, however, the fathers did not indulge in evasive talk about complementarity and about charismata of femininity and masculinity as reasons for not admitting women to the priesthood.

The church father further justified women's second class status, their subordination to men and their exclusion from priestly roles on the premise that women are first in the order of sin. The same primitive creation myth that doomed women to an inferior "female nature" placed on them a second burden, primacy in sinfulness.^{ccli} In Orthodoxy's androcentric theology woman and sin became synonyms. Theologians, past and present,^{cclii} follow the author of I Timothy 2: 14, who exonerated Adam and blamed only Eve for the introduction of sin into the world: "for it was not Adam who was led astray but the woman who was led astray and fell into sin." In agreement with this prejudiced interpretation of the Fall the fathers named Eve the "mother" and "author" of sin, neglecting to assign paternity to Adam. Ever since that unhappy day long ago in Eden, women have been scapegoated by church and society, saddled with responsibility for sin and all the evils that plague the human condition. Adam was the first, but not the last, to put the blame on Eve.

In Orthodox sermons and hymns Eve serves as the archetypal sinner. The words "sin" and "death" inevitably accompany her name. The contrary is true of Adam, her partner in original sin. He is seldom, if ever, associated with *hamartia*. Thus, St. Andrew of Crete, hierarch and hymnographer, laments in his penitential hymn, the Great Canon, that his soul resembles Eve.^{ccliii} During the Great Lent it is women who figure

conspicuously as the paradigms of sin and repentance. Along with their sinful "first mother" Eve, St. Mary of Egypt and the "sinful woman" of Luke 7:36-50 achieved super-star billing in Lenten sermons and hymns.^{ccliv} The most famous and beloved of these Lenten hymns is, of course, the troparion about the woman "who fell in many sins," composed by the ninth century nun Kassia. The conspicuous absence of male sinners is due understandably to the moral superiority and strength of Eve's sons. To her daughters alone is attributed a "propensity to sin." Credit for this phrase belongs to St. John Chrysostom, who advised the priest that women, indeed require more of his attention because of their propensity to sin."^{cclv}

This ideology based on women's special, inferior and sinful nature has dominated Orthodox attitudes toward the feminine half of the royal priesthood. Yet historically it has co-existed with other traditions and practices which did not limit women's life in the church along sexual lines. Thus, in the rich experience and glorious past of her church Orthodox Eve finds support for the expansion of her roles, models to inspire and challenge her faith and God-given gifts.

The earliest valuable models for contemporary Orthodox women come from the egalitarian community that Jesus gathered around him. They are Christ's women disciples.^{cclvi} At a time when women counted for less than nothing ecclesiastically and socially, women like Mary of Magdala, Mary the Mother of James, Salome, Joanna and Susanna heard and accepted Jesus' call to discipleship.^{cclvii} Three gospels record that women "followed and served him." and together express the essence of Jesus' radical concept of discipleship.^{cclviii} Despite the custom that forbade rabbis from teaching women, Jesus taught his female disciples new teachings about freedom and equality. Abandoning the traditional segregated life of women, the women disciples led public lives, openly traveling and living with Jesus, as they shared his ministry of love and healing. It was they who proved in the end to be the true disciples of Christ.

In the earliest of the four gospels Mark draws a sharp contrast between the male and female disciples. The evangelist records the failure of the male followers of Christ to achieve true discipleship. They failed to understand Christ's concept of *diakonia*, the selfless giving of love, the acceptance of redemptive suffering and death. Attached to patriarchal patterns of power and status, the male disciples quarreled about first places in the kingdom of God.^{cclix} Individually and collectively, the twelve, the inner circle of male disciples, failed to "follow and serve" their teacher at the time of his passion and death. Peter, John and James slept during Christ's agony in Gethsemane. Judas betrayed him with a kiss. And when he was arrested, "abandoning him they fled, all of them" (Mark 14:50). Peter denied him three times. With this demonstration of selfishness, lack of spiritual sensitivity, to say nothing of perfidy and cowardice on the part of the twelve male disciples, the patriarchal image of male superiority collapses.

At the end of Mark 14 the male disciples disappear from the oldest account of Jesus' death and resurrection. Precisely at this point the story of the female disciples begins.

In the bleak fourteenth chapter Mark relates the story of the anointing of Jesus by a woman disciple at the home of Simon the leper at Bethany. The contrast between her act of homage and the behavior of the male disciples is explicit (Mark 14:3-72). This unnamed woman disciple alone had understood Christ's three allusions to his death, as well as the meaning of his messianic mission and kingship. She therefore assumed a traditional male role and anointed Jesus' head, just as in ancient Israel male prophets had anointed the heads of kings.^{cclx}

The story of the women disciples reaches a supreme climax at the tomb where Jesus had been buried. In chapter 16 Mark describes how at sunrise on Sunday Mary Magdalene with two other women disciples went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. To their surprise they found the stone rolled away and heard from the angel that Christ had risen. According to all four gospels the women disciples, the *Myrophoroi*, were the first to learn that Jesus had triumphantly trampled upon death. The first *Christos Aneste* fell from women's lips. Thus, the truth of Christianity's fundamental mystery, the Resurrection, depends entirely on their witness, on the word of "weak" women.^{cclxi} Surely there is no more astounding or significant fact in Christian history for the feminine half of the royal priesthood.

By their love, understanding, sensitivity, courage and loyalty these women proved to be Christ's only true disciples. The so-called "weaker vessel" was revealed to be the stronger, strong enough in fact to succeed where the male apostles had failed. These *mathetria* are the first of countless women who have proved the sexist stereotypes false. Nevertheless, the stereotypes survive, hallowed by traditional theology.

The first to have knowledge of the Resurrection, the women disciples were the first to proclaim the good news. For this reason Orthodox tradition recognizes them as both evangelists and as disciples. In a recent illuminating article Bishop Demetrios Trakatellis has interpreted priesthood as disciple-ship.^{cclxii} In view of this interpretation, the women disciples, the true followers of Christ, offer a significant biblical paradigm which deserves serious consideration in future discussions on the ordination of women to the priesthood.

To look back to the apostolic church itself is to discover challenging models of women who functioned in major roles of leadership. Galatians 3:28 did not propose males as the norm for life in the spirit. It ruled out maleness as a requirement for leadership roles in the church, declaring the irrelevance of ethnic, social and gender distinctions in the new creation inaugurated by Christ.^{cclxiii} Thus, in the early church women were not marginalized. Rather, they were empowered to share equally in the various ministries of leadership.

The apostolate, the highest position and authority in the early church, was open to women as well as to men. In his epistles St. Paul makes clear that the leadership of apostles was the most decisive for the primitive *ekklesia*. St. Paul also inscribes on the

record of women's roles in the church the name of an "outstanding" woman apostle (Romans 16:7). The only woman in the New Testament who is called *apostolos*, Jounias^{cclxiv} represents who knows how many women apostles and leaders, whose names have been lost. Converted to Christianity before St. Paul, Jounia and her husband Andronikos were an apostle-couple like Priscilla and Aquila.

In addition to Saints Jounia (May 17) and Priscilla (February 13), the Orthodox Church recognizes a number of other women apostles.^{cclxv} Thereby it honors the memory of courageous charismatic women who criss-crossed the Roman Empire to spread the *evangelion*, to establish churches and to exercise authority over them. The women apostles commemorated by our church include: Saints Mary Magdalene (July 22); Horaiozele (July 26); Apphia (November 22); Xanthippe and Polyxena (September 23); Thekla (September 24); Mariamne (February 17); Photeine (February 26)^{cclxvi}; and Nympha (February 28).

The career of St. Hermione (September 14)^{cclxvii} illustrates the many faceted activity of the woman apostle. A prophet known throughout Asia Minor, Hermione was also an inspired teacher and preacher, winning many souls to Christ by her "god-speaking tongue." Empowered by the Holy Spirit, who did not scorn souls wearing female bodies, she cast out demons and healed the sick. Like her brother apostles, Hermione preached a new faith to a multi-ethnic, polylingual and polytheistic society. Hers was a public ministry, shocking and revolutionary in the patriarchal culture of her time.

The women apostles and leaders of the primitive church did not fail to win the recognition and admiration of the very church fathers who excluded women from leadership roles. St. John Chrysostom, who decreed silence, submission and segregation for women explained the contradiction between past and present practices: women in his day were no longer like those in the days of the apostles.^{cclxviii} Hence there was no chance of expanding women's roles to what they had once been in the church.

Likewise, St. Paul inscribes on the record the name of Christianity's first woman deacon. Phoebe was deacon of the church at Cenchreae and the "ruler over many" including himself (Romans 16: 1-2). Paul clearly indicates that Phoebe enjoyed authority in this church near Corinth. The importance of the deacon is suggested by Philippians 1:1, where Paul names the "presiding elders and deacons" as the leaders of the church at Philippi. At that time the diaconate was open to women and men on equal terms. The qualifications for both were the same (I Timothy 3: 8-11, as were their functions. Later, however, the ministry of the deaconess was restricted, although she too wore the oration and communed at the altar with priests.

The order of deaconess has a long and respected tradition, extending from apostolic times to the twelfth century in Eastern Christendom.^{cclxix} Documents of the third and fourth centuries describe the diaconate of women as it developed in post apostolic times. It was considered a position of honor. The *Didache XII Apostolorum* states that

the deaconess should be honored as a figure of the Holy Spirit. Her position is analagous to that of the deacon. Both were seen as collaborators of the bishop. Immediately one thinks of Orthodoxy's most celebrated deaconess, St. Olympias (July 25)^{cclxx}, the influential confidante and supporter of several hierarchs, including her friend St. John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople.

After New Testament times women deacons were authentically ordained and belonged to the clerical hierarchy. At the Council of Nicaea (325) deaconesses are referred to as clerics. In the Apostolic Constitutions of the fourth century the bishop is charged to ordain deaconesses. Their ordination took place during the Divine Liturgy at the same point as that of the priest. This document specifies terms, prayers and actions (the laying on of hands, etc.) for the ordination of deaconesses, which are the same as those used for the ordination of bishop, priest and deacons. If these were sacramentally ordained, then so were the deaconesses.

Thus the Orthodox Church has within its historical experience a precedent for the ordination of women to the sacramental priesthood. By renewing the ancient order of deaconesses the church would move away from the patriarchal tradition that restricts women's roles in the church on the grounds that she is inferior to and more sinful than man. At the same time it would be a move toward fulfilling the promise of Galatians 3:28, that in the body of Christ there is neither male nor female.^{cclxxi} In view of the precedent of the deaconesses some Orthodox theologians see no theological obstacles to the ordination of women to the other ranks of the priesthood, the presbyter and bishop.^{cclxxii}

To restore, however, the egalitarianism and inclusiveness of the primitive church will not be easy. Change is always difficult. The habits of many centuries have to be overcome. It is never easy to break with established patterns of thought and behavior, to cast off taboos, fears and superstitions. Above all, how difficult it is to separate divine laws and human conventions. Where then can the church look for guidance in turning away from the patriarchal and androcentric traditions that have for so long governed its attitudes and praxis concerning women? Where else than to its founder, who lived briefly on earth to show the way from the old to the new creation?

To fulfill his liberating vision of philanthropic and diatonic Christ challenged outworn creeds, laws and rituals. He rejected ancient regulations for fasting. New wine had best be put in new skins (Mark 2:2). Traditional religious observances meant less to him than did humankind's physical and spiritual welfare. The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Jesus accused the religious establishment of ignoring God's commandments and clinging to conventions created by themselves. "How well you succeed in getting around the commandment of God in order to preserve your own tradition" (Mark 7: 8-9).

