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The Problem of Women's Ordination in the Modern Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue

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Abstract. *Bilateral dialogues are one of the essential outcomes of the Ecumenical Movement. The Anglican-Orthodox dialogue is a good example of such inter-confessional conversation. It was initiated at the end of the 19th century and came to maturity in the 20th century. Unfortunately, nowadays the modern Anglican-Orthodox dialogue faces some problems. The most problematic issue for the Orthodox Church is the decision of the Anglican Communion to ordination women as priests and bishops. This issue alone raises questions about the future perspectives of Anglican-Orthodox dialogue. The aim of this study is to explain the problems raised by women's ordination for the modern Anglican – Orthodox dialogue. Historical and analytical methods are used for achieving this goal. The research shows that there are no strong theological arguments for or against women's ordination. The differences in understanding some passages of the Scripture, the flexibility of Tradition and the role of gender equality are the main reasons of the controversy. Despite that, both sides decided to continue the dialogue and give a common witness of the Christian faith in the modern world. Conversations about women's ordination raise up the question about 'legitimate diversity' of practices in Churches which seek full communion. I think the Churches will discuss this question in the future meetings of the international Anglican-Orthodox dialogue.*

Keywords: women's ordination, the Anglican Church, the Orthodox Church, the Lambeth Conferences, dialogue.

The Anglican-Orthodox dialogue and its historical development

The first attempt to start a theological dialogue between the Church of England and the Orthodox Church can be traced to the 17th century.¹ In the 19th century the relations between the two Churches developed and some Anglican clerics began seeking a closer contact with the Eastern Orthodox Church.² In 1864, Anglicans and Orthodox founded the Eastern Churches Association, which also continues its work nowadays.³

In the 20th century, the Anglican-Orthodox dialogue remained important for the Churches, despite all difficulties related to the First World War and to the political changes in Russia. The Ecumenical Movement gave fresh perspectives to the conversation. Representatives of both Churches had meetings on the conferences of *Faith and Order* or *Life and Work* that gave a basis for some Orthodox Churches (Constantinople, Jerusalem, Cyprus) to consider recognizing the Anglican ordination.⁴ In 1948, both Churches were among the founders of the WCC. Because representative of the two Churches were working together in the WCC, it came natural for the Anglicans and for the Orthodox to establish an

¹ Hudh Wybrew, "Anglican-Orthodox and Anglican-Roman Catholic Theological Dialogue", in *Theoforum* XXXIV (2008), no. 2, p. 217.

² Bryn Geffert, *Eastern Orthodox and Anglicans: diplomacy, theology, and the politics of interwar ecumenism*, Notre Dame, Ind. University of Notre Dame Press, 2010, p. 11.

³ Official web-site of Anglican and Eastern Churches Association, <https://www.aeca.org.uk/index.html>, accessed 07. 12. 2017.

⁴ Vassiliki El. Stathokosta, "Relations between the Orthodox and the Anglicans in the Twentieth Century: A Reason to Consider the Present and the Future of the Theological Dialogue," in *Ecclesiology*, VIII (2012), no. 3, p. 360.

"The Problem of Women's Ordination in the Modern Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue," *Astra Salvensis*, VI (2018), no. 12, p. 419-429
official international bi-lateral dialogue. This dialogue brought several agreed statements.

In 1973, the special organization 'The Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Discussions (A-OJDD)' had the first meeting in Oxford.⁵ The discussions that started in 1973 were summarised by the Moscow Agreed Statement and used thereafter in the conversation. The Statement was a result of previous conversations and brought a convergence in problems related to Scripture and Tradition, to the role of Councils and in the problem of Filioque.⁶ After coming to an agreement on these topics, the Dublin Agreed Statement (1984) dealt with questions about the mystery of the Church.⁷

However, the progress made in dialogue faces now new challenges. In 1993, the General Synod of the Church of England opened the possibility for women to be ordained.⁸ As a result, in the Cyprus Agreed Statement (2006) the Orthodox participants declared their strong disagreement on this issue.⁹ Nevertheless, the Church of England took the decision to introduce the episcopal ordination for women in 2008.¹⁰ This situation in the Church of England gave the reason for an additional question among the Orthodox: "Does the dialogue with the Anglican Church have a perspective?"

The problem of women's ordination

Nowadays, the Church of England has women ordained as deacons, priests and bishops. The implementation process has been very long and is consistent. The decisions of the Lambeth Conferences,¹¹ which gather each 10 years since 1867, played the main role in this action. Decisions of these Conferences are not mandatory, but they incite member churches of the Anglican Communion to consider them and adopt an ecclesial stance on the local level.¹² That is why, I am going to examine the decisions of the Lambeth Conferences about women's

⁵ The International Commission for the Anglican - Orthodox Theological Dialogue: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/relationships/ecumenical-dialogues/orthodox.aspx>, accessed 07. 12. 2017.

⁶ Peter-Ben Smit, "Traditions in Dialogue: A Comparison of the Concept of Tradition in Old Catholic – Anglican, Orthodox – Anglican and Orthodox – Old Catholic Dialogue," in *Ecclesiology*, V (2009), no. 2, p. 224.

⁷ The Dublin Agreed Statement 1984: http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/103812/the_dublin_statement.pdf, accessed. 07. 12. 2017.

⁸ Hillarion Alfeev, *Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church with the Churches of The Anglican Community: History and Modernity*: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/2552828.html>, accessed 28. 10. 2017.

⁹ ***, *The Church of the Triune God: The Cyprus Agreed Statement of the International Commission for Anglican – Orthodox Theological Dialogue*, London, The Anglican Communion Office, 2006, p. 87.

¹⁰ *Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church with the Churches of The Anglican Community: History and Modernity*.

¹¹ Paul Avis, "Anglican Ecclesiology," in Gerard Mannion and Lewis S. Mudge (eds.), *The Routledge companion to the Christian Church*, New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 211.

¹² Andrey Posternak, "Church ministry of women in the Anglican Church according to the Lambeth Conferences," in *Herald of MSHU*, III (2013), p. 73.

ordination. Then I will look into the decisions of the General Synod of the Church of England and their theological background.

Since the middle of the 19th century, the Anglican Church accepted women to the order of deacons. However, the deaconess were doing only social and mission work, so very soon the question of their ecclesiastical status was raised. Nevertheless, the answer was ambiguous. "In 1920, the Lambeth Conference declared that deaconesses were in the holy orders; in 1930, it declared they were not."¹³ During the Second World War in Hong Kong, the local bishop ordained the first woman as a priest.¹⁴ It was done as an exception, but also created a precedent. Later events, especially the women movement, lead to a modification of the 1968 Lambeth Conference's agenda and questions on women's ordination were considered.¹⁵ This Conference took three main decisions: it allowed women associations inside the Church;¹⁶ it recommended that the deaconesses should be ordained by prayers and by laying on of hands;¹⁷ and it recognized, that "the theological arguments as at present presented for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood are inconclusive."¹⁸ The 38 resolution suggested that women's involvement in the Church life should be encouraged and the deaconess should even be allowed to distribute the Holy Communion.¹⁹ Actually, this decision gave women the right to do some liturgical ministry.

After 10 years, the question of women priesthood was raised again. The next Lambeth Conference, in 1978, went further and adopted three important decisions. First, the recognition of the deaconess and of their liturgical role became mandatory.²⁰ Then, a second resolution described the division among the Anglican Communion in the question of women's ordination as priest. Some provinces had already ordained women as priests, because (§1) "there are either no fundamental or no theological objections to the ordination of women to the historic threefold ministry of the Church."²¹ Others were still against this practice. However, the participants asked both sides to keep unity and mutual respect (§6). The Conference also recognized that this decision could create troubles in the dialogues with the Roman-Catholic Church and with the Orthodox Churches (§7). Nevertheless, the participants insisted in continuing the dialogues and explained the

¹³ Jane Shaw, "The ordination of Anglican women: Challenging tradition," in *Preachers, prophets & heretics: Anglican women's ministry*, edited by Elaine Lindsay & Janet Scarfe, Sydney, NewSouth Publ., 2012, p. 16.

