

25 January 2016  
51<sup>st</sup> International Eucharistic Congress

## The Church is Woman: The Missionary and Pastoral Role of Women in the Church

It is a great honor for me to speak this afternoon at the 51<sup>st</sup> International Eucharistic Congress. In the past years, when I was coming across this title - the Eucharistic Congress - it always made me curious. The word 'Eucharist' attracts me in a special way because I am an Orthodox theologian. The Orthodox Church understands its oneness through the Eucharistic communion. The ecclesial identity of the different local/national Orthodox churches dwells in Eucharistic communion. The Orthodox theology keeps referring to it as "the medicine of immortality" (Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Ephesians*). So for me, for an orthodox theologian, it is an alluring title.

On the other hand, I am an Orthodox *woman* theologian: I understand and practice my ecclesial self/ ecclesial belonging slightly differently from the fellow male Orthodox. This difference contributes to my vision of the missionary and pastoral role of women in the Church.

I would like to share with you a few moments from my personal background, so that I justify my intervention on behalf of the Christian women, particularly Orthodox women.

I was born and brought up in Soviet Georgia, one of the Soviet republics in the Caucasus, on the Black Sea. When I was a child none of my classmates went to church to worship; I was an exception. For me it was a 'normal' thing to go to church with my mother or grandmother. Over the years things changed in this direction, not little by little but dramatically, during the so called "Openness or Restructuring" under the Soviet rule. The majority of the population turned from atheists into theists almost overnight and filled the abandoned churches. Such an immediate increase in numbers of the faithful raises questions regarding the level of their preparation for practicing Christianity amidst the increasingly multi-confessional

and multi-religious world, and to remain open towards others. By 'others' I mean non-Orthodox as well as women. My observation here can be referred also to the other states that emerged from the Soviet regime but I am exclusively focusing here on Georgia.

Within the Soviet system of education there was no way to study theology at universities, so instead, my University studies focused on Georgian philology, Georgian language and literature that dates back to the fifth century. Therefore Christian literature, original or translated, was a part of the curriculum, containing texts of the ancient Georgian language. Thus a course on the Old Georgian Literature started with ancient translations of the Gospel and the oldest original texts from hagiography, hymnography etc. So, my *first theological* formation at university was a disguised process.

However, my theological education *formally* started when I first was enrolled as a special student at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York. By that time I had already received degrees in ancient Georgian literature which focused on ancient Church texts.

One more detail from my remote past in support of further arguments -- not at all easy arguments-- is that in that ill-remembered Soviet past which did provide a minimum for life but deprived us from freedom of thought and individual responsibility, women had equal rights with men. At the end of the day, there were no 'rights' as such but there was equality between men and women. This gave equal opportunity to girls and boys for studying and achieving. Again, we are not forgetting that all this was happening under the Soviet regime, where all were prisoners of the system. For me and my friends, however, there was a vision beyond this system, hope to overcome it, and determination to escape it. In the late seventies together with a fellow students of mine we believed in the end of the system which would allow us to do theology. There was no other logical argument but hope! I wish that young people today do not give up hoping in this deeply challenged world.

My arguments in this paper will be largely relying on hope: hope that I will be able to deliver my message, hope that you will be able to share my concerns and expectations.

I intend now to explain briefly what it means to be Orthodox and then what it means to be an Orthodox woman theologian.

Let me start with a rather bold statement that a theology of the Orthodox Church is very close to a theology of the Roman Catholic Church. The churches agree on interpretation of the four major signs and characteristics of the Church: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. Essentially, the two Churches could have gone further in rapprochement than it is at the moment. What the Churches do not agree on *is* also an important part of the teaching of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. No one denies importance of the later, post 1054 doctrinal development on either side when our Churches sadly broke apart, but the core of the Trinitarian and the Christological theology of both Churches is similar. So much so that when studying Church fathers strongly identified with the teaching of the Orthodox Church, students of theology refer to the Catholic authors without hesitation. I am not aware if the same happens with regard the Orthodox theologians, if the Orthodox authors may appear on a list of reading material of the Catholic students of theology. (I know that some contemporary Orthodox *theologians* have been studied by Catholics.)