Jesus' words and example light the way to understanding his new law for women and men. In his attitude toward and relationships with women he deliberately broke time-honored customs and laws which diminished women's dignity and humanity.^{cclxxiii} Nowhere in the four gospels does he treat women as a special, inferior being. In no instance does he endorse negative, destructive attitudes towards women. He was a revolutionary teacher who invited women to join his circle of disciples, to study and learn the word of God. Jesus never mapped a special sphere for women. He never urged them to be "feminine." When Mary of Bethany chose for herself a role traditionally defined as "masculine," Christ did not send her back to the kitchen, forcing her to fit the patriarchal sexist model. Rather, he insisted that women as well as men are called to the intellectual and spiritual life.^{cclxxiv} Above all, he treated Mary of Bethany and all women as autonomous persons of equal worth and dignity. His church should do no less.

Jesus disregarded religious taboos which humiliated women and excluded them from cult and society as "unclean." The three synoptic gospels (Mark 5:25-34; Matthew 9:20-26; Luke 8:42-48) record Jesus' public rejection of the blood taboo, the "uncleanness" of women with a flow of blood. No matter what his tradition prescribed, Jesus simply did not believe in the ritual "uncleanness" of women. Yet two thousand years later this old taboo persists, setting women apart.^{cclxxv}

On another occasion Jesus again deliberately violated traditional codes governing the relationship between men and women. Men, and rabbis in particular, never spoke to women in public. That a rabbi would discuss theology with a woman was unthinkable. According to a remarkable account in John 4: 4-26 Jesus did both. By the well of Jacob, a public place, Jesus, a Jewish rabbi, initiated conversation with a woman of Samaria, member of the inferior sex and of a despised religious sect. This conversation is the longest recorded of Jesus. Before long the conversation turned to religion and at the end he instructed the foreign woman how to worship God: "God is spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

To worship God who created female and male in the divine image only spirit and truth matter. The gender, race, social or economic position of the worshipper never matter to God who is spirit. Manifestly, they did not matter at all to Jesus when he discussed theology with the Samaritan woman. He did not despise her because of her sex, reject her because of her religion, or shun her because of her life-style. To this woman, not to one of the twelve male apostles, Jesus made an important disclosure about his identity. To this "weaker vessel" he revealed for the first time that he was the Messiah foretold by the prophets of Israel (John 4: 25-26).

That gender seems to matter to the church, that gender defines women, places them *en duetere taxi* (in second place) and justifies restricted roles for Orthodox women has nothing to do with God's commandment. It has everything to do with customs, conventions and traditions created by the pride, fears and prejudices of fallible human

beings.

To conclude, this birthright Greek Orthodox woman hopes and prays that in memory of and in the names of our forefathers and foresisters the saints Orthodox Eve will claim her rightful heritage; that together Orthodox men and women will turn away from the sin of sexism and move forward to equal discipleship and *diakonia*, worshipping God in spirit and truth, and with love for the Creator and for all creation.

Symposium on Medicine, Psychology and Religion, The Expanding Roles of Women. Hellenic College. Brookline MA., April 19, 1986.

After Easter Reflections 1986

During the 50 days after Easter the Orthodox Church celebrates some exceptional women saints. They are the Myrophoroi, the Samaritan Woman and the Woman with the Issue of Blood. Their names are inscribed on our calendars. Our service books contain numerous hymns in their honor. The Pentekostarion provides hundreds of examples. And for more than a thousand years theologians and hierarchs wrote and delivered sermons and encomia to these holy women of faith. Yet we pay little or no attention to them.

According to liturgical traditions, on the third Sunday of Easter the Myrophoroi - among them Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Salome, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee - are honored collectively. All four gospels (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20) testify that these faithful women disciples are the first witnesses of the Resurrection; the first to see the Risen Lord and the first to proclaim the good news (euangelion) that Christ had truly risen from the dead as he foretold.

It is a striking and significant fact that Christianity's basic premise, the Resurrection, depends exclusively on the word of women. The first Christos Anesti came from the lips of the Myrrh-bearing women. Thus, these mathetriaí are the first evangelists and apostles. Since the male disciples, the 11 of the inner circle, had fled and hidden, they learned the euangelion first from the women. These words of an ancient hymn make it clear what the succession is: "Learning from the angel the bright message (kerygma) of the resurrection, the women disciples (mathetriaí) of the Lord said to the male apostles, "Death has been defeated; Christ who is God has risen."

Another woman of faith is celebrated on the fifth Sunday of Easter. She is the Samaritan Woman, with whom Christ conversed one hot noon by the Well of Jacob. It is the longest conversation recorded of Jesus. The fourth chapter of John tells the remarkable story of her encounter with Jesus. When the male disciples saw their teacher talking to the foreign woman, they were shocked. The impropriety was too much for their conventional views.

Jesus, however, did not share their prejudices. He did not despise the woman because of her sex, life-style and religion. Rather, he discussed theology with her, instructing her to worship God in spirit and truth. And to her, not to the male disciples, he revealed for the first time that he was the Messiah, whom the prophets of Israel had prophesied.

The Samaritan Woman heard these startling words and at once believed him. Then she ran to tell the good news to the people of her town. So strong was her faith (pistis) that they also believed. She, too, was a first apostle. Later, the "Faithful Samaritan Woman" became the subject of many Byzantine hymns and sermons.

From the synoptic gospels (Matthew 9:20-26, Mark 5:25-34, Luke 8:42-48) comes the

story of another woman who had faith. She is the unfortunate woman whom society and cult shunned and shamed because of a blood taboo. The Orthodox Church commemorates her on the sixth Wednesday of Easter and as St. Beronike on July 12th. She was cured of her illness and liberated from shame when she healed herself by touching the hem of Jesus' garment.

In a hymn composed by St. Romanos Mdos in the sixth century, Christ tells the woman that the healing was not his doing, that her pisti (faith) had worked the miracle. Nevertheless, this story demonstrates Jesus' attitude towards rituals, taboos, and traditions which humiliated and discriminated against women. Regardless of what his tradition had taught about blood and "unclean" women, Jesus rejected the notion. One wonders why it has lasted to this day in the church.

Through the experiences of the Myrophoroi, the Samaritan Woman and the Woman with the Issue of Blood, the church seeks to illustrate the meaning of the Resurrection, of Easter with its message of life, joy and hope. Strong, confident, intelligent, and brave women, these female saints welcomed the advent of the new creation inaugurated by Jesus. Unafraid, in contrast to the male disciples, the Myrophoroi went to the tomb, learned that Christ had trampled on death, and became the first bearers of the Christian gospel. The Samaritan Woman conversed with Jesus, discovered that the Messiah had come, and announced him to the world. To recover health and entrance into society and cult, the outcast woman defied conventions, overcame fear, approached Christ and found healing through her faith.

At the critical centre of each story stands Jesus. It was he who made it possible for these women to experience joy and liberation. It happened because he accepted them as persons and valued each of them as human beings created in God's image. He never mapped out a "feminine" sphere for them. He never forced them into patriarchal stereotypes. The relationship of these female saints with the founder of Christianity provides thoughts for reflection in this after-Easter period.

Orthodox Women and the Iconic Image of Christ

The last word on Orthodox women and the priesthood has not yet been spoken, the arguments pro and con refined. Everything - a two thousand year-old rich tradition - must be examined, prejudices, fears and stifling customs overcome. Indeed, much remains to be said about this issue which has often been declared to be non-existent. Evidence for its existence is, however, more than ample.

Most important is the fact that Orthodox women have been and still are called to serve God at the altar, to become ordained priests. I personally know of two fine young women, both daughters of Greek Orthodox priests, who have the vocation. They are now professional women, their God-given talents and calling rejected by our church because of their gender.

Orthodox Christians today must answer this question. Do we really believe that the Holy Spirit looks first at bodies to make sure they are male before calling souls to God's service? Prejudices, self-interest and ancient customs may blind us fallible beings. But Orthodoxy teaches, above all, that God is love (I John 4:8) and that God does not discriminate between persons on the basis of social status, ethnicity or sex (Galatians 3:27-28).

The recent article by the Rev. Dr. Efthimiou raises many serious questions which merit informed discussion. I wish only to comment on one, the claim that the Orthodox Church does not and can not ordain women to the sacramental priesthood because such ordination would "disregard the symbolic and iconic value of male priesthood . . ." This means that since Jesus was male, all priests must be males. Jesus was also Jewish in race and culture, but no one claims that priests must likewise be Jewish. According to the theory of the iconic image of Christ nothing matters so much as maleness. It matters so much that automatically half of the body of Christ is barred from the priesthood on the basis of sex alone.

It must first be pointed out that this explanation for the exclusion of women from the priesthood is not Biblical. Nowhere in the New Testament is there anything about the priest as the "iconic " of Christ. According to the four gospels, Jesus himself was not a priest, but a Jewish rabbi in the tradition of prophets, who by word and deed taught two fundamental commandments, love of God and love of humankind. The gospels nowhere record that Jesus "ordained" anybody as "priest." Nor did he leave a blueprint for organizing His followers into laity and a priestly hierarchy.

Furthermore, neither the New Testament nor the Greek Church Fathers emphasized Christ's maleness. They regarded it as irrelevant to the Incarnation and to redemption. Our redemption, in their view, depends not on Jesus' sex, but on His humanity. The point of the Incarnation is that God became human in order to save all of the children of

Eve and Adam. In one patristic text after another the critical key words relating to Jesus are *anthropos* and *enanthropeo*, as well as *enanthropesis*.

The Greek Fathers clearly interpreted the Incarnation to mean that Jesus represented males and females. Otherwise, the great Cappadocian Fathers taught, all humankind could not be redeemed. Salvation would be restricted to that part of humanity which Christ assumed. Therefore, since Christ represented both female and male humanity, it follows that both may represent Christ in the priesthood.

The priest as the "iconic image" of Christ does not appear in patristic discussions of the priesthood. Nothing like this can be found, for example, in St. John Chrysostom's treatise, "On the Priesthood." In this authoritative work he discusses the moral, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral imperatives of the priesthood and its duties. Chrysostom, to be sure, categorically excludes women from the priesthood. He does so not because women cannot physically image Christ. He excluded all women because he believed, as did all the Fathers, in the innately inferior and flawed sinful nature of the female sex. Women by patristic consensus were declared second in creation, thus inferior to men; and first in the order of sin, thus more sinful than the "first" sex.

Because of this belief and not because of the "symbolic and iconic value of the male priesthood" St. John Chrysostom and the Greek Church Fathers justified second class status for women and their exclusion from the sacramental priesthood. All Orthodox Christians are called to the "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). Within this inclusive priesthood, however, some are more royal than others. Although women, too, are created in the divine image and likeness (Genesis 1:28), we are still categorized as somehow less royal and priestly than our brothers - in a word, less divine.

At Forty Days

Among other legacies, Judaism bequeathed to Christianity the sacred number "forty." In the Old Testament we read that after Noah built the ark, the heavens opened, raining hard 40 days and 40 nights (Genesis 7: 12). Moses remained on Sinai for 40 days and nights, receiving from God the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:28). To reach the Mountain of God, Elijah walked 40 days and nights (I Kings 19:8). The same sacred number determined the date for women's "purification" after the birth of a male child (Leviticus 12:1-5). Considered twice as "unclean" as the mothers of males, mothers of females were "purified" 80 days after childbirth!

In the New Testament the number "forty" retains the same religious and ritual significance. At the beginning of his ministry, Christ fasted and prayed in the wilderness for 40 days and nights (Matthew 4:1f, Mark 1:12f, Luke 4:1-13). Risen from the dead, Christ appeared to the disciples over a period of 40 days (Acts 1:3). And 40 days after Jesus' birth, Mary was "purified" and Jesus presented in the temple, according to Mosaic law (Luke 2:22-38).

All Orthodox Christians are familiar with this sacred number. We celebrate the Feasts of the Hypapante and the Ascension 40 days after Christmas and Easter respectively. Our dead are first memorialized at the *saranta*. The Easter fast, the *sarakoste*, lasts 40 days. And Orthodox women are "purified" and their infants blessed 40 days after birth. Until that time new mothers are considered "unclean" and are excluded from participation in the liturgical life of the church.

