

In spite of the fact that I have been a feminist for more than thirty years, I have resisted looking at the Orthodox Church through a feminist lens: as I have explained to curious friends, the women's movement, not the UOCC, is the proper place for that struggle. But when Fr Roman Bozyk of St Andrew's College offered to come to Edmonton Summer 2009 to present a version of a course he had taught for the first time earlier this year at St Andrew's – Ethics 336: Gender & Women's Issues – I absolutely knew I had to sign up. Call it the movement of the Holy Spirit.

I am profoundly grateful for the experience. As Fr Bozyk warned us, some of the readings were going to be hard –going (intellectually and emotionally), and as I had warned myself, revisiting the misogyny (woman-hatred) of a patriarchal religion was going to reignite all my feminist outrage of the 1970s, but the fact is that I am glad I finally engaged with this topic :in my life as a woman, as a baptized Orthodox, and as a member of the UOCC.

In the first place, it was a comfort to be in the class with others willing to read and discuss openly and probingly, and to be under the intellectual and spiritual guidance of Fr Bozyk, an immensely sympathetic interpreter and teacher of the Orthodox theology which bears on this issue of gender in the Church. In the second place, the readings! From Genesis and Leviticus to Romans and Ephesians to the Church Fathers to current contributions -feminist, anti-feminist and pro-feminist -to the discussion of women's role in the Orthodox Church, especially concerning the revival of the ordination of deaconesses: what a treasure trove of learning, what a catechism of the spirit.

Now that I reflect on the experience, however, I can see that it has not left me untroubled. I ask myself: How do I reconcile the deeply compassionate teachings of Jesus Christ about women, with the centuries of abusive and cruel attitudes and statements about women from some of the men of the Church? Do the Protestants have a point when they refer only to Scripture as the basis for their faith? Is it really possible to be a true member of this Church without there being some sort of movement towards a greater pastoral and especially liturgical role for women? Why, in spite of decades of petitions, recommendations, motions etc. which have come out of committees and congresses of the Orthodox community internationally, asking our clergy and our structures finally to reconsider their position on women and the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, precisely nothing seems to have been undertaken?

A Jewish friend recently told me, almost in tears, how moving it has been for her finally to hold and read from the Torah, in a synagogue where women also are rabbis.

If young women are not present in our Church, it may be that they do not find the spiritual consolation there that they do find in communities where women are welcome at the Table as fully human (*anthropos*) and as icons of God.

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