Having said this much, I can go straight to what I am aiming at: that the question of women in the Orthodox Church runs parallel to the question of women in the Catholic Church with one significant difference, and now I am going to surprise some of you by saying it: the issue of women has been addressed in the Catholic Church in much more open way than it has been in the Orthodox Church. Catholic women theologians participate in Church life more *formally* than women in the Orthodox Church. Catholic women represent the Church at various levels: they are members of theological commissions, they take part in dialogues, they are professors of theological subjects at Catholic universities or seminaries. There is even a woman rector of the Catholic University in Rome! Women, also attended the

recent synod of the Catholic Church on the Family (although, without the right to vote, they were present and, most probably, while being in conversation with other participants of the synod, indirectly affecting the process). Certainly, one wishes more profound participation on the part of women than mere attendance. However, taking into account the ongoing tendencies towards expanding the synodality of the Catholic Church, which aims at holding the widest possible involvement of laity in discussions, there is definitely more to come for Catholic women in the near future. Let us hope. Hope in Christianity is more than a wishful thinking, it/hope is always in conversation with the mercy of God.

From my point of view, I wish Orthodox women could be as seriously taken by their Church as the Catholic women are at present.

Where does the women's issue belong in the Orthodox Church? It is a part of the teaching of the Church; it is a doctrinal question. But most often it has been attributed to the Tradition. In my view this is to be corrected. Also, I have a serious reservation concerning the fact that sometimes the Orthodox Tradition is viewed as being closed to new reflection over the role of women in the Church. In general, the Orthodox consider their Tradition as open-ended and a constantly renewing phenomenon, which is deeply rooted in the life of the Church but also in the present historic manifestation. The *contradictory character of Tradition -- its capacity to embrace diversity -- signifies that it is not within Christ's Kingdom but is a tested tool aimed at redemption by bringing a variety of gifts into the divine unity.*

I find it difficult to reconcile with the fact that women's genius is not a part of formal deliberations of Church life, that women's spiritual experience is not a part of the spiritual advancement in the Church and this is often explained by the Tradition.

Christians are brought up in the spirit that all are one in Christ, all are children of God through faith. (Gal. 3-26-8) And there is no distinction according to race, gender

or class. “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Rom 10:12-3)

Our Churches view of Mary offers an interesting example of ecumenical convergence. For the Orthodox Church the Mother of God is first among the saints and a symbol of the Church. How close this comes to Catholic Mariology which sees in Mary *the beginning* of the Church (Preghiera Eucharistica, Immacolata Concezione Della Beata Vergine Maria, 8 Dicembre 2015, p29). The level of devotion to Mary in the Orthodox Church is very high and it can also be seen as “the measure of the extent to which we belong to the body of Christ.”<sup>1</sup> One of the most frequently cited prayers in the Orthodox church, after the ‘Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit’, is “Calling to remembrance our all-holy, most pure, most blessed and glorious Lady, the Mother of God and ever-Virgin Mary, with all the saints, let us commend ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God.”<sup>2</sup>

By virtue of her complete discernment of the Word of God, Mary is connected to the saving power of the Church even before Pentecost, but then even more so in receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit together with the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14; 2:1). As a human person, Mary embodied all the holiness which the Church is capable of.<sup>3</sup> She is the archetype of the Church’s fulfilment as she personifies the saved people of God at the end of times.<sup>4</sup> As the new Eve, Mary becomes *through grace* the means to restore humankind to its right relationship with God. In this sense she is “the glory of the world. In her, God is already “all in all”.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Lossky, “Panagia”, in: *The Mother of God, A Symposium by Members of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius*, edited by E. L. Mascall (Dacre Press, Westminster,) 36.

<sup>2</sup> In its primitive form the prayer is found at the conclusion of the litany of the faithful in Apostolic Constitutions. The present version is found in the 8<sup>th</sup> c. text (Barberini 336) and probably appeared some time after Ephesus (431).

<sup>3</sup> Lossky, 34.

<sup>4</sup> Nikos Nissiotis, “Mary in the Orthodox Theology”, in *Concilium – Religion in the Eighties, Mary in the Churches*, Edited by Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1983) 29.