Biblical sanction for this orthodox ritual and practice lies in Leviticus 12:1-5. Written several millennia ago and reflecting primitive taboos based on ignorance, this passage declares women "unclean" after childbirth and mandates their exclusion from the sanctuary until they are "cleansed." In view of scientific knowledge of the birth-giving process, we cannot today accept the basic assumption of Leviticus and our Orthodox service, namely, that child-birth renders women physically "unclean," and, therefore, ritually "impure." Nevertheless, in June 1986 a prominent Greek Orthodox theologian, in defense of this ritual, wrote concerning woman after childbirth these shocking words: "uncleanliness is a description of her biological condition." By the fortieth day, he continued, she has "normalized" and can return to "normal social and church life." Orthodox women are right in asking what is there that is not "normal" in a woman's giving birth to another image of God. When a woman brings into the world a new life, is she not continuing God's work of creation?

This primitive theory of women's "uncleanliness" clearly denigrates all Orthodox women. It especially demeans Orthodox mothers, causing such pain and alienation that the church can ill afford to ignore it any longer.

Furthermore, sexist discrimination against Orthodox women begins when we are only 40 days old. A month ago I witnessed the "churaching" of two infants. The priest carried the first one into the altar area and around the altar table once. The second infant was carried only up to the Holy Gate. These two tiny human beings were equally pure, innocent, sinless and created in the divine image. Why, then, were they treated differently? The one was admitted to the sacred space of the altar and the other was not. This discrimination, it cannot be denied or explained away, is based solely on sex. At 40 days the male infant gains access to the altar, while at 40 days the female infant is denied access forever after. At 40 days the female is marked by tradition spelled with a capital "T" as somehow less holy than the male.

At her "churaching" the female is of course, unaware of the sexist discrimination against her. However, she experiences it soon enough, the experience lasting a lifetime. Little girls are forbidden the joy of service at the altar available to little boys. Because of gender women are denied the privilege of serving God and humankind in the priestly ministry. All our lives we experience second-class status in our church, the inequality imposed upon us by man-made patriarchal prejudices, traditions and practices. When we become mothers we are reminded of our "uncleanliness" and the cycle of discrimination begun at 40 days after birth is completed.

Surely in 1986 the time has come to end this cycle. Reform of the service of "purification" and "churaching" is a good way to begin.

At Forty Days – A Postscript

A reader of my article "At Forty Days" which appeared in *The Greek Star* recently, has written that my facts were personal opinions. To further clarify my statements, I would like to review and explain some of the facts.

1. IT IS A FACT that our church considers menstruating women and women after giving birth as physically "unclean" and ritually "impure," denying them participation in the liturgical life of the church during these periods. That this practice derives from Leviticus 12:1-5 does not justify its continuation. This prehistoric taboo, based on ignorance and fear of the life-giving process that occurs in the female body does not belong to the church founded by Christ. It is a fact that Christ himself rejected this Levitical blood taboo, as is recorded in the Gospel story of the *"woman with the issue of blood"* (*Matthew 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-29, Luke 8:43-48.*). Therefore to continue this practice is to reject the teachings and practice of the church's Founder.

2. IT IS A FACT that the writers of the New Testament nowhere mention that the early church "reserved the priesthood for male." Rather, these writers reveal that in the "earliest church" women and men alike shared equally the most important ministries, the apostolate, diaconate and the prophetic calling. The Holy Spirit called the earliest Christians without regard to gender. Nothing in the Gospels or Epistles indicates that the roles of women apostles, deacons and prophets differed from or were subordinate to the men apostles, deacons and prophets.

3. IT IS A FACT that Christ's first apostles were women, the faithful Myrophoroi. Unlike the 11 male disciples who fled and hid themselves, the women disciples followed Christ all the way to the cross and to the tomb. Thus women are the first witnesses of the Resurrection, the first to say *Christos Anesti*, the first to be commissioned by the Risen Lord to announce to the world the joyful paschal kerygma, Christ's victory over death. To restrict the apostolate to the 12 men apostles is to destroy the Scriptural record. Moreover, Paul, the most important of all the apostles, was not one of the 12. And women were also included in the apostolic company.

4. IT IS A FACT that women have "second class" status in our church. It is a reality established by the church fathers, a reality experienced by Orthodox women. St. Cyril of Alexandria, Orthodoxy's prestigious dogmatic theologian, stated the principle of women's subordinate position in honest plain language: "men must always rule and women must everywhere in everything remain in second class (*en deftera taxei*).\" For more than a thousand years this principle has prevailed. This ruling and its application is neither anyone's "personal opinion" nor the product of the "minds of a few Christians who want change for the sake of change." It is a fact of women's historical experience in the church as well as in society.

5. IT IS INDEED A FACT that the church honors the Theotokos. No one denies this.

The image of the Theotokos dominates the sacred space around the altar. But this high honor of the Mother of God has not brought honor to her daughters. The sacred space in which the Theotokos appears is reserved for men only. Women are excluded from it simply because they are women. If this is not discrimination, then what is it?

As a Greek Orthodox woman, a traditionalist who values Orthodox spirituality, Orthodox teachings of sacrificial love, Orthodox belief in the intrinsic worth of each human being, I have reason to hope that our church will reconsider its theology of woman; that our church will someday accord equality to women, who together with their brothers are created in the divine image and likeness (Genesis 1 :27) and that our church will fulfill the promise that in the body of Christ racial, social and sexual differences do not matter (Galatians 3:27-28). In the words of St. Paul, "*what matters is faith that makes its power felt through love*" (Galatians 5:6). That being so, women should have equal access to all the ministries of the church, to its rich liturgical life.

December Gifts

Buying, wrapping, giving and receiving gifts mark the busy month of December. We pause, however, to celebrate once again a divine gift, God who appeared among us in the flesh to light our way to grace, life, love and peace on earth.

December also brings other gifts for Orthodox Christians to celebrate, 105 women saints. Of these, 80 martyred heroines remain nameless (Dec.13, 24). The names of 25 saints survive. I list them according to their place in the calendar: Barbara, Iouliane, Christodoule, Anna, Hannah, Bebaia, Loukia, Anthia, Susanna, Theophano, Zoe, Sophia, Thessalonike, Iouliane, Anastasia, Theodote, Eugenia, Basila,. the Virgin Mary, Domna, Anyisia, Theodora, Melania, Olympiodora and Neme.

98 of these women gave the last full measure of devotion and wear the crowns won by martyrdom. Two belong to the select group of "Great Martyrs." St. Barbara (Dec. 4), "taught by God," defied her pagan father to remain faithful to her conscience. She bravely accepted a martyr's death. St. Anastasia, Great Martyr and Healer of Wounds (Dec. 22) is the other. Defying her husband, she secretly visited persecuted and imprisoned Christians to give them medical aid. Betrayed by her angry husband to the authorities, Anastasia endured death by fire. Whether a mother like St. Anthia or a young woman like St. Loukia, all 98 women showed unsurpassed courage and loyalty.

The Blessed Martyr Susanna (Dec.15) had an extraordinary life. Born in Palestine, the daughter of a Jewish mother and Greek father, she became a Christian. For 20 years she lived as a monk named John in a monastery near Jerusalem. Church tradition records that "because of her many virtues she was made the archimandrite of the monastery." When it was discovered that Archimandrite John was a woman, the Bishop of Eleutheropolis ordained Susanna a deacon. Her miracles brought her great fame. When by her prayers she destroyed pagan idols, Deacon Susanna was put to death, another valiant woman martyr.

Among the seven women who are not martyrs one comes from the Old Testament, Hannah the Prophetess (Dec. 9), the mother of Samuel. On this day also occurs the feast of the Conception of St. Anna, the mother of the Theotokos. When the prayers of these two barren women were answered, Hannah and Anna dedicated their children to God.

This group also includes two women "Miracle Workers." In the ninth century, St. Theophano, Thaumaturgos and Empress of Byzantium (Dec.16), scorned the glamor and glitz of imperial privileges. She chose instead a spiritual lift of prayer to God and an active life of loving service (diakonia) to the least of her disadvantaged sisters and brothers. St. Sophia Thaumaturgos (Dec. 18) is honored with two verses:

Sophia loved the wisdom of God.

Therefore she received even the grace of miracles.

On Dec. 26 the Orthodox Church celebrates the most ancient Marian feast, the Synaxis of the Theotokos, the woman who made the gift of her flesh and womb to God so that God might come and live among us. Hence Mary's pre-eminent glory among the saints, her power and majesty in heaven.

Finally, December and the old year end with commemorations of two women ascetics, Hosia Theodora of Caesarea (Dec. 30) and Hosia Melania the Roman (Dec. 31). Aristocratic women of the eighth and fifth centuries respectively, Theodora and Melania achieved holiness as nuns, seeking and finding God through the denial of self.

Although they belonged to the sex thought to be the "weaker vessel" (I Peter 3:7), these 105 daughters of Eve proved to be strong generous donors to the church, bringing their rare gifts of love and sacrifice. Themselves precious gifts beyond the price of gold and even of nuclear weapons, the women saints of December deserve our homage this season of giving and receiving gifts.

In Their Own Write

As in all patriarchal societies, so in Byzantium. Letters and learning were reserved for men only. Sentenced to subordination and silence by societal and ecclesial traditions, most Byzantine women did not know how to read and write.

Nor were they encouraged to write books. In fourth century cosmopolitan Alexandria, a prominent Christian teacher and theologian shuddered at the thought of female authors. Women, Didymos declared, should be prohibited from writing books "in their own right." Seventeen years after his death a mob of monks lynched Hypatia of Alexandria, the brilliant author of books on astronomy, philosophy and mathematics. Her murder occurred during Great Lent, 415.

Hence in the history of Byzantine literature the names of women are conspicuously rare. These few women writers belonged to the upper strata of society. They were fortunate to have been given an education. I call your attention to two of this small select company.

The first is Eudokia of Byzantium, 421-460. The daughter of a pagan professor she was named Athenais after the city of her birth. From her father, Leontios, and two of his colleagues, Athenais received a classical Greek education. Despite the ancient belief that silence is woman's most sublime virtue, she was also trained in the art of public speaking.

Shortly before her marriage in 421 to the emperor Theodosios II, the pagan Athenais was baptized a Christian and given the name Eudokia. Keenly interested now in theology, Empress Eudokia befriended monks, nuns and clergy. She built churches in Constantinople and Jerusalem, as well as hospitals, rest homes and shelters for the sick and homeless. For her *eusebia* and *philanthropia* Eudokia was canonized and is commemorated on Aug. 13.

This educated Byzantine *basillisa* championed Greek culture in the Queen City. An enthusiastic patron of academics, poets and men of letters, she saw to it that the Greek curriculum at the University of Constantinople was expanded. Eudokia was herself a woman of letters, a poet and orator. Seated on a golden throne in Antioch, she delivered a memorable speech before the senate. And although women were not supposed to write books, this literary empress, a true daughter of Athens, wrote several. She composed a poetic version of the first eight books of the Old Testament, and of the Prophets Zechariah and Daniel. She is the author of a hagiographical poem on the martyrdom of St. Kyprianos. In another book written in Homeric verses St. Eudokia related the life and miracles of Christ. Thus as a writer she combined the old with the new, classical Greek culture and Christian teachings.

Our second writer is Anna Komnene, the world's first woman historian. The eldest child

of Emperor Alexios 1, she was born in Constantinople on Dec. 2, 1083. This learned imperial princess died sometime after 1148 in the convent Kecharitomene, where in enforced retirement from court politics she had lived for over thirty years and where she wrote the *Alexiad*, the history of her father's long reign (1081-1118).

Anna Komnene was probably the most intellectual and best educated woman in the Byzantine millennium. In the *Alexiad* she repeatedly thanks her parents for educating her. She boasted of her great "zeal for learning" and of the purity of her Greek. This Byzantine bluestocking looked down her imperial nose at barbarians who did not know Greek and at Greeks who did not speak Greek as well as she did. Indeed she spent most of her life studying and learning. The pages of her history document her knowledge of the Bible, theology, philosophy, history, medicine, rhetoric, mathematics and classical poetry, especially Homer.

