# The Iconicity of Priesthood: Male Bodies or Embodied Virtue?

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## Abstract
Late-ancient theologies of the priesthood frame its tasks, virtues and metaphorical relationships around its chief task: encouraging a common life of *theosis* as embodied virtue. Metaphorical relationships are used to evoke the manner in which, and the virtue with which, priestly tasks are to be practiced. In the priest, we hope to see an icon of the deified humanity to which all are called. This theological structuring allows the participation of women in the sacramental priesthood. Modern Orthodox arguments, in their efforts to defend an exclusively male priesthood, subvert this structure. The language of relationship and virtue is used to define the priesthood according to specifically gendered tasks. This theology results in, and derives from, a reduced view of the full personhood of women and the breadth of the priestly task, undermining the priest's role of embodying and encouraging all the virtues of the deified life.

## Introduction

Eastern Orthodox and Catholic debates about female ordination to the priesthood are typically viewed as issues of sacraments and liturgy. Moral approaches, especially among Catholics and Anglicans, tend to utilize rights language, elevated by proponents of change and dismissed as inappropriate to the charism that is ordination by supporters of continuity. My approach is via virtue, though my argument is not about virtue itself. Rather, my argument is that late-ancient theologies of the priesthood frame its tasks, virtues and primary manner of relating around a soteriological focus: encouraging the life of *theosis* as embodied virtue in all persons. For Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom, virtue is both a chief task of the priest, as well as the means of pursuing its other primary tasks of teaching, pastoral care, healing and eucharistic service. The many metaphorical relationships they use to describe the priesthood evoke the manner in

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which, and the virtue with which, these tasks are to be practiced. Relational metaphors are polyvalent evocations of the many ways in which priests and laity relate in order to participate together in a life of embodied virtue. There is no significant separation of sacrament and liturgy from the moral priority of practicing virtue. Rather, in the priest, we hope to see an icon of the deified humanity to which all are called. This theological structuring allows the participation of women, provided we think they too are fully human and fully able to be virtuous.

Modern Orthodox arguments, on the other hand, use the language of relationship and virtue to define the priesthood according to specifically gendered tasks.[1] In order to provide a theological basis for the traditional practice of an exclusively male priesthood, both Thomas Hopko and Timothy Patitsas prioritize only a few relational metaphors whose effectiveness in the community depends on male embodiment. As a result, the priesthood is no longer an icon of deified humanity, but of purportedly masculine virtue and capability. Their theology results in (and derives from) a reduced view of the full personhood of women and the breadth of the priestly task, utterly reorienting the framework offered by Nazianzus and Chrysostom.

At issue in this framework is not simply a proper articulation of tradition, but shifting anthropological and liturgical priorities. The 'iconic' argument is probably the most familiar in popular dismissals of female priests: in the liturgy the priest represents Christ who is male, and so his representative, his icon, must also be male. Initially a supporter of this reasoning, a decade later Kallistos Ware jettisons this argument as too Roman Catholic. Orthodox liturgical symbolism emphasizes the 'eastward' stance of the priest during the anaphora, standing not as Christ facing the people, but *in persona Ecclesiae* facing God.[2] Here, Ware exemplifies a shifting liturgical priority. Élisabeth Behr-Sigel and Nonna Harrison have challenged the assertion that women cannot image Christ on incarnational and soteriological grounds: If it is true that 'what is not assumed is not saved', then cannot women image Christ who assumed their humanity?[3] Their challenge

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1  For Orthodox opposition, see Thomas Hopko and Kallistos Ware (eds.), *Women and the Priesthood* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983); Thomas Hopko (ed.), *Women and the Priesthood*, 2nd edn (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999). For constructive arguments, see Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, *Le Ministère de la Femmes dans L'Église* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1987); É. Behr-Sigel, 'The Ordination of Women: A Point of Contention in Ecumenical Dialogue', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 48.1 (2004), pp. 49-66; Leonie B. Liveris, *Ancient Taboos and Gender Prejudice: Challenges for Orthodox Women and the Church* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005); V. A. Karras, 'Orthodox Theologies of Women and Ordained Ministry', in A. Papanikolaou and E. H. Prodromou (eds.), *Thinking Through Faith: New Perspectives from Orthodox Christian Scholars* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), pp. 113-58; Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, *Woman, Women, and the Priesthood in the Trinitarian Theology of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

2  See the very different essays of the same title, 'Man, Woman and the Priesthood of Christ', in Hopko and Ware, *Women and Priesthood* (1983); Hopko, *Women and Priesthood* (1999).

3  É. Behr-Sigel, 'The Ordination of Women: An Ecumenical Problem: A Reply to a Reply', *Sobornost* 15.1 (1993), pp. 20-26; N. V. Harrison, 'The Maleness of Christ', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 2 (1998), pp. 111-51. See also U. von Arx and A. Kallis, 'Common Considerations: The Orthodox-Old Catholic Consultation on the Role

underscores the iconic and anthropological assumptions at play in liturgical symbolism, and raises the significant question, is male biological sex a constituent vehicle for what or who the priesthood represents? Typically, answers revolve around interrelated arguments for the moral and spiritual superiority of men, the 'priority' of men over women,[4] the ritual impurity of women,[5] and in the most recent variation, the equality but difference of women and men. Perhaps more important, however, is our understanding of what the priesthood makes present in the community. According to Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom, the priest is tasked with nothing less than embodying and encouraging all the virtues of the deified life.