<sup>5</sup> Sergeius Bulgakov, “The Virgin and the Saints in Orthodoxy”, in: *Eastern Orthodox Theology, A Contemporary Reader*, edited by Daniel B. Clendenin (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2003) p66. The quoted article is from his book *The Orthodox Church*; Bulgakov wrote a book *The Burning Bush, On the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God* (Translated by Thomas Allan Smith, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2009) which offered a strong critic of the Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate

Mary is blessed, not merely by virtue of the physical fact of her childbearing, but also and more fundamentally by virtue of the spiritual depth of her inner faith and attentiveness to God's word. "Had she not first learnt to hear the word of God in her heart, she could never have borne the Word Incarnate in her body."<sup>6</sup> The Orthodox tradition sees in Mary's reply to the angel, her active participation in the mystery of the Incarnation. Mary's reply is the supreme expression of 'co-operation' between divine grace and human freedom.<sup>7</sup> "She was a person who sought to realize, in her own consciousness, the meaning of the fact of her divine maternity."<sup>8</sup> As a person Mary achieved the degree of holiness corresponding to her unique motherhood: the plenitude of grace she received and the unlimited glory she attained made her a human person through whom the Word was made flesh.

As the first among the saints, Mary is to be seen as the model for believers. Her 'obedience' to the Word of God is not a sign of passivity. She says 'yes' because she knows what she is doing. Therefore she has become a model and a symbol of the Church: active obedience, submitting one's will to the divine will but fully responsible for what is to come.

The early Church shows a different picture on the role of women in Church life. The Orthodox Church knows female deaconesses who are canonised and are part of the calendar of saints: Phoebe, Publia, Melania the Younger, Domnika, Theosevia, Xenia, Apollonia (also commemorated in the Western calendar), Gorgonia, Nonna, Macrina, Olympias. Their service in the Church was indispensable with regard to female baptism, and in some other ways during a liturgical act. It seems, however, that thus far, there is no evidence of

---

Conception and introduced the orthodox cult of the Mary also form the sophiological perspective. Bulgakov's Sophiology has not been accepted by the Orthodox Church.

<sup>6</sup> Bishop Kallistos Ware, "Mary Theotokos in the Orthodox Tradition", *The Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Oxford, 1997)13.

<sup>7</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon writes: "Mary co-operates with the economy". *Against the Heresies*, 3.21.7 PG 7, 953B. The 14<sup>th</sup> century byzantine theologian Nicolas Cabasilas writes: "Just as He was conceived by His own free choice, so in the same way she became His Mother voluntarily and **with her free consent.**" *Homily on the Annunciation*, 4.5 (*Patrologia Orientalis* 19. 488)

<sup>8</sup> Lossky, 32.

deaconesses assisting within the Eucharistic celebration. Ordination rites for deaconesses are preserved in two ancient documents, the Didascalia Apostolorum and the Apostolic Constitutions, 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively. Stories of their lives reveal that they were made witnesses of the Church not only for their technical assistance at liturgical rituals.

The Orthodox Church venerates a distinguished missionary female witness, Saint Nino, a young woman from Cappadocia, who evangelised the Georgian people. In the early fourth century, no later than 337, Nino was chosen to bring the good news of Christ's Kingdom to the East-Georgian kingdom of Kartli (Kartli is also called Iberia by the Greeks in contrast to the Iberian peninsula in western Europe). Considering the difficulty of travel in the fourth century and the significance of the task itself: converting idol-worshippers in such a remote area (seen as 'remote' from the centre of the Roman Empire), it is not difficult to understand that she was an exceptional witness. Moreover, according to the legend, Nino was a very young woman when she set out on her mission of evangelisation. The Orthodox Church names her equal to the Apostles, a title given to few saints only, someone like Mary Magdalene, Thekla, Constantine the Great and his mother Helena, Patrick of Ireland, Cyril and Methodius, Boris of Bulgaria, Vladimir, Stephen of Hungary, Sava of Serbia, Innocent of Alaska, Nicholas of Japan. (For women the list closed in the tenth century.)