Although she failed in her attempt to become empress of Byzantium, Anna Komnene succeeded in becoming the "golden queen" of its intelligentsia. She turned her apartments in the convent into an institute for advanced studies. There the scholarly princess presided over a circle of the empire's most original theologians, philosophy and men of letters, one of whom compared her to a bright comet appearing among fixed stars.

By any standards Empress Eudokia and Princess Anna Komnene were remarkable women. Called an "astonishing woman," Anna wrote an important history "in her own write." And "in her own write," Eudokia wrote poetry. Both were gifted and fortunate in the circumstances of their birth into the privileged classes of Byzantine society. Thus they were able to cultivate their talents, to enrich their minds with the heritage of ancient Greece and in their own right to write books, expressing in new ways the Christian Greek ideals of culture.

Philothei the Athenaia

Each year on Feb. 19, Athena's violet-crowned city honors an illustrious daughter, the Holy Martyr Philothei the Athenaia. On that day a Greek Orthodox Mother of the Church is celebrated and her relics venerated in the Cathedral of Athens. A remarkable woman who lived four centuries ago, Philothei is commemorated for her loyalty and sacrifices to Orthodoxy and Hellenism, for whose survival she dedicated talents, fortune and life.

About 1522, the future saint was born in Athens, then a small town at the foot of the Acropolis. Masters of the entire Greek world after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Turks ruled also the birthplace of Philothei. The only child of aristocratic affluent parents, Syrigi and Angelos Benizelos, she was given the name Regoula. At age fourteen she married and while still in her teens was widowed. A few years later, after the death of her parents, Regoula inherited a fortune and became mistress of herself.

No longer a dependent daughter or wife, the young Athenian aristocrat was free to begin a life of her choosing. For a long time she had known what she wanted to do. Now, without delay she embarked on a life that was both God-and people-loving, *philotheos* and *philanthropos*. It lasted until her martyr's death, Feb. 19, 1589.

She inaugurated her new life by turning a small church of St. Andrew the First-Called into a convent. Tonsured a nun and taking the name Philothei (God-Loving), she became its first abbess. Inspired and guided by Philothei, the Convent of St. Andrew became quickly a spiritual and philanthropic lighthouse for the people of Athens.

The energetic and compassionate abbess used the Benizelos family fortune to provide Athens with social services which otherwise would not have existed. Philothei established schools for the young, to teach them their Greek Christian heritage. She maintained a school for girls, next to her convent. She called it the Parthenon. She founded other institutions as well: hospitals for the sick, shelters for the homeless, and homes for the elderly. No one in need was ever denied her help. In addition, the citizens of Athens looked to the fearless abbess of St. Andrew for moral support and protection against their Turkish masters.

From the beginning of her ministry, Philothei showed special concern and sensitivity for the plight of women. Always society's most vulnerable group, in Turkish ruled Athens women were the most likely to be victims of injustice and violence. At great risk to herself, over several decades, Philothei rescued women in trouble, hiding them in the dependencies of her convent which were located outside Athens, in the countryside and on Aigina and Kea.

These activities cost Philothei her life. Although the Turks had once arrested, jailed and mistreated her, they had not broken the will of this indomitable woman. On Oct. 3,

1588, Philothei attended an all-night vigil in honor of St. Dionysios the Areopagite, the first Bishop of Athens. Turks entered the church, seized Philothei and beat her severely. The sixty-seven year old nun never recovered from the beating. Four months later, on Feb.19, 1589, Philothei the Athenaia died, martyred for Christ and for her people.

Within a decade after her death, Patriarch Matthew II of Constantinople canonized Philothei, enrolling her among the "blessed and holy women" of the Orthodox Church. Thus Philothei the Blessed martyr of Christ and our God-bearing Mother joined the large company of women recognized as Holy Mothers of our Church.

Nevertheless, our Holy Mothers are generally ignored and slighted, even in the Divine Liturgy. For example. the Liturgy ends with the prayer "*Di' evchon ton pateron emon.*" No mention of our Mothers who also intercede for us in heaven. Yet surely their intercessions are equally as valid as those of the Fathers.

The martyrdom of Philothei the Athenaia reminds us that in all truthfulness we should say "*Di' evcho ton pateron kai meteron*" -"Through the prayers of our Fathers and Mothers."

Demonstrating for Orthodoxy

In 729 a nun in Constantinople named Theodosia defied the emperor's orders, protested and demonstrated for Orthodoxy. For her role in the demonstration she was put to death on May 29. Immediately her fame spread and a cult soon developed among the Orthodox of the empire. Theodosia's relics were miraculously discovered in 869 and the church recognized her as a saint and holy martyr of the faith. Translated from Greek into Slavonic, the story of her heroism made Theodosia the Constantinopolitissa popular also among the Russians.

The daughter of pious parents, Theodosia was born in Constantine's imperial city. When she was seven, her father died. Her mother then had the little girl tonsured a nun in a local convent. A few years later the mother died, leaving Theodosia an inheritance of some size.

The young nun took some of the money and ordered three ikons to be made of gold and silver. The rest of her legacy Theodosia distributed among the poor. One of the ikons was of Christ, another of the Theotokos and the third of St. Anastasia the Martyr. Devotion to holy ikons finally cost Theodosia her life.

In 717 Leo III ascended the imperial throne of Byzantium. Nine years later he began a campaign to remove ikons from Orthodox worship, to end the traditional veneration of holy images. At first the emperor tried persuasion, delivering speeches and sermons against ikons. When Patriarch Germanos I refused to cooperate with Leo, he was removed and replaced by a more pliable prelate on the patriarchal throne. Having failed by persuasion to impose his religious policies, the emperor resorted to removing ikons by force. It now became dangerous to oppose the emperor.

As a start, in 729 Leo sent an officer with soldiers to take down one of the most revered ikons in Constantinople, the image of Christ in the Chalke Gate, the bronze ceremonial gate of the Great Palace. Having heard of the emperor's order a large crowd of nuns and monks laymen and laywomen ran to the scene, determined to prevent the desecration. A ladder was in place. The imperial officer was on it to carry out the emperor's commands. Theodosia, Maria the Patrician and other "furious women" toppled the ladder causing the officer to fall to his death.

The leaders of this demonstration became the first martyrs in the long struggle to defend Orthodoxy against the "enemies of ikons." Maria the Patrician and nine monks were arrested, jailed and tortured for months. On August 9 they were beheaded, thus "receiving the crowns of martyrs."

Nor did Theodosia escape. A "brutal and inhuman" soldier seized her. He dragged Theodosia to a place called Bous and there he stabbed her to death with the horn of a goat. In such a cruel way died this brave daughter of Constantinople and the church in

order to preserve the traditions of Orthodoxy.

The high visibility of women and their activism in the bitter struggle against the "ikon-breakers" is acknowledged by the church which has enrolled them among the saints and granted them halos of immortality. Likewise, modern Byzantinists credit women with significantly contributing to the victory which came in 843. It is this triumph which we celebrate each year on the Sunday of Orthodoxy.

Yet Orthodox women today are invisible on the Sunday of Orthodoxy. They remain silent participants at celebrations of the victory for which our foremothers, the many women who like saints Theodosia the Constantinopolitissa and Maria the Patrician endured exile persecution torture and death.

The all-male processions of ikon-bearers continue each year to mock the blood tribute and sacrifices of orthodox women and also to deny our history.

Oh Susanna

Orthodox women rarely, if ever, bear the name "Susanna." Yet our church recognizes three martyrs of that name, celebrated on December 15, May 24 and June 7. Of this trinity of Susanna's one is the most unusual and interesting. The dramatic life of St. Susanna the Holy Martyr (December 15) is summarized by the title with which St. Nikodemos Hagioreites identifies her: "Susanna the Saint and Holy Martyr who dressed like a man and was renamed John."

This remarkable Susanna was born in Palestine sometime in the fourth century. Her mother was Jewish, her father a Greek pagan devoted to the ancient gods of Olympos. Child of a mixed marriage and conflicting traditions, Susanna rejected the faiths of both parents. She became a Christian and was baptized, it is recorded, by Bishop Silvanos.

After the death of her mother and father, Susanna began a new life. First she distributed her inheritance among the poor and freed their female and male slaves. Then she cut her hair and put on men's clothing. She went to a male monastery in Jerusalem where she was tonsured a monk and took the name "John." Because of her "many virtues" John was made the archimandrite of the monastery. For twenty years Susanna lived the austere life of an ascetic, denying self and seeking union with God. During this time no one suspected that the exemplary archimandrite was in fact a woman, belonging to the sex biblically described as the "weaker vessel" (1 Peter 3: 7).

It was then commonly believed that women were inferior to and more sinful than men. Therefore women could not attain the same degree of holiness achieved by men. For this reason devout women sometimes concealed their sex and became women monks. The case of Susanna is not unique. The list of Orthodox saints includes a number of women monks: Eugenia (December 24); Pelagia (October 8); Marina (July 17); Euphrosyne (September 25); Anastasia (March 10); Apollinaria (January 4); Athanasia (October 9); Anna (October 29); Matrona (November 9) and Maria (February 12). These mothers of the church were all women of great piety and faith.

Finally, a false accusation against Archimandrite John led to the discovery of her true identity. The Bishop of Eleutheropolis came to the monastery to investigate the scandal caused by the unjust charges against the model monk. And Susanna told her secret to two virgins and two women deacons. When the bishop learned that John was a woman, he was "astounded." His astonishment, however, did not cloud his judgment.

Susanna had broken the biblical command that women should not cut their hair (1 Corinthians 11:5). She had also violated canons of the church which forbade women to wear men's clothing and to go to male monasteries. Despite these transgressions of custom and church laws, the Bishop of Eleutheropolis did not punish Susanna. Rather, he ordained her to the holy diaconate. In the words of St. Nikodemos Hagioreites, "echeirotoneisen auten diakonon."

Deacon Susanna then left the monastery in Jerusalem and returned with the bishop to his diocesan see in Eleutheropolis. In the years preceding her martyrdom she worked many miracles there.

One day Alexander the provincial governor came to Eleutheropolis to offer sacrifices to the gods. On hearing this, Susanna went to the temple and with her prayers toppled the god's statue. Her deed and confession that she was a Christian cost Susanna her life.

The angry governor ordered Susanna's arrest. She was put in jail, tortured until she died. Thus ended the life of a courageous woman, Susanna the Deacon and Martyr. Called by the Holy spirit to holiness and service to God and the church, Susanna the Saint and Martyr who dressed like a man and was renamed John violated man-made laws, conventions and taboos. By her life and death Deacon Susanna proved that anti-woman prejudices are unfounded, unjust and unchristian. We may discriminate against women, but the Holy Spirit does not.

Women Bearing Myrrh

Who were the women bearing myrrh to the tomb of Jesus? Why do Byzantine icons of Easter show white-clad women standing in front of the holy sepulchre? And why do hundreds of Byzantine hymns praise the Myrophoroi as "holy" woman of 'godly-minded," "wise," "God-loving" and "God-bearing?"

The answer lies in the four Gospel accounts of the Resurrection. The evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John transmit in their pages the unanimous tradition of the apostolic church that these women are the first authoritative witnesses and proclaimers of Christ Risen from the dead. Christian belief in the Resurrection of Jesus thus rests ultimately on their word.

When Christ was crucified and buried all his male disciples had fled and hidden. Earlier one of the twelve had betrayed him for a few pieces of silver and another had denied him three times. Not so, however, the female disciples. They followed Christ to the end, faithful and strong as rock. They stood close by, watching and sharing the pain and death of their beloved teacher and friend. At dawn, three days later, carrying myrrh, they went to the tomb where he was buried and found it empty. Their grief soon changed to joy. And their loyalty and love were rewarded. The Risen Lord appeared and spoke to them, entrusting these women to announce the *evangelion*, the good news of his triumph over death. The first *Christos Anesti* - "Christ is Risen" - fell from their lips. The male disciples learned of the Resurrection from the women disciples. The male disciples, moreover, did not believe the women, causing Christ to rebuke them for the hardness of their hearts and their lack of faith (Mark 16:14).

