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## **Patriarchy, authority and exclusion from full participation of women in the Orthodox Church**

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**Patriarchy, Authority and Exclusion  
from Full Participation of  
Women in the Orthodox Church**

**Leonie Beth Liveris**

**This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
of Edith Cowan University**

**Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences**

**October 1999**

## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## Abstract

From 1948, when the Orthodox churches became members of the World Council of Churches, the "woman question" has been debated and researched through various assemblies, consultations and programmes. The general attitude of Orthodox Church hierarchs on the debate of the 'woman question' is that it is an imposition from the West and therefore any changes for the Church to be active in improving the status of women are not under serious consideration. The question of changing roles in the ministry of women is one of the most contentious issues in the ecumenical movement for the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox member churches have not implemented specific programmes for Orthodox women based on the work of the WCC. This thesis includes analysis of the archives of meetings and documents contributed by Orthodox theologians and historians to discern at what level the recommendations for change were acted upon or ignored.

This thesis analyses patriarchy and authority within the Orthodox Church and the influences of culture and tradition upon the status and participation of women. The analysis focuses on data from ecumenical archives; national church documents and statements; traditional Orthodox church theology and history and sacramental practices of the Church. The thesis questions the present understanding that in order to be Orthodox, that is, for 'right thinking' and 'correct practice' in the faith of the Orthodox Church, Orthodox men have authority and spiritual leadership for both the sacramental and liturgical life of the church and in turn their rightful authority and headship in the family and community.

This thesis focuses on both historical and contemporary elements of human sexuality, ministry and participation of women in the Orthodox Church with reference to selected teachings of the Church Fathers whose attitudes and perceptions were very often to the detriment of women. The Church Fathers continue as guide lines for the Church today with little reference to the context of their times and in contrast to contemporary issues and concerns for women and societal influences of society, imposed and absorbed, that have arisen in the twentieth century.

The women's movement in the Orthodox Church is in the infancy stage and very few women have written or researched present day situations; contemporary Orthodox Church historians are not engaged in critical analysis of the liturgical, religious or cultural traditions that place women in gender specific subservient roles and have led to the exclusion and prohibition of women within the fullness of religious life of church communities. Specific contributions of Orthodox women, though not necessarily with a feminist agenda, are analysed in the context of a feminist framework of a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' in addition to references to the contemporary work of Catholic and Protestant feminist historians and theologians.

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my Principal Supervisor, Associate Professor Cynthia Dixon for her enthusiastic support for the thesis proposal and her careful guidance throughout the preparation of this thesis. I express my appreciation to external supervisors, Rev. Dr Beate Stierle and Dr Harry Simmons, who both provided valuable advice, criticism and encouragement, in different ways when writing the thesis.

I am grateful to librarians Marie-Claude Borel at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, and Pierre Beffa at the World Council of Churches, who both gave me open access to archives, suggestions for where the hidden works could be found and provided me with ideal working conditions during my research in Geneva. I also acknowledge the assistance of all the staff at the Ecumenical Institute who were supportive and most helpful during my many weeks in residence.

I thank Aruna Guanadason, Executive Secretary for the Women's Unit in WCC Unit III, Justice, Peace and Creation, for her support, encouragement and inclusion by personal invitations to attend Bossey Seminars, the Orthodox Women's consultations and as a reader for the final report of the "Living Letters". These meetings introduced me to Orthodox women around the world thus providing the substance for this thesis.

I express my gratitude to Edith Cowan University for the three year scholarship to undertake the research for this thesis, and for travel funds in order to visit and access the archives at the WCC Library in Geneva and the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland.

I wish to pay tribute to Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Eva Catafygiotu Topping, 'matriarchs and scholars of Orthodoxy' who 'carried the lamp of discerning the times', and provided encouragement, friendship, their experience and wise words since my research and work began for Women in the Orthodox Church.

Last of all, but certainly not the least, I thank my husband Marcus who has listened, criticized and edited the technical aspects of this thesis. I thank him for his patience and support during the research; understanding and empathy for my commitment to feminism and women in the Orthodox Church over many years, and especially his encouragement in so many ways throughout the writing of this thesis.

## Abbreviations and terms

BEM	<i>Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry</i> (document)
CWMC	Community of Women and Men in the Church
EDCSW	Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women
F & O	Faith and Order
JPIC	Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation
MECC	Middle East Council of Churches
OCA	Orthodox Church in America
RSCM	Russian Students Christian Movement
WCC	World Council of Churches
WELG	Women's Ecumenical Liaison Group

<i>archimandrite</i>	honourary title conferred on unmarried priest
<i>autocephalous</i>	an independent Orthodox Church which elects its own leader
<i>autonomous</i>	independent Orthodox Church with appointed leader
<i>economia</i>	the examination of Canon Law to meet the needs of the faithful according to various circumstances
<i>diakonia</i>	service, ministry
<i>diaspora</i>	Orthodox Christians living outside the boundaries of their traditional jurisdictions
<i>ecclesia</i>	the church
<i>hierarchy</i>	the ordained clergy of the Church, particularly the bishops
<i>patriarchate</i>	the most senior jurisdictions in the family of Orthodox churches
<i>Patriarch</i>	the bishop of one of the Apostolic thrones.
<i>philoptochos</i>	usually a women's charitable society
<i>orthodoxia</i>	right belief, or right worship
<i>orthopraxia</i>	the right practice



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## Introduction

In May 1997, the fourth of a series of consultations for Orthodox women, organized and supported through the Women's Unit of the World Council of Churches (WCC) since 1976, was held in Istanbul, Turkey.<sup>1</sup> The theme of the consultation 'Discerning the Signs of the Times' was the focus for official delegates representing many jurisdictions of the Orthodox Church. The mission of the consultation was for women to discuss and analyse the participation of women in the Orthodox Church and in particular to examine their ministries as lay women, monastics and theologians in both historical and contemporary context. The recommendations from the 1997 meeting, continued to be positive in the report to the member churches about the possibilities for women. Nevertheless, even with the growing influences of the feminist movement in churches and societies of the West and increasingly all the Orthodox countries and *diaspora*, the discussions and final reports were conservative, tentative and conciliar. However, the issues remain relevant to the activities of many feminists within the other member churches in various cultures. The recommendations of all the Orthodox women's meetings and the participation of Orthodox women in ecumenical meetings have remained on the periphery of the Orthodox Church and are little known or discussed within Orthodox women's organisations. This thesis explores the contributions of individual Orthodox women in the ecumenical movement and the influence of growing relationships between Orthodox women in different jurisdictions with Protestant and Catholic women theologians and activists in the Church. The membership of the Orthodox churches in the World Council of Churches has many detractors, and in the fiftieth year of the Council, three Orthodox churches withdrew or reduced their membership, three issues were cited on which they had theological differences: the ordination of women to the priesthood, inclusive language in particular in Scripture and references to God, and the religious and moral issue of homosexuality.

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During the decades 1948-1998, the work by and for women in the churches was administered through separate departments of the WCC. To avoid confusion the term Women's Unit of the WCC, has been used throughout the thesis. A list of departments and tenure see Appendix 3.

### Background of this thesis

This thesis has emerged from the personal journey of the candidate who in 1968, became a member of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia. The difficulty for the 'new convert' being absorbed into the culture, tradition and theology of the Orthodox Church whose worship and pastoral language is not English has always presented particular questions of identity and especially choices as to what culture and tradition one belonged to and practiced in one's daily life. As part of an 'ethnic church' still rooted in the culture of the old world, how does an Australian woman not only contribute to but also absorb the tradition of this ancient church while unable to separate from the feminist movement in society and latterly within the Church. The revelation of teachings that are detrimental to women and their participation in the 'royal priesthood' of the Church, created many problems and raised many questions. Does the acceptance of the 'convert' only exist on one side of the sacrament of chrismation? Is the only way to be absorbed entirely into an Orthodox community therefore to rely firstly on faith; secondly, on unquestioning acceptance of ritual and cultural practices; and thirdly, on the convert developing the ability to absorb the ongoing antagonisms and hostilities to her 'non-ethnic' identity throughout a lifetime of membership of the Orthodox Church? As John Chryssavgis claims: 'the (convert), coming in from the 'outside' must accept everything - almost as if the Orthodox faithful do not belong to but rather constitute the very essence of Orthodox Christianity'.<sup>2</sup>

The stories and patterns of discrimination and exclusion are familiar to women and men within all the churches. However, the context of the stories and experiences of Orthodox women in which they take place are within the Eastern churches, cultures and traditions, which differ markedly from the Western churches and societies influenced by the Enlightenment and the progress of women in many facets of secular and ecclesial communities during the twentieth century. Susan Parsons claims as much for Orthodox women as all other women when she calls for 'a critique of social practice and of ideology which could unsettle the foundations of'

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<sup>2</sup> John Chryssavgis, 'Obedience- Hierarchy and Asceticism. The concept of spiritual Authority in the church, *SVTQ*, Vol.34, no.1, 1990, p.57.

patriarchal privilege and create a space for a more fulfilling human life'.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, she writes, (the need is also for ) breaking the hold of cultural assumptions that inhibit and silence woman in submission for some (perceived) greater good'.<sup>4</sup>

This thesis is concerned with patriarchy, both ordained and lay, and authority of the ancient Eastern Orthodox church and its practices of selective exclusion of women. The thesis is constructed by utilising a feminist perspective that has developed through experience in the feminist movement and knowledge of scholarship formulated by numerous feminist theologians and historians in the West during the last decades of the twentieth century. There are many within the Orthodox churches who would reject such analysis as being a Protestant and secular western tool of analysis of no validity whatsoever to the tradition, teachings or practices of the Orthodox Church. Critics would further claim that such analysis cannot be achieved outside an Orthodox country, let alone from the perspective and subjectivity of a convert living in the context and construct of the *diaspora* which brings its own unique experience of 'living Orthodoxy'. However, the candidate takes the position of Liz Stanley and Sue Wise who assert that:

a researcher's own experiences are an integral part of the research as to who we are and how we experience the research, have a crucial impact on what we see, what we do, how we interpret and construct what is going on. Our experiences must be included within research within 'feminist science'.<sup>5</sup>

The candidate has lived within the Orthodox church community for many years and has an active interest in ecumenical relationships and the place of the Orthodox within the universal Church. In addition she was a member of the Cairo Steering Committee, a participant, though not an official delegate, to the Crete and Istanbul Consultations, attended and presented papers at the three Bossey Seminars that focused on Orthodox women, feminine images and spirituality; she was invited to be an Orthodox reader for the 'Living Letters' Report for the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, and for eight years was the editor of

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Frank Parsons, *Feminism and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996, p.97.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.97.

<sup>5</sup> Liz Stanley & Sue Wise, *Breaking Out Again. Feminist Ontology and Epistemology*, Routledge Press: London, 2nd Edition, 1993, p.60.

*MaryMartha*, an international journal for Orthodox women funded by a grant from the Women's Unit of the WCC. Although these experiences and responsibilities do bring a subjective influence to the research questions, the archival material and the voices from the silence of Orthodox women more than adequately speak for themselves.

### **Methodology**

This thesis will focus on the contemporary status of women in the Orthodox Church using a feminist framework that presumes that patriarchal structures and the authority of men, both hierarchs and laity, have for centuries enforced silence and submissiveness of women. There is an application of the 'hermeneutics of suspicion', advanced by feminist theologian Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza in 1982, that reveals behind the biblical texts, the theology and the writings of the Church Fathers, both ancient and contemporary, the intent of patriarchy is, for all its forms in church and society, to maintain authority and power and for women to remain in subservient and service roles. It is through fulfilling the roles of servant and service that women receive pietistic praise. The 'theology of service' means being a servant of Christ for both women and men. However, this concept has been distorted by patriarchy so that the theology of service is focused on women's service and men's authority. This situation exists due to the denial of the equality of women in the 'royal priesthood' of believers, and by the exclusion of women in leadership and full participation in the Orthodox Church.

This thesis concentrates on the work and involvement of women in raising the issues of women's participation, human sexuality and ministry in the Orthodox church since the first ecumenical study on women in the church was presented to the inaugural Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1948 through to the Istanbul Consultation held in May 1997. The question constantly addressed is how much progress has there been in fifty years, and are the changes sufficient to ensure the movement will have mobility and commitment for the future. The structures of the WCC are changing and the specific issues pertaining to women's ministry and participation may well be judged as having been answered in this century. In late 1998, two Orthodox churches, Georgia and Bulgaria withdrew membership from WCC, and the

Russian Orthodox church signalled its intent for limited participation. The reasons cited were opposition to the ordination of women to the sacramental priesthood, inclusive language in theology and the homosexuality debate. These three reasons together with other undisclosed reasons of dissent, may also contribute to a further silencing of women from those churches and bring to an end their recent ecumenical involvement with women in sister churches.

Very few Orthodox women publicly critical of the traditional attitudes of their Church or cultural expectations of women let alone offering critical analysis in Orthodox theology, church history or social anthropology. Prominent exceptions are the works of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Eva Catafygiotu Topping, the two best known 'matriarchs in Orthodoxy' in the *diaspora*, express concerns for the ministry of women in the Orthodox Church, and their work will be examined as key texts for feminist analysis in this thesis. This thesis is not a comparative study between women in Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches, although it draws upon the findings and theories advocated by scholars and theologians in the various traditions. In time, such in depth and detailed studies will be necessary, but firstly there is need to analyse the situation of Orthodox women in their Eastern and Oriental churches. This thesis will provide an historical overview of Orthodox women's participation in dialogue through the ecumenical movement and associated affiliations, observing that questions on inclusion and participation are the same for all women in the Church.

The hierarchical structure of the Orthodox Church, the patriarchal nature of church, society and family, the ethnic diversity of the various jurisdictions, a *diaspora* founded through mission and migration and the significant period in which many Orthodox churches were under persecution during the twentieth century are all significant influences on the participation of women in Orthodox churches. While many Orthodox women have achieved status and professional careers in the secular society they continue to be the 'Other' in the church and often in the family. This thesis explores the questions of women's ministry including the issue of ordination to the priesthood in order to expose the misogynist language and attitudes based on the early Fathers' perception of women which continues in the work of the majority of

contemporary Orthodox theologians and hierarchs. The debate on the ordination of women has brought forward statements from Orthodox theologians and clerics that have been less than favourably received by their ecumenical colleagues.

### **Significance of the thesis**

This thesis will make a contribution to understanding and awareness of the participation of women in the Orthodox Church particularly during the fifty years of the membership of the Orthodox churches in the World Council of Churches. This research thesis will contribute to the ongoing debates and feminist analysis of women's participation, ministry and sexuality in the life and practice of the Church. The study reveals both the contributions to ecumenism and the difficulties confronting Orthodox women wishing to participate more fully in the leadership and ministry of their church. This study exposes the discriminatory practices that alienate women in the church. The debate on the ministry of women and the possibility of the ordination to the diaconate have emerged from consultations and seminars supported by the Women's Unit of the WCC. This thesis reflects the positive role that the WCC has taken in providing opportunities for Orthodox women to meet and discuss issues not promoted by the hierarchs or Synods.

### **Limitations of the thesis**

The limits to the study are determined by a number of factors. The majority of Orthodox documents, both past and present are written in languages other than English. Therefore, the author has relied on translated works especially those which are well known and used by theologians and historians in all churches. The discussion on women in the Orthodox Church is a relatively recent field of research especially on contemporary issues. While some feminist theological work in the Orthodox tradition has been undertaken by women scholars in France and Greece, the main focus is biblical exegesis and their work at this time is not available in English. More importantly, many archival resources are not available to women scholars, particularly those held in monasteries, patriarchal libraries, seminaries and Mt Athos. This limited access to archival resources in itself indicates gendered knowledge and questions of secrets. In addition to restricted knowledge the debate on women in the Orthodox Church most



often takes place outside the community, that is, among Orthodox women in ecumenical relationships, rather than within the Orthodox community. There is resistance to the 'women's question' and the feminist movement which are perceived as being the province of secular feminism that is destructive of tradition and family. This attitude exists within many jurisdictions which again restricts access to archives and 'women's knowing and experience'.

This thesis is not a theological examination of Orthodox canon law nor are the issues examined using a theological perspective. There is the assumption that some issues will fall naturally into theological understanding by any laywoman, and do not require a theological degree or academic expertise. The root problem is that male dominance of the patriarchal system ensures that the inequality of women exists through lack of personal privilege, unfair allocation of resources whether in economics, biological, social or familial structures and where women continue to be valued more for their function performed for others or bearing others than themselves.<sup>6</sup> It is within these wide ranging parameters that themes of the thesis will be developed.

At this time it is not possible to discover and recover dissident voices of women from the East as experienced in modern scholarship of the West. The candidate is lacking in language skills and is therefore reliant on English as her working language. It is anticipated that eventually translation work will be undertaken by feminist scholars in the Orthodox countries of Russia, Greece, Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria for example or by Western scholars fluent in the relevant languages. Documents of dissent have rarely found sympathy amongst official translators and it would be highly unlikely for a full selection of documents from the Eastern European or Middle East churches to be officially translated by the churches into English. A further limitation is the nature of the Orthodox jurisdictions where dialogue is rarely encountered amongst women's groups and resources are not shared also due to the language difficulties. Therefore the documents in the archives of the WCC have been essential although many were of limited content or with little research value for this particular thesis.

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<sup>6</sup> Elaine Storkey, *What's Right with Feminism*, SPCK: London, 1985, p.95.

As the Church that claims a continuous tradition with the original church and the Day of Pentecost, the history of the Orthodox churches is richly endowed with a tradition of liturgical and spiritual history. For one thousand years they shared with the western churches, although in a diminishing relationship, teachings and traditions from the days of the Apostles. After the schism of 1054 C.E., the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, East and West, continued to entrench the patriarchal and hierarchical structures that remain to this day. Of course, there were women present, and there are legends and documents of women saints, writers, monastics and martyrs in all the churches. It is fortunate that their tales so exceeded the norm of society and church, that they remain to this day. One of the difficulties of research in this area of women in the Church, regardless of which tradition, has been the paucity of early documents translated into English. There is no doubt that many women and their writings and details of their work and theology, remain hidden even today due to the lack of interest by male scholars and monastics who are the only persons with access to the originals. The libraries of Mt Athos and the Monastery of Amba Boshoy in Egypt, for example, contain treasures to be slowly filtered into the academic and theological works of the present day. There is no urgent need or desire for documents written by or about women to be prioritized by the majority of antiquity or theological scholars, not even by the very few women who are slowly being accepted into theological seminaries in some Orthodox jurisdictions, to study for undergraduate, and sometimes to doctorate level in theology. Any analysis of research themes, publications and translations will reveal a propensity to focus on the early church, the schism or theology from biblical sources, before is research focused on the contemporary issues of the day.

### **Sources**

The primary material for this thesis was found in original and translated documents made available through the Ecumenical Movement and the World Council of Churches (WCC). In more affluent periods of this large universal organisation there was a policy to translate papers from conferences, official inter-church discussions and seminars into the four official languages of the WCC. It is fortunate for the candidate, though not unexpected, that English

has been the primary working language. However, it is acknowledged that the use of the four official languages, English, French, German and Spanish has often determined and limited the choice of participants at such meetings in the last fifty years. The desire to participate in international dialogue has encouraged clerics and theologians in the member churches to learn more than one language in order to contribute their scholarship. While English is most often amongst the languages, English speakers have not always undertaken the same responsibility. This linguistic knowledge of course, also pre-supposes access to higher education in theological and other relevant studies, which very often excludes women, and there is in many Orthodox jurisdictions a positive discrimination against women entering theological seminaries. It is acknowledged that many reports from seminars are 'returned home' with the authors and no opportunity given for translation, in addition to subjective selection by the various units of what was deemed most important for the translation service to work on.

In addition to the primary source material in the archives, including the translated work of Orthodox scholars and unpublished papers from various seminar participants, there have been a number of significant studies, reports and research findings written and published by the World Council of Churches on Women in the Church. Amongst the most significant for this study are *The Service and Status of Women in the Church*, compiled by Kathleen Bliss in 1952 from the first worldwide survey of women in the church; in 1977, the papers and recommendations for the first Orthodox Women's Consultation in 1976 were recorded in a booklet edited by Constance Tarasar and Irena Kirilliva; in 1981, Susannah Herzel reviewed the Women's Department of the WCC in *A Voice for Women*; and in 1983 Constance Parvey edited the report from the Sheffield Consultation on Community of Women and Men in the Church. A recent publication in 1998 was "Living Letters", a report of the success and otherwise of the programme for the WCC Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women.<sup>7</sup> In between the major reports, books, recommendations and papers have been published from the

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<sup>7</sup> Kathleen Bliss, *The Status and Service of Women in the Church*, SCM: London, 1952; Constance Tarasar and Irene Kirilliva (ed.), *Agapia. The Roles and Participation of Women in the Orthodox Church*, WCC: Geneva, 1977; Susannah Herzel, *A Voice for Women*, WCC : Geneva, 1981, Constance Parvey (ed), *The Sheffield Report, The Community of Women and Men in the Church* WCC : Geneva, 1983. *Living Letters. Report on Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women*, WCC: Geneva, 1998.

consultations on ordination, tradition, ecclesiology, in which women have contributed considerable scholarship and expertise.

Feminist theology and feminist history are not new academic fields for Orthodox scholars. However, scholars such as Eva C Topping, (USA), author of *Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy*, and *Saints and Sisterhood*, and Elisabeth Behr-Sigel (France), author of *The Ministry of Women in the Church* and various keynote addresses at ecumenical meetings, do research and write from within a feminist perspective. Eva Topping is very strong in her analysis of patriarchal authority and the exclusion of women in the church particularly emphasising the church in the *diaspora* of America. Elisabeth Behr-Sigel has had many years writing on the church and has recently co-authored a small book with Bishop Kallistos Ware 'L'ordination de la femme dans l'eglise....', on the ordination of women, a question for the Church that for both authors has changed over the years from an impossibility to a theological question to be explored with optimism. Both Eva Topping and Elisabeth Behr-Sigel are women of mature years and both regret the lack of 'disciples' following behind them, prepared to take up the difficult criticisms that are needed.

In France, there are Orthodox women theologians, such as Veronique Lossky and Sophie Dacha, whose works have not been translated from French, nor have the works of Katrina Karkala-Zorbas, Dimitra Koukoura, Eleni Kasselouri or Eva Adamazglou been translated from Greek. However, these women have all spoken or participated in ecumenical forums either in the WCC or in the European Christian Women's Forum. From these meetings papers have sometimes been translated to English thus providing some resources, though limited, from Orthodox women in Europe who often have a feminist perspective. Very few Orthodox women in America could claim to be feminist theologians or present papers that indicate a strong feminist perspective on Women in the Church. The language of feminism is easily assumed as a tool of criticism to be used particularly against the critiques and theories of feminist theologians in the Protestant churches. However, such criticisms are less inclined to be used to

debate with Catholic feminists where the discriminations against women in both traditions are often similar. Kyriaki FitzGerald, Constance Tarasar, Deborah Belonick, Valerie Zahirsky, Verna Harrison (now Sr Nonna), Valerie Karras and Demetra Jaquet are amongst recent active women in the Orthodox churches in America and ecumenical forums but few could claim to be feminist activists. The experience of women in the early years of developing and expanding theories of feminism and feminist theology was the difficulty of attracting the interest of publishing editors. This situation may well be the same for Orthodox feminist writers, and perhaps in the next decade there will be changes; many more Orthodox women will become known, not only within their own church but as contributors to the wider theological debates concerning the full participation of women in the church.

There have been a few doctoral theses in recent years that focused elements of research on the presence of women in the Women's Unit of the WCC, and the participation of women in the work of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC. Two theses were written by women employed in different capacities in the WCC and therefore experienced in the structure and mission of the WCC and with the difficulties of encouraging participation and other issues vital to women. The thesis by Janet Crawford 'Rocking the Boat': Women's Participation in the World Council of Churches 1948-1991 was completed in 1995,<sup>8</sup> and Melanie A May published her thesis as *Bonds of Unity: Women, Theology and the Worldwide Church*, in 1989.<sup>9</sup> Both women are Protestant theologians, both are ordained and both have held significant appointments within the World Council of Churches offices and Central Committee commissions and are presently academics in theological seminaries and universities. A third doctoral thesis from Stephen Thottathil, a Roman Catholic, focused on the 'Identity and Relationship of Women and Men in the Church and Society: Thinking Within the World Council of Churches.'<sup>10</sup> These three particular theses are important as they consider the roles

<sup>8</sup> Janet Crawford, 'Rocking the Boat': Women's Participation in the World Council of Churches, 1948-1991, unpublished PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1995.

<sup>9</sup> Melanie A May, PhD 1986, Harvard University Divinity School. *Bonds of Unity: Women, Theology and the Worldwide Church*. Scholars Press: Atlanta, Georgia, 1989.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Thottathil, Identity and Relationship of Women and Men in the Church and Society: Thinking Within the World Council of Churches, unpublished D.Theol. (Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, Academia Alfonsiana, Institutum Superius Theologicum Moralis), Rome, 1990.

of the member Churches in the ecumenical movement on the issues relevant to women. In addition these briefly review the personalities and work of the very few Orthodox women who at various stages were appointed to the staff, the Central Committee or Commissions of the World Council of Churches or were delegates at various consultations promoted by units and study groups of the WCC.

Some primary material from the archives of the WCC was also referred to by Janet Crawford, Melanie May and Steven Thottathil although their analyses do not extend to in-depth discourse or criticisms of the Orthodox Church. Their references are more general and with varying opinions rather than critical observations on the constrained participation of Orthodox women. The practice of the Orthodox Church has been to confine the findings of consultations, meetings, and statements pertinent to women, to hierarchs and theologians and the few chosen women known for not 'rocking the boat' as Janet Crawford titles her thesis. Some material does not reach the offices of clergy, and rarely, without effort or contacts have the recommendations been received in the parishes by Orthodox women themselves. It is claimed that knowledge of consultations concerning discussions on issues important for women has come about because women themselves were interested in the ecumenical movement or profess an openness to new challenges from Anglican, Catholic, Protestant and Reformed churchwomen. This challenge is not confined to Orthodox women in the West. The programmes of some church women in Romania have a more focused feminist agenda for their work in the church than their Orthodox sisters in America or Australia.<sup>11</sup> Catholic and Protestant women have moved out of the church, and it is reasonable to assume that feminist Orthodox women in the *diaspora* have also moved out of the church in order to work for reform. In common with their ecumenical sisters, those remaining in the church leave their 'feminist ideals' at the door when they enter the church. Feminist activists are seldom found working openly within the structures of the Orthodox churches.

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<sup>11</sup> Romanian Orthodox women, Mihaela Rabu and Liliana Andronescu are both members of European Christian Women's Forum. Rabu is co-editor of *Analyze*, a feminist journal in Romania. Anca-Lucia Manolache is a well known theologian in Romania who has written on female sexuality and discrimination against women in the church. Some of her work is in French, very few papers are translated into English except through the WCC.

During the past fifty years many books and articles written about women in the ecumenical movement, have contained references, though brief, to the role and participation of Orthodox women in WCC programmes, studies and seminars. Their voices are not loud, they are often hesitant, and in most cases have reflected the conservative and traditional opinion of their lives and work for the Church. Rarely have Orthodox women challenged the patriarchy, or been critical in their presentations of elements of social dysfunction of various Orthodox communities even when provided with the most open opportunities for dialogue. The question must be asked - why not? Simply answered Orthodox women are present at the recommendation of the bishop, the authority in the Church, and remain as the representative of the bishop until the bishop decides another woman is a more suitable delegate.

Without such a recommendation, no Orthodox woman could consider being a member of a commission of the WCC nor seek employment as an Orthodox woman at the WCC, even though academically and experienced she may well be the best candidate. There is no position for an Orthodox woman to challenge structures from within the Church; rarely is an Orthodox woman seen or heard as a delegate in important meetings or in dialogue with other member churches on behalf of her church. The issue of patriarchal patronage and male authority are key factors in examining the exclusion of women in participation from and for the Orthodox Church. To insist on silence and obedience even to the local priest who can be far less educated than the woman, places many women and perhaps many men in subservient situations which permit no stepping beyond the acceptable parameters of Orthodox doctrine, culture and tradition. Orthodox women have learned to participate and work for change in different ways, and some have given outstanding service to the ecumenical movement and to the Orthodox church in general, though it is rarely acknowledged.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> While Orthodox women have not embarked on the 'consciousness-raising' forums so prevalent amongst feminists in the Protestant and Catholic churches over the past thirty years, there are small working groups of Orthodox women who have debated particular problems, or established networks to communicate various issues arising in contemporary church life. eg. W.O.M.E.N; O.W.N; Orthodox Healing Ministries; Orthodox Clergy Wives; Oxford Discussion Group; London Orthodox Group. Discussion papers, journals and websites have been established, but not with church funds and little if any recognition from clergy or hierarchs.

This thesis is a critical analysis of the participation, sexuality and ministry of women, their place in the Christian tradition particularly the Orthodox Church, which for its own reasons has insisted that the statements on social, moral and spiritual matters affecting women are best left to men. Few Orthodox women have raised a critical voice, published or analysed their situation, beyond conservative seminars and always their recommendations for the future are repeated again and again, but by new voices. Other women have despaired of change and no longer participate in church affairs. Why is this so? It cannot be assumed that all women agree with their situation, or that all are content to live into yet another generation with the same lifestyle and church practices. In the countries of Russia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, for instance, the Orthodox faith is the official religion of the people. For centuries the teachings of the Church, of community leaders and of parental heads of family have been bound up in the Pauline admonition, of husbands being the head, of women having no authority, and of children being the property of the parent. The Orthodox Church has women saints, martyrs and monastics as ideals to admire and emulate, but rarely the laywoman, wife and mother who are 'the silenced ones'.

Feminist studies in religion and history during the past century have revealed many holy women of centuries past, indeed women to admire for their work for the Church. For women in the Western tradition of education and emancipation, it is difficult to imagine or even understand the void in research left by women in the Eastern churches. The modern feminist historian in the West can refer to such theologians as Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich, and many other writings separate to the model of virgin/mother put before them of Mary, the Mother of God and the saints, sinners and martyrs of the early church. The exemplary lives of women saints and martyrs, whose lives barely had any resemblance to the modern woman of today, remain the role models for Orthodox women.

The Catholic and Protestant traditions have been challenged by the modern scholarship of feminist historians and theologians for over a century, and more especially in the 'second wave' feminism from the 1960s from which feminist theology emerged firstly in the Protestant



traditions and later taken up and more forcibly challenged by Catholic women after Vatican Council II in 1963. The early secular work of Mary Wollstonecraft in England, rebuffed the assertions Thomas Payne maintained in the *Rights of Man* in 1791 by publishing her manifesto *The Vindication for the Rights of Women* in 1792. In the late twentieth century women have confronted issues which continue to profoundly effect the lives of women. The lives of women that are still dictated by the hierarchies of the church, the men of the church who continue to act without consultation with women nor take into account the presence of women. This thesis will examine the patriarchy and authority of men who through their actions or apathy continue to deny the equality of women in the 'royal priesthood' of the Christian tradition, by exclusion of women in leadership, especially in the Church.

This thesis is about the possibilities for Orthodox women denied by patriarchy and authority of the Church. Revelations of discrimination, exclusion and misogyny have been endorsed by use of Canon Law. Praiseworthy piety has allowed generations of women to live faithful lives within the Church tradition unaware that the Church and its esteemed teachers have held women in silent contempt, practicing what St Cyril of Alexandria stated that: 'woman should always be second behind a man'. In addition his fellow hierarch St John Chrysostom believed women to be 'emotional, fickle, superficial, garrulous and servile in temperament'.<sup>13</sup> While the pulpits of the Orthodox churches of today do not ring out these words so bluntly, nevertheless, daily practices and attitudes in the home, liturgical custom within the Church, and relationships between laity and clergy, all manifest the subconscious derogatory attitudes that exist amongst the 'patriarchy' of the Church, both lay and ordained.

In the late twentieth century there has been a rise in fundamentalism in the Orthodox churches. It is presently focused amongst a minority of the faithful, but it is steadily attracting both clerics and monastics as well as lay persons who feel threatened by the growing openness and desire for the Unity of the universal Church and outreach to other Christians throughout

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<sup>13</sup> Eva C Topping, *Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy*, p.5. St Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria wrote: 'the male must always rule; the female must everywhere remain in second class' (PG 68, 1068C) ; (Pg 47, 510-511; 61, 316; 62,548).

the world. This fundamentalism has been expressed as 'Orthodox Militant Conservatism', which relates to the style of authority and structure of the Orthodox Churches. While always stressing a conciliar style there is a preponderance of autocracy instead, at both Holy Synod and local parish decision-making and discussion. Contrary to the importance placed on the role of the laity in the early church, their absence in decision making and leadership has already come to crisis point in the USA, with the foundation of the Orthodox Christian Laity (OCL) and the Greek Orthodox American Leadership (GOAL) during the last decade. Of course, this has not meant an equal partnership with women in the lay movements, although a few women have been involved in the foundation of the movement. Orthodox women are present in many spheres of the Church and its outreach into the Orthodox communities. But they are singularly absent in real positions of decision making and leadership and until very recently this situation has been accepted and unquestioned. What has slowly changed in the last fifty years has been education of Orthodox women in the *diaspora*, the improvement in the socio-economic status of Greece, and the breaking up of the Soviet Union, which brought the churches of Russia, Serbia, Romania, Georgia, and Bulgaria out of seclusion. Sections of their society now look to the Church for moral and spiritual guidance and philanthropy. For centuries many of the Orthodox churches were under the control of the Ottoman Empire and it would be very difficult to blame the hierarchy or, indeed, the men in any situation of the Christian east for the lack of women in leadership. Following the Islamic practice of secluding women, the Orthodox women were confined to the home, they were seldom seen about the cities and they concentrated on ensuring the tradition of the Orthodox faith would be carried on from generation to generation during those four hundred dark years.

Finally, this thesis is not an argument between feminist theorists nor particular advocates of the intricate and complex historical changes wrought by the women's movement throughout the centuries. This thesis focuses on Orthodox women and their inclusion in ecumenical dialogue with Protestant and Catholic women, differentiated by their peripheral and fleeting opportunities for equal participation in the Orthodox Church on terms pre-determined by the 'norm', the patriarchy and hierarchy of the Orthodox Church. The questions asked

throughout this thesis come from a radical feminist perspective, which on one hand reveals the presence of women in the history, culture and tradition of the Orthodox church but also notes the disappearance of their words and works into the dark abyss of silence. There is the assumption that the patriarchy, both ordained and laity, the 'norm' in Orthodox church and society, controls the spiritual and physical complexities of the 'other', that is women. There is no ongoing commitment from the hierarchy in Orthodox churches or societies, for reform or radical changes that will include women as the 'norm' in leadership, sacramental ministry or equal participation in all facets of the 'royal priesthood' of the church, despite the biblical affirmations from Paul in Galatians 3:27-28: 'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'. and I Peter 2:8-9, '... chosen by God and precious...you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ'.<sup>14</sup>

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14 For discussions on the women's movement and feminism in society and churches, see the following works: Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism, A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement*. Martin Robertson: Oxford, 1981; Brian Heency, *The Women's Movement in the Church of England, 1850-1930*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1988; Carl Degler, *At Odds, Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1980. Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women. Work and community for single women, 1850-1920*. Virago Press: London, 1985; Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2 Vols. 2nd Edition, SCM London, 1972; David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain. A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. Unwin Hyman: London, 1989; Patricia Hill, *The World Their Household. The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation 1870-1920*. University of Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1982; Frank Prochaska, *Philanthropy in 19th Century England*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1980; Elaine Storkey, *What's right with Feminism*. SPCK: London, 1985. Ann Loades (ed.), *Feminist Theology. A Reader*. SPCK: London, 1990. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk. Towards a Feminist Theology*. SCM: London, 1983. Susan Frank Parsons, *Feminism and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996. Leonie Liveris MPhil thesis, 'The aims, methods and organisation of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society, 1852-1920, 1995.

## **Chapter Outline**

The focus of this thesis is the role of the patriarchy and authority, the limits to full participation of Orthodox women in their churches and the programmes and challenges for women introduced and promoted through the ecumenical work of the Women's Unit of the World Council of Churches.

In Chapter One, the structures, beliefs and brief outline of relevant contemporary history of the Orthodox Church including the tradition of the Theotokos are outlined in relation to the relationship with the World Council of Churches. An overview of the early women's movement and the subsequent feminist movement are placed into perspective with the first opportunities provided to Orthodox women in the ecumenical movement

Chapter Two analyses the reports and commentaries from the women who participated in the initial study of the Life and Work of Women in the Church. This first study reveals the presence of strong individual Orthodox women particularly from Asia and Europe who were involved in finding leadership roles in society and working within the limited possibilities of the Church;

Chapter Three focuses on the issue of sexism endorsed by the theology and teachings of the Church and the first Orthodox Women's Consultation held in Agapia, Romania in 1976, and the radical nature of the papers presented. Examines the tradition of Orthodox society manifested in the service by women for church, society and family;

Chapter Four examines the important consultations held by the WCC which focused on the Community of Women and Men in the Church and the response from conservative Orthodox theologians to the development of feminist theology and the call for the ordination of women to the sacramental priesthood;

Chapter Five develops the themes of participation, consultation and challenges to the churches by women. It considers the effects of the Vancouver Assembly in 1983, the launch of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women in 1988 and the Rhodes consultation, convened by Patriarch Demetrios I in 1988, and calls into question the continuing conservatism of Orthodox women;

Chapter Six analyses the recommendations from the second consultation in Crete in 1990 in order to focus on the issues of human sexuality, participation and ministry of women. The Bossey seminars held during the 1990s focused on feminine images and spirituality where Orthodox women were in uneasy dialogue with Protestant and Catholic women; and finally,

Chapter Seven reviews the problems that arose out of the Canberra Assembly in 1991, the response of the Orthodox churches to the Ecumenical Decade, and discusses the work undertaken in the final two consultations at Damascus 1996 and Istanbul 1997. This final chapter reflects on the growing number of Orthodox women who have taken action to work within the church without resources and often without authority or blessings of the patriarchy, clergy or laymen, and the growing emphasis after fifty years on the ordination of women to the diaconate, if not the priesthood.

Final comments are presented in the conclusion with recommendations for further research and analysis in this new area of study regarding 'double standards' on human sexuality, on the participation and ordained ministry of Orthodox women and the authority of patriarchy in the Orthodox churches and societies.

## Chapter One

### **The Orthodox Church, Women's Movements and Ecumenical Relationships**

The Golden Charter of Orthodox ecumenism was addressed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate encyclical in January 1920 to : 'all the churches of Christ, wheresoever they be', and stated that: '... a mutual understanding between the several Christian churches is not prevented by the doctrinal differences existing between them'.<sup>1</sup> This statement opened the way for ecumenical dialogue on all matters pertaining to the faith, including the controversial and necessary discussions and consultations on the participation and ministry of women in the Church. The aim of the first chapter of the thesis is to place into context for following chapters : an historical overview of the structures and relevant teachings of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches and their new relationship with the World Council of Churches from 1948; the development of the women's movement and feminism in the West and the participation of Orthodox women in the early programmes and studies organized and promoted by and within the Women's Unit of the Ecumenical movement.<sup>2</sup>

#### **The Orthodox Church - structure, beliefs and contemporary history**

The Orthodox Church has not experienced the same influences of the Middle Ages nor undergone Reformations or Counter-Reformations of the Western churches. The Church experienced canonical divisions which occurred following the Third and Fourth General Councils held in Ephesus in 431 and at Chalcedon in 451. At the Third Council following the condemnation of Patriarch Nestorius, the Christians of Mesopotamia and Persia, formed the Nestorian church, now referred to as the Assyrian Church of the Near East. Following the Chalcedon Council, the Oriental (or Monophysite) Churches of the East differed in their understanding of the Nature of Christ and were not present at subsequent Councils. Father

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<sup>1</sup> Lev Zender, *The Ecumenical Movement and the Orthodox church*, *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol.1, no.3, 1949, p.268.

<sup>2</sup> During the fifty years since the women's department was established in 1948, it has been known by various names. For the purpose of this thesis to avoid confusion, the Department will be referred to as the Women's Unit of the WCC. See Appendix 3.

Kondothra M George from the Mulankara Syrian Orthodox Church suggests that it was not so much the Christological disagreement which led to the separation, but rather the cultural-political element which led to revolt of Asian and African churches against the dominant Graeco-Roman civilization attempting to impose their power on the Orientals'.<sup>3</sup> Centuries later, within the Ecumenical movement, this analysis is not beyond consideration when observing the relationship between Eastern and Oriental participants in consultations, assemblies and contemporary attitudes to ecumenism on a global dimension. However, despite the theological and cultural differences, the hierarchical structures, male authority and omnipresent militant conservatism, all the Orthodox churches are united in a brotherhood steeped in tradition and sustained by patriarchal cultures, whether enforced or absorbed.

The Eastern Orthodox Church comprises the four ancient Patriarchates: Constantinople, (The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople has special honour for historical reasons, but has no legalized rights to interfere in the internal affairs of other Orthodox churches), Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem; eleven autocephalous churches (that is, self-governing): Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Poland (Slavonic); Greece, Cyprus and Sinai (Greek); Romania, Georgia and Albania.<sup>4</sup> The churches in Finland, Japan and China have 'autonomous' status; and there is the Orthodox *diaspora*.<sup>5</sup> In Western Europe, North and South America, Australia, New Zealand and some African countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Ghana. The *diaspora* churches have an Archbishop or Metropolitan, bishops and clergy, and are in turn 'spiritually' administered from the Patriarchates of the home country. The Oriental Churches include : Coptic Orthodox Church (Egypt), Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Syrian Orthodox Church, Armenian Apostolic Churches, Mulankara Syrian Orthodox Church (India) and the Assyrian Orthodox Church (Iraq and the *diaspora*). Together, it is estimated the Orthodox Church worldwide encompasses between 250 million and 300 million believers.

<sup>3</sup> Kondothra M George, 'Historic Reconciliation. Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, in *One World*, No.167, July 1991, p.5.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 1 and 2.

<sup>5</sup> Dispersion of Orthodox Christians outside their country of origin.

Timothy Ware,<sup>6</sup> an Orthodox monk who had converted from the Church of England, writes the following in *The Orthodox Church*:

'The primary elements that make up the Tradition of the Orthodox faith are: (i) The Bible, as the verbal icon of Christ, which is not set up over the Church but as something that lives and is understood within the Church, and all the liturgical services. Whilst the Church is the authoritative interpreter of Scripture it does not forbid the critical and historical study of Scripture'; (ii) the Seven Ecumenical Councils which determined the doctrinal statements of the Church, though queries Ware, 'to say there can be no more Fathers of the Church (to determine the doctrines as resolved at the Councils) is to suggest that the Holy Spirit has deserted the Church'; (iii) the Fathers of the early centuries who are living witnesses and contemporaries of the church today; (iv) the inner Tradition of the faith as preserved in the Liturgy through the sacraments; (v) the Canons of the Church, 'often perceived as rules of great strictness and rigour that attempt to apply the dogma of the Councils to practical situations in daily life'; and (vi) Icons, the Orthodox Christian receives a vision of the spiritual world wherein the iconographer must reflect the mind of the Church. <sup>7</sup> For both the cradle-Orthodox and the convert to Orthodoxy, these basic understandings must be accepted as synonymous with being a member of the Orthodox Church

In 1821, the War of Independence liberated Greece from four hundred years of Ottoman oppression. In the decades following, other Balkan states were also liberated from Turkish rule and all looked to the future in order to re-establish their place in the world, economically and socially, but more especially to be returned to the Christian world where the Orthodox Church would again play a significant role in the development and progress of the people. In the small Orthodox countries, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece, the changes over the next hundred years were conservative, beset by economic constraints and internal conflicts amongst those

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Ware, now Bishop Kallistos Ware, studied classics and theology at Oxford University. In 1958 he was received into the Greek Orthodox Church under the Patriarchate of Constantinople. He is considered the pre-eminent Orthodox theologian in the English-speaking world. He has translated significant liturgical and spiritual texts for the benefit and understanding of non-Greek speaking Orthodox.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church, Part Two, Faith and Worship*, Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1983, pp.207-215.



who desired power and control over the country. Poverty was commonplace and became a major impetus for migration to Western Europe and the New World in order for families to survive and provide for the future. Whether from Greece, Romania or the Ukraine, for example, the Orthodox Church had sustained the people throughout the Turkish rule and against the influences of Islam through national culture and traditions, icons, candles, prayer and memorized liturgies, and this Church travelled with the migrant to the New World. In the *diaspora* small communities turned in on themselves for survival and focused on the Church as the centre of their lives, the place of refuge, the place of familiarity, the place of being at home. In the *diaspora* the church sustained the migrant through the nineteenth century and long past the early decades of the twentieth century.

During the nineteenth century there were many social and political changes in Europe and within the vast empire of Russia in particular. The Russian poet N A Nekrasov described the condition of Russia of the times as highly contradictory : *You are both poverty stricken and rich; You are both mighty and weak, Mother Russia.*<sup>8</sup> For Russia, both the nineteenth century and through the twentieth century, were times of growth and contradictions in all spheres of life, and a time of radical reassessment of values and far-reaching changes leading ultimately to the 1917 Socialist Revolution. The great powers that emerged in the early decades of the nineteenth century were Britain, France, the Habsburg Empire, Prussia and Russia. The western countries were increasingly industrialized, there was expansion in production, trade and finance, and both personal and national wealth. Industry expanded with new labour saving technology, the standard of living for the masses was rising along with population growth, improved sanitation and medical care increased the longevity of populations. Combined with the rise of the 'petty bourgeoisie', trade unions and more efficient production, all factors contributed to a changing society at large. However, the increased prosperity was not evenly shared by the great nations, and antagonisms developed over territorial claims and objections to military expansion by some powers resulted in confrontation.

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<sup>8</sup> Nicolai Sabolotsky, *The Russian Orthodox Church and the Poor*, WCC: Geneva, 1981, p.64.

The expansionist policies of Russia, the need for warm water ports for trade, a desire for a Pan-Slavic nationalism to embrace the nations speaking Slavic languages and the desire to rule the city of Constantinople, the centre of the Holy Orthodox Church led Russia into various conflicts with Turkey. After defeating various Turkish forces in the Balkans after 1806, supporting Greece in the 1820s and Romania in 1848, the Russian Czars secured recognition of Russia's right to intervene diplomatically on behalf of Orthodox Christians living within the Ottoman Empire. A passion to maintain their prestige on a matter of religious privilege by the Russians after a minor dispute in the Holy Lands led to the Crimean War in 1854, a war against the West that was lost, and set in motion various political scenarios for future turmoil that affected Russia well into the late twentieth century.