## Virtue and Priesthood

Gregory of Nazianzus's articulation and redefinition of Christian priesthood rests on the use of relational language to evoke the manner in which the priest engages his responsibilities.[6] Faithful to biblical language, Gregory describes the priest as a shepherd, with an immediate, and humorous, qualification. The lazing, pipe-playing shepherd has no concern for the virtue of his flock since sheep are incapable of virtue (*Or*. 2.9). Like sheep, people need a guide and guardian. Unlike sheep, people do not spend the day contentedly munching grass, but instead uniquely wrestling with being virtuous. The body of the church resembles more a mythical beast comprised of many animals, wild and tame, than it does a placid herd of sheep (*Or*. 2.44). It is the disciplined practice of freely chosen virtue which tames the discordant body of the Church (*Or*. 2.17). As a shepherd the priest provides spiritual food and protection through both the Eucharist and orthodox teaching. However, the adequacy of this model founders on the simple reality that people are not sheep. Because the model of shepherd cannot possibly encompass the full range of formative relationships between priest and laity, Gregory quickly puts it aside, adopting instead the more flexible image of the philosopher-physician.

This adoption results in what Susanna Elm considers an innovative presentation of orthodoxy, 'defined as improved *mimesis*. It is a continuous, dynamic movement towards the ideal prototype, the *eikon* as embodied in and elaborated by Scripture'.[7] Scripture portrays Christ as the physician who heals the sin-sick (Matt. 9:12). By the third century,

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of Women as an Ecumenical Issue', *Anglican Theological Review* 84.3 (2002), pp. 501-506.

4    Aside from Hopko, see K. P. Wesche, 'Man and Woman in Orthodox Tradition: The Mystery of Gender', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37.2-3 (1993), pp. 213-51; Brian Patrick Mitchell, *The Scandal of Gender: Early Christian Teaching on the Man and the Woman* (Salisbury, MA: Regina Orthodox Press, 1998).

5    For elucidation and critique, see V. Larin, 'What is "Ritual Im/Purity" and Why?', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52.3-4 (2008), pp. 275-92.

6    Gregory's earliest orations on the priesthood, written between 362 and 364, were likely edited at the end of his career. See John A. McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), p. 10.

7    S. Elm, 'The Diagnostic Gaze: Gregory of Nazianzus' Theory of Orthodox Priesthood in His Orations 6 *De Pace* and 2 *Apologia De Fuga Sua*', in S. Elm, E. Rebillard and A. Romano (eds.), *Orthodoxie, Christianisme, Histoire* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 2000), p. 87.

episcopal ministry explicitly included efforts to heal the sick, mentioned for the first time in the ordination prayer from the *Canons of Hippolytus*.[8] In Gregory, Scripture and history converge with a contemporary understanding of the philosophical life as one of perpetual *paideia* and training through rigorous asceticism. Weaving together the threads of scripture, history and contemporary philosophy, Gregory develops an interpretation of the Christian life as participation in God through growth into virtue, and the Church as a location of this growth. Like late-ancient philosopher-physicians, priest-physicians train their students 'in the art of living, to seek justice and philanthropy, to cope with anger, lust, desire, fear of death, worldly goods, and ambition and showed them the way to a life of virtue and piety'.[9] Gregory is establishing the priest as one who encourages the virtuous life by practicing the priestly tasks in a virtuous manner.

The physician metaphor allows Gregory to highlight the importance of skilled, trained priests. Like a physician, the presbyter discerns, diagnoses and treats disease, but human passions are far more difficult to discern than physical illness. Our inclination to avoid diagnosis and treatment causes us to resist those who wish to help (*Or.* 2.15). Both physician and presbyter vary treatments according to each person, and since the wrong treatment at the wrong time can be dangerous, diagnosis and treatment are essential skills which must be learned (*Or.* 2.31). Pastoral discernment and persuasion are skills and techniques gained through continuous ascetic discipline, training which sharpened internal mental qualities, and taught a 'diagnostic gaze through which the priest could cure others by persuading them towards their own good'.[10] The physician is hardly the only metaphor Gregory uses to emphasize learned skills and competencies. The presbyter is also a trained and skilled ruler, the learned navigator of a ship or general of soldiers (*Or.* 2.5), a soul to a body or an intellect to a soul (*Or.* 2.3). These asymmetrical relationships between clergy and laity emphasize not only priestly authority, but the skills which establish such authority. So delicate a task is pastoral discernment and persuasion that Gregory claims, 'the guiding of man, the most variable and manifold of creatures, seems to me in very deed to be the art of arts and science of sciences' (*Or.* 2.15).[11]

Although gender plays no explicit part in Gregory's early orations (one will search in vain for analogies to parenthood or spousal images), the descriptions of the teaching ministry wrenched from him at the end of his life are rich with gendered imagery. In poems written after his exile from Constantinople, Gregory speaks of the bishop as responsible for the 'birth' of the faithful, describing his former congregation as 'pure

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8   See *Can. Hipp.* 3 and discussion in Paul F. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West* (New York: Pueblo, 1990), p. 48.

