



Saint Catherine's Vision
Building Up the Body of Christ

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCTOBER 20, 2018

Memory Eternal:
Reflections on the Witness of Professor Evangelos Theodorou
Distinguished Theologian,
Educator and Advocate for the Ministry of Women

Presvytera Dr. Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald

Earlier this week, the heavenly realm received the soul of the faithful servant of God, Professor Evangelos Theodorou. Distinguished, *Emeritus* Professor of the University of Athens School of Theology, he also served as a theological faculty member of the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki. His accomplishments of service in theological education, included teaching, serving as dean on both faculties, representing the Church of Greece at international theological consultations, including the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. He has also served as the Editor of the noteworthy periodical, *Theologia* and other journals.

An authority in liturgical theology, from the 1940s, he pioneered Orthodox historiography regarding the ordination of deaconesses. His research led to the publication of two seminal studies on this topic.¹ He was an honored presenter at the 1988 Pan-Orthodox Rhodes Symposium on Women. This historic international event unanimously recommended the expansion of the ministries of women in the laity, including the rejuvenation of the entire diaconate, male and female. He was subsequently honored in 2015 by the School of Theology of the Aristotelian University for almost seventy years of work on this topic. Professor Theodorou also served as an advisor and co-author of the *Call for the Rejuvenation of the Ministry of the Ordained Deaconess* by Saint Catherine's Vision (SCV).²

His Eminence, Metropolitan Serafim (Kykotis) of Zimbabwe affirms that, "*His influence will bless the Church for many generations to come! Professor Theodorou mentored countless persons now serving around the world within the life of the Church as hierarchs, clergy, monastics, lay-theologians and professors of theology, including, me. Most recently, he served as an advisor for the Holy Patriarchate of Alexandria's decision to proceed judiciously, yet resolutely, with the establishment of this ordained ministry for the Church in Africa, taking place in the not-too-distant future. We give thanks to God that the late Prof. Evangelos Theodorou became the divine instrument to play a very unique role for the miracle of the restoration of the ordination of women as*

¹ Available on www.saintcatherinesvision.org.

² Available on www.saintcatherinesvision.org.

deaconesses in our Church today, as Saint Paul did during the first century . . . May God rest the soul of our beloved late Prof. Evangelos Theodorou. It is not by accident that the name of the one who is going to initiate the ordination of deaconesses is “Theodoros”, our Patriarch of Alexandria. This means the restoration of the ordination of women as deaconesses is “Theou Doron”, a gift of God. Prof. Theodorou, as a theologian, of the Church, will be ever-respected for his life-long efforts to rejuvenate the ministry of ordained deaconesses and Patriarch Theodoros, will be ever-respected as the one who will be initiating this contemporary application of Orthodox theology for the pastoral needs of our Church and for the salvation of the people.”

In addition to Professor Theodorou’s scholarly work, together with his wife, Hareklea (also a trained theologian), he spent a great portion of his professional life advocating for the ministry of ordained deaconesses, for example, helping establish in 1953 a school for lay-deaconesses in Athens³. At international meetings during the 1980s, he privately urged this writer to study, write and speak on this topic. My early published research and subsequent book on the ordination of women deacons, would never have been written without “vigorous” encouragement from both Professor Theodorou and Fr. Thomas Hopko, of blessed memory. Subsequent international Pan-Orthodox conferences regarding women that I was invited to design and lead⁴, even the eventual formation of Saint Catherine’s Vision, by the grace of God, ultimately rest on a foundation that he, himself, helped to build. He was gratified to learn in recent years that many persons around the Orthodox world have begun to appreciate and enthusiastically advocate for the rejuvenation of this ministry.

In the Professor’s own words:

...The deaconess can serve the ever-expanding needs of the local church under the direction of the bishop. She can assist in areas such as pastoral care, education, mission, and philanthropy. She can expand the outreach of the church particularly through evangelism and witness as well as care for the sick, destitute and unchurched. She can bear witness to the values of the Gospel in the wider society.

May those who are committed to serve within the life of the Church today, continue to pray and advocate for the rejuvenation of this ministry as God wills. Orthodox Christians owe Professor Evangelos Theodorou a profound measure of gratitude for his insightful scholarship and fidelity to the gospel. In humble response to the will of God for his life, for over seven decades he diligently cultivated a vocation in theological service and witness. In fact, through his nearly century-long life, he bore witness to the living Tradition of the Church. He courageously endeavored to “hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 11:28).

Memory Eternal!

Dr. Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald is co-founder and Executive Director of Saint Catherine’s Vision (www.saintcatherinesvision.org) and adjunct professor of theology at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. Among her scholarly publications, she is the author of Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church: Called to Holiness and Ministry (Holy Cross Orthodox Press). This book contains an extensive contribution from Professor Theodorou.

³ By 1990, this was absorbed by the School of Social Work of the University of Athens.

⁴ i.e. the International Pan-Orthodox Women’s Conferences held in Damascus, Syria (1996) and in Constantinople, Istanbul, Turkey (1997), See: *Orthodox Women Speak: “Discerning the ‘Signs of the Times’”*, ed., Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald, (WCC Publications and Holy Cross Orthodox Press: Geneva, Switzerland and Brookline, Mass.) 1999.