The Orthodox Church, in turn, preserves this tradition inherited from the apostolic church. It recognizes as Myrophoroi Mary Magdalene, Salome, Joanna, Martha and Mary of Bethany, Mary of Kleopas, Susanna, Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the disciples James and John, the sons of Zebedee. It acknowledges them to be true authentic disciples (*mathetria*) of Christ, "the first who saw the Resurrection," "the first evangelists." Clearly then these remarkable women followers of Christ are the first mothers of the church, and indeed its true founders. Without the witness of the women bearing myrrh there would not have been a Christian *kerygma* of the Resurrection. It is striking how often Byzantine theologians, preachers and hymnographers apply the word *first* (*protai*) to the Myrophoroi.

It is manifestly not enough once a year to say on the second Sunday after Easter that we "honor" the Myrophoroi. (Words come all too easy whenever we ignore their meaning.) The primacy of the Myrophoroi in the Easter story related in the four Gospels, their position as recognized authorities in the apostolic church of the first century have implications for our church today as it reconsiders the role of Orthodox women in the *ekklesia*.

Archbishop Iakovos recently announced that a meeting will be held which will review the status of women within the body of Christ. Orthodox tradition indicates that the discussion should begin with the Myrophoroi, the women whom Christ called to discipleship, to be the first witnesses of his Resurrection and the first to proclaim it. The women bearing myrrh provide appropriate models and theology for expanding women's participation in the rich life of Orthodoxy, for restoring to women a wider diakonia. Christ's truest disciples, the Myrophoroi challenge the church today to recognize the calling of Orthodox women to unrestricted service to God and humanity.

St. Paul and the Women in Romans 16

Although St. Paul has often been indicted for misogyny, many of his best friends and most valuable collaborators were in fact women. Their names appear scattered in the Book of Acts and in the genuine Pauline epistles. Generally they are overlooked. But one passage cannot be easily ignored, Romans 16:1-15. Here Paul himself mentions an interesting group of ten women: Phoebe, Prisca better known as Priscilla, Mariam, Jounia, Tryphaina, Tryphosa, Persis, the mother of Rufus, Julia and the sister of Nereus. Of these only two are nameless, being identified by their relationships to males. This remarkable chapter in the history of church women documents not only that Eve's daughters were numerous in the Christian communities, but more importantly that they held offices in the primitive churches known to that much-travelled apostle, St. Paul. Paul makes it clear that women were neither silent nor submissive and subordinate members of the body of Christ.

The strong and resilient character of Christian women had been known to the apostle from the time before his dramatic conversion from Saul the persecutor of Christians to Paul the missionary-founder of churches. By his own admission, Paul had earlier arrested and jailed Christian women. Later he came to know them as his teachers, friends and co-workers. Several times he publicly acknowledged his debt to faithful apostolic women.

Phoebe is the first woman to be named in Romans 16. It is a letter of introduction for her to carry to the church in Ephesus, written by Paul in Corinth in 57 A.D. The writer identifies Phoebe as "deacon (diakonos) of the church at Cenchreae" and as the "ruler (prostates) of many people, including myself" (vv. 1-2). Clearly Phoebe exercised leadership and authority in the important church located in the seaport town near Corinth. Otherwise she would not have been traveling officially to meet the church leaders of the Ephesian church.

Among the leaders whom the traveling deacon would meet in Ephesus Paul mentions first Prisca (vv. 3-4), an old friend whom he had first met in Corinth five years earlier. Recalling how she and her husband had saved his life in Ephesus, Paul identifies Prisca as his "co-worker" (synergos). This word implies equality between Paul the male missionary and Prisca the female missionary. Moreover, not only Paul but also "all the churches of the Gentiles owe gratitude to Prisca and Aquila." In three out of the four mentions of this missionary pair the name of Prisca precedes that of her husband. The reversal of the usual patriarchal order, naming the man first, suggests that Prisca was the more prominent of the two. Taking notice that her name comes first. St. John Chrysostom praised Prisca as a brilliant teacher. True to scriptural history and tradition, the Orthodox Church celebrates Prisca as saint and *apostolos* (February 13).

Having spent several years with the church in Ephesus, Paul knew well the local women who "had worked very hard for the Lord" in the city famous for its veneration of and its

great temple to the pagan goddess Artemis. He applies to four Ephesian women the word *kopiao*, his favorite verb to describe the work of teaching and preaching the gospel.

With Phoebe he sends greetings to four hard workers: Mariam, Tryphaina, Tryphosa, and "beloved Persis" (vv. 6-12). Mention of Mariam inspired Chrysostom to exclaim what an honor it is for men that "there are such women among us. But we are put to shame that we men are left so far behind them....For the women of those days were more spirited than lions."

Paul also sends greetings to a second missionary couple in Ephesus, Andronicus and Junia who are "distinguished (episemoi) among the apostles, my compatriots and fellow-prisoners who became Christians before me (v. 7). These words testify to a close association of Junia and Andronicus with the apostle Paul. In his commentary on Romans 16 St. John Chrysostom adds to Paul's praise of Junia: "To be an apostle is something great. But to be distinguished among the apostles-just think what a wonderful song of praise that is....how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle" (*Patrologia Graeca* 60, 669).

Indeed, apostolos was the highest title of authority and honor in the early church. According to I Corinthians 12:28 the apostles ranked first in the ministries of leadership and teaching, followed by prophets and teachers. Thus in Romans 16:7 we learn from Paul's own words that women like Junia were not excluded from the most significant ministry of the apostolic church. Called by Christ and the Holy Spirit to the apostolate along with men, women also had leadership and authority roles in the church at its beginnings.

Through the ages Orthodox tradition has preserved the memory of women apostles, those peripatetic missionaries, founders and nurturers of church in the Mediterranean world. Some of them are enrolled among our saints. In addition to the apostles Prisca (February 13) and Junia (May 17) Saints Mary Magdalene and Haraiozele (July 22, 26); Mariamne and Photeine the Samaritan Woman (February 17, 26); Hermione, Xanthippe and her sister Polyxene, Thekla (September 4, 23, 24); Apphia (November 22) all wear the bright halos of the apostle.

Historically then, credit for the success achieved by the primitive church does not belong only to the sons of Adam. The daughters of Eve have a rightful claim to an equal share of recognition.

St. Paul's tribute to women in Romans 16 makes us wish we knew more about our apostle-foremothers. But what little we do know constitutes a precious legacy for Orthodox Eve.

St. Elizabeth and the Dragon

Everyone knows about St. George and the dragon. Hundreds of churches bear his name. And in thousands of ikons he appears, the handsome young warrior on a white horse. The dragon lies dead, fatally wounded by the lance wielded by St. George.

But who knows anything about our Blessed Mother Elizabeth the Wonder-Worker (Thaumatourgos), who also killed a dragon? It is most unlikely that any church bears her name or that ikons of Elizabeth and the dragon exist. Nevertheless, she has not been totally neglected. Orthodox tradition has happily preserved the memory of this woman who was both an ascetic saint and a dragon-slayer. Her feast day falls on April 24. In the past, Byzantine writers and hymnographers recorded her story and sang the praises of Elizabeth "our God-bearing Mother."

Fifteen hundred years ago, sometime in the fifth century, Elizabeth was born in the Thracian town of Heraklea. The only child of devout parents, she began to learn the "holy writings" when she was only three years old. After hearing the lives of saints one time, she could recite them by heart. By the time she reached adolescence Elizabeth had lost both parents. Having distributed her inheritance among the poor, she left Heraklea and went to Constantinople.

In the imperial city she entered the Convent of St. George the Great Martyr, whose abbess was a sister of her father. There the young nun soon adopted a strict ascetic life style. Winter and summer, Elizabeth wore but one garment and never wore shoes on her feet. Imitating the prophets Moses and Elijah, she often fasted for forty days, abstaining from all food and drink. Once she "fastened" her mind so intently on God that for three years she never saw "the beauty and breadth of the heavens."

Disciplining her body, Elizabeth freed her spirit to search for God. As a result, in the words of a hymnographer, she gained "wisdom in her soul, humility and divine gentleness, pure faith, god-like love and hope." She also received power to heal physical and spiritual illnesses and to drive out demons. When her aunt the abbess died, Elizabeth was elected to succeed her.

Soon after her elevation, the emperor Leo I gave her convent a piece of property belonging to him. It is said that the gift was an expression of respect for Elizabeth. However, the property was useless and uninhabitable because a "very huge and most deadly" dragon lived there. "Sorrow and despair" gripped the entire city of Constantinople. No one dared to go near the dragon.

The abbess of St. George's convent, however, was not in the least afraid of the monster. One day she went to her newly acquired dragon-infested property. As usual, she was bare-footed. In her hand she carried a cross. Looking up to heaven, she prayed for help from above. Then she ordered the dragon to come out from his lair.

Meekly the ferocious beast obeyed her and appeared. When Elizabeth had made the sign of the cross over him, she spat on him. Next she grabbed his head and with her bare feet stamped on the dragon. Thus she slew the dragon and liberated the city from terror.

Unlike St. George, St. Elizabeth did not rely on weapons of steel to kill the dragon. Nor did she require armor for protection. Just as she had by faith and prayer triumphed over demons, so did the pious abbess rid Constantinople of the terrorist dragon. From that moment of triumph Elizabeth worked countless miracles. The years passed and she reached venerable old age. To the end of her life and beyond St. Elizabeth brought divine blessings to humankind.

Rejoicing that she had once again celebrated the shining feast of St. George, our Blessed Mother Elizabeth died the next day, on April 24.

Notes

In the original book, the notes were variously chapter endnotes and footnotes. In the online edition all the notes have been converted to endnotes. Notes 1 – 88 were originally endnotes for the chapter “Thekla the Nun: In Praise of Women.” Notes 89 – 110 were originally footnotes for the chapter “Kassiane the Nun and the Sinful Woman.”

ⁱ The Theotokarion is a liturgical containing kanons in the eight tones, composed in honor of the Theotokos and sung during vespers. For a history of this collection see N. B. Tomadakes, "Epimetron A': Peri tou theotokariou tou Nikodemou," *Epeteris Hetaireias Byzantinon Spoudon* 32 (1963), pp. 15-25.

ⁱⁱ Quoted from Spyridon Choraiteas, "Theotokarion" in *He Threskeutike kai Ethike Enkyklopaideia VI* (Athens, 1965), Col. 316.

ⁱⁱⁱ In most of the brief notices and lists of Byzantine hymnographers e.g. C. Emereau, *Hymnographi Byzantini*, *Echos d'Orient* 24, (1925), P. 176. For relevant bibliography consult Enrica Follier, *Initia Hymnorum Ecclesiae Graecae V* (Vatican City, 1966), p. 266; Josef Szoverffy, *A Guide to Byzantine Hymnography: A Classified Bibliography of Texts and Studies II* (Brookline, Mass., and Leyden, 1979), p. 44. These two valuable works will henceforth be cited by the authors' names.

^{iv} The hymn *De S. Theclae* published by Joannes Baptista Petra, *Analecta Sacra: Spicilegio Solesmensis 1* (Paris, 1876), pp. 636-37, cannot be securely attributed to Thekla.

^v Unfortunately a satisfactory text has not yet been established, two tests available to me were Nikodemos Monaches ho Naxios, *Theotokarion: Neon Poikilon kai Horaiototon Oktoechon* (Volos, 1949), pp. 34-37; and Sophronios Eustratiades, *Theotakarion A* (Chennevieres-sur-Marne, 1931), pp. 166-68. All references, numbers and citations in this essay are to latter. These two editions will henceforth be cited by the authors' names. For criticism of Eustratiades see E. P. Pantelakes, "Metrikai Paratereseis eis to Neon Theotokariou," *Theologia* 13 (1935), pp. 296-322; "Philogikai Parateresies eis to Neon Theotokarion," *Eperteris Hetaireias Byzantinon Spoudon* 11 (1935), pp. 73-104.