9   R. L. Wilken, 'Alexandria: A School for Training in Virtue', in P. Henry (ed.), *Schools of Thought in the Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1984), p. 20. See also Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Pierre Hadot and Arnold I. Davidson, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995).

10  Elm, 'Diagnostic Gaze', p. 85.

11  Gregory of Nazianzus, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzen*, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* II.7 (1893), p. 208. Hereafter NPNF II.7.

offspring of my labor pains'.[12] Echoing the Pauline image of baptism as birth, the bishop here is not the midwife who catches up the birthed child from the waters of baptism, but the mother whose labor brings forth new Christians.[13] Gregory makes frequent references to his congregants as children, and the loss of his congregation leaves him, a celibate man, childless (*Carm.* 2.1.43.9-12). The pain of this loss leaves his congregation without succor,

> a people that earlier exulted in my homilies
> because from my tongue the triple light shone forth.
> But now, as a weaning infant in the arms of his mother
> pulls on a dry nipple
> with his thirsting lips, but his desire is disappointed by his mother,
> so also from my tongue the people are suspended,
> yearning for more of the previously flowing spring,
> from which now their ears have not even a little juice.
> Others gush forth a sweet stream, but those listening
> grieve, for they do not have the speech of their father.[14]

Teaching trinitarian orthodoxy, arguably the most important function of a bishop, is carried out by a father whose tongue is a nipple and whose speech is a mother's milk.[15] Gregory's use of gendered metaphors is fluid, creating evocative ties between the nurturing love of a teaching bishop and a hungry congregation.

The plethora of metaphors is not simply poetic excess, but reflects the breadth and difficulty of the clerical task. Teaching right knowledge and virtuous practice are shared through preaching, painting the 'charms of virtue' (*Or.* 2.13).[16] Yet words alone are insufficient. Priests must be of such virtue that the gospel is evident as much by their character as their preaching (*Or.* 2.69). Priests must teach and model Christ by the manner in which they relate to the community (*Or.* 1.2). Relationships exemplify and sustain virtue, and given the diversity of people within a vibrant, urban congregation, Gregory allows that many types of relationships encourage and model virtue. Metaphors function as 'verbal icons' which, like wood-and-paint icons, point neither to themselves nor to the body which 'images' the metaphor, but to a shared life of virtue.[17] The priest must make every effort to *be* precisely what *all Christians are becoming*. The priest does not have

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12   *Carm.* 2.1.15.17. In S. Abrams Rebillard, 'Speaking for Salvation: Gregory of Nazianzus and Poet and Priest in his Autobiographical Poems', PhD diss., Brown University (2003), p. 263.

13   Rom. 6:1-14, Gal. 4:14–5:1, Titus 3:5. See Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

14   Rebillard, 'Speaking for Salvation', p. 23.

15   On teaching trinitarian orthodoxy see Christopher Alfred Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

16   Gregory of Nazianzus, 'NPNF II.7', p. 207.

17   S. A. Harvey, 'Feminine Imagery for the Divine: The Holy Spirit, the Odes of Solomon, and Early Syriac Tradition', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37.2-3 (1993), pp. 111-39; N. V. Harrison, 'Word as Icon in Greek Patristic Theology', in W. R. Barr (ed.), *Constructive Christian Theology in the Worldwide Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 58-70.

unique virtues, but rather, particular skills exercised through various relationships which enable him (or her) to help all Christians live a life of virtue.

What is essential for Gregory is that the priest, by being the *eikon* of virtuous humanity, persuades all towards Christ. In a beautiful allusion to the *Phaedrus*, Gregory summarizes the 'art' of the priesthood:

> to provide the soul with wings, to rescue it from the world and give it to God, and to watch over that which is in His image, if it abides, to take it by the hand, if it is in danger, to restore it, if ruined, to make Christ to dwell in the heart by the Spirit: and, in short, to deify, and bestow heavenly bliss upon, one who belongs to the heavenly host (*Or.* 2.22).[18]

It is the job of the presbyter to participate in the deification of each and every member of the congregation, and to do so by modeling the very life into which all are called. This call to embody virtue by virtuously engaging in the tasks of priesthood is not an essentially feminine or masculine call. The relational metaphors utilized by Gregory are multi-gendered, emphasizing care, nurture, laborious effort alongside learned skills and earned authority. These metaphors are about the manner in which the priest persuades others towards virtue. The priest's body and character is a richly painted icon which always points towards Christ, the fully virtuous human in whose image we are all created. In light of this, it is fair to ask, can a woman pilot a ship, persuasively teach, offer the healing balm of a physician, and nurture the faithful from her breast? Is a woman able to stand before us as an icon of virtuous humanity?