¹⁴ Andrey Posternak, "Church ministry of women in the Anglican Church according to the Lambeth Conferences," p. 76.

¹⁵ Jane Shaw, "The ordination of Anglican women: Challenging tradition," p. 21.

¹⁶ Resolution 30, "Fellowships for Church Women," The Lambeth Conference 1968, (access 12.12.17), <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1968/resolution-30-the-ministry-fellowships-for-church-women?subject=Women>

¹⁷ Resolution 32, "The Diaconate," The Lambeth Conference 1968: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1968/resolution-32-the-ministry-the-diaconate?subject=Women>, accessed 12. 12. 2017.

¹⁸ Resolution 34, *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ Resolution 38, *Ibidem*.

²⁰ Resolution 20, *Ibidem*.

²¹ Resolution 21, *Ibidem*.

"The Problem of Women's Ordination in the Modern Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue," *Astra Salvensis*, VI (2018), no. 12, p. 419-429

differences in the practice of women's ordination as a diversity that does not affect the unity of faith. The question about episcopal ordination of women was left open. The 22 resolution suggested that such ordinations should not be made, prior to a consultation of the entire episcopate.²²

The Anglican Church took a step forward in 1988. The first resolution (§1) of the Lambeth Conference recognized the right of each province to ordain women as bishops.²³ The mutual respect and the importance of remaining in full communion were emphasized again (§2). The Archbishop of Canterbury with other prelates created a special commission charged with solving any dispute that should emerge between provinces with a different point of view on the problem of women's ordination (§3).

Therefore, the decisions of the Lambeth Conference opened the possibility for women's ordination in the Anglican Church. Nevertheless, the Church of England did not immediately ordain women. The first woman was ordained as deacon only in 1987 and the first time one was ordained as priest was in 1994.²⁴ Debates about the ordination of women to the episcopate were very long and difficult. In November 2012, the General Synod voted against women bishops,²⁵ but in July of 2014 the Synod gave, "its final approval for women to become bishops in the Church of England."²⁶

Thus, the Church of England has ordained women in all clerical orders. The quick evolution made in this topic raises questions on the basis for such radical changes. Among the Orthodox it is common to see in these changes a victory of feminism and of the secular society.²⁷ Are there theological arguments for the ordination of women as priests and bishops?

In 1993, the Ecclesiastical Committee of the Church of England summarized the arguments 'pro and contra.' The document gave the following arguments for female priesthood:

The nub of the case advanced in favour of women priests is that women will enrich the priesthood, and that without women the priesthood is incomplete.

²² Resolution 22, "Women in the Episcopate," The Lambeth Conference 1978: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1978/resolution-22-women-in-the-episcopate?subject=Women>, accessed 12. 12. 2017.

²³ Resolution 1, "The ordination or consecration of women to the episcopate," The Lambeth Conference 1988: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1988/resolution-1-the-ordination-or-consecration-of-women-to-the-episcopate?subject=Women>, accessed 12. 12. 2017.

²⁴ Jane Shaw, "The ordination of Anglican women: Challenging tradition," p. 26.

²⁵ Jerome Taylor, "Church of England General Synod votes against women bishops despite late plea from next Archbishop of Canterbury: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/church-of-england-general-synod-votes-against-women-bishops-despite-late-plea-from-next-archbishop-8335671.html>, accessed 13. 12. 2017.

²⁶ "Church of England to have women bishops," The Church of England official web-site: <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/news/church-england-have-women-bishops>, accessed 12. 12. 2017.

²⁷ Andrey Posternak, "Church ministry of women in the Anglican Church according to the Lambeth Conferences," p. 81.

Women will bring distinct gifts to the priestly ministry, and their inclusion within it will ensure that it fully reflects the richness and diversity of humanity created in the image of God.²⁸

From this quotation, it is clear that the two main arguments used for women's ordination are based on the interpretation of Scripture. These arguments are (1) the priesthood of all believers, which includes all members of Church, despite sex differences (1 Peter 2:9) and (2) the unity of mankind, because all human beings are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). Arguments against women ordination into priesthood can be formulated in these key points:²⁹

- Representative – the priest represents Christ, who was incarnated in male sex;
- The Apostles did not ordain women as presbyters, therefore women's ordination breaks apostolic continuity;
- Some Scripture passages emphasize different roles of men and women in the Church;
- The Church of England can have problems in its ecumenical dialogues with the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches.

The Committee mentioned both categories of arguments, because not every parish had agreed with the Synod resolution about women's ordination. In 1999, 7% of all parishes still kept only men as priests.³⁰ In 2004, the House of Bishops published the report about the inclusion of women into the Episcopate, where also theological reasons for and against the ordination of female bishops were explained.³¹ Again, most of the arguments presented highlighted the different possibilities in interpreting the Scripture and assuming the Tradition. In the words of Henry McAdoo, “the heart of the question here is not the authority of Scripture but the right way to interpret and apply it.”³²

The report presents, also, the reasons for which the Synod accepted to ordain women as bishops.³³

- Consecration of women to the priesthood from 1992 opened the possibility for women to become bishops;
- Despite all disagreements, there are sufficient arguments for ordaining women as bishops;

²⁸ Ecclesiastical Committee, *Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure and the Ordination of Women (Financial Provisions) Measure, 203rd and 204th Reports*, 27 July 1993, HC 895 1992-93, paragr. 9 – 16.

²⁹ Ecclesiastical Committee, *Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure and the Ordination of Women (Financial Provisions) Measure, 203rd and 204th Reports*, 27 July 1993, HC 895 1992-93, paragraph. 9 – 16.

³⁰ Ian Jones, "Earrings behind the Altar? Anglican Expectations of the Ordination of Women as Priests", *Dutch Review of Church History* LXXXIII (2002), p. 462.

³¹ The House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England, *Women Bishops in the Church of England? GS 1557*, London, Church House Publishing, 2004, p. 137.

³² Henry McAdoo, *Anglicans and Tradition and Ordination of Women*, Norwich, Canterbury Press, 1997, 105.

³³ *The House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England*, p. 193 – 199.

"The Problem of Women's Ordination in the Modern Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue," *Astra Salvensis*, VI (2018), no. 12, p. 419-429

- Since 1994 women were providing priesthood ministry successfully, so it will be unjust to preserve them from participation in the episcopal ministry;
- Episcopal ordination will break the discrimination of women clergy 'as second class';
- A positive decision will break the discrimination of women in the witnessing to the Gospel;
- The Lambeth Conference 1988 gave the permission for women to become bishops;
- Despite some problems in ecumenical dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church and with the Orthodox Churches, the decision to ordain women to the episcopate will give positive impact for relations with the Methodist Church and with the Lutheran Churches.

From this presentation it is clear that the theological arguments for women's ordination did not play a major role. Nevertheless, as the Synod had predicted, this decision became especially problematic in the dialogue with the Orthodox Church. What does the Orthodox Church think about the possibility of women's ordination?

First, there is no general canonical decision adopted by a Pan-Orthodox Council on this issue. The problem of women's ordination came to the Orthodox theological field through ecumenical conversations. However, for a very long time it was understood as a specific Western problem.³⁴ Orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe did not consider this issue important. In 1976, the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow declared that, "We see no grounds for objecting to any solution to this question in confessions where the priesthood is not recognized as a sacrament and where, consequently, from the point of view of Orthodoxy, there is no sacramental priesthood."³⁵

The Orthodox theologians, which had been involved in ecumenical discussions, were the first to seek a more complex answer to the question of women's ordination. In 1963, at the *Faith and Order Commission* in Montreal, two Orthodox theologians presented papers on this matter. The papers explained why the Orthodox refuse to ordain women as priests and bishops.³⁶ One of the theologians, archimandrite George Khodre, made a new point to the debate in relation to the natural distinction between sexes.³⁷ Later, in 1976, the WCC and the Patriarchate of Romania initiated an Orthodox conference in Agapia monastery about "The role of Orthodox Women in Church and Society."³⁸ The conference brought together more than fifty Orthodox women from different Orthodox

³⁴ Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, Kallistos Ware, *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 2000, p. 12.

³⁵ Hillarion Alfeev, *Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church with the Churches of The Anglican Community: History and Modernity*.

³⁶ Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, Kallistos Ware, *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church*, p. 13.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

³⁸ Katarina Karkala-Zorba, "The Ordination of Women from an Orthodox Perspective," in *Women and ordination in the Christian churches: international perspectives*, edited by Ian Jones, Kirsty Thorpe and Janet Wootton, London, T&T Clark, 2008, p. 58.

Churches, besides bishops and other theologians. This gathering proclaimed the necessity for further theological investigations on the issue. Moreover, participants proposed the restoration of the female diaconate in the Orthodox Church, because this order is not in contradiction with the Church's Tradition.³⁹

In the beginning of 1980s, the Orthodox interest on the Western debate concerning women's ordination increased. Of the many papers published by Orthodox on this topic, a special mention should be given to the book "Women and the Priesthood", published in 1983.⁴⁰ I want to emphasize two works from this collection of articles on women's ordination. The first of them is sign by bishop Kallistos Ware and is called "Man, Woman and the Priesthood of Christ"⁴¹. In the article, Kallistos Ware explains several reasons against the ordination of women. Most of them concerned the arguments relate to Scripture interpretation, Tradition and patristic evidence, diversity of gifts and the 'iconic' role of the priest. The author also distinguished between universal ministry and sacramental ministry. Ware's article became the first systematic work, where all the arguments against women's ordination were shown. The second article that should be mentioned is entitle "On the Male Character of Christian Priesthood"⁴² and was written by Father Thomas Hopko. The main argument Fr. Hopko emphasized is the ontological difference between man and woman, based on the direct and symbolic relations between Adam and the Word of God, respectively Eve and the Spirit of God.

In 1988, the Orthodox bishops, priests, lay men and women gathered in Rhodes, Greece, for an Interorthodox Symposium.⁴³ The participants discussed two major issues: the place of the women in the Church and the question of women's ordination. The Symposium distinguished the two kinds of priesthood and presented a summary of all the arguments on "the impossibility of ordination of women to the special priesthood."⁴⁴ Most of the evidence against women's ordination concern the Tradition of the Church and were summarized as follows:⁴⁵

- Jesus Christ did not select women to the Apostles circle;
- Theotokos did not exercise the sacramental priesthood, even though she was the Mother of God;
- The Apostles never ordained any woman to the priesthood;
- The Pauline teaching about the place of women in the Church could be interpreted as an argument against women's ordination.

³⁹ Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, New York, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999, p. 163.

⁴⁰ Kallistos Ware, "Man, Woman and the Priesthood of Christ," in *Women and the Priesthood*, edited by Thomas Hopko, New York, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983, p. 9-38.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

⁴² Thomas Hopko, "On the Male Character of Christian Priesthood," in *Women and the Priesthood*, edited by Thomas Hopko, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983, p. 97.

⁴³ Katarina Karkala-Zorba, "The Ordination of Women from an Orthodox Perspective," p. 57.

⁴⁴ Conclusions of the Consultation, *The Place of the Woman in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women*, edited by Rev. Gennadios Limouris, Katerini, Tertios, 1992, p. 25.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

"The Problem of Women's Ordination in the Modern Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue," *Astra Salvensis*, VI (2018), no. 12, p. 419-429

Except these arguments, the participants emphasized the necessity of fuller inclusion of women into the liturgical, pastoral, catechetical, missionary and social work. Moreover, they insisted on the revival of the apostolic order of deaconess. Until nowadays, the decisions of this symposium has the highest status for the Orthodox Church.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the implementation of this decisions was very difficult and is still ambiguous.

In 1990s, the discussions about women's ordination became even more vivid. Kallistos Ware, who continue his investigations on the topic, divided all arguments against women's ordination in three categories: Tradition, anthropology and liturgical symbolism.⁴⁷ He insisted that all these arguments have theological features. In contrast to him, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel declared that there are no theological arguments against the ordination of women to the priesthood.⁴⁸ Other Orthodox theologians – Maria Gwyn McDowell – also criticized the weakness of Kallistos' arguments, using the Eucharistic theology of Zizioulas.⁴⁹

In June 2016, the Pan-Orthodox Council held in Crete ignored the issue of women's ordination, despite the recommendations of the Pre-council consultations.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, in November 2016, the Synod of the Alexandrian Patriarchate decided to restore the institution of deaconess⁵¹ and in February 2017 the first deaconesses were ordained by the Patriarch of Alexandria in Kongo DRC.⁵² It was the first Orthodox ordination of deaconesses after the 6th century.

In conclusion, it can be said that there are no strong theological arguments against women's ordination in the Orthodox Church and there are no strong theological arguments for women's ordination in the Anglican Church. All differences in approaching the issue are based on a different interpretation of the Scripture and on a different attitude in relation to the Tradition. The consecration of women as priest became a problem for the Anglican-Orthodox dialogue after 1992. That is why it was one of the topics considered by the Cyprus Agreement Statement, a document of the International Commission for the Anglican - Orthodox Theological Dialogue that was adopted in 2006.⁵³

Perspectives for the future conversation

⁴⁶ Natallia Vasilevich, "Die Stille der Frauen am Heiligen und Großen Konzil," RGOW 11/2016: *Die Orthodoxe Kirche nach dem Konzil*, p. 24.

⁴⁷ Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, Kallistos Ware, *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church*, p. 64.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

⁴⁹ Maria Gwyn McDowell, "Seeing Gender: Orthodox Liturgy, Orthodox Personhood, Unorthodox Exclusion," in *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, XXXII (2013), no. 2, p. 87.

⁵⁰ Natallia Vasilevich, "Die Stille der Frauen am Heiligen und Großen Konzil," p. 22.

⁵¹ Patriarchate of Alexandria restored the deaconess ministry, <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/98812.html>, accessed 21. 12. 2017.

⁵² Patriarch Theodoros of Alexandria performs first consecration of deaconesses: <http://basilica.ro/en/patriarch-theodoros-of-alexandria-performs-first-consecration-of-deaconesses/>, accessed 21. 12. 2017.

⁵³ ***, *The Church of the Triune God: The Cyprus Agreed Statement of the International Commission for Anglican - Orthodox Theological Dialogue*, London, The Anglican Communion Office, 2006.

Section VII of the Cyprus Agreed Statement was dedicated to the issue of women's ordination. First, the document declared that there are no disagreements between the Churches in the question of women's consecration to the diaconate (§20).⁵⁴ However, on the problem of ordaining women as priests and bishops, the Church are in disagreement. There are no deep theological divisions in the doctrine under this differences.⁵⁵ Participants emphasized in §23 that they believe, "that our respective decisions have been made in fidelity to Scripture and Tradition and in response to the leading of the Holy Spirit."⁵⁶ But, the Holy Spirit cannot lead two communities to different conclusions. That is why, both Churches agreed that the Spirit calls them to search the truth with a readiness to question their own certainty.⁵⁷

Anglicans and Orthodox believed that they could find a convergence point by using a theological approach. In order to this, the representative of the Churches considered the Trinitarian relations. They agreed that the Trinitarian language describes the inner personal relations – between the Father and the Son – and does not connect with gender (§28).⁵⁸ In addition, they reached consensus and affirmed that the Scripture and the Church Fathers emphasize Christ's incarnation as an event that has effect for the entire human reality and is not exclusively related to gender (§29 – 33). His saving work and priesthood is integral to his humanity and extend equal to male and female.⁵⁹ All of what has been agreed before and the eschatological equality of human beings in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist gave the theological ground for Anglicans to ordain women. Moreover, "at the very least ... there are no compelling theological reasons against doing so."⁶⁰ Therefore, the Anglicans repeated the formulation of the Lambeth Conference, 1978, "There are either no fundamental or no theological objections to the ordination of women to the historic threefold ministry of the Church."⁶¹ The Orthodox participants distinguished the Christian's equality in Christ's priesthood from the ministerial service in the Church. They saw no theological reason for breaking the Tradition of the Church to ordain only man to the sacramental priesthood. In §37 this decision is shortly explained:⁶²

- The priest acts in *persona Christi*;
- Issues of justice and equality are not valuable for changing the Church's Tradition;
- Orthodox women have their own ministry;

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 84.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 85.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

⁶¹ Resolution 21, "Women in the Priesthood," The Lambeth Conference 1978, <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1978/resolution-21-women-in-the-priesthood?subject=Women>, accessed 12. 12. 2017.

⁶² ***, *The Church of the Triune God*, p. 87.

"The Problem of Women's Ordination in the Modern Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue," *Astra Salvensis*, VI (2018), no. 12, p. 419-429

- The Orthodox think that the pastoral motivation behind women's ordination cannot cover the ecumenical problems it raises.

For the future discussions, the commission chose the following topics: culture and its influence on the Tradition, women's ordination through the theological and canonical view, heresy and its definition. The question of heresy concerned the condemnation of the Montanist practice of women's ordination. If this condemnation did not apply on the practice of women's ordination, both Churches will need clarification for the possibility of both practices of consecration within the Christian communion (§38).

The last paragraph (§39) of this section makes an important point, "We wish in conclusion to affirm our conviction that our theological differences with regard to the ordination of women do not undermine the agreement we have reached in the previous sections of this statement."⁶³

Thus, despite the disagreement about the practice of ordination of women to the priesthood, both Churches decided to continue the dialogue. In 2015, the Commission published the Buffalo Agreed Statement, which presents the theological agreements in respect to the anthropological implication of the questions.⁶⁴ In 2017, the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and an Anglican delegation visited the Russian Orthodox Church. During the meeting, Patriarch of Moscow, Cyril, declared that,

"Therefore, in the present difficult time, especially for Western Christians, we in the Russian Church are not ready to break our historical contacts with Western Christians. We strive in an open, honest conversation with each other to find out our positions and, as far as possible, to achieve a common understanding, including those events that are happening in the world today."⁶⁵

Both leaders published a common declaration about the persecution of Christianity in the Middle East.

It is clear that Anglicans and Orthodox decided to continue the international ecumenical dialogue. The issue of women's ordination is still a problem for unity, but both sides realized that there are no strong theological arguments for either of them. Despite the differences, many common theological points were reached. The modern challenges of secularism and Christian discrimination are calling the Churches to work together. Therefore, it is important to look forward for visible unity and have one voice in the world.

Conclusion

The international Anglican-Orthodox dialogue has its own deep history and its own examples of convergence on great theological questions. The issue of

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p.89.

⁶⁴ ***, *In The Image and Likeness of God: A Hope-Filled Anthropology, The Buffalo Statement Agreed by the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue*, London, The Anglican Communion Office, 2015.

⁶⁵ Meeting of Patriarch Cyril with Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, <http://foto.patriarchia.ru/news/vstrecha-svyateyshego-patriarkha-kirilla-s-arkhiiepiskopom-kenterberyskim-dzhastinom-uelbi/>, accessed 12. 12. 2017.

women's ordination became a major problem in these discussions. However, the short investigation of this topic shows that there are no strong theological arguments for and against this practice. The reasons are based on the different interpretations of the Scripture and on the different way we understand Tradition. The question of women's ordination still needs further clarifications. It is clear that both sides decided to continue the dialogue, despite the different opinions about the consecration of women to priesthood and episcopate. It is a problem for the visible unity between Churches, but not for a common Christian witness and dialogue. In my opinion, the conversations raise up the question about the possibility of having different practices, but remaining in communion with each other. Thus, I believe it is for the Churches to discuss what is 'legitimate diversity' in their searching for unity. I think, this will be the topic for the future conversations of the international Anglican-Orthodox dialogue.

"The Problem of Women's Ordination in the Modern Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue," *Astra Salvensis*, VI (2018), no. 12, p. 419-429