^{vi} Described by Eustratiades pp. ια-ιστ

^{vii} It is generally accepted that Thekla belongs to the ninth century. Cf. Egon Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine and Hymnography*, 2nd ed. (Oxford 1961), p. 444.

^{viii} The most famous woman hymnodist and the only one whose hymns are used by the Orthodox Church, Kassia is the subject of a model study by Ilse Rochow, *Studien zu der Person, den Werken und dem Nachleben der Dichterin Kassia* (Berlin 1967)

^{ix} Very little is know about this hymnodist. See Sophronios Eustratiades, "Poietai kai Hymnographoi tes Orthodoxou Ekklesias," *New Sion* 53 (1958), pp. 295-97; Follier, 5, p. 266; Szeverffy p.48.

^x See Hans-Georg Beck, *Kirche und Theologische Literatur im Byzantinischen Reich* (Munkch 1977), p. 797; Szoverffy, p. 75.

^{xi} Joannes Baptita Pitra, *Hymnographie de l'Eglise Grecque* (Rome 1867). Both seemed to have been know to Theodore the Studite.

^{xii} Vv. 41-45, Joachim also appears in the oldest extant biography of the Theotokos, composed during the iconoclastic era. See PG 120:189.

^{xiii} Vv. 49-50.

^{xiv} Vv. 53-60.

^{xv} Vv. 111-14, 127-30.

^{xvi} Christ appears almost as frequently as his mother. He is identified as *Theos* (12, 25, 36, 56, 71, 74, 76); *Christos* (13, 23, 31, 81, 150, 160); *Logos* (58, 112); *Despotes* (123); *Kyrios* (147); *Kistes* (71).

^{xvii} Vv. 37-40, 84-88, 101-04.

^{xviii} Vv. 28-36, 65-69, 89-92, 105-10, 171-77, 185-91. All but two odes (7, 12) contain prayers, doxology, and petitions being inseparable elements in liturgical poetry.

^{xix} For the function of the liturgical poet see the discussion by E. C. Topping, "The Poet-Priest in Byzantium," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 12 (1966), pp. 92-111.

^{xx} V. 45.

^{xxi} Of the four Gospels women figure most prominently in Luke. See the interesting comments of Constance F. Parvey, "The Theology and Leadership of Women in the New Testament," in *Religion and Sexism*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York, 1974), pp. 138-42.

^{xxii} Vv. 48, 85, 159, 82, 101, 161.

^{xxiii} Vv. 87-88, 187-91.

^{xxiv} I have underway a study of the image of woman in Byzantine hymnography. It appears from this study that only the Theotokos was untouched by the guilt and shame which women inherited from Eve. Not even female saints, martyrs, and ascetics were exempt from this legacy.

^{xxv} Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire V*, ed J. B. Bury (London, 1901), p. 276.

^{xxvi} Steven Runciman, "The Empress Irene the Athenian," in *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford, 1978), pp. 101-19, redresses the shabby treatment that Irene usually receives.

^{xxvii} Gibbon, *The History*, p.253.

- xxviii See Nikodemos Hagioreites, *Synaxaristes* 2 (Athens, 1868), pp. 172-73; Constantine Akropolites, PG 140:893-935; R. Janin, *La Geographie ecclesiastique de l'empire byzantine*, Pt. I, vol. 3, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1969), pp. 143-45.
- xxix Rochow, *Studien...Kassia*, pp.20-26.
- xxx See the above references in n. 9.
- xxxi A good account of this elaborate poetical form is to be found in Wellesz, *A History*, pp. 198-239.
- xxxii Women composers in Byzantium are even fewer than women hymnodists. Besides Kassia one other is known. See Milos Velimirovic, "Byzantine Composers in MS Athens 2406," in *Essays Presented to Egon Wellesz*, ed. Jack Westrup (Oxford, 1960), pp. 12, 16.
- xxxiii The only rare heirmos is that of Ode E for which Follieri, 5, p. 41 cites only this occurrence.
- xxxiv A troparion so called because the congregation sat while it was being sung. In Thekla's kanon it follows the sixth ode.
- xxxv The identity of Klement and the relationship of his strophes to Thekla's kanon present thorny problems that have not yet been satisfactorily solved. See S. Petrides, "Office inedit de Saint Clement, hymnographe," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 12 (1903), pp. 571-81; W. Weyh, "Die Acrotichis in byzantinische Kanonesdichtung," *ibid.* 17 (1908), pp. 51-53; Sophronios Eustratiades, "Poietai kai Hymnographoi tes Ortodoxou Ekklesias," *Nea Sion* 53 (1958), p. 293, For additional bibliography see Szoverffy, p. 36.
- xxxvi P. 166. See Follieri, 1, p.347, 1, 28.
- xxxvii P. 34. See the discussion of W. Weyh, *Die Acrostichis*, pp. 52-53.
- xxxviii Rochow, *Studien...Kassia*, pp. 37-38.
- xxxix See vv. 30,, 32, 64, 709, 75, 99, 116, 124, 184, 189. Characteristic of hymns composed during the iconoclastic controversy, *ekklesia* appears in vv. 4, 67, 151. The fourth ode ends with a prayer to the Theotokos that she safeguard the church's orthodoxy.
- xl Considered the first encomiast of the Theotokos, Gabriel is twice mentioned: vv. 7, 90. Every hymn to the Theotokos has as its prototype the angelic salutation of Luke 1.28.
- Vv. 28-36, 65-67, 89-92.
- xli Vv. 28-36, 65-68, 89-92.
- lii Nikodemos' reading γνῶσχομεν is perhaps to be preferred.
- liiii Kontakion 16 On the Entry into Jerusalem, Paul Maas and C. A. Trypanis, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Gehuina* (Oxford, 1963), p. 122. Cf. E. C. Topping "Romanos, On the Entry into Jerusalem: A Basilikos Logos," *Byzantion* 47 (1977), pp. 84-85.
- xliv See Follieri, 1, p. 558, 1. 25.
- xlv For a sympathetic account of Marian piety, the intimacy existing between the suppliant and the Mother of God, see Theodoros Xydes, *Byzantine Hymnographia* (Athens, 1978), pp. 297-305.
- xlvi V. 187.
- xlvi Vv. 68, 107, 176.
- xlvi For the texts and introductions of the two hymns see C. A. Trypanis, *Fourteen Early Byzantine Cantica* (Wiener Byzantinistische Studien, Band 5) (Vienna, 1968), pp. 17-27, 159-64. For a typical sermon read Proclus, PG 65: 721-57.
- xlvi Vv. 6-8; Repeated in vv. 90, 99-100.
- ¹ This episode, referred to in vv. 41-45, is based on the infancy gospel in the apocryphal Protevangelium of James. See the translation by Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 39-40. Celebrated on September 8, the Nativity of the Theotokos was established in the liturgical calendar of the Eastern Church in the sixth century.
- ⁱⁱ Vv. 47, 50, 128, 151; 23, 46, 84, 103, 135, 183. References to Mary's womb occur in vv. 52, 61, 118, 126, 134, 142.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Vv. 39, 73, 75, 144, 151, 158, 188. According to John Damascene this title contained the whole history of the divine economy in the world, PG 94:1029.
- ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Vv. 12, 66, 106, 121, 167, 186; 31.
- ^{lv} Vv. 49-50; 53-60; 111-115, 127-130.
- ^{lv} The rules of the encomium required the encomiast to claim superiority for his subject. Cf. Toivo Viljamaa, *Studies in Greek Encomiastic Poetry of the Early Byzantine Period* (Helsinki-Helsingfors), 1968), pp. 114-116.
- ^{lvi} V. 78. Cf. Joseph Ledit, *Marie dans la liturgie de Byzance* (Paris, 1976), p. 41.
- ^{lvii} Quoted above on p. 359.
- ^{lviii} V. 14. A much used metaphor for the Theotokos. Cf. Follieri, 1, p. 252, 11. 3-6.
- ^{lix} V. 74m Cf. Ledit, *Marie*, pp. 86, 106, 161.
- ^{lx} V.. 143, Cf. Ledit, *Marie*, pp. 48, 96, 277.
- ^{lxi} Vv. 10-11. Cf. Ledit, *Marie*, pp. 82-84, 106.

- lxii Vv. 39; 4, 128.
- lxiii Vv. 144, 172. A title reserved exclusively for the Theotokos. Cf. Ledit, *Marie*, pp. 41-42, especially n. 75.
- lxiv Vv. 12, 41, 59, 61, 73; 197; 16; 94. For Mary the Bride of God see Ledit, *Marie*, pp. 180-193.
- lxv Reconciliation is the theme of two strophes, vv. 37-40, 119-26.
- lxvi Cf. Ledit, *Marie*, pp. 286-90.
- lxvii $\Theta = \Xi$ froms an important motif in Thekla's kanon: vv. 11, 17, 41, 63, 146, 149.
- lxviii A recurrent theme in Marian hymns and particularly associated with the Nativity of the Theotokos and the Feast of the Annunciation, joy constitutes a major statement in our kanon also: vv. 42, 44, 45 47, 89, 91, 101, 102, 104, 143, 161.
- lxix Vv. 79-81, 157-58.
- lxx Cf. Follieri, 2, pp. 351, 1.28, 359, 1.8.
- lxxi In Byzantine hymnody the words $\delta\alpha\chi\rho\nu\alpha$, $\lambda\psi\pi\eta$ and $\alpha\rho\alpha$ are so constantly connected with the name of Eve as to become formulas.
- lxxii See above p. 357.
- lxxiii Vv. 38, 158.
- lxxiv Thekla speaks of Mary's "divine glory" in v. 94.
- lxxv See the discussion by Jean Danielou, S. J., *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church* (London, 1961)
- lxxvi To describe woman's daring, Thekla chose a rare word, $\epsilon\upsilon\tau\omicron\lambda\mu\epsilon\omega$, which does not occur in patristic writings. The adjective is used, however, in a hymn in honor of an early woman martyr, Saint Epicharis. Cf. Follieri, 1, 599, 1.14.
- lxxvii Suggested by the strong verb $\nu\pi\epsilon\rho\alpha\theta\lambda\epsilon\omega$. G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1968), s.v., cites four passages in which it appears.
- lxxviii Her trials and career are recounted in the apocryphal *Acta Pauli et Theclae* written at the end of the second century. See the translation by M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 272-81.
- lxxix A typical sermon is that of Basil of Seleukia, PG 85:447 A-617 D.
- lxxx R. Janin, *La Geographie*, pp. 141-43.
- lxxxi The eldest child, she appeared on coins with her imperial parents, Theophilus and Theodora. See Philip Grierson, ed., *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collections* 3, Pt. 1 (Washington, D.C., 1973), p. 428. Special devotion to her saintly namesake is indicated by the fact she built and dedicated a chapel to Thekla. Cf. Janin, *La Geographie*, p. 141.
- lxxxii See the account of the virginal woman as a new cultural ideal by Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Misgynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," in *Religion and Sexism* (New York, 1974), pp. 150-83.
- lxxxiii A word often used to convents, current in the ninth century; e.g. Theodore the Studite, PG 99: 1549 B.
- lxxxiv One of Mary's most significant titles; vv. 46, 50, 54, 62, 80, 84, 115, 167, 171. Cf. Ledit, *Marie*, pp. 167-79.
- lxxxv Vv. 18, 52, 118, 126, 134, 142, 164, 179, 193.
- lxxxvi Vv. 21, 132; 89, 98; 115.
- lxxxvii For the state of education in Thekla's time see the study of Ann Moffatt, "Schooling in the Iconoclast Centuries," in *Iconoclasm*, eds. Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (Birmingham, 1977), pp. 85-92.
- lxxxviii Jose Grosdidier de Matons, "La Femme dans l'empire byzantine," in *Histoire mondiale de la femme*, ed. Pierre Grimal (Paris, 1967), pp. 11-42, discusses various aspects of woman's condition in Byzantium.
- lxxxix With slight modifications this paper was given at Hellenic College on 12 November 1980.
- xc Of the several variants of her name I have chosen Kassiane, the one most widely used by Greek Orthodox.
- xci The text with a translation may be found in E. Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1961), pp. 353-54; C. A. Trypanis, *The Penguin Book of Greek Verse* (1971), p. 435.
- xcii Thus service has been translated by Mother Mary and Archimandrite K. Ware, *The Lenten Triodion* (London and Boston, 1978), pp. 535-41.
- xciii Reproduced in *Acta Sanctorum, Iunii II*, (Paris and Rome, 1867), p. xx.
- xciv Commemorated on May 29, her life was written by Constantine Acropolites, PG 140:893-935.
- xcv C. Mango, "Historical Introduction" in *Iconoclasm*, ed. A. Bryer and J. Herrin (Birmingham, 1977), p. 4.
- xcvi For the careers of Eirene and Theodora see C. Diehl, *Byzantine Emperresses* (London, 1964), pp. 65-113.
- xcvii The feast days of Eirene and Theodora fall on August 9 and February 11.
- xcviii See K. Krumbacher, *Kasia* (Munich, 1897), pp. 363-64.
- xcix All the hymns are listed and discussed by I. Rochow, *Studien zu der Person, den Werken und dem Nachleben der Dichterin Kassia* (Berlin, 1967), pp. 35-58.
- c See my article "Thekla the Nun: In Praise of Woman" in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 25 (1980), 353-70.
- ci PG 109:685 C-D. The translation is my own.