The wars of early nineteenth century in which Russia was embroiled meant hard times for the nation and intensified poverty amongst the masses. Particular moments of patriotic enthusiasm, heroism and unselfish labour by civilians could not counterbalance the impoverishment and weakening of the State. The defeat of Russia was a defeat of the Czar, who had failed to deliver the promise of protector and defender of the faith. The legend of invincibility and great strength was destroyed. And yet:

The vast Russian masses remained attached to their country and their Czar by notions of patriotism, superstition, false expectation of the Czars' beneficence and perhaps sheer apathy. Their stoicism in the face of unbelievable hardships is possibly the most remarkable feature of Russian history.<sup>9</sup>

Some reforms introduced by Czar Alexander II were influenced by the social changes in the west and included the emancipation of serfs, civic reforms, academic freedoms and the growth of an intelligentsia. The reforms were associated with liberal thinking and eventually were suppressed by another regime following the assassination of Alexander in 1881. Revolutionaries were either exiled or executed, universities lost autonomy, there was censorship, and religious dissenters were persecuted.<sup>10</sup> The Russian intelligentsia from the educated and professional classes and political activists were the idealists of the nineteenth

<sup>9</sup> M Florinsky, *Russia: History and Interpretation*, MacMillan: London, 1955, p.263.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon Greenwood, *The Modern World. A history of Our time*, Angus and Robertson: Sydney, 1964, p.409.

century who moulded and shaped much of Russian thinking of the time. They hoped and planned for a Russia where freedom from oppression, ignorance and poverty was possible for all. However, following the political constraints and the emergence of secret police and forced exile of thousands of men and women to Siberia, many in this group of activists, men and women, were forced into self exile by leaving Russia and seeking asylum in the west, particularly France, Germany and America. Also from this group of activists emerged Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, to be known as Lenin, who adopted a political philosophy that ensured the power of the Czar and the Russian Orthodox church was eventually relinquished to the authority of the State. Perhaps Lenin realized that the very nature of the Russians themselves desired that one's life be ordered and controlled, and that a free democratic Russia would never be a reality. <sup>11</sup> The only change in the end, from the days of serfdom, suppression of the intelligentsia and reforms, and the utter hopelessness of poverty only made bearable by a belief in the holiness of suffering, was the replacement of the Czar and nobility by the corporate rule of the Kremlin. The suppression and oppression of the Russian Orthodox Church created collaborators within in order for the church and the believers to exist. However, there were also martyrs who died for the faith and emigration by thousands who left in order to survive.

The centuries under Ottoman rule in Greece and the Balkans, autocratic rule and authoritarian corruption in Russia and colonialism in the Middle East have all contributed to conservative forces and participants, hierarchs and laity, of the Orthodox Church. The most important mission that faced all the hierarchs and clergy was the preservation of the faith and the moral identity of the laity. They had to ensure the continuation of Orthodox culture and traditions yielding no dogma and accepting no innovations into the canons of the church and always relying on the wisdom and spiritual guidance of the church fathers and theologians. In the late twentieth century, there are hierarchs, clergy and laity who do 'discern the signs of the times'. They are cognisant of the early invitation by the Ecumenical Patriarch in 1920, that ecumenical relations were 'not prevented by the doctrinal differences existing', speaking at a time when reconciliation was of paramount concern after the destruction during World War I.

<sup>11</sup> Rolf H W Theen, *Lenin.. Genesis and Development of a Revolutionary*, Quartet Books : London, 1974, p.74.

There is no equivalent position to the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church who, as the Bishop of Rome, is considered as 'equal amongst equals' by the Orthodox Church and before the schism of 1054 CE. 'had right to the most honourable seat at an Ecumenical Council'.<sup>12</sup> The schism between the Roman Church and the Greek Patriarchates was the result of linguistic, cultural, theological and political factors. The Roman claim of primacy to arbitrate all matters of faith, morals and administration was totally unacceptable to the Greek East and they acknowledged no such precedence or papal claims.<sup>13</sup> At the end of the twentieth century the memories and influences of Turkish Islamic occupation for four hundred years of nearly all the Orthodox countries of the East has, according to Timothy Ware: 'led to immense conservatism as Greeks cling to the Byzantine inheritance of the past entrenched in the repetition of ritual'.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Ware continued, 'while the ossification of the intellect was to be regretted it did preserve Orthodox tradition'.<sup>15</sup> However, he also introduced the reader to the fact that due to the oppression by the Turks, there was a period during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when theological students from the East travelled to the West for higher education in theology and were inevitably influenced by Catholic and Protestant theologians during their time of study in Italy, Germany, Paris or Oxford'.<sup>16</sup> While this may have opened the doors to ecumenical dialogue before ecumenism was a contemporary phenomenon, it is suggested that both traditions East and West, would have taken comfort from each other's opinions and teachings on women, patriarchy and authority.

### **A tradition of veneration, piety and sanctity**

It is not the intention of this thesis to explore in depth the theological or historical importance of the Theotokos, Mother of God or the women saints placed before contemporary women as the ideal of 'womanhood'. However, it is essential to place in context the feminine

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<sup>12</sup> Demetrios J Constantelos, *The Greek Orthodox Church: Faith, History and Practice*. Seabury Press: New York, 1967, p.45.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44.

<sup>14</sup> Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin: Harmondsworth (1963), revised 1983, p. 100.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.100.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.101.

presence of Mary which is paramount in Orthodox theology, liturgy, tradition and in the culture of the Orthodox Christian believer. Mary is commemorated throughout the Offices and the Eucharist every day. In all the Orthodox churches there are two dogmatic statements concerning the person and holiness of Mary. The first is the Nicene Creed which states as a foundation truth of Orthodoxy, that 'the son of God was "born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary", and that Mary was given the title *Theotokos*, Mother of God or God-bearer, at the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE. This decision, explains Sally Cunneen, was reached after Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria overcame the objections of Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, to proclaim Mary as 'majestic common-treasure of the whole world... the crown of virginity, the sceptre of orthodoxy...'.<sup>17</sup> She refers to the influence of the 'Church Fathers reading into Scripture their own androcentric assumptions about human nature and the body, changing the meaning of Mary's virginity and minimizing the value of her humanity'.<sup>18</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, a Catholic feminist theologian, comments that: 'the declaration at the Council of Ephesus naming the Theotokos took place amid fanatical enthusiasm by the populace of a city that had once given its enthusiastic support to another virgin, the great Artemis of Ephesus'.<sup>19</sup>

The dogmatic statements of 'Immaculate Conception' and 'the Assumption of the Virgin' were determined by the Roman Catholic Church in 1854 and 1950 respectively.<sup>20</sup> The dogma of the 'bodily Assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven is rejected by the Orthodox as they believe it to be incompatible with Mary's full solidarity with the human race'.<sup>21</sup> At the time, H Alivisatos, Greek Orthodox theologian stated in the Ecumenical Chronicle that:

In spite of the quite exceptional place of honour which we give in our church to the most Holy Mother of God, we must reject the new dogma of this Church not only as being incorrectly and improperly proclaimed by the Pope alone, whose right in this matter we do not recognise, but also because there is no evidence for it

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.133.

<sup>18</sup> Sally Cunneen, *In Search of Mary, The Woman and the Symbol*, Ballantine : New York, 1996, p.109.

<sup>19</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Mary - The Feminine Face of the Church*, The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, PA, 1977, p.61.

<sup>20</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, Oakwood Pubs: Redondo Beach, CA, 1991, p.182.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.200.

either in Holy Scripture or in the Sacred Tradition'.<sup>22</sup>

'The Orthodox Church focuses on the dogma of Ephesus, revealing the truths of Theotokos through the poetic and symbolic language within the liturgical tradition of the Church.'<sup>23</sup>

Elisabeth Behr-Sigel explains that:

the Dormition or Falling Asleep of Mary is observed by the Orthodox in reference to the tradition of the church for as Mary was raised up to heaven in the wake of her Son's Resurrection and Ascension... her assumption anticipates the end for which all humankind was created... She is our promised land, the great sign of the coming in power of the heavenly kingdom.<sup>24</sup>

In the iconography of the Orthodox churches, Mary is very seldom represented without her Son, from whom she is inseparable.<sup>25</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel asserts that 'the Orthodox devotion to Mary is rooted in the Christological dogma and is expressed in the form of poetic symbols that are proposed, not imposed, for mediation, a mediation that probes their meaning and progressively discovers the richness of their significance'.<sup>26</sup> Barbara Corrado Pope questions the timing of the 1854 pronouncement of the Roman Catholic church which came when religious practice was waning in Europe. Throughout the nineteenth century religion became more and more the prerogative and comfort for women who have been extolled by the church as 'naturally' more religious, whereas men, influenced more by the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason were more 'rational'.<sup>27</sup> The pronouncement was built upon centuries of Catholic theology that defined Mary as both Virgin and Mother, a view held and theologized by the Eastern and Oriental churches as well. As Barbara Pope claims:

this depiction presented real women with a complex ideal of womanhood that they could not fulfil. For some women, it had the effect of denying female power, or the positive power of sexuality in human life. At the same time, the Virgin Mother provided a male, celibate clergy with a 'safe' object of contemplation and adoration.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> H Alivisatos, 'The New Dogma from an Eastern Orthodox Standpoint', *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol.3, no.2, January 1951, pp.152.

<sup>23</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, p.190.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.198.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.182.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.183.

<sup>27</sup> Barbara Corrado Pope, 'Immaculate and Powerful', in Clarissa W Atkinson, Constance H Buchanan and Margaret R Miles (ed.), *Immaculate and Powerful. The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, Crucible: London, 1987, p.193.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.193-94.

The devotion to the Virgin Mary is manifest in contemporary times by Pope John Paul II, a piety, Barbara Pope suggests that is related to his conservative attitudes on the issues of birth control, sexuality and women's roles in society and the church.<sup>29</sup> Such conservative attitudes are also manifest in the hierarchs, clergy, monastics and laity within the Orthodox churches. However, it is also important to record that there is the same familiarity amongst many women, married and single, Orthodox and Catholic, towards the Theotokos who is often referred to in a less formal manner as *Panagia*, meaning all-holy, and she is called upon in prayer for those matters close to the heart. Joy Corona, for example, placed in context the personal understandings an Orthodox woman might express for the Theotokos: 'Mary being the example and inspiration to us all of the humility and obedience which should also characterize our relationships with God. She is a model of submission which we all, men and women should follow'.<sup>30</sup> While accepting the piety and devotion of Orthodox women for the Theotokos, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel cautions the exaltation of 'feminine charisms' in relation to Mariology in order for the church to justify the exclusion of other women from real responsibilities in the church and society.<sup>31</sup>

According to tradition in the Orthodox churches, the Virgin rested on the shores of Mt Athos during a journey to Jerusalem, which was subsequently dedicated to her as the *Aghion Oros*, Holy Mountain.<sup>32</sup> Following a vision of the Theotokos, it is also claimed that she spoke to St Peter the Athonite (681AD), saying 'I have chosen Mt Athos to be a monk's proper residence... I received it as an inheritance from my Son and God'.<sup>33</sup> Alice-Mary Talbot refers to the exclusion of women on Mt Athos as an extension of the traditional monastic rule of *abaton* - the prohibition of men and women from entering the monastic house of the other. As Mt Athos has always been regarded as one monastic 'house' therefore the prohibition rule applies. In addition, there is the tradition that Christ granted Athos to his mother, 'the peninsula became

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.196.

<sup>30</sup> Joy Corona, 'Images of Mary', in *MaryMartha*, Vol.2, no.1, 1992, p.14.

<sup>31</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, p.130.

<sup>32</sup> *The Life of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos*, written, compiled and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, Colorado, 1989, p.434.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.436-437.

off-limits to all other women' .<sup>34</sup> which supposedly reinforces the exclusion of women. Talbot refers to the *Typikon* of Athanasios in the tenth century for the Lavra Monastery which stated 'you will not own any animal of the female sex, for the purpose of doing any work which you require, because you have absolutely renounced all female beings'.<sup>35</sup> Talbot claims that the *abaton* rule was so entrenched that no official law was actually written forbidding women from entering Mt Athos. Such were the sensitivities and religiosity of women that they would never dream of attempting to enter the sacred peninsula. Talbot alleges that the constant injunctions against the presence of female animals 'so that monks might be pure in all respects and not defile their eyes with the sight of anything female' implicitly suggests, without actually stating, the prohibition of women from Mt Athos.<sup>36</sup>

At the Agapia Consultation held in 1976, Dumitru Staniloae was quite clear as to the relationship of women and the Theotokos when he reminded the delegates that mankind (sic) was represented integrally by the two poles - man and woman - which complete each other without any clash, each having his or her vocation. 'If the priest has his prototype in Christ, the woman as a mother, wife or collaborator of the priest, has her prototype in our Lady'.<sup>37</sup> These comments were made notwithstanding the paternalistic assurances stated by Bishop Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church at the WCC Nairobi Assembly in 1975, that 'in our church and in our theology we have never discriminated against women (for) we hold Mary, the Mother of God in the highest esteem',<sup>38</sup> women could not be assured by such a statement or sentiment for the reality was that while honouring Mary, women were often considered completely without honour. As Eva Topping suggests in *Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy*:

the celestial Mother of God occupies holy space in the apses of countless Orthodox churches, while no daughter of hers is permitted access to the altar. Her holiness has yet to trickle down to women in the church... Mary's glory

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<sup>34</sup> Alice-Mary Talbot, 'Women and Mount Athos', *Athos and Byzantine Monasticism*. Papers from the 28th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, 1994, p.67.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.68.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.69.

<sup>37</sup> 'The Ecumenical Consultation at Agapia Convent - Romania, in *Romanian Orthodox Church News*, Vol.VI, no.4, October-December 1976, p.27.

<sup>38</sup> Constance Parvey, 'The Patriarchal Captivity of the Churches Come Loose', *Lutheran World*, No. 3, 1976, p.228.



grew brighter in inverse proportion to the downgrading of the female sex.<sup>39</sup>

There are, of course, exceptions, and nuns may be blessed to enter the altar to prepare for the Liturgy, especially in the convents, but this is not a practice or blessing extended to laywomen. Alice-May Talbot also draws conclusions in regard to Mt Athos, the Holy Mountain as analogous to the sanctuary of the church where only the priest may enter and no woman except the Virgin is admitted.<sup>40</sup>

Such is the high praise and adoration of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, claims Ann Loades, that we are invited in Orthodox tradition to: '*stand with reverence in the house of God and cry aloud: Hail, Queen of the world; Hail, Mary, sovereign over all of us; hail, thou who alone art blameless and fair among women.*' Loades asks the pertinent question for women 'what are all other women, as distinct from men, being blamed for?'<sup>41</sup> The feminist Orthodox scholar will have much to explore when the time comes for such questions to be answered within the perspective of Orthodox tradition and theology. Many statements have been promulgated by the church and clergy about the unsuitability of women to enter holy places or be incorporated into the sacramental ministry of the church. The advice to turn to the Church Fathers and words from the monks has not always provided women with solace nor the understanding of inclusion within the church. Indeed, perhaps some words should not have been spoken let alone heeded, or furthermore, been judged worthy of record and translation. Tim Vivian refers to conversations that Elders had with one another concerning thoughts that he acknowledges 'does unfortunately cast a cold eye on women'. In particular he quotes *Saying 24* when the monk asks the question, 'if it is necessary to come into contact with women, how ought we to meet with them?'. The answer is harsh:

Thus "necessity is the Devil's doing... if some need requires you to be in contact with a woman... just say a few words, finish your meeting and quickly dismiss

<sup>39</sup> Eva C Topping, *Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy*, Light & Life Pubs: Minnesota, MN, 1987, p.63.

<sup>40</sup> Alice-May Talbot acknowledges this reference to an unpublished paper by Henry Maguire on the location of images of the Virgin in Byzantine churches, p.68.

<sup>41</sup> Ann Loades, 'The Virgin Mary and the Feminist Quest', in Janet Martin Soskice, (ed.), *After Eve. Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition*, Marshall-Pickering: London, 1990, p.16

her. If you loiter with her, know that her stench will debase your thoughts'.<sup>42</sup>

Of course it has been accepted for centuries that monks of Mt Athos and indeed any other monastery, as do the nuns in strict Orthodox convents, have the right to admit whom they will and deny entrance to those not deemed worthy. While the sisters can and do deny men the right to worship in their chapels during services and can insist they do not enter the monastery, nevertheless male priests are needed to celebrate the liturgy and many other holy services. In Cairo the women's monasteries close to all the public, including those seeking spiritual guidance, during the period just prior to Great Lent through to Easter Sunday. However, on Mt Athos, while the rules of their monastic order are spiritual obligations for each and every monk there is a clear exclusion of all females not just from the services but from the entire island.

The absorption of negative attitudes and practices towards women has permeated throughout the cultures of the Orthodox churches and such responses accepting their exclusion from the holy are not unexpected in the context of the paramount authority of patriarchy. For one thousand years women have had to depend on the writings of men to understand and appreciate the priceless inheritance of Mt Athos. In October 1985, an exhibition of the vast number of treasures of Mt Athos ranging from manuscripts, icons, vestments, rare books and official documents was made available for the Thessaloniki International Fair, and for the first time women availed themselves of the rich variety of historical objects and ancient documents for their own research.<sup>43</sup>

On 15 September 1997, at a meeting of the European Union, two women ministers from Sweden and Finland objected to the monastic community of Mt Athos excluding women as being "contrary to the principles of equality and free movement of persons within the European Union". However, such political correctness was not deemed a sufficient reason for any changes according to Alekos Alavanos, a Greek member of the European Union, who was supported by socialist EuroMP Anna Karamanou, the former general secretary for equality.

<sup>42</sup> Tim Vivian, 'WORDS TO LIVE BY: A Conversation that the Elders Had with One Another concerning Thoughts', in *SVTQ*, Vol.39, no.2, 1995, p.139.

<sup>43</sup> *The West Australian*, 15 October 1985, p.9.

Together they supported the right of the monasteries to exclude women, a view the report noted, that was supported by most Greek feminists who accepted their exclusion was a cultural and not a feminist issue.<sup>44</sup> This issue of the exclusion of the female will continue to be a controversial point of view not just amongst Greek Orthodox feminists, and not so readily accepted as a cultural point of view and therefore not open for debate.

### The Ecumenical Movement

Following the four years of terror, destruction and millions killed or maimed on the battlefields of Europe during the Great War, nations and churches alike were left devastated by the manifestation of inhumanity and evil that could exist in the hearts and minds of men. Neither dialogue nor prayer had halted the onslaught of machine or 'manpower'. With single minded and manic obsession the combatants were determined to be the side whom God favoured. For they were the years when the Church still mattered, when prayer on the lips of soldiers and loved ones at home, and even Generals invoked the Almighty to grant victory to their side. Death and destruction on both sides of the War left bitterness and hopelessness in the hearts of many. The naive trust that governments would protect the people and the belief in the benefit of prayer to bring peace were cynically dismissed as futile dreams by the millions of people affected so adversely. It was in the atmosphere of distrust between the victors and the defeated that two major concepts came before the governments and churches of the world in an effort to ensure that the Great War would be 'the war to end all wars'.

In 1919, the formulation of the League of Nations was proposed by US President Woodrow Wilson and supported though in modified form by Britain and France. David Thomson refers to the proposal as being 'a democratic organisation that would replace the separate alliances and secret deals by providing infrastructure for peaceful resolution and constructive cooperation which could result in collective security for Europe'.<sup>45</sup> By 1925 there were fifty nation states who held to the covenant of the League of Nations but they did not

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<sup>44</sup> Athens News, 19 September 1997 [Online] Available: <http://www.goarch.org/worldnews>. [1997, 21 September]

<sup>45</sup> David Thomson, *Europe Since Napoleon*, Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1966, p.638.

include Germany or United States. Russia did not become a member until 1934, and was expelled in 1939 when the League of Nations was almost finished.

The noble concept of the League of Nations, though it did not truly live up to the initial ideals, did provide the foundation for the encyclical pronounced from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in January 1920. The Encyclical was a call for the various Christian Churches to 'overcome the spirit of mistrust and bitterness and demonstrate the power of love in the faith by establishing a *koinonia* of churches'.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, it was considered that the present time was most favourable 'especially in view of the hopeful establishment of the League of Nations'.<sup>47</sup> It was deemed important that the Churches should 'not continue to fall piteously behind the political authorities, who were applying the spirit of the Gospel in order to defend justice and cultivate charity and agreement between the nations'.<sup>48</sup> The Encyclical called on the sister churches to reply to the proposal with their own ideas in order to proceed with the establishment of a fellowship (of churches).<sup>49</sup>

At the Faith and Order World Conference held in Lausanne in August 1927, the Most Reverend Archbishop Germanos re-iterated the position of the Orthodox Church for future ecumenical dialogues: 'the Orthodox church, following the advice of Augustine, *in dubius libertas*, concedes to theologians freedom of thoughts as regard to things which are not essential and which have no connection with the faith of the heart'.<sup>50</sup> At the same meeting, Sergius Bulgakov, a delegate from the Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, focused remarks on the place and participation of the laity in the Orthodox Church.

The laity no less than the clergy, has its place and value in the Church as a whole. The status of the layman (sic) is not negative, it is not merely non-clerical, but is

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<sup>46</sup> Constantine G Patelos (ed.), *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement. Documents and Statements 1907-1975*, WCC : Geneva, 1978, p.40.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p.42.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43.

<sup>50</sup> Encyclical letter from Patriarch of Constantinople to Pope Nicholas I, cited in Faith and Order, Proceedings of the World Conference, Lausanne, 3-21 August 1927, SCM : London, p.21.

a special order, imparted by confirmation of holy oil... <sup>51</sup> the clergy is not above the people but in them and with them; it is not a judicial absolutism but divinely given authority... <sup>52</sup>

Bulgakov reminded both the clergy and the laity that 'no part of the Church can claim infallibility over or against the others, even bishops and patriarchs as Church history sufficiently shows, can fall into error'. <sup>53</sup>

In following years, the Orthodox churches were present at World Conferences on Faith and Order at Lausanne in 1927, and Edinburgh in 1937 and again in Lund in 1952, four years after the formation of a church 'League of Nations' - the World Council of Churches (WCC). The Russian Orthodox Church and the Churches of Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Poland and Albania were originally negative and resisted membership of the new Ecumenical body founded in 1948. However, by 1961 all the Orthodox churches, Eastern and Oriental, were members of the World Council of Churches and all sent delegates to the Third Assembly in New Delhi, India, but included no women. Since the 1960s the two families of Orthodoxy have been assisted by the WCC to dialogue and to affirm their common tradition of the one church in all important matters including liturgy and spirituality, doctrine and canonical practice and the sacraments.<sup>54</sup> In 1990, agreed statements on common understandings between Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, brought to a close 1500 years of theological dispute and doctrinal separation. <sup>55</sup>

Lev Zander, theologian and a member of the Russian Orthodox community in Paris under the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, expressed his concerns about the anti-Ecumenical sentiments of the Russians in 1949, when he reflected on the relationship between the WCC and the Russian Orthodox Church. The Russians declined to be founding members of the newly formed World Council of Churches and officially pronounced against ecumenism.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, (translation revised by Lydia Kesich), SVSPress: Crestwood, NY, (original published in Russian, 1935), 1988, p.238.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.259

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.261.

<sup>54</sup> K M George, 'Historic Reconciliation', p.5.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.6.

Though believing it was entirely based upon misunderstanding and lack of information nevertheless Zander was critical and stated that: 'it was an expression of ecclesiastical self-assertion, provincialism and suspicion always found in Orthodox churches and used as the voice of true and pure Orthodoxy'.<sup>56</sup> Zander warned that 'without participation in the Ecumenical movement 'Orthodoxy would finally shut itself within its confessional and national boundaries'.<sup>57</sup> He further claimed that 'ecclesiastical provincialism is a disease of the spirit, a disease which can attack all churches whatever their power, greatness, or holiness'.<sup>58</sup> Zander cited Sergius Bulgakov, as 'perhaps one of the boldest, most exacting and responsible Orthodox workers in the cause of ecumenism', who criticized the local church that often regarded itself as universal and all-embracing while ecumenism offered the possibility of 'breathing with two lungs' in order to expand out of provincialism and away from the conceit of mistaking oneself of being the Church in all its fullness.<sup>59</sup> It is in the light of such comments that consultations in the Ecumenical movement have often revealed the provincialism of Orthodox churches and the narrow vision held of women in their life and work for the Church.

Many of the women advocates of the early Ecumenical movement were activist churchwomen for suffrage, the right to work, marital equality and the right for education of women and amongst the first women to challenge the Church and its discriminatory attitudes and practices towards women as they challenged the State. Through the WCC, as the various jurisdictions joined between 1948 and 1961, Orthodox women came into a movement that for the next fifty years would call upon the member churches to take account of the work, participation and ministry of women in the Church, through the dedication of churchwomen committed to the scriptural truth that men and women were created 'in the image of God... and all who are baptized in Christ are all one in Christ'.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Lev Zander, 'The ecumenical movement', p.267. Lev Zander, Orthodox theologian, was a member of the Russian Orthodox community in Paris, and keen supporter of ecumenical relationships. His wife, Valentina was the church's correspondent with the women's unit and also a delegate to ecumenical meetings.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.268.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p.275.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.276. Sergius Bulgakov, *My Life in Orthodoxy and Priesthood*, trans. Lev Zander, Autobiographical notes (in Russian), p.55.

<sup>60</sup> *Genesis 1:27; Galatians 3:27-28.*

### **Women, Church and State - the Feminist movement**

During the nineteenth century the early waves of feminism came not only through the action of radical and secular women, but also from the evangelical feminism of Protestant women that emerged through radical acts for social and moral reforms. This unlikely class of women who, while engaged in fighting for causes usually imposed by the desires or neglect of men, were nevertheless women who did not openly challenge the accepted view of women as subordinate to their husbands. The revivalist campaigns, the increase in female missionary societies and growing charitable and philanthropic causes were taken up by middle class women whose leisure time increased as they were alienated from public and economic life filled by male family members. With increased leisure time now that household chores were taken up by servants, women turned to religious and philanthropic causes, taking their domestic skills, both in production and management, into a separate though public sphere dedicated to good works and Christian acts.

The Evangelical movement arose out of a reaction against the rationalism and secularism of the Enlightenment, and was particularly active amongst women and men, in America and Britain where the industrial revolution and social changes were also new phenomena for their societies. Evangelicals believed that wholesale conversion and the practice of Christian moral and ethical values would alleviate the suffering of the poor and encourage philanthropic tendencies in wealthy adherents. Some women were engaged in producing tracts for distribution to the poor and unchurched and preaching in the countryside as members of the Bible Christians and Primitive Methodists sects in the non-conformist churches. Other city women were involved in relief work for the destitute, provision of asylums for the deaf and insane, and activists in the anti-slavery movement in America and advocates concerned with the moral issues of prostitution and alcoholism. Out of this tradition came women such as Florence Nightingale, Josephine Butler and Octavia Hill in Britain and Lucretia Mott, the Grimke sisters, Susan Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in America. These women, amongst many, battled the churches, the courts, male structures, families and Parliament for the repeal of laws that discriminated against women.

Throughout the nineteenth century women continuously engaged in moral and social reform becoming more aware that their exclusion from the power structures of society was realized in not having the vote, their property went to their husband on marriage, and their children were the husband's property on separation. Women were less educated and were denied entrance into the professions such as medicine, law and science and especially into the ministry of mainstream churches. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the focus of the women's movement was for suffrage and the benefits that would accrue should women gain the vote. Women began to enter the 'white collar' workforce before suffrage was granted, since they were needed more for their labour than as direct result of the feminist campaigns for the right to work. However, the right to work with the rights for equal pay were campaigns that continue until the end of the twentieth century.

The problem of the 'surplus woman' in Britain made the inactivity and poverty of women more noticeable. The surplus was due to a number of factors including the higher mortality of male babies, the emigration of men to the colonies and America, and the permanent absence of men in the armed forces and merchant navy. Single women were discriminated against even more than married women because they were perceived as having failed in the one expectation of society, to engage and marry a man and be a wife and housekeeper. Florence Nightingale held no illusions about opportunities and status for women in marriage: 'some few sacrifice marriage, because they sacrifice all other life if they accept that... for behind his destiny woman must annihilate herself, must be only his complement'.<sup>61</sup> Her words were confirmed by a Church of England clergyman some decades later who claimed that 'unmarried women can never be accepted as the true or best representatives of womanhood, however brilliant their intellectual powers or astonishing their actual achievements'.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Florence Nightingale, 'Cassandra', in Ray Strachey, *The Cause*, Virago: London, 1978 (originally published in 1857), p.407.

<sup>62</sup> Brian Heency, *The Women's Movement in the Church of England 1850-1930*, Clarendon: Oxford, 1988.



The largest growth of women entering the monastic life in the Anglican Church and the women's missionary movement in America and Britain, and the emigration of single women, occurred between 1880 and 1912 when 'the feminist movement, educational opportunities and new jobs were expanding for educated women'. Perhaps this was also the rise in the numbers of women taking the initiative to decide their life destiny separate from patriarchal control. When the call for the vote was growing in momentum in England, Helen Hanson, a former missionary medical doctor asserted that: 'in the West, supposedly superior to all other societies, it was possible to trust an ex-criminal, trust an immoral man, trust a man who beats his wife, trust a naturalized alien, but never trust a woman to vote'.<sup>63</sup> The reforms in Britain were to lead church women from evangelical feminism in the nineteenth century to a radical call for the sacramental priesthood in the twentieth century.

In America, the reform programmes were focused on similar issues. The purity campaigns revealed a double standard of morality where women were judged by their public behaviour as virgin or whore, where men were the receivers of unblemished woman or enjoyed the depravities of the flesh with prostitutes and mistresses, blaming them for their fall from grace. The double standard moral judgements were entrenched not only in Britain and America but manifested across all societies no less in Orthodox and Roman Catholic societies where the purity of the woman was aligned with the purity of the Virgin Mary. The campaigns for legal changes on birth control, abortion, divorce, suffrage, education, employment and equal rights and the temperance movement expanded in the twentieth century. It was not difficult for the churches to oppose the campaigns by attacking them as the result of Enlightenment and the subsequent decadent expectations of women in countries that had largely forgotten God and the Christian faith as the guide for moral and family relationships. It is not difficult to accept that the continuing conservative attitudes and practices of the Orthodox Church reflect the lack of reform and feminist activists in the movements of women throughout the world.

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<sup>63</sup> Helen B Hanson, *From East to West. Women's Suffrage in Relation to Foreign Missions. The Church League for Women's Suffrage*, Pamphlets No.2, September 1911, p.3.

Throughout the feminist movement, it is widely accepted there are three broad streams of feminism: liberal, socialist and radical, that absorb at different times, various issues that can be contained within the parameters of a general definition. The liberal feminists, which included evangelical feminism, focused their concerns on equality and civic and civil rights for women and men, and are associated with various missions for equal access to education and professional opportunities, reproductive self-determination and equal pay for equal work. Liberal feminists include the many women in the churches who work for reform from within the structures. The American Equal Pay Act in 1968 and the Sex Discrimination Acts of 1975 in Britain were contemporary reforms of liberal feminist activity.

Marxist or socialist feminism had its roots in the Enlightenment especially through the early work of Robert Owen and the Saint-Simonians whose philosophy centred on community rather than the individual. The emphasis on class, and the belief that power, privilege, wealth and control were in the hands of a minority who enjoyed their status due to exploitation of labour of the working class (production) and women (reproduction). For the radical feminist the cause was centred on the core issue of women's control over their own bodies as vehicles of autonomous sexual experience and their own reproduction. For Rosemary Radford Ruether, Catholic feminist theologian, 'patriarchy, means above all, the subordination of women's bodies, sexuality and reproduction to male ownership and control.... Any theory of women's liberation that stops short of liberating women from male control over their bodies has not reached the root of patriarchy'.<sup>64</sup> Many women claim they will not be liberated from patriarchy until they are liberated from men, other radical feminists can and do accept relationships with men while remaining strong and committed advocates of liberation from male control, whether in society, personal relationships or church teachings. It cannot be denied that the power structures in all societies are male controlled. The minute presence of a few women has not changed the structures nor has it changed the patriarchy. Many women, in order to succeed in leadership, have taken on male characteristics in order to maintain their position, and in the process this has led to alienation from the women's movement, and a conservatism in regard to possibilities

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<sup>64</sup> Ruether, Rosemary Radford, *Sexism and God-Talk. Towards a Feminist Theology*, SCM :London. 1983, p.94.

for reform. Margaret Thatcher, a former Prime Minister of Great Britain, was not an advocate for equal opportunity nor women's ministry; she was however, an advocate for models of conflict and aggression which brought her approval and electoral success.

The first indications of dissent and resistance to the ongoing practices of discrimination and subordination of churchwomen in the modern era were initially revealed in the late nineteenth-century, particularly in America and England. While the women scholars, mainly in the Anglican, Protestant and Reformed churches, were critical of patriarchy and male authority in the church and society, the majority of Orthodox churches wherever they were, were still recovering from four hundred years of Ottoman oppression, in lands beset by poverty, illiteracy and power struggles by the elite, in Church and State, to pay any attention to revolutionary words from the West.

The Protestant churches especially in North America and England had experienced many examples of feminist action since the mid-nineteenth century when evangelical women joined the anti-slavery movements. The tenacious and committed women had shown they were formidable proponents amidst the forces for emancipation as they campaigned for the temperance movement, the right for education and entry into the workplace on an equal standing with like-qualified men. Parallel with those concerns, women became increasingly involved in moral and social reforms for society in general and for women in particular. The ordination of women into the 'ministry of the word' was also an issue for a small number of women who felt 'called by the Spirit'. In the case of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Gage, their call for the emancipation of women in the churches manifested in the publication of *The Women's Bible* written by Stanton in 1898, a theological exegesis on the biblical passages that she determined were detrimental to both the standing and status of women in the Church; and *Women, Church and State* written by Gage in 1893 and dedicated to 'all Christian women and men, of whatever creed or name who, bound by Church or State, have not dared to Think for Themselves'.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Matilda Joslyn Gage, *Women, Church and State*, (orig.1893), reprint Ayer Books : Salem, 1992, p.3.

Gage explained her reason for writing such a volume because she was '... indignant at the injustice of Church and State towards women; at the wrongs inflicted upon one half of humanity by the other half in the name of religion; and always hearing that it was God ordained that woman was subject to man and that her position was much higher under Christianity than ever before'.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps the most telling words written by Matilda Gage, well suited to raise the issue of women in the church for Orthodox women over a century later are contained in the final chapters of her book : 'the most important struggle in the history of the church is that of woman for liberty of thought and the right to give that thought to the world'.<sup>67</sup> There are women in the Church, even the Orthodox Church, whose experiences of Church patriarchy and authority have come to understand these words even though they may have no knowledge of the struggles in the western churches.

The early years of the twentieth century were marked by new movements formed by the working class and women. In Great Britain, the Victorian ideology of "separate spheres", when public life belonged to men while women were confined to the home, was increasingly challenged by new wave feminists.<sup>68</sup> The right to vote was the single most important public issue for women, and when war broke out in Europe in late summer 1914, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in England, for example, had the strength of 480 affiliated groups and 53,000 dedicated members.<sup>69</sup> The outbreak of war brought to a halt the possibility of franchise for women and the appropriate legislation, albeit restricted to women over thirty years in order not to upset the gender balance of voters, was not passed until 1918 after the War ended. Instead the women of Britain put their energies into the support of the War with 'a rhetoric that was sexist and militaristic'.<sup>70</sup> As women joined the workforce they freed another man for the front where 'mass slaughter', claims Françoise Thebaud, 'made nonsense of manly

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.525.

<sup>68</sup> Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism*, Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1981, p.15.

<sup>69</sup> Françoise Thebaud, 'The Great War and the Triumph of Sexual Division', in Françoise Thebaud (ed.), *A History of Women. Toward a Cultural Identity in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. V, Trans. Harvard University Press : Harvard, 1996, p.25.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.27.

images of war and victory, indeed of the values of Western civilization itself'.<sup>71</sup> There is no reason to doubt that women in the countries dominated by the Orthodox church also were caught up into the workforce for the war effort, while in Russia the internal political conflicts were set to tear apart the fabric and reason of Russian society in 1917.

The women of America and England were well advanced in education and social awareness in relation to most other Western countries in their variety of requests for equality before the law and eventually before the Synods of their churches. While accepting there was and is a diversity of cultures and religious back-grounds within the many movements for reform especially in North America and Western Europe, one is hard pressed at this stage to find evidence of an activist Orthodox women's movement outside the issues of traditional service within church life. While it is probable that many Orthodox women from various jurisdictions in the *diaspora* were politically active, especially in social reform issues following the Second World War, their activities were more likely to have been directed within their own ethnic Greek, Russian, or Lebanese or other communities, than in the wider growing movements of women in secular society.

The work of the philosopher Simone de Beauvoir and the publication of *The Second Sex*, published in 1949 in France, cannot be eliminated as an influence on the thinking of Western women, and it can be accepted that her work was also an influence for the French Orthodox theologian, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel whose contributions to the discussions on the participation of women in the Orthodox Church came to the notice of the ecumenical movement from 1976. Educated writers and philosophers of the fifties and sixties in France and western Europe were increasingly exposed not only to de Beauvoir and her theses concerning the secondary nature of women and the seemingly normal condition of women to be 'second always in everything', but also the increasing volumes of works that were coming from the desks of feminists throughout Europe and North America. For the benefit of scholars well established volumes were taken up by translators for sharing new concepts and theories with

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

other women.<sup>72</sup> The concept that de Beauvoir put before the reader and feminist thinker was the existing theory of human history that man was 'normal' and woman was 'other' was wrong and women needed to challenge such notions. 'From the earliest days of the patriarchy', she writes: 'they (men) have thought best to keep woman in a state of dependence; their codes of law (*including it is presumed religious laws*), have been set up against her and thus she has been definitely established as 'the Other'.<sup>73</sup>

It was not long before a woman immersed in the mysteries of her faith and church practices would transfer her acceptance of such a philosophy from her secular concerns to examine her own personal and private spiritual existence and begin to ask the same questions from different archival sources. Could Elisabeth Behr-Sigel have been so influenced? It is hard to imagine she would not be. For Behr-Sigel, 'the seeds of Christ's revolution in relation to woman' had lain dormant for a long time.<sup>74</sup> In practice, she claimed: 'the Church's attitude towards women often seems to be a compromise between the demands of the Gospel requiring the recognition of the equal dignity of men and women in the Church, and the inherited weight of patriarchal structures.'<sup>75</sup>

In the 1960s the second wave of a feminist revival began in America, and in 1961 a Presidential Commission on Women, with Eleanor Roosevelt as chairwoman was appointed by the new John Kennedy administration. While the Commission did not favour nor adopt a feminist position it did constitute a turning point for a new women's movement, and by 1967 every state of the union had commissions on the status of women.<sup>76</sup> In 1964 women were

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<sup>72</sup> Women scholars in the English-speaking world are often hampered by the inability to read works in other languages, perhaps the sense of superiority and the influence of imperialism have ensured that English has become the 'universal language'. The woman scholar too often reaches her studies at post-graduate level and then discovers that the knowledge of French, Greek or German would have opened her research fields even more as she discovers volumes translated from unknown writers, especially feminist historians and theologians exploring similar problems from their cultural perspective and political experience.

<sup>73</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Picador: London, 1988. (orig 1949, trans. 1953), p.171.

<sup>74</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, 'The Meaning of the Participation of Women in the Life of the Church', in Constance Tarasur and Irina Kirillova (ed.), *Orthodox Women. Their role and participation in the Orthodox Church*. WCC: Geneva, 1977. p.23.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>76</sup> Carl N Degler, *At Odds. Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present*, Oxford University Press: New York, 1980, p.441.

included in the protection's of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibited discrimination on grounds of sex, colour, race, religion and ethnicity. Carl Degler claims that the Act was 'surely the most significant single force behind the feminist movement as women's equality of opportunity was endorsed by the Federal Government.<sup>77</sup>

The 1960s brought forth new scholars and thinkers in a revived feminist movement, names now synonymous with the women's movement of the twentieth century. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1965); Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (1969) and Shulamith Firestone *Dialectics of Sex* (1971) were amongst many 'second wave' secular feminist publications which became the working tools for thousands of women across America, including Christian students in women's studies across the universities of America.<sup>78</sup> The feminist studies were quickly embraced and endorsed by the burgeoning women's movements in Canada, Australia, England and Western Europe. Such volumes eventually contributed to a movement in many Asian and Latin American countries as they also worked towards emancipation from colonialism and oppression of women in their societies by adapting the theories of action and discourse developed within the feminist movement that were most relevant to their contemporary cultures.

### **Orthodox Women and the Ecumenical Movement**

Women in the Orthodox Church belong to an ancient and tradition filled institution which claims that it is the Church of Pentecost, as old as Christianity itself, that has come to this present age without corruption or compromise of the faith. It is a church of great ritual, ceremony and mystery and above all a place where authority is given only to men. Women serve in roles subordinate to the patriarchy, whether in the person of hierarch, father or husband. The Orthodox Church is a family of self-governing churches held together not by a centralized government nor a single prelate but by the double bond of unity of the faith and

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.442.

<sup>78</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, Penguin:Harmondsworth,1965. Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, Doubleday: New York, 1970. Shulamith Firestone, *Dialectics of Sex, The Case for Feminist Revolution*. Jonathon Cape: London, 1971.

communion in the sacraments. Each church, while independent, is in full agreement with the rest on matters of doctrine, and among them there is full sacramental communion.<sup>79</sup>

It has been written that 'Orthodoxy by its very nature cannot really be talked about. It must be experienced in its devotional life in the rhythms of its liturgy, its calendar, its culture, tradition and community'.<sup>80</sup> However, within both the *orthopraxia* and liturgical experience of 'living Orthodoxy', the Church either endorses or does not correct particular cultural traditions and practices in communities that are demeaning to Orthodox women. The cultural traditions granted religious authenticity which of necessity must be absorbed in the life and practices as part of the true faith and must be analysed particularly within the *diaspora*, where traditions are entrenched in the past and reinforced by the very nature of migration and defence against other religious and cultural influences. Notwithstanding the reality that for many communities the Church provided both social security and familiarity for early migrants, nevertheless the *diaspora* churches, particularly in the 'New World', found themselves very often holding on to traditions no longer practised in the 'home' country and which no longer had a relevant religious meaning because of changed environment and family life, except in the 'eye of the beholder'. In the *diaspora* the 'tyranny of distance' was not the only problem for the Church hierarchs, it was also finding a place in a new land and holding on to the 'birthright Orthodox' who in company of members of other churches were no longer regular worshippers at the Sunday Liturgy. All this in addition to coming to terms with political realities, new questions of identity, new perspectives on old theologies, and new challenges from women and men no longer satisfied with age old answers, authoritative hierarchs, ill-educated clergy and tribalism that prevents the true face of Orthodoxy being experienced by its members. The problem has been exacerbated in the *diaspora* by the priesting of men who, in the early years of migration, though 'good and faithful' believers, lacked theological training, and brought customs from their own village to become religious traditions for a new community. Women have always been the 'beneficiaries' of customs that discriminate against them. In the late twentieth century, a priest can still insist on separated congregations, no women chanters or readers, covered head

<sup>79</sup> Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p.15.

<sup>80</sup> Susannah Herzog, *The Voices of Women*, WCC : Geneva, 1981, p.50.



at services or receiving communion, no communion for a woman who is menstruating, the girl child not taken into sanctuary when named at forty days, nor permit her participation in any liturgical services except in a choir, where even that is limited and in some jurisdictions not allowed.<sup>81</sup> The situation for Orthodox women in the West continues to reflect the age old customs of 'exclusion', though it is acknowledged there are signs of change. These changes or 'modern innovations' are to be discussed throughout the thesis, noting however, at the outset that such changes have not been at the instigation of an active or liberal feminist Orthodox women's movement outside the Church.

While secular feminist writers questioned the status of women in contemporary times in the 1960s, some far-reaching programmes had already begun in the churches through the Ecumenical movement and provided a powerful statement that women should be involved with their questions at the first Assembly of the newly formed World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948. The study on 'The Life and Work of Women in the Churches' began in 1947, with the encouragement of Dr W A Visser 't Hooft who had worked in Geneva through the war years as the liaison between the many churches who had been participants in the World Faith and Order meetings and was appointed the first General Secretary of WCC in 1948. Inspired by the efforts of women during the war, he believed the stories should be told to the wider church. As Susannah Herzel states: 'not since the Reformation had systematic attention been directed in gaining a picture of the life and work of women in the Church as a whole both professional and voluntary, evaluating it as it is and seeing the hopes for its future'.<sup>82</sup> Initially the proposal was discussed with the World YWCA, where the idea expanded to take in the whole question of women's Life and Work in the Church. after Twila Lytton Cavert, a Board member of the YWCA in America rejected the suggestion that the YWCA should be responsible, by insisting that the study should be the responsibility of the churches themselves.

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<sup>81</sup> Eva C Topping, *Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy*, Light & Life : Minneapolis, 1987. There are various papers which stress the 'alienation' of women from the life and spirit of the Church. These issues are discussed in later chapters.

<sup>82</sup> Susannah Herzel, *A Voice for Women*, p.7.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

The questionnaire was compiled, translated into a number of languages and sent to key women's organisations in over fifty countries, over a two and a half year period. The women were asked to write on their past work and history in the church as well as respond to the invitation to express their beliefs and aspirations about the possibilities for the future. Such was the tremendous response, that the French Reformed Church requested the subject of women in the church should be a formal agenda item for the World Council's Amsterdam assembly. The women in North America and Europe had a story of service to tell of their Christian commitment within and for the Church. The service of women missionaries to India, China, Africa and the Middle East since the mid-nineteenth century had been supported financially and administratively by well organized and motivated women's societies back home. These women's groups were powerful in their own right, and were often suspicious of any attempts by the parent organisation to interfere in their work.<sup>84</sup> This was not the case for Orthodox women whether in Greece or Russia or in the smaller Oriental churches in India and the Middle East. The lives of Orthodox women had been influenced by surrounding cultures, by the teachings of the Early Fathers, and religious subservience to patriarchy for over four hundred years, living in the shifting sands of nation states in the Middle East, and from 1948, were then submerged behind the Iron Curtain of the Soviet Bloc. The culture of passive acceptance continued to be internalized by Orthodox women. Only on rare occasions through the centuries, had great women risen out of Byzantine society that was patriarchal in every sense of the word,<sup>85</sup> and exerted profound influences upon the society and the Church, but they were few compared to those whom Monk Athanasios of Meteora considered as 'an affliction, the powerhouse of passion for those afflicted to the flesh'.<sup>86</sup> Women were useful and marriageable pawns in the diplomatic game engaged in by Byzantine rulers while they were in political power. Following the decline, stagnation and eventual defeat of the Byzantine Empire, as Donald Nicol claims: 'women returned to secluded lives, never venturing out except with faces veiled, even before the Turkish conquest, and thereafter it was all dark'.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Leonie B Liveris, MPhil thesis. The aims, methods and organisations of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society, Murdoch University 1996.

<sup>85</sup> Donald Nicol, *The Byzantine Lady. Ten Portraits 1250-1500*, Cambridge Press : Cambridge, 1994, p.3.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

### Women and Ecumenical programmes

While not all the Orthodox churches joined the World Council of Churches when it formed in 1948, among those that did were the Greek Orthodox Churches of Greece, Egypt and Palestine, the Russian Orthodox community in Paris, the Coptic Church of Egypt and the Armenian Apostolic Church of the Lebanon. The Orthodox women who responded for the first time to the initial questionnaire expressed a realistic description of their situation as women in the ancient churches. It was an opportunity for women to present themselves, their lives and their work from their context.<sup>88</sup> Amongst the women of the Orthodox church were women who were not promoted as leaders by their church hierarchs, but who were instead leaders in ecumenical women's organisations in their own country on their own initiative. It was those few women, rather than the clergy, who encouraged their church women to respond to the questionnaire and participate in future programmes of the World Council of Churches. From the early days, the hierarchs and theologians considered their membership in the WCC in terms of the spiritual rather than the corporeal and with the dignity and honour of the ordained office, rather than the questions of participation and social justice raised by the laity and the specific issues and struggles of women. Of course, this was not unique to the Orthodox churches.

