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STEPPING INTO THE STREAM

An interview with Alice C. Linsley

Road to Emmaus staff have eagerly awaited the publication of this fascinating talk with college and high-school instructor Alice Linsley, who, after sixteen years as an Episcopalian priest joined the Orthodox Church in 2007 as a member of the Antiochean Archdiocese. Her three decades of research on the Book of Genesis is weighty ballast for Alice's insightful reflections on her Anglican-Episcopal past, on women in the 21st-century Church, and on Holy Tradition as revealed through the ancient world of the Old Testament patriarchs.

RTE: Alice, what is your background? Were you born Anglican?

ALICE: I actually became Anglican overseas. My family was Baptist, although my English grandfather, who went to church with his Baptist wife, always kept his little Book of Common Prayer, and my mother was a closet Anglican, who was open to the idea of liturgy and the sacraments. After I married, we moved to Isfahan, Iran, for my husband's work. While looking for a church we found an Anglican hospital-orphanage mission, which had a small Iranian congregation that was severely persecuted and an expatriate congregation with an English Anglican priest. I found that I felt more at home there than in the Baptist Church. When we returned to the U.S., I taught some classes at an Episcopal church in Pennsylvania—the books of Ruth, Esther, and Genesis—and little by little I felt that God was calling me to more.

RTE: You were an Anglican-Episcopalian priest for sixteen years and then laid it down to become Orthodox. What made you feel that you were called to the Episcopalian priesthood, and looking back now, how do you view those years of ministry?

Opposite: Alice C. Linsley.

ALICE: I felt called because of the limited opportunities for me to serve in the Episcopal Church. My choices were either to be ordained as a deacon or a priest, and because I like to teach and am more academically inclined, the priesthood was the more natural choice. I went through a year-long period of discernment with two devout Episcopalian priests before we even broached the subject with the bishop. They felt that the verse that says, “In Christ there is neither male nor female” justified my ordination. Of course, this is not what St. Paul is doing with that scripture at all. St. Paul was thoroughly steeped in the Hebrew tradition, and the only priests that the apostles ever knew were male priests. The reason those guiding me didn’t understand this is because they didn’t understand Holy Tradition.

Also, I was open to ordination because my father’s mother had been ordained a Baptist pastor in 1925, so I grew up as a child seeing my grandmother preach from the pulpit. Now the Baptists aren’t sacramental, and growing up I didn’t know that there were sacraments other than baptism, but I did have this female role-model of ministry from my grandmother, whom I was named after. Her name was also Alice Linsley.

If, when I first started exploring ordination, someone had said to me, “Alice, in the true tradition of the Church, women are not priests, but that doesn’t mean that there aren’t many ways your gifts can be used. Let us discern a way they can...,”—that would have been the right answer.

At that time women were just being ordained priests in the Episcopal Church. The original twelve women in Philadelphia were ordained uncanonically, and the first woman to be ordained a priest once the canon had been changed was Ellen Marie Barrett in 1977, who was ordained by Bishop Paul Moore in New York, and was publicly known to be a lesbian. In ordaining her, the Episcopal Church effectively broke the back of catholic orders. Not only does the Episcopal Church now ordain women as priests and bishops, but it also has set a precedent by ordaining homosexuals. Ellen also became the first co-president of Integrity—the gay activist group inside the Episcopal Church—which, for political reasons, maneuvered the church to where it is now, with gay bishops and same-sex ceremonies.

So, I believed that my initial call was to serve God in the Episcopal Church, and I would probably have been most happy serving either as a theologian or as a lay teacher, but I needed a stipend to support my family. That was going to become even more important as my husband left soon after I became a deacon in June of 1987—this was completely unexpected and had nothing

to do with my ordination, but was his choice to divorce and remarry. Our house had come with his job, and so that was lost to me and our children. So, I began my new life with a part-time deacon’s position and taking care of our three children. It was a rocky first year, and I served as a deacon until I was ordained a priest the following year.

The Anglican-Episcopal Church

Remember, the Episcopal Church (originally called the Protestant-Episcopal Missionary Church of the United States), a member of the worldwide Anglican Communion, is in “impaired communion” with many Anglican jurisdictions because of the consecration of an unrepentant homosexual bishop, Gene Robinson, in November 2003. Today the Episcopal Church is hardly Christian and if it can be said to have a mission, it is to champion gay rights. This innovation followed in the wake of an earlier innovation: the February 1989 consecration of Barbara Harris, a divorcée, the first female bishop in the Anglican Communion.

Anglicans are Protestant in many ways—since the 16th century, Anglicans have largely embraced the principles of Reformed theology. While Thomas Cranmer, the architect of the first Book of Common Prayer (1549), was more Catholic liturgically than Protestant, subsequent versions of the Book of Common Prayer became more Reformed in theology. This is evident when one compares the original 1549 Book with the revised 1552 Book, where he succumbed to pressure to introduce more Protestant elements. The earlier 1549 version reads very much like a Roman Catholic priest’s manual, in which Cranmer incorporated elements of the Latin liturgy used at Salisbury Cathedral along with Orthodox elements, including whole passages from St. John Chrysostom’s liturgy. He borrowed the words “It is meet and right...,” and used them in the sacraments of Baptism and Communion, and the Episcopalian “Prayers of the People” follow the words of the Orthodox Great Ektenia: “For the peace from above, and for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord.” Cranmer wanted to know “What did the Church believe before the Roman magisterium?” So he went back to St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Gregory the Theologian, and drew from those sources into the Book of Common Prayer.

RTE: But wasn’t the compromise with Protestantism part of King Henry VIII’s agenda to dismantle the traditional church structure in England, nam-

ing himself as its head? Surely a return to the Church Fathers wouldn't have helped that.

ALICE: Actually, Henry VIII had little to do with the development of the Book of Common Prayer. Both the original Book of Common Prayer and the more Protestant one of 1552 were drafted during the reign of Henry's son, King Edward VI. King Edward died very young and England fell into a period of religious wars, from which Queen Elizabeth I finally emerged as the new ruler. Although she was Christian, Elizabeth wasn't so concerned about what people believed. She thought that if she could just get people to worship together the bloodshed would stop, and that was her primary concern. So she told Cranmer, "I want a book that represents enough of a compromise that I can get the opposing sides into the churches. If they kneel and receive Communion together, they will stop killing one another." The idea of "Common Prayer" was for people to pray with the same words, at the same service, using the same liturgy. The "Elizabethan Compromise" was forced on a population that had been overwhelmingly Catholic just a few years earlier, and even with these changes, the Puritans were still unhappy. They felt that the new prayer book was far too "papist".

This tug toward Reformed theology has remained a permanent part of the Anglican-Episcopal tradition, and this is why the Evangelical wing of Anglicanism has remained strongly attached to it. The Episcopal clergy who supported my ordination were Evangelical, and this means that they sought their answers in the Bible, not in the Fathers or in Holy Tradition. I love Evangelicals, but it troubles me that while they say that authority for them resides in Scripture, they are selective in how they use the Bible. These Evangelical clergy believed that they were doing the right thing in presenting me to the bishop as a candidate for the priesthood.

Ministry and a Move Towards Orthodoxy

I was ordained an Episcopal priest in 1988 and, not long after, I took a position as the chaplain of an all-boys Episcopal boarding school for three years. It was a good arrangement as it provided housing on the grounds, and I had my children very nearby, but it was still seventy hours a week, and I was now a single mother. When I finally felt that I couldn't keep up that pace, we moved to a small house I'd bought in Ohio, and we made it a fam-

ily year. There was no television and because of this we really came together as a family. We took walks, played games, and so on. When television was gone, the children quieted down, their language improved, they weren't as materialistic, and they played together.

At that time I worked in Ohio for three small parishes, none of whom could afford a full-time priest, but who joined forces to share clergy. I was the priest in charge. We had a retired priest and deacon to assist, and we shared a secretary. This lasted for three years and was very exciting, but my heart was in teaching and I missed it, so I took a position at a very good private school in Lexington as well as doing parish ministry at the Episcopal mission in Bardstown, Kentucky.