- cii For the prominence of women in the third Gospel, see C. F. Parvey, "The Theology and Leadership of Women in the New Testament," in *Religion and Sexism*, ed. R. R. Ruether (New York, 1974), pp. 138-42.
- ciii Translation from *The Jerusalem Bible*.
- civ Translated in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, 13, Pt. 2 (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1956), pp. 336-41.
- cv Probably the earliest hymn on the subject. See the text in P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 73-80.
- cvi H. J. W. Tillyard, "A Musical Study of the Hymns of Cassia," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 20 (1911) p. 433.
- cvi See Mt 28.1-10, Mk 19.1-10, Lk 24.1-10, Jn 20.1-10.
- cvi See Tillyard, "A Musical Study of the Hymns of Cassia," p. 432.
- cx I have a study underway of Eve's image in Byzantine Hymnography.
- cx For example, Saint Andrew of Crete in the Great Canon upbraids his soul for imitating Eve rather than the *pome*.
- cx "But Adam accuses Eve." From a primitive kontakion on paradise lost, P. Maas, *Frühbyzantische Kirchepoesie* (Bonn, 1910), 14. The first to blame it on Eve, Adam was not the last. (I wish to thank Professor Elizabeth A. Clark of Duke University for her helpful reading of this essay.)
- cxii On the significance of religion for the "woman question" see the valuable essays in Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York, 1974).
- cxiii Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (New York, 1974), 109.
- cxiv Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 68, 1068 C. (hereafter cited as PG).
- cxv Genesis 1:26-27, in the theological account of creation by the "Priestly" writer. It is repeated in Genesis 5:1-2
- cxvi Genesis 2:7, 21-22, in the narrative account by the "Yahwistic" writer.
- cxvii *De Generatione Animalium* 728 A.17ff. For the widespread influence of Aristotle's 'scientific' proof of female inferiority see Vern L. Bullough, "Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women," *Viator* 4 (1973):485-501.
- cxviii E.g., Basil PG 30, 33 C-36 A, discussed by Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "The Image of God in Man-Is Woman Included?" *Harvard Theological Review* 72 (1979): 198-199.
- cxix PG 8. 581 A-B. Clement excluded women from intellectual pursuits, believing that spinning and weaving were suited to their limited capacities.
- cx E.g., the Apostolic Father Clement of Rome, PG 1. 220-221; St. John Chrysostom, PG 50.687.
- cx PG 74. 689 B, 691 C-692 C-D., The women of Egypt enjoyed a high status unique in the ancient world. Cf. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 997-98.
- cx PG 62. 500
- cx PG 50. 635.
- cx E.g., Clement of Alexandria, PG 8. 1260 C; Gregory of Nazianzus, PG 35. 797 C; Basil of Seleukia, PG 85. 44 B.
- cx PG 65. 420 D. Sara is one of the several "Desert Mothers" whose ascetic accomplishments were admired and thus rescued from oblivion. Women's acceptance of the male standard of superiority can further be illustrated by the words of a twelfth-century Byzantine empress, Eirene Ducas. When she founded a monastery in Constantinople she prayed that the Theotokos would endow the nuns "those feminine souls with virile virtues." Quoted from C. Diehl, *Byzantine Emperresses* (London, 1963), 211.
- cx PG 46. 960 B.
- cx PG 61. 316; 62. 543.
- cx PG 47. 510-511.
- cxix Origen, PG 12, 296, D-297 A.
- cx PG 42. 740 D, 745 B.
- cx PG 42. 752 D-753 A.
- cx PG 35. 800 A
- cx See the remarkable collection Παροιμια δημωδεις collected and edited by I. Venizelos, 2nd ed. (Hermoupolis: Syra, 1867), *passim*.
- cx Quoted from *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality*, ed. G.P. Fedotov (New York, 1965), 430.
- cx *Les Homelies festales d' Hesychius de Jerusalem I*, ed. M. Aubineau (Brussels, 1978), 26.
- cxvi Genesis 3:16
- cxvii I Timothy 1:14
- cxviii Theophilo of Antioch, PG 6. 1096 A St. Athanasius of Alexandria, PG 27. 240 D.
- cxix PG 54. 594.
- cx Ephesians 5:24
- cxli Colossians 3:18; I Peter 3:1; I Timothy 2:11; Ephesians 5:24.
- cxlii I Corinthians 11:1-3

- cxliii PG 46 332 C.
- cxliv Homily 20.1 *In Ephsios* (II 144 A)
- cxlv PG 62. 543-545. Chrysostom represents patristic consensus on the subject
- cxlvi Repeated in I Timothy 2:12-14
- cxlvii PG 79. 249 D.
- cxlviii PG 39. 989 A.
- cxlix *Ibid.*
- cl Canticum 51 *On Fasting*, ι' 4. P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis, *Sancti Romani Meoldi Cantica: Cantica Genuina* (Oxford, 1963), 445.
- cli Canticum 19 *Mary at the Cross*, L' 4. *ibid.*, 146.
- clii Genesis 3:20, I Timothy 2:13; II Corinthians 11:3.
- cliii Since this vocabulary is so generously distributed in the hymns I shall not give references
- cliv PG 97. 1332 A. In a Lenten sermon St. Basil instructs his congregation not to imitate Eve (PG 31, 168 B).
- clv Especially the sinful woman whose story is recorded in Luke 7:36-50. Another reformed harlot, St. Mary of Egypt, is celebrated on the fifth Sunday of Lent.
- clvi Genesis 3:20.
- clvii See E. C. Topping, "Patriarchal Prejudice and Pride...", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 1 (1983), 7-17; "Belittling Eve," *Greek Accent* 5 ((1984), 23-27, 49, 51 .
- clviii A frequent phrase found in Byzantine hymns to the Mother of God
- clix See Nikodemos Hagioreites, *Synaxaristes*, 2 vols. in 1 (Athens, 1868). II, 107. Hereafter cited as Nikodemos.
- clx For a fuller account see F. Halkin, "Sainte Elisabeth d' Heraclee, Abbesse a Constantinople. *Analecta Bollandiana* 91 (1973), 24-264.
- clxi Nikodemos. II, 172-173
- clxii Acts 1:14 states that a "group of women" were in the "room upstairs" when the Holy Spirit descended as promised by Christ.
- clxiii Hosia Martha. the martyr Kalliste. the Forty Virgins and Ascetics. See Nikodemos. 1, 4-5
- clxiv *Ibid.* 50.
- clxv *Ibid.* 52
- clxvi *Ibid.*, 42-43. This empress-saint was eulogized by St. Gregory of Nyssa after her death in 387 A.D. K.G. Holum, *Theodosian Emperresses* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1982) 23-26, quotes from the eloquent eulogy.
- clxvii Nikodemos. 1. 31. My brief discussion of this imperial woman saint is based on Holum, op. cit., 79-111, 175-216.
- clxviii Holum, op. cit., 213-216. Later, two other emperresses who convened holy synods were also canonized: Saints Eirene and Theodora, August 9 and February 11 respectively.
- clxix The first major feast of the liturgical calendar. Because Mary's sainthood requires special treatment it cannot be discussed in this essay.
- clxx Nikodemos I, 79 and Neon Martyrologion 3rd ed. (Athens, 1961), 86-188. In addition to Akylina and Philothee of Athens (February 19), the best known female neo-martyr, there are other women who remained faithful to Orthodoxy even unto death.
- clxxi From a hymn sung On September 1 in their honor, published in *Menaia tou holou eniautou*, 6 vols. (Rome, 1888-1901), I, 15. Hereafter cited as MR.
- clxxii Nikodemos, I, 83-86.
- clxxiii *Ibid.*, 5.
- clxxiv Published for the first time in *Analecta Hymnica Graeca*, ed. Shiro, I: *Canones Septembris*, ed. A.D. Gonzato (Rome, 1966), 41-51. Hereafter cited as AHG I
- clxxv *Ibid.*, 46, 51
- clxxvi *Ibid.*, 48
- clxxvii *Ibid.*, 45.
- clxxviii Nikodemos, 1, 54-55. See also the hymns in MR I, 210-219.
- clxxix Nikodemos does not mention her and her sons; but see the hymns in AHG I, 168-177 and the commentary, 423.426. Prokopios the hymnographer mentions a church built in their honor (AHG I, 175), thus suggesting the existence of a cult.
- clxxx Nikodemos, I, 48-49
- clxxxi *Ibid.*, 29-30. See MR I, 116-122 for the hymn to this trio of fourth-century female martyrs, composed by St. Joseph, the distinguished ninth-century hymnographer.
- clxxxii Nikodemos, I 63-64. For the hymns of her feast day see MR I, 238-246.