If a woman in the fourth century could be listened to so seriously that the royal family trusted her and followed her word, why today it is not possible to listen to women at the formal discussions in the Church? Are women today not capable of such heroic zeal and virtue, so that they are named 'equal to the Apostles' as it happened in the past? Curiously, the Church appears to have had more confidence in women's genius in the first centuries of the Christian era.

A couple of months ago I was preparing a course for the MA theology students on Gender and Orthodoxy. It was a tough subject. Without compromising on either side, one - being Orthodox almost by birth and brought up into this tradition, the other - being a theologian with a long professional experience in ecumenism and

sympathising with Feminist theology - I tried to 'defend' my position. This was about knowing limits with regard the issue of women (for an Orthodox theologian), but also knowing early Church teaching which suggests a possibility of formalising the active involvement of women in the life of the Church. During the course we looked at the Eucharistic prayers of the Orthodox liturgy by St. John Chrysostom and saw that all prayers are asking the same for males and females: "Lord, look upon us... grant us your abundant mercy..." or again: "Holy God...You have created and brought all things out of nothing into being. You have created man and woman in Your image and likeness and adorned them with all gifts of Your grace. You give wisdom and understanding to the supplicant and do not overlook the sinner but have established repentance as the way of salvation. You have enabled us, Your lowly and unworthy servants, to stand at this hour before the glory of Your holy altar and to offer to You due worship and praise..." So God's wisdom and understanding is given in the same measure to males and females. The difference in receiving God's wisdom is another matter, it does not depend on male-female distinction but only on a degree of one's worthiness. (The issue of worthiness/axios belongs to Christian anthropology, developed in Patristic writings.)

There are certain things that I would not call into question at this stage, such as the male nature of the hierarchy in the Church but it is certainly fair to call into question the understanding of Church authority as a straightforward power from the top to bottom, as opposed to a more synodal or collegial approach to leadership which Pope Francis has been advocating in his reform of the Roman Curia.

A prominent Orthodox woman theologian, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, claimed that "Christological disputes overshadowed the Christian anthropology".<sup>9</sup>

The Orthodox theological thinkers of the twentieth century in the so called diaspora, those who, after the October Revolution in 1917, emigrated from

---

<sup>9</sup> Martyria, Mission : The Witness of the Orthodox Churches Today, ed. Ioan Bria (WCC : Geneva, 1980) 55.



Russia, or other countries, developed the early biblical-Patristic idea about femininity which *rejects* defining woman only as an organ of procreation. In this context, the publication of a book by Paul Evdokimov *Woman and the Salvation of the World* in 1958 was a remarkable moment. “Deciphering the Genesis narratives, Evdokimov sees in them the original archetype of the necessary union or oneness of the complementary principles of the masculine and the feminine. Eve is the flesh of Adam, the other one who is like her. Thus, man and woman are called to be a single flesh in a diversity of persons. Sin has disrupted this unity in diversity -- a unity in which a negative masculinity is opposed to a negative femininity, caught in eternal discord and struggle. But divine grace recreates the initial unity in Christ.”<sup>10</sup>

This divine grace, *Misericordia*, has now become a guiding principle of journey in the Catholic Church in this Jubilee year of Mercy. The mercy of God encourages all to think anew about the feminine destiny without which there is no anthropological oneness or unity in the divine creation. Even though diversity is a result of the fallen humanity, it affects equally the male and the female. In Christ, both male and female become children of God and both are given the redemptive potency through the Eucharistic communion. Indeed, a full recognition of femininity in the Church is a part of the recreation in Christ to which all followers of his words are liable.

Having said a few things about Orthodox teaching and tradition with regard the issue of women, I would like now to address the role of women in the Church based on the Gospel narrative: *Mary and Martha, the sisters from Bethany*, Luke 10: 38-42.

“Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 56.

me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

Let us see how the passage is interpreted in the third century by one of the most prominent theologians of the early Church, Origen.<sup>11</sup>

(170) “The Saviour lodged with holy women in a certain village. Luke is silent about its name, but John specifies it and says it was “Bethany”. (John 11:1) (171) You might reasonably take Martha to stand for action and Mary for contemplation. For, the mystery of love is lost to the active life unless one directs his teaching, and his exhortation to action, toward contemplation. For, there is no action without contemplation, or contemplation without action. But we should rather say that Martha received the word more somatically, in her house—that is, in the soul—whereas Mary heard it spiritually, even if she sat “at his feet”. This means that she had already passed beyond what was handed down by way of introduction according to the plan of salvation, since she “had put aside the things of a child” (1Cor. 13:11) but had not yet received what is perfect. Martha can also be the synagogue of circumcision, which received Jesus in his own territory, because it was engaged in worship according to the letter of the Law. But Mary is the Church of the Gentiles, which has chosen the good part, the “spiritual law”, (Rom. 7:14) which is not to be taken from her and cannot be destroyed, like the glory upon the face of Moses. (2Cor. 3:7) From the Law she takes few beneficial things—or rather, she sums all of them up in one commandment: “You shall love” (Luke 10: 27) And, corresponding to the expression “one thing is necessary”, (Luke 10:42) you will understand, “you shall love your neighbour as yourself.” (Luke 10:27) And, to the expression, “there is need of few things,” (Luke 10:42) “you understand the commandments: You shall not commit adultery. You shall not murder, “ (Luke 18:20) and what follows. Still another interpretation: Martha can be the believers from among the circumcised,

---

<sup>11</sup> In English translation these are numbered as 170-171. Origen, *Homilies on Luke, Fragments on Luke*, Translated by Joseph T. Lienhard, S.J. The Fathers of the Church, (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996) 192-3.

and the Judaizers, who keep the precepts of the Law in Jewish fashion, while Mary can be those among them who have been evangelized, and are “Jews in secret.” (Rom. 2:29) they sit only at Jesus’ feet, and “seek the things that are above, not the things upon the earth.” (Col. 3:1-2) For interpreting the passage in another way, you will find Martha is more somatic and busy “with many things,” (Luke 10:41) while Mary is concerned only with contemplation and spiritual things.”

This interpretation has become paradigmatic in Orthodox theology, taking for granted that *vita practica* and *vita contemplativa* are inseparable for life in the Church. This has been further developed within monastic spirituality, since in the West as in the East, monasteries were centres of education and literacy. Over the centuries however, has been forgotten that this rich symbolic interpretation on the ministry was introduced by means of the sisters from Bethany and would do well to be recovered as we look toward the future of our Churches. For there is more to be seen and received through that prism: the Gospel teaches the inseparability of spiritual and diaconal life in the Church, using the sisters from Bethany, Mary and Martha as a model.

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, one of the most interesting orthodox theologians of the past century, wrote: “A theology of mission is always the fruit of the total ‘being’ of the Church and not a mere specialty for those who receive a particular missionary calling.”<sup>12</sup> He sees the mission of the Church as its cosmic and worldly dimension.

It is “in the Eucharist (that) the Church becomes what it is, fulfills itself as the Body of Christ, as the divine *parousia* –the presence and communication of Christ and of His Kingdom.”<sup>13</sup> The realization of this Eucharistic fullness in the world is *the mission* of the Church. The Church itself is a missionary community and its

---

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission, Reflections on the Orthodoxy in the West* (SVS Press, Crestwood, NY, 1979) 209.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 212.

'missionary imperative' is expression of the Eucharistic fullness in space and time.<sup>14</sup>

How does this missionary imperative apply to the world? Let us look at the commentary by St. John Chrysostom on the passage from Matthew 5:23-24, "So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift." The commentary reads: "What goodness! What all-surpassing love is shown to humanity! ... He calls us to pour forth love towards our neighbour ...What is the motivation in making such a drastic command? It seems to me that he has two ends in mind towards which he is hinting and preparing. First, as I have previously said, he desires to show how highly he values love and considers it to be the greatest sacrifice. So he does not even receive the sacrifice of worship without the sacrifice of love. Second, he is imposing such a necessity for reconciliation that it admits of no excuse. The person who has been commanded not to offer sacrifice to God before one is reconciled, will hurry to the one who has been grieved and eradicate the enmity between the two. He does so that his sacrifice may not lie unconsecrated."<sup>15</sup>

The missionary imperative of the community is to participate in the mysteries of Christ with the reconciled mind and loving heart. It is a common ground for the orthodox theology to pull all into the Eucharistic celebration, and I deliberately use here the word 'celebration' because the Church underlines the festive character of coming together with reconciled mind and loving heart to offer the Holy Gifts, to 'consecrate the sacrifice', to taste the heaven on earth, to go forth in peace and bring to the world the news of Christ's Kingdom, and, again and again, seek reconciliation and love with others.