A timely reminder of the struggles of women came some years later in 1981, when Rev. Dr Philip Potter, General Secretary of the WCC, referred to the first World Faith and Order meeting held in August 1927 in Lausanne and emphasized that regardless of the faithful service given by women in parishes, the mission field and in Christian education, there were only seven Protestant women present amongst the hundreds of clergy and laymen. He reminded delegates at the Community of Women and Men in the Church consultation in Sheffield, England that: 'the women had the courage to say that the right place of women in the church is a matter of grave moment and should be in the hearts and minds of all ...that every member of the Church must be allotted his or her right work and right position of responsibility.'<sup>89</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Susannah Herzel, *A Voice for Women*, p.9.

<sup>89</sup> Betty Thompson, *A Chance to Change. Women and Men in the Church*, WCC : Geneva, 1982, p.10.

Furthermore, from the Lausanne proceedings, the women had asked: 'that the gifts of women as well as men may be offered and used in full in the great task ahead...'.<sup>90</sup> It is of no surprise to feminists in the churches, still claiming 'their right place to full participation in the church' that the formal statement of courage from seven women would be the catalyst to much stronger and demanding words sixty years later from feminist theologians and historians in many member churches of the WCC.

Immediately after peace was declared in 1945, the stories and experiences of women that occurred during the six years of war were slowly revealed as quite extraordinary and in many cases heroic when women replaced men in traditional roles in the church and society, as women as in previous wars, freed a man for the front. Their stories needed to be told. The introduction statement to the questionnaire for the world wide study by the World Council of Churches, placed a number of considerations before the women in the church. Foremost was the question whether women were able within their life experiences, to make their fullest possible contribution to the common life. The common life included not only the family and community at large, but was also within the Christian movement where women should also make the fullest possible use of their intellectual, professional and spiritual gifts.

The introductory statement acknowledged and affirmed the great and varied roles that women had undertaken for the Church including the war effort and during the previous one hundred years whether in home and foreign mission work as teachers, evangelists, nurses and doctors, or fundraisers for the many varied projects approved and sanctioned by the church hierarchy. While these traditional activities continued, the statement also acknowledged that there were new activities emerging from the church women's voluntary organisations including Bible studies, church history, race relations and family life. The question posed was whether the reason for church women being so active with women's organisations could be directly related to their exclusion from the governing bodies of parishes and dioceses or whether in fact women preferred to work with other women where they controlled their programmes rather

<sup>90</sup> *Faith and Order Proceedings of the World Conference, Lausanne, Switzerland, 3-21 August 1927, SCM: London, 1927, p.373.*

than responding to higher authorities?'<sup>91</sup> The statement concluded with the questions addressed to the present status of women in their church; whether women were giving their fullest and most distinctive contribution to the Church; and whether the women were aware of their full potentiality for strengthening the Ecumenical movement and building a Christian society?<sup>92</sup>

In 1952, Kathleen Bliss, Director of the WCC Work of Women and Men in the Community of the Church wrote her book, *The Service and Status of Women in the Church*, the culmination of the responses from the 1947 questionnaire. The book was written because the information so willingly given by women for the survey was one way of helping women in the Church in their struggle for equality, and for them to know that they were not alone in the struggle, and to let men know of the incredible contribution so many faithful women had given to the life and work of the universal Church. Nevertheless, mindful of the conservative responses received, and aware of how far women had to progress in order to attain equal participation in the life of the Church she wrote:

To say that women's powers to educate and to succour have found an outlet in an immense variety of ways is not the same thing as saying that the Church has made use of even a title of the vast reserve of talent and devotion which lay to hand in the persons of its women members.<sup>93</sup>

Kathleen Bliss was faced with the challenge of providing conclusions from the many responses to the questionnaire when she wrote the book. Her two questions addressed to the churches over forty years ago have changed the thinking and practices of many member churches of the WCC. As a result of the positive acceptance of the 1947 study and the ongoing work of the Commission, a new Department on the Cooperation of Men and Women in Church and Society was established in the World Council of Churches. Already it seemed that responses from some people concerning the study questionnaire had brought criticisms that the Commission was to be 'only a clearinghouse for women's concerns'.<sup>94</sup> The Commission redefined its aims, functions and composition of the new Department and included the

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<sup>91</sup> Introduction Statement for the Study - *The Life and Work of Women in the Church*, 1947, p.1.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>93</sup> Kathleen Bliss, *The Service and Status of Women in the Church*, SCM: London, 1952, pp.184-185.

<sup>94</sup> Susannah Herzel, *A Voice for Women*, p.24.

recommendation of the appointment of a male to the staff, and that a male should be the next chairperson of the department. With the exception of Sarah Chakko, Orthodox women were not involved as staff members, nor for some years did they participate in any of the various and varied consultations organized by the Department. Madeleine Barot, French Protestant, was always conscious of both the absence of personnel and contributions from Orthodox women and in most instances from Roman Catholic women.

The questions from Kathleen Bliss continue to apply to the Orthodox churches at the end of the twentieth century: 'Are the gifts and willingness of women being used to the best advantage by the Church?' and 'Are women, married or not, being helped by the Church to understand the problems of the age as they affect women, to play their part in modern life as Christians and as women?'<sup>95</sup> For it is agreed that the Church has 'an underlying fear of modern women, their independence of character, and their acceptance of themselves as persons in their own right, not merely made for man'.<sup>96</sup> Little comfort can be taken from the challenge of the Life and Work study in 1952 for many years later in 1988, Pope John Paul II could still state that 'home or convent were the proper place for women';<sup>97</sup> Church of England Bishop Graham Leonard could claim 'secular ideas about feminism contaminate long settled views of women and their roles that are essential to a sense of Christian order',<sup>98</sup> and the aims of the Inter-Orthodox Symposium in Rhodes in the same year on the place of woman in the Orthodox church were 'to carefully restate the impossibility of the ordination of women from the perspective of Church doctrine'.<sup>99</sup>

In 1991 Monica Furlong, a writer and campaigner for women's status in the churches and in the midst of the ordination for women debate in England, took up Kathleen Bliss' questions of 1952 and claimed that it was still important for the Churches to change their

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<sup>95</sup> Kathleen Bliss, *The Service and Status of Women in the Church*, p.187.

<sup>96</sup> Monica Furlong, *A Dangerous Delight. Women and Power in the Church*, SPCK : London, 1991, p.5.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>99</sup> Gennadios Limouris, *The Place of the Woman in the Orthodox church and the Question of the Ordination of Women*, Tertios Publications : Katerini, Greece, 1991, p.11.

attitudes towards the expectations and attitudes of women rather than to focus entirely on the debate for the priesthood of women. The debate had revealed misogynist attitudes and practices of clergy and laity towards women that were far more destructive to the self-esteem of women and more conducive to continuing the subservient roles adopted by women than the opposition to their ordination.<sup>100</sup>

The participation of women in the life of the ecumenical movement, from local women's groups to the highest positions in the World Council of Churches has been a difficult journey, always tenuous to hold on to and driven by the needs and desires of women themselves for necessary changes to theological interpretations, church rituals and every-day practices that discriminated against women. From the beginning of the WCC, the number of active Orthodox women has been minuscule, and every decade the effort to increase their role and encourage their professional and ministerial vocations has been on the agenda of various units working on specific areas of concern for the churches.

In one contemporary publication which particularly focused on the women's department, and their roles and participation in the member churches of the World Council of Churches, Susannah Herzel noted that an ecumenical leader, Cynthia Wedel, reflected on the absence in the 1980s of Orthodox women in the struggle for women in the church, although there had been for a time, in the beginning of the Council, dynamic, intellectual and deeply committed Orthodox women from different countries and diverse cultures.<sup>101</sup> Those committed women, few but vocal and active, were less known to their Orthodox sisters in the many jurisdictions around the world, both homeland and *diaspora* than by women in other churches. Why such a situation existed, why the women involved were not considered leaders for women, and more importantly why were their voices quietened? These questions need to be addressed to priests and bishops who in keeping with the culture and traditions of the Orthodox churches, ensured that women were secondary and excluded from any power base other than the matriarchal home, which in itself requires much analysis and criticism. While such in depth cultural studies

<sup>100</sup> Monica Furlong, *A Dangerous Delight*, p.4.

<sup>101</sup> Susannah Herzel, *A Voice for Women*, p. 85.

in reality belongs in the realm of anthropology and sociology, the 'private sphere of influence', much criticized by feminist historians in the early and subsequent 'waves of feminism' must be examined in order to place before the church evidence of patriarchy, authority and exclusion of women from full participation in the life of the Orthodox church.

The concept of the 'private sphere of influence' remains as a contemporary value for theologians in the Orthodox Church. Stanley Harakas, Greek Orthodox priest and theologian in America wrote:

Men have been given the public aspects of the Christian life for their concern. Women have been responsible for the private sphere in the life of the Christian community. The priesthood, for instance, is reserved for males but everyone knows that the important 'church in the home' receives the most significant leadership from its female members.<sup>102</sup>

However, Liz Stanley and Sue Wise suggest that 'this masculinist world view' is endemic (not only in the church), and is so much advanced as the only 'scientific' way of interpreting social reality, that very few people are aware that it is a social construct and a part of sexism'.<sup>103</sup> Despite the efforts of church patriarchy either to ignore or dismiss the growing feminist consciousness of women there has been a movement, albeit scattered across jurisdictions, of a very few Orthodox women who have responded to the 'signs of the times'.

Women have cared for the Church and have served Her faithfully over centuries, accepting the teachings as Tradition, often in ignorance of the attitudes and distinct antagonism and distaste for the female human persons. The Church has long extolled the virtues of women as saints, monastics, martyrs and mothers of holy sons, and on the other hand, has relished the exposure of sinful women who have failed to behave in such a way as to ensure that they have a place on the 'male created' pedestal of holiness and sanctity. The lessons and examples for women of today continue to be drawn from examples of the early centuries, both in Biblical

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<sup>102</sup> Stanley Harakas, *Contemporary Moral Issues facing Orthodox Christians*, Holy Cross: Boston, 1981, p.57.

<sup>103</sup> Liz Stanley & Sue Wise, *Feminist Praxis: Research, Theory and Epistemology in Feminist Sociology*. Routledge: London. 1990, p.47.



interpretation and martyred women of the Mediterranean and mission churches, often with little reference to the reality of the late twentieth century problem of dislocation from the cultural and religious ties of previous centuries.

The hierarchical models of leadership with dominant clergy and subservient laity, the natural inferiority of women manifest in exclusion from authority and enforced in marriage and familial relationships, a suspicion and denouncement of sexuality especially manifested in women and their bodily functions, and the extolling of the virtues of asceticism, sacrifice, suffering and total obedience were common factors bringing the theologies and practices of Christian tradition together in varying forms of patriarchy and authority in which women had no consideration. Ecumenical relationships have provided opportunities for Orthodox women not only to be in dialogue with other women but more importantly with women within and between all Orthodox jurisdictions, homeland and in the *diaspora*.

## Chapter Two

### Women and the Ecumenical Movement

The membership of the Orthodox churches in the worldwide ecumenical movement was well received from the first assembly in Amsterdam in 1948. Many mainstream Protestant churches had already experienced fellowship and dialogue in the Faith and Order Commission and were convinced of the necessity for Orthodox membership and contribution to the Council's mission for unity. The presence of women though small, was obvious from the early days, and the work of Kathleen Bliss, Sarah Chakko and Twila Cavert ensured that ecumenical women would be valuable resources for the movement. This chapter examines the material that emerged from Orthodox women during the Life and Work Study of Women in the member churches and the early programmes of the Women's Unit.

#### **'the bounds in which she may work'**

In 1948, a pre-Assembly meeting was held at Baarn near Amsterdam in order to prepare a report on the Study to present at the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches scheduled to commence soon after the Baarn meeting. Twila Cavert reported that responses had been received from churches in fifty-eight countries including some of the 'older churches in Greece, Egypt and Lebanon, whose constant awareness of heritage and tradition leads back to early days of the Christian Church'.<sup>1</sup> In the Interim Report presented to the Assembly it was noted that there was a strong sense of women's place with great expectations of women on the part of the Church and an expressed fulfilment by the women in the extensive programmes of benevolent and catechetical work. The growing debate elsewhere such as those relating to women as clergy, according to the responses, were never considered in the Orthodox churches where life was based on long established tradition. A Coptic Orthodox spokesperson noted that, 'while there was a great necessity for freedom for

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Susannah Herzel, *A Voice for Women*, WCC: Geneva, 1981, p.9. Susannah Herzel published a very comprehensive chronology of the work of women at the WCC until 1981. Her book is a concise and standard reference on the background of the women's department at the WCC

women especially those with outstanding attributes, 'she must always remember the bounds within which she may work'.<sup>2</sup>

In the countries where the Islamic tradition was very strong such as Egypt, Turkey, Iraq and Iran, Christian women received very little attention from their priests and hierarchs in regard to the participation and place of women in the Church beyond traditional piety and motherhood.<sup>3</sup> The report from Egypt made mention that Christian women were 'gifted' but needed training. The Church had found it difficult to secure the services of professional workers as they were more readily employed by the government, the armies and private business. Most of the philanthropic work carried out by women for the Church was undertaken by women who were most likely to have a servant or servants in the home. These circumstances were not unlike the social position of women reformers and philanthropists in Britain and America in the nineteenth century. According to the report the claim was made that the social situation for women was more difficult in a country with a predominant Muslim culture where women could only work amongst women.<sup>4</sup> The restrictive religious influence was stronger in the country than the cities where there was a more liberal attitude to women, although even in cities they were still overlaid with the prevailing attitude in Islamic societies that 'women should be not only not seen but also not to be heard'.<sup>5</sup> In practically all the churches women were seated on one side, men on the other, and in village churches a curtain prevented any view of the other side. In regard to equivalent responsibilities and possibilities for women in the Church being offered women in the secular world, an active and prominent woman replied it would never happen, but perhaps, noted the anonymous recorder, 'it would be safer to say "not now"'.<sup>6</sup> Her response perhaps reflected a personal hope that eventually women should and would be in positions of authority and leadership.

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<sup>2</sup> Questionnaire response, 'Life and Work of Women in the Church', Coptic Orthodox Church, Egypt, 1947, p.20.

<sup>3</sup> Interim Report of Study on Life and Work of Women in the Church, WCC First Assembly, Amsterdam, 1948, p.14.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>5</sup> Questionnaire response, Coptic Orthodox Church, p.2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

The initial reaction from the hierarchs and priests (whose names were not recorded in the responses) of the Greek Orthodox Church in Egypt was a reluctance to respond to the questionnaire until pressed that all the other churches in Egypt would respond. The responses were not unlike the Coptic Orthodox Church combined with a stronger statement on the ordination question which was revealing in the authoritative tone which tolerated no argument:

The role of women in the church was never discussed; women have never officially played an active part in the Greek Orthodox Church; women clergy had never existed because the Church believed only men were assigned by God to receive ordination.... In fact the very idea of women clergy is extremely repugnant to the Egyptians. <sup>7</sup>

In another brief report, the Association of Church-Loving Women of the Old Armenian Gregorian Church of the Lebanon (Armenian Apostolic Church) affirmed their role in the Church by forming choirs to sing old Armenian chants; working as interpreters in church work; publishing Christian literature and organising religious and moral lectures for their community. They claimed to 'have a great desire to be allowed to serve on the governing boards of the Church, but 'the Church was governed by a constitution written before Armenian women had any standing outside the home'. <sup>8</sup> From another of the ancient Oriental Orthodox churches, the Orthodox Syrian Church of India, came reference to the menstruation 'problem' which raised the question of how could any woman hold church office (not only ordination) when at certain times she was not deemed worthy to partake of Holy Communion:

not a few suspect that at the least subconsciously, the minds of some Christian leaders in the world are plagued by a sneaking suspicion, that woman is indeed of a lower order of creation, and that physical manifestations related to her potential or actual functions as mother are designed to be a constant reminder of that fact. <sup>9</sup>

The ordination debate proved to be 'indeed a controversial subject' that like no other related to women in the Church, required a full ecumenical study to take into account the

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<sup>7</sup> Questionnaire response, Greek Orthodox Church, Egypt, p.41.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

principles involved that would have implications for church unity.<sup>10</sup> The response from the *diaspora* church of the Russian Orthodox Community in Paris endorsed the stand of the Orthodox Church that had always considered the role for women in the Church as helping and not an executive one and never considered it possible to ordain women as ministers of the Church.<sup>11</sup> According to the writer and translator, the Russian believer had a great reverence toward the Sacrament of Priesthood and would never admit a lay person to do what belongs to the function of an ordained priest, although allowing that it was permitted when no priest was available for a lay man or woman to administer the Sacrament of Baptism to a new born baby, a practice also acceptable in other churches. It was also from the report from Paris, that women in the churches learned of the life and work of Russian Orthodox women as pastors' assistants, which came to the forefront following the 1917 Revolution, when *economia* was practiced by the Church.<sup>12</sup>

The practice of *economia* in the Orthodox Church has meant a certain relaxation of the Canon Law as recorded in *The Pedalion* (The Rudder) in order for a particular situation to be accommodated.<sup>13</sup> This has occurred when the canon, adequate in one given historical period no longer meets the purpose of contemporary life and gradually falls into disuse in another period of time. Nicholas Afanasiev asked about the canons: 'is everything in the Church changeless?'<sup>14</sup> The Church, he claimed, cannot live only by existing Canon Law, which in reality is the law of the Byzantine Church supplemented by the decrees of local churches... and the church has the right to perform creative canonical work at all times, not just a restricted time, as church life slowly changed'.<sup>15</sup> In Paris, the Russian Orthodox community reported that the services of women as pastors' assistants in Russia were mainly

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>11</sup> *The Life and Work of Women in the Russian Orthodox Church, Paris Community, 1947*, p.8.

<sup>12</sup> The report was not signed nor attributed to any one person, but most likely the reporter was Mme Valentine Zander, and the translator her husband Professor Lev Zander, both enthusiastic supporters of the ecumenical movement in Paris.

<sup>13</sup> *The Pedalion* is a collection of Greek canons used primarily though not consistently by the Greek Orthodox Church. For the Orthodox, Canon Law does not function as in Roman Catholicism.

<sup>14</sup> Nicholas N Afanasiev, 'The Canons of the Church: changeable or unchangeable', *SVSQ*, Vol.11, no.2, 1967, p.54.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.66-67.

employed for convents, girls' colleges and parochial schools and their work had not originally extended to helping the priest in the parish. However, the Revolution of 1917 radically changed the situation for believers, the Church and Russian society.

The persecutions especially from 1919-1943 in Soviet Russia brought about necessary changes requiring *economia* that assisted the participation of women in order for the Church to survive. The Soviet law stated that a parish church could only continue to exist if it was financially supported by twenty persons in the parish. The financial debt included taxes, payment of the priest, upkeep of the church and philanthropic work in the community. As employees of the State, men were placed in very difficult situations if declaring themselves believers, so the women formed the committees of twenty and parochial councils for the church and were the assistants for the priests.

It was these experiences, the Paris report noted, that gave Russian Orthodox women the energy and purpose to build up communities in the *diaspora* after emigrating or escaping from Russia during the times of persecution and war.<sup>16</sup> The Russian emigre women worked as volunteers, a common situation for women in all the churches who participated in the 1947 study, in order to build up their communities. However, it was not only the parishes that were established by the hard work of the Russian women. Amongst the emigres were a number of women who had received some theological education in Russia prior to the Revolution, and were trained as readers, iconographers and chanters. The Holy Synod planned for 1917 had approved Theological Institutes for women teachers, together with plans for the restoration of the ancient order of deaconesses, which did not come to fruition due to the Revolution. Some women were part of communities of "sisters", trained not for medical work, but during war time had assisted priests in their pastoral work among the soldiers at the front. Many of these women, including members of the exiled royal families, became founders of religious communities and convents in Paris and other cities in France where numbers of Russian exiles established their new lives.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Russian Orthodox Community in Paris Report, p.9.

In 1994, the WCC Ecumenical Press Service re-published an excerpt from the 1940 Russian periodical *The Antireligious* on women in ministry in wartime Russia, which referred to the women known as 'deaconesses', 'readers' or 'mothers'. While the women were not permitted to enter the sanctuary and the iconostasis remained closed in the church, they conducted prayer services in parish churches remaining within the congregation of the faithful:

The women ministers have very good diction; they speak clearly and not at all like the old unintelligible buzzing of the sacristan. The services conducted by these women often make a greater impression than those conducted by priests. The fact that the congregation itself takes part in the singing strengthens this impression still more. <sup>17</sup>

The most public of the ministries provided by the women was at the services for the dead in providing pastoral work for the mourners. The writer of the article was convinced that the existence of the women ministers was simply a trick and called upon 'the Godless women, especially those who had important posts in the Soviet administration to be mobilized for the struggle against believing women'.<sup>19</sup>

### **Russian Student Christian Movement**

The Paris report praised many women, both laity and monastics, who endeavoured to support the Russian Orthodox Church in the *diaspora* and to develop many of the proposed reforms within the Church that had been abandoned due to the War and the Revolution. More importantly the report revealed the high level of educated, talented and religious women who in a unique *diaspora* laid the foundations for what has become a dynamic and integrated Orthodox community. This was a community, perhaps unique amongst the Orthodox of the times, developed in the twentieth century, having experienced women as parish presidents, women as professors of theology, women as church historians and philosophers within the life of the Church, together with a thriving community of monastics and a growing number of converts. It has been this community in an openness unusual for

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>18</sup> Ecumenical Press Service, September 1994. (excerpt from *The Antireligious*, no further reference).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

most, that has discussed the full ministry and participation of women in the Orthodox Church including the issue of ordination to the priesthood, and it is this community that has male priests and theologians prepared to debate the arguments for the ordination of women.

The report from France included references to the professional work of women in the Church. Their names may well be recorded in church records in France, but their work is unknown outside the country, nor are their examples promulgated in papers or documents from the Church when the participation and ministry of women is a discussion point. There is no doubt that the dedication, commitment and religiosity of the Russian women who went to France was extremely important in undertaking parish work traditionally considered the province of the priest. The influence of the Russian Student Christian Movement, established in 1923, cannot be over-rated when reviewing many of the brief biographies that were written in the French report. Alla Mateo, a 'Russian Israelite' by birth and Orthodox by religion was a member of RSCM, who organised a hostel for young Russian girls, later a home for unemployed and destitute people and continued her work until arrested and deported to the camps during the War.<sup>20</sup> The report acknowledges many young women considered to be martyrs to the faith. Tatiana Dezen, was the chairperson of the Russian Student Christian Movement in Estonia, and the initiator of a religious movement amongst young peasants and workmen. She walked from village to village with a bible in her hand and preached the Gospel, not unlike the women preachers who were Bible Christians in early nineteenth-century England and the *starets* in Russia. When Tatiana Dezen was arrested after the Soviets occupied Estonia in 1938, she was deported to Russia and disappeared.<sup>21</sup>

The influence of the RSCM was evident when some students, such as Anna Sminof (secretary of RSCM in Estonia) were sent to Selley Oak in Birmingham for further studies. Nadejda Gorodetsky went to Oxford University and was later appointed a lecturer in Russian literature at Oxford; Alexandra Tchetcherikof was the author of religious leaflets and many were published in English by the Religious Tracts Society in London and Militza

<sup>20</sup> Russian Orthodox Community in Paris Report, p.19.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.



Zernov, formerly in RSCM in Paris, was to become a very influential partner with her husband Nicholas Zernov in establishing Anglo-Russian church work in England.<sup>22</sup> In addition to the women who were active in teaching and charitable work were women who contributed their talents directly to the liturgical life of the emigre church in Paris with their commitment to church music and iconography. The work undertaken by women in the Russian Orthodox community in Paris, Nice and Lyon and other cities in France was centred on assisting the emigres from Russia.<sup>23</sup>

In the meantime others on the fringes of French society were included in the charitable work of Russian women. Mother Maria Skobtsova, perhaps, as suggested by many Orthodox, one day to be named amongst the known saints, was one such woman who emigrated from a life of luxury as a member of Russia's wealthy families. Mother Maria experienced two marriages, the deaths of her two daughters, and then took on the monastic habit 'living in the world' where she walked the streets of Paris visiting slums, caring for alcoholics and prostitutes, the elderly and mentally ill. She painted icons, sewed and embroidered vestments, and organised courses for Christian teachers while herself lecturing to the working class. She also wrote poetry, theological articles, and biographies of saints. She was considered too left-wing for the church and to the left she was considered to be too church minded.<sup>24</sup> Her attitude to the Church and those in society are reflected in her scribbled writings that were collated and later recorded in a biography of her life, *Pearl of Great Price*. Mother Maria wrote of the freedom her community had been granted in France beyond the reach of persecution so prevalent in Russia. In addition, she wrote of the release from age-old traditions for 'we have no enormous cathedrals, no encrusted gospels, or monastery walls...'. She believed that there was responsibility to liberate the real and authentic from the layers to which most were accustomed... 'we must scrupulously distinguish Orthodoxy from all its decor and its costumes... if it becomes necessary to enter

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20. The Fellowship of St Albans and St Sergius was established in 1928 to foster relationships between the Anglicans and Orthodox and especially devoted to the cause of Anglo-Orthodox reunion.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>24</sup> Sergei Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price. The Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova, 1891-1945*, Darton, Longman & Todd: London. p.70

into conflict, the most surprising discovery will be that the strength of our opponents is negligible. We must be tolerant to people while being uncompromisingly intolerant to the ideas which inspire them'.<sup>25</sup> During the war and German occupation, Mother Maria and many in her community including her son Iura (Iurii Danilovich Skobtsov) supported Jews and eventually were arrested and deported to Ravensbruck concentration camp in Germany. After two years internment she was gassed on Easter Eve, 31 March 1945. Her son was gassed and cremated at the Buchenwald camp.<sup>26</sup> The decision of Mother Maria to live her monastic life in the midst of the community was in contrast to the usual monastic life of 'departing for the desert' so often experienced by ascetics in Orthodox tradition. She did not escape the world but embraced it.<sup>27</sup> Sergei Hackel asked the question whether 'the unconventional, even anarchic life in monasticism of Mother Maria led, inevitably, to bitter criticisms in her lifetime and to question 'ought she to have become a nun at all... would the role of deaconess, particularly as proposed but not acted upon by the Russian Orthodox Church in the nineteenth century, have suited her better?'<sup>28</sup> Hackel concluded his article: 'her refusal to tolerate the security of inherited norms was the result of her quest (to serve)'.

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Mindful that the purpose of the questionnaire from the women in Geneva was to reveal both the traditional and extraordinary work of women in the Church, it is vital to recall the words of Kathleen Bliss:

a danger lies in the very virtues of women, their ability to make sacrifices and raise money and the thorough-going nature of much of their organised work. Few of them think theologically and few theologians turn their minds to the enormous work done by women and ask what it all means in terms of a doctrine of the Church...For too many women the only work they can do for, and be approved by, the Church is work for and with women - the church within the Church!<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.73.

<sup>26</sup> In 1995, the name Maria Skobtsova was added to the names of those who had paid the ultimate sacrifice in the defence and support of Jews during 1939-1945, in the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC.

<sup>27</sup> Sergei Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price*, pp.15-16.

<sup>28</sup> Sergei Hackel, 'Mother Maria Skobtsova: Deaconess Manquee', in *Eastern Churches Review*, Vol.1, no.3, Spring 1967, p.264.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.266.

<sup>30</sup> Kathleen Bliss, *Life and Work of Women in the Church*, p. 6.

The opening statement of the Paris report emphasised that 'the place of women in the Church has been always considered in Orthodox theology as a helping and not an executive one'. The statement was repeated later in the report with an additional emphasis that 'it has never considered it possible to ordain women as ministers of the Church'.<sup>31</sup> Throughout the reports from the Orthodox churches regardless of the words of praise from hierarchs and theologians, there is the firm reminder that neither ordination nor positions of authority were the province of women.

In 1954, a later report was received by the Women's Unit in Geneva, from the Russian Orthodox community detailing the programmes of the Women's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Paris. It belied some long held views about the problems of Orthodox women in theological education and especially women in the *diaspora*. The report outlined the establishment of the seminary in 1949 by Professor Zenkovsky, Dean of the Theological Institute of St Sergius, with Bishop Cassian as the Rector. Over fifty women were the first students at the evening classes, for courses taken over three years. The range of subjects was all encompassing including biblical studies, history of the church, Christian ethics, church singing, philosophy, patrology, patristics, pedagogy and psychology. Some students were wives of priests, nurses working in the hospitals, teachers of Sunday Schools and leaders of youth organisations. Some younger students were also studying at the Paris University. In addition to on-campus students the seminary was engaged in correspondence course with Orthodox women in Morocco, Lebanon, Syria, Belgium and the United States.

The aims of the Women's Seminary were to provide trained missionaries to work throughout France and Belgium, especially in industrial centres where Russian emigres had settled soon after 1917, or were recent arrivals from the Displacement Camps. There was educational work where religious pedagogical work amongst the Russian emigration had special requirements. In particular the work focused on education needs for children in secular schools. Visiting the sick in homes and hospitals was important pastoral work and finally, some women

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp.1, 8.

were trained for singing and reading in Church services and undertaking work in the parishes on social, educational and administration in order to provide support for the priest. Ecumenism was very important to the seminary, and they organised several meetings throughout the semesters. While the students paid a nominal fee for their tuition, the World Council of Churches provided considerable funds to enable the seminary to progress and Orthodox women to gain theological education.<sup>32</sup>

### **Church of Greece - women in conflict**

The final illuminating and informative Orthodox responses to the questionnaire in 1947 came from the Church of Greece. The principal report was compiled by Thalia Woyla a Greek Orthodox woman, active with the National Organisation of Christian Solidarity (E.O.H.A.) and the International Red Cross. The report was very extensive and reflected the Church of Greece as the Greek Orthodox Church to which over ninety-five per cent of the population belong and where tradition and culture are shared by a homogeneous population and accepted without question. Again, the document begins with the statement that 'women are not admitted to any office in the ministry of the Orthodox Church, hence there can be no question of their "place" there'. Nevertheless, the report noted that in the Archbishopric of Athens women were regular speakers in churches in Athens and elsewhere but always after the Liturgy was over.<sup>33</sup> There is no indication in any of the positive reports of the content or context of their addresses nor any indication that they were directly theological. However, judging from the various reports that indicate the importance of social work and religious teaching, these were very much the activities of Orthodox women approved by the Church and very often instigated by the local bishop.<sup>34</sup> Of particular interest was the Eusebia Sisterhood, a missionary sisterhood of unmarried women, and named for Archimandrite Eusebius Matthopoulos, the founder of the 'Zoe' movement in 1911. The 'Zoe' Brotherhood was 'characterized by the absence of centralized power and glorification of personalities', members were celibate, about one third clergy, and all were

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<sup>32</sup> Report, Women's Orthodox Theological Seminary, Paris, 1949-1954, 8 March 1954.

<sup>33</sup> The Life and Work of Women in the Church, Greece, Synopsis, 1947, p.1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

graduates in Theology. Their principle was not to seek high office in the church, and to teach the Gospel of Christ according to Orthodox tradition to all classes of the Greek people.<sup>35</sup>

In 1938, the Eusebia Sisterhood was founded in order to prevent too many pious young women turning to the monastic life, which at that time Greece considered as 'decadent and in decay'.<sup>36</sup> The missionary sisterhood situated in Athens was a closed society with limited members, the women were university graduates and their aim was: 'the propagation of the Christian Faith and Culture to Greek women in general and young women in particular'. The Eusebia Sisterhood report noted that there were 'no deaconesses today in the Orthodox church'. However, the sisterhood in many of its functions used the example of women's work of past centuries as they offered assistance to the Church. The revival of the truly Christian religion, the report states, 'presents women as worthy trustees of responsible service to the Church, foremost as the Christian mother - queen of her family- realising her high vocation', and the unmarried woman, whose worth and service cannot be overestimated'. The report is adamant by asserting that while the Eusebia Sisterhood was on very good terms with the Church, (presumably this also included the local clergy) , 'it (the sisterhood) was not subject to 'her' orders as regards the procedure of its work'.<sup>37</sup> The independence of the sisterhood was ensured as it neither asked for nor accepted grants, relying on the only support being the work of its members and their personal self-sacrifice. The Sisterhood in many ways was re-enacting the philanthropic and charitable societies that existed in America and Britain in the nineteenth-century. An evangelical zeal, voluntary service and reasonable education of the members, led to many social reform movements for women, although there is little evidence to indicate that the Sisterhood in Greece led any calls for the right to vote, for example, amongst the women of Greece.

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<sup>35</sup> Demetrios J Constantelos, 'The Zoe Movement in Greece', in *SVSQ*, Vol.3. no.2, 1959, p.11.

<sup>36</sup> The Life and Work of Women in the Church, Greek Report No.1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p.2.

For Kathleen Bliss, collating the reports at the WCC, the report from Greece was quite different from most others she had received and it was a first glimpse by other church women into the work of women in the Greek Orthodox Church, firstly for what women could not do because they were women, but what women had achieved for the Church because they were women.<sup>38</sup> No report was more striking than the account of the achievements of Greek women under the leadership of the Church during the German occupation especially when the country was ravaged by terrible famine. Because of the need to alleviate the suffering of victims of malnutrition during the occupation in 1941, Nausika Flenga-Papadaki recorded that she had found the courage to stand and speak in church as soon as the liturgy finished to appeal to the congregation to open a soup kitchen for children in Evrytaunia. 'My first incoherent words were not heard in the initial confusion and shock at my act - it was unheard of for a woman to speak inside a church'.<sup>39</sup> However, that night a soup kitchen was set up, the first step in establishing the Association for the Protection of Children and the National Solidarity Association'. These organisations spread nationwide and served as life-lines through the occupation and the civil war that followed, providing the immediate needs of communities devastated by the ravages of war and famine.

The National Organisation of Christian Solidarity was formalized by Archbishop Damaskinos in 1941 during the enemy occupation; the 'Virtuous Maidens' Christian Club, connected to churches in Athens and Piraeus was run by women under the presidency of their Archimandrite: 'who thinks that women's sole function in the church should be relief work', and the Christian Women of Volos which was started by Bishop Joachim Aleopoulos in 1936 for social work, education, and supported the International Red Cross during the occupation. This particular group proposed in their report that the World Council of Churches should stress to churches and governments the 'need for the protection and raising of standards of motherhood' and 'restrictions on women gone astray - not just rescue work'.<sup>40</sup> What emerged from the excellent report from Greece, was the study of the service

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>39</sup> Eleni Fourtouni, *Greek Women in Resistance*, Thelipini Press: New Haven, c.1984, p.32.

<sup>40</sup> Greece Report, p.4.

and work of Greek Orthodox women, but no reflections on the personal lives of Orthodox women.

The stories of thousands of Greek women exiled to the island of Trikeri by the Royalist government were not included as part of the response to the WCC Life and Work Study and yet they provided a balance to the somewhat pietistic responses from the Church of Greece. Some stories were compiled by Eleni Fourtouni after she gained access to hidden diaries Greek women had written during the war years. While the Sisterhoods and Solidarity Association worked through-out the war years in the cities and towns of Greece, other Greek women joined the resistance, and many continued to fight against the Royalist army after the Germans were defeated. As Diamando Grizona recorded, there were village girls, teenagers still at high school, who believed that it was imperative to help the men in the guerilla forces in the mountains by providing them with food, clothing, medicine and information. In order to do this, 'we were stepping outside the home, taking on roles other than those assigned to us by our fathers and strictly enforced by our mothers'.<sup>41</sup> However, Diamando Grizona noted, regardless of the fearless actions of the young girls they still maintained the social propriety of never passing by the coffee shops where men congregated.<sup>42</sup> Although the work of the young girls was obviously vital, the stories were not referred to in any manner in the report from the Church of Greece for study of the Life and Work of Women in the Church

The focus of women's commitment during the War changed after civil war broke out in 1944 and ended in 1949. Greek women committed themselves to social change for the emancipation of many members of the community and endeavours to find new opportunities for equal participation for women that would change their subordinate and second-class status. The 'new government' of Free Greece founded in 1944 introduced a programme of reform that was different to the history of service and servitude strongly promoted by Church tradition and included proposed legislative articles on women's rights: the right to choose a place of domicile; the right to choose a profession; equal child custody; equal pay

<sup>41</sup> Eleni Fourtouni, *Greek Women in Resistance*, p.35.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36.

for equal work; and the right to divorce for reasons of incompatibility.<sup>43</sup> This may well have been the beginnings of a socialist feminist movement in Greece not necessarily endorsed by women in the church. By 1949, the monarchy and old government, aided by the British, were back in power, socialism was crushed and women retained only the right to vote but no other proposed reforms.<sup>44</sup> In August 1949, women resistance fighters who had not signed a Declaration of Repentance were sentenced to indefinite imprisonment and by September 1949, there were close to five thousand women and children on Trikeri.<sup>45</sup> The island of Trikeri lies in the same region as Volos, where the Christian Women had recommended in the 1947 report that the WCC should 'honour motherhood'.<sup>46</sup>

Notwithstanding the efforts of volunteer women during the War, all the responses from the Orthodox Churches affirmed the traditional roles for women and their service to Church and society. Philanthropic work was instigated amongst the poor, the elderly and orphans, hospital work for the mentally ill and war veterans, and religious education for the rural and city dweller alike. At all levels of society the goal was to evangelise the Orthodox faith amongst all levels of society. The pattern of Orthodox church life in Athens, Cairo and Paris was traditional and reminiscent of the church work of the Evangelical churches in England in the nineteenth century although the Orthodox missionary work was in their own cities and rural centres rather than India and Africa.

There was no evidence in the Orthodox responses that any struggle for women's emancipation from patriarchy was taking place nor uppermost in the minds of the women surveyed. One report merely stated that as women were deprived of political rights in Greece they were naturally prevented from participation in organised parish life as church wardens though perhaps in the future, voting rights would be given to women as they could

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.41.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.48.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.83.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.163. In April 1953, nineteen women and ten guards remained on Trikeri, by September they were relocated to Al-Strati where they lived with men who also had been exiled, until released on parole in the late 1950s.



serve in the same positions as laymen.<sup>47</sup> The women were fulfilling valuable roles in society that the Church endorsed and encouraged. The reports all began firmly stating that the role of the priest was not one for women, had never been a role for women, and for a number of reasons would never be considered a role for women. Kathleen Bliss was very impressed with the quality and depth of the Greek report and encouraged Thalia Woyla to attend the Baarn meeting. However, this was not possible due to Thalia Woyla still being on duty at a military hospital, and leave was almost impossible due to the very severe draft laws in Greece.<sup>48</sup> Of some consolation was the presence of Valentine Zander from Paris who had accepted the responsibility to prepare prayers for the women's meeting. The report from the Church of Greece was very important, not only for the unique and detailed information but because it has been one of the few positive responses from the Church of Greece. Some fifty years later, the Church of Greece was one of very few member churches that did not receive a team visit of 'Living Letters' as a part of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women programme.<sup>49</sup>

### **Sarah Chakko - Orthodox woman**

Among the first group of women to work for and on behalf of women in the church at the World Council of Churches, was Sarah Chakko, considered by many to be an outstanding Orthodox woman from the Syrian Orthodox Church of Malabar. She was born in Trichur in South India, the fourth child in a family of ten children whose father was head of police and later the excise department in Cochin. He was responsible for the foundation of Union College, one of India's first indigenous colleges for Christian higher education. She received her degree in history in 1925 and taught at the Bentinck High School of the London Missionary Society in Madras. In 1930 she completed her Masters Degree and was appointed in 1943 to the Isabella Thoburn College, an American Methodist college in

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<sup>47</sup> Church of Greece Report, 1947, p.12.

<sup>48</sup> Correspondence, Thalia Woyla to Olive Wyon (secretary), 11 June 1948.

<sup>49</sup> To be discussed in Chapter Six.

Lucknow, North India, where she later served as Principal of the College until her death in 1954.<sup>50</sup>

Like so many of her contemporaries at WCC, Sarah Chalko was involved with the Student Christian Movement and was the Chairperson of the SCM of India, Burma and Ceylon. In 1936 she was one of India's representatives to attend the World Student Christian Federation in San Francisco. In 1937 she received a Master of Education at the University of Chicago. Her other commitment aside from teaching and SCM was on the National Committee of the YWCA, and in 1947 she was one of the vice-presidents of the World YWCA. She served on the Board of Christian Higher Education and the National Christian Council of India. She was invited to attend the first Assembly of the WCC at Amsterdam by Methodist Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam to which she responded that she would only go as a Syrian Orthodox with her Orthodox bishop's approval. Sarah Chalko was invited to present the Baarn Report from the Life and Work of Women in the Church survey to the Amsterdam Assembly.

In response to points raised concerning the ordination of women, Sarah Chalko replied that 'while the question of ordination was only a minor part of the whole problem, there were many other matters relating to the service of women which would be good to discuss, nevertheless it surely could not be so very dangerous to discuss the ordination of women'.<sup>51</sup> The concerns of women have often been used as the serious obstacles for church unity, especially ordination and the use of inclusive language in reference to God. Pauline Webb, a past President of the WCC commented at an Ecumenical women's meeting that: 'It is as though women are held hostage to a commitment to a certain ecclesiology... (for) to discuss these issues may cause offence to churches for whom the concept is alien to their tradition'.<sup>52</sup> For the next five decades, the issue of the ordination of women would be raised as the obstacle for discussion on many other issues concerning women, and in 1998

<sup>50</sup> Susannah Herzel, *A Voice for Women*, p.115

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.120.

<sup>52</sup> Pauline Webb, *She Flies Beyond*, WCC: Geneva, 1993, p.41.

would be cited as one of three reasons for some Orthodox member churches to suspend or limit their membership of the WCC.

Sarah Chakko was subsequently appointed Executive Secretary of the Commission on the Life and Work of Women in the Church at the first meeting in March 1950, taking sabbatical leave for this work until returning to India in August 1951.<sup>53</sup> She travelled widely visiting women's groups in Canada, United States, Germany, France, England, Greece and the Middle East. Her detailed reports to the Women's Department reveal her impatience with the situation of many women in the church. 'In all matters it is a sad commentary on the Churches to find that women who have ability and initiative find their outlets in service outside the Churches and not in and through the Churches'.<sup>54</sup> The General Secretary Dr Visser 't Hooft remarked when she left Geneva that: 'during the year it became clear that the Commission was entering into a field in which little thinking had been done by the churches and in which no ecumenical thinking had been done at all'.<sup>55</sup>

In August 1951, Professor T C Chuo of China resigned as a WCC President on political grounds and Sarah Chakko was chosen to succeed him 'in recognition of her exceptional service to the whole Ecumenical movement'.<sup>56</sup> Sarah Chakko is best remembered as the woman who introduced the Orthodox Church to women in the Ecumenical movement. Such was her presence and influence that she was named an official delegate by the Syrian Orthodox Church in India to attend the 1954 Assembly at Evanston in the United States. Her response was to state that 'such an appointment establishes the principle that a woman can work in an official capacity in the Orthodox Syrian Church. There has never been any rule against it, but it has never been done'.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Susannah Herzel, *A Voice for Women*, p.11.

<sup>54</sup> Confidential letter, Sarah Chakko to Kathleen Bliss, 5 June 1951.

<sup>55</sup> Susannah Herzel, *A Voice for Women*, p.122.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.123.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.123

What has become obvious through the years in regard to appointments of Orthodox women is that the women have been members of the smaller churches or in the *diaspora*, and have been involved originally in ecumenical bodies such as the Student Christian Movement, the YWCA or have worked with and for women in secular society. These women include Teny Pirri-Simonian, Armenian Apostolic Church, who has held a position in Christian Education for over fifteen years and two women from the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt. Marie Assaad a sociologist, was appointed to the position of Deputy General Secretary in 1980 and Dr Salwa Marcos, a medical doctor from Cairo, worked at the Middle East Desk from 1992 to 1998. In January 1999 Dr Marina Rizk, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, a medical doctor from Damascus, Syria, was appointed Executive Secretary for the Middle East.

According to the regulations of employment at WCC, each applicant for a position or nominee for a commission or formal working party must have the endorsement of the bishop of his or her Church. Many women in the Ecumenical movement have been fortunate to belong to member churches who have not felt threatened when endorsing a woman to a particular position nor prevented her input of progressive ideas and ideals on behalf of the advancement and inclusion of women. Not all the reports and commissions focused on the ministry of women in the Church have been welcomed by member churches, but few have so strongly opposed proposals and recommendations as the spokespersons for the member Orthodox churches.

Due to the overwhelming authority of Orthodox male clergy appointed to WCC Central committee, staff and its commissions, the participation of Orthodox women theologians or women activists in the work of the Council is noticeable by its absence or in recent years by defensive and conservative contribution. Following the 1991 World Assembly in Canberra, a woman of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia was nominated from Geneva to serve a seven year term on the Commission for Justice, Peace and Creation. The Central Committee accepted the nomination, but her Archbishop refused to endorse her

position, citing that he did not consider her to be 'truly Orthodox'. Despite correspondence from the woman to the Archbishop requesting an explanation, his refusal was relayed to her through the secretary of the theological college, not by formal letter. Her nominated position was not taken by another Australian woman either on Unit III Commission or any other Commission.<sup>58</sup>

In 1951, Sarah Chakko returned home to Lucknow, India from Geneva through Europe and North Africa visiting member churches and especially gathering information and forming insights into the work of Church women, particularly those known through the Life and Work study and would be useful for the ongoing work of the Commission. She was impressed with the vigour and vitality within the lay movement of the Church of Greece including the activities of the Eusebia women's organisation, which at the time had over six thousand members. She commented: 'it will be interesting to see how this community of very highly trained women, some of them graduates of universities, will work out a pattern suitable for themselves'.<sup>59</sup> While travelling through Europe she had taken note of other churchwomen who expressed their dissatisfaction with existing religious communities because of the strict discipline and very narrow circumspection of life in deaconesses' houses and noted with special interest the Greek women's movement. Sarah Chakko queried how future influences might act upon the movement as she was well aware that the revival of church life in Greece was very much tied up with the Nationalist movement. 'In other places and times it has proved dangerous. Whether Greece would be able to steer clear of such unwholesome developments remains to be seen'.<sup>60</sup> Chakko noted the emergence of the social service training school in Kiffissia as a new venture sponsored by the YWCA which offered opportunities for young women to get modern education in social service needs in addition to the American College for Women which also trained women for social work.

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The nomination of Leonie Liveris came from the Women's Unit, WCC. The nomination of Orthodox women to WCC Central Committee and the problems associated with the churches regarding their equal representation is discussed in Chapter Six.

<sup>59</sup> Correspondence, Sarah Chakko to Kathleen Bliss, Chair, Commission on the Life and Work of Women in the Church, 5 June 1951, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

In Cairo, Sarah Chakko met women from the Coptic Orthodox Church who had assumed responsibility for the care of orphans and maintenance of several private schools since Egyptian State Law prohibited any Christian education in state schools. However, she also noted that the Church was doing very little to give encouragement or training to the women, no doubt a further reflection on Egyptian culture, as the men she spoke to believed that the desire of Egyptian women to have the vote, for instance, was most ill-advised since it would bring women into the 'rough and tumble' of public life. <sup>61</sup> The effects of the State Laws were felt keenly by the Church. Some twenty years later in 1973, Maurice Assad, Director of Family Life Education Programme for the Coptic Orthodox Church, expressed the needs for planned parenthood, new methods of pastoral care and family guidance and religious education. The shift of personal affairs concerned with marriage and divorce from the church to the civil courts meant the church no longer had effective influence on the family. Maurice Assad added that church education was too concentrated on personal piety, with little attention to training its members for family life and interpersonal relationships. <sup>62</sup>

Sarah Chakko completed her report on visits to the Orthodox Church in Addis Abbaba in Ethiopia where she recorded that the clergy were ill-prepared theologically, they had very little general education and no understanding of teaching children. She noted that while Ethiopian women were pious members of the church they understood very little of its theology or what it meant. Sarah Chakko did not believe the church would work for any change as it did not indicate there was any dissatisfaction with the existing situation. <sup>63</sup> In all matters, she noted, 'it is a sad commentary on the Churches to find women who have ability and initiative finding their outlets in service outside the Churches, not in and through the Church'. <sup>64</sup> In 1966, a report was tabled by Fr Habte Marian from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church at a consultation in Geneva on the Cooperation of Men and Women in Church,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>62</sup> Maurice Assaad, 'Priorities of Family Life Education in the Coptic Orthodox church', Background paper for Family Power: A report on a consultation of international ad hoc advisory committee of the Office of Family Ministries, WCC, Salina Bay, Malta, 25 April-3 May 1973, pp.45-46.