- clxxxiii E.C. Topping, "Thekla the Nun: In Praise of Woman," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 25 (1980), 353-370.
- clxxxiv Anatolios, St. Andrew of Crete and Ioannes Monachos are among writers of hymns to Thekla.
- clxxxv For example, Basil, Bishop of Seleukia (c. 440-459), PG 85, 477-617.
- clxxxvi Translated by A.J. Festugiere, O.P., *Sainte Thecle, Saints Come et Damien*. . . (Paris, 1971), 81-82
- clxxxvii Nikodemos, I 47. For the hymns of her feast day see MR I, 178-187
- clxxxviii See C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453: Sources and Documents* (Englewood. NJ, 1972).
- clxxxix From the canon to Euphemia by Ioannes Monachos, MR I, 185.A
- cxc Nikodemos, I, 4, merely lists her name along with a distich. Her sainthood derives primarily from her motherhood. Her famous son, by contrast, is praised by Nikodemos in 2 long columns. Mother and son are celebrated on the same day.
- cxcI *Ibid.*, 4
- cxcii Nikodemos, I, 114-116, assigns the feast of Andronikos and Athanasia to October 9, although other authorities give September 18 as the date.
- cxciii Nikodemos, I, 64, relates how Euphrosyne revealed her true sex and identity on her death bed. For 38 years her father had been searching for his lost daughter. As she lay dying he came to her monastery. When she saw him, she said, "Father," her last word. Whereupon the old man followed his daughter's example and "forsook the world." Hosios Paphnoutios is celebrated on the same day as his daughter.
- cxciv For a description of Theodora's triumphs over Satan see Nikodemos, I, 32. She is sometimes identified with Amma Theodora who is quoted in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*. For the text of these sayings of the desert mother see P. K. Chrestou, *Apophthegmata Geronton* (Thessalonike, 1978), 288-293.
- cxcv Nikodemos, I, 306, assigns her feast to December, although the *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, 58-59, dates it to September 19. Preserved in 6 manuscripts, the hymn to St. Susanna by St. Joseph the Hymnographer is found in AHG I, 269-279 with commentary, 443.
- cxcvi Nikodemos, I, 306.
- cxcvii From the numerous examples of this attitude expressed in the hymns and in the church fathers I refer to a few; AHG I, 272, 276; Nikodemos, I, 22, 32. 65.
- cxcviii These 3 "women-monks" are not unique. Among others, Hosia Anastasia the Patrikia (March 10, Nikodemos, II, 25-27); Hosia Maria (February 12, Nikodemos, II, 415) and Hosiopartheno-martyr Eugenia (December 24, Nikodemos, I, 333-334) illustrate women's internalization of the masculine ideal.
- cxcix She is also commemorated on the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman. See E.C. Topping, "St. Photeine, the Woman at the Well," *The Churchwoman* 49 (Winter 1983-84), 23-24.
- cc Nikodemos, II, 278-280.
- cci Nikodemos, I, 62-63, 7.
- ccii Polyxena's career follows the model of team work by a male and female apostle, first recorded in Romans 16:3, 7
- cciii See above 76 and notes 26, 27. 28.
- cciv See, for example, MR I, 239, 245
- ccv Nikodemos, I. 16-17
- ccvi AHG I, 88-97
- ccvii *Ibid.*, 89, 90, 96
- ccviii *Ibid.*, 89
- ccix *Ibid.*, 89, 90, 92
- ccx *Ibid.*, 89.
- ccxi *Ibid.*, 91.
- ccxii *Ibid.*
- ccxiii Addendum. For Mariamne see E. C. Topping, "St. Joseph the Hymnographer and St. Mariamne Isapostolos," *Byzantina* 13 (1985), 1034-1052.
- ccxiv From I Peter 2:9, repeating Exodus 23:22 (LXX) and Isaiah 61:6.
- ccxv Nikodemos Hagioreites, *Synaxaristes*, 2 vols. in 1 (Athens, 1868), 11, 107. Hereafter cited as Nikodemos
- ccxvi *Ibid.*, II, 270f; Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women around Jesus* (New York, 1982), 61-90; L. Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Woman* (Philadelphia. 1979), 207-214. Hereafter cited as Swidler, a valuable handbook, containing biblical passages with commentary. Another excellent study of women in the Judaic and Christian traditions is the collection of essays edited by Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religion and Sexism* (New York, 1974).
- ccxvii The service books of the Orthodox Church contain a large repertory of hymns to Mary Magdalene. I have underway a study of these hymns.

ccxviii Swidler, 300-304.

ccxix Ibid., 301f.

ccxx Ibid., 299: Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza in *Womanspirit Rising*, edited by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (New York, 1979), 89f.

ccxxi Nikodemos, I, 63f; Swidler, 318-320. Honored also as the first woman martyr, Thekla enjoyed great popularity in the Christian East.

ccxxii See Eva C. Topping, "St. Joseph the Hymnographer and St. Mariamne Isapostolos," *Byzantina* 13 (1985), 1035-1052.

ccxxiii From the account in John 4, the Samaritan woman appears to have been the first missionary to carry the gospel to Samaria. Cf. Swidler, 189-192. According to tradition she traveled in North Africa, preaching and converting pagans to Christianity. See Eva C. Topping, "Saint Photeine, the Woman at the Well," *The Church Woman* 49 (1983-84), 23f.

ccxxiv St. John Chrysostom praised the wisdom of this woman apostle (*Patrologia Graeca* 60.669). Hereafter cited as PG. See Swidler, 299; Bernadette Brooten, "Junia. . . Outstanding among the Apostles" in Leonard Swidler and Arlene Swidler, *Women Priests. A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration* (New York, 1977), 141-144. Informative and stimulating essays in this volume support the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Catholic church.

ccxxv A gifted teacher and leader, Priscilla is mentioned six times in the New Testament. In four cases she is mentioned before her husband, thus reversing the patriarchal order of naming men first. Cf. Swidler, 297f.

ccxxvi Ibid., 309-311.

ccxxvii Like γυναικον, which occurs in patristic texts, γυναικαριον conveys derogatory connotations.

ccxxviii For ancient Greek views see Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines, ed. *Not in God's Image* (New York, 1973), 2-32, I 18-122.

ccxxix For example, St. John Chrysostom claims it is a "divine law" that excludes women from the priesthood. See W.A. Jurgens, *The Priesthood. A Translation of the Peri Hierosynes of St. John Chrysostom* (New York, 1955), 38.

ccxxx Corinthians 14:35, a passage considered by many New Testament scholars to be a later interpolation, dating from the post-Pauline era.

ccxxxi Quoted from G.H. Tavard, *Woman in Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1973), 68.

ccxxxii In Paul's day Gentile and Jewish men thanked the gods for not making them women. Cf. 322f.

ccxxxiii See Eva C. Topping, "Heroines and Haloes," forthcoming in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* (1986). That we generally ignore our women saints was brought dramatically home to me when my parish church was dedicated. Although the church bears the name of St. Katherine, she was named in passing, without any comment on the significance of this great martyr. Nor were any relics of a female saint placed in the altar, only relics of male saints.

ccxxxiv Nikodemos, 11, 172f. In the eighth century this intrepid nun led a group of women in a public demonstration against the removal of Christ's ikon from the Chalke Gate. Their resistance caused the death of an imperial soldier. Without women like Theodosia and the empresses Saints Eirene (August 9) and Theodora (February 11) there would be no Sunday of Orthodoxy to celebrate.

ccxxxv With the exception of Philothei the lives of the other women neo-martyrs are to be found in Nikodemos Hagioreites, *Neon Martyrologion*. 3rd. ed. (Athens, 1961), 186-188, 258-261, 133-135, 114f.

ccxxxvi *Triodion* (Athens, 1960), 21.

ccxxxvii See the Letter to the Editor in *Greek Accent* 6 (May-June, 1985), 4. The writer left the Orthodox Church because "The niche the Church carves for its women is too narrow and confining." She became an Episcopalian "because it is a church that is learning that the daughters of our Lord have talents that are as diverse and valuable as the talents of His son's." Who knows for how many alienated Orthodox women she is speaking?

ccxxxviii This phrase is taken from Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Mary-The Feminine Face of the Church* (Philadelphia, 1977).

ccxxxix See Eva C. Topping, "Patriarchal Prejudice and Pride in Greek Christianity: Some Notes on Origins," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* I (1983), 7-17

ccxl Quoted from Jurgens (note 16), 21

ccxli For a discussion of these passages consult Swidler, 76-78, 329-338.

ccxlii The importance of the Theotokos in Orthodox theology and worship cannot be discussed in this brief paper. A subject of utmost importance in relation to women in the church, the position of the Theotokos must be reconsidered creatively.

ccxliii See Eva C. Topping, "Belittling Eve," *Greek Accent* 5 (November-December, 1984), 24-27, 49, 51.

ccxliiv "Subordination" and "Subjection" are the key words for women's place in relationships to the opposite sex, in both the New Testament and in patristics. See, for example I Timothy 2:11; Ephesians 5: 22-24; Colossians 3:18: PG 53. 144; 55.559,602; 61.215.

ccxlv Clement of Alexandria (150- 215 A.D.), somewhat more moderate than most of the church fathers, allowed women into his school and occasionally admitted that they possessed capacity for learning equal to that of men. Cf. Tavad (note 18), 62-66. It is worth noting that Clement sometimes imaged God as Mother (PG 9.46).

ccxlvi For Cyril's views on women see Swidler, 3441

ccxlvii St. John Chrysostom's low opinion of women is amply documented in his voluminous writings. For a fuller discussion and references consult Elizabeth A. Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom and Friends* (New York and Toronto, 1979), 1-34. Diodorus of Tarsus (ob. 390) also believed the divine image was restricted to men (PG 33. 1564).

ccxlviii See Swidler, 343. Epiphanius considered women and heresies the two greatest threats to law and order. In his view, Eve planted the first heresy (PG 42. 750D-753A).

ccclix Quoted from G. R Fedotov ed., *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality* (New York, 1965), 430.

cccl A. Wenger, a.a., *Jean Chrysostome. Huit Catecheses baptismales. . . .inedites* (Paris, 1957), 126.

cccli Genesis 2 and 3. Cf. Swidler, 78-81

ccclii For example, Theophilus of Antioch (PG 6. 1096A); St. Athanasios of Alexandria (PG 17. 240D). An Orthodox priest in the mid-west justifies the denial of the altar to women on the basis of their primacy in sin: "Because she was deceived by Satan and brought calamity upon the human race, no woman is allowed to enter the sanctuary." Quoted by Arlene Swidler, "If deaconesses, why not priests?" *National Catholic Reporter*, November 25, 1977, p.8. Adam was the first, but not the last to blame Eve for sin. See Eva C. Topping, "Blame It on Eve," *The Church woman* 47 (February-March, 1981), 8, 15.

cccliii PG 97. 1332A. In a Lenten sermon St. Basil instructs his congregation not to imitate Eve (PG 31. 168B).

cccliv The most famous of a considerable group of reformed harlot-saints, Mary of Egypt is commemorated on April 1 and on the fifth Sunday of Lent. Hymns on the Lukan sinner are featured on Holy Tuesday. See Eva C. Topping, "The Psalmist, St. Luke and Kassia the Nun," *Byzantine Studies/ Etudes Byzantines* 9 (1982), 199-210.

ccclv Jurgens (note 16), 101. Hence Chrysostom did not hesitate to exclude women from the priesthood (*ibid.*, 17, 38). See also R. Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville, Minnesota, 1980), 80-85.

ccclvi The term *mathetria* occurs only once in the New Testament (Acts 9: 36). In both patristics and Byzantine hymnography it is frequently applied to Jesus' woman followers, particularly to the Myrophoroi. For a detailed treatment of the discipleship of women see Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York, 1983), 130-151.

ccclvii See the lists of women disciples in Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; Luke 8: 2-3; John 19:25

ccclviii See the perceptive remarks of Bishop Demetrios Trakatellis, "Follow Me," (Mt. 2:14): "Discipleship and Priesthood," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30 (1985), 271-285, especially 272-274, 276-278.

ccclix See Schussler Fiorenza (note 43), 316-323

ccclx *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv, 152f

ccclxi Variations in details notwithstanding, the four gospels agree on the primacy of the women disciples' knowledge of the Resurrection. Luke 24:11 records that when the male disciples heard from the women that Christ had risen from the dead, their words seemed nonsense, and they did not believe them

ccclxii See note 45.

ccclxiii See the analysis of Galatians 3:28 by Schiessler Fiorenza (note 43), 205- 241

ccclxiv See above note 11.

ccclxv See above notes 7 to 12.

ccclxvi See above note 10. St. Photeine the Samaritan woman is also celebrated on the fifth Sunday of Easter.

ccclxvii Nikodemos, 1, 16f.

ccclxviii PG 58. 677. Chrysostom, however, approved of the *axioma* given to the deacon Phoebe (PG 60. 663C-664A), acknowledged the close collaboration of women and men in the early church (PG 51.236: 58. 669,677) and admitted that in the past the promise of Galatians 3:28 had become a reality (PG 60. 34).

ccclxix See E. Theodorou, "He 'cheirotomia' e 'cheirothesia' ton diakonisson," *Theologia* 25 (1954), 430-469; 26 (1955), 57-76; Gryson (note 42). 41-43, 60-64, 69-74; Swidler, 311-315.

ccclxx See Clark (note 34) 107-144.

ccclxxi As it had once become a reality in the early church. See above note 55.

ccclxxii See, for example, the statement by the Rev. Dr. Demetrios Cohstantelos, cited by Arlene Swidler "If deaconesses, why not priests?" *The National Catholic Reporter*, November 25, 1977, p.8.

ccclxxiii See the article by L. Swidler, "Jesus was a feminist," in *Dimensions of Man* edited by H. P. Semonson and J. Magee (New York, 1973), 211 -219.

ccclxxiv Swidler, 192f, 272f.

^{cclxxv} In a recent letter to the editor of the *Orthodox Observer* the writer states that a priest had forbidden a new mother from attending church until forty days had passed after the birth of her child. The writer does well to question this practice in 1986.