According to the Gospel tradition, Jesus sends out the twelve and the seventy on mission as strangers, without anything to carry with them but words of peace

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 214.

<sup>15</sup> Manlio Simonetti (ed.), Matthew 14-28 (*Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament*) (IVP USA: 2006) 103-4.

and love of the Christ's Kingdom (Mark 6:7-13, Matt. 9:37-38, Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-16.). The strangers could be listened to or rejected. The freedom of choice was up to the targeted ones. All these missionary statements have eschatological implications, promising new life according to the Christ's Kingdom.

The other New Testament contexts referring to mission are also eschatological. "...so that God may be all in all" (1Cor.15.28) teaches St. Paul, whose missionary activity evangelized a considerable part of the Greco-Roman world. The end of the mission always is "the transfiguration of the entire cosmos, humankind and nature alike, into the original beauty and harmony that not only existed before the fall but, to a much greater degree, will be acquired at the *eschaton*."<sup>16</sup>

The Orthodox theologians tend to emphasize the Trinitarian understanding of the Mission, of the Matthean passage at the end of the chapter 28. "The making of disciples is meaningless without a reference to 'baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. After all, the call of the church to mission is rooted in the fact that Christ himself was sent by the Father, in the Holy Spirit (John 20:21-22). ...the sending of Christ was the inevitable consequence of the inner dynamics of the Holy Trinity. ...Christian mission can be justified only if we conceive our missionary task as the projection in human terms of the life of communion that exists within the Holy Trinity. That is why the subject of mission is not the individual believer, the missionary or even the church as an impersonal corporate entity – rather, it is the triune God. (Humanity enters into the missionary field only within the framework of the divine synergy.)"<sup>17</sup>

The mission of the church is to draw the divine creation into the communion with God's very life: "mission does not aim primarily at the propagation or

---

<sup>16</sup> Petros Vassiliadis, *Eucharist and Witness, Orthodox Perspectives on the Unity and Mission of the Church* (WCC Publication : Geneva, 1998) 37.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

transmission of intellectual conviction, doctrines, moral commands, etc. but at the transmission of the life of communion that exists in God.”<sup>18</sup>

In this brief description of the ‘missionary imperative’ of the Orthodox Church, it is hard to see anything against women, on the contrary, they are fully accommodated by this teaching: women are as good at transmitting the Trinitarian understanding of the divine communion as men.

The wholeness of the orthodox theology comes forth also with mission: the Church is unable to separate diakonia from contemplative life, mission from the sacraments, they are all pulled into one immense hub, without margins/periphery. The truth of the Incarnate and Resurrected Christ underlies the Church life in its manifold expressions, the purpose of which is to bring the whole of the divine creation in communion with God.

Men cannot do it alone, without women.

Now, it is time to draw conclusions and say how do I see the missionary and pastoral role of women in the church. In my view, I have already expressed it. Men and women are indispensable in the divine plan for inauguration of the age to come and full realization of the *eschaton*. All laborers are needed at the harvest. The difference between male and female indicates only that male and female do things differently but both of these ways of doing things are necessary for the final destiny of the Church that is the salvation of the divine creation.

With this belief I would like to conclude: women cannot be reduced to the role of an honorable company. Nothing is revolutionary in making women in the Orthodox Church an indissoluble part of the human response to God’ call for unity and spiritual advancement.

---

<sup>18</sup> Ioan Bria, “Go Forth in Peace », World Council of Churches Mission Series (WCC Publications : Geneva, 1986) 3.

In my discourse I deliberately avoided reference to categories of the secular world, such as equality in democratic societies or equality supported by the Human Rights. Those are taken for granted where democratic structures and civil society have been well established. However, even in those places women are not formally part of the church leadership, part of the decision-making. I intended to demonstrate that the Church gives plenty of possibilities to raise questions and address issues around the female leadership in the Church in spite of the socio-political context.

Tamara Grdzeldze