Chrysostom's view of the priesthood reflects that of Gregory. Like Gregory, he does not hesitate to use both male and female metaphors. However, because of the surpassing difficulty of the priesthood, he does not believe women can bear this burden:

> The other things I have mentioned could easily be carried out by many of those under authority, women as well as men. But when someone has to preside over the Church and be entrusted with the care of so many souls, then let all womankind give way before the magnitude of the task—and indeed most men. Bring before us those who far excel all others…let the difference between shepherd and sheep be as great as the distinction between rational and irrational creatures (*On Priesthood* II.2).[19]

Chrysostom is alluding to contemporaneous assumptions that women are less able to attain virtue or practice wisdom than men, and that men have a certain level of pre-eminence in the presence of women. Whether Chrysostom suggests these as limitations inherent in women or the result of particular social structures and mores regarding women's leadership cannot be answered here. His comments about women in his chapters on priesthood, directed towards meddling widows, corrupted virgins and gossiping women, could be the complaints of a man frustrated at women stepping out of 'natural' bounds, or flouting socially appropriate behavior. Regardless, they leave little reason to wonder at the modern characterization of Chrysostom as a

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18 Gregory of Nazianzus, 'NPNF II.7', p. 209.
19 John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, trans. Graham Neville (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), p. 54. Chrysostom's treatise, written between 381 and 386, largely parallels the work of Gregory.

misogynist.[20] Whether his rhetoric here is occasional or universal is not the point. Fortitude, perseverance and endurance are virtues in the ancient world. By denying the ability of women to bear tasks of magnitude Chrysostom seems to imply that women cannot be fully virtuous, a belief that we today are in no way obligated to share.

What is interesting, however, is that Chrysostom's belief that women could not excel enough in a particular virtue to consistently bear the burden of priesthood does not cause him to shy away from feminine metaphors. Chrysostom illustrates both the core tasks of the priesthood and their immense difficulty using a birth metaphor. The baptismal work of priests is a great effort that Chrysostom likens to the birth process. Our fathers 'begot' through blood and flesh, but priests 'are responsible for our birth from God, that blessed second birth' (*On Priesthood* III.5).[21] It is easy to overlook the female associations of birth since the passage explicitly mentions begetting by fathers. Chrysostom's point, however, is that the begetting by earthly fathers is trivial compared to the more honorable midwifery of the priest (III.5). The male reproductive function of insemination is super-seded by the female reproductive function of God who is giving birth in the presence of the priest-midwife. The priest, serving in a traditional woman's role, supervises and is responsible for the birthing of Christians into the world by God.

Chrysostom's metaphorical description of the priest as a father evokes a particular way of relating. The presbyter is an 'ambassador' who 'begs God to be merciful to the sins of all men', an intercessor who exceeds even Moses and Elijah, who 'approaches God as if he were responsible for the whole world, and himself the father of all men… supplicating for peace and prosperity, and a speedy release from all ills, private or public, that threaten any man' (*On Priesthood* VI.4).[22] 'Fatherhood' hyperbolically extends to all humanity. Yet the use of the metaphor expands on what Chrysostom means by 'ambas-sador'. Metaphors expand and build upon one another. In this case, the metaphor of 'father' describes an action hardly unique to men or fathers, since surely women pray and supplicate, even 'for the whole world'. The passage establishes the love and responsibil-ity the intercessor bears towards those for whom he, or she, intercedes.

Chrysostom's parental images are consistently hyperbolic, elevating priesthood over parenthood, not asserting a spiritual equivalency between parents and priests.

> God has given greater power to priests than to natural parents [φυσικῶν γονέων], not only for punishment, but also for help. The difference between the two is as great as between the present

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20    Famously, E. A. Clark, 'Sexual Politics in the Writings of John Chrysostom', *Anglican Theological Review* 59.1 (1977), pp. 3-20; E. A. Clark, 'Theory and Practice in Late Ancient Asceticism: Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5 (1989), pp. 25-46. Among Orthodox, see V. A. Karras, 'Male Domination of Woman in the Writings of Saint John Chrysostom', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 36 (1991), pp. 131-39; David C. Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. John Chrysostom* (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1996); N. V. Harrison, 'The Inevitability of Hermeneutics: David C. Ford on St John Chrysostom', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 44.2 (2000), pp. 195-205; M.-F. P. Kapsalis, 'Image as Authority in the Writings of John Chrysostom', PhD dissertation, Department of Theology of the Toronto School of Theology (2001).
21    Chrysostom, *On Priesthood*, p. 73.
22    Chrysostom, *On Priesthood*, p. 140.

and the future life. Parents bring us into this life; priests into the life to come. Parents cannot avert bodily death nor drive away the onset of disease; priests have often saved the soul that is sick and at the point of death, by making the punishment milder for some, and preventing others from ever incurring it, not only through instruction and warning, but also through helping them by prayer. They have the authority to remit sins, not only when they make us regenerate, but afterwards too… Again, natural parents [φυσικοὶ γονεῖς] cannot help their sons if they fall foul of the prominent and powerful, but priests have often appeased the anger of God himself, to say nothing of rulers and kings (*On Priesthood* III.6).[23]

Chrysostom's repeated use of the phrase φυσικοὶ γονεῖς (literally, 'physical parents') provides a contrast to the priest's superior role as a *spiritual* parent. The term 'parents' affirms that it is not merely fathers who 'bring us into this life', hope to 'avert bodily death' and 'the onset of disease', or seek mercy for their children, but mothers who do the same. In the end, however, the priestly embodiment of these roles is more significant.