My final position as a priest was with a small African-American congregation in Lexington, Kentucky. They called me "Mother Alice." When I arrived the average Sunday morning attendance was 26 people and when I left it was about 78. The building had been so badly neglected that they'd had to hang blankets over the broken windows in the basement, there was no central heat or air-conditioning, nor did we have room for a Sunday school. We raised the money for all of that and we also studied Genesis that year, which they loved because I brought out the Afro-Asiatic connections. Unfortunately, we also had a lot of funerals because this was an elderly congregation.

Toward the end of my third year there, the Episcopal Church decided to consecrate Gene Robinson, the first homosexual bishop. This took place on the first Sunday of November, 2003, and this was literally the last Sunday I ever stood at the altar. Although I wasn't aware of the significance of the date, as I was preoccupied with the great change in my own life at laying down the Episcopal priesthood, I believe it wasn't a coincidence that I left on that day. I feel that the Lord brought this about, as it saved me a lot of pain. Many of my Episcopal friends and fellow-priests and deacons have struggled on and on trying to reclaim some right belief, but it hasn't worked. All of them have suffered and so have their families.

RTE: When did you begin moving towards Orthodoxy?

ALICE: I had always leaned towards Orthodoxy, but I didn't know it. For example, although in most Episcopal churches the altar had been turned around to face the people, I had developed a practice of facing east with my back to the congregation when I served. Then, in the Book of Common Prayer, we had an option to do the *Kyrie Eleison* or the *Trisagion*. I did something rather un-

usual with this in my parishes: we did the *Kyrie Eleison* during Lent, and the *Trisagion* for the rest of the liturgical year. For me, it fit the liturgical cycle. I didn't know that this was Orthodox practice. Also, in the American Book of Common Prayer there are four possible Eucharistic prayers (A, B, C and D). Although I didn't realize it then, Eucharistic Prayer D is clearly based on the liturgy of the Eastern Church, and this was the prayer I always used. My intuition about the liturgy was already taking me towards Orthodoxy.

RTE: Looking back now as an Orthodox Christian who no longer accepts the ordination of women as priests, what do you think happened when you performed the liturgy?

ALICE: Frankly, I don't know. All I can say is that God would not fail to meet the needs of those who come to Him. I still pray that my ignorance was not an obstacle for these people. No, it wasn't the Body and Blood of Christ, because there wasn't a priest serving. And technically no, Christ was not in our midst. But I don't believe that Christ fails us because I failed.

As an aside, around the same time it became clear to me that I would have to leave the priesthood, the new commandant at the Millersburg Military Institute near Lexington asked me to bless the old plantation house, the school's administration building and commandant's residence. It was about 180 years old, and had been haunted for as long as anyone could remember. The previous commandant's family had been plagued by weird nightly noises, and the new commandant wanted the house blessed before he and his wife moved in. I had done many house blessings over the years, including some that involved ridding houses of spirits, and my experience was that only when Communion was celebrated in that place or when it was brought in, did the prayers have any effect at all.

When I went into the house that day, over my vestments I was wearing a crucifix made out of clay, which had been brought to me from Peru by a dear Hispanic friend. I held the cross while I was saying my preparatory prayers, and I said, "Lord, you know, this may be the very last time I stand at the altar as a priest, but whatever happens with me, this place needs Your intervention. Please come." As I stood holding the cross and praying, not applying any pressure to it, the crucifix all of a sudden broke in my hand. I began to weep and said, "It is through Your broken Body that all things are made, and it is only through Your Blood that we have life. I trust that You will take care of this, it's not about me." The commandant, his wife, and a few of the

school's Christian staff were attending the blessing, and we used the Episcopal liturgy. That was the last time I celebrated as a priest. I got through it, but it was very difficult. With His broken body in my hand, it was bittersweet, but also very reassuring to know that the Lord was there.

RTE: You knew then that this was the end of your Episcopal priesthood?

ALICE: Yes, I had a very definitive sense that His body was broken for me, and that I was released from the priestly vows I had made. In other words, the Lord Himself broke the bond, not my bishop. God Himself released me.

The other thing I need to add is that, through all of those years, I had had doubts about the priesthood. It was like a suit that didn't fit right. But at those times when the suit didn't seem to fit, I didn't have anyone to talk to about it. During the last decade of my ministry, however, I'd had a prophetic dream in which I was vested and in a clerical procession with the bishop in front (which is not normally the way a procession forms; the bishop comes behind the clergy). But in my dream he was in front, he was my "head". As we processed, a luminous pearl suddenly appeared in the air beside me. I knew that this was my heart's desire, the pearl of great price, but in order to take hold of it, I had to leave the procession of priests and walk away, turning my back to the bishop.

RTE: So, although you didn't have anyone to talk to, the Lord himself brought you to this decision. Did you have any regrets about leaving the priesthood?

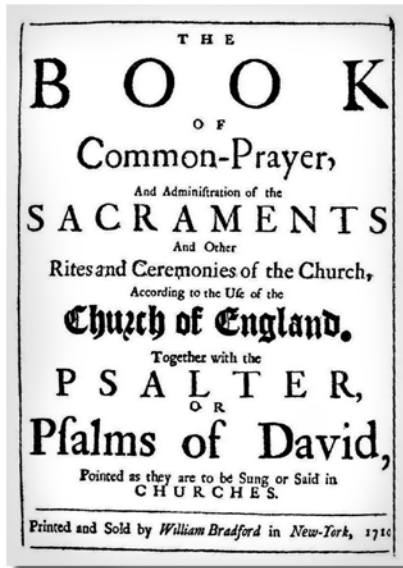
ALICE: No regrets. Now that I understand Holy Tradition, I see how damaging the ordination of women is because it creates even more confusion. I deeply regret that I contributed to that greater confusion about the priesthood. Fundamentally, the issue is not about women. It's about the nature of the priesthood.

The Legacy of the Book of Common Prayer

RTE: Before we talk about the nature of the priesthood, may I ask what positive things you were able to bring to Orthodoxy from your Anglican experience?

ALICE: I have high admiration even to this day for the true Book of Common Prayer, the one before the 1979 Episcopal Church version. I once did an in-

depth study of every edition of the Book of Common Prayer, from 1549 up to the American 1979 version. I compared everything: the ordination service, baptism, Eucharist, intercessory prayers, the funeral service, the pastoral offices. There is minimal change from 1549 to 1928, usually just word order, or a prayer moved from one Sunday to another, but when you get to the American



1979 prayer book you have a totally different book with heterodox theology.

The Episcopal Church changed everything, even discarding the matins service (or rather disregarding it—it's still in the book, but almost no one does it now). Today's Episcopalians often don't know this because they aren't cradle Episcopalians, and they didn't start with the 1928 edition. The earlier generations of Episcopalians wouldn't have dreamt of attending liturgy without Morning Prayer first. This new service book is still called *The Book of Common Prayer*, but it shouldn't be, as it's a completely different book—flavorless and lacking spiritual integrity.

My appreciation of the older editions of the Book of Common Prayer is what brought me to appreciate the liturgies of St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil.

Nevertheless, I was book-bound when I was an Episcopalian; every Episcopal congregation follows the services with the book open. Now in Orthodoxy, I never use a book. Once I became Orthodox I understood, “You don't need a book. The liturgy is an organism. The services are totally integrated and woven of one fabric. What are you worried about? Just stand here and live it and breathe it. Don't worry about the book.”

Actually, I'm not convinced that I'm bringing anything good from Anglicanism except that it gives me a perspective on how good Orthodoxy is. That, I think, is the truth.

RTE: Yet Anglicanism was a step along your way towards Orthodoxy.

ALICE: Yes, it was one step closer to home. And for a while it felt like home. After I became Orthodox, someone said to me, “Alice, you know there is a lot

of Anglicanism left in you.” I said, “Well, I was Anglican for a very long time, but there's not enough Anglican in me to take me back to that church.”

When I came into Orthodoxy I felt, “Ah, I can breathe here.” It was like stepping out of a stale smoke-filled environment onto the top of a mountain where fresh breezes were blowing and as far as I could see was sun and blue sky. That's the difference. The expansiveness and freedom of Orthodoxy.

Women and the Priesthood

RTE: If someone asks you now why women can't be priests, what is your answer?

ALICE: It's very simple. Ontologically, women aren't priests. You can give something a name, but that doesn't make it fact. When the Episcopal Church chose to call me “priest,” that didn't make me a priest. When humans name something, that doesn't produce an ontological change. Only God's Word can do that and God's Word never contradicts itself. This is not to say that women can't provide good ministry in the church. Certainly, biblical history and the witness of women saints show that God uses women in leadership in the church. But never as priests.

Interestingly, the very first Episcopalian woman priest was a Chinese woman, Florence Li Tim-Oi, who was ordained in Hong Kong in 1944. The reason that they ordained her was because all of the Episcopalian priests had been imprisoned after the Japanese invasion. Since the Japanese occupation authorities knew that women couldn't be priests, the Episcopal Church ordained her so that she could travel around surreptitiously taking Communion to people. That was their reasoning during a time of persecution, and it was not their intent for this to become a movement. It was an exception.

RTE: I remember that C.S. Lewis wrote a letter to Dorothy Day, asking her to speak out against the ordination. He didn't feel his protest would be as effective because he was a man.

ALICE: The liberal swing began in the 20's. By the 30's, it had become apparent and by the 40's, it was very evident. C.S. Lewis was watching his church



Florence Li Tim-Oi,
first Anglican woman
priest, 1944.

lose ground to modernism and many ideas that were going to undermine Holy Tradition. He was quite clearly fighting that battle. He would have liked to have enlisted Dorothy Sayers, there's no question about it, but Dorothy was fighting her own battle against the patronizing attitudes of the time against women academics and writers. She'd had her fill of it. Since then, the horizons of the Episcopal and Anglican churches have actually shrunk, and today's possibilities for women are even more limited—it is clerically top-heavy and women are only seen as potential deacons or priests.

The ordination of Florence Li Tim-Oi was later used to advance the political agenda of gay activists. When I was in the Episcopal Church they would say things like, "This is God doing a new thing. The first woman priest was Chinese, the first woman bishop is African-American (Barbara Harris)." You can see that this is all about the Civil Rights Movement. They've cast the priesthood as a civil right, and that right should extend even to the sexually impure. It shows how far removed they are from Holy Tradition.

In other words, the Episcopal Church threw out the binary distinctions that frame the biblical worldview: male-female, heaven-earth, holy-profane.... They're throwing out whatever they don't like. It doesn't matter what God says, or that this is the order of creation. "We are going to create our own church, we're going to write our own liturgy, and we are going to do what we think is right." That's why I started to investigate the whole question of women priests.

RTE: You know, in traveling to small English and Welsh villages with ancient churches named after pre-schism saints, whose walls or foundations are often part of original 6th- to 10th-century monastic sites, I've found time and again that the churches that have women vicars (over half of the priests in the Church of England are now women), also usually have a newly painted icon of their pre-schism patron saint. Often these women tell us that they have started a prayer-group in the name of the saint, and will even talk about healings that have occurred through these prayers. They seem interested in recovering their tradition. Do you think that this might lead them back?

ALICE: It does appear that they are seeking Holy Tradition—which is the Church's natural worldview—but until they come to grips with what the priesthood is, they won't get there. I'm worried about the Church of England now because of the large percentage of women priests. Even though they are doing some good things, the evidence indicates that when you have pre-

dominantly female leadership in the church, the men disappear. There's no question about it. The only men who stick around are either gay, or men who feel that they are being very progressive and with the times by being there to support women in those roles. Thus, you don't have your strongest, most masculine and assertive men (in a godly way) hanging in there.

RTE: And I imagine that participation in practices like confession would drop off dramatically among men in parishes with women priests.

ALICE: Yes. Although I made confession regularly available (which is rare in the Episcopal Church), I can count on one hand how many people took advantage of this over eighteen years.

RTE: How then do you address this premise that women's orders are valid?

ALICE: Evangelical Anglicans say, "We are going to have women priests, because this is not an issue of first priority—it doesn't touch on salvation." I would argue with that, because the priesthood is at the heart of tradition, and there is only one priesthood. It is the messianic priesthood of Jesus Christ, and every priest stands as an icon of that priesthood. He is a priest only by virtue of Christ being The Priest. There is only one Blood, the Blood of Jesus Christ, and one priesthood. The Blood of Jesus Christ is not only the Blood that saves on Calvary, but it's the same Blood that was from the beginning the source of all life. If my salvation is totally dependent upon the person of Jesus Christ, the great High Priest, then don't tell me that having women priests is a secondary issue that doesn't touch on salvation. It doesn't make sense to pretend that the priesthood is somehow divorced from salvation. It is tied to right Christology, as is our salvation.

RTE: How would this fit with your thoughts on God's boundaries, the order of creation, and binary oppositions?

ALICE: The order of creation helps us to understand what God wants from us; where the boundaries are set. The priestly office has boundaries too.

As we consider the boundaries in the created order we see that these are marked by binary opposites: night and day, the heavens and the earth, the seas and dry land, male and female Only once we are aware of these opposites, can we begin to consider what is in the middle, the Presence at the sacred center. In Holy Tradition and throughout the Bible, the sacred center is where God and man meet. But we can't think about what's in the middle if



we don't know where the middle is, and we can't detect the middle without keeping the binary distinctions in sight. Even physically, we are created this way—we have a bicameral brain, a right hand and a left hand, right eye and left eye, and so on. There is a reason for this and we are going to understand so much more when Christ appears and we are able to get answers for much that is hidden. But even now, many of the things that seem hidden are not so mysterious once we look through the right lens. I think that Genesis is a good place to start because it helps us to understand the order of creation, the reality in which we live.

The Paradox of Feminism

RTE: How do you view the women's movement now, especially within Christianity?

ALICE: As a lawyer's daughter, I worked against the passing of the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970's because I felt it was a shoddy piece of legislation. Another problem for me is that feminists have taken a lot of Marxist principles on board. I'm always suspicious of Marxist-socialist thought, and of that trajectory of political philosophy. More people have been murdered under the banner of Marxism in the 20th century than by any other ideology—from Russia to Spain and Greece, from South America to North Africa.

RTE: I recently met a woman who said, "I get very irritated with feminism because instead of allowing me to be this wonderful thing that God has created, it forces me to evaluate myself and everything I do through the prism of manhood. If I'm not doing the same thing as a man, I'm somehow not good enough. I've been put into a little box of manhood and told that I have to stretch myself to fill it."

ALICE: Yes. It is tedious to feel we have to measure ourselves against men. If as a feminist you are always fighting against men, then you are also only pre-occupied with men and with men's power, and that's not what real power is anyway. Feminism is one of the ideologies that clearly runs counter to Holy Tradition. Its premise is not based on historical reality. I did a workshop for Orthodox women last fall, and my topic was *The Paradox of Feminism*. In that workshop I tried to help people understand the real roots of feminism. Feminists always attack the Church and they attack St. Paul in particular, saying that the Church is oppressive and St. Paul is a misogynist.

I decided that if this were true, there should be some historical evidence from when Christianity became the official religion. So I looked at the Justinian code, the first official Christian legal and ethical system, to see if it provided some historical support for the feminist view that the Church oppresses women. What I found was exactly the opposite. The Justinian code forbade fathers from selling their daughters into slavery. It gave women some political authority—they could actually rule. It decreed that when a man died intestate, that his family did not automatically lose their property. It gave permission to slave holders to free their slaves. (There had been restrictions on doing so before.) It eliminated polygyny, the practice of having two or multiple wives. (Polygamy is the general term for multiple spouses). It also eliminated infanticide, which was completely gone from the Roman Empire in 200 years. This really takes a lot of wind out of the sails of feminists who say that the Church oppresses women. There is no evidence whatsoever and, in fact, the situation of women greatly improved.

So then I asked, “Where did these 20th-century feminists get this idea that Christianity is so terrible?” Actually, they got it from 19th- and 20th-century western philosophers, primarily from people like Schopenhauer, who didn’t like women very much, and Nietzsche, who was clearly a misogynist. He’s the one who wrote all sorts of terrible things about women, but laid them at the feet of the priesthood. He said, “Christianity is a religion for weaklings, for priests, and for old women.” This was the kind of thing he often wrote, trying to blame his anti-women views on Christianity. The feminists just gobbled that right up, but it wasn’t Christianity at all, it was a very sick world-view. (Literally sick—many people now believe that Nietzsche was suffering from advanced syphilis and accompanying dementia.)

So the feminists don’t get their arguments from the Church at all, nor do they get them from St. Paul, whom they quote out of context as saying, “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak,” (I Cor. 14:34), completely ignoring the verse where the apostle says, “But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head...” (I Cor. 11: 5). In both of these passages St. Paul is using the order of creation to locate the proper boundaries for women in the assembly, but he is not saying that women have nothing to offer the Church. Feminists pick from St. Paul only what they feel will justify their anger against the Church.

So, when I finished writing this—it was quite a lengthy piece of research—I

thought, “You know what the real issue is? The real issue is that these women are hurt. They are trying to muster up some kind of moral courage by laying all the world’s wrongs at the feet of men. Their rhetoric is full of righteous indignation, but it’s really that they are hurt and they need love, and the Church has failed to love them.” We are stuck with feminism until the Church is willing to find a way to reach out to these women. It’s not going to be pleasant because they don’t like the Church or its leaders and see us through their pre-conceived ideas, but if we don’t try, there will be another generation that will perpetuate these lies.

I’m somewhat of an intellectual person, so I have a tendency to approach people through reason and historical evidence. But that’s not what they want. They just want someone to love them. A strident feminist is a hard person to approach, and these angry hurt women will probably try to hurt you if you do try to love them. You just have to wait for God’s moment and pray that He will help.

But isn’t that the answer for everyone we meet? To love them and put ourselves aside enough to be there for them. Even just listening to someone speak about their life for a half hour is a good thing.

RTE: Even among Orthodox women, I’ve heard of new converts or teenagers asking, “Why is the hierarchy so male-dominated?” Or “Why can’t I be a leader in the Church?” How would you answer this?

ALICE: I would say to her, “If God has called you to come into the fullness of Orthodoxy, then you need to live in it in the joy and contentment that Holy Tradition has already set. Within those boundaries is a vastness. Consider the typology of Scripture. In the fiery furnace of Babylon, the three youths were accompanied by the Angel of the Lord, a theophany of the pre-incarnate Christ. The womb of the Holy Theotokos was like that furnace, containing the uncontainable, consuming fire of God’s Holiness. In this sense we understand the Mother of God to have held within her finite being the vastness of heaven. The words of one of the *Theotokia* praise the Virgin Mary as, “Door of Heaven, Glory of all the world, sprung forth from man, who also bare the Lord; the Song of the Bodiless Powers, and the enriching of the faithful. For she revealed herself as Heaven and the Temple of the Godhead.”

When people ask me, “How could you become Orthodox? There’s nothing for women to do in Orthodoxy,” I say, “Are you kidding? If you want nothing for women, go to the Episcopal Church—there is nothing for them

except to be a priest or deacon.” There are amazing opportunities in Orthodoxy that women don’t have in other places—you can teach in the Church, you can have a monastic life, and you can even live as a hermit if you choose. Perhaps we’re a little disorganized and some of our clergy aren’t thinking about how to encourage women in their talents, but the opportunity to serve Christ in the Church is there. Also, there is greater reverence for women in Orthodoxy. One side of our parish church is entirely dedicated to icons of the Theotokos. Several times in the liturgy we sing to the Theotokos. We talk a lot about the women saints, we remember the holy myrrh-bearing women. You aren’t going to find that anywhere else.

We tend to be so individualistic in America. The fact that a young Orthodox woman must struggle with these questions by herself suggests that there’s been a breakdown of community. We would do well to have the older women really nurturing the younger women in our parishes. Instead, the older women often have their group, and the teenagers have their group. That is not the biblical model. The biblical model is what St. Paul described, when he said, “Older women teach the younger women.” When a younger woman can be mentored by an older woman who has struggled with some of these questions herself, has learned about juggling family, job, and parish responsibilities, and has the advantage of a few years of maturity, that girl is going to benefit enormously. She will understand that she is not being oppressed, ignored, or marginalized.

The other side of that is, when in history have 18 year-olds ever been given leadership? Yet a lot of young people now think that they have that coming—the entitlement mentality. So there’s a lot going on here: a breakdown in community, not following the pattern to which the apostle points, segregating into age groups, and an entitlement attitude, which children learn from their parents.

I find that if I take the time to sit down and talk to the girls at the high school where I teach, outside of class, I can talk to them as fellow human beings, and this always leads to opportunities to talk about things that are on their minds.

RTE: And where there is true holiness, in man or woman, everyone flecks to it.

ALICE: And that’s the nature of our life in the Church—people responding to the Lord, and He being able to work through them. And it shouldn’t be

surprising. Deborah was a great judge in Israel. Huldah was consulted by the king and his chief priests. We have these examples of God using women in the Old Testament as judges, counselors and teachers. God is the same yesterday, today and forever, and if God used women among His holy people then, He will use women in His holy Church now, especially if they’ve prepared themselves to serve Him in humility and purity of heart.

RTE: Many men speak with great reverence about what their mothers or grandmothers taught them, and this also holds true for the monks on Mt. Athos, who don’t have contact with women yet are deeply dedicated to the Mother of God and the women saints. I also remember some years ago, when most of the monks of one of Russia’s largest monasteries went regularly for guidance, with their abbot’s blessing, to a lay-eldress in a nearby village.

ALICE: There is something here about the opposites attracting—it may be the need to have the binary opposite to help clarify the picture, to bring it into focus. That’s why women must be women and men, men. Reality includes both and they supplement each other in such a way that if you take one away, you take away a piece of reality.

RTE: I’ve often wondered if western feminism has its roots in the loss of the veneration of the Mother of God and women saints in the Protestant churches. When the Protestants broke so radically with tradition, a sort of metaphysical ceiling was put in place that must be very stifling. Do you remember Chesterton’s remark? “God’s greatest gift to mankind was Himself, and man’s greatest gift to God was a woman.” When we lose that, we’ve lost a major cross-bearing.

ALICE: I agree that when Protestantism became so removed from Holy Tradition it did great damage to the spirit of women. Protestant women have very little to rejoice about in their tradition. They’ve had to substitute it with really paltry teachings, such as the “headship principle,”—women can teach women, but they can’t teach men—and all of these strange ideas have distorted their view of Christianity. Many Roman Catholics are also losing touch with tradition, and the Episcopal Church is extremely out of touch. If you have a presiding bishop who says that Jesus Christ is only one of many ways to God, you have to face it—this is apostasy. He’s not even Christian. It’s getting so that there aren’t many places anymore where you can step into the stream.

When I first came to talk to my priest about possibly becoming Orthodox, he asked me, “Why would you want to become Orthodox?” I said, “Father, I want to step into the stream.”

Ethics, The Order of Creation and God’s Boundaries

RTE: Alice, what are you doing now?

ALICE: When I left the ordained ministry, I thought I was going to be able to take it easier, but I’ve never worked harder in my life. I now have two full-time jobs. On the college level I teach Ethics, Critical Thinking, Philosophy, World Religions and Organizational Management, and I also teach Spanish full-time at a Christian high school. In two weeks, I’m going to start teaching a college course on women in the Bible. Although I don’t purposefully talk about Orthodoxy, it is so integrated into my approach that often people pick up on it and ask a leading question. So it always comes up.

I also have my thirty-two years of on-going research with the Book of Genesis, and I manage three blogs: *Just Genesis*; an ethics blog; and a blog where creative writing students publish their work. The ethics blog takes about two hours a day to keep up because I have to continually search out new sources. I can’t get balanced news on ethical topics if I just go to the American mainstream news, so this is a place where my college students can get news about ethical issues from around the world. The creative writing blog, “Students Publish Here” has students’ work from all over the world, and I also provide lesson plans for teachers of creative writing.

Just Genesis is the most demanding. It involves original research and sometimes takes as much as a week and a half to get something new up. For instance, I’ve just finished a piece on *Thomas Hobbs and the Order of Creation*, about how Hobbs created tremendous problems for us in the West with his idea of the Social Contract, which was completely cut off from the order of creation, and which fed into our American Constitution.

I have to say, though, that I’ve never been so fulfilled and so content, as if these clothes were made for my frame. People from around the world read essays posted at *Just Genesis*—hundreds a day from Singapore, the Philippines, Russia, Bosnia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Israel, many African nations, Central and South America, the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain. This week more than 32% of the readership was from outside the U.S.

RTE: What have you come to about gender from your study of Genesis?

ALICE: A book I wrote on ethics begins, not with ancient Greece, but with the earliest known human communities. If you start there you get a very different picture than if you start with Plato and Aristotle. When you start with ancient tribal peoples you discover that ethics is about recognizing and respecting boundaries. Everything was about boundaries for earliest man. They had to know where they were, so they had to track east to west with the sunrise. They separated men from women for various activities and work, and they based this separation on the observation of nature. So women cooked and tended the children and the garden, and men hunted, waged war, and sat in council. Some things, such as the harvest, might be done together, because both men and women were needed to get the job done. Still they never lost sight of the supplementary binary oppositions—like night-day, east-west, hot-cold. All of their ethical considerations were determined by their understanding of the order of creation. The biblical worldview preserves this framework, and this is one reason that we know that the material in Genesis is very old.

That is really what ethics is—recognizing where the boundaries are that God has already established and respecting them. We like to think that we create the boundaries, that we are moving things. (That’s what Thomas Hobbs does.) But we’re not. Our job on this earth is to discover the boundaries that God has already established and to respect them. In fact, Satan has done a really good job at blurring the binary distinctions, and as soon as you don’t know where the sign-posts are, you’re lost. It’s no wonder we’re lost.

I myself am a Platonist—I don’t believe that anything in the natural order changes. The order of creation is fixed. When I sow corn I harvest corn, not apricots. When I sow wheat I harvest wheat, not frogs. I don’t agree with everything Plato says, but I think he is right in that there is something eternal and unchanging, and we recognize it because it is planted in our soul. That is a good place to start in sorting out the confusion caused by modern ideologies such as convergence evolution, in which everything changes randomly.

RTE: Speaking of Plato and ethics, have you ever noticed how Greeks especially seem able to circumvent this modern blurring of reality? I’ve known Greeks who appear to be real materialists, completely caught up in modern culture, who suddenly make a 180 degree turn and come to you with a story about a saint appearing to them. They seem to be able to stand in both worlds. Is this because they have a long heritage of Orthodoxy?

ALICE: That, and because they are heirs to the classical Greek metaphysical heritage. If you can hold Plato and Aristotle in dialectical tension, then that allows you to be materialistic, even greedy, but at the same time open to the eternal forms and to the eternal unchanging reality of God. Actually, a close Orthodox friend has had that experience with Greek women on retreat. She said, “Oh Alice, they are all about the newest car and the Gucci handbag, and at the same time there is such real spiritual depth when we talk about the saints and the Theotokos.”

Just as the Greeks have retained inner ties to their own philosophical heritage, I also have a Native American friend who is the chief of the Leni-Lanape, a tribe from southern Delaware, who once said to me about boundaries, “All tribal peoples understand this. If I were talking to tribal people they would just say, ‘Yes, of course,’ but when you talk to modern western people about this, they think you are crazy. In the beginning when God made the tribes, He gave us all our own piece of land. Everything was good as long as we maintained our boundaries and respected what the Creator had done. But as soon as we started to covet more land or possessions, this was the cause of all war and turmoil.”

Ethics students, however, have a hard time learning this—that ethics is about discovering divinely-established boundaries and respecting them. Once you understand this you will think clearly, you won’t be disoriented. Satan won’t be able to fool you as long as you have those fixed points clear in your mind. The Scriptures speak a good deal about the evil of violating boundaries. In Hosea 5:11 God warns, “The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound: [therefore] I will pour out my wrath upon them like water.” And in Proverbs 23:10 we read, “Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless...”

These boundaries also serve as measurements of God’s mercy. Psalm 103:12 tells us, “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” This biblical view of boundaries extended even to who the ruler was permitted to marry. The marriage pattern of rulers among Abraham’s people never changed. It is a consistent pattern from Genesis 4 to the genealogical information found in the New Testament. This is so that the Promised Son, the Messiah, would be born to the line to which God had first made the promise of salvation. This is one of the findings of my Genesis research.

Our problem is that we don’t understand that binary oppositions—night:day, light:darkness, heaven:earth, sea:land, are supplementary and that they constitute Reality. When I speak of binary oppositions as being supplementary, rather than complementary, I am following Jacques Derrida¹, a brilliant North African, Arabic-speaking, Jewish philosopher, who said that these oppositions are supplementary because one is unknowable without the other. Night is known because it is unlike day. Derrida recognized that the philosophical project in the West had thrown out Plato and turned Aristotle into a 20th century empiricist. He understood that we can’t have one without the other, and that we can’t get anywhere in western philosophy without restoring the binary supplementarity.

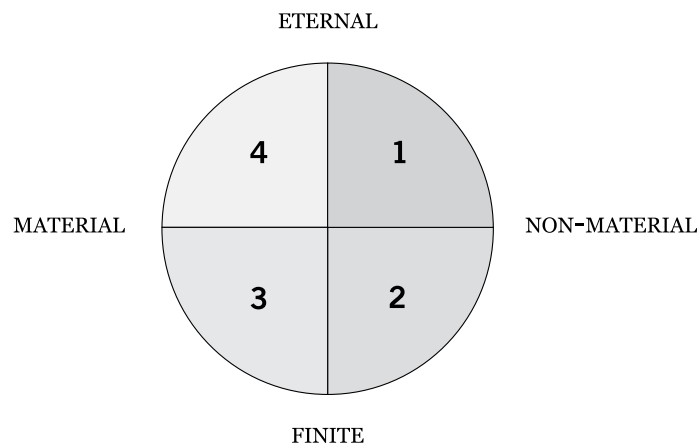
Derrida is often referred to as the father of deconstructionism. Many people think that he showed that there was no absolute meaning or truth, but this was exactly *not* what he did. He had fun deconstructing meaning to see what other layers might lie under the conventional interpretations, but Derrida’s argument is that in examining binary opposition and reversals, deconstruction brings to light traces of meaning that cannot be said to be present, but which *must* have metaphysical existence. This is not a new idea or a new approach to meaning. It is consistent with the mystical approaches of the Semitic peoples. In a real sense, Derrida’s contribution to western philosophy has been to re-introduce the Semitic interpretive approach to meaning. He maintained that binary opposites indicate that there is something in the middle, at the core, that is called different names—God, metaphysics, Logos—but we can be sure that there is something in the middle and it is fixed and eternal.

It will be decades before people recognize that he wasn’t just a buffoon having fun pulling texts apart, but that he actually was pointing us back to the center. Because of his Afro-Asiatic background Derrida could look at philosophy in the West and say, “Gosh, you guys have reached a dead end. You have to rediscover the binary opposites.”

Ephraim the Syrian did almost exactly the same thing. He interprets Scripture with the Semitic understanding of binary opposites. There is meaning in this tension between the opposites, but when we throw them out, we end up with meaninglessness, which is exactly what has happened to modern man.

¹ Jacques Derrida (1930-2004): French philosopher, born in Algeria, who is known as the founder of deconstructionism. His work had a profound impact upon literary theory and continental philosophy. Derrida’s best known work is *Of Grammatology*.

This is one reason that I believe we need Orthodox schools, where we can prepare our students to argue for the fullness of this view of creation—an Orthodox worldview. I try to explain to my students that they need to be prepared to defend the Faith with perhaps 80% of the professors they will have in college. They need to understand that most of these teachers will be able to think only of material finite things as real. They will not be able to see that Reality is what happens in the Cross, at the intersection of the eternal and the finite and the material and the spiritual. I use a diagram to help them consider what Reality looks like, and it is Cross-shaped.



Here we notice that the eternal and the finite are binary opposites, and that the material and non-material are binary opposites. This gives us an image of Reality that can only be expressed by a cross. Or we should say The Cross. This is reality, but the worldview of most western people encompasses only quadrant 3, that is, they see as real only what is material and finite. We call these people ‘empiricists’ and it is evident that they view only one-quarter of reality. The only way you can view all of reality is to hold to the Cross in the center.

RTE: What kinds of people would hold the other quarters?

ALICE: Well, for example, Gnosticism emphasizes only the non-material and the infinite, denigrating the material and finite which God created and pronounced “good”. The Gnostic view of reality is limited to quadrant 1. When people reject the eternal soul and the truth of Christ’s Incarnation they func-

tion in the finite-material quadrant 3, as empiricists. If they claim to be “spiritual” and believe in non-material entities, but reject Jesus as God Incarnate, they are probably romantics whose deity is Nature. Romanticism emphasizes the beauty of the material world and tends to think of Nature as eternal, and this would be represented by quadrant 4. The Romantic glorifies nature and largely ignores the distinction between creation and the Creator.

Now, the Orthodox also live in quadrant 4, recognizing the truth of Job’s words: “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another.” (Job 19:25, 26). When Paul says, “And we shall rise in our bodies and we shall see Him... and we shall have bodies as His resurrected body,” that is within this material-eternal quadrant. It’s still a body.

But Orthodoxy also embraces all the quadrants as a unified whole, the fullness of Reality. This is one reason I knew that I must be Orthodox. Orthodoxy is holistic, in the true sense of that word—as it relates to the word ‘holy’. It’s impossible for a true Orthodox Christian to compartmentalize and say, “This has to do with my spiritual life only, while this has to do with real day-to-day life.”

Orthodoxy holds all of Reality in view by keeping the Incarnation and the Blood of Jesus at the center. By recognizing the binary oppositions between material and immaterial, between eternal and finite, and by keeping the cross at the center, we gain a clearer picture of Reality. When the Bible talks about these binary opposites, it is to give us the key points that we need to bring Reality into focus. That’s why people who reject scripture and Holy Tradition, can become delusional. They are unable to orient themselves to the Truth.

Genesis and the Priesthood

RTE: You’ve mentioned the nature of the priesthood several times already in this interview. Can you tell us about your research?

ALICE: I’ve published numerous essays about the priesthood at *Just Genesis* because until we understand the priesthood and these binary opposites as God-established boundaries, people will continue to think that women can be priests. Yet this is an ontological impossibility.

Anthropologically speaking, the priesthood is the oldest religious institution known. It can be traced to the earliest religious practices of the Afro-



Asiatic people, and is found only among the Afro-Asiatics whom we first meet in Genesis.

The Afro-Asiatic peoples extended from the Atlantic coast of modern day Nigeria to the Indus River valley, and all of the people who lived in that area were ruled by kings who were connected through marriage, all of whom spoke languages in the Afro-Asiatic language family. Abraham and his Horite ancestors were part of this. In fact, the evidence shows that the Horites, a tribe of priests, greatly influenced the ancient world. The biblical worldview comes to us from these people, and the priesthood was part of that worldview. Interestingly, the priesthood's origin among the ancient Afro-Asiatics is easily traced because only these peoples and those who have adopted the biblical worldview have priests. If you go to the global north or to the Americas, for example, you find shamans, but not priests.

RTE: What was the difference between shamans and priests for the pre-Christian world?

ALICE: It was very significant. Shamans and priests served the same function in their communities—they were both religious leaders who addressed guilt, anxiety and problems of bloodshed, but their worldviews were different. When murder or a transgression happened in an Afro-Asiatic community, it was the priest's responsibility to address that by blood sacrifice offered to God, and God alone restored harmony. But shamans were concerned with the spirits. They saw disharmony, bloodshed, anxiety, and guilt as the results of offending the spirits, so the shaman must perform rituals and prayers to appease the spirits. The first is a theistic worldview which requires repentance for the sacrifice to be accepted, and the second is a spiritistic worldview which requires right ritual to restore balance between the spirits of the living and the spirits of the dead.

RTE: Obviously only some of these Afro-Asiatic people were Hebrews or the ancestors of Hebrews. Were the other pre-Christian Afro-Asiatic priests then monotheistic?

ALICE: They were henotheistic, which is common with tribal peoples. Henotheism is a view that there is a supreme Creator with lesser assisting powers. They called the powers 'Baal' (Baal means "power"). But in henotheism these powers do not have authority to act except as God orders, which is where the

idea of Satan falling from heaven comes in. He rebelled against the order of creation and then inspired Eve to do the same.

We forget that Eve had a glorious high estate. She enjoyed a unique relationship with the Creator and with Adam. She was above the creatures. Now, suddenly, she listens to a creature and puts herself into subjection to



Ancient Indus River Valley carving from the time of Abraham.

a creature. She exchanges her high natural estate for something lower. St. John Chrysostom identifies this as Eve's sin. St. Paul also talks about this exchange of the natural for the un-natural, about exchanging the truth for the lie. People usually interpret this as having to do with homosexuality, but homosexuality is just one way that people exchange the natural for the unnatural. The first

sin was when Eve exchanged her high estate as a noble bride who enjoyed a trustworthy relationship with God and with a man, to listen to a creature that lives belly to the dust.

Then Adam, who was made from dust, listens to the creature too, and as a result we are told that now he will eat dust all the days of his life through his toil. So, the first sin of Satan, of Eve, and of Adam is the same sin—against the order of creation. This is why the Book of Genesis is so important. I'm convinced that if we didn't have any other book of the Bible—if for some reason all of the books of the Bible were taken away from us but we had Genesis, we would be alright, because from our perspective as Christians we can read the book of Genesis and find everything that we need. Look at this: God says "to the woman..." (and you notice she wasn't called Eve here—she isn't named until five verses later), "...Your offspring shall crush the head of the serpent."

RTE: Christ is already there.

ALICE: Yes, He's already there and this is the promise that is going to be fulfilled through the Theotokos. Christians can look at the text and see this. It's as clear as can be. So, the first promise of salvation is also in the same place

where the first sin against the order of creation takes place. The whole rest of the Book of Genesis is just working it out.

So when Evangelical Episcopalians think of the priesthood as something that developed over time they are wrong. The priesthood is extremely old. It existed before the apostles because they already knew the priesthood. It existed even before the time of Abraham, because Melchisedek represented a tradition that was already established. The Horites (Egyptian 'khar') were a tribe of priests (khar was a measurement of fuel used in burnt offerings) whose rulers were careful to marry chaste daughters of priests, and it's not a coincidence that Joseph, the first-born son of Jacob by Rachel, married Asenath, a daughter of the "priest of On" (Gen. 41:45). The intermarriage between Horite priestly lines requires that we take these words quite literally: "For me you shall be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation." (Ex. 19:6)

And when you think of the priest, you have to think of blood. You can't separate the priest from the sacred Blood of Jesus Christ. And you can't think of the Blood of Jesus as fixed in time. St. Paul speaks of the Blood in these terms: In Him all things were created, all things are made, all things are sustained. That's the *pleroma*, the Greek word meaning "the fullness of all things".

The fullness of all things is in Christ. St. Paul goes on to say that our pleromic essence is tied to the Blood of Christ, which he mentions no less than twelve times when teaching about the pleroma, and if we don't understand that connection we can slip into the Gnostic idea of the "Cosmic Christ," which is really a Hindu conception. The real Christ is the Incarnate One who shed His Blood on the Cross and on the third day rose from the grave. If you believe that St. Paul is right (and there's no reason to doubt him—he knew the Hebrew tradition better than anyone else), then Christ's Blood redeems us, and by that same Blood, all life was made possible at the beginning.

To me, this explains why thousands of years ago in the Lobombo Mountains of southern Africa they were mining red ochre, grinding it to powder and using it to bury their nobles, in the belief that their leaders would go to the Creator and intercede on their behalf. Now this practice wasn't an iso-



The Lord drawing Adam and Eve from Hades.

lated phenomenon. We've found nobles buried in this red dust in Australia, the Americas, Ireland, Czechoslovakia, and Germany. And all anthropologists agree that the red ochre dust represents blood. What they can't get their mind around is the pleromic fullness—that the Cross was both in time and out of time. So, St. Paul hinges everything on the pleromic Blood of Christ. It gave life to the world and it redeems that life. This is what the priesthood is about, and the moment you detach the priesthood from this conception, the priesthood becomes meaningless.

Also, consider the whole concept of the sacrifice of animals. We know it didn't bring salvation, so why was it the practice of God's people? Again, because it was a sign pointing to the pleromic Blood. The Old Testament prophets

kept saying, "The blood of bulls won't save you." They knew that. But the practice was there because through it people were reminded that there is One that gives life. They were looking forward to the Messiah without a clear understanding.

This is what St. Paul is talking about, and for me it is the heart of Holy Tradition. This worldview must go back to the beginning, because if it doesn't, it's not whole or holy. Genesis helps us to understand that God created this Tradition, that He sustains it, and that He breathed it from the beginning as His self-revelation. That is Holy Tradition. The saints and sacraments all point beyond themselves

to the Blood of Christ that makes us one, that births the new Kingdom, that will create the new heaven and the new earth.

This is what I'm working on in *Just Genesis*—trying to extend our understanding of Holy Tradition as Reality. This effort has completely and radically changed my life. When someone asks, "Do you really believe that stuff in the Bible?" I say, "Absolutely." When I'm asked if I think that every word in the Bible is true, I respond: "There is so much truth that we can't get our minds around it. I've spent 32 years studying just the first book—and I am blown away by how it speaks reliable truth."



Christ as the Ancient of Days.

RTE: This is a call for all of us to keep reading scripture. Since we are on the subject of sacred blood, can we bring up a corollary to it, the question of ritual impurity, and particularly the Church tradition against women receiving Holy Communion and venerating icons during their monthly cycle? Many modern western women, particularly converts in the U.S. and Europe, feel that they can safely ignore these proscriptions as outdated and unreasonable. Yet, these canons have existed from the first centuries of Christianity and are still observed in traditional Orthodox cultures where most women seem to intuitively feel that it is right to abide by them. It's our contemporary western women who sometimes have a problem with it.

ALICE: God has planted eternity in our hearts from the beginning, and we have always associated life, salvation and the renewal of life with blood. The anxiety about bloodshed is the most ancient anxiety. There are two kinds of physical bloodshed—again binary opposites—the bloodshed that pertains to males and the bloodshed that pertains to females and they are very different. The bloodshed that pertains to men has to do with war, hunting, execution, and animal sacrifice. The bloodshed that has to do with women is menstrual cycle, the blood at intercourse, and the blood at birthing. Primitive people believed that there is great power in blood, and that therefore blood had to be handled carefully. They also maintained the binary distinctions so that the blood of women could not be in the same place as the blood pertaining to men. A woman could not be present where an animal was being sacrificed, a man could not be present in the birthing hut. So, you begin to have the separation of these things. The priest was the only one called to blood work that purifies from sin, and the ritual sacrifice of animals that purifies from blood pollution.

Also, blood sometimes had to do with their work and what was their work? Men hunted, while women took care of the crops around the village. But when it came time to bring back the meat that had been hunted to the village and prepare it the women helped, and when it came time for the harvest, the men helped bring it in. So there are also areas where men and women work together, but we notice this overlap because it is the anomaly. Generally the work was distinct.

So, when we talk about binary distinctions we notice that the blood that pertains to women is life-giving. Everything about women's blood has to do with the potential for life. Whereas, when we look at what men are do-

ing with blood, it has to do with death—hunting, war, sacrifice. And life and death are opposites. We have some clues to this, when we have these odd prohibitions in the Old Testament that cause people to ask, “Why is that in Scripture?” One of them is, “You will not boil a kid in its mother’s milk.” God doesn’t want us to be confused about life and death. He wants us to have a very clear sense that “This is life-giving and that is about death.” When you boil a newborn kid in its mother’s milk, it’s...

RTE: ...something that a Satanist would do.

ALICE: Exactly. And what does Satan want to do? He wants to destroy life. And how does he do that? By blurring the boundaries, the distinctions between truth and lie, between life and death, between good and evil. In fact, by blurring all binary distinctions. The devil has convinced most of the western world that the material world is all there is to reality. We have to hold the binary distinctions in mind or we’ll be fooled by Satan. He wants us to boil the kid in its mother’s milk.

RTE: An acquaintance told me that while visiting the Hopi Indians in New Mexico a few years ago, she ignored a restriction on women attending a Hopi religious service during their cycle. Within a moment after she entered the kiva, she was asked to leave by Hopi tribesmen who had never seen her before and had no way of knowing her state.

ALICE: They would know because they are very sensitive. They sensed disbalance and knew something was wrong. These are tribal peoples, like Abraham and his people, and tribal peoples have always maintained the binary distinctions because, this is a way of honoring the Creator. You honor the Creator by respecting the boundaries the Creator has established. And keeping the bloods apart was extremely essential.

Now as to the Orthodox perspective, the liturgy is referred to as the ‘bloodless sacrifice’ which is not to say that the Blood of Christ isn’t present. When we say that, we are not denying the Body and Blood of Christ, for we do believe that we receive His Body and Blood. That is why we approach reciting the sinner’s prayer and ask that we be spared from condemnation; for the Blood of Christ brings both redemption and condemnation, as the Apostle Paul warned.

The Roman Catholic Church tends to define the Blood materialistically, which is more typical of western theology. It points to a particular moment

in the liturgy and says this is when the wine becomes His Blood. For the Orthodox, Christ’s Blood is effectual for us meta-materially or meta-physically, the way that eternity is sometimes revealed in a given time and space. In both traditions the priest stands at the altar and recites ancient words before we may receive His Body and His Blood. The two traditions are not so far apart, but approach the question from western and eastern mindsets.

RTE: Could we then say that we Orthodox believe that the bread and wine becomes the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit within the liturgy, and that the priest’s words within the act of worship provide the context for this?

ALICE: Yes, and here the Orthodox and the traditional Anglican understandings are close. For both agree that bread and wine, the action of the Holy Spirit, and the prayers offered by the priest are essential elements of the Divine Liturgy. This is one reason I was attracted to Orthodoxy; this and the strong Trinitarian language of the Faith. Then again, it takes a metaphysical way of thinking to probe the mystery of the Holy Trinity and to glimpse the eternal nature of the Blood of Christ.

The Blood of Christ is eternally and universally present, even outside the Liturgy, but in the Liturgy we come into communion with Him in an intentional way and acknowledge this when we proclaim: “Christ is in our midst.” In the very early Antiochean priests’ manuals, and perhaps the Greek and Russian as well, if for some reason a priest accidentally cuts himself while at the altar, he must immediately leave. Why? Because human blood and the Blood of Christ cannot be in the same space.

This is the most important binary distinction. It reminds us of the difference between what comes from heaven and what is of the earth. If the priest has to leave because his cut finger is bleeding, then it can only mean that His Blood is already there. The One from heaven is already there. And that is the startling aspect of the Eucharist, that Christ is in our midst, giving us His Body, His Blood.

RTE: So, if that is true for the priest having to leave because the heavenly Life is already there, that would apply to women also?

ALICE: Yes, exactly. The blood of women is distinct from the blood of men although we are both human, and the blood of the female is distinct from

the Blood of God. We can't share the same space. This is why women didn't come into the assembly during their cycle. They came afterwards. That's the pleromic Blood and there is no room for any other blood, male or female.

These restrictions are older than 2,000 years, which is proof that Christianity is not a synthetic religion. This faith that we talk about developed organically out of the human experience of God from the earliest time. These canons reflect an experience from before we had what we recognize as the Church. This means that the Church developed organically out of a tradition that is as old as humankind.

RTE: What about those who say that Christ's coming changed things? For example, after Peter's vision, Christians could eat what had previously been forbidden food, such as pork. Many women view this canon about ritual impurity on the same level and say that when Christ came, He changed and sanctified everything. Nothing is now unclean.

ALICE: His coming didn't change anything. His coming fulfilled everything. That's a really big difference. The things that people say He changed—did Jesus say anywhere, "I came to change?" In fact, nothing God made is unclean. What does Genesis say? "I give you the fruit of the trees, and now you may eat of the flesh of the animals." The rest of the food prohibitions developed later. If you go back to Genesis there is nothing there about uncleanness, but you also aren't going to find your binary distinctions spelled out in Deuteronomy or Leviticus. What you have there are priestly laws—and a priesthood that has become so self-absorbed in the layers of law that you can't find your binary distinctions. It's not that they didn't believe, they did, but they made it harder to find Christ, to find God's truth. They got hung up with the sign rather than what the sign points to.

Nowhere in Scripture do I find that Christ came to change anything that God had established. He is the fulfillment. That idea of "change" is what the Protestant churches get into when they say, "God's doing a new thing." Yes, God is always doing a new thing, but it's the same old thing. He didn't change His plan. He's got it right on track.

Working it Out

RTE: A few moments ago, when you said that the creation story is about the order of creation and the rest of Genesis is about "working it out," did you

mean working out the details of how the Hebrew people would live in a fallen world?

ALICE: Yes, and it's very deep. For instance, you have the story of Lamech bragging to his two wives: "If God avenged Cain seven times, he'll avenge me seventy times." It is very interesting to know that all of those tribal chiefs had two wives and that they physically maintained them in separate households on a north-south axis, one in a place to the north of him and one to the south. But Lamech, unlike all of the others, had them living on an east-west axis, which meant that he set himself up as God, because the sun's journey from east to west was regarded as God's territory. This is why their names are Adah "dawn" and T-zilla, "dusk". He had set himself up as God and in his mind this justified killing someone.

St. John Chrysostom is the only one who got this story right. He says, "Yes, Lamech was a sinner, yes, a braggart, and yes, a murderer, but he is claiming God's grace, and if he confesses his sin, God will bless him." Lamech did confess, and God did bless him. And the proof of this is that when you trace his lineage through the "begets", you find that from Lamech eventually comes Noah. Lamech's daughter Naamah married her cousin Methuselah, and she named their firstborn son Lamech after her father. That Lamech (the Younger) was Noah's father. This means that while Cain's line is often regarded as cursed, the descendents of Cain married into the line from which the Messiah would come. Here we have yet another example of God's kindness to sinners.

Saint John Chrysostom didn't have my genealogical diagrams, but he knew this because he knew his Bible and he knew the nature of God's mercy. He is one of the greatest Bible expositors of the Church. You can tell that most other commentators are wrong because their explanations don't fit the text, but when you read Chrysostom, it's crystal clear. He absolutely nailed it. Today, most people read Protestant-influenced commentaries, which don't align with a lot of what St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil the Great understood about the Scripture. They were much closer to it. They knew Holy Tradition and Scripture and never pitted one against the other in their sermons.

Another example of how things work so beautifully in Scripture is the "begets". I sat down as a skeptic, thinking that genealogical information in Genesis 4 and 5 wouldn't hold up anthropologically, but because I have a background in kinship analysis, I decided to tackle it. I sat down, diagrammed

the names, and when I did the analysis I thought, “Oh, my heavens! This is an authentic kinship pattern. Look at this. You have parallel cousin marriage—the cousin brides are naming their firstborn sons after their own fathers. It’s consistent all the way through.” You can’t make up an authentic kinship pattern—you can’t write it back into a text centuries later. Somebody couldn’t have written the Book of Genesis, say, two thousand years ago, and made up these “begats”. If these persons named in the Genesis genealogies were not historical, it would be impossible for me to analyze the diagrams and find an authentic kinship pattern.



Lake Chad.

RTE: For us non-anthropologists, what do you mean by an authentic kinship pattern?

ALICE: Kinship patterns have to do with right marriages (especially for rulers), line of descent, and the naming of children (especially first-born sons). Kinship patterns are as unique as

signatures. So, when you analyze a kinship pattern and identify its characteristics, you may also be able to identify where this kinship pattern comes from. When I analyzed the kinship pattern of Abraham’s people in Genesis, I discovered that the lines of Cain and Seth intermarried and that the cousin brides named their first-born sons after their fathers.

This pattern is consistent all the way through Genesis. Rulers maintained two wives in separate households on a north-south axis. One wife was a half-sister wife (as Sarah was to Abraham), and the other was a patrilineal cousin (as Keturah was to Abraham). Only the cousin bride named her first-born son after her father. That’s a very unique pattern, found only in west central Africa around the region of Lake Chad, the Jos Plateau of Nigeria, and in Cameroon.

So then I started looking to see if there was any evidence that Abraham’s ancestors came from that part of the world. Once I started to look in the right place, the pieces of the puzzle fell into place. Did you know that there is only one place in the world that claims to be the homeland of Noah? It’s called Bornu (Land of Noah) and it is near Lake Chad. So then I thought, “I wonder if I can find some of the place names like Enoch and Cain in that area.” Sure

enough! “Noch”, which is the African form of “Enoch” is the oldest site of metal-working in Africa, and directly north of there is the city of Kano, which is the African form of the word Cain.

Notice again—a north-south axis. All of these chiefs maintained their wives on a north-south axis, as did Abraham, who had Sarah up in Hebron and Keturah, his cousin-wife, in Beersheba to the south. Likewise, Terah, Abraham’s father, maintained two wives, one north in Haran and the other south in Ur. By strictly adhering to this kinship pattern, these priest-rulers made it possible for us to trace the lineage of Jesus Christ and to know that He is indeed the fulfillment of God’s promises.

I’m not making this up. God has preserved the information in Genesis and if it weren’t a true genealogy, we couldn’t reconstruct it using the science of kinship analysis.

So, when people ask, “Why do you believe this is God’s word?” I say, “Don’t ask me how, because I don’t know, but God has superintended this text through centuries of time—remember it wasn’t a book until relatively recent history. Before that it was on scrolls, and before that it was passed orally from generation to generation. The only possible way we could end up with something we can verify through sophisticated science is if God superintended this information through thousands and thousands of years, which is exactly what He did.”

This is what my thirty-two years of research has been about, and it was through it that I realized, “I want to step in the stream, a stream so ancient that it flows from the dawn of time, when God first said, ‘Let there be Light!’”

The farther I went into Genesis, the more I realized that there is only one expression of Christianity on earth today that represents this stream, and that is Orthodoxy. Everyone else has diverted parts of the stream here or there, but I want to be in the stream, not in a tributary. It was Genesis that made me realize that Orthodoxy is the stream. ✦

Readers may access Alice Linsley’s Genesis research here:
<http://jandyongenesis.blogspot.com>

Her essay The Paradox of Feminism may be read here:
<http://www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=7885>