<sup>63</sup> Sarah Chakko to Kathleen Bliss, p.3.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p.4

family and society, relating to 'the paternal perspective on Women in Ethiopia' and was presented by Fr Mariam. The priest stated that women in Ethiopia enjoyed equal rights and privileges with men, that women were not segregated or discriminated against and they participated in all religious activities allowed to laymen. In addition there were women's organizations where women could demonstrate their religious convictions to the public with services to the poor, but importantly he noted that women were not as active as in the past.

The priest noted that women served as deaconesses, but they did not conduct services or lead worship and were not permitted to exercise any functions of the priest other than the role of servant, but, he added, the deaconesses were permitted to teach and preach to women congregations.<sup>65</sup> In other words, traditional roles continued and equal participation actually meant charitable work in the church and community amongst the poor. Throughout the surveys and consultations in which Orthodox participants provided information to WCC, the overriding impression of Orthodox women is of service and a subordinate role in community where women only ever set their goals as high as the male members of the church set their limits, and no higher. The positive aspect of all the reports was that for the first time Orthodox women were asked to report on their work, that someone was interested in knowing what they had achieved and indeed, hoped to achieve in their churches.

In 1954 Sarah Chakko died suddenly at the young age of forty-nine years, just months before the Evanston Assembly and more importantly before her astute observations of women's work and participation in the Orthodox Churches could be more widely promulgated. After Sarah Chakko, it was nearly thirty years before another Orthodox woman was in a position of authority in the Ecumenical movement. One note of caution however when assessing Sarah Chakko is to take into account that while she was raised within a deeply religious Syrian Orthodox family, her adult years were spent at Presbyterian and Methodist colleges in India. The women's colleges were founded by the women's

<sup>65</sup> Rev Fr Habte Mariam, Dean, Holy Trinity Cathedral, Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Addis Abbaba, Geneva Consultation, July 1966, pp.31-33.

missionary societies in America. The mission women and their Indian teachers were educating young girls in a quite different environment to that of an environment of an Orthodox family. The ecumenical experience in her college years, graduate studies in America and travel were also major factors in the formation of the ecumenical spirit of Sarah Chakko, not from any enthusiastic endorsement for women's leadership or ministry from her own Syrian Orthodox Church.

Following the Third Assembly in New Delhi in 1961 when the Russian Orthodox Church became a member of the WCC, Madeleine Barot was most responsive to the proposal from Archbishop Nikodim for Valentina T. Shiskina, an employee of the Moscow Patriarchate Editorial Department to be appointed a member of the Working Committee of the Department. However, despite correspondence and invitations to Paris meetings to the Archbishop, all they received were official acknowledgments of the papers and no word whatsoever of Valentina Shiskina. Madeleine Barot queried whether exit visas were very difficult to obtain from the USSR for women, adding if it would be easier for a priest, the Department would be very pleased to have him join the working committee. She also endeavoured to send a group of nuns from the West to the USSR as a beginning to formalising contacts with women in Eastern Europe and more specifically with Orthodox women.<sup>66</sup> None of these well intentioned plans of Madeleine Barot came to fruition.

Some years later Madeleine Barot expressed her frustration's with the Orthodox noting that she had not found any real signs of interest from officials of the Orthodox Church, her communiques with various representative patriarchs went unanswered, few attended consultations even if designated by their hierarchy to do so. Susannah Herzel placed the comment in context some years later when she cited an unnamed source at WCC who claimed:

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<sup>66</sup> Correspondence, Madeleine Barot to Rev. Fr. Paul Verghses, 1 October 1962. Fr Paul Verghesé was a Syrian Orthodox priest from South India and appointed to Ecumenical Affairs at WCC. He later served as a Vice-President of WCC Central Committee as Metropolitan Dr Paulos Mar Gregorios (discussed in later chapter).



I think that the Orthodox, from the first, considered the department to be somewhat dangerous... and they don't want the women in the Orthodox churches to come into contact with it because they are afraid of the results... Madeleine could not convince church leaders there was any necessity for the women in their churches to be concerned about the work of the department. <sup>67</sup>

However, Pauline Webb, a Methodist laywoman from England, was appointed to the WCC Central Committee in 1968 and subsequently as a Vice-Chairman (sic) and recalled that amongst the first to speak positively of her appointment was Metropolitan Nicodim who added to his comments 'I want you to know that you will have our prayers'. Susannah Herzel comments in her publication that the Orthodox acceptance of a woman in a position of leadership was an important gesture, although she adds the proviso, 'the position was alongside a man and it was free of sacerdotal responsibilities'. <sup>68</sup>

Orthodox women have related experiences in various consultations and workshops that their clergy and bishops seem to have no difficulty speaking and working with women who are Protestant ministers and theologians within all the Commissions of the WCC. It is with Orthodox women that bishops have the problem with women in leadership and theological discussions. It was often Protestant women who 'found' Orthodox women in the church and recommended them to WCC for assistance or invitations to consultations, or nominations to Central Committee. Twila Cavert met Sarah Chakko at the Isabella Thoburn College in Lucknow and she had also mentioned her concern that the Women's Department should encourage and support the work of Valentine Zander, Russian Orthodox woman in Paris: 'I feel so deeply that great need of the liturgical and mystical gifts which one such as she has to share with us'.<sup>69</sup> Valentine Zander, well known to the Department, was a member of the Women's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Paris and in the winter of 1949 had involved Dr Paul Evdokimov in providing a course for studying the Man-Woman Relationships document at the women's seminary. As the course was in French, Protestant and Catholic women were also invited to participate in what became an Ecumenical activity carried on for many years. Subsequently Paul Evdokimov contributed a variety of papers at

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<sup>67</sup> Susannah Herzel, *A Voice for Women*, p.52.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.84

WCC consultations on the subject of women in the church including his paper 'Ecclesia Domestica' presented at the Paris Consultation of the Women's Department in July 1962.<sup>70</sup>

In August 1959 Madeleine Barot attended the WCC Central Committee meeting in Rhodes, Greece and took the opportunity to organise a consultation in Kiffissia on 'Women's Activities in Church and Society'. A conservative agenda for conservative Orthodox women with the keynote address 'The Orthodox Woman facing the Modern World' presented by Archimandrite Timiades, a representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at the WCC. Of particular interest to Madeleine Barot was the discovery during her visit that Athens had an Institute of Social Training whose students had to study theology for four years before starting their social work course. There were equal numbers of women and men in faculties of theology for the four year degree. However, while the men then became priests, some women did the two year course at St Barbara's Institute to become parish assistants or social workers. Cynthia Wedel expanded an earlier query about the absence of Orthodox women by asking: 'where are the trained theologians, seminary teachers, lay preachers in the churches?' and moved on to ponder whether 'after the ordination question was raised they finally realized how absolutely intransigent the Orthodox were on this point', and it became more difficult and unusual for Orthodox women to participate fully in the programmes organised by the Women's Department.<sup>71</sup>

From 1948 the World Council of Churches has both rejoiced in and despaired of the membership of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches. The influence of Orthodox theology and tradition has permeated the work and programmes of WCC and has been a welcome dimension and expansion to the majority Protestant churches. From the first survey conducted by Kathleen Bliss and presented to the First Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948, the concerted effort to include and encourage Orthodox women has not diminished. The WCC provided the impetus and Protestant women committed themselves to the task of discovery.

<sup>70</sup> Paul Evdokimov, 'Ecclesia Domestica', Paris consultation July 1962. Also published in Susannah Herzel, *A Voice for Women*, 1981, pp.174-183. Paul Evdokimov was for a time the Director of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey.

<sup>71</sup> Susannah Herzel, *A Voice for Women*, p.114.

The patriarchy, their authority and how women participated in the sacramental life of their member churches have become the most pressing issues for women in the Church. The initial revelations of subservience and exclusion of women throughout the member churches would be the focus of women's programmes for the following fifty years.

### **Sexism, society and the churches**

One of earliest 'second-wave- feminist books appeared in 1968 with the publication of *The Church and the Second Sex* by Mary Daly, philosopher and theologian, who focused her criticisms on the Catholic church and led initially to the termination of her tenured position at Boston College, a Jesuit University, though soon after she was reinstated through the public protest by her students.<sup>72</sup> Her most radical public action after addressing a congregation in Boston, was to urge women to stand and leave the church with her as a demonstration of their solidarity for change and reform of patriarchy and power structures of the Church. For many women the challenge Mary Daly issued to the Church hierarchy was both radical and relevant to their situation and many were prepared to argue with the energy and passion of the religious zealots of earlier times. Mary Daly expected that women would find themselves liberated from centuries of sexism, submission and servitude by the challenging decisions through the direction of Pope John XXIII of Vatican Council II. Failing any significant change for women she wrote of her disillusionment and sense of betrayal. Within a few years, as she developed her arguments and analysis of various oppressions within the teachings and practices of the Church, she left the Roman Catholic Church and indeed walked out of Christianity itself. Some years later Jacqueline Field-Bibbs agreed that Vatican II had arguably cleared the way for Roman Catholic women to request ordination, which in turn would mean radical change:

The emphasis on the people of God on community, on developing the talents of all were apparent... "every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether

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<sup>72</sup> Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, Beacon Press, revised Edition, 1985. In 1999, Mary Daly, now aged 70 years, took leave from her position at Boston College, when the University insisted she accept male students into her lectures as they threatened to cite their exclusion on the grounds of gender discrimination.

based on sex, colour, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent".<sup>73</sup>

The work of Mary Daly was taken up by other feminist theologians who continued to challenge the patriarchy and hierarchy of the churches, their denial of priesthood or ministry, and even exclusion from voting, teaching or being in any decision-making position for a parish or diocese. For within the Orthodox, the Anglo Catholic movement within the Anglican Church and Roman Catholic churches, where there is clergy there is the power and authority of the Church. There are no leadership roles for women in the hierarchical structures of the Orthodox Church. The work of English and American feminist theologians and historians, religious and lay, such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Sara Maitland, Elizabeth Johnson and Monica Furlong became study books for women in the Church, whether Catholic or Protestant.

Following the Fourth Assembly of the WCC at Uppsala, Sweden in 1968, ecumenical relationships between the women of the WCC and women in the Roman Catholic church expanded. The combination of initial influences of the secular women's movement and a women's department in the ecumenical movement with an agenda for reform and equality for women and the new opportunities that emerged for Catholic religious and laywomen out of the Second Vatican Council were the catalysts that led to the formation of the Women's Ecumenical Liaison Group (WELG) in 1968 and continued until 1972. A world conference organised by WELG in Nicosia, Cyprus in May 1972 included delegates from twenty-nine countries but not 'official' Roman Catholic WELG members.

Athena Athanassiou, the Greek Orthodox committee member, and also a member of the World YWCA, believed that such a meeting should be appropriately political in order to encourage women into the political arena. As Susannah Herzel explains: 'the Cyprus conference recognized that any liberation *from* one thing must be liberation *for* something else'.<sup>74</sup> Herzel

<sup>73</sup> Jacqueline Field-Bibbs, 'Praxis versus Image: Women towards Priesthood in the RC Church', in *Concilium*, 1996/1, p.81. Walter M Abbott (ed) *The Documents of Vatican II*, London, 1966, pp. 227-8.

<sup>74</sup> Susannah Herzel, *A Voice for Women*, WCC: Geneva, 1981, p. 57.

cites both the new co-operation between Protestant and Catholic women but also noted the issues that were very distinctive expressions of Christianity. These differences were similar to the problems both ecclesiastically and theologically to be faced between Protestant and Orthodox women in the decades ahead. The impediments included: Mary's power and place in salvation; the concepts of authority and hierarchy; the religious life; and the efficacy of intercession through and with the saints. The emphasis was on new roles of lay service and ministry for women in their churches. However the difficulties of structural and theological differences, and moral and ethical issues concerning abortion, birth control and divorce were not discussed, nor were the slowly emerging theological problems that the ordination of women debate had created for a few member churches in various Protestant and Anglican jurisdictions.<sup>75</sup>

The Fifth Assembly of WCC held in Nairobi in 1975, the Declaration of the International Year of Women in 1975, the United Nations International Women's meeting in Nairobi in 1975, the subsequent Decade of Women announced to carry forth until 1985, and the Sixth Assembly of the WCC in Vancouver in 1983, were events and programmes known to church women throughout the world wherever issues of oppression, violence, equality, racism and sexism were being considered in contemporary society. The churches noted the exit from the pews of many women no longer able to accept the subservient roles in the church they had lived in and faithfully supported most of their lives. Church women already reading *The Second Sex*, *The Feminine Mystique* and *The Female Eunuch* in the early 1970s, began to find on the shelves the work of feminist theologians, Letty Russell, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Constance Parvey for instance, who were asking the same critical questions of the Church as de Beauvoir, Greer and Friedan asked of the State and society. Monica Furlong maintains that when Christian women began to ask questions concerned with the admonition that women should be silent in the church; why women were deprived of leadership; why women gave men the power in the church; and why when women asked the questions in order for change they were accused of 'irrelevance, selfishness, stridency, unnaturalness and lusting for power'.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, a prominent German feminist theologian, referred to women as being not only the 'silent majority' but also the 'silenced majority' in the Roman Catholic Church, a practice that 'engenders an ecclesial and theological invisibility'.<sup>77</sup> She further emphasised that 'women as Church are invisible neither by accident nor by our own default but by patriarchal law that excludes us from Church office (and place) on the basis of sex'.<sup>78</sup> Orthodox women should relate to Fiorenza's claims for indeed they are also a 'silenced majority' and cooperative passive recipients in prayer who continue to be reliant on the presence and participation of men in all aspects of liturgical celebrations from altar boy to chanter to priest to bishop. Exclusion from such church offices include where women may sit in church, participate in the choir or respond to the 'call' for ordination to the sacramental priesthood. Indeed, there is substance in Fiorenza's strong claim that 'religious obedience, economic dependence and sexual control are the sustaining force of ecclesiastical patriarchy'.<sup>79</sup>

Religious obedience encompasses the full impact of canon law, which endorses the authority of priest and bishop in Church; economic dependence, while placing some responsibility on men nevertheless informs women that their most important place is in the home not the workforce, that her duty is first of all to her husband, the 'breadwinner'; and sexual control brings to the fore the restrictions on a woman's body, which should, to be duly accorded respect and honour according to canon law, be in a virginal state or in marriage with her husband. Both her sexual life and her reproductive life have been determined by the male hierarchy, endorsed by ancient canon laws of the early fathers and accepted and unquestioned by women throughout the ages until present times. It is in the context of such experiences that Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza calls women to access the texts and doctrines of the Church to find their rightful place in the modern Church:

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<sup>77</sup> Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, 'Breaking the Silence- Becoming Visible', in *Concilium*, No. 182, December 1985, p.3.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

if we understand the ideological function of androcentric texts, theological scholarship and ecclesiastical authority in the maintenance of societal and religious patriarchy women must develop a "hermeneutics of suspicion" in order to perceive what is said and what is not said about women's reality under patriarchy and our historical struggles against patriarchal oppression.<sup>80</sup>

While Catholic and Protestant women have enthusiastically and critically developed a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' in reference to their specific church doctrines and biblical teachings, Orthodox women have either a difficulty or a reluctance in assuming any tools of analysis that have not been endorsed by their male colleagues. By reiterating the same code of traditional theological exegesis, and researching with the same sources of historical scholarship little new light or benefit to women has been thrown upon the evidence of the past as exposed by Western feminist scholars.

Orthodox historians have to a large extent relied on the 'safety' of traditional research of the past, while theologians have continued traditional exegesis on approved topics. A survey of theses at a number of theological colleges and seminaries reveals a startling lack of research directed to 'new' academic scholarship, for the Orthodox researchers have failed to respond to the 'signs of the times' and often displayed a distinct lack of understanding or sympathy with what women were really asking the Church. And yet, reading the emerging volumes on women's history, the facts of women's oppression are the same regardless of the tradition. Orthodox women share the same history and organisational oppression in church and society as women in other denominations and cultures of the Christian world. Opponents of women's quest for full participation and inclusiveness in the life and sacraments of the church always related to the sacrament of ordination. The initial work of women writers and researchers has been shadowed by the accusation that what all women wanted was ordination, and that was of course, a result of western women's desire for equality with men. The detailed reports for the Life and Work of Women in the Church Study signified the possibilities for action and interaction between Orthodox women and their ecumenical partners. The records from the WCC Women's Unit

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.13.

clearly show that in many jurisdictions of the Orthodox churches women expressed and enacted a wide range of ministries in their work for social justice.



## Chapter Three

### Women are not subordinate but they are different

The questions of women's participation and roles within the churches following the World Council of Churches ecumenical study of *The Life and Work of Women in the Church* in 1947, and various other consultations in subsequent years, were not taken up with any feminist ideology from within the Orthodox Church. Any emancipation from age old practices and theologies within cultures and traditions were still resisted by conservative Orthodox well into the 1980s, by both men and women of the churches. While many feminists, secular and religious, became widely known through their writing during these years, the names of Orthodox women still remained conspicuous by their absence. This thesis is not a comparative study concerned with changes in ministries for women in other mainstream church traditions, but it is important to mark the progress of the women's movement as it permeated and evolved through the churches, whether in the West or the East. The question must be focused on the universal challenges of women and why it has taken so long. Even now, at the end of the twentieth century, it is considered controversial in the Orthodox churches that a feminist movement of women could emerge and work within the ecumenical movement to raise the issues of patriarchy, male hierarchy and authority. This chapter examines the planning, processes and recommendations from the Agapia Consultation in 1976, the precursor consultation and very important event for Orthodox women; the early ecumenical debate on the ordination of women to the sacramental priesthood; the programmes of the WCC that included issues of interest to Orthodox women, and the introduction of new possibilities beyond the traditional 'servant and service' expected from women, and indeed given, over centuries into the Orthodox context of women's ministry and participation in the Church.

#### **The Ordination of Women - the early debates**

The Women's Unit at the World Council of Churches was in a unique position to inform all the member churches of the growing movement by women within churches and

their desire to work with many of the issues and concerns raised in secular communities, and through subsequent federal legislation in many countries in the decades after the War. For many in the Church it was a sudden revelation and uncomfortable experience to be faced with the over-whelming evidence of centuries of sexism within the church, both in its theology and its manifold practices. Sexism has been defined by Rosemary Radford Ruether, a Catholic feminist theologian as: 'a component of patriarchy that enforces gender hierarchy through cultural, psychological, physical, economic and legal means'.<sup>1</sup> Sexism, she maintains, is expressed in the 'exclusion of women from certain roles assumed to be the prerogatives of men'.<sup>2</sup> The prime example of sexism exists within the Church where the prevailing culture and tradition exemplify and endorse the hierarchy of leadership and subordinate roles between men and women.

During the 1950s the Women's Unit was gradually expanding its work and the issues of ministry and service by women in the church were constant items on agendas and work programmes. While the ordination debate seemed to be new in the 1970s there was for many years a slow compiling of documents, articles and historical archives on ordination to assist in the dialogue that would occur years later. During a time when the Orthodox church theologians were co-operative with the WCC and particularly with personnel in the Women's Unit, interesting opinions were received from Orthodox theologians. In 1958, the Council of Bishops of the Church of Sweden asked the World Council of Churches for reports from member churches on the practice or denial of admission of women into the ministry of the Churches.<sup>3</sup> In January 1958, Vasil Istavridis, from the Theological School of Halki, forwarded a brief outline to Helen Turnbull, Secretary of Women's Unit at WCC, on 'The place of Women in the Eastern Orthodox Church' in relation to discussions on the possibility of their ordination. Istavrides made it clear that women were only considered lay persons and not permitted to enter the orders of the clergy. In addition he strongly affirmed that

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<sup>1</sup> Letty M Russell & J Shannon Clarkson (eds.), *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky, 1996, p.257.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.257.

<sup>3</sup> Reference in letter from Helen Turnbull (WCC) to Christopher King (field officer, Athens, Greece), 10 January 1958.

'according to the ecclesiastical law women enter the church on all days except the days of their monthly period, were not permitted to participate in any of the Sacraments of the church, including baptism and eucharist, and women did not enter the church for forty days after childbirth. In addition, during public worship women in the churches sat in the balconies (*gynaeconitis*, a place set apart for women), in some churches they stayed in the nave while in others they were in any place reserved for the laity. He acknowledged that in some churches women sang in mixed choirs, but in some circles it was not well looked upon'.<sup>4</sup> Some months later Istavridis responded to the 'Report on Women in the Ministry', a report that presented opposing views. While defending the views of the Orthodox he provided at the same time a generous acceptance of the particular views put forward by Protestant members of WCC:

I think that the opinion supporting the ordination of women is more amply and fully presented than the opposite view. This work does not merely present well chosen facts, but proceeds to the explanation, which again, in my opinion, seems to favour the matter of discussion... there appears a general tendency to minimize the importance of the argument against the ordination of women.<sup>5</sup>

However, Istavridis was critical that 'the practice of the Church about women and menstruation, as defined by Canon Law (he carefully adds), is unfortunately called 'evidence... of taboo and deep-seated prejudices, often unconscious, an expression I find difficult to accept'.<sup>6</sup> The summary of facts about the ordination of women in the Orthodox churches noted: 'of the fourteen Orthodox and other Eastern churches which are members of WCC none ordains women to the priesthood; although it should be noted that deaconesses were ordained in the Eastern Orthodox church from the fourth to the ninth centuries'.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time as the responses from the Church of Greece were received in Geneva, Christopher King informed Helen Turnbull that he had also contacted the Greek

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<sup>4</sup> Vasil T Istavridis, 'The Place of women in the Eastern Orthodox church in relation to the lately discussed possibility for their ordination', 27 January 1958, pp.4.

<sup>5</sup> Vasil T Istavridis, A Statement on the Report on Women in the Ministry, July 1958. p.1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.3.

Evangelical Church on the issue of the ministry of women as deacons or elders. The ordination of pastors or elders was confined to men for there was no evidence in the Church that there had been women deacons or deaconesses. However, the Greek Evangelical Church did not regard deacons as being 'ordained' as were the elders. 'In practice the ministry of women in the Evangelical Church was confined to Bible women, "who are not in any way considered as ordained ministers"'. The extreme conservative view on the ministry of women 'reflected their theological concerns and its desire to avoid scandalizing the Orthodox among whom they live'.<sup>8</sup>

In 1963 an important study 'Concerning the Ordination of Women' was prepared by nine men and women, for two Departments of the WCC: Faith and Order and Cooperation of Men and Women in Church, Family and Society, as study material for the Fourth World conference on Faith and Order in Montreal, 1963. There were two comments from the Orthodox, Professor Nicolae Chitescu, from the Theological Institute, Bucharest, Romania and Archimandrite George Khodre, Director of Christian Education in the Diocese of Tripoli, Lebanon. Though mindful of the call for the re-examination of tradition and canon law in the churches and the historical reasons for the old traditions and non-theological influences, such as patterns of sexual prejudice,<sup>9</sup> Nicolae Chitescu began by stating:

In the Orthodox Church the opinions of theologians do not count. The only thing that matters is the traditional regulations established by the Church as a whole in its canons and in its practice... women cannot receive the sacrament of ordination in the Orthodox church as it is both prohibited by scripture and the subsequent rulings of the Church'.<sup>10</sup>

However, he also claimed that since 1949, women in Romania who had been elected to the parish council could perform certain functions, 'which do not involve any special blessing', such as the church choir, parish libraries, helping the poor and other philanthropy, while old women could be employed to prepare bread for holy communion, and keep the church clean -

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<sup>8</sup> Christopher King to Helen Turnbull, 3 March 1958.

<sup>9</sup> *Concerning the Ordination of Women*, Initial Statement by Dr Lukas Vischer, Department on Faith and Order, WCC, p.9.

<sup>10</sup> Nicolae Chitescu, 'A Comment on the Attitude of the Orthodox Church', in *Concerning the Ordination of Women*, p.57.

but not the altar. Chitescu gave a traditional response which relied on the often repeated references to the ancient documents of the Syriac *Didascalia*, the *Apostolic Constitutions* and the *Canons of the Church* <sup>11</sup>

Rev. George Khodre on the other hand asked the question from a contemporary perspective : 'on the plane of natural anthropology, is the feminist movement well-founded' ? Nevertheless his own response was also conservative and traditional. While acknowledging the difficulty of distinguishing between what is due to nature and what is due to culture in determining what was the concept of womanhood, Khodre continued with one certainty, 'that biological rhythms fluctuate more in women than in men and their moods are affected by those rhythms'. <sup>12</sup> He continued, 'maternity seems essential for a woman who lives in the world...for public activity, no matter how extensive, can never fully meet the need that women have to be loved'. Furthermore, he concluded, 'as man was created first he has established his primacy in the hierarchy of nature therefore the submission of the wife to her husband is an acceptance of that hierarchical order as divine in which the wife regards her husband as the mediator of God's splendour'. <sup>13</sup> Both Chitescu and Khodre offer time-old arguments without room for debate or consideration of the 'signs of the times' as requested in the discussion paper. In direct contrast to the sentiments of Khodre, another contributor Dr Marga Buhrig, a Lutheran theologian, asked the question whether the confinement of women into the family alone hinders the service of the Church, for only a church using all the gifts and powers at her disposal can truly respond to the coming of the Holy Spirit'. <sup>14</sup> These contrasting opinions and statements became background documents not only for the Montreal meeting in 1963 but would still be relevant in the ordination debates thirty years later.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.58.

<sup>12</sup> Georges Khodre, 'A Further Orthodox View', op.cit. p.61.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.62-63.

<sup>14</sup> Marga Buhrig, 'The question of the ordination of women in the light of some New Testament texts', op.cit. p.56.

The ordination of women was taken up again at the consultation in Cartigny, Switzerland in September 1970 following the mandate given at the WCC Fourth Assembly in Uppsala in 1968:

(We) realise that the question of the admission of women to holy orders has been the subject of several studies. We urge that these be continued, especially taking into account the experience of an increasing number of churches which now ordain women, so that in the light of their experience there may be further theological reflection on the ecumenical implications of this development. <sup>15</sup>

Brigalia Bam, Director of the Department of Cooperation of Men and Women (Women's Unit) edited the booklet which contains position papers and also the results of a questionnaire completed by fifty-six ordained women from member churches of WCC. The only Orthodox representative at the Cartigny consultation was Pierre Huillier, Bishop of the Patriarchate of Moscow for France. Although there was no Orthodox woman at the Cartigny meeting for obvious reasons, it did not mean that Orthodox women were not present at meetings elsewhere when the ministry of women was discussed.

Constance Tarasar, an educator in the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), was the only Orthodox woman at the meeting of 'Women Who Minister: Encounter 1971', held in St Louis, Missouri in America. Notwithstanding that most of the keynote speakers were men, she asserted that whenever women get together to talk about themselves and their role in society they feel compelled to focus their attention on 'rights', 'privileges', 'authority', 'equal status' etc. The conference, she felt, became polarized very quickly between those who felt they were suppressed by the predominantly male hierarchy of the Church and those (including herself) who felt content in their respective positions, wanting only to examine the content of their ministry:

Being the only Orthodox at such a conference is, at best, an agonizing experience... the pressure of an overwhelming tone of 'liberation', struggle for 'equality' and 'rights' within the context of ministry, took much of the potential joy out of meeting women who supposedly have dedicated themselves to the same goals and service in the life of the Church. <sup>16</sup>

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Brigalia Bam, (ed.), *What is Ordination Coming To?*, WCC: Geneva, 1971, p.1.

In her 'Notes and Comments' on the meeting, Constance Tarasar, one of the very few Orthodox women working within the church and ecumenically for the church, was clearly not a woman in search of radical changes to her own status nor even the status of women in the Orthodox Church.

In 1971, the National Convention of the Episcopal Church in America agreed to the ordination of women deacons, which led to the issue of ordination of women to the priesthood to be again considered as an agenda item for the Convention in 1973. The strong opposition to ordination soundly defeated the proposal. Aware that conservative forces and strong vocal opposition would continue and probably increase, an activist in the church Suzanne Hiatt, an ordained deacon, together with other similarly ordained women deacons, were able to convince three retired bishops of the holiness of their calling to the priesthood, and the 'Philadelphia Eleven' were ordained to the priesthood in Philadelphia in 1974. While the ordinations were valid, having been consecrated by a bishop, they were nevertheless considered and treated as irregular, and for some time the women were refused permission to perform priestly duties by their diocesan bishops. There are Episcopalians still struggling to accept women in leadership and priestly roles in their church and it is likely that Constance Tarasar well understood that any such changes for women in the Orthodox Church, let alone ordination, were likely to be even more difficult. Orthodox theologian Georges Barrois was less than charitable in his criticisms of the ordinations by asserting that: 'the ordinations came from the pressure of "women's lib" and reckless theorizing of far-out scholars', and had led:

To a few (Anglican) women, braving the official interdiction (refusal of their ordination), found bishops willing to ordain them (Philadelphia Eleven) and weekly magazines printing pictures of avant-garde priestesses in full eucharistic vestments. <sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Constance Tarasar, 'Women Who Minister: Encounter 1971', *SVTQ*, Vol.16, no.2, 1972, pp. 90-92.

<sup>17</sup> Georges Barrois, 'Women and the Priestly Office', in Thomas Hopko, *Women and the Priesthood*, St Vladimir's Press: Crestwood, NY, 1983, p.42.

Bishop Kallistos Ware was also in agreement that the ordination of women was not possible in the Orthodox Church by asserting that the priest is the icon of Christ, and since the incarnate Christ became not only man but a male; and since, therefore in the order of nature the roles of male and female are not interchangeable, it is necessary the priest should be a male. Despite his objections based on Sacred Tradition and the 'iconic' character of the Christian priesthood, Kallistos Ware was decidedly more diplomatic and conciliatory when he commented that:

Loyalty to tradition must not become simply another form of fundamentalism.<sup>18</sup> ...the true traditionalist is one who 'discerns the signs of the times', is prepared to discover the leaven of the gospel at work, even within such a seemingly secular movement as "women's lib"...<sup>19</sup> there is nothing in scripture and tradition that explicitly commands the ordination of women to the priesthood, yet at the same time there is nothing that explicitly forbids it.<sup>20</sup>

By 1976, despite objections from within the Anglican church and ecumenical relations with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, the convention in America passed the necessary legislation for women's ordination, the irregular ordinations were validated, and the 'Philadelphia Eleven' moved into the historical archives joining many other women's movements for changes to tradition and theological thinking.<sup>21</sup> However, Thomas Hopko maintained the traditional objections of the Orthodox church by writing some years later:

By virtue of the unique ways in which women actualize their prophetic and royal priesthood in Christ as women, they are not called and ordained to this specific ministry in the church. Should they be so, theological and symbolic confusion would reign with disastrous moral, psychological and social consequences.<sup>22</sup>

For women to be held responsible, should they be ordained, for the breakdown in the very fabric of contemporary society is to enforce the message that woman has had her place

<sup>18</sup> Kallistos Ware, 'Man, Woman and the Priesthood of Christ', in Thomas Hopko, *Women and the Priesthood*, p.12

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.13

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.17. In 1998, Kallistos Ware and Elisabeth Behr-Sigel authored a small publication specifically focused on the Ordination of women in the Orthodox church..See Chapter Six.

<sup>21</sup> Muriel Porter, *Women in the Church. The Great Ordination Debate in Australia*, Penguin: Ringwood, Vic. 1989, p.23.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Hopko, 'Ministry and the Unity of the Church: an Eastern Orthodox view', in *SVTQ*, Vol.34, no.4, 1990. p.278.



already determined, and that any position of authority and leadership of sacramental ministry should continue to be denied her, in the best interest of all humanity.

The reaction from the Roman Catholic Church against the ordination of women, and the ongoing debates in Anglican Synods around the world, meant that ecumenical partners were also embroiled in the discussion including theologians of the Orthodox Church. Paul Evdokimov, Russian Orthodox theologian, had expressed that 'the vocation of every woman is to protect the world and men like a mother, as the new Eve, and to protect and purify life as the Virgin. Women must reconvert men to their essential function, which is priesthood'.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Evdokimov claimed:

Men are *ecstatic* beings who express themselves in the world through instruments and acts. Women are *enstatic*, they live not by acting but by being, they are turned towards the depths of their own nature... they are present in the world by giving themselves.<sup>24</sup>

For the Russian Orthodox, gender stereotypes pre-determined the roles men and women would and should undertake in this world. Notwithstanding the opportunities given women in society in the late twentieth century there remains a 'public sphere' and a 'private sphere' both imbued with influence, but ensuring that the self-effacing 'private sphere' that is, women, continue to support the 'public sphere', men, who are regarded as fulfilling more important roles both in society and for the Church. The 'private sphere' becomes the sole place of personal morality.<sup>25</sup>

In 1973 Alexander Schmemmann, Dean of St Vladimir's Theological Seminary in New York, responded to 'an Episcopal Friend' concerning women's ordination. His opening words stated: 'The Orthodox Church is against women's priesthood on dogmatical, canonical

<sup>23</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *Ecclesia Domestica*, (1962), Appendix, Susannah Herzel, in *A Voice for Women*, WCC: Geneva, 1981, p. 183. Paul Evdokimov, was a professor at St Sergius Theological Institute in Paris, Director of the Centre for Orthodox Studies and served as the Director of the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Geneva.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.183.

<sup>25</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Male Clericalism and the Dread of Women', Pamphlet 24. SCM: London, 1976, p.17.

and spiritual reasons'. The Orthodox Church was not prepared for the discussion as there were no terms of reference in the Tradition of the church. Furthermore:

the debate confirms a built in indifference of the Christian West to anything beyond the sphere of its own problems, its own experience... The debate seems to be provincial, deeply marked and even determined by Western self-centredness and self-sufficiency by a naive, almost childish conviction that every 'trend' in western culture justifies a radical rethinking of the entire Christian Tradition <sup>26</sup>

Alexander Schmemmann would have been well pleased when Militza Vladimirovna Lavrova-Zernov, a founding member of the Russian Student Christian Movement in France, and the first warden of the Orthodox chapel on the Boulevard Montparnasse where the movement was based. <sup>27</sup> agreed with his sentiments when in early 1975 she wrote on women's ministry in the Church. There was no doubt in her mind or her experience that there was no place in the Orthodox church for women priests. 'We Orthodox women are often grieved by the aggressiveness of some Western women of different denominations in support of this innovation, and are astonished at the reasons put forward for it'. <sup>28</sup> She was convinced that the arguments for women's ordination came as a result of inferiority complex and a desire for elevation and equality, which was not a problem for the Orthodox woman who was generally free from such an affliction. Again, she uses the example of the veneration of the Mother of God as 'the eternal example of humility' who enables women not merely to be tolerated but honoured in the church. <sup>29</sup> She claimed that the woman, in fact, is the 'maternal-feminine' who teaches her children long before they are acquainted with the priest or bishop. <sup>30</sup> She goes further to admonish women should they not accept this duty stating: 'when there

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, 'Concerning Women's Ordination: A Letter to an Episcopal Friend', *SVOTS*, Vol 17, no.3, 1973, pp. 239-243.

<sup>27</sup> Nicolas Zernov, *Sunset Years. A Russian Pilgrim in the West*, Fellowship of St Alban & St Sergius: Oxford, 1983, p.146. Militza Zernov, wife of Nicolas Zernov, a well known professional oral surgeon living in England, was active in London for many decades working with her husband to establish the Anglo-Orthodox Fellowship of St Alban & St Sergius, and two ecumenical centres. St Basil's House in London and St Gregory and St Macrina in Oxford.

<sup>28</sup> Militza Zernov, Women's Ministry in the Church, *Eastern Churches Review*, Vol.VII, no. 1, 1975, p.34.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38. Zernov cites Paul Evdokimov, Russian Orthodox theologian in Paris who wrote extensively on the maternal feminine, and the role of women in the salvation of the world.

is a shortage of vocations to the priesthood, are not the mothers to be blamed?"<sup>31</sup> The responsibility was placed firmly on women to immerse themselves in the ministry of motherhood and be the theological teachers for their children, for any other calling to ministry could only be irresponsible.

In 1976 the Very Reverend Maximos Aghiorgoussis, systematic theologian at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts and co-chairman for the Orthodox-Roman Catholic Dialogue responded immediately when the Episcopal Church accepted and legitimized the ordination of women to the priesthood. In a small booklet *Women Priests?*,<sup>32</sup> the Orthodox theologian asserted that the decision had appalled all Christians of various denominations who were both interested in the preservation of revealed truth and the restoration of unity of the churches, and further claimed that 'the ordinations were in order to accommodate the world - the so-called women's liberation movement'.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, he made clear that for both the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church 'the priest represents Christ directly and not the faith of the Church alone'.<sup>34</sup> Maximos continued:

The Orthodox Church was unequivocal that the reasons against the ordination of women are theological and it was imperative to preserve the masculine identity of the priest with Christ; for the fatherly role of a priest in the Church reflects the Father's role in the All-Holy Trinity'.<sup>35</sup>

However, these observations did not dissuade the later comment in 1987 from Anthony Bloom, Metropolitan of Sourouzh, who observed that while 'the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood has only recently been asked, for us Orthodox, the question comes "from the outside". It must become for us a question that is asked 'from the inside'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.38.

<sup>32</sup> Maximos Aghiorgoussis, *Women Priests?*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press: Brookline, MA, 1976.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>36</sup> Anthony Bloom, Preface to French Edition, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, Oakwood Publications: Torrance, CA, 1991, p.xiv

Throughout the decades many issues on doctrinal and traditional matters were discussed in ecumenical fellowships by men and women, clergy and laity, interested in open dialogue in order to understand each other and their life in the church with the freedom of not being official representatives of their respective churches.<sup>37</sup> The report of the Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Commission which had taken place in Moscow in 1976, contained a resolution, though no discussion had taken place, on the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood:

The Orthodox members of the Commission wish to state that if the Anglican Churches proceed to the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate, this will create a very serious obstacle to the development of our relations in the future.<sup>38</sup>

The Commission agreed to meet again on this issue with papers prepared setting out arguments for and against the ordination of women, and the results to be available for the Anglican Bishops' Lambeth Conference in August 1978. Hugh Wybrew, Secretary of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius in England, agreed it was not only a divisive issue between Anglicans and Orthodox, but also between the Anglicans themselves. He wisely suggested that 'the understanding of truth usually takes some time to discover with any certainty' and asked whether 'this (matter) was a doctrinal question or a matter of church discipline'. Speaking personally he added:

When I hear the arguments advanced against the ordination of women, I find those in favour less unacceptable, and similarly, when I listen to advocates of the practice, I am often impressed by the strength of the arguments against... Some are saying God cannot call women to be priests, others are saying this is just what God is doing, it does seem that both can be right.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the initial gains made by Anglican women in America it was some years, at times with bitter and rancorous debates at General Synods in many other countries including Australia with a substantial Anglican Communion, before the ordination of women was moved away from the central agenda of gathering bishops, clergy and laity debating what was

<sup>37</sup> In January 1928, the Fellowship of Saint Alban and Saint Sergius was founded in Britain as an ecumenical fellowship of Anglicans and Orthodox.

<sup>38</sup> Hugh Wybrew, 'The Ordination of Women. Editorial Notes', *Sobornost*, Series 7: no.6, Winter 1978, p.429.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.430.

best for the church. Even in the late 1990s, a few Anglican dioceses around the world continue to hold either the narrow Anglo-Catholic theology which is aligned with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox teachings on the priesthood, or the 'fundamentalist or evangelical theologies which insist on the Pauline admonitions, that no woman should have authority over man or the right to preach'. A most recent comment from Andrew Philips, a British neo-Orthodox, puts yet another view from the Orthodox, a somewhat disparaging opinion of the advocates of women's ordination:

Protestants do not venerate the Mother of God, and many do not confess that She was a Virgin and remained so...Protestant women, unable to identify with the Virgin... are forced to identify with the clergy and seek a role there to solace an emotional, mental, and spiritual deprecation'.<sup>40</sup>

A number of Protestant and Catholic feminist theologians, have expressed their opinions about the antagonisms expressed by the conservatives against ordination based on perceptions of women's 'nature' and gifts. Elaine Storkey is critical in her assessment that when women do not fit the acceptable gender roles as biologically determined as wife and mother, they are threatening to the structure of the Church, especially if they show independence of mind or unwillingness to be categorized by men. 'The dualism of both nature and hierarchy remains, for men are rational, men are theologians, church leaders, popes and archbishops and women are sexual and problematic'.<sup>41</sup> Monica Furlong asserts that the organized church is: 'an oppression for women for its attitudes and teachings on the Fall, God, authority, nature, sexuality and others, and have kept women in a subordinate and disadvantaged role'.<sup>42</sup> For Rosemary Radford Ruether 'the Church, a hierarchical patriarchal conjugality, is introduced to express the relationship of clergy and laity, and becomes split into a 'male' active principle, hierarchically related to a 'female' passive principle'.<sup>43</sup> She further maintains that this patriarchal relationship 'has structured both the social system and the cultural symbols about the nature of reality into a hierarchy of male over female... there is

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<sup>40</sup> Andrew Philips, 'Some Reasons why the Orthodox church does not admit women to the priesthood', *Orthodox Life*, No.2, March-April 1993, p.44.

<sup>41</sup> Elaine Storkey, 'Sex and Sexuality in the Church', in Monica Furlong, *Mirror to the Church*, SPCK: London, 1988, p.50.

<sup>42</sup> Monica Furlong, *A Dangerous Delight, Women and Power in the Church*, SPCK: London, p.4.

<sup>43</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Male Clericalism and the Dread of Women', p.17

a major task for feminist theologians and historians to identify and critique this patriarchal symbolic pattern of theology and change it into one of egalitarian mutual relations of women and men'.<sup>44</sup>

Many conservative Orthodox speakers and writers claim that such opinions from the feminist movement are the product of the Western Enlightenment which has no place in Orthodox thinking. However, this is a denial of historical evidence. During the history of the Orthodox Church women such as Empress' Irene and Theodora not only questioned the actions of clergy and emperors but their actions led to the theological acceptance in Orthodox belief and praxis of icons, an integral part of Orthodox worship. Orthodox critics should also be mindful of the words of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, who, while acknowledging that the feminist debate was a 'foreign virus' for the Orthodox, stated that her colleague in Paris, Paul Evdokimov, was for many years interested and had some sympathy for the women's movement. He discerned, she writes, "in the women's revolt, beyond the "sound and fury", a legitimate ethical imperative, one of the "signs of the times" which Christ exhorted his disciples to be attentive to'.<sup>45</sup>

In the quest for ordination of women to the priesthood, women in the Church of England were accused of threatening the very possibility of church union with the Roman Catholic Church before the new millennium. In 1975, the General Synod voted and defeated the motion 'that this Synod consider that there are no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood'. In 1978 at the Lambeth Conference, of Bishops the motion was again defeated.<sup>46</sup> The ordination of women rather than papal authority became the primary problem for dialogue between the mainstream churches. The growing number of Catholic women and men also challenging their church on the very same issue, seemed not to

<sup>44</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Patriarchy', in J C Brown & C R Bohn (eds), *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, Pilgrim Press" New York, 1989, p.173-74.

<sup>45</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, Oakwood Pubs: Torrance, CA, 1991, (orig. French 1989), p.3.

<sup>46</sup> *The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood. A Second Report by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England.* GS 829 London, 1988. In 1994, the first Anglican women were ordained to the priesthood.

be of any consequence to church leaders admonishing Anglican women and their supportive bishops and clergy. Church unity with the Orthodox Church was often cited as another reason not to proceed with women's ordination. Susan Dowell and Linda Hurcombe have observed that there are ongoing cultural constraints that both influence and control the lives of Orthodox women and may never be resolved, unless of course Orthodox women also become activists for equal participation as laity or sacramental ordination. The astute observations of Dowell and Hurcombe can only be discomfoting for the Orthodox:

We find ourselves looking with an ironic eye at the wheeling out of Greek archbishops. 'In the name of Mary', said the late Archbishop Athenagoras, 'teach your women humility'. We (asserts Dowell), view with some cynicism the romanticizing of the Greek Orthodox Church, held up to us by our own prelates as a repository of a magic and spirituality which we sorely need. How much of this is disingenuous -an Aegean Tours view of spirituality? Whitewashed villages, black clad, bearded, almost biblical figures - the myth of Other and the Exotic- authentic. How much of all this is ill-disguised put-down? Is the humility of the Greek peasant woman really enshrined in the archbishop whose frequently extended ring she kisses and whose sanctuary she may not enter? <sup>47</sup>

Many Orthodox women could attest to the expectation by many priests of the hand-kissing ritual enforced by tradition and culture and too often expected in secular situations where the action, given automatically, has no context and certainly no reverence. Even worse is the embarrassment and humility often felt by the same women, when the gesture is impatiently swept aside for the priest to accept the greetings from men who are less likely to meet the obsequious obligation for the hand-kissing ritual particularly in situations outside church rituals. The emphasis on hand-kissing in one jurisdiction is not necessarily the tradition in others where the gesture may be restricted to within the Church during the liturgies or at appropriate gatherings for a religious purpose, such as the blessing of a new home, celebration of an engagement or the visit following a death in the family. In some Orthodox communities, it is not unusual for young people to kiss their elders' hands as a sign of respect. Some priests encourage children to kiss their parents' hand for their blessing and forgiveness before taking communion. Nevertheless, Dowell and Hurcombe quite rightly question the

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Susan Dowell & Linda Hurcombe, *Dispossessed Daughters of Eve. Faith and Feminism*, SPCK: London, 2nd edition, 1987, p.76.

reasons why their own bishops would romanticise the spiritual dimension and humility of Orthodox women as somehow manifested in hand-kissing .

### **Sexism in the seventies: Berlin 1974**

During the seventies there was a very important consultation organized by the WCC Women's Unit focused on *Sexism in the Seventies: Berlin 1974*, when the churches had to confront the sexism endorsed by theology and teachings of the Church. It was also an important forum to consider the place of Christian women in the context of women's struggles for liberation around the world, in addition to preparation for the UN International Women's Year and the WCC Fifth Assembly to be held in Nairobi. <sup>48</sup> This was the first conference where women only were the invited delegates, and for the five Orthodox women, amongst one hundred and fifty women from forty-nine countries, it was the first time they would be able to speak freely at a conference without men present. Pauline Webb, keynote speaker applied her definition of defined sexism as 'any kind of subordination or devaluation of a person or group solely on the ground of sex'. <sup>49</sup> Melanie May records that many issues were on the agenda for discussion including politics, economics, education and family and church.