At this point, the following is clear in both Chrysostom and Gregory: relational metaphors point not to themselves, but evoke the skills, relationships and virtues which enable the priest to carry out the primary tasks of teaching, pastoral care, healing, and liturgical leadership. These verbal icons evoke the varied relationships which encourage *theosis*. At no point do the theologians claim a correspondence between the body of the one who makes the metaphor present, and either the metaphor, the virtues, or the skills to which it points. After all, how can they? Chrysostom and Gregory refer to male priests as nursing mothers and midwives catching the God-birthed faithful. It does not occur to them that the effectiveness of the symbol is in any way hampered by the sex of the body which bears it. Reduction to any single metaphor, or insisting that the sex of the body must match the gender of the verbal icon, misses the point of priestly metaphors: as evocative and imaginative utterance, it points towards the relationships, skills and tasks that are required to nurture virtue.

Chrysostom's rejection of female priests is not about the deficiency of female bodies' ability to symbolically represent a skill, virtue or relationship. Rather, it is an assertion about the actual capabilities of women (and, to be fair, of many men). In this, modern opponents of female priests share with Chrysostom a diminished view of women's nature, though they do not identify the same deficiency as does Chrysostom. Unlike Chrysostom, though, their arguments are as reductive of the priesthood and its iconic qualities as they are of women.

## Nature and Symbolism

Thomas Hopko, a well-known North American priest and theologian, has repeatedly addressed the theological reasoning which undergirds a male-only priesthood over the last four decades, while the theologian Timothy Patitsas entered the debate more recently. In their work, the metaphorical symbolism of priesthood and liturgy is closely intertwined with particular assertions regarding male and female natures. Both theologians speak in terms of virtue, acknowledging that women are fully capable of exercising the virtue of the saints. Both argue that virtue is uniquely realized according to gender, and

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23   Chrysostom, *On Priesthood*, p. 74.

that there must be a correspondence between the role and the body which bears it. Each prioritizes a singular gendered quality of virtue (Hopko) or liturgical moment (Patitsas) as definitive of the priesthood. Ironically, for Hopko, the entirety of the priesthood is essentially masculine in character, whereas for Patitsas, the essential liturgical act, the words of institution, are 'too' maternal to be uttered by a woman.

Hopko's initial arguments against female priests weave trinitarian theology with anthropology, associating men with Christ and women with the Spirit based on what he considers self-evidently distinct and gendered ways of engaging with the world. When he speaks of virtues, he acknowledges that there is no such thing as male or female virtue since, as with the Trinity, all godly virtues are accessible to all persons at all times. However, it is the '*manner of realization*' of common virtues which varies according to sex, and therefore 'is, or at least should be, different'.[24] What this difference entails Hopko leaves to our imaginations. He consistently identifies gendered qualities with biological sex, and argues that each gender has particular ways of expressing virtue: men are 'givers' and women 'receivers'.[25] All relations between men and women, even those supposedly 'restored' by baptism (as in Gal. 3:28), should be read in light of this 'priority', precisely because, for Hopko, the priority of men over women is a part of creation itself, not a fallen order.[26]

How then does this relate to priesthood? For Hopko, Christ is the final fulfillment of the male Adam. In the Church, 'the sacramental presence and image of Christ in the Church and the churches as the last and true Adam, the personal bridegroom, head and husband of his creaturely bride, is the presbyter/bishop'.[27] For Hopko, these relationships point exclusively to authority, which can only be embodied by men. Despite the baptismal status of all believers as priests, prophets and rulers, 'the headship which sacramentally actualizes the headship of Jesus himself may be exercised only by certain men'.[28] The symbolic reality of the situation is 'clear': women simply 'cannot be bishops and priests in the Orthodox view because it is not in their divine calling and competence as women'.[29] Because men have a natural priority over women, women are not competent to lead.

Notice a number of key features of Hopko's reasoning. First, Christ, despite his full assumption of human nature as priest, prophet and ruler, a nature both men and women 'acquire' through *theosis*, is primarily the male Adam. It is not clear that Christ encompassed Eve. If he did not assume Eve as fully as Adam, then are the descendants of Eve (only women?) not healed? The Adam-Eve/Christ-Mary typology is

24   T. Hopko, 'On the Male Character of Christian Priesthood', in T. Hopko (ed.), *Women and the Priesthood* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983), p.108, n. 14.

25   T. Hopko, 'God and Gender: Articulating the Orthodox View', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37.2-3 (1993), pp. 141-83, at 168-69.

26   T. Hopko, 'Presbyter/Bishop: A Masculine Ministry', in T. Hopko (ed.), *Women and the Priesthood* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), p. 144. On Gal. 3:28, see T. Hopko, 'Galatians 3:28: An Orthodox Interpretation', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35.2-3 (1991), pp. 169-86.

27   Hopko, 'Masculine Ministry', p. 154.

28   Hopko, 'Masculine Ministry', p. 157.

29   Hopko, 'Masculine Ministry', p. 159.

hardly new to Hopko. However, using the ancient Eve/Mary typology to underscore the maleness of Christ is an application that Kyriaki FitzGerald reminds us is viewed as a 'misdirection' by patristic scholars.[30] Second, Hopko's hierarchical vision of marriage derives from Gen. 3 and 1 Cor. 11, texts that are both post-lapsarian visions of human relationships.[31] Third, this particular vision of marriages defines all male-female relationships and capabilities. The way males and females ought to relate derives from a post-lapsarian ontology of marriage and gender. This ontological correlation of hierarchical male-female relationships relates directly to Hopko's vision of the priesthood. The presbyter/bishop is defined exclusively in terms of the same marital language in which all males are defined: husband, father, head. Women cannot be priests because they cannot exercise the primary capability to which these metaphorical roles point for Hopko: authority.

Hopko does not demonstrate that either the liturgy itself or sacerdotal theology gives exclusive primacy to marital metaphors. Instead, he declares these particular roles as non-metaphorical. Hopko notes the many metaphors that provide verbal images of God: a loving mother, a brooding hen, or Paul's pastoral care as like a nursing woman. 'But sometimes', claims Hopko, 'the words and images are not metaphorical, but theological, spiritual and substantial, and as such, real, true and unchangeable'.[32] God '*is* the Father', Christ '*is*' a bridegroom, and bishops and priests '*are* fathers, husbands and heads of their specific churchly families with a specific spiritual calling and a specific sacramental consecration given and received specifically for this particular purpose'.[33] Hopko offers no linguistic or theological explanation for how such obviously metaphorical terms are suddenly literal. He certainly does not explore the rather startling implications that arise from literalizing familial and sexual relations between the priest and his many (male and female) wives, sons and daughters. The only apparent criteria for this move appears to be his view of the order of creation which simply does not allow women authority of any kind, and so requires the displacement of all non-masculine and non-hierarchical metaphors. It is not at all clear which comes first for Hopko, the belief that women cannot bear authority and therefore cannot engage in authoritative relationships, or the elevation of authority as the primary characteristic of priesthood which has as its consequence the exclusion of those not competent to bear authority. What is clear is that these two definitions work together to justify a male-only priesthood. Lost is the more traditional use of marital symbolism, 'an exhortation addressed to the priest-bishop to serve the flock entrusted to him faithfully, devotedly and absolutely selflessly'.[34]

An interesting recent comment on the possible ordination of women comes from Timothy Patitsas. Patitsas develops a complicated schema in which he seeks

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30  K. K. FitzGerald, 'The Eve-Mary Typology and Women in the Orthodox Church: Reconsidering Rhodes', *Anglican Theological Review* 84.3 (2002), pp. 627-44, at p. 632. See the more recent work of N. V. Harrison, 'Eve, the Mother of God, and Other Women', *Ecumenical Review* 60 (2008), pp. 71-81.

31  On the choice of which era to consider definitive in relation to female priesthood, see Karras, 'Orthodox Theologies'.

32  Hopko, 'Masculine Ministry', p. 160.

33  Hopko, 'Masculine Ministry', p. 160; emphasis original.

34  Behr-Sigel, 'The Ordination of Women: A Reply', p. 24.

to balance the similarities and differences of men and women through a literary, chiastic approach based on the three Christian offices of priest, prophet and king. While all Christians are called to each office, men have an 'initial priority' to the kingly office through 'headship', and women to the prophetic as 'truth-telling'.[35] Here metaphorical roles are used to indicate particular communal functions: leadership (priority) and truth-telling (note, though, that truth-telling is also a virtue). Gender differentiation lies in practicing the offices in their 'proper sequence'. Each sex has a primary responsibility to enact their respective initial priorities, and only secondarily (but necessarily) to enact the other office. The priestly office is not gendered, but is a manner of exercising the other two offices in a 'self-sacrificial' way.[36] Key, however, is that love truly comes to fruition *by becoming other*, that is, by symbolizing the primary office of *the other gender*. Thus, the Theotokos is honored not for her feminine truth-telling but as the masculine 'Invincible General (*Ypermachos Strategos*)'. The archetypical 'Man' John the Baptist enacts the primary feminine office through prophetic truth-telling as Prophet and Forerunner.[37] Men and women truly love when they become 'other'.

It is important to pause and note a significant difference between Hopko and Patitsas. For Hopko, the 'order of creation' ideally practiced does not allow one sex to enact the roles or capabilities associated with the 'other' gender. Sexual dimorphism is built into creation and the modes and roles through which virtues may be expressed are fixed. Patitsas here (perhaps unintentionally) picks up on an element of Paul Evdokimov's exploration of gender and virtue that Hopko neglects: full humanity includes the practice of both masculine and feminine modes of engaging the world.[38] Patitsas does not eradicate difference, nor fix difference in particular bodies, but implies that full humanity requires the appropriation of all modes of being.

Initially, Patitsas opens the door to maternal language in a way Hopko cannot: he characterizes the words of institution, attributed first to Jesus, as 'maternal statements', flesh and blood from one's own flesh and blood, an ultimate expression of the gestation, birthing and nourishing process. Here, he displays a beautiful attentiveness to liturgical language. At this moment, the presider appears to stand *in personae Theotokos*, the woman who brings forth the sustaining word to God's people. Nonna Harrison likewise hints at this imagery. The priest, Harrison notes, is 'in some sense an icon of the Mother of God', facing with the congregation towards the east during the *epiclesis* in which he receives the Holy Spirit.[39]

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35   T. Patitsas, 'The Marriage of Priests: Towards an Orthodox Christian Theology of Gender', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 51.1 (2007), pp. 71-105, at 72, 74.

36   Patitsas, 'The Marriage of Priests', p. 75.

37   Patitsas, 'The Marriage of Priests', p. 101.

38   Paul Evdokimov, *La Femme et le Salut du Monde: Étude d'Anthropologie Chrétienne sur les Charismes de la Femme* (Paris: Casterman, 1958). On Evdokimo's influence among Catholics, see P. C. Phan, 'Gender Roles in the History of Salvation: Man and Woman in the Thought of Paul Evdokimov', *Heythrop Journal* 31 (1990), pp. 53-66. For the relation between Evdokimov and Behr-Sigel, see Wilson, *Woman, Women, and the Priesthood*.

39   N. V. Harrison, 'Orthodox Arguments Against the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood', in T. Hopko (ed.), *Women and the Priesthood* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), p. 14.

Curiously, Patitsas allows, and then immediately rejects, that his theory might open a way to the ordination of women. Why? Because the liturgy must exemplify the best expression of love. The congregation, often composed predominantly of women, embodies the male task of standing guard outside the altar. The priest, on the other hand, embodies a female task; he '"brings forth" from behind a veil the incarnate Logos for the nourishment of the people', a feminine task of nourishment which is 'too well suited' to women.[40] The liturgy, which presumably demands our most loving selves, requires that men become fully the other by symbolizing a female office. According to Patitsas, a woman engaging in the liturgical task of feeding God's people would retain too much of her maternal self; love is defined thus as so other-oriented that, in its liturgical ideal, it abnegates the self.[41] Patitsas prioritizes this single moment as definitive of all priestly tasks, relationships and bodies.

As with Hopko, underlying this reduction is a particular view of gender. Patitsas assigns a gendered 'priority' to common Christian offices with what he admits to be an 'arbitrary character' in light of patristic anthropology.[42] He offers scriptural support for the assignment of the qualities associated with the offices, emphasizing 'masculine headship and self-sacrifice, and feminine purity and modest unknowing (e.g., in 1 Cor. 11.1-16 and in Eph. 5.22-33)'.[43] To ascribe gender to the practice of truth-telling requires a series of linguistic leaps: A non-metaphorical act, telling the truth, is described metaphorically as 'bringing forth', a metaphor which is then associated with maternal feeding. Truth-telling becomes inherently feminine despite Scripture's long list of male prophets. As a result, a task and virtue are defined as gendered because a metaphorical description of the practice of virtue and truth-telling is associated with a particular sex. The circularity seems to continue when the role then requires a corresponding body. Except, of course, that the circle does not quite complete: love demands becoming other, so a female role must be enacted by a male. Here, roles, virtues, sex, and gender are self-referential, conflated, and ultimately confused.

Despite this confusion, Patitsas's insight regarding the necessary fluidity of gendered 'roles', the requirement that love must include the other, should not be lightly put aside. If we can remove the liturgical reductionism of his theory, and (in a future work) define with care what including the other means in a broader sense, Patitsas's literary chaiasm highlights two aspects of the patristic tradition that Patitsas himself does not utilize. First, Gregory and Chrysostom seem to have no qualms about a certain, limited, gender fluidity: male priestly bodies enact feminine roles as a part of their very priesthood. Gregory clearly viewed his sister Gorgonia as a philosopher, which indicates that at least in a metaphorical relationship, women can embody male roles. Second, Patitsas's theory

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40   Patitsas, 'The Marriage of Priests', p. 103.

41   Anyone who takes seriously the work of Valerie Saiving should be concerned. Equal opportunity self-abnegation does not respond to Saiving's concern that defining pride as the primary human sin, and self-sacrificial humility as primary response, fails to attend to the danger of exclusively prioritizing self-sacrifice. See V. S. Goldstein, 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View', *Journal of Religion* 40.2 (1960), pp. 100-112.

42   Patitsas, 'The Marriage of Priests', p. 100.

43   Patitsas, 'The Marriage of Priests', p. 102.

allows for difference to remain, without insisting, as does Hopko, that difference is fixed. In light of the various movements with feminism, this is particularly important. Hopko's rejection of feminism's seeming adoption of solely masculine values is echoed by subsequent generations of feminists themselves. Difference, whether socially constructed or biologically based, is no longer necessarily assumed to be inherently subjecting of women.

## Conclusion

Where, then, does this leave us in terms of the priesthood, virtue, and gender? First, a masculine priesthood may in effect simply be a cipher for the assertion and elevation of masculine virtues. Claiming that the mode of virtue is gendered does not exclude the effect that virtues are themselves being gendered. In Hopko's original article on the male character of the priesthood he acknowledges 'exceptions to normality', where men must enact female modes of being, and women male modes, but considers these 'accommodations and compensations to sinful "abnormality"'.[44] Quoting Chrysostom, Hopko implies the wiser wife who teaches her husband does so only because the order of creation has been reversed. David Dunn puts forward Thecla as a counter-example to Hopko's gendered schema. Thecla's faithful response to God led her to behavior that was hardly feminine, but certainly rich in faithful virtue.[45] If Thecla had been properly feminine, would she have ever been a saint? As Harrison notes, Hopko's 'suggestion' that the leadership of empresses, abbesses and female missionaries is a compromise of good order is fortunately dropped in his later writing.[46] However, I think it is worth noting the simple slide between male priority and 'modes of enactment' which serve to limit the venues in which women can exercise their skills and virtues, to identifying their pursuit of virtue as sinful compensations to a broken natural order. This danger lurks behind every assertion of male priority.

Second, how do we carefully distinguish between gendered modes of realizing virtue? We are hard pressed to distinguish between the generosity of St. Nicholas and care offered by St. Maria Skobtsova to poor Parisians on the grounds of their sex. For many female saints their manner of realizing virtue required a defiance (conscious or not) of societal expectations of womanhood. Certainly, the many roles of the Theotokos, who as *hodegetria* 'leads the way', who is the Enthroned Virgin hymned as champion and general, exemplify neither a particularly feminine realization of virtue nor an ideal model of 'Woman'.[47] Third, and closely related, is the question of whether there is any necessary correspondence between a body, a role, and the virtues it evokes. Just as it is

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44   Hopko, 'Male Character', pp. 112-13.

45   D. J. Dunn, '"Her That is No Bride": St. Thecla and the Relationship between Sex, Gender and Office', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 53.4 (2010), pp. 37-68.

46   Harrison, 'Orthodox Arguments', pp. 171-72.

47   M. G. McDowell, '"The Hands of a Woman": Person, Image, and Ordination', in S. H. Wilson and E. Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi (eds.), *A Communion Lived in Faith and Love: Reflections on Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's Ecclesiology* (Geneva: Doxa and Praxis, forthcoming).

clear to Gregory and Chrysostom that a man's body can be a nursing mother and midwife, it is clear to many modern men and women that a woman's body can pilot a ship, lead the family, serve 'faithfully, devotedly and absolutely selflessly'.[48] If women are capable of carrying out the tasks of priesthood in a skillful and virtuous manner (perhaps contra Chrysostom here), they can be denied the role only if we declare that biological sex is constitutive of the tasks, skills and virtues of the priesthood. This is, at root, exactly the path chosen by Hopko and Patitsas.

This choice leads to what I consider the greatest danger exemplified by arguments formed in the service of preserving a male-only priesthood: the richness of priestly relationships evoked in the service of virtue is reduced to only a few metaphors. This inevitably emphasizes some virtues over others. Roles and virtues are not simply conflated in Hopko's work. Rather, literalized metaphors trump the virtues which they are meant to evoke. Bodily correspondence dictates not just who can embody the metaphorical role, but its very meaning, and, thus, its very ability to encourage participation in virtue. The liturgy becomes a place where masculine virtuosity as authority is embodied, and other virtues, regardless of their gendered associations, are rendered invisible. The structure of both Hopko and Patitsas's arguments, unlike those of Gregory and Chrysostom, cannot equally value all virtues and the many roles through which they are enacted and encouraged. Their presence subverts a male-only priesthood. The consequence is a reification of authority, which, when elevated above faithfulness, devotion and selflessness, is dangerous.

The arguments against women priests are inconclusive. In the name of preserving tradition they undermine the traditional framework of the priesthood. This framework reflects both the common call to embodied virtue as constitutive of the Christian life, and the importance of the priesthood as an icon of this life in body, word and deed. Liturgical symbolism itself is fluid: the priest stands in the person of Christ, the Theotokos, and the church. Gendered 'modes' are equally fluid: the very image of offering bread that for Patitsas is an act of feminine bringing forth characterizes for Hopko the masculine act of giving. Hopko excludes women's authority because they are receivers, yet Harrison notes that the priest 'receives' the Spirit.

Rather than reduce the priesthood or persons to convenient caricatures, we ought to be guided by polyvalent and multi-gendered metaphors offered by Gregory and Chrysostom. By doing so, we acknowledge that the liturgy is polyvalent, the modes of effective priestly ministry are varied, and that the unique vocation, skills and virtues of a person may be 'colored by the person's sex, but not determined by it'.[49] More importantly, we allow the priesthood to be an icon of *all* humanity, not simply a few persons. How much more effective and powerful an icon the priesthood would be if all appropriately gifted, skilled and trained persons were permitted to embody it. Given the existing gendered fluidity of the priesthood and the polyphonic expression of virtue, perhaps we should ask, what is being lost by a male-only priesthood? What have we not yet learned about embodied virtue, *theosis*, because we have historically prioritized only men in our most sacred spaces?

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48    Behr-Sigel, 'The Ordination of Women: A Reply', p. 24.
49    Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, trans. Steven Bigham (Redondo Beach, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1991), p. 16.