The turning point was the request from Constance Parvey to organize a group on women and theology. Twenty-three women joined the group, only Parvey was a pastor, and the discussion raised the difficulties and issues of conflict women encountered in the church, no matter which church was mentioned. <sup>50</sup> From this group, a recommendation was made that that the WCC Nairobi Assembly would address 'the problems of speaking about the action of God in ways that communicate the gospel to all races, sexes and cultures'. Melanie May cites Madeleine Barot, the other co-ordinator with Brigalia Bam, 'this was really the beginning of the Faith and Order study on The Community of Women and Men in the

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<sup>48</sup> Melanie A May, *Bonds of Unity. Women, Theology and the Worldwide Church.*, Scholars Press :Atlanta, GA. 1989, p.40.

<sup>49</sup> Susannah Herzog, *A Voice for Women*, ,p.73.

<sup>50</sup> Melanie A May, *Bonds of Unity*, p.44.



Church'.<sup>51</sup> Out of this conference came the demand from church women to be not only better informed and motivated for change but also that women should have better representation and relevant participation in discussions within the ecumenical movement and member churches. Susannah Herzel commented that 'theology itself was seen to be working at a subliminal level which dehumanized women and created images contradictory to the spirit of the gospel'.<sup>52</sup> While Orthodox women were present, and in a sympathetic and supportive environment, nevertheless the recorded comments remained cautious and were carefully enunciated to reflect the context of their traditional societies.

The organisers chose nine women at random to elicit comments on their life and status in their church. Leila Shaheen da Cruz, Greek Orthodox from Lebanon, editor and manager of a publishing house and member of World YWCA executive committee responded when asked 'how do you feel your church and your society value you as a woman', by reiterating the honoured position women had in Arabic society, their responsibility for the new generation and household economics, and the contribution women made to building churches and Christian schools. She also noted that in the present days many women were professionals working alongside men, and some in even higher executive positions than men: 'I think to serve the cause of true liberation it is for us to liberate not only ourselves but the communities around us to accept us, to see us for our true value so that we can recreate a new pattern of living which will be better for all'.<sup>53</sup> As Janet Crawford comments: 'the Berlin consultation was a landmark in the history of women's participation in the WCC. It marked the beginning of a new phrase, a phase in which "a shift of emphasis from man-woman cooperation in church and society" to "the liberation of women" is found'.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>52</sup> Susannah Herzel, *A Voice for Women*, p.71.

<sup>53</sup> West Berlin Consultation on 'Sexism in the Seventies', *Risk*, Vol.10, no.2, 1974, p.36-37.

<sup>54</sup> Janet Crawford, *Rocking the Boat. Women in the World Council of Churches*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wellington, 1995.p.34.

Following the 'Sexism in the Seventies' consultation in West Berlin in 1974, Madeleine Barot and Constance Parvey formulated a small working group dedicated to a distinctive 'feminist theology' that developed as a group and all the Catholic women who attended the conference joined the group. The Faith and Order Commission meeting in Accra, Ghana the same year, a priority study was put forward to the WCC Central Committee. The Faith and Order Commission recommended that a study on 'The Community of Women and Men in the Church' be undertaken in cooperation between Faith and Order and the WCC Unit on Education and Renewal.<sup>55</sup> The coordinators of such a study were confronted with basic challenges to address that included such statements as:

Christ took on the basic human reality which both men and women share in finding their identity. In his particularity as a Jewish man, he called men and women to relate in ways that did not depend upon roles dictated by their culture... Whether one considers the professions, churches, government, remuneration, possibilities of advancement or decision-making powers, women receive the lesser share.<sup>56</sup>

After the WCC Fifth Assembly in Nairobi in December 1975, there was no doubt that the concerns of women had moved towards a new agenda after the issues raised at the Assembly revealed that women in the churches were quite able to articulate 'clearly, fully and radically' out of their own situations. There were thirteen Orthodox women present as delegates from various Orthodox churches. Although twenty-six women were elected to the WCC Central Committee to serve for the period 1975-1983, no Orthodox women were nominated. Constance Parvey expressed her pleasure to see an increase in the number of women delegates at Nairobi, although '... many delegates tended to remain "silent observers", pleased to be present but lacking knowledge of "how to work the machinery, or how to get their concerns before their sections, drafting committee and the plenary sessions".<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Accra 1974. Meeting of the Commission on Faith and Order, Minutes and Documents, Faith and Order Paper no.71, WCC : Geneva, 1974

<sup>56</sup> 'The Community of Women and Men in the Church'. A Study by the World Council of Churches. Working Paper to be presented to the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches for discussion and further directions.

<sup>57</sup> Constance Parvey, *Patriarchal Captivity*, p.226.

During the plenary on 'Women in a Changing World', Tety Pirri-Simonian, a social scientist on the staff of the Middle East Council of Churches and a member of the Armenian Apostolic Church participated on the three woman panel analysing the role of the Church in male dominated societies. The more radical women in the church had spoken out and would not retract nor retreat from their concerns for the decades ahead. The question remained whether Orthodox women would articulate their concerns out of their situations. One of the delegates, Nina Sergeevna Bobrova worked in the Department of External Affairs of the Moscow Patriarchate, was a vice-president of the Christian Peace Conference and had attended various ecumenical meetings for the Russian Orthodox church. She was a delegate to the Nairobi Assembly and at the following Vancouver assembly in 1983 was nominated to the Central Committee at the Vancouver Assembly. <sup>58</sup> Nina Bobrova made the observation that representatives from the Protestant churches had 'no conception of, or simply did not know the point of view of the Orthodox church that the question of ordination for women cannot arise due to existing ancient traditions and canon law'. <sup>59</sup> She was also critical that women delegates from socialist countries were not given the opportunity to speak on secular and political achievements of Russian women especially in the Soviet Union in connection with the International Women's Year. Bobrova emphasized that:

not only did women possess full equality with men in all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life but devout women also participated actively in ecclesiastical life...helping officiating priests during Divine liturgy by singing in choirs and performing the duties of readers, as chairwomen of church councils and most importantly the educators of succeeding generations in the Orthodox faith. <sup>60</sup>

The comments from Nina Bobrova, in an ecumenical forum, were a reminder that the church continued in Russia, contrary to the perceptions of many in the West, including member churches of WCC, who were more ready to believe the country was a 'godless state'. It appears that in the beginning of the women's movement there was a certain amount of

<sup>58</sup> *Journal of Moscow Patriarchate*, No.12, 1975, p.44.

<sup>59</sup> Nina S Bobrova, 'Women in a Changing World. Impressions of a Participant in the WCC 5th Assembly', *Journal of Moscow Patriarchate*, June 1976, p.66.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.67.

cultural insensitivity, perhaps emerging out of lack of knowledge and impatience with intransigent attitudes of conservative and tradition bound women in other communities.

### **Agapia Consultation 1976**

Susannah Herzel has quite rightly claimed that it was through the WCC that Orthodox churches have been encouraged to articulate their official position in regard to women in the church. From the 1947 Life and Work of Women in the Church Study through to plans for the first consultation of Orthodox women in 1976, it was the Protestant women in the Ecumenical movement who instigated and provided the necessary organisational and funding requirements to enable Orthodox women to respond and participate at ecumenical meetings. There is no evidence to suggest that the Orthodox hierarchs placed any priority nor believed it important for Orthodox women to have discussions on their service and ministry, their participation in the structures of the church, or indeed, their place in society in general. As far as clergy and hierarchs were concerned, and perhaps most women themselves, women had their important positions as wives and mothers, fund-raisers for church buildings, teachers of the young, coordinators of philanthropic and charitable work in the parish; and in some though not all jurisdictions, women could be members, though rarely directors of church choirs, and monastic life was possible for single or widowed women. Until the Agapia Consultation, there had never been such an ecumenical and inter-Orthodox meeting of women, and for that reason, Agapia was bold and encouraging, indicating that given the opportunity Orthodox women had something profound to say and offer to the Church.

The original suggestion for the first Orthodox women's consultation came from Brigalia Bam, Director of the Women's Unit, in November 1974 after the WCC Faith and Order meeting in Accra. She expressed the hope that such a specific meeting would 'look at the theological issue of patriarchal systems; new ministries in the Church; ordination; women and worship, and women and Liturgy in the context of the International Women's Year, the Nairobi Assembly and Orthodox women in the Ecumenical Movement.<sup>61</sup> The consultation

<sup>61</sup> Department memorandum: Brigalia Bam, 5 November 1974, Orthodox Women-Crete Consultation.

was planned to take place in May 1975 at the Orthodox Ecumenical Centre at Chania, Crete. Though it was not fully explained why the consultation did not proceed then, the lack of time and the hope that issues for discussion for women would emerge from the Nairobi Assembly, and the plenary session on 'Women in a Changing World' are reasonable suppositions.

The invitation received from Metropolitan Justin to hold the meeting at the Women's Monastery of Agapia in Moldavia, Romania, in September 1976 was accepted by the WCC Unit on Education and Renewal and more specifically, Brigalia Bam, Director of the Women's Unit and Rev. Bertrice Wood, WCC staff person. Both women were responsible for the programme, the subjects for discussion, participant list, finance budget and travel arrangements. The budget for the Agapia Consultation included the payment of Sfr2,380 by the WCC to the Romanian Orthodox Church in Geneva as a contribution to the Romanian Patriarchate in appreciation of the proposed hospitality for the delegates.<sup>62</sup> The Orthodox Church provided the hospitality, accommodation and internal travel in Romania, and Protestant women provided funds for travel and all administration costs.<sup>63</sup> This was not the first time the Protestant churches were generous to the Orthodox Churches, particularly during the Cold War years, when member churches outside Eastern Europe and USSR contributed travel costs for Orthodox to attend meetings of WCC Central Committee and as members of particular Commissions and encouraged Orthodox churches to host meetings in their country to which women and men from other member churches could attend. Not all churches sent delegates to the Agapia meeting, and most hierarchs nominated only one woman. Patriarch German of the Serbian Orthodox Church expressed interest, requested the summaries of the consultation but regretfully declined to send representatives. Panteleimon, Metropolitan of Corinth and President of the Synodical Committee on Foreign Relations also declined to send a representative from the Church of Greece, but in any event, Athena Athanassiou, Catherine Chiotellis and Argyro Kontoyorgli from the Greek Orthodox Church

<sup>62</sup> Internal department papers: WCC archives, 1975. There were considerable memorandums between the various organisers before the final agenda and financial grants were finalized.

<sup>63</sup> A further US\$16,787 was received in generous donations including: United Methodist Women (USA) US\$5,000; Das Diakonische Werk, Stuttgart(Germany), US\$7,761 and from the European Women's Consultation and European Desk, US\$4,026.

were present through personal invitations from the Women's Unit. Over the years, many Orthodox women have also received such 'personal' invitations to ensure their involvement in discussions on a wide range of issues for women in the ecumenical movement.

The committee was assisted by the presence of Tomoko Evdokimoff, a Russian Orthodox woman from Paris (and widow of Paul Evdokimov) who was an official translator for the World Council of Churches in Geneva. According to Susannah Herzel, Tomoko Evdokimoff was a traditional woman in the Church, and her agenda for the Agapia Consultation was prefaced by her understanding that:

women are central, not peripheral, to the churches in Eastern countries, that Orthodox women had no need to protest the matter of ordination... for them the problem of the priesthood is not a problem. They really do see the priest as representing Christ quite specifically. <sup>64</sup>

Accordingly her suggested agenda reflected a traditional view of women in the church. The most helpful discussion to place Orthodox women in context of their church was to compare the life and church in different countries including the *diaspora*; to provide an historical overview, reveal patristic texts about women; and direct the study of contemporary roles and tasks of women and men in the church from an Orthodox anthropological view point on marriage, celibacy and sexuality. <sup>65</sup>

The delegates invited or nominated for the Agapia meeting were not unfamiliar with ecumenical meetings or with WCC Assemblies. Many of the women were involved at both national and international consultations including representation on other ecumenical bodies. Athena Athanassiou (Greece) was a member of World YWCA Executive Committee; Vivian Hampers (USA) a member of the executive committee for Church Women United; Outi Maria Piironen (Finland) was European Secretary, for Ecumenical Youth Service and Houda Zacca (Egypt) was the staffperson for the Women's Projects for Middle East Council of Churches. The Orthodox women who worked for and within the church included: Constance Tarasar, lecturer in Religious Education at St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in

<sup>64</sup> Susannah Herzel, *A Voice for Women*, p.89.

<sup>65</sup> Correspondence: Tomoko Evdokimoff to Brigalia Bam, 7 May 1975.

New York; Stefanka Petrova, teacher and interpreter from Bulgaria; Eleana Goundiaeva, librarian and translator, Russian Orthodox Church, USSR; and Maica Nazaria Nita (Varatec convent) who were all delegates at the Nairobi Assembly 1975, and Professor Ekaterina Braniste, Professor of Religion and Romanian Literature at University of Bucharest had represented her church at the WCC meeting on *Koinonia and Diakonia* in Arbreste, France in July 1976.<sup>66</sup>

In September 1976, after many months of planning by the women in the Unit of Education and Renewal at the World Council of Churches, forty participants arrived at the Agapia Monastery in Romania for the first Orthodox women's consultation to discuss their role and participation in the Orthodox church. As Elisabeth Behr-Sigel recalls some years later 'for the first time in Christian history, women were called upon to reflect together, in dialogue with bishops and theologians, on their vocation and specific ministry'.<sup>67</sup> This consultation was not intended to analyse women's roles from a feminist perspective nor contribute to the growing debate in the women's movement and in other member churches of WCC, nor indeed to adopt the agenda of work or issues being promulgated in the women's movement especially in North America and Western Europe. No emphasis was placed on the United Nations Decade for Women nor the recommendations from the 'Sexism in the Seventies' Consultation held in 1974.

However, there is no doubt that the discussions and resolutions from those distinctive and prophetic meetings were well known to the Orthodox hierarchs and theologians. The problem for the Church was that at Agapia women were the organisers and funders of a unique 'experiment', that is, for the first time in Orthodox church history, Orthodox women would be discussing church issues amongst themselves, and this may have sent out an alarm to the hierarchs. In response to this concern, a number of male theologians and bishops were present, not only as delegates - Metropolitan Ignatios Hazim from Syria; Prof Nicolae

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<sup>66</sup> *Orthodox Women. Their Role and Participation in the Orthodox Church*, WCC: Geneva, 1977, pp.11- 15.

<sup>67</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, p.11.

Chitescu, Rev Prof Constantin Galeriu and Prof Iorgu Ivan from Romania; and three male guests Mr Sumir Gholan, Rev Elie Jacob and Dr Panayotis Nellas and of course, Metropolitan Emilianos Timiadis and Prof Ion Briu from WCC Geneva staff - but were also to present keynote papers concerning their interpretation of the situation by anticipating questions and answering from the traditional stance of the Church on the issue of ordination.

### Elisabeth Behr-Sigel

The keynote speaker for the Agapia Consultation was suggested by Tomoko Evdokimoff. The participants were indeed fortunate that she suggested Dr (Mrs) Elisabeth Behr-Sigel as:

' a theologian, very capable, who teaches at the Ecumenical Institute of the Catholic University in Paris. She did her doctoral thesis which she passed in 1974 at over sixty!... the only pity is that she is about sixty-five years old... but she could be a good speaker! <sup>68</sup>

In the light of the contemporary and relevant theological perspectives of a Western Orthodox which Elisabeth Behr-Sigel has given to the Church as a spokesperson for the ministry of women, Orthodox women are in debt to their Protestant sisters for the decision to invite her to speak at such a crucial meeting place. The choice of Dr Elisabeth Behr-Sigel as the keynote speaker was far sighted. The organisers provided the opportunity for an Orthodox woman, a convert from the Lutheran church many decades previously, to introduce new thoughts and new challenges to Orthodox women out of the context of her own theological and philosophical expertise and more especially as a voice from the *diaspora*. Elisabeth Behr-Sigel writes that on receiving the invitation she was:

Stunned and filled with joy and apprehension. I took great pleasure that the ancient Orthodox church... had shown itself ready to consider one of the great questions of modern time... it was willing to consult women as responsible members of the Christian people in search of a creative response... A reflection was started, to rediscover under the deposits of the past the authentic ecclesial Tradition about women, and secondly to apply that Tradition creatively to new situations. <sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Correspondence: Tomoko Evdokimoff to Agapia Planning committee, 21 May 1976.  
<sup>69</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, trans. Steven Bigham, Oakwood Publications: Torrance CA, 1991, p11.



Elisabeth Behr-Sigel was Professor of Philosophy at the Graduate Institute of Ecumenical Studies in Paris, Co-editor of *CONTACTS*, *French Review of Orthodoxy* and Lay President of the French Orthodox Community of the Holy Trinity, Paris. While the official report was most welcome following the consultation, the two editors had chosen to publish only Behr-Sigel's paper as a contribution from the women delegates. Elisabeth Behr-Sigel provided some reasons why this situation occurred when in her opening comments regarding the invitation to speak she asked 'did this mean that our venerable Orthodox institutions were preparing to catch up with modern feminisms?'<sup>70</sup> Furthermore she frankly stated her position on the matter by claiming that the oft held opinion that women in the church were not frustrated or oppressed by their assigned place in the church having been assigned to them by nature and Tradition was only partly true, and indeed it was usually men who proffered this opinion without any reference to the women.<sup>71</sup> Modern feminisms had introduced into dialogue within the Orthodox churches a new tool for scholars interested in discovering and analysing women's participation and roles in the Orthodox churches. The reputation of feminists, and even more so the notions of feminist theory or feminist theology within the doctrine and dogma of the Orthodox churches have at the least been referred to as incorrect and at the worst as heresies.

Elisabeth Behr-Sigel provided an enormous leap into the final quarter of the twentieth century for scholarship and action by Orthodox women, and her words could still be read and received with amazement for the very first time by Orthodox women well into the 1990s. Elisabeth Behr-Sigel spoke without fear or favour and she continues to be for many Orthodox women a 'new' voice that has challenged the church with the legitimacy of her scholarship and her mature years. It has perhaps been her mature years that allows her voice to be so widespread throughout the Orthodox world where very few other Orthodox women writers or theologians are known. Her ideas and conclusions have become beacons for younger

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<sup>70</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, 'The Meaning of the participation of women in the life of the Church', in *Orthodox Women*, p.17.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

theologians and researchers who follow behind, not always in complete agreement with her arguments but agreeing to be part of the discussions. Since the publication of the Agapia Consultation report, her Agapia address has appeared in other Orthodox journals and has provided a fresh insight for many readers who otherwise would have no access to her work.

<sup>72</sup> Responses to the articles and arguments by Elisabeth Behr-Sigel continue until the late 1990s, most often within an ecumenical environment which has always proven to be more open and available to listen to new ideas and challenges within the Church universal, and provide a forum for disparate Orthodox women's voices. There is a perennial problem facing Orthodox women writers to expand their work in the Orthodox Church and ecumenical relations, which relates primarily to the issues of language and jurisdiction. A fierce male and clergy reaction to a laywoman, lack of resources, or inert church bureaucracy can all play a part in preventing her work, or indeed the work of other women being widely heard or distributed.

The delegates to the Agapia Consultation were not 'official' spokespersons for the Church. The address by Elisabeth Behr-Sigel could only be accepted by the delegates as a learned paper from an Orthodox woman who based her theological work on the church doctrine and truths of the Early Fathers accepted by the Church. Her interpretations and criticisms are not accepted as relevant for deliberation by hierarchs of the Orthodox Church. In fact no woman is a spokesperson for the Orthodox Church. Bishops, clergy and male theologians have been granted that authority in accordance to the understanding of canon law based on scriptural understanding. Of course there are women scholars, historians, theologians and monastics who speak, teach and on occasion preach, but they do not have authority. As queried by Archbishop Peter (L'Huilier):

who is entitled in the Church to make authoritative statements with respect to dogmatic, ethical, liturgical and administrative matters? According to Church Tradition, decisions fall within the competency of the episcopacy by virtue of Apostolic Succession.<sup>73</sup> Among us, the Orthodox, neither Patriarchs nor Synods

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<sup>72</sup> See bibliography

<sup>73</sup> Archbishop Peter (L'Huilier), 'Authority in the Church', *SVTQ*, Vol.39, no.4, 1995, p.330.

have ever been able to introduce novelties, for the defender of religion is the body of the Church, that is to say the people want its religion to remain eternally unchanged and identical in its forms to that of the Fathers. <sup>74</sup>

However, for women in the church, the paper presented by Elisabeth Behr-Sigel in 1976, has had ramifications for over twenty years for Orthodox women in the ecumenical movement. At the Agapia Consultation women dared to speak out, not to demand rights in a hostile tone, but to express their desire to serve in a Church as free and responsible persons, daughters like the sons created in God's image.<sup>75</sup> While the 1970s were years of change for women in western society, and the influences spread into Eastern Europe, Middle East and Asia eventually Orthodox women could no longer deny the changing social status of women and not re-examine their standing in church society. Agapia opened the dialogue for Orthodox women to ask what they desired from the church and for their family and community life.

#### Agapia presentations

The other published papers were from Metropolitan Emilianos Timiadiis, Bishop of Calabria and representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the World Council of Churches in Geneva, and the theologian Evangelos Theodorou. Both men discussed the possibilities for women but more particularly the limits of their possibilities were confirmed. There were a number of papers offered at the consultation, though not all were translated or included in the final report. <sup>76</sup> Two other papers provided in the report from Agapia have been reprinted and often referred to as useful background material for discussion on the participation and ministry of women in the Orthodox Church. Both written by Greek Orthodox men they

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.335.

<sup>75</sup> 'Questions about Men and Women in the People of God'. Document is the result of a discussion about men-women relationships inspired by the Agapia consultation. Intended to serve as starting point for a wider reflections within the Church. Thirty-six persons signed the document- men and women, clergy and laity. Published in *Service Orthodoxe de Presse* #40, July-August, 1979. Appendix in Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women*, 1991, p.217-226.

<sup>76</sup> Catherine Chiotellis, *Après la rencontre des femmes orthodoxes à Agapia*; Ekaterina Braniste, *Notes d'une participante*; Houda Zacca, 'Why Should...'; and Outi Maria Piironen (no title).

provide positive roles and historical evidence of the roles women had undertaken or been called to in centuries past. Metropolitan Emilianos Timiadis, representative of His All-Holiness, Patriarch Demetrios I at the World Council of Churches spoke on the concern for women in Orthodox tradition, and Evangelos Theodorou, theologian, spoke from his doctoral thesis and extracts for the WCC Study Encounter series on The Deaconess.<sup>77</sup> At best it can be said that both these writers had some empathy for the questions women were asking the Church in the turmoil of the years following the War. Timiadis asked 'how much longer will women have to seek to convince the responsible church people that there is no reason why they should not have access to a wider involvement in the noble mission of the Church in the world? Nevertheless, while accepting that women already assumed particular and important responsibilities in family, church and society, he claimed, 'they are undoubtedly not on an equal footing, not participating in the decision-making life of the Church nor in its ministerial and institutional life'.<sup>78</sup>

It was well understood from most women delegates that women were not involved within the Orthodox communion as advisors in the structures of the Church, and decisions that might affect women were usually made, should such an issue be placed on a Council agenda and programmes set up in their absence, without their knowledge and later imposed as decisions of the whole Church. Even women's limited contributions were confined to insignificant areas and directed and prescribed by others, and were received with reluctant consent by the Church. Timiadis' paper is one of some affirmation for women and a desire to properly examine their possibilities for ministry in the Church, while at the same time, there remain traditional perceptions of her roles that prevent his paper being perceived as radical or too challenging to the Church. Timiadis assumes a feminist perspective when he claimed that: 'in most societies woman is traditionally looked down upon, and subordinated... an unconscious scorn but it continues to exist'.<sup>79</sup> However, he also affirmed the catechetical role

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<sup>77</sup> Emilianos Timiadis, 'The Concern for Women in the Orthodox Tradition, *diakonia*, Vol.12, no. 1977, pp.8-23; Evangelos Theodorou, "Cheirotonia" or "Cheirothesia" of Deaconesses', PhD dissertation, Athens, 1954.

<sup>78</sup> Emilianos Timiadis, 'The Concern for Women', p.8.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

of women and their social responsibility in the philanthropy of the Church and agrees that St Paul was right to refuse both educational and ministerial hierarchy to women.

Timiadis was sensitive to the voices of women for he understood that for many it is the need to explore new possibilities for new ministries rather than the demands for sacramental priesthood that is the concern for women. However, he focuses, as too many before and since have done, on the 'sacred motherhood' role responsible to bring comfort, kindness and tenderness to those she guides. 'The task of women is to prepare men for their office and to inspire them to fill it rightly'.<sup>80</sup> Again, he emphasises the dichotomy of the roles of man and woman - 'Personality belongs to man, universality belongs to woman, she is the doer and he is the thinker'.<sup>81</sup> For Timiadis, the ordination of women is a side-issue in comparison with the dominant problem of the Christian image of the human persons.

The various papers presented by the delegates contained many forward thinking ideas and concepts for women in the Orthodox Church. For the first time women determined the important issues to put before the Church that they understood to be essential for modern Orthodox women to move forward, all the while remaining faithful while questioning centuries old customs and traditions that were demeaning to women. While recommendations were made by the forty women, they were guided by clergy, theologians and bishops whose influence cannot be removed from the considerations. They may not have been present at all times during the group discussions but they were omnipresent in their authority and the final wording of the recommendations.

Anca Manolache, a Romanian Orthodox theologian, stated that 'any disrespect shown by one human being for another human being is a crime against the ontological fraternity of the human race'.<sup>82</sup> She appealed to men as 'our contemporaries, to adopt a mature reflection

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>82</sup> Anca Manolache, 'Reflections of Human Nature and the Unity of the World', Agapia Consultation, unpublished paper, September 1976. p.1.

with a view to finding the right way to the recovery of half of the human race, by seeing the woman as she really is - a being who carries, gives and guards human life'.<sup>83</sup> Manolache emphasized the necessary changes by asking the interesting question:

Will the women be able to train future generations in such a way that their sons-men shall not remain children pampered by a biological maternity? Is she sufficiently mature to tone down in herself her biological maternity, which has been so intensely developed over many centuries at the expense of spiritual maternity?<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, Manolache asked, as woman regains her confidence and the maturity she needs will she also succeed in convincing her son equally of his obligation to become mature and therefore accept joint responsibility for the maintenance of life; a maturity which 'primitive' man has struggled against with all his egocentric instincts'.<sup>85</sup>

At the end of the consultation six overall concerns emerged from the papers and the group discussions: family; monasticism; society; education; church service; witness and ecumenism.<sup>86</sup> Many of the recommendations within the various concerns were traditional and not unfamiliar for women in parishes across many dioceses. However, concerns emerged that offered women ideas to begin new ways of thinking and questioning their place and participation in the life of the Church. There were obvious influences from the *diaspora* churchwomen in both the language and the traditions they believed should be examined, changed or removed from church practices. They wanted 'the family liberated from oppressions suffered in the past' so that women might be relieved of the many burdens that inhibited them from making contributions to the church or indeed to the family and society.<sup>87</sup> In particular questions were raised about re-examining the rituals and prayers related to the 'uncleanliness' of women, especially the theological implications of exclusion from sacramental practices. However, having written this recommendation, the points of concern regarding monasticism were somewhat ambiguous when the comparisons were made that 'the virtues

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>86</sup> *Orthodox Women. Their role and participation in the Orthodox Church, WCC: Geneva, 1977, pp.44-51.*

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.44.

inherent in monasticism - obedience, humility and chastity- were also necessary in family life and find their particular expression in motherhood'.<sup>88</sup> The desirable place for women in society was understood as an expansion of the 'service and servant' roles within the home and already undertaken by church women. The delegates wanted higher education possibilities for women, in particular theological training in order to better educate their family, be better informed lay persons and Sunday Schools teachers.<sup>89</sup>

The delegates called for special conferences and workshops in theological and psychological studies to provide foundations for better religious training, and participation in decision-making on issues pertinent to contemporary life. Elisabeth Behr-Sigel cited a critical issue for women from which they were excluded from any discussion. An Orthodox diocese in Western Europe had conducted a consultation on contraception and abortion and only clergy, theologians and male doctors were invited. This situation, Behr-Sigel asserts resulted not from canonical rule but reflected a particular mentality that 'the thinking Church is made up of men as though women by nature were not capable of participating in a debate about an existential problem of immediate concern to them'.<sup>90</sup> She called women out of the silence of resignation and indifference in order to undertake reflection and study on all manner of contemporary problems. From this observation, the delegates recommended that all Church bodies concerned with theological reflection should include theologically qualified women in their membership, encourage women to enter theological schools in order to contribute in the future. This recommendation raised the question of extending women's contribution to the Church in parish councils, diocesan councils, departments and commissions of Church administration under the authority of the bishop. For the first time the issue of service by single women especially those who had not professed a monastic vocation was raised in the light of the Church creating a ministry for them in the same sphere as the diaconate or by new creations.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>90</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, p.105. The Agapia delegates did not record workshop notes on the issues of contraception and abortion. The Crete Consultation delegates made recommendations on these issues and are discussed in Chapter Six.

In his report that the Agapia Consultation had taken place, Sergei Hackel remarked that the meeting had been 'less publicized than it might have been had it challenged Orthodox customs and Tradition sufficiently to please the Press'.<sup>91</sup> While Hackel believed that such was the nature and discussion of the women, that the consultation was 'not minded to proceed along such lines', it is strongly suggested that the presence of male hierarchs, clergy and theologians overwhelmed any new attitudes or proposals about the participation and ministry of women so that even the phrase introduced by Elisabeth Behr-Sigel in her paper that 'ordination was no problem for Orthodox women at present (*actuellement*)' was withdrawn from the final communique in favour of an unqualified disclaimer as the ordination of women was not being considered a question for Orthodox women.<sup>92</sup> It is not surprising that women were reticent in claiming any position that might bring them into conflict or threaten their authority as homemakers and matriarchs of the family.

It must be well understood that while many documents and patristic writings are available in modern Greek, Romanian and French it is very difficult for many scholars to access this rich harvest, as English translations are limited and as correctly claimed not all are of very high quality. The limited work of the translation department at WCC has therefore opened many opportunities for scholars to access many contemporary theological works which have often contained translated ancient texts not widely known in the West. Likewise for many non-English scholars access to contemporary documents and publications from feminist scholars in the West are not always available because of language and even expense. It has been since the Agapia Consultation that the work of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel has become well known outside France, and that has occurred due to her involvement in the ecumenical movement, the special and unusual circumstances of the faith community in which she lived, her own willingness to articulate new ways of Orthodox thought, and especially the English translations of her work. From the Orthodox community in France, theologians Paul

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<sup>91</sup> Sergei Hackel, 'The Agapia consultation'. *Sobornost*, op.cit, p.431.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p.431.



Evdokimov, Olivier Clement and Nicolas Lossky were also writing of women in the Church, and Behr-Sigel cited positive comments from theologian Olivier Clement, who also teaches at St Sergius in Paris, who wrote in response to the emerging women's movement: 'today, women are seeking to assert themselves as human beings in the fullest sense, as free responsible agents'.<sup>93</sup>

Elisabeth Behr-Sigel has continued to contribute a strong voice with new suggestions for Orthodox women, while also bearing in mind the more tentative voices of all women in the Church and society regardless of denomination, culture or society. She was sensitive to the 'weaker ones' in her church, and the importance of not 'offending their sensibilities', but thankfully has gone on for a further twenty five years, writing and proposing possibilities for women, even though she is now a woman of more mature years. Her opinions have been most welcomed by a few women as there has been no internationally recognized feminist expression offered in the Orthodox consultations. Most appointed delegates have not been part of a wider ecumenical movement of women discussing diverse ideas and the same familiar conservative arguments continue to be given by both male and female theologians and male hierarchs concerning the diaconate, human sexuality, women's participation and their ministry.

### **Diakonia - service or ministry**

The Greek Orthodox theologian Evangelos Theodorou provided background paper for the delegates at Agapia on the ministry, ordination, canonical status, spheres of work and the renewal of deaconesses work in Greece. His original academic and theological contributions and the specific paper at Agapia, like Behr-Sigel's and Timiadis', has also been a constant reference from before Agapia and has provided primary source archival material for many researchers unable to access original Greek documents. Theodorou claimed there was a ministry of deaconesses in the Greek Orthodox church during the early centuries. From the beginning widows, certain consecrated virgins, married women living celibate lives,

<sup>93</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, 'The Meaning of the participation of women in the life of the Church'. p.18. Olivier Clement, *Questions sur l'homme*. Paris 1975, p.115.

especially wives of bishops were admitted to the order of deaconesses.<sup>94</sup> The deaconesses were chosen by the bishop and consecrated for their ministry 'through prayer and the laying on of hands'. Their ordination (*cheiratonía*) was a liturgical rite very similar to the ordination of deacons and took place within the holy sanctuary and during the liturgy, receiving the Orarium, liturgical emblem of the ministry, and Holy Communion at the altar and replacing the chalice on the altar themselves.<sup>95</sup>

The diaconate, unlike the Anglican rite for example, is not necessarily a first step into the priesthood in the Orthodox Church where the nature and vocation of the ordained deacon is permanent, complete and unique.<sup>96</sup> The role of deaconesses were seen as 'life time commitments to full vocational service as presently contained in the canons of the Church'.<sup>97</sup> The order of deaconesses has existed since the mission of St Paul, was relevant to the bishopric of St John Chrysostom in Constantinople in the fourth century, and in some jurisdictions, deaconesses were still referred to in the fourteenth century. Their roles were missionary, catechetical and educational in the early church; they were the 'social workers' of the church; in the early church they were the Abbess of convents in addition to their church functions which included responsibility for the order and decency of women attending church, which included a strict demarcation line of men one side and women the other, with deaconesses in the front, the widows, married women and last unmarried women. Deaconesses were appointed to prepare adult women for full immersion baptism, they carried Holy Communion to the homes of women and they dressed the bodies of women for funerals.<sup>98</sup> Kyriaki FitzGerald writes: 'Those persons who presently believe that there is no need for the diaconate in general, and more particularly, for women deacons would find the prayers of

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<sup>94</sup> Evangelos Theodorou, 'The Ministry of Deaconesses in the Greek Orthodox Church', in *Orthodox Women. Their role and participation in the Orthodox Church*, WCC: Geneva, 1977, pp.37-43.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>96</sup> Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald, *Orthodox Women and Pastoral Praxis*, in Theodore Stylianopoulos, *Orthodox Perspectives on Pastoral Praxis*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press: Brookline, MA, 1988. p. 111.

<sup>97</sup> Agapia Consultation - recommendations, op.cit. p.49.

<sup>98</sup> Evangelos Theodorou, 'The ministry of Deaconesses in the Greek Orthodox Church', *Studies No.4*, in *Orthodox Women*, pp.37-43.

the Orthodox Church of special interest. In the Orthodox service of the deaconess, the following prayer is offered by the ordaining bishop:

O God, the holy and Almighty, you have blessed woman through the birth in the flesh of your only-begotten Son and our God from the Virgin and you have given the grace and visitation of the Holy Spirit not to men only, but to women as well; Lord, look now upon this your servant and call her to the work of your ministry. Send down upon her the rich gift of your Holy Spirit. Preserve her in the Orthodox faith, that she may fulfil her ministry in blameless conduct according to what is well pleasing to you. For to you are due all honour, glory and worship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.<sup>99</sup>

Increasingly through the twentieth century, from earliest attempts in Russia in 1904-5, the possibility of the revitalization of this ministry has been discussed in meetings, consultations and in the written works of eminent theologians.<sup>100</sup> In Russia, Elizabeth Fedova, grand daughter of Queen Victoria of England, converted to the Russian Orthodox church after she married into the Romanov family. Following the assassination of her husband in 1905, she attempted to revive the Order of Deaconess but the church authorities would not give permission. Instead, she founded a convent and the Sisters of Martha and Mary for charitable work amongst the poor and sick, and established a hospital and orphanage. She was arrested and killed in 1918 by the Bolshevists. In 1981 she was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.<sup>101</sup>

While Evangelos Theodorou continues to be an important reference, especially for Greek Orthodox scholars, he is not the only historian or theologian interested in the topic.<sup>102</sup> Kyriaki FitzGerald has expanded the study of Theodorou and her detailed and historical publication refers to contemporary efforts to re-examine and renew the order of women deacons for the church. She refers to the efforts in the *diaspora* in 1953 that were attempted

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.111. Translation by Kyriaki FitzGerald.

<sup>100</sup> This issue will be discussed in other chapters in relation to other women's demands.

<sup>101</sup> *Distinctive Diaconate* (London), No.40, April 1997, p.1. *The Martha-Mary Convent and the Rule of St Elizabeth the New Martyr*, Holy Trinity Monastery: Jordanville NY, 1991.

<sup>102</sup> Ellen Gvosdev, *The Female Diaconate: An Historical Perspective*, Light & Life Publishing: Minneapolis, 1991.; Elizabeth Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom and Friends*, Edwin Mellon Press: New York, 1979; and *Women in the Early Church*, Liturgical Press: Collegeville, MN 1983; Aime Georges Martimort, *Deaconesses An Historical Study*, Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, Liturgical Press: Collegeville, MN, 1976.

by the Greek Orthodox Archbishop Michael in America from 1953, to actively recruit candidates for an order of deaconesses, similar to the work being undertaken in the Church of Greece.<sup>103</sup> FitzGerald states that the project did not eventuate for two reasons: the absence of parental approval for their daughters to study away from home and the lack of awareness of the ministry among the faithful.<sup>104</sup> However, it is important to note, that while the discussion and the academic and historical work continues to explore this order of service, at the end of the century the Church has moved no closer to announcing the liturgical re-introduction for this ordination of women nor is it proposed on the agenda for the next Great Holy Synod. There have been attempts for the renewal in the Church of Greece, the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church, but there continues to be great reservation by the bishops to properly address this issue.<sup>105</sup>

As the debate on ordination of women to the priesthood was increasing especially in the Anglican communion, women requested special studies on the subject in order to clarify and interpret the Orthodox Church position to other churches especially by the women who lived in western societies and were continually being engaged in dialogue on this question. The dialogue has taken place mainly in ecumenical meetings, for very few Orthodox women engaged in dialogue with emerging Protestant and Catholic women's groups, founded for discussion and action on their exclusion, participation or ministry in the church. The 'seventies' was a time of ferment in all the churches as women, inspired by second wave feminism, economics, racism and violence in North America and western Europe and the war in Vietnam, galvanized women, young and mature aged, to action against conservative and patriarchal control in governments, families and churches.

<sup>103</sup> Kyriaki K FitzGerald, 'Orthodox Women and Pastoral Praxis', op.cit., p.154.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p.157. There are a number of references to the diaconate in different contexts throughout the thesis. However, the diaconate by itself is not a focus of the thesis nor is the ordination of women to the sacramental priesthood. They are issues relevant to the argument concerning the exclusion of women from full participation in the Orthodox church, and cannot be avoided.

<sup>105</sup> see Ellen Gvosdev, *The Females Diaconate, 1991*; Kyriaki K. Fitzgerald, *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church... Called to Holiness and Ministry*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press: Brookline, MA. 1998.

Tertiary educated and theologically educated women questioned the 'status quo' in society, demanded affirmative action, founded political lobby groups demanding legislative change in society particularly in areas of work, relationships and children. Social dysfunction in families, the workplace and the intimate relationships of marital life all came under the scrutiny of Christian and secular feminists. For the first time, albeit not strictly an Orthodox consultation, but instigated and encouraged by Protestant women, forty Orthodox women discussed and proposed modest and moderate recommendations to their church leaders. Time and the influence of outside forces have in fact proven to be far more effective in raising the consciousness of the 'woman's question' in the Orthodox church, than any consideration of the Agapia document. While many individual Orthodox women have struggled with the challenges of this late twentieth century no movement for change as experienced in the Anglican, Catholic, Protestant and Reformed Churches across the Americas, western Europe, Africa and Asia emerged from the first consultation.

The participants at Agapia completed their recommendations to the bishops of their churches by expressing the hope that a further consultation of Orthodox women would take place and be organized by the Orthodox. It was not until 1988 that the Inter-Orthodox Rhodes consultation was called by His All Holiness Demetrios I, and addressed the participation and the priesthood of women, but there were only eighteen women present amongst forty-five men, in the main bishops and theologians, and the views expressed moved very little from the first address by Elisabeth Behr-Sigel in 1976. The next WCC consultation for Orthodox women was not held until 1990 in Crete. Meanwhile, two years after Agapia in November 1978, the General Synod of the Church of England rejected the motion for the ordination of women to the sacramental priesthood. While the rejection certainly galvanized many women in the Anglican Church communion to action with the formation of the Movement for the Ordination of Women, the calls for reform in many other areas were in danger of being subsumed as sacramental ordination would change everything. When ordination of women to the priestly office eventually came to the Anglican Church in England

and the provinces, it certainly did not lead to improvement of attitudes nor to a more inclusive and participatory church especially for lay women.

The Orthodox Church considered the ordination of women to the sacramental priesthood as a result of Western Protestant feminist influences which had no authority for the Orthodox. Orthodox spokespersons, women and men, refer to the influence of 'western culture' concerning the ordination and women's ministry debate as though Orthodox live in totally separate worlds. There is an underlying message from Orthodox clergy and hierarchs that even the lessons of history and the examples of discrimination and inequality inherent in the life of the Orthodox church in the last years of the twentieth century are of little consequence for most Orthodox believers, clergy and laity, who live in Western cultures. Nevertheless, there are a few women and men who strongly believe that the debate on women's ministry and a resurgence of scholarly research and contemporary exegesis of scripture must continue and expand. All Orthodox churches, homeland and *diaspora*, now find themselves intrinsically linked to their sister churches and indeed, to secular society and there can be no turning back. The participation of the Orthodox churches in the Ecumenical movement has already moved the question of women's ministries and inclusion beyond the narrow parameters insisted upon by the traditions and cultures of the past. The Agapia Consultation was the beginning for Orthodox women and it was also the most honest expression of the concerns of women. It is suggested that because the church hierarchs took little notice, nor took responsibility to encourage further discussion on the recommendations or more importantly begin to implement them in the dioceses and parishes, subsequent meetings at Crete, Damascus and Istanbul together with local and ecumenical meetings were destined to repeat the work of the delegates at Agapia if only in different places and from different women.

### **Following Agapia**

The issue of ordination to the sacramental priesthood was not on the agenda for Orthodox women, although Brigalia Bam 'ad hoped the discussion on women's ministry

might be included. Of considerable interest was the response when the issue of ordination was placed on the agenda by the hasty actions of the hierarchs, an action that would have consequences as the decades passed. Constance Tarasar, a delegate from the Orthodox Church in America and co-editor of the final report of the Agapia Consultation, referred to the educational and professional level of the participants and the well-balanced paper given by Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and her insistence that it was the responsibility of the Church to take leadership and restore women to their full place in society and in the church.<sup>106</sup> Tarasar was critical of the other keynote presentations, all given by men, which turned out to be either glorification of motherhood or arguments against the ordination of women to the priesthood. 'It became clear as the meeting progressed that three professors of theology had been sent to the consultation specifically to speak against the ordination of women, even though the participants had not intended to (formally) raise the issue'.<sup>107</sup> The professors were aware of the growing movement for the ordination of women in the Church of England and America, and Agapia was a forum to state the Church's position on the impossibility in the Orthodox Church.

In the preface to the final Agapia report, Ekaterina Braniste, Professor of Romanian Literature at the University of Bucharest, and former Professor of Religion made it clear that from her perspective women were not at Agapia to find out about themselves, nor find ways and means to work towards undermining their subservient and traditional roles in church and society. She believed that the understanding of the roles of women was to be reinforced by both women and men throughout the consultation and that: 'by her very nature, woman has a special vocation in the education of children and men, and in bringing consolation, affection, and a softness of the harshness in the human heart'.<sup>108</sup> When women had the 'correct understanding' of the teachings of the Church they were able to pass it on to others,

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<sup>106</sup> Constance Tarasar, 'Orthodox Women's consultation', *SVOTS*, Vol.20, no.4, 1976, p.242

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p.244.

<sup>108</sup> Ekaterina Braniste, 'Reflection of a Participant', in Constance Tarasar and Irena Kirillova, *Orthodox Women. Their role and participation in the Orthodox Church*, Geneva: WCC, 1977, p.7.

influencing many aspects of family life and their communities. They were present to learn more about and have the traditional views of women's vocations affirmed. Indeed, by their very nature as women, their vocations were already determined by history, theology, culture and tradition. It has been this attitude that has driven many women from the Church in the latter years of the twentieth century, though it is not a new phenomenon for women through the centuries who have desired an inclusive community of church.

This is not to say that some women delegates did not present views contrary to acceptable church or society expectations of women. In a move that would provide a model for all other Orthodox women's consultations, the nature of ecumenical involvement in the arrangements and programme was both the impetus and the 'light through the window' for many Orthodox women, in both the West and the East. The organisation of the meetings by competent and educated women, in the main Protestant staff members, with reference to Orthodox women in France and America, rather than by male clerics of Orthodox churches, introduced concepts and practices to Orthodox women seldom experienced if at all within their own jurisdictions whether in homelands or the *diaspora*. Vivian Hampers, delegate from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in America, reported that the fact the consultation took place was of 'primary, utmost, historical significance in itself':

I believe Nairobi was the turning point. The results - a new focus for Orthodox church women was shaped which reflected a shift from emphasis on statements and resolutions to ventures into new bolder forms of witness to Christ... From the standpoint of a "women's meeting", I welcomed the opportunity to discuss women's role in the Church and in society apart from their stereotyped role as bakers and money-makers to help pay off mortgages or purchase church kitchen equipment. For years I have resented this exclusive "use" of our women in the USA. Our women have been kept so busy they have not had time to learn or be educated in the faith.<sup>109</sup>

In April 1977, the women students at St Vladimir's Seminary in New York organized an inter-Orthodox conference 'Woman in God's Creation', and were 'finally making a

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<sup>109</sup> Vivian Hampers, Report on the Agapia Consultation, September 1976. Hampers does not make it clear whether Nairobi refers to the UN Women's conference or the WCC Assembly. The WCC Fifth Assembly in Nairobi recommended that 'Churches allow the discussion on the ordination of women and not reject it on the basis of 'ecumenical considerations'. It also called on churches, whether or not they ordained women to continue the dialogue concerning the full participation of women in priestly service.



beginning' according to Constance Tarasar.<sup>110</sup> The issues focused on the service and functions of women in the Christian community; and for the programme at St Vladimir's to centre on the image of Christian women and Mariology. Sophie Koulomzin reflected that twenty years previously she had not been permitted to teach church school and while women now attended seminary she stated that 'the woman is the instrument of spiritual cleansing for her whole family; she purges the sins of the family by her own spirituality'.<sup>111</sup> In May 1977, Bertrice Wood from the WCC Women's Unit reported that a similar meeting held in Helsinki with twenty women from the Orthodox church in Finland, raised the issues of mixed marriages and study groups for the laity, but no response (or permission) had been received from the bishop.<sup>112</sup> Bertrice Wood suggested that 'the participation of Orthodox women is growing very slowly and is often imperceptible'.<sup>113</sup> In Paris, a discussion was instigated from the Agapia recommendations resulting in a public document being published in 1979 'Questions about Men and Women in the People of God' and signed by thirty-six persons, men and women, clergy and laity who recommended that: 'We propose them (the questions) to conciliar thinking, that is, thinking done in a spirit of humility, openness and mutual listening'.<sup>114</sup>

The Agapia consultation took place in the midst of great cultural and social change throughout USA and Western Europe, but Orthodox women were not moving within their churches for those changes. The Agapia document remained in the archives of the Orthodox churches, rarely referenced or promoted, and certainly not directly acted upon. When the Agapia report was published in 1977 not all the papers nor the group reports were included. This of course was not unusual, and had the papers written by Orthodox women reflecting their work in and for the Church been widely circulated it is unlikely that John Erickson in his review of the small publication would have been able to write 'it is not easy to assess the

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<sup>110</sup> Constance Tarasar to Bertrice Wood, 10 May 1977.

<sup>111</sup> *The Orthodox Church*, September 1977, p.8.

<sup>112</sup> Bertrice Wood to Constance Tarasar, 17 June 1977.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>114</sup> Appendix, 'Questions about Men and women in the People of God', in Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, Oakwood Pubs : Redondo Beach, 1991, p. 226.

significance of the Agapia consultation'.<sup>115</sup> Erickson focused on the recommendations of the meeting and possible restoration of the office of deaconess, lauded the fact that he could read no demands for certain abstract 'rights' and that the 'sometimes strident language of women's liberation is conspicuous for its absence'.<sup>116</sup> With this review, it is hardly likely that any feminist or activist Orthodox women would have accessed the report of the meeting, quite easily dismissing the consultation as conservative and tradition bound. As future consultations would reveal, the Agapia Consultation was a bold step forward for Orthodox women in light of the new movement of women within the church and society at large, the paucity of resources, and the absence of feminist theologians in the Orthodox Church.

Though the challenges of studying women and culture, women and economics, women and men relationships may not have rung the alarm bells for Orthodox hierarchs and traditionalists, the problems of language and imagery of God together with the calling to specific ordained ministry for women, warned Orthodox clergy and theologians that they too would need to articulate the theological, anthropological and sociological reasons for the exclusion of women from sacramental ministry, debate the understanding of the Trinity in Orthodox tradition that precluded any change to liturgical language, and re-examine the subservient roles allotted to women in the church, embellished with words of 'holy service' and 'glorious motherhood'.

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<sup>115</sup> John H. Erickson, Review: Agapia Consultation in *SVOTS*, Vol.21, no.3, 1977, p.170.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p.170.

## Chapter Four

### Ignored by those who approved the priorities

Immediately following the Agapia Consultation the expectations of the women delegates may well have been enthusiastic and hopeful for the future. For the first time in the history of the Orthodox Church, a group of women, notwithstanding disparities of culture, jurisdictions and communication difficulties, had cooperated to present the Consultation recommendations to the Church. The Agapia Consultation was the first opportunity most Orthodox women, especially outside France and Western Europe, were given to hear and subsequently read the work of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel. However, it was the Women's Unit and more specifically the Protestant women in the ecumenical movement who promoted her work and encouraged her presence and contributions at the various consultations and seminars concerned with the status of women in the Orthodox Church. Since 1976 Elisabeth Behr-Sigel has been considered as the precursor Orthodox woman scholar who has raised awareness for Orthodox women, as an ecumenist promoted the need for scholarship and understanding of the Orthodox faith, and raised the need for change and awareness of the subservient and discriminatory practices against women in the Orthodox Church while at the same time being sensitive to those who see no need to question or to change. This chapter explores where or whether 'the voices from the silence' of a few Orthodox women together with the Agapia recommendations responded to growing feminist influences in church and society during the 1980s. This chapter discusses the conflicting attitudes of Orthodox hierarchs and theologians, and their lack of positive response to recommendations from various consultations, and the experiences of Orthodox women during the 1980s which encouraged their increasing personal involvement in the women's movement in secular society and the ecumenical movement, particularly at national and international dialogue.

### Community of Women and Men in the Church

From 1978 to 1982, Constance Parvey directed the study programme 'The Community of Women and Men in the Church' (CWMC) for the Women's Unit in the WCC.<sup>1</sup> The programme which was located in the Faith and Order Commission was co-ordinated with the Sub-unit on Women and Men in Church and Society, a combination that provided some authority and gained involvement of theologians in the process. Over 65,000 copies of the study guide, translated into various languages, were distributed through the member churches of WCC into their local churches and congregations. The study focused on three specific areas of concern for women and men in church life; theology, participation and relationship. The specific questions of the study raised the issues of culture; participation and gender relationships; marriage, family and alternative lifestyles; church teachings; tradition; church structures; worship and ministry.<sup>2</sup> It was a study whose time had come. It was time that the questions about women, raised in the secular world by women, including churchwomen, needed answers from within church tradition and culture.

During the four years of the study other smaller and specific consultations took place in order to gather as much sociological and theological data as possible as contributions to the information received from local study groups around the world. In September 1979 a consultation on 'The Ordination of Women in Ecumenical Perspective' was held at the Chateau Klingenthal, near Strasbourg, France. There were thirty participants and included Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Evangelos Theodorou amongst the Orthodox theologians who had been at Agapia, together with notable Protestant feminist scholars, Daphne Hampson and Letty Russell and Catholic scholars Rosemary Radford Ruether and Leonard Swidler. The delegates represented widely diverse opinions and theological positions on the ordination and ministry of women. The Orthodox delegates were all firmly expressing their opposition to and denial of the ordination to the sacramental priesthood for women.

<sup>1</sup> Rev Dr Constance Parvey, ordained pastor of the Lutheran Church in America, and participant at the Berlin Consultation, *Sexism in the Seventies*, was appointed by WCC in 1978 to head the Community of Women and Men in the Church study.

<sup>2</sup> Betty Thompson, *A Chance to Change. Women and Men in the Church*, WCC; Geneva, 1982, pp.113-121.

Deborah Belonick, graduate student at St Vladimir's Seminary (OCA) claimed there was no movement for the ordination of women in the Orthodox churches in America, but the question was being raised from outside and women wanted to understand the reasons in order to dialogue with Protestant and Catholic scholars and theological activists.<sup>3</sup> Bishop Antonie, Orthodox delegate from Romania noted that there were fourteen denominations in his country, none interested in the problem of ordination of women for 'against the threat of atheism, why be occupied with such a problem?'.<sup>4</sup> Coptic Orthodox Bishop Youannes from Egypt referred to the early centuries when heretical groups ordained women and the Church condemned them. The bishop added that in present times, the cultural and religious situation of Orthodox women, as part of a minority religion living in an Arab society, had been further constrained by the fact that as Islamic women had fewer rights in their religion and society over the centuries, their situation had influenced the attitudes and practices of the Coptic Orthodox church towards their women.<sup>5</sup>

All the historical, cultural and social contexts have very strong influences on the practices within the churches, though increasingly it is well understood the wide diversity of cultures incorporated various interpretations of similar rules and always within the context of patriarchal traditions and authority. The Orthodox participants all recognized the possibility of the restoration of women to the diaconate, an issue that continues to re-appear at future consultations whether amongst women or male theologians and hierarchs especially when the issue of women's ordination and priesthood are raised. The diaconate of women is an issue for which little serious debate has occurred, is usually presented as the pinnacle for women's ministry, although there are no definitive documents before the bishops, and as previously mentioned, it is not an agenda item for the forthcoming Great and Holy Synod of

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<sup>3</sup> Constance Parvey, (ed.), *Ordination of Women in Ecumenical Perspective*, Workbook for the Church's future, *Faith and Order Paper 105*, WCC: Geneva, 1980. p.8. Orthodox participants were Dr Elisabeth Behr-Sigel (France); Deborah Belonick (USA); Catherine Jones-Goltzin (Switzerland/USA); Bishop Antonie Plamadcala (Romania); Dr Evangelos Theodorou (Greece) and Bishop Youannes (Egypt).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

the Orthodox churches. The diaconate for women is still discussed as though the ministry still required many years of theological and historical work, despite the numerous articles and publications that point clearly to the diaconate being a restored ministry, not a new innovation. The important points the Orthodox wanted the participants to remember, writes Constance Parvey, were that there had always been ministries in the church not merely the ordained office of the priesthood, and that it was a part of the Tradition of the Church to have unity within diversity.<sup>6</sup> Parvey further claimed that the Orthodox understood that the diversity of cultures and subsequent influences are inferior to the overall Tradition of the Church that has not admitted the possibility of the ordination of women to the priesthood. In all Orthodox tradition, it was stated, the priest represents the 'persona Christi'. Christ represents God the Father, Christ is the Head of the Church, Christ is male therefore it follows that the priests' function as the male 'icon' of Christ. Not only is the male representing Christ but he can be the only mediator on behalf of the faithful with God.<sup>7</sup> Later consultations held within the Orthodox families, raised the question of ordination but first provided a preamble that specifically denied the sacrament to women.<sup>8</sup>

There is always the possibility in ecumenical dialogue including Orthodox church delegates that the issue of women's 'uncleanness' will arise. Though such attitudes are not unknown in Protestant and Catholic communities they are not promulgated nor taught with the authority of scripture and tradition from one generation of women to the next as by Orthodox mothers. Some Orthodox theologians and clerics use menstruation, pregnancy and birth, as the definitive reasons for women's exclusion from the rituals and full participation in the holy of the Church. They are the reasons for her exclusion from the holy, and also manifest in subtle and visual daily practices of liturgical life. Her natural biological functions are deemed less worthy than those of man although her contribution because of such functions is the bearing and giving birth to life. It is her motherhood that is revered not her womanhood. At Niederaltaich the delegates referred to the psychological and biological

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.32.

<sup>8</sup> The Rhodes Consultation, 1988. Discussed in Chapter Five.

realities of the brokenness of true community. The over-emphasis of patriarchal biases against women, it was claimed, have thrown a shadow on their life-giving biological productivity by projecting the concept that women had an 'unclean spirit' or 'shadow side'.<sup>9</sup> This bias has created an inner schism, a loss of security and trust and unnecessary feelings of tension and isolation.<sup>10</sup>

In September 1980, the Consultation 'Towards a Theology of Human Wholeness' took place at the Niederaltaich Benedictine Abbey in Germany. Amongst the eighteen delegates were three Orthodox women, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, Catherine Chiotellis (both had attended the Agapia consultation) and Vasiliki Eckley from the Orthodox Church in America (OCA).<sup>11</sup> Christine Chiotellis reported that in modern Greece women had access to university schools of theology and were lecturers in theological faculties although she did not define the disciplines of theology which could not be taught by women. There had been a renewal of the diaconate of women through the foundation of a Higher School for Deaconesses and Social Assistants and a revival of women entering the monastic life often after acquiring higher education. The women's movement was manifested mainly through the YWCA student unions and university women's association where programmes were being undertaken on women's issues.<sup>12</sup> Chiotellis further commented that with little demarcation between church and society, an educated woman feels fulfilment in her chosen role whether in the parish or in society.<sup>13</sup> For this reason, women do not look upon the ordination to the priesthood as a goal, for she can be 'ordained' to other roles. Then, surprisingly Chiotellis stated that:

because the Orthodox understand the church to be the people of God - clergy and laity together -- women take little heed of traditional attitudes to them and they pay little attention to sexually discriminating practices against them, not even the denial of infant girls to be taken into the altar nor the prayers read at childbirth. <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Janet Crawford & Michael Kinnamon. (ed). *In God's Image. Reflections on Identity, Human Wholeness and the Authority of Scripture*, WCC: Geneva, 1983. p.72.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.72.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.78.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66.

The subtle practices of exclusion are entrenched to such a degree that most women did not recognize their passive presence, as women, as discriminatory. Has it in fact, as the hierarchs claim, been the western feminists particularly in the Protestant churches, who exerted their influence towards the raising of the question of women's position in the church?

Elisabeth Behr-Sigel explained the peculiarity of the Russian Orthodox community in France which stretched the bounds for women's inclusiveness wherever possible in the life of the community of the Church. However, she also stated that while women could direct the parish choir, they could not preach (even though theologically educated), and no woman was a professor of systematic theology rather they were relegated to teaching languages or philosophy. Of particular interest to the CWMC study was the revelation that a group of lay persons, a majority being women, had 'published an innovative catechism without the church hierarchy having intervened directly in the process of its production'.<sup>15</sup> Behr-Sigel continued her report: 'it must be noted - whether one deplores or applauds it- that, at the present time, there exists no aggressive feminism within the Orthodox communities in France'. Nevertheless she remarked there were small groups intent on developing their concerns of the idea of women's ritual impurity; the exclusion of women from all liturgical functions; the refusal to discuss on a serious theological basis, the question of the ordination of women to the ministerial priesthood and the refusal to restore the diaconate of women.<sup>16</sup>

The Klingenthal Consultation in 1979 brought to the fore the emerging analysis of patriarchal structures and symbols as they affected theology and church life in the member churches of WCC as well as the Roman Catholic Church. For observers of, and indeed some members in Orthodox church structures, it is obvious that 'masculine power controls the symbols, rites, sacred acts and teaching office of the Church and that women are receivers, responders and implementers of male power and decision-making'.<sup>17</sup> In the light of maintaining the status quo in ecumenical relationships it is not surprising that the Orthodox

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.61

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.62.

<sup>17</sup> Faith and Order Paper, no.105. p.35.



claim that any public discussion on the ordination of women remains a threat to the unity of the churches.<sup>18</sup> However, the opposite view from churches that do recognize the full ministry and priesthood of women is that without the discussion on ministry and the full participation of women and men in the Church an 'act of disunity is perpetrated against humankind'.<sup>19</sup> Notwithstanding the reluctance of the Orthodox delegates to contribute beyond the standard denial of the priesthood for women, there was discussion on the lay ministry that was possible in some elements of church practice in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church. Again, from the diocese that seems both steps ahead and out of step with the more traditional diocesan structures and practices Elisabeth Behr-Sigel related her situation in Paris and her participation in ministry within her community:

When I was elected lay president of our parish I was expected to be concerned basically with material problems: upkeep of church buildings, organization of parish meals, and if necessary, catechism work among young children. As it happened, however, I had theological training and little aptitude for housework or cookery. The priest of our parish became accustomed to discussing with me theological and spiritual problems arising from the integration with the Orthodox Church of a community which, in language and culture, was French. Other parishioners, men and women, took part in this reflection and assumed different responsibilities. This effort was not without its problems, but with God's help our common desire to serve the Church enabled each of us gradually to find his or her place within the community according to his or her particular charisma and competence. <sup>20</sup>

At the completion of the report from the Klingenthal consultation, Constance Parvey noted significant shifts in ecumenical conversations as the Church of England was about to open dialogue with the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches regarding the ordination of women; in America the United Methodist Church ordained its first woman bishop, and in Africa, the Anglican Church of Kenya ordained the first black African woman priest.<sup>21</sup> The report was eventually compiled into a publication from the WCC but was not promulgated amongst Orthodox churches. Only members interested in ecumenical affairs had any inkling that such a document existed, that the issue of the ordination of women to the priesthood in

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.37.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.37.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp.52-53.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.64.

the Orthodox church had been included in discussions on women's ministries and in fact Orthodox women had been contributors. The issues posed by the delegates were not taken up by bishops or clergy, and the recommendations for further dialogue were ignored much as was the Faith and Order meeting on 'Concerning the Ordination of Women' that had taken place in 1964.

Even with the positive lay ministry of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and possibly a few other enlightened women there remained a majority of clerics who agreed with Archimandrite Georges Khodre who observed that:

Man was created first which establishes his primacy in the hierarchy of nature; and was not the submission of wife to husband an acceptance of that hierarchical order as a divine order in which the wife regarded her husband as the mediator of God's splendour? <sup>22</sup>

Khodre had cited Balsamon, on Canon 11 of the Council of Laodicea who stated that 'for a woman to teach in a Catholic church... is, in the highest degree, indecorous and pernicious'.<sup>23</sup> Not content with Balsamon, Georges Khodre concluded that for women 'the ministry of virginity is particularly theirs... for woman is the religious life because womanhood means sacrifice and self-surrender'.<sup>24</sup> While having difficulty with the concept that virginity was a particular ministry for women and not men, in light of the expectations the faithful had of their priest one might consider that such sacrifice and self-surrender were positive attributes for a potential priest. The acceptable place for recognition and reward of women's lay ministry was focused on traditional expectations, as noted in 1977 for example when it was reported from one Orthodox diocese that:

<sup>22</sup> *Concerning the Ordination of Women*, WCC: Geneva, 1964, p.62.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.62

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64.

Father Jordan Mitrev's devoted assistant and indispensable helper in his industrious parish ministry is his beloved wife, Troyana Mitreva, who knows the order of the service and Psalm singing excellently. She sings in the choir and helps to keep the church clean, orderly and well-decorated'.<sup>25</sup>

The Orthodox churches had difficulty with the theme of the final community study. The delegates to the two consultations in France and Germany produced challenging documents for the Sheffield Consultation to be held in the summer of 1981. However, there were no Orthodox delegates at the consultation on 'Scriptural Authority in Light of the New Experiences of Women' held in Amsterdam December 1980. Not one male theologian nor clergy, let alone a woman, were delegates. While five Roman Catholics were present, the report noted that 'Orthodox contributions, an essential input for any future work on this theme, were absent'.<sup>26</sup> A perusal of the preliminary material indicates possible reasons for their absence. The consultation included an exploration of scriptural authority and its relationship to the new experiences of women; work on experiential rather than analytical methods to expose relationship between scripture and culture and the recommendation to examine scripture and the roles in supporting and vindicating male domination.<sup>27</sup> Timothy Ware has noted that while Orthodoxy does not forbid critical and historical study of the Bible, nevertheless on reception into the Orthodox Church, the convert must promise 'I will accept and understand Holy Scripture in accordance with the interpretations which was and is held by the Holy Orthodox Catholic Church of the East, our Mother'.<sup>28</sup> Of course, this ruling applies also to those born and baptized into the Orthodox family regardless of the jurisdiction. Therefore any consultation to explore, examine and critically assess scripture with the intent to reveal its role in 'supporting and vindicating male domination' would not be in the interest of the teachings of the Orthodox Church. Amsterdam 1980, was the first

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<sup>25</sup> *Journal of Moscow Patriarchate*, 1977, no.8, p.41. In 1965 Troyana Mitreva was presented with a certificate of honour by H.H. Patriarch Kirill of Bulgaria for 'her twenty-five years of diligent service to the church'. In contrast, in Perth, Western Australia, Archbishop Stylianos, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, remarked that he did not single out women for awards 'for women can be jealous of each other, and all work for the church'. Following the Divine liturgy on Sunday, the Archbishop presented eleven men with certificates recognizing their service to the Church'. (author's personal observation)

<sup>26</sup> Janet Crawford and Michael Kinnaman, *In God's Image*, p.80-108.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.81.

<sup>28</sup> Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1984, p.208.

WCC consultation dealing with scripture which took into account the experiences of women as its starting point.<sup>29</sup>

Prior to the Sheffield meeting in July 1981, material was gathered from local study groups, regional meetings and the specific consultations in Europe. Over one hundred and fifty detailed reports were received at WCC, amongst them responses from Orthodox groups in France, the Middle East and North America. The report notes that the Orthodox responses were more inclined to comment on women in relationship with family and Church rather than expressions of an individual's feelings, beliefs or private dilemmas with Church. It is quite possible that the reason responses were received from Orthodox groups was due to the action of the WCC Central Committee which had recommended the Community Study be of concern to the Secretariat for the Commission on Faith and Order, the Commission where the Orthodox had a very long association and influence. It was to be 'a study of church unity with particular regard to the experience of women'.<sup>30</sup> In Protestant and some Catholic responses, women were more inclined to write experientially with more emotion and theological references even though they were not formally educated theologians. Responses from Orthodox Christians emphasized that there are profound and permanent difference between women and men. The basis for this distinction was understood to be principally theological and spiritual.<sup>31</sup>

In America, a separate study guide was formulated as the OCA stated that the study in its original form 'was irrelevant to the climate of Orthodox Christian parishes across the nation'.<sup>32</sup> As the committee noted:

Orthodox Christians are often 'on the other side of the fence in conclusions drawn when discussing women's issues. Orthodox Christians in general radically refuse feminist philosophy and theology. Nevertheless, creating an Orthodox response to a feminist position is all-important, and the Orthodox Church in America is accepting this task and responsibility with fervour'.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Janet Crawford and Michael Kinnamon, *In God's Image*, p.83.

<sup>30</sup> Melanie A May, *Bonds of Unity*, p.62.

<sup>31</sup> Janet Crawford and Michael Kinnamon, *In God's Image*, p.25.

<sup>32</sup> Melanie May, *Bonds of Unity*, p.134.

The study guide 'Women and Men in the Church' was prepared by the Ecumenical Task Force of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) and the Department of Religious Education. The guide contained ten sections, each included a statement which raised the central problems of each subject and presented an acceptable Orthodox position on the theme together with a series of questions intended to raise discussion within the groups. All parishes in all deaneries and dioceses of the OCA were requested to organise discussion groups on the subject.<sup>34</sup> However, with the emphasis on the Early Fathers and Canon Law and the recommended conservative reading list, the more open questions proposed for discussion in each chapter did not result in radical opinions or ideas from Orthodox parish groups. The report made it clear that the primary importance for women was their role in the family and the liberal social and moral changes of contemporary society which threatened both marriage and family life.<sup>35</sup> For the Orthodox, 'the family constitutes the "little church", a reflection of the Holy Trinity itself, sacramentally constituted as an expression and realization of the kingdom of God on earth.'<sup>36</sup> As Stanley Harakas has stated quite clearly:

as long as (Orthodox) women continue to love Christ, practice the life of prayer, participate in the sacramental life, and continue to exemplify the Christian virtues of love, mercy, faith, gentleness, forgiveness, patience, and good-will, their place of importance in the church will remain secure.<sup>37</sup>

At the same time while Harakas has maintained that in the 'new age', most arguments about new roles for men and women did not appear to contribute to the growth of the faith, the increase of Christian community, or the salvation of souls', he also acknowledged that theologically, a strong case could be made for the ordination of women in the Orthodox church alongside the existing equally strong case against such a notion.<sup>38</sup>

The response of the Orthodox study group acknowledged the principle that the church should use whoever was the best qualified for the task without gender discrimination.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.134.

<sup>34</sup> *Women and Men in the Church. A Study of the Community of Women and Men in the Church*, Department of Religious Education, OCA: New York, 1980.

<sup>35</sup> Janet Crawford and Michael Kinnamon, *In God's Image*, p.27.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.27.

<sup>37</sup> *Contemporary issues: Orthodox Christian perspectives by "Ecclesiastes"*. Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Press: New York, 1976, p.42.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.41. Discussed in later chapter.

The French group responded that such equality was obvious in the tasks of serving parish councils, the choir, readers, religious education of children and youth, and theological studies. However they questioned whether this participation was satisfactory or whether more was possible for women <sup>39</sup>

women take care of many tasks, but in the execution rather than in the conception of such tasks. Are we willing enough to solicit their creativity in the sphere of thinking, of faith or of spirituality? Are we willing to have them participate, as part of the whole people of God, in positions of responsibility and in decision-making if only as lay people? <sup>40</sup>

The report from France reflected the more open attitudes of the members of the group, perhaps reflecting the uniqueness of the particular community to which women such as Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Veronique Lossky were members, and where the community had experienced long time ecumenical relationships both locally, nationally and with the WCC. Following the Agapia consultation the words and scholarship of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel were becoming well known both within the Orthodox churches and the ecumenical movement. She spoke with frankness and openness and without the defensiveness so often observed in the writing of other Orthodox women.

The Orthodox in the Middle East churches also placed their own expectations on the study guide. The Middle East Consultation on the CWMC Study, sponsored by the Women's Programme for the Middle East Council of Churches, was held in Beirut, Lebanon in January 1980. Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant delegates from throughout the Middle East were present even in the midst of considerable tensions and the imminent danger of war. Houda Zacca, member of the Antiochian Orthodox Church and delegate at Agapia, as the director of the women's programmes expressed her hopes for women that:

we would like, here, to rehabilitate her in the Church, clarify her status, and unburden women from all the worldly vanities and false accusations that have been put on her, we want a New Woman to participate again and anew in the Church. <sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Janet Crawford and Michael Kinnamon, *In God's Image*, p.35.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.

Bishop Georges Khodre, of Lebanon opened his remarks as an Orthodox hierarch on 'Who is Woman' with regret that no more men were present so that thoughts about woman should not be those of woman alone', and hoped that he would not hear someone say in the future that women are better than men.<sup>42</sup> His main concern was not so much the western model of liberation for women in the Third World, but the liberation of the Third World from the Western influences of increasing materialistic pressures that threatened the spiritual and moral values of the people. In order to begin such a process 'we must seek our own special model for women's emancipation, but I don't know how to go about it...'.<sup>43</sup> Emma Khorrayyeh Khoury posed the question concerned with the demands of twentieth century woman. In her analysis she has difficulty not judging women with the same eyes of men that the bishop desired to have present, while at the same time admitting that woman had no value of worth of her own 'for in many places she is known as wife, sister or daughter of a certain man. Even more she was of no consequence unless she gives birth to a son'.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless she continued by asking 'what rights does woman really need, for is she not mistress of the home where housekeeping in itself is an independent occupation? and if woman were to replace man where would she find her happiness and fulfillment?'<sup>45</sup> The issue of the ordination of women to the priesthood is dismissed as an innovation that does not rest on any tradition in addition to the problem that a woman could not keep a secret of a confession.<sup>46</sup>

If the marriage is Christian, woman must be submissive to her husband so that chaos does not prevail in the family and thus lead to its total collapse.<sup>47</sup> In order for a woman to remain on the path of faith 'she must renounce Eve as a means of temptation, possessiveness, domination, pride, arrogance and avarice and develop Mary in her, humility, charity, self-negation, self-respect and freedom'.<sup>48</sup>

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41 *Report of the Middle East Council of Churches Consultation on the Community of Women and Men in the Church., Beirut, Lebanon, 22 - 26 January 1980, WCC: Geneva, 1981, p.3.*

42 *Ibid.*, p.5.

43 *Ibid.*, p.8.

44 Janet Crawford and Michael Kinnamon, *In Images of God.*, p.10.

45 *Ibid.*, p.38.

46 *Ibid.*, p.38.

47 *Ibid.*, p.40.

48 *Ibid.*, p.41

More important for the CWMC than the conservative papers prepared and presented by the bishops and the traditional woman were the variety of comments and questions raised at the Consultation that indicate there were voices that raised doubts differing from the certainty presented to them by clergy and authority. The Middle East Consultation led to the exploration of the image of 'woman' in scripture, culture and tradition and tentatively revealed a selection of comments that not all women were of the same conservative opinion as the bishop:

- A woman has her own personality in our culture, but she is not always respected. We are at the stage of the Middle Ages in our outlook towards women
- Why is there no official recognition of women theologians in the Church?
- Women speak out of their experience - men are more biblical and ecclesiastical. they are two different languages
- There is no theological basis for women not to become deacons. Ecclesiology is a product of sociology. Here is the whole question of patriarchy. Why are there no women in leadership?
- We all believe totally in the priesthood of all believers... The discussion of ministry should not be related to the Virgin Mary. We should not mix up the role of the Virgin Mary with priesthood <sup>49</sup>

The final word was left to Dr George H Bibawi when he completed his paper on 'Woman in the Tradition' with the following comment: 'the church insisted on keeping women away from the priesthood not because she was despised but because man was from the sexual and organic point of view more fit to represent the image of the divine Father ... <sup>50</sup>

The Ecumenical Consultation organized by the Middle East Council of Churches was a further example, though conservative, of the willingness, indeed eagerness, of the Women's Unit to formulate the questions and listen to the answers of Orthodox women. However, unlike the many growing Protestant and Catholic women's groups in Western Europe and North America, Australia, Latin America, India and South-East Asia, the consultation still needed the imprimatur of male clergy or male theologians to explain to women their roles in the life of the church - in other words, to give legitimacy to the meeting. This has continued

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., Comments and Questions, pp.78-81.

<sup>50</sup> George H Bibawi, 'Woman in the Tradition', *MECC Consultation*, 1980, p.71.



to be the case whenever Orthodox women have gathered together, even when the meetings have been organized by the Women's Unit at the WCC and including the 1997 meeting in Istanbul. Why is this so? Does the Church not trust women to speak freely amongst themselves, are women ignorant and in need of instruction or is it that the Orthodox Church is really not interested in what her women say?

Orthodox women with ambition to be further involved in the ecumenical movement and women's participation in the Church are thankful for the work and commitment of women such as Sarah Chakko and a far different woman Marie Bassili Assaad who in 1980 was appointed the Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, and the staff moderator on Unit III, Department of Women and Men in Church and Society. Marie Assaad was a sociologist, with a long history of involvement in women concerns and participation in the ecumenical movement from as early as 1947, when she was a YWCA delegate from Egypt to the second world conference of Christian Youth in Oslo. She served as Associate Programme Director in the Youth Department of World YWCA in Geneva during 1952-53 and worked as Senior Assistant in social research at the American University in Cairo. Marie Assaad was one of the first women to focus research on the practice of female genital mutilation on young girl children that continued in North Africa and Egypt. However, whilst active in her Coptic Orthodox church, her ecumenical work was initially achieved through membership of the YWCA and a member of the working committee of the WCC Department on the Cooperation of Men and Women in Church, Family and Society. Marie Assaad was a delegate to the Nairobi Assembly in 1975 and was appointed to the Christian Medical Commission. She expressed in her report the hope that women would be more courageous and not hesitate to make their contributions as advocates and enablers to the church and society.

During the UN mid-decade forum held in Copenhagen in July 1980, Marie Assaad commented on 'the emergence of a positive feminism striving for justice, peace and

development for all people'<sup>51</sup> As the first woman appointed to the executive structures of the WCC. Marie Assaad, faced considerable difficulties being taken seriously. As a woman coming from a church that did not acknowledge women in the hierarchy in addition to lacking formal theological education she felt she was expected to conform to the male stereotype by her male colleagues. As Pauline Webb comments:

she (Assaad) felt excluded when men either failed to acknowledge her presence or spoke to her patronizingly, as to a little child. Despite her official status in the Council, some church leaders seemed quite unwilling to enter any serious conversation with her or even hear her when she did venture to make any contribution to a discussion.<sup>52</sup>

Marie Assaad was instrumental in the planning and publication of a two year study on female sexuality and bodily functions in different religious traditions, a document prepared for the 1985 Nairobi meeting at the end of the UN Decade on Women. In the publication, eventually published in 1990, prior to the Canberra Assembly, Orthodox women contributed from France, a *diaspora* church community, and Romania revealing two aspects of the unclean issue, the imposition by the church and culture which was enforced by tradition, and the decision by some women to question such traditions and not accept that menstruation is a reason for exclusion from the liturgical and eucharistic life of the Church.<sup>53</sup>

### **Women in the *diaspora***

In the 1970 and 1980s, the concern for migrant women in the *diaspora*, especially in Australia, America and Canada, resulted in some Orthodox women becoming involved in broad based programmes that raised concerns for the well being of migrant women and their various situations within their 'new country'. The involvement was usually through secular organisations and because of professional qualifications, medical doctors, lawyers, and social workers were increasingly aware of the many difficulties migrant women faced. The women had migrated from Europe, Russia and the Middle East decades previously, and most often

<sup>51</sup> 'Marie Bassili Assaad' in *Women in a Changing World*, no.9, December 1980, p.3.

<sup>52</sup> Pauline Webb, *She Flies Beyond*, WCC: Geneva, 1993, p.19.

<sup>53</sup> Jeanne Becher (ed.), *Women, Religion and Sexuality. Studies on the Impact of Religious Teachings on Women*, WCC : Geneva, 1990.

lived in 'ethnic ghettos' immersed in their own culture, customs and traditions that migrated with them from the 'old country'. They were committed to perpetuating the attitudes and practices of the past on to their daughters and sons of the late twentieth century. The Orthodox Church was the centre point for many communities from Greece, Romania, Serbia, Russia, and the Middle East. While acknowledging that religiosity was not as fervent nor practiced by the young as their elders, nevertheless, the Orthodox churches maintained a control over their communities because of culture and tradition, and the explicit and implicit patriarchal nature within community and family.

In 1977, the ACC Commission on the Status of Women in Sydney, Australia invited women of the member churches and other faiths to contribute an article reflecting on the roles of women in religion.<sup>54</sup> One of the few responses ever received from an Orthodox woman was written by Julie Anthony, a teacher and member of the Educational Council of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in Australia. Unlike the other articles contained in the small volume, Anthony defers to the opinions of her priest and bishop on most matters, whilst making it perfectly clear to the reader that all was well for Orthodox women. Anthony directed the questions for response from Father Vasilios, an abbot visiting from a monastery on Mt Athos. Father Vasilios stated that: 'because the church honoured Mary, the Mother of God, all women were similarly honoured' to which Anthony offers no critical comment, adding her remark that 'the matter of women priests has never been raised in our church', because Christ was a man, who the priest represents, therefore only men could be priests.<sup>55</sup> The alternatives to marriage and motherhood, she claimed, were the convent or lay orders of service as nurses, teachers and social workers. As for community activities women could visit the sick, and raise funds for charity by organising luncheons, presenting theatrical plays and organising needlework exhibitions.<sup>56</sup> This may well be the case according to Julie Anthony, but at what cost to the individual life, conscience or faith of the woman, wife or

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<sup>54</sup> Barbara Thiering, ed. *Deliver Us from Eve*, ACC: Sydney, 1977.

<sup>55</sup> Julie Anthony, 'Women in the Greek Orthodox Church', in Barbara Thiering, *Deliver Us from Eve*, p.60-62.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61.

daughter? There was no reflection by Anthony on the role of the church for women in difficulties, single women or women who might rebel against the constrained patterns of paternal and ecclesial discipline.

Julie Anthony made no mention of the concerns expressed by an earlier study of Orthodox women in 1966, when Margaret Anderson undertook a survey for the WCC of Eastern Orthodox immigrants to Australia, including Russian, Serbians and Greeks. During the period 1964-65, 21,000 Orthodox persons arrived in Australia as landed immigrants. Anderson singles out the lack of welfare structures in the Greek churches to support young unaccompanied Greek women who often migrated to 'arranged marriages, sight unseen', and on arrival were not meeting the expectations of the husband to be, she was soon abandoned sometimes pregnant without funds, relatives or a home. Prostitution was an alternative for a number of Greek women in order to survive and often to pay for her passage. Despite the strong influence of the church in many community matters, when it came to the settlement and welcome for many single Greek Orthodox women, it was the YWCA, which had close liaison with the YWCA in Athens, the Resettlement Department of the ACC and the European-Australian Christian Fellowship that expressed more concern for their safety and well-being.<sup>57</sup> Was the neglect of many young women by the church and community due to simple ignorance of their arrival, or a deeper cultural disapproval that young Greek women had travelled out on a ship unaccompanied by a chaperone or family member? Such a display of independence would not be readily acceptable in some established communities where the rules of social behaviour were stricter and more binding, reflecting the village mentality and culture, rather than the modern realities of large cities in post-war Greece.

Julie Anthony claimed that 'it may appear that maternal authority is weaker than that of the father, yet it lasts longer, because there comes a time when paternal authority loses its

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<sup>57</sup> Margaret Anderson, 'Problems of Eastern Orthodox Immigrants', Unpublished paper prepared for WCC in Geneva, January 1966, 6pp. See also research document by Paul B Anderson, 'Eastern Orthodoxy in Australia. A Study of the Welfare and church life of recent immigrants from South and Eastern Europe', unpublished, WCC: Geneva, 1966, 35pp.

power, whilst that of the mother lasts for ever'.<sup>58</sup> This time of maternal power comes as daughters near the age of consent and relationships, when daughters are at their most vulnerable and exposed to the likelihood of creating dishonour for the family. Mothers become the authoritarian figure protecting daughters from external influences and possible disgrace. Julie Anthony stressed that young girls were taught the role of the woman as mother and wife with particular care and according to Anthony, there was no such term as 'unmarried mother' in the Greek language. Women were expected to remain virgins until their marriage, for it was a matter of great shame and dishonour for all the family if a daughter behaves immorally.<sup>59</sup> J K Campbell claimed that a young woman could be considered defiled not only by contact or awareness but by inviting an 'unwitting arousal of desire' and becoming the focus of gossip amongst men.<sup>60</sup> The honour of a woman depended 'not on her own perception of self, but her reputation granted by others that subsequently flows on to the family'.<sup>61</sup> In concluding her comments Julie Anthony claimed to speak for all women declaring that 'as a woman, I can say with some Christian pride that we women in the Greek Orthodox church are very happy with our position, since we have all the freedom we want to do any kind of church work... for in the church, we find prestige, honour, love and respect'.<sup>62</sup> Her words are again reflected in the earlier observations of J G Peristiany writing on honour and shame of Greek families in Cyprus that:

a woman's foremost duty to self and family is to safeguard against any and all criticisms of her sexual modesty. In dress, looks, attitudes, speech, a woman when men are present should be virginal as a maiden, and matronly as a wife.... the ideal woman would be a married mother who is virginal in sensations and mind'.<sup>63</sup>

There is great difficulty accepting that such attitudes remain as the guidelines for women in many Orthodox communities nevertheless their existence does provide insights into why Orthodox women have not been active in raising issues about women, ministry and

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.62.

<sup>59</sup> Julie Anthony, *Deliver us from Eve*, p.62.

<sup>60</sup> J K Campbell, 'Honour and the Devil' in J G Peristiany, ed, *Honour and Shame: the values of Mediterranean Society*, University of Chicago: Chicago, 1966 p.162.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.164.

<sup>62</sup> Julie Anthony, *Deliver Us from Eve*, p.62.

<sup>63</sup> J G Peristiany, ed. 'Honour and Shame in a Cypriot Highland Village', in *Honour and Shame* op cit. p.182.

participation in the church. How do women speak if there is no forum where their voices are considered legitimate by their community, culture or Church and even more inhibiting, that such actions would be severely criticized by other women and the community as a sign of disrespect and dishonour towards her own family.

### **The Sheffield Consultation - 1981**

Following the three consultations in Europe, the WCC again provided the forum for the Sheffield Consultation. The programme of study instigated by the WCC Sub-units on Women in Church and Society and Faith and Order Commission, was undertaken by member churches and congregations around the world, and the culmination of the reports and recommendations from regional consultations was the meeting of over 250 delegates in July 1981, in Sheffield, England. The planning committee included Orthodox staff persons, Marie Assaad and Tudor Sabev from the Bulgarian Orthodox Church working with Barbel von Wartenberg and William H Lazareth the directors of the two sub-units to host the consultation.

Amongst the Orthodox delegates sent by their churches or invited by the WCC to participate were Elisabeth Behr-Sigel (France), Deborah Belonick (USA), Elena Gundayeva (Russia) and Houda Zacca (Lebanon), who had all participated in one consultation or another since Agapia, and newcomers Rachel Mathew, Eugenia Sykacz and Amal Dibo, from India, Poland and Lebanon respectively together with Andrei Ivanovich Chizhov from USSR and Jan Lukaszuk from Poland. Strong Orthodox criticisms later emerged concerning the agenda and direction of the Consultation and the alleged disenfranchisement of Orthodox delegates and their contributions to the meeting. These criticisms were made by persons not present at Sheffield nor were they participants at the three study consultations. All the Orthodox member churches had the opportunity to nominate strong, theologically educated and active women and men to attend and contribute to the meeting. There were only two women Orthodox theologians, no representatives from Greece or Romania, and their

absence was queried by Elisabeth Behr-Sigel 'was not this under-representation a sign of disinterest, even of disapproval ?'<sup>64</sup>

The major contribution from the Orthodox to the Sheffield consultation came in the plenary session on Tradition. Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, speaker at Agapia and a delegate to two pre-Sheffield consultations was asked on the day she left Paris to present the keynote address on the 'Orthodox Tradition as a Resource for the Renewal of Women and Men in Community'.<sup>65</sup> She made it very clear that for the Orthodox, tradition was not something that belonged in the past but was indeed, the 'very life of the church and its continuity'.<sup>66</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel was concerned for the renewal into a new community but was adamant that the process should not follow a masochistic portrayal of the teachings and praxis of the church which oppressed the weak. 'I am deeply disturbed by a certain way of criticizing, of globally and one-sidedly condemning the historical church as has been done even at Sheffield.'<sup>67</sup> More specifically, she took to task the portrayal by some speakers of the patriarchal model of church which she maintained was not wholly negative and not necessarily implying lack of respect for women'.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, she stated 'I recognize the genius of the tradition of the church in the women's movement which claims women are to be respected as free and responsible persons... (and) it is in authentic tradition we find the source of true liberation'.<sup>69</sup>

Moving beyond her theological insights Behr-Sigel allowed that the contemporary influence of psychology, sociology, psychoanalysis and Marxist analysis were human sciences to be used with discernment in order to explore aspects of historical tradition and 'those determinisms that hang heavily on a humanity entangled in its anxieties, its egoism and

<sup>64</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, p.162.

<sup>65</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, 'Orthodox Tradition as a Resource for the Renewal of Women and Men in Community', in Constance F Parvey,(ed.), *The Community of Women and Men in the Church. the Sheffield Report*, edited by WCC : Geneva, 1983, pp.61-68.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.63.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64.

its contradictory desires'.<sup>70</sup> Betty Thompson, in her report on the Sheffield meeting referred to the 'profound and poetic address' from the Russian Orthodox theologian who shared the riches of her ancient tradition by placing before the delegates 'the mystical vision expressed in icons as a source of inspiration for the daily struggle for the real community of men and women'.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, the address presented in Sheffield, did not contain the questions nor the criticisms Elisabeth Behr-Sigel had posed at Agapia. This scholar and theologian was invited to speak at the last minute, replacing a male theologian, presumably Orthodox, thereby reducing her ability to expand and challenge both Orthodox and Protestants in thinking new ways on Tradition for both families of the Church as she had accomplished at Agapia.

Constance Parvey, the director who nurtured the Community of Women and Men Study for four years offered a personal reflection for the publication of the Sheffield Report and acknowledged her own personal place and subjectivity as a woman of a privileged group in North America. She also accepted that as an interpreter of texts and contexts her authority came from her own experience and human limitations.<sup>72</sup> She did not claim to have spoken for men, preferring the voices of women at the consultation, nor voicing all the concerns raised having had to make choices. Parvey commented that 'if I do not speak enough of Orthodox concerns, perhaps I have not heard all of the voices clearly'.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps this comment should not only be taken as self-criticism from Parvey, but also examined by the Orthodox churches who did not send more women delegates. Apart from Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, there were no other keynote Orthodox speakers, but equally there were few Protestant speakers to represent the various families of Reformed, Evangelical or Anglican churches. The questions about the community of men and women in the church were not only of personal relationships and local identity as Parvey claimed but also:

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.65.

<sup>71</sup> Betty Thompson, *A Chance to Change. Women and Men in the church*, WCC: Geneva, 1982, p.37.

<sup>72</sup> Constance Parvey, *The Sheffield Report*, p.157

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.157.



the very concepts and structures of power and authority by which women are either left out from the beginning through custom, attitudes and education, or given a special complementary status that may include them spiritually, but exclude politically. <sup>74</sup>

It is in this context that Orthodox women are perceived and permitted their limited space in the church. They are left out of decision-making processes because they are not part of the male hierarchy who are the ordained clergy and bishops. As Eva Topping critically assesses: 'androcentrism, patriarchal prejudice and pride lie deeply imbedded in Orthodox tradition' <sup>75</sup> and no more so than within the authority of the Synods and Councils of the churches that are exclusive of women and in many cases also of laymen. Notwithstanding the power and authority of the ordained, Sergius Bulgakov rightfully called to account the hierarchy who acted for the Church, excluding the laity. He challenged their rigid adherence to tradition:

the laity are not passive subjects with their only obligation being that of obeying the hierarchy.... the lay state (which is women and men) should be considered as a sacred dignity, for the name Christian was made a people of God, a royal priesthood. <sup>76</sup>

At the conclusion of the Sheffield Consultation frank assessments of the processes and contents were obtained from the delegates in regard to revelations or surprises; the future in the participants' situation and the real obstacles to true community. Amongst the responses were those that remain continuous and contentious 'thorns in the side' even in the late 1990s. One delegate from New Zealand was shocked at the political 'game playing', and the continual implied threat to leave the World Council of Churches whenever anything un-acceptable to the Orthodox church came up'. (In 1998, the threat was finally carried out by the Bulgarian Orthodox and Georgian Orthodox churches who used the 'woman question and its challenges' as legitimate reasons to withdraw their membership of the WCC). An Orthodox delegate from America, Deborah Belonick, asserted that 'the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) would feel more and more a different religion and separatist if other

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.161.

<sup>75</sup> Eva C Topping, *Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy*, Light and Life Pub.Co: Minneapolis, MN, 1987, p.4.

<sup>76</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, SVSPress: Crestwood, NY, 1988, p.48.

churches in the ecumenical movement adopt some of the feminist proposals of this conference'.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, she asserted in a later publication:

When feminism left social problems and turned to religion, a revolution began, and this revolution has resulted in religious beliefs blatantly disparate with the teachings of the Orthodox Christian church, with the gospel of Jesus Christ and with the traditional moving of the Holy Spirit .<sup>78</sup>

Nevertheless, Belonick has acknowledged that the women's movement of the present era presents opportunities to the Orthodox Church. In particular she asked for ongoing discussions on the rulings in different parishes on why women were not able to read and sing in church, why women continued covering their heads, why women refrained from taking the Eucharist when menstruating and why women were forbidden to enter the sanctuary of the Church.<sup>79</sup> As noted previously, nuns can be granted permission to enter the sanctuary in their convents and sometimes in a local church laymen can be forbidden entry. However, the general understanding and acceptance by women is one of exclusion because they are women. These cultural practices continue in Orthodox parishes and across the jurisdictions, and are seldom questioned or discussed in open forums.

In Cairo, in the Coptic Orthodox Church, men and women separate to each side of the Church to receive communion. In other Orthodox churches, men and women sit separately from each other 'lest man be filled with lustful thoughts', for women according to St Romanos the Melodos, are the daughters of Eve, who was 'a snake more dangerous and snakier than the snake'.<sup>80</sup> Bishops and clergy ignore the discrimination against women, naming 'tradition' or 'culture' for the situations and do not speak out from the pulpit, rather they rely on parish bulletins to anonymously reinforce the edict of 'separate spheres' in worship. It is more likely that women be reminded by the church about observing the rules in regard to their preparedness and purity to receive communion. The Early Fathers themselves contributed and indeed reinforced discriminatory attitudes about the nature of

<sup>77</sup> Betty Thompson, *A Chance for change*, p.91-92.

<sup>78</sup> Deborah Belonick, *Feminism in Christianity. An Orthodox Christian Response*, OCA: New York, 1983, p.7.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.46. Canon XLIV of the Synod of Laodicea, 343-381CE.

<sup>80</sup> Eva C Topping, *Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy*, Light and Life: Minneapolis, MN, 1987, p.4.

women. According to St John Chrysostom, woman should be confined to home and performing chores, <sup>81</sup> for the female sex was emotional, fickle, superficial, garrulous and servile in temperament'. <sup>82</sup>

### Central Committee meeting, Dresden 1981.

The dissemination, reception and recommendations of the Sheffield Report by the hierarchs of the Orthodox churches differed markedly from their response to the Agapia Consultation held in 1976. After Agapia, the main response was at St Vladimir's Seminary (OCA) in New York, where Constance Tarasar also took a major responsibility for the 1981 contributions for the Community Study. In 1979, in Paris, the group of men and women, clergy and laity, prepared and signed a public document inspired by the Agapia meeting and the forward thinking recommendations to the churches by the delegates present acknowledging that 'even ecumenically minded Orthodox theologians had not shown themselves motivated in finding a positive way of expressing women's aspirations... for an authentic liberation of women'.<sup>83</sup>

If it is important to cleanse the church of the sludge and dust deposits that for so many centuries have disfigured it, must we not also explore new and ancient ways that would allow women to use their charisms and aptitudes in the service of the church better and more freely. <sup>84</sup>

The French group noted that at Agapia women were treated as privileged guests but, although they did express their desire to serve the church, they did not enjoy complete freedom of expression. The reluctance by Orthodox bishops and clergy to involve any women, laity or theologians, in discussions that directly affected women was to be questioned. They asked why women were not part of discussions in church studies regarding contraception, abortion, or divorce which concerned women as well as men? The questions on such contentious issues would remain open for years, the domain of conservative theologians, as is the ordination debate. Despite the positive aspects of the Agapia meeting,

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.5. (PG 62, col.500).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p.5. ( PG 47. cols.510-511;61.col.316; 62. col.548).

<sup>83</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, p.218.,221.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.223.

even the fact that it took place, such was the progressive nature and theological understanding of the Paris group, Agapia did not go far enough. And when the Orthodox and Anglican theologians discussed the ordination of women to the priesthood, the Anglicans specifically requested that at least one or two Orthodox women theologians be present but the request was refused by the Orthodox bishops. The group asked again, 'did the Bishops fear an attempt to undermine their authority?'<sup>85</sup> Perhaps this question is the most perceptive of all questions to be asked of the hierarchy in the church.

The Orthodox hierarchs were not in a position to ignore providing input for the Sheffield document for it was placed before them in a number of formal and informal discussions in the WCC. It is fortunate there were controversial issues brought to member churches forcing the authority of the church to confront and provide adequate theological or cultural responses to the recommendations from Sheffield. The recommendations from the Sheffield consultation were directed to all three units of the WCC, the General Secretariat and the Vancouver Assembly Preparation Committee. Of immediate importance was the presentation to the WCC Central Committee meeting in Dresden in August 1981 by Mercy Oduyoye, Methodist theologian from Nigeria, and the 'delivery' of the Letter from Sheffield presented by Jean Mayland.<sup>86</sup>

The Orthodox response was precise and predictable. Metropolitan Gregorios, Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, whilst acknowledging the important insights on sexism, racism and classism, nevertheless placed emphasis upon the recommendation to the Faith and Order Commission concerning the ordination of women, which he stated not only created divisiveness amongst the women themselves, in fact it could create many difficulties for the Orthodox churches and (the implied threat that) it could even endanger their continued presence in the WCC.<sup>87</sup> Bishop Antonie, Romanian Orthodox, stated that the Orthodox

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.224.

<sup>86</sup> WCC Central Committee thirty-third meeting, Dresden. East Germany, 16-26 August 1981. pp.14-25.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.16.

supported the equality of men and women and were opposed to social and human oppression. However, he believed that the Sheffield Letter 'was an attempt to win a battle without dialogue and without presenting the opposition of Orthodox churches to the ordination of women'.<sup>88</sup> Perhaps Bishop Antonie had not recalled that at the Agapie conference, in Romania only five years previously, Orthodox women had expressed their wish to have dialogue on the Orthodox position on the ordination of women to the priesthood "clarified" and "made explicit".<sup>89</sup> The difficulty may well have been that, according to Metropolitan Meliton, 'in Orthodox circles, the quality of internal dialogue was poor'.<sup>90</sup>

The second major obstacle to acceptance of the Sheffield Letter for the Orthodox was the principle of equal participation for women as delegates nominated for the Assembly and subsequent commissions of the WCC was considered an impossibility by the Orthodox hierarchs. How could a woman carry an equal voice, vote or theological opinion equal to a male theologian, clergy or priest? When the Central Committee affirmed the principle of equal participation and agreed to work towards the principle by equal representation in WCC decision-making and consultative bodies during and after the Sixth Assembly, the Orthodox indicated their deep opposition about such direct legislation affecting theological and dogmatic questions that would be binding on member churches. In regard to both resolutions, Metropolitan Chrysostom felt the Sheffield Letter as a whole created great difficulties for the Orthodox churches and, again, might even endanger their continued presence in WCC. When the Central Committee finally voted on the amendments the Orthodox members of the Central Committee chose not to participate in the vote. They no doubt felt the rising disquiet that their authority might be threatened by such equal participation. As Joan Chittister, a Catholic theologian claims:

In patriarchal society men own, control, shape and administer all facets of life, culture and society in such a way that the assumptions, beliefs and authorities of

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.27.

<sup>89</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, 1991, p.182.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p.182, cited *Episkepsis* 15, September 1982, p.18.

the group favour the males of the society. <sup>91</sup> ...patriarchy together with rampant clericalism have denied the Church its full measure of insight and ability. It is not possible to talk about ordination without also talking about power because the Church is run only by the ordained. <sup>92</sup>

To nominate women as equals to serve in decision-making bodies was neither the practice nor the tradition of the Orthodox councils or synods and even the suggestion remains an 'anathema' shared by the Roman Catholic Church. However, although women in the Catholic Church are excluded from full participation in the sacramental ministry of their church, there are many Catholic women such as Sr Joan Chittister, Prioress of Benedictine Order in the United States of America, who continue to write, speak and challenge in public forums the intransigence of her bishops, on the moral and ethical issues of the day that specifically influence the private and spiritual lives of women. Even with all the education and social changes in secular society and the support by example from their Catholic sisters Orthodox women rarely speak so plainly. Why is this so?

The challenging issues brought forward by many delegates to the Sheffield consultation were not elaborated by Orthodox delegates. Instead the Orthodox women were conservative and conciliar throughout their participation. There were no rebellious statements from Orthodox women nor indeed questioning of their place in the Church. Was this through careful selection of delegates by the local bishop? Letty Russell declares that:

the prevailing paradigm of authority in male-dominate religions is one of authority as domination... The feminist "liberation" paradigm of authority in community seeks to raise questions of legitimacy based on the needs of those who are at the bottom of the patriarchal pyramid of oppressions . <sup>93</sup>

Demonstrated again and again, the silencing of women's voices of dissent is not difficult when the power and authority of the Church are vested in clerics and bishops.

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<sup>91</sup> Joan Chittister, *Women, Ministry and Church*, Paulist Press: Boston, 1983, p.3.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>93</sup> Letty M Russell & J Shannon Clarkson, *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 1996, p.19.

The Central Committee meeting at Dresden recommended the transmission of the Sheffield recommendations to the meeting of the WCC Faith and Order Commission in Lima, Peru in January 1982, where the focus on the three themes of 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry' (BEM), the basic components of all member churches would have far reaching effect on the relationships between those members and also other churches outside the full membership of WCC. For Melanie May :

The Lima Document stands as a waymarker on the road to church unity... measured by classical controversies among the churches, its accomplishments is remarkable. Its failure to recognize contemporary controversies among the churches- particularly those related to the role and image of women- is also remarkable <sup>94</sup>

She continued her reflections noting that the bonds of unity are tangled with constraint and conformity, the era of ecumenical exchange was an era dominated by 'people who could not but perpetuate the "recalcitrant and sceptical frame of mind" of which the women spoke at the first Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948. <sup>95</sup> The Faith and Order Commission promoted the BEM document and took over the debate on ordination to such an extent that any feminist discussion was effectively stifled and marginalized.

The discussion of ministry by Orthodox clerics and theologians showed them to be committed to an intransigent theological position and delegates would continue to oppose and negate the role of women in the sacramental ordained ministry of the priesthood. However, there was also another voice. Professor Nicolas Lossky, an Orthodox theologian from France, recommended the delegates take the community study seriously and that it should be incorporated within all deliberations of the Faith and Order Commission. Lossky particularly stressed the role of the Mother of God as 'a female prototype in the ecclesial community' worthy of further reflection in discussions on the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ. <sup>96</sup> In an unexpected reaction to the Orthodox absence of female "presidents" of the

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<sup>94</sup> Melanie May, *Bonds of Unity*, p.117.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>96</sup> Betty Thompson, *A Chance to Change*, p.84.

eucharistic community in the tradition of the Church, he declared a desire for the ecumenical community 'to be patient with us and give us the possibility of effecting this reflection'.<sup>97</sup>

Nicolas Lossky was one of the very few Orthodox theologians to suggest possible and affirming ministries for women, no doubt with Orthodox women in mind. Lossky acknowledged that women often do not fulfil certain functions because of 'neglect or sinful historical circumstances'; he stated that women could fulfil liturgical functions such as reading, singing, choir directing, there was no question that women were able to be iconographers, and if that were so then why not hold chairs in theological academies, in the 'noble' subjects (not only the 'subsidiary ones), such as dogmatics, church history, canon law and liturgies.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, Lossky believed it time to restore the form of the 'feminine diaconate for women' and he expanded his early statement on the diaconate to state:

I have overcome childhood hangups over seeing a woman at the altar. It does not shock me. But this is not the question. The real question is: what gives us the right to exclude women from this charisma simply because they are women? I do not know if it is right to ordain women, but to say it can't be done because it has not been done for 2000 years no longer seems valid to me. Orthodox Christians must get to work starting from this question.<sup>99</sup>

However, regardless of affirming comments from theologian Nicolas Lossky the overall reaction from the Orthodox churches was to express their immediate concerns with two issues, the ordination of women and defined quotas in delegations to ecumenical meetings - both issues emerging from the increased participation and resolutions of women through twenty-five years of ecumenical consultations, together with the accepted norm of inclusive language in documents and liturgies of the ecumenical movement. These issues have become as Betty Thompson claims, 'deeper than the question of whether there were trained and qualified women in Orthodoxy to serve on decision-making groups was whether the World Council could prescribe to the churches how they should choose their representation.'<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> *Faith and Order Document*, No.112, p.401.

<sup>98</sup> Nicholas Lossky, 'Women Priests as seen by Orthodox Christians', *Actualite - A.R.M.* 120, 15 March 1994. Trans. by Colin Williams, *MaryMartha*, Vol.3, no.314, 1994. p.23.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Betty Thompson, *A Chance to Change*, p.83.



Indeed, she alleges, for the Orthodox, 'it was perceived as more than a difference about the role of women. There were underlying questions of authority, biblical understanding and doctrine'.<sup>101</sup> Officially, the Orthodox barely heard the call for 'immediate action for women and men struggling against tyranny, militarism, economic exploitation and racism'; or the sincere and deeply felt distress that women experienced when 'they felt called to the ministry of word and sacraments and ordination was not open to them', and indeed, not only not open to them according to Tradition of their church, but that the Church did not respond to creative developments in society'.<sup>102</sup> While there was such a lack of willingness to open the issue to debate for theological and cultural examination, Emilianos Timiadiis, a speaker at Agapia, maintained that: 'the early patristic period, undoubtedly rich in moral writing, excellent formulation of dogmas, and doctrinal essays is nonetheless disappointing in that there is not one single work defining the place of woman in society'.<sup>103</sup>

Kathleen Jones, a professor of women's studies with concerns on the nature of categories of feminist theory and the need for reconstituted concepts of authority, claims that what the community, (which presumably includes religious bodies) construe as authority depends on representations that privilege masculinity - male bodies and masculinized knowledge and practices.<sup>104</sup> She is concerned with relationships between women and authority and maintains that feminists cannot develop a coherent vision of alternatives for building political (or religious) community unless they directly question authority where men are the accepted historical 'norm' with authority, women are the 'other', to have authority over. Furthermore, it is important to keep in one's sights when questioning that authority, the perception of the patriarchal authority that considers: 'the menstruating body, the body-with-a womb, the birthing, the fecund body, the lactating body, the menopausal body, the more docile and more specular or to be-looked-at body - and how difficult it is to imagine

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p.82.

<sup>102</sup> 'A Letter from Sheffield to the Churches', in *Mid-Stream*, Vol. XX1, no.3, July 1982, pp.418-420.

<sup>103</sup> Emilianos Timiadiis, 'From Margin to the Forefront', in *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 28 no. 4, p.367.

<sup>104</sup> Kathleen B Jones, *Compassionate Authority. Democracy and the Representation of Women*. Routledge: New York, 1993, p.81.

such bodies being in authority <sup>105</sup> Rebecca Chopp, feminist and systematic theologian, criticized the church, as an institution, that has long promulgated ideologies of the superiority of men and inferiority of women in its social organisation as well as the myths and theories. <sup>106</sup>

feminists understand that they must actively redo the meaning of symbols and the use of tradition, away from patriarchal constructs, the supposed 'norm', and toward the ongoing transformation of 'other' to being wholly inclusive. <sup>107</sup>

The conclusions at Sheffield emphasized that the ordination of women was not *the* issue, it was *an* issue of real importance that required theological insights and exegesis viewed with a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' towards the given answers as to why women should not be ordained together with the same suspicion of why women should be ordained.

The Sheffield recommendations acknowledged that alongside the concern regarding the priesthood of women was, 'the tradition of Mary being reappropriated by more churches... no longer a model of submission and subordination, but as a woman who fully lived her partnership with God in the Christ event.'<sup>108</sup> The Orthodox churches have held a long term view, that apart from the Catholic Church, the honour and understanding of the nature and person of the Mother of God was often singularly lacking in the theological and traditional teachings of some Protestant churches. And yet, given the opportunity in providing the leadership within the WCC to recommend new understandings of Mary, two decades later no such ecumenical consultation or theological programme has been proposed or organized particularly with contributions from women scholars and theologians.

The Orthodox have been quick to feel 'wronged' by their ecumenical brothers and sisters, but there are very few instances where they have insisted on Orthodox programmes, unless it is talking to themselves with Protestant or Catholic observers or guests at such

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<sup>105</sup> Cited in Kathleen B Jones, *Compassionate Authority*: Iris Young, *Justice and the politics of Difference*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1990, pp.141-59.

<sup>106</sup> Rebecca S Chopp, *Saving Work. Feminist Practices of Theological Education*, Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 1995, p.28

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>108</sup> Constance Parvey, *The Sheffield Report*, p.141.

consultations. Even at the highest level at WCC, through the offices of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, there remain many questions as to the lack of innovative Orthodox programmes in Faith and Order commission to specifically assist the Western churches to better understand the theology and tradition of the Orthodox churches. If the clergy and theologians have been unable to promote such programmes or have been unwilling to do so, then it is highly unlikely that any woman would have leadership roles to instigate such enquiries and in-depth explorations of 'theologies'. Their presence as members of WCC is greatly valued by the major church traditions who believe the contribution of the Orthodox is essential. It is this invisible control that allows the Orthodox to adopt either an aggressive stance on particular issues or claim the high moral ground on others.

The 1980s were a time of considerable change for society and the churches, and the intransigence of the Orthodox seems at odds with most of the societies in which they were either the national church or highly influential communities in the diaspora. Were the clergy and hierarchs fearful of sharing their centuries old leadership and authority in communities with the laity, and even worse, women? A careful examination of women delegates to ecumenical forums and speakers at inter- and intra- orthodox meetings reveal conservative, though educated and scholarly women speaking for all women in the church, the disenfranchised and apathetic as well as the devout and pious ones. There is a preponderance of priests' daughters and priests' wives which could be a hierarchical precaution against radical research or scholarship, and an insurance to maintain the status quo which remains their most important task at hand while seemingly including women in the dialogue.

Even at the end of the twentieth century while there are so many issues to challenge the churches, in the Orthodox churches there remains a focus on tradition, maintenance of traditional womanly values, support for the churches' views on moral issues such as abortion, contraception, divorce and inter-marriages. While acknowledging there is social change, which occurs beyond the control of the church, nevertheless, for women desperately trying to stay in the church that is relevant for their daily lives, there are very few women or men

who support change or have the courage to challenge the growing fundamentalism and piousness that for many expresses an aversion to living in the modern world. A rare exception to the practice is Metropolitan Anthony Bloom of the Russian Orthodox Archdiocese in London, whom Elisabeth Behr-Sigel cites as stating 'for the Orthodox it is much easier to say that what has never been can never be rather than to rethink the problem and try to understand that there is in fact a problem'.<sup>109</sup> While specifically addressing the ordination debate, the remarks of Metropolitan Anthony can in fact be applied to all the issues and problems of participation, exclusion, and authority manifested in the lives of women in the Orthodox Church.

### Prague Consultation 1985

Because the study on the Community of Women and Men in the Church was jointly supported by the Faith and Order Commission, the recommendations from Sheffield were discussed at various consultations held by Faith and Order. Foremost was the Prague Consultation held in 1985 within the context of 'The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community'. Two specific areas were selected for deeper discussion in order to assist the member churches, social issues and unity and renewal of the human community. In order to facilitate further discussions all the papers were published by WCC in 1988.<sup>110</sup> It was at the Prague Consultation that delegates proposed that the three elements which formed the ecclesial parameters for discussion in Faith and Order meetings, Scripture, Tradition and traditions, should in future include *experience*, an element long included by women in the Church, but not accepted as a valid theological perspective by many clerics or theologians, especially by the Orthodox. Experience could only bring modernity and social issues into the esoteric and definitive theology of the orthodox, which according to Tradition was determined and written centuries before, notwithstanding the social influences of the worlds of the early Fathers, far less informed on the nature of humankind. Present day theologians continue to use the derogatory and dismissive pronouncements made by the

<sup>109</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of women in the Church*, p.170.

<sup>110</sup> Thomas F Best, *Beyond unity-in-tension. Unity renewal and the Community of Women and Men*, Faith and Order Paper No.138, WCC: Geneva, 1988.

Fathers and included in Canon Law of the church, about women, often focusing on their perceived sinfulness and second class status in society as expressed by the Fathers of the Early Church .

John Erickson, Orthodox theologian and professor of Canon Law and church history, acknowledges that patristic attitudes in regard to the nature of women and their order in creation may have been 'moulded by the contemporary legal and social conventions as much as by Christian revelation and excluding women from all positions of responsibility even in secular society'. And he queries:

if the order of creation excludes women from position of leadership and authority, surely this should apply to position in society as well as to positions in the Church. Here again are the hazards of appealing too quickly to patristic testimony.<sup>111</sup>

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, a delegate at Prague claimed that case studies, or bible studies, about the relations of women and men in society and church are theological reflections on very concrete experiences and ecclesial situations. For Fiorenza, 'obedience, economic dependence and sexual control are the sustaining forces of societal and ecclesiastical patriarchy'.<sup>112</sup> In order to respond to the recommendations of Sheffield, and to provide a theological framework in which women can best function in the life and faith of the church, then the church was reminded it could not maintain unity nor community at the expense of the biblical vision of the 'discipleship of equals'.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, she declared that 'the expectation and laws of the Church that stress 'submission of subordinate members to patriarchal households and church' and deny women leadership in Christian community, must not be justified theologically just because it can claim tradition from the Early Fathers.

<sup>114</sup> These statements were not well received by the Orthodox delegates, who were

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<sup>111</sup> John Erickson, 'The Priesthood in Patristic Teaching', in Gennadios Limouris (ed.), *The place of the woman in the Orthodox church and the Question of the Ordination of women*. Tertios : Katerini, Greece, p.107.

<sup>112</sup> Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, 'Liberation, Unity and Equality in Community', in Thomas Best, *Beyond Unity in Tension*, pp.58-73.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p.68.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p.71.

constantly critical of the Sheffield recommendations, mild though many of them had been, by declaring them to be 'of little relevance in her situation and especially noting that "feminism" was not a term acceptable to the Orthodox church.<sup>115</sup> Did this mean that any theological reflections or biblical studies using the experiences of women of the present era, were of little relevance, although references to the sufferings and holiness of martyrs and saints was acceptable to the Orthodox? When was the line drawn between saintly suffering in the past and the personal suffering encountered in valid spiritual and physical experiences of women of the present?

Feminist historians and theologians in most church traditions have not only researched and published scholarly volumes revealing excesses of patriarchy which create the submissiveness and exclusion of women in equal partnership in the Church. They have additionally placed before their hierarchs and theologians their writings on the vast range of misogynist and andro-centric writings, from scripture itself, to interpretations and exegesis that place women in a secondary role. In turn, the hierarchs have had need to notice these women and in some circumstances have heeded their words and taken action. Regretfully, this has not been the case of the vast majority of Orthodox clergy, hierarchs or theologians who continue to dismiss the call from women as influences of the western, secular feminist movement, Eva Topping, an American Orthodox scholar accuses the church of denying women the privilege of serving God and humankind in priestly ministry because of their gender,' All our lives we experience second-class status in our church, the inequality imposed upon us by man-made patriarchal prejudices, traditions and practices'.<sup>116</sup>

In the final report from the Prague Consultation, the Orthodox delegates were content with their presentations that were totally consistent with Orthodox tradition. Gemadios Limouris declared that:

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<sup>115</sup> Report of Group 1, Prague Consultation, p.127.

<sup>116</sup> Eva C Topping, *Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy*, p.127.

'man' fills the world with their creative energies, and assert themselves as master and conqueror, while woman being more interiorized, is quite comfortable within the limits of her being.... she is as a mirror reflecting the face of man, revealing him to himself and correcting him in the process...<sup>117</sup>

Furthermore, Limouris continued 'the characteristic of man is to *act*, the characteristic of women is to *be* and this is the religious state *par excellence*'.<sup>118</sup> All those declarations fall in naturally with the sentiments according to Paul Evdokimov that:

Woman is completely at ease within the limits of her being, for she is the betrothed, wife and mother. She is 'the glory of man': for in her luminous purity, she is like a mirror that reflects the face of man, reveals man to himself and thereby betters him. She helps man understand himself and realize the meaning of his own existence. She accomplishes this by deciphering his destiny, for it is through woman that man more easily becomes what he is'.<sup>119</sup>

In a most unusual decision, and hardly in the light of ecumenical co-operation, the Orthodox insisted on the inclusion of a minority statement as an attachment to the report. Affronted, rather than challenged by the other theologians at the consultation, the three minority Greek Orthodox signatories, George Dragas, Dinitra Koukoura and Gennadios Limouris, from Greece, dismissed the daily feminist reflections on the Bible as 'unpre-cedented emotionalism which opted for particular contexts, cases and concerns at the expense of common basic experience'.<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, the trio believed the presentations 'to be openly offensive... by imposing value judgments of feminist ideology on biblical data'.<sup>121</sup> Not one of the three authors had attended the Sheffield Consultation, nor participated in the studies that had emanated from the Women's Concerns of the WCC. This attitude by the church's official representatives was not uncommon, and revealed much of the traditional intransigence regarding the concerns of women in their lives experienced by women from the hierarchy of the Orthodox church amongst clerics and theologians. Considering that the theme of the consultation was focused on the Community of Women and Men, and that the whole process

<sup>117</sup> Gennadios Limouris, 'Men and Women: Equal Partners in the Christian community': an Orthodox Point of View' in Gennadios Limouris (ed.), *The place of the woman in the Orthodox church and the Question of the Ordination of Wwomen*, p.103.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p.104.

<sup>119</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love*, SYSP: Crestwood, 1985, p.33.

<sup>120</sup> Thomas Best, *Beyond Unity-in-tension. Unity, renewal and the Community of women and men*, WCC: Geneva, 1987. p.166.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p.166.

of this consultation had been to encourage open, frank and forthright comment about the concerns and experiences of women in the church, the response was certainly far less than might have been from the Orthodox trio. The trio cited the Consultation as inadequate by emphasizing specific limited cases and giving the impression of deliberately ignoring the total picture. For many women in the Church this inadequate and critical response from the Orthodox was familiar.

Constance Parvey discovered in the Community Study 'the enormous need in the churches for women's stories to be heard as the basis for new levels of female/male dialogue'.<sup>122</sup> These processes were not part of community or church dialogue for the Orthodox. Where the leadership of any parish or church was not committed to disseminating the study 'it was simply ignored by those who set priorities in the churches' theology and seminary education'.<sup>123</sup> What stands out as being so remarkable was the work of the OCA Department of Religious Education. Although the study guide was amended, and that in itself reveals an Orthodox attitude, the amended study was nevertheless widely used by many parishes for discussion and raising the issues of how community could be more inclusive of women and men. Nevertheless the original intent of the community study was to pose open questions not suggest the answers. By ensuring that canon law and acceptable biblical text on women/men relationships were always included in each chapter for discussion, the debate would take place within the parameters set by church teachings, not necessarily from human experience within the church.

In keeping with the structures of most ecumenical consultations, group reports were also included in the Prague report. The participants acknowledged the value of case studies that reveal particular human experience from which the group may be directed to expand their deliberations on the theme and task at hand. While the group appreciated the theological dimensions of the two Orthodox presentations, nevertheless they decried the lack

<sup>122</sup> Constance Parvey, 'The continuing significance of the Community of Women and Men in the Church Study: its Mixed Meanings for the Churches', in Thomas Best, *Beyond Unity-in-Tension*, p.35.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p.42.



of information of particular experiences of women and men in the Orthodox church in the form of 'descriptive picture and more experiential material'.<sup>124</sup> The Orthodox were adamant that women had many opportunities to participate and serve, including the study and teaching of theology in schools and universities and that Orthodox women had no feeling of exclusion. More important than being active in the church was to become a saint in the body of Christ. In addition, the Orthodox participants claimed that theology and true understanding of church were more important than the study of society, thereby negating many of the issues dealt with in the CWMC Study which they claimed was 'seriously imbalanced from an Orthodox point of view'.<sup>125</sup> It is not surprising therefore, that few parishes or even diocese ever knew of the Sheffield Report nor the negative responses from the three theologians following the Prague consultation. The Orthodox women in America who participated in the CWMC Study according to the limitations of Orthodox perspectives, believed that the issues of the Study did not impinge upon them, and that the manner of the questions was foreign to their understanding of church.

In 1983, Alexander Schmemmann, Dean of St Vladimir's Seminary in New York, stated that in regard to the priesthood of women, all Orthodox theologians had affirmed the impossibility of isolating the problem of women's ordination from the totality of the church's Tradition; that Orthodox theology is unanimous affirming that the question of women's ordination must be placed within the scriptural doctrine of men and women, not 'human rights' or 'equality', and that one cannot equate the inferiority of women within secular society as being the same inferiority within ecclesiastical power just because they are excluded from being clergy.<sup>126</sup> The denial of ordination to the priesthood continues to encompass denials for many other forms of ministry for women in the church - ministries beyond the traditional roles of nurturer, housekeeper and church financiers. The theologians

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<sup>124</sup> Report of Group I, *Prague Consultation*, p.131.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>126</sup> Thomas Hopko (ed.), *Women and the Priesthood*, St Vladimir's Press: New York, 1983, p.8.

find it very difficult to move beyond the ordination issue when women speak of ministries in the church, equal participation, or a place in the decision-making of and for the Church.

The problem of ordination of women to the priesthood, claims Befr-Sigel, (is that) '... it touches the darker and very powerful regions of the emotions, the unconscious and cultural archetypes'.<sup>127</sup> Even women have now been caught into this discussion, a discussion that has barely developed beyond the same proposals at the turn of the century in Russia.<sup>128</sup> The diaconate for women is the focal point for discussion amongst theologians, but what form of the diaconate it will take, is not clear. Will it be the same as the sacramental ordination for men to the diaconate, or will it merely be a token blessing for the charitable 'veiled' ministering social worker, dedicated and subservient to the priest and the church as a 'handmaiden of the Lord'?

From 1975 to 1985, the UN Decade for Women, there were many occasions in which Orthodox women were able to participate in discussion and decision-making processes. Through the efforts of the WCC and the Women's Unit, the movement for women was also encouraged in the churches. The changes were much slower, and were resisted more openly by most churches than in secular society. In western countries the church clergy, administrators and legal advisers demanded exemptions from the courts and the parliaments, which were granted, from equal opportunity legislation, discrimination laws and particularly that the sacramental ministry of women could never be perceived as a 'right' for women. The programmes endorsed by the WCC endeavoured to encourage women to work within the structures of their churches for an inclusive community of women and men. The worldwide community study brought together at the Sheffield consultation and further developed in Prague was moved sideways by the work of the Faith and Order Commission on the Lima document. Consensus on baptism and eucharist and the acceptance between member churches on each others theological understandings did not spill over into the

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p.179.

<sup>128</sup> Kyriaki K FitzGerald, *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church*, Holy Cross Seminary Press; Boston, 1998.

ordination debate. The emphasis on the 'woman question' raised in 1947, then through the Sheffield Report, had been effectively sidelined. For Orthodox women ten years had past since the hopeful spring of the Agapia meeting, from which the reports and recommendations were in danger of being relegated to the archives of WCC. There seemed to be little relevance of this work to the exponential growth of the work of Catholic and Protestant women scholars particularly in feminist theology and feminist history. Those women were determined to undermine and challenge the patriarchal structures within their churches, the misogynist teachings from their clergy and to open up the spiritual boundaries for their faith as Christian women.

## Chapter Five

### Questions, Consultations and Challenges

Orthodox women share the same human experiences as all other women in society ranging across cultures, traditions, religion, class and race. Notwithstanding these experiences, and despite the rapid changes in secular societies at large, there was no nationwide nor universal movement of Orthodox women during the three decades following the 'Life and Work of Women in the Church' study of 1947. Women in the Protestant, Anglican, Reform and Roman Catholic traditions formulated their programmes for change ranging from the non-segregation of church congregations to the ordination of women to the priesthood and the bishopric. Both feminist church historians and feminist theologians developed research and scholarship based upon a general 'hermeneutics of suspicion' and using new theories and concepts of inquiry and examination. These scholars provided many possibilities for Orthodox women to also seek equal lay participation in a clergy-dominated church having already gained some aspects of equality in secular society although scattered across jurisdictions and lacking supportive mentors in the hierarchy of the church. This chapter considers the effects of the Vancouver Assembly in 1983, the launch of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (EDCSW) and the Rhodes Consultation both held in 1988, and the specific issues that were recommended for discussion from the Cairo Steering Committee meeting for the Orthodox Women's Consultation in Crete in 1990. This chapter questions why Orthodox women were not inspired to action by the ecumenical debate on social justice issues that shifted from the local and national to global perspectives on discrimination and exclusion of women in church and society. Have Orthodox women conspired with their conservative clergy and theologians to enforce the existing isolation from other Christian women - especially feminist Christian women?

### Orthodox Women in Community

The most disturbing aspect of the continued conservative status of women in the Orthodox Church is that while Orthodox women have been active in their secular communities, alongside other women, and have entered the political arena, are educated in the professions, and active in social concerns and welfare on behalf of women, they nevertheless have remained, on the whole, outside meaningful commitment for reforms for women in the Church. Orthodox women, experience many of the same hierarchical structures as Roman Catholic women. However, unlike their Catholic sisters, who are amongst the strongest advocates and feminist theologians committed to changes in the church's teachings and practices in regard to women, Orthodox women are not activists nor claim to be feminist theologians. These 'communities of women', Catholic and Orthodox, are essentially no different, despite dogma and doctrine in their tradition, to the whole community of Christian women where the Church which continually exhibits and preaches a fundamental sexism that Catherine LaCugna claims: 'values men over women, sees masculine experience as normative for women's experience, has imaged God in pre-dominantly masculine metaphors and has used the Christian message to support violence against women'.<sup>1</sup>

It is in the questioning of the restrictive roles, Rosemary Ruether claims, 'that the wall of a sexist ideology and depersonalization of women is breached and ... every aspect of male privilege loses its authority as a natural and divine right and is re-evaluated as sin and evil... this is deeply frightening to males'.<sup>2</sup> The emergence of the feminist critique of gender relationships has brought defensive reactions from male hierarchy particularly within the church. Such is the authority of bishop, clergy, and male laity, that women find themselves on the 'cutting edge' between the conservative acceptance of their situation or named as defiant outsider vulnerable to exclusion. In addition to this 'masculinist' view of the Christian world, ethnic nationalism has also become an important focus for Orthodox communities in the *diaspora* as well as their homelands, and until very recent times have also contributed to

<sup>1</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna (ed), *Freeing Theology. Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, HarperCollins: New York, 1993, p.2.

<sup>2</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk. Towards a Feminist theology*, SCM Press: London, 1983, p.173.

the restrictive public and private roles for women. By their very inaction, disassociation and often expressed disdain with the ecumenical church society around them, Orthodox women are marginalized to live in cultural and religious enclaves which profess no fellowship with other groups.

In 1976, the issue of ordination to the female diaconate, orders of acolytes, and possible newly created minor orders and parochial leadership were tentatively raised at the Agapia Consultation. In addition, for the first time statements were pronounced about the impossibility of ordination of women to the sacramental priesthood, a hitherto unmentioned topic by Orthodox women. In 1981, according to the response from the Orthodox church in America to the WCC *Study of the Community of Women and Men in the Church*, the emphasis was placed on the impossibility of such ordination for 'the bishop or priest must image, symbolise and mystically actualise the Lord's presence as husband and father of the flock'.<sup>3</sup> However, according to noted Orthodox writers, Eva Catafygiotou Topping, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Elisabeth Moberly, 'these views of 'iconic image' and 'complementarity' are new theories and lack both Scriptural and patristic base'.<sup>4</sup> The image of the Mother of God (*Theotokos*) - ever virgin and mother- promoted as the 'archetype of the feminine royal priesthood for women'<sup>5</sup> is most often promoted as the alternative 'icon' for women alongside the possibility only available to men for the ordained priesthood. The particular issue of sacramental ordination has been considered in various seminars and consultations as 'brought in from the outside' through the auspices of the ecumenical movement and 'western radical feminists'.<sup>6</sup> However, writes Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, 'Orthodox Christians can no longer escape from it (the ordination issue) on the pretext that it is foreign

<sup>3</sup> Committee of the Ecumenical Task Force of the Orthodox Church in America, *Women and Men in the Church*, OCA: Syosset, NY, 1980, p.49.

<sup>4</sup> Eva C Topping, 'Orthodox Women and Our Church', in Stephen J Stekas & George E Matsoukas (eds.), *Project for Orthodox Renewal*, OCL:Chicago, 1993, p.87.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World. A Christian Anthropology on the Charisms of Women*, SVS:New York, 1994 (trans. Anthony P Gythiel, p.214.

<sup>6</sup> Deborah Belonick, *Feminism in Christianity*, M Div thesis, St Vladimir's Press: New York, 1981, p.7. Member of the Orthodox Church in America, OCA (Russian Patriarchate)

to the Tradition?... for authentic faithfulness to Tradition is creative and requires each generation to respond to new needs and challenges according to the dynamic of Tradition.'<sup>8</sup>

Deborah Belonick, theologian and member of the Orthodox church in America, argues that when 'feminized-Christians', a derogatory and dismissive terminology, left social problems and turned to religion, a revolution began, which has resulted in religious beliefs being blatantly disparate from the teachings of the Orthodox Church'.<sup>9</sup> To the detriment of present day women in the Orthodox church who seek change, there has been no similar movement of 'feminist Orthodox Christians' addressing social problems as they impact more directly on the lives of women within the Church. Belonick does not explain what teachings are so sacrosanct as to not permit critique or close scrutiny by the laity and more specifically, women. Even the most conservative group of women have over time challenged the *praxis* of the church when philanthropy and charity have been neglected by the clergy and bishops. Social reform, instigated by evangelical and liberal feminists, moving from their concerns in secular society to the church, has on some occasions resulted in the church taking up the cause and then leading the reform. The challenge of the suffragettes for the vote in the government, in order to participate in programmes of reform in the nineteenth century, eventually led to women participating on Parish Councils and Synods of the Church of England. Does the patriarchy of the Orthodox church, which includes all males, secular and ordained, perceive that progress for women in their particular societies may some day lead women to anticipate their right to share the leadership and decision-making in the Church, whether as clergy or laity? In the light of Orthodox history, few women have taken leadership roles in Orthodox societies or positions of influence in the church. Nevertheless, those women did make profound decisions that affected the church even to these modern times. Nevertheless, the emphasis on self-sacrifice of women saints and martyrs is rarely offset by the influences of those powerful women in the Church.

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<sup>7</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, Translated by Stephen Bigham. Oakwood : Torrance, CA, 1991, p. 17

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>9</sup> Deborah Belonick, *Feminism in Christianity*, p.7.

Reproductive rights and biological functions are centrepiece controls by the church over private decisions that women make within families and within personal relationships. The church, often aided and abetted by women, has demanded certain behaviour and acceptance by women of the negative functions of menstruation, marriage and motherhood, child bearing, birth control, abortion, sexuality, virginity and celibacy. In recent years the practice of female circumcision has also been revealed as customary in some Orthodox communities. Whilst some teachings are controlled by Canon Law of the early centuries, many continue to be practices endorsed by a particular culture and tradition. These issues are difficult for women to raise in forums where the church might listen, women may experience control over the discussion and find ways of liberation from such attitudes. The control of patriarchy over women's reproductive functions is powerful and diminishes women's capacity to control her own life. The teachings of her uncleanness, are with women from the first days after her birth to the time of her funeral. Orthodox women, no less than any other particular group of persons organised within specific religious parameters, share the same oppressive and suppressive controls by male hierarchies over their lives and bodies. These are issues for feminist Christians to challenge the Church.

### **Ordination continues on the Ecumenical Agenda**

In the midst of the UN Decade for Women, 1975-1985, many concerns affecting the lives of women and within the context of church practices were deemed issues for discussion by the Church. Racism and apartheid, environmental destruction, violence against women, poverty and economic deprivation were presented as issues for the churches. The most successful participation of women at an international ecumenical meeting was at the 1983 WCC Vancouver Assembly. It was during the Vancouver Assembly that delegates recommended that 'while the position of Orthodox women needs to be respected, the ordination of women must still be kept actively on the ecumenical agenda'.<sup>10</sup> Nearly twenty Orthodox laywomen, including nuns from Russia and Romania, were official delegates at Vancouver, and for the first time, took an active part in the proceedings. Maud Natias, from

<sup>10</sup> *Gathered for Life*, Official Report VI Assembly World Council of Churches, Vancouver 24 July-10 August 1983, edited by David Gill, WCC: Geneva, 1983 p.58.



Lebanon was a vice-moderator for one group; Connie Tarasar from USA was a rapporteur for another; Frieda Haddad, a theologian from Lebanon presented an address in a plenary session as did Mother Euphrasia, Abbess of a women's monastery from Romania. However, both the presentations were within Orthodox tradition and did little to raise specific social issues or propose solutions for the many problems facing women in the church and society in general. Constance Tarasar also made it clear to delegates that the 'women's issue' was not viewed in the same way as feminist theologians and 'lay' women were speaking on language and God, in Protestant and Catholic churches:

There is only one theology for us ... that theology is the theology of the church. Theology is not something we possess, own or guard, nor is it something we change through our own reasoning. Theology- the knowledge of God - is a gift given by God himself. Western minds, often find it hard to grasp that in Orthodox theology. We can't assign femaleness or maleness to any person of the Trinity since they all reflect both sides of male and female humanity. Any terms we use to describe God are inadequate. <sup>11</sup>

While that may be the teachings for the Orthodox, the inference that the western mind is somewhat lacking in its perceptions of theology and understandings of God, was not well received by Ellen Leonard, who responded from a Catholic perspective 'that theology has developed not only outside women's experience but often against women's experience... feminist theology is a corrective'. <sup>12</sup> Inclusive language, ordination and feminist theology became the most contentious issues between member churches of WCC, and more specifically between the Orthodox and mainstream Protestant churches in the following years.

The recommendation which focused on women's ordination caused considerable angst amongst the Orthodox hierarchs and created antagonism and suspicion with other member churches and has become one of the reasons claimed for withdrawal by three churches from membership of the World Council of Churches in 1998. The tensions between the Orthodox and other members at the Vancouver Assembly regarding women

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<sup>11</sup> *Women in Changing World*. Vancouver WCC Sixth Assembly, July 1983, no.15 p.31  
<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

were best illustrated during the report from one of the groups. An Orthodox delegate, later identified as Fr George Dragas, maintained that the ordination of women issue was in fact an obstacle to church unity. Nicole Fischer, President of the National Protestant Church of Geneva, responded that 'one should not lay the burden of the question of unity on women', and asked 'Gentlemen, what were you doing for the unity of the Church before this, when there was no discussion of the question of the ordination of women?'.<sup>13</sup> In the practice of ecumenical relations criticisms towards the Orthodox have maintained a polite facade, and it has only been from individuals that open criticisms of Orthodox attitudes has been heard.

What continuously escapes the notice of the Orthodox, both clergy and laity, is that sacramental ordination and ministry of the word (as expressed in many Protestant traditions), are not always the focus of the struggles by women for equality in the member churches. Women, no less than men, recognize that the 'call' to ordination is special and spiritual, and that few will experience or know such a 'calling'. It is in the real world of personal survival and human relationships, while seeking equal participation in the life of the family and the church, that women know themselves to be considered outside the "norm", and to be "other" for whom male headship need have little consideration. However, while the debate about the exclusion of women has continued to focus on sacramental ordination, the debate has served one very important purpose. The debate has revealed a culture of misogyny and patriarchal authority within society and church, that assumes a superiority of males, that focuses on the sinfulnesses of women, the uncleanness of women, and the natural submission of women to be submissive, servant like and faithful in order to serve patriarchy. This culture, according to E B Taylor is a 'complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law and customs that have a constraining and directive influence on people. It is a collective tradition'.<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding the reality of oppression from outside forces, nor the ignorance and illiteracy of most of the faithful, this tradition and culture has undergone no renaissance through the centuries. The Orthodox theologians continue to proclaim the

<sup>13</sup> Janet Crawford, *Rocking the Boat: Women's Participation in the WCC 1948-1991*, Unpublished PhD thesis, 1995, p.427.

<sup>14</sup> John S Pabee, *Culture, Women and Theology*, ISPCK : Delhi, 1994, p.14. cites E B Taylor, *the origins of culture*, Part 1, Harper & Row : New York, 1958.

foundations of *orthopraxis* based on the writings of the early church fathers as sacrosanct and beyond contemporary criticisms and critical analysis that could lead to a holistic view of women beyond their bodies and biological purposes.

The response from many member churches to the Sheffield recommendations, and the Vancouver Assembly, was that the debate on the ordination of women to the priesthood should continue, notwithstanding the position of the Orthodox churches. It was obvious that in order for Orthodox women to continue, albeit tentatively, to participate in discussion and consultation regarding their position on this issue and many others affecting women in the Church, then meetings and seminars should take place under the auspices of the Women's Unit at WCC. Constance Tarasar, a staff person in the Department of Information and Public Relations for the Orthodox church in America was an important contact for both WCC and the Orthodox Task Force within the WCC and the subsequent presence of Orthodox women at an international ecumenical level. In her correspondence with Fr George Tssetsis, Ecumenical Patriarchate representative situated within WCC, Constance Tarasar was able to advise certain strategies required for Orthodox women to participate in more meaningful and positive ways in ecumenical meetings, and in addressing recommendations from the Orthodox women meeting in Vancouver.

As far as ecumenical issues were concerned, Tarasar recommended guidelines on how to 'communicate and transform' the language of Orthodoxy. She was aware of the security felt by most Orthodox delegates in focusing their interests in the Faith and Order issues but believed it important for Orthodox to diversify their interests even into commissions and units that seemingly were of little direct concern for the Orthodox. Her note in regard to the 'style of presentation' is most important, for it is often cited by women and men from other traditions of the Church as a major reason for the breakdown in debate and on particularly sensitive matters:

It was recognized that the attitude of Orthodox participants in ecumenical discussions often promotes misunderstanding... We need to make a greater effort

just to be 'personable' and to promote better personal relationships with others in our ecumenical contacts. Orthodox participants are often thought to be 'aloof', - though the inability to communicate in a common language sometimes nurtures this impression...Clearly there is need for preparation and training of Orthodox women for ecumenical dialogue. <sup>15</sup>

As for the complex issue pertaining specifically to Orthodox women, Tarasar proposed that careful consideration be given firstly to 'an exploration of the concept of women in Orthodox thought and life, particularly as a spiritual concept; secondly, the formation of a team of Orthodox women to visit various Orthodox countries and churches to communicate ecumenically amongst the Orthodox women themselves; thirdly, that efforts should be made for more Orthodox women to be appointed as staff persons at WCC; and the fourth recommendation, and possibly the most important, that a consultation focusing on the ministries for Orthodox women was critical, especially in view of the growing number of theologically educated women who do not have any outlet for their talents, part of the reason being that the Church did not know how or where to use the women. <sup>16</sup>

The letter from Constance Tarasar forwarded to Barbel von Wartenberg, Director of the Women's Unit, with an accompanying note from Fr Tssetis noted that he, together with members of the Orthodox Task Force: Marie Assaad, Ion Bria and Dan-Ilie Ciobotea, had met with Connie Tarasar in Geneva and that the recommendation from the Task Force was for a second Orthodox women's Consultation on a general theme 'Witness and Diakonia of Women in the Church', to be held, with fifty persons including eight non-Orthodox WCC Central and Executive Committee women members 'in order for the women to have a first-hand experience with their Orthodox sisters'. <sup>17</sup> There was an anticipation that the Consultation would take place in the near future; however, in October 1985, the proposal for the consultation, under the auspices of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, was still in the planning stages and the Valaamo Monastery in Finland was proposed as the meeting site. Tomoko Evdokimoff-Faerber, a Russian Orthodox interpreter

<sup>15</sup> Constance Tarasar to Fr George Tssetis, 2 March 1984, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>17</sup> Memorandum. George Tssetis to Barbel von Wartenberg, 10 May 1984.

on the WCC staff was hopeful that the consultation would take place in the near future. However, twelve months later she was still endeavouring to proceed with the planning and the programme, for the Orthodox Advisory Group did not take responsibility for the project 'believing it should be taken up by the 'Women's Unit'.<sup>18</sup>

Teny Pirri-Simonian, an Armenian member of the Orthodox staff at WCC, addressed the Women's Task Force just weeks before the steering committee meeting. She stated her position as 'observing with caution the feminist movement in the West in general and its manifestation in the ecumenical movement in particular'.<sup>19</sup> She asserted that the dominance in ecumenical dialogue of the articulate and vocal groups was a sort of 'triumphalism as the basis of ecumenical feminism'. Simonian concluded that in order to start meaningful dialogue with Orthodox women, three essential elements, which conveyed different meanings to Orthodox and Protestant women, were vital in analyzing Orthodox women's participation in the life of the church: continuity of the church - the historical and spiritual richness; participation in the church, already a concept because of the centrality of the vocation of the 'royal priesthood'; and feminine images in the church, already manifest through the Theotokos and the Saints'.<sup>20</sup>

The remarks of Teny Pirri-Simonian reflect the prevailing attitude of many members within the Orthodox Church that there is an understanding that Orthodox women have little to learn from the new wave of feminist thinking and action. She does however encourage Orthodox women to engage in self-criticism and articulate a vocabulary that best describes their place in the Church:

the ecumenical movement has categorized (them) as a conservative group of women unresponsive to change. It is time the women in the ecumenical movement realize that such an encouragement will be mutually beneficial, mutually enriching and the first step towards an ecumenical feminism.<sup>21</sup>

18 Tomoko Evdokimoff-Faerber to Priscilla Padolina, 5 October 1986.

19 Teny Pirri-Simonian, 'Towards an Ecumenical Understanding of Feminism in the Church', 22 February 1989, p.1.

20 Ibid., p.2.

21 Ibid., p.6.

What Simonian did not take in to any account was that already by the late 1980s there were Orthodox women articulating their feminist interpretations and their discontent with their place in the church. For many Orthodox women, the stories of martyrs and saints of the early church were not sufficient inspiration for their faith life. In their secular and private lives, society had moved them into a new way of thinking and of new experiences outside the norm of an Orthodox community. The rules and regulations inherent through the patriarchy in the home and the patriarchy in community and church were becoming less important particularly for educated and professional women. As issues of equal employment, sexual harassment, birth control and abortion became the issues of the women's movement, both in the West and the East, Orthodox women, whether in the church or not were also caught up in the struggle with other women, where religious loyalties were of little significance, indeed were seen as major barriers to the progress of women in the twentieth century. Rules of the fifth century, attitudes of misogynist saints and fathers, customs within families that served to separate women from men, were meaningless and almost ridiculous in light of the knowledge of biological sciences and historical experiences. Even women attending church found it impossible to keep silent in their criticisms against the discreet and often offensive discriminations they were experiencing because they were women.

### **The Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women 1988-1998**

After the Vancouver Assembly in 1983, there was no turning back by member churches from the changes they were experiencing through the increased involvement and expectations of women in the churches. Women decided that they also were the Church, determined to stake their place within the Tradition while at the same time endeavouring to challenge the traditions that continuously denied them full personhood 'in the image of God'. Women were especially ready to be challenged in ecumenical movement.

The influence of the United Nations Decade for Women had made little effect upon the churches, who rather than being in the world conscious of change, seemed more determined to continue outside society. In some western countries the churches actively

lobbied their governments by demanding exemptions from particular legislation affecting equality for women, whilst at the same time demanding a prominent voice in legislation that could and would affect the private and sexual lives of women and men. However, reports Mercy Odoyoye, an African feminist theologian, in late 1985, at a WCC Central Committee meeting after a delegate criticized the failure of the churches during the UN Decade, a Methodist bishop declared 'what is needed is a churches' decade for women'.<sup>22</sup> In April 1988, on the day of the Myrrh-Bearing women in the Eastern Orthodox calendar, the second Sunday after Easter. The Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women was launched. The purpose of the Decade was to address five particular issues around 'empowering, affirming, giving visibility, enabling churches and encouraging action and dynamic movements'<sup>23</sup>.

In order to prepare programmes for the Decade, meetings were conducted in various regions around the world. They included Africa, India, Russia, the Middle East, North America, Latin America and Europe. In the Middle East and North America Orthodox women participated in discussions, and in July 1988, in Moscow the Russian Orthodox church organised the ecumenical launch of the Decade, the first ecumenical seminar of church women in the USSR, supervised by Nina Bobrova, a long time central committee member of WCC. Participants at the thanksgiving service included women from the Russian Orthodox church, the Lutheran Church of Estonia and the Baptist Church. Perhaps more importantly was the presence of young students from the Church Choir Precentors Classes of the Theological Seminaries of Leningrad and Zagorsk, and the issues discussed were on spirituality, the mission of women and theological education.<sup>24</sup>

In August 1988, at the discussion on the Ecumenical Decade at the Central committee meeting in Hanover Metropolitan Dr Paulos Mar Gregorios of the Mar Thoma

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<sup>22</sup> Mercy Odoyoye, *Who Will Roll the Stone Away? The Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women*, WCC: Geneva, 1990, p.1.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>24</sup> Nina Bobrova, *Ecumenical Meeting of Churchwomen Report*, Moscow 15 July 1988.

Syrian Orthodox Church in India chaired the session on the Decade presentation. In this plenary session Nina Bobrova spoke on behalf of the women living in socialist countries, and more especially of the difficulties for the Orthodox churches. Whilst the Decade document had not been entirely approved by all Orthodox churches and 'we cannot accept some of the things which are absolutely contrary to our thinking', Bobrova urged member Orthodox churches to accept the document as a working document, for each to use what they need or what was important for them.<sup>25</sup> Gregorios ended the session by declaring that the Decade programme related to legal, cultural, social and ecclesiastical disabilities, all of which required serious study by both men and women. In Porto Novo, Benin in late 1988, Dr Ion Dura, a Romanian Orthodox theologian, called for the Church to be more attentive to the situation of women's participation and decision-making, and their insignificant presence in theological education, and that their absence in ecumenical and theological discussions was an issue for both member Orthodox churches and the WCC executive to take notice of and act upon in the future.<sup>26</sup>

The participation of Orthodox women was spasmodic and depended on whether there was an Orthodox woman with a recognized position in the Church, which could be as educator or theologian for instance, willing to explore the programme and take up the issue with her priest, and in turn with her bishop and to be granted permission to speak with some authority in an ecumenical meeting. In some places however, isolated Orthodox women joined ecumenical programmes without the imprimatur of their bishops, and remained independent voices for 'solidarity with women' in order to speak openly and honestly of power, authority and patriarchy that women experience within the Church and the Orthodox church in particular. The issue of ordination has become a crucial turning point for women in the Church through the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women and a political and ecumenical issue for the hierarchs within the Orthodox churches.

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<sup>25</sup> WCC Central Committee meeting, Plenary session, The Ecumenical Decade, 16 August 1988

<sup>26</sup> Ion Dura, 'The Woman in the Life of the Orthodox church: General Considerations about her Actual Participation in it', Faith & Order Consultation - 'The Ecclesiological Significance of the Community of Women and Men', Port Novo, Benin, 1988.



Anna Karin Hammar, Director of the Sub-unit on Women of the WCC, and ordained pastor in the Lutheran Church of Sweden, declared that:

The unfolding women's movement is a sign of hope for women. They are joining forces to work for the transformation of society; for cultural change and a new political order... but also many Christian women have re-discovered Christian faith as a counterforce to oppression, injustice and sexism as a sin against God.<sup>27</sup>

She also noted that the Ecumenical Decade was a follow-up of the WCC Community of Women and Men Study in 1981 and provided the opportunity to use the study instigated by Marie Assaad for the 1985 Nairobi meeting at the end of the UN Decade on Women, on Female Sexuality and Bodily Functions in different religious tradition together with other human rights issues raised during the UN Decade for Women.

Constance Tarasar reported on an ecumenical consultation at Stony Point, New York, on the proposed Decade programme held in late 1987. The report from that meeting had welcomed the proclamation of the Decade, though (Orthodox women) had expressed their unwillingness to accept certain formulations contained in the Decade proposals. In particular 'they objected to the need for replacing hierarchical structures with more participatory ones which assumed a false opposition to church structure'. The Orthodox women noted that terms and phrases dealing with 'power' and 'the empowerment of women' and the theme 'churches in *solidarity* with women' brought about negative connotations and concepts which did not have a place in Orthodox understanding of 'Church'<sup>28</sup>. The recommendations were to be expected, conservative and already expressed within Orthodox women's community organisations. Orthodox women at the conference in New York suggested goals for implementation of the Decade in Orthodox churches. Included in the list were: open hearings on social and moral issues, (though most were already determined by the particular ethnic culture and Orthodox dogma); that a proposed group of theologically educated Orthodox women should provide leadership and direction for other goals of the

<sup>27</sup> *Ecumenical Press Service*, 87.08.141.

<sup>28</sup> Constance Tarasar and Elaine Goumaris Hanna, '1988-1998 An Ecumenical Decade for Women in the Churches', *The Orthodox Church*, November 1987, p.6.

Orthodox during the Decade; inter-Orthodox relationships be developed both in community and globally; that wives of priests should engage in issues that concern women in church and society; there should be participation of youth groups in the Decade; Orthodox women to become involved in discussion at ecumenical levels and that any and all of the activities to involve co-operation on a pan-Orthodox basis'.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Place of the Woman and the Question of Ordination of Women**

In 1988 the Anglican Church Lambeth Conference of Bishops, held in England every decade, again included the debate on the Ordination of Women to the priesthood in the Church of England. The debate was not new, but support for women's ordination was growing, especially amongst the bishops and the laity delegates. There was maturity in both the arguments for and the arguments against the possibilities in contrast to the report of the 1936 Conference when it was claimed that 'the ministry of women would tend to lower the spiritual tone of Christian worship; that the thoughts and desires of the female sex are more easily made subordinate to the supernatural; and that it would be impossible for men at a church service conducted by a woman to not be unduly conscious of her sex'.<sup>30</sup> Opponents of the priesthood for women hoped for the support of Orthodox theologian Metropolitan John Zizioulas to speak against such a proposal. The Bishop, whilst not necessarily or overtly a supporter of women's ordination nevertheless offered the following comment:

We all have to take seriously into account the view of the others, and we all have to think, act and decide on the basis not of what we want, but what the world demands and really needs in order to have a future, that future promised by God...<sup>31</sup>

Zizioulas continued to speak bluntly about his concerns on the validity of the priesthood of women, by asking that before such decisions were made by the Anglican Church, the Lambeth Conference should be mindful that as far as the Orthodox were concerned there had not been

<sup>29</sup> *Ecumenical Press Service*, 87.11.80

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Jean Skuse, *Feminism and Religion*, NSW Women's Advisory Council: Sydney, 1985, p.11. Report of the Archbishops' Commission on the Ministry of Women. (Church of England, UK, 1936)

<sup>31</sup> Peter Anthony Baktis, 'The Dublin Statement and Women's Ordination', in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 29:1, Winter 1992, p.36.

sufficient theological nor ecumenical dialogue. He urged that the question should be asked 'what is in the nature of priesthood that prevents women from being ordained to the priesthood? And, what is it, apart from serious and important social reasons, that necessitates the acceptance of women into the priesthood?'<sup>32</sup> Those in opposition had only produced reasons amounting to traditional practice, and those supporting it were accused of only responding to sociological concerns.<sup>33</sup> As to the concerns of unity Peter Baktis, Orthodox theologian and chaplain, noted in his examination of the Dublin Statement on Anglican-Orthodox dialogue, that despite the Orthodox declaration that the ordination of women would be a violation of the apostolic faith and order of the church and would lead to the severing of relationships between the Orthodox and Anglicans, the relationship continues.<sup>34</sup> Baktis also draws the parallels between the Orthodox and Anglicans pattern of 'self governing national and regional churches'<sup>35</sup> noting that:

whilst the classical Anglican pattern is almost as 'patriarchal' as the Orthodox pattern yet the Anglicans have been able to accept women's ordination at least in some place, without overthrowing that pattern or altering its basic anthropological foundation.<sup>36</sup>

It was no longer possible for Orthodox hierarchs and theologians to ignore the question being raised on the ordination of women to the priesthood for they were fully aware of the changes pending for the Church of England and the Anglican Church in Australia and other Anglican provinces, following Lambeth 1988. The question was whether there was a way in which the Orthodox churches should begin to examine the impossibilities, alongside the improbabilities, for the ordination of women to the priesthood in the future. The surprise was by whom the question was asked - His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios I

In November 1988 in response to this new phenomenon the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Demetrios I, invited Orthodox theologians, a few women (specifically

<sup>32</sup> John Zizioulas, 'Ecumenism and the need for vision', *Sobornost*, Vol.10, no.2, 1975, p.41.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Baktis, cited, 'The Dublin Statement Introduction', p.2-3.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Baktis, 'The Dublin Statement and Women's Ordination', in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol.29, no.1, 1992, p.41.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40. The Dublin Agreed Statement 1984, began to refocus the international dialogue between the Anglican and Orthodox churches on the question of ecclesiology.

chosen by the bishops) and hierarchs from the majority canonical jurisdictions to discuss 'The Place of the Woman in the Orthodox church and the Question of the Ordination of Women'. However, even from the beginning of the meeting the Patriarch made it clear in his introduction that 'whilst the Church appreciates the fact that the achievements of women constitute an application of religious freedom on which all healthy feminism should be based, any attempt to apply equality to the point of trespassing the canonical limits has no place in the Church of Christ'.<sup>37</sup>

The Consultation in Rhodes was the first meeting of Orthodox churches to focus entirely on the topic of women and their place in the Church. Metropolitans, bishops, clergy and theologians from Alexandria to Serbia, together with eighteen women scholars were invited to participate. The women delegates included Kyriaki FitzGerald, (USA) Francoise Jeanlin (France) and Frieda Haddad (Lebanon) who presented papers together with Mother Superior Makrina and Sister Theologic (Greece) and Mother Superior Nazaria Nita (Romania). The papers focused on women's diakonia and monastic life to the place of women in contemporary secularized society and an Orthodox assessment on modern feminist theology. Francoise Jeanlin (France) specifically examined the place of the Mother of God and the ordination of women. Were any papers a surprise in their content or context? No, for the arguments put forward were compatible with the presentations usually heard from Orthodox theologians, bishops and clergy. There were no feminist theologians to present papers or include the arguments well known from Roman Catholic, Anglican or Lutheran women. There was no Rosemary Radford Ruether, Monica Furlong or Letty Russell in the midst of the speakers. It is unlikely that theologians would have been so bold and forward as to suggest possibilities for more dynamic and sacramental ministries in light of the constraints within the invitation from the Ecumenical Patriarch. Elisabeth Behr-Sigel (France), was a participant but not a speaker. Other Orthodox women present who had been delegates to WCC meetings as representatives of their churches included Catherine Chiotellis

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Gennadios Limouris (Ed.), *The Place of the Woman in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women*, Tertios Publications: Katerini, 1992. p.18.

(Greece), Elaine Gounaris Hanna (USA), Stefanka Petrova (Bulgaria) Eva Suvarsky (Czechoslovakia) and Constance Tarasar (USA).

The focus of the consultation was to clarify the theological basis for the Tradition that Orthodox ordain only men, and to discuss how Orthodox churches understood the place and role of women in their life, work and practice.<sup>38</sup> To the question posed as to 'whether the Church was deceived for so many centuries in not granting the priesthood to women', it could only be agreed that not only was the Church not deceived but the Church consciously condemned those who supported such claims.<sup>39</sup> The consultation came, was attended by a selected few, recommendations disseminated, and the consultation passed. It was some years before it was widely known that such a consultation had taken place. Were the papers of significance in moving forward the argument for women's ministry in the church? The only significance of women's participation was the fact that they were present, and that should the unusual practice of voting be required, their voting rights would be equal to the vote of a bishop. The collection of papers were eventually translated and published in 1992, four years after the meeting and following the WCC Seventh Assembly in Canberra, Australia. For some theologians there was little compromise in their attitudes towards women and what they considered significant within the life of the church. Rev Prof. Constantin Galeriu, from the Institute of Theology in Bucharest, Romania stated that:

women should be concerned not with assuming attributes that are not part of their identity, but with keeping and cultivating, deepening and discovery new values in their own identities. More attention needs to be given to the temptation of self-identification outside one's own mission... (reminding women that) the first to do so was Lucifer in his desire to take the place of God.<sup>40</sup>

Galeriu continued that it was not insignificant that the subjects of women's ordination, homosexuality and abortion were analysed together in various ecumenical bodies, and perceived this as harmful developments for which the religious conscience should take some responsibility. Does this mean that women seeking not only ordination, but also dialogue on

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>40</sup> Constantin Galeriu, 'The Orthodox Church and the Question of Admitting women to the Ordained ministry', *op.cit.*, p.58.

the social and moral issues affecting all people of faith, are in league with the fallen angels? Galeriu acknowledged that the emphasis on women's vocations had re-ignited interest in updating the ancient order of deaconesses, an order that existed in the Eastern Churches until the twelfth century. Nevertheless he did not pursue this proposal, rather he reverted to reminding women of their true vocation and place in the church:

The woman as mother, wife or as helper to the priest has her prototype in the Virgin Mary for if woman did not devote herself as mother to the personal development of the priest, there would be no true priests... the mission of every woman... is to be the mother of good children .<sup>41</sup>

Constantin Galeriu was supported in his views by another professor and theologian, Christos Voulgaris from Greece who concluded in his paper that man and woman occupy, by divine order, different places in creation because of 'man's priority to woman in creation; woman was made from man'; and that 'woman was from the beginning created to be a helper fit for man'. From these presumptions, Voulgaris concluded that 'man is woman's head.. man has authority over woman ... thus always woman occupies second place'.<sup>42</sup> Applying sacred and selective biblical texts to oppose growing secular influences has never been difficult for Fathers of the Church, in the East or the West. In present times, the rise of fundamentalism in all religious faiths continues to encourage a psychological and physical retreat from the 'world' by demanding ever increasing restrictions on women and endorsing more authority to men.

The Consultation in Rhodes raised many issues about the personhood of women and how the Church accepted and restricted certain roles for women in relation to the Church, to men and as individual women. The issue still remains both unresolved and an irritant for certain sections of the Orthodox church. What emerged in the papers and discussions presented to the Lambeth and Rhodes meetings in 1988 by the Orthodox theologians was the powerful influence of early church fathers, ethnicity, culture and tradition within the patriarchal societies where the Orthodox church is the national or majority church. Such

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.66.

<sup>42</sup> Christos Voulgaris, 'The Sacrament of Priesthood in the Holy Scriptures', op.cit., p.101.

influences are also evident in the churches in the *diaspora* which at times have exhibited a more rigid view of the faith and its authority over the believers. Influenced by their desire to maintain their authority, church hierarchs insist that women continue their submissive roles in the church, a position usually supported by their priests and laity, including women. As Virginia Wolfe asserted the man/woman relationship is one of patriarchal authority and natural submission of women for:

Women have served as looking glasses possessing the delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size... 'How necessary we are, and how threatening when we refuse to reflect the glory, when we criticize the image, and thereby reduce the authority when we question'.<sup>43</sup>

Without a movement and without capacity and opportunity to challenge the structures even at a parish level, the few Orthodox women who have raised issues in public forums, conferences and even in parish councils very soon find themselves ostracized or their church appointments terminated. In her criticisms of church hierarchy, Orthodox feminist Eva Topping asserted that 'the evidence was a wide-spread, fully developed anti-woman theology... (and that) androcentrism, patriarchal prejudice and pride lie deeply embedded in Orthodox tradition.'<sup>44</sup> A philologist and readily acknowledged as a scholar of Greek hymnography, her feminist challenges have not been well received by the Church. In 1987, Topping published a collection of her essays, *Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy*, containing both scholarly and general essays. One of very few Orthodox writers to challenge the Church by revealing the misogyny of the church fathers and the complicit agreement by the present fathers and theologians, her book, though small, has been claimed by many women as a valuable resource for translation and exegesis to be read with 'new eyes' by questioning Orthodox women.

The papers given by women at Rhodes did not expand upon the challenges already published by Eva Topping. Francoise Jeanlin, from the Russian Orthodox church in France, in her paper on 'the place of the Mother of God in Relation to the Ordination of Women'

<sup>43</sup> Virginia Wolfe, *A Room of One's Own*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1929 p.45-46.

<sup>44</sup> Eva C Topping, *Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy*, p.4

focused on the 'royal priesthood of believers' that is the priesthood of all the laity, men and women. '... but you are a chosen race; a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart...' (1 Pet. 2:9).<sup>45</sup> The image of Mary, according to Jeanlin, is of a 'complete Saint, a woman who never committed personal sin, a woman who attained the highest degree of holiness possible for a human being'.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, she was not designated an Apostle by her son even in her sanctity, therefore, claimed Jeanlin, 'there is no Marian foundation for women to ever be called upon to be priests or bishops'.<sup>47</sup>

The essay from Kyriaki FitzGerald was addressed to the delegates to provide some understanding of how the Orthodox might assess feminist theology. She firstly stated that the Orthodox, 'painfully lack a substantial response to the general issue of the participation of women in the life of the contemporary Church and the challenges of Feminist Theology in particular'.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, whilst acknowledging that the Orthodox need to be part of the debate, she is careful to place her scholarship within Tradition of the Orthodox church, including acceptance of male episcopacy and presbyterate, without possibilities of correction. Here she was supported by Sister Theologie, who asked:

Perhaps present-day woman- today's Eve- finds herself once again in a state of temptation similar to that of our ancestral mother in Paradise? Maybe her desire to taste of the forbidden fruit of priesthood is once again preparing her for the bitter taste of the first act of disobedience?<sup>49</sup>

FitzGerald had not moved in her position regarding women in priesthood and other vocations from her statement in 1983 that 'the Orthodox church, in her entire history, has never affirmed a female priesthood...<sup>50</sup> to disregard the living history and faith of the Church of Jesus Christ is ultimately to create a new religion altogether'.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, she asserted, that

<sup>45</sup> Francoise Jeanlin, 'The Place of the Mother of God, the Theotokos, in the Orthodox Church in Relation to the Ordination of Women', op.cit., p.134.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.137.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 142 & 154.

<sup>48</sup> Kyriaki FitzGerald, 'An Orthodox Assessment of Modern Feminist Theology', op.cit. p.287.

<sup>49</sup> Sister Theologie, 'Voices from the Monastic Life', op.cit., p.317.

<sup>50</sup> Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald, 'The ministry of Women in the Orthodox church: Some theological Presuppositions', in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol.20, no.4, Fall, 1983, p.573

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.574.



those churches which have created a totally new order in their churches by ordaining women, from the Orthodox point of view, are further alienating themselves from the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.<sup>52</sup>

Frieda Haddad addressed the mission of women in the modern world. She declared that 'it was a special task of womanhood to stop man in his ruthless pursuit of technology and put him face to face with his own dignity'.<sup>53</sup> By their actions to secure 'so-called equal rights with men', women have wandered far from the 'meek and mild spirit which in the sight of God is of great price'. The boisterous assemblies of the feminist movement, Haddad continued, fit well with the words of St Paul; 'women will listen to anybody and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth'. (2 Tim. 3:7).<sup>54</sup> Speaking from her context as a Middle East woman, Haddad stated that 'in a society in which soundless thundering are brewing in the depths of contemporary history... we are torn between God whom we seek to see but whom we do not see, and between the world which we only see too much'.<sup>55</sup> Haddad acknowledged the traditional roles of women, steeped in custom and culture of the Middle-East, and existing through the contemporary society at war in her own country of Lebanon and she appealed to women who live in the reality of the crucifixion 'to awake to her potential as man's helper in rebuilding a national entity grounded in justice, freedom and economic well-being'.<sup>56</sup>

Very Rev Dr Gennadios Limouris declared at Rhodes, that 'we Orthodox see the ordination of women not as part of this creative continuity, but as a violation of the apostolic faith and order of the Church'.<sup>57</sup> The words of heresy and violation have not been well received. In 1988, the issue of the ordination of women to the priesthood at Lambeth

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.574.

<sup>53</sup> Frieda Haddad, 'The mission of women in the Modern World. Woman in Contemporary Secularized Society', in Gennadios Limouris op cit. p.239

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.241.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.245.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.245.

<sup>57</sup> Gennadios Limouris, 'Orthodox Reactions to Non-Orthodox Positions in Support of the Ordination of women', op.cit., p.281. Executive Secretary of the consultation

Conference was still only a possibility within most provinces of the Anglican Church, an issue of little significance to the Papal Curia, an anathema for many Evangelical Protestant churches, but a growing issue amongst women including some Orthodox women across the ecumenical movement. However, nowhere in the essays of the Rhodes Consultation held some months later was any reference made to the possibilities of the Decade and Orthodox women taking up the issues from Rhodes and participating in ecumenical seminars in order to present the views of the Orthodox churches. That this involvement eventually occurred was due to the efforts of the Women's Unit, Protestant women and the very few ecumenically committed Orthodox women, of whom only Elisabeth Behr-Sigel was present at Rhodes. Without knowing any other reason, one must speculate that her presence was because she could not be ignored, rather than any desire, it is suggested, by the hierarchs and theologians to hear her arguments and exegesis on the possibilities for women in the Orthodox Church.

Kyriaki FitzGerald extended her criticisms of feminists to both their historical and theological perspective's which raise the issues of the authority of Scripture, and the relationship of Scripture and Tradition. For the Orthodox, any correction of the Scriptures, as revealed through the scholarship of feminist theologians, 'violate the integrity of Scripture and the authority of the Church as guardian and interpreter of the Scriptures'.<sup>58</sup> She was continuing in accordance with the Greek Orthodox Philoptochos at their meeting in San Francisco in 1982 who stated:

For Orthodox women to seek and/or attain ordination to the priesthood would constitute a violation of the Orthodox tradition of faith. Consequently, Greek Orthodox women categorically and unequivocally reject any such innovation in the Christian Orthodox church.<sup>59</sup>

For the Orthodox one of the most disturbing trends, particularly experienced within their ecumenical dialogue, is the use of inclusive language when addressing God, which has received considerable attention from both Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars. These

<sup>58</sup> Kyriaki FitzGerald, 'Modern feminist theology', *op.cit.* p.292.

<sup>59</sup> Alice Nicas, Philoptochos Position Paper- Moral Issues. 'Focus on the Family, Philoptochos Biennial Convention, 4-9 July 1982, p.76.

scholars assert that patriarchy has been affirmed as the natural state of human relationships, because God, referred to as 'Father' is the way in which the church has used the male God to keep women in their place. The issue of inclusive language is not only in reference and understanding of the Holy Trinity, it also goes to the daily use within the Church, and in the interpretation of Scriptures, and daily prayer life, that women find themselves outside, or excluded, by masculine images and masculine language. For women in the West, such exclusion has been the reason many have cited for leaving the Church. Kyriaki FitzGerald concluded that the Orthodox in the past had confronted many heresies by responding with positive statements and criticizing the negative aspects of the heretical theologies. In light of the more accommodating tone of John Erickson's paper, there seems to be little to commend these conclusions.

The delegates, while praising the special charisms of women in the service of the whole *pleroma* of the Church, nevertheless did acknowledge that there was a need to confess in honesty and humility that 'the Church has not been always and everywhere able to counteract effectively ideas, manners and customs, historical developments and social conditions which eventually turned against women' .<sup>60</sup> Accordingly the delegates recommended 'the Church should re-examine potential data, views and actions, which do not agree with her theological and ecclesiological principles, but have intruded from outside and being in fact perpetuated are possible to be taken as demeaning the woman'.<sup>61</sup> The Rhodes meeting reported no major theological opposition to the Orthodox tradition regarding ordination of women. However, in one of the workshop reports it is disconcerting to read that the fulfilling of the Levitical priesthood of ancient Law by the male members of the People of God, was transferred and fulfilled in Christ and therefore participants in his priesthood, who stand in the place of Christ must be male.

According to an explicit ordinance of the Law, the animals which were chosen for the sacrifice had to be definitely male. Thus that which the Son and Logos of God assumed, in order to offer it to God, had to be definitely male. Thus,

<sup>60</sup> Rhodes Consultation, Report B, p.2. Chairman: Protospesbyter Vitali Borovoy.

<sup>61</sup> Rhodes Consultation, Report B, p.3.

Christ assumed human nature in its male form and established the priest as mediator between God and humanity in his own person. Consequently, the partakers of his sanctifying grace must also be male.<sup>62</sup>

These words are reflections from the early church fathers as though no knowledge or intellect had been applied to theological thinking since the third century. The revelation of particular opinions written by the saintly fathers about women comes as a shock in the late twentieth century, as their works have not been disputed by worldly scholars of the present era. St Clement of Alexandria in the third century believed that 'by removing a rib from Adam to create Eve, God forever purged males of all weakness so that males are the personification of wholeness and perfection as opposed to females who are left fractured and imperfect'.<sup>63</sup> While three centuries later St Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria could add to the negative view of the Church about women by stating that 'the male must always rule; the female must everywhere remain in second class'.<sup>64</sup> As well as the opinions of the early fathers as to the unworthiness of women, in keeping with such attitudes, Topping asserts that, 'because of our sex, women are prohibited from serving and worshipping God at the altar resulting in separation and exclusion and alienation from the body of Christ'.<sup>65</sup> While this separation and alienation of women as a second class person finds its ultimate prohibition in the denial of women to the priesthood there are also many other places in the church and Orthodox societies that deny women equality even in the realm of service and spiritual life.

By maintaining that the priest is the image of Christ, a man not a woman, and that there is no historical precedent for women priests, John Pobee asks those in opposition 'is the silence of history a *locus theologicus* or an accident of history and culture that leads to a perverse refusal to allow new things to come to our consciousness?'<sup>66</sup> For women in the Orthodox churches, this question is most pertinent. Until recent times, the esoteric

<sup>62</sup> Rhodes Consultation, Report A, p.4. Chairman, +Metropolitan Meletios of Nicopolis and Preveza.

<sup>63</sup> Eva C Topping, *Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy*, p.5. PG 8.col. 581A-B.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5. PG 68.col.1068C.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.PG

<sup>66</sup> John S Pobee, *Culture, women and theology*, ISPCK :Delhi, 1994, p.12.

theological arguments have been left to theologians who may speak amongst themselves and more often than not continue to hold to ancient teachings and practices particularly on the issues affecting women. However, in contemporary society and because of the real need to experience more fully the sense of a spiritual and physical presence in the Church, women, both lay and theologically educated, have more readily addressed the teachings of the Church, the effects of culture and tradition as experienced throughout history by women in their church life.

Metropolitan Anthony of Sourouzh addressed the London School of Economics in 1989 with a more conciliatory attitude towards the discussion of ordination and equality for women in the laity, saying 'there is a conviction for the need to rethink the problem globally, with courage, without prejudice and creatively. There is a hope that the door will one day open for women called to the sacramental priesthood and even the episcopate'.<sup>67</sup> His comments gathered a positive response in 1993 from Olivier Clement, a theologian from St Serge Russian Orthodox community in Paris who also stated:

my opinion- and I know that very few Orthodox theologians share it- is that there are no strictly theological reasons to bar women from the priesthood, (and that) traditional attitudes towards women has resulted in a pseudo-theological justification in many instances of imposed inferiority status on woman for 2000 years in marriage, church affairs, and indirectly, education and society'.<sup>68</sup>

The negative attitudes and practices in regard to the nature and roles of women in Orthodox culture and tradition are endured in addition to the rules of Canon Law and Sacred Tradition well practised by the patriarchy in the Church. Furthermore, in societies where women have been allocated the active nurturing and ritualized passive roles then the hierarchy and authority figures will continue to resist change, and continue to argue that 'women should understand, mediate, conciliate, appease and endure, rather than resist and confront'.<sup>69</sup> Dale Spender, feminist and social historian, emphasizes that 'it is men who have decreed that women should occupy a different place from themselves in a patriarchal universe, but men in

<sup>67</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, Oakwood Press: Redondo Beach CA, 1991

<sup>68</sup> *Terre des Femmes*, No 2 1993, pp.33-34.

<sup>69</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, p.17.

fact have no knowledge what it is to be in that different place' <sup>70</sup> In addition, she asserts that in order for patriarchy to remain as the 'norm' in human society, (and indeed the church), it is necessary that women remain invisible, their experience and nature rendered insignificant except in fulfilling the roles of service assigned them by patriarchy. <sup>71</sup>

Motherhood and nurturing are not always the fulfilment of women's expectations of life, but may well be included amongst their hopes and aspirations. Longevity and education have opened and widened the horizons of women in the last generation. Patriarchal authority that weighs upon and demands from their lives becomes increasingly irrelevant as women mature and question both their physical and spiritual existence. The desire to experience a meaningful and fulfilling lifetime is not entirely reliant on attaching oneself to the patriarchy, whether it be in family, in relationship or in the church. Judged essential for worthiness, honour of family and the only possibility for generations of women before them. Contemporary theologians and clergy will need to reconsider the attitude towards women, as some few have already realized, taking into account the changing parameters of women's lives.

### **Cairo steering committee - Church and Culture**

In March 1989, a steering committee appointed by the Women's Unit at the WCC, organised and met in Cairo, Egypt, to discuss the proposed consultation agenda and theme for the next Orthodox women's consultation. The meeting took place after the Rhodes symposium on 'the place of women in the church' where many views were stated concerning what was and what was not possible for Orthodox women and their ministries. The agenda in Cairo, particularly in view of the issue of the ordination of women, was taken from the ecumenical environment and placed under the auspices of the Orthodox member churches, where recommendations and proposals could as in the past be easily ignored or resisted. The small group of women invited to the Cairo meeting represented both Eastern and

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<sup>70</sup> Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas and What Men have done with them*, Ark: London, 1982, p.5.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

Oriental families of the Orthodox Church and they brought traditional and modern attitudes to the planning for the meeting of the Orthodox Women's Consultation and its contribution to the EDCSW. The women were not hampered in the meeting by the presence of a male priest or layman, perceived by some women as present to ensure the agenda was kept within strict guidelines.

The expectation from the steering committee in Cairo was for a move by Orthodox women to open up discussion about their real presence or invisibility in the Church according to their culture and tradition. It had been in the interest of maintaining control and authority as the Church, that patriarchy has had the power to disassociate from both the words and wisdom of women unless they are complimentary to the words and actions of men of the church. The problem for most women in the church, alleges Dale Spender in her analysis of nineteenth century writer Matilda Joslyn Gage, remains constant in all churches in the late twentieth century.

Women are intent on reform (charity and philanthropy), not structures; they avoid confrontation for it betrays their feminine characteristics; they use feminine wiles of persuasion rather than rebellion, and compromise rather than revolution, for this maintains the 'status quo' of upholding patriarchy and supporting submission of women in spirit and in body.<sup>72</sup>

From the early centuries, the sanctification of women has relied on their martyrdom and their extreme asceticism that focused on expunging their feminine nature and physical body, in order to be elevated spiritually to the masculine. Such women continue to be placed before late twentieth century women of the church as role models they should be constantly mindful of, if not to emulate, in order to fulfil their potential within the church. When women choose to use their intellect in ways not approved by the Church, the response from patriarchy is to 'disparage the woman activist, writer, thinker - to insult, alienate, to dismiss, ignore, exclude, expel, and embark on personal attacks on women's appearance, her lifestyle and her failure's'.<sup>73</sup> The accusations of not being 'truly Orthodox' are easily addressed to

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<sup>72</sup> Matilda Joslyn Gage, *Women, Church and State*, original 1893, reprinted 1980, Persephone Press; Watertown, MA, p.334.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p.338.

women endeavouring to work within the church but whose actions are not acceptable to clergy and hierarchs. Such criticisms are especially addressed to many women who have come into the church, through choice or marriage and have included women of diverse cultures as well. From these women the Church expects the most committed acceptance of church teachings and a spiritual obedience to the clergy at times in excess to their relationships with the 'cradle-Orthodox'. It is an irony to say the least, that many of the most influential and provocative modern Orthodox theologians and clergy in France, England and America are either converts into the Orthodox church or have studied theology in a range of ecumenical seminaries and universities. This is of course an issue for the Orthodox Church. Converts bring their own cultural 'baggage', which is sometimes beneficial to their 'new' church but can also be perceived and accused by traditional Orthodox as being too radical or too Protestant or even becoming too fundamentalist in their desire to become truly Orthodox in faith. Ecumenism brings open-mind and understanding of other traditions in relation to the Orthodox church.

However, for the small group of Orthodox women gathered in Cairo, converts were not the concern. They were asked by the Director of the Women's Unit, Anna Karin Hammar, an ordained Lutheran minister from Sweden, to articulate the specific problems for women in their own countries as well as proposing the most important themes in order to co-ordinate a much wider consultation to take place in Crete.<sup>74</sup> The most experienced delegate outside Egypt in ecumenism was Constance Tarasar who was able to reflect her experiences not only from the Orthodox church in America but also as an Orthodox woman involved in the ecumenical movement and familiar in particular with the Stony Point meeting in 1987.<sup>75</sup> Her work had not been involved specifically for the women's movement, rather as an Orthodox woman committed to the ecumenical movement despite difficulties emanating from being a minority delegate at many ecumenical meetings and consultations.

<sup>74</sup> The following notes are taken from unpublished papers and records from Cairo Steering committee, January 1989 in possession of Leonie B Liveris, Perth, Australia.

<sup>75</sup> Constance Tarasar was the first Orthodox woman to graduate with an education degree and then Master of Divinity degree from St Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary in New York



Unfortunately and probably for either political reasons or the strict guidelines for visa and entry to Egypt, the women invited from USSR, Romania and Poland were not able to attend.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless amongst the few women present, there were wide disparities between the reports of the situation for women in various jurisdictions, although a certain level of exclusion was obvious in all jurisdictions. In the USA women were able to enter theological seminaries and were active in church administration, parish councils and in some jurisdictions in the liturgical life of the Church. Women were music and choir directors, theologians, psycho-therapists and educators. However, concern was expressed that there were few church positions for women, though often better qualified than laymen, as though the Church did not know how to use their skills and knowledge. The issues of disparities between jurisdictions, language difficulties of recent generations and the growing influence of 'converts' who viewed progress in the Church as a betrayal of Orthodox teachings and practice are problems in America.

In India, churchwomen were well educated and forward thinking in their secular work and professions. However, in a report received from Mary Thomas, a sociology professor and member of the church community of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox church she noted that while women could avail themselves of a general orientation course at the theological seminary, and they had achieved very good results, in general women had no representation on General management or Synod of the church; women had no voting rights on parish councils; and no access to tertiary theological education. The prominent and traditional women's association, Martha Mariam Vanitha Samujam (founded in 1930) had concerns for society and ecumenical relations. However it was not autonomous, and was directly controlled and supervised by the Holy Synod of the Church. The president of the women's association was the bishop, who was appointed to preside over diocesan meetings while the priest presided at the parish meetings. The women's wing of the Orthodox church

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<sup>76</sup> Other delegates to the Cairo meeting also had problems when informed their passport expiry date had to be valid at least six months after leaving Egypt. The churches were also late in nominating their delegates leaving the WCC office with little time or opportunity to intervene on behalf of the women. This was not the first time that Orthodox women were unable to attend meetings, sending apologies almost at the last minute.

played no direct part in the struggle of Christian women in Kerala within the church in matters of succession and inheritance dowry; divorce or other family, moral and social concerns, yet they participated in both action and organisation at an ecumenical level on the same issues. <sup>77</sup>

In addition to the report provided from Professor Mary Thomas, Dr. Annamma Varghese, a heart specialist, expanded on issues of discrimination against women. From birth women were taught to serve and be submissive to the men of their family, community and church. The most important role for a woman was to ensure prosperity, peace and harmony in the home, and to pray in the church. Two issues of particular concern for women in India were a result of centuries old cultural practices. The first had been resolved for women in 1986 when women protested the discrimination when bringing their new child to church at forty days old. While the boy child remained the first to be baptized after Epiphany, girl children could be taken into the sanctuary for naming. The Catholics, Metropolitans and the Holy Synod responded to the appeals of Indian women against the discrimination which still continues in other Orthodox churches. In 1988, permission was granted for girls to read the Bible during Sunday worship. <sup>78</sup> The second concern, now often hidden from public view, that the demand for dowry, although outlawed by the Indian government, continued within church families. As Varghese noted:

the Syrian Christian woman does not have equal rights for her paternal assets. Once married, with or without a dowry, she loses all her rights in her father's house and is totally at the mercy of her husband and in-laws. If the latter is not congenial, she can be totally insecure. The Church had not condemned the practice as in some instances it receives a percentage of the dowry after the marriage. The Church does not protest the situation for women as it does not want hostility from influential men in their communities. <sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Mary Thomas, Women's Commission, Kerala Council of Churches. Report for the Cairo meeting, March 1989.

<sup>78</sup> Mary Thomas reported at the Crete meeting, January 1990, that this permission had not been taken up by young women as much by family pressure considering it totally inappropriate. She had not read at services in India, but had read in churches outside India.

<sup>79</sup> Annamma Varghese, 'Women's concerns in the Church from an Orthodox perspective', Cairo, March 1989.

The dowry problem had also meant many women remaining unmarried as the qualities of the woman were considered secondary to the possibilities of a dowry payment, and continued income and goods.<sup>80</sup> While the issue of dowry in this instance is particularly relevant in the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, dowry has also been important in other Orthodox traditions and cultures. In Perth, Western Australia, the major population of Greek Orthodox migrated from the island of Castellorizo in the Dodecanese. The dowry, or *prika*, in earlier years hopefully consisting of property, money, livestock and the traditional hope chest of linens, clothes and house furnishings, was an essential consideration when marriage negotiations were undertaken between families. However, as John Yiannakis claims: 'dowries were the property transactions between males and the bride-to-be merely part of the package'.<sup>81</sup> While not openly discussed, the community were usually aware of the value of the *prika*, often as a matter of pride to the bride's family and good fortune for the groom's family. The marriages arranged by parents, or through another relative as go-between, required the daughter to be virgin and her reputation safeguarded in order to arrange honourable marriages. Even in the 1970s young Greek women in Perth had less freedom and independence than their brothers, most of their limited social life was within the community and their escort most often a brother or male cousin.<sup>82</sup>

In Australia there was no theological education available for Greek Orthodox women and it was not known if any woman had studied in America at that time, but it was highly unlikely due to the cost of studying at a private university or seminary overseas. Orthodox communities and parishes were ethnic based, with little co-operation between the various groups; and there were massive problems between old established communities, new arrivals and the Archdiocese. The *diaspora* of Australia remains decades behind America, and the ladies' auxiliaries exist for the purpose of fund raising and building churches as their most important task as it was for other mainstream churches in Australia until the 1970s. In some

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<sup>80</sup> In recent years the number of bride deaths by drowning and fire, sometimes murder and others by suicide, has risen considerably in India. The reasons are stated as being the lack of dowry and the greed of the groom and his family for more money and goods.

<sup>81</sup> John Yiannakis, *Megisti in the Antipodes*, Hesperian Press: Perth, 1996, p.75.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p.191.

Orthodox churches, the Russian, Ukrainian and Antiochian for instance, women have served as readers and chanters and full members of the church choir. Perhaps this is due as much to the very small congregations in contrast to the Greek Orthodox church which has large communities and parishes throughout Australia and men to serve readily in those roles. There are active feminists in Greek communities in Australia, but they are not activists on behalf of women in church affairs arguing against discriminatory practices. Perhaps this is because women perceive such questioning as against 'the family values' and parents, rather than the Church. To question the authority of the church would be to question the authority of the mother who had taught the tradition and cultural practices would not be considered in the best interest of the family. There is no activist or feminist network of Orthodox women in Australia, and charity and philanthropy, together with fundraising for the Church and church schools are both the focus and the social life for Orthodox women.

The women from the Coptic Orthodox church informed the group of their place in the church and in Egyptian society. As a minority religion in a Moslem country, the Christians were careful to keep strictly to their own community and certain discriminatory practices were imposed on their women in order it was claimed 'not to draw attention to them'. Salwa Mureos, a medical doctor, stated that while the Church was a great strength, it also imposed a negative status upon its women. In the wedding ceremony, for instance, the bride is told to be absolutely obedient to her husband, 'and to call him "my master" as Sarah called Abraham.' Women were officially forbidden to attend Mass when menstruating, they sat separately in Church and received communion after the men; a woman stayed away from the church for eighty days after the birth of a daughter but only forty days after the birth of a son. In common with nearly every other Orthodox church, the girl child was not taken into the sanctuary. Officially, women were not permitted to speak in the church. However in general society education was accepted by Coptic Orthodox families as essential, and both girls and boys who were encouraged to seek university degrees, which in turn become important criteria for marriage. From 1962, women could attend theological seminaries, and since 1974, general degrees and PhD's have been awarded to women. By 1990, there were

five women on staff at the theological seminary lecturing church history, pastoral issues and language. Outside the church, many Coptic Orthodox women take a leading role in social concerns particularly amongst the rural and slum areas, focusing on health, family planning, illiteracy and specific teachings to take the place of traditional attitudes to raising girl children.

Of considerable concern to many women were the results of the research of Marie Assaad that female circumcision was also practiced within Coptic Orthodox families especially in rural areas. In 1980, Marie Assaad was one of the first women to write on the social implications of the practice of female circumcision in Egypt performed on both Moslem and Christian girls before puberty, a practice originating long before Christianity and Islam, although it is commonly believed to be an Islamic tradition.<sup>83</sup> The purpose was to maintain female modesty and chastity, only to be broken on her wedding night when the *daya* (traditional midwife) was called upon to deflower both the Christian and Muslim girls. In one case study the young Coptic Orthodox woman stated: "The handkerchief stained with the girl's blood is shown around to the accompaniment of drums, music and acclaim. I don't think the government ever interferes to stop this brutal deflowering custom: why should it then not forbid female circumcision?"<sup>84</sup> Marie Assaad acknowledged that religious leaders had spoken against female circumcision, but she believed that tradition and family practice were much stronger forces and that the most important agent of change would be better education for girls, and boys, especially regarding their own sexuality and moral standards which are the same whether circumcised or not.<sup>85</sup>

A report in 1998 indicated that this practice still remains amongst Copts, noting that the Coptic leadership has maintained total silence on the subject whilst the practice of clitoridectomy and infibulation continue. In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the report noted

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<sup>83</sup> Marie B Assaad, 'Female Circumcision in Egypt: Social Implications, Current Research and Prospects for change', in *Studies in Family Planning*, 11:1, January 1980.p.5.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

that 'some priests consider a woman unclean if she is not circumcised and may refuse to let her enter their church'.<sup>86</sup> The women expressed their concern that the men in their society lived in an 'oriental culture' and saw nothing wrong with having the right to define and determine the feelings and thoughts of women without consulting them. Patriarchy and authority were entrenched to the point where men exercised complete power over women's right to control their own bodies. Two thousand years of patriarchal control, writes Rosemary Ruether, has 'ensured male prerogative in everything and is defended in civil and ecclesiastical law in addition to denying women those capacities for autonomous selfhood, decision making and critical intelligence that remain monopolized by males'.<sup>87</sup>

In one important aspect of the Orthodox church, the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch His Holiness Shenouda III supported an authentic ordained ministry for women. In 1981, twenty-four women were consecrated deaconesses. One order of deaconess comprised of widows or women who had passed through menstruation, were over forty years of age, had the time and private income to serve, were referred to as *tamev*, 'mother' or *taxarni*, meaning sister. These women were in charge of the discipline of the church as far as women were concerned, 'to check their way of dress and that the ladies were behaving in a respectful manner taking the Eucharist' and in the preparation for baptisms, particularly assisting the mother, but not to help the priest during the sacramental services of baptism and chrismation.<sup>88</sup> In addition the deaconess had the social responsibility of visiting the sick and knowing when women had not attended church. These women had been blessed for their work by Pope Shenouda and twelve bishops with the laying of hands, were given new names, wore a robe and distinctive headgear during church services. They did not receive communion at the altar and were only permitted to address women's meetings. In addition, these deaconesses lived in Cairo in different districts of the city. They usually continued to

<sup>86</sup> *A Call for Global Action*, 2nd Edition, UNICEF report, 1998, p.32. Men are also required to be circumcised in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

<sup>87</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk*, p.174-175.

<sup>88</sup> Chrismation occurs during the baptism and is the anointing of the holy chrism. For baptized converts only the sacrament of chrismation is required for acceptance into the Orthodox Church.

live in their family home and were not financially supported by the church. This meant that only a certain class or economically independent woman could serve in this order of service.

The other group of deaconesses were more akin to the early church where women had served until the seventh century in the Coptic Church until under Muslim control Christian women were forced to stay within the family environment. Pope Shanouda required these women to be university educated and to have worked in a secular position before being blessed for their work. He also required the women to live in community as celibates for six or seven years in order to test their vocation, before taking vows of obedience, poverty and chastity. They wore a habit of grey and a head veil. These deaconesses had more freedom to speak to the community, but no authority to speak without permission of the priest. If in the future the bishops agreed, the women might be consecrated as deaconesses with the same rights and responsibilities as the deaconesses of the early church. Pope Shanouda refuted the notion of sacramental ordination for that was only applied to deacons and priests.

In 1990, there were over one hundred and fifty women in their twenties who had chosen to be 'consecrated'. These women lived in 'mother houses' and had their own discipline and rhythm of prayer life. Pope Shanouda suggested that the deaconesses and 'consecrated' young women, may work in communities in the same manner as nuns/sisters of the Catholic Church. However, unlike the acceptance that their daughters enter the convents as nuns, or be married, many families were cautious about their daughters becoming consecrated 'girls' as their future was uncertain, and any disagreement with the priest or bishop would mean she could not serve the church in that capacity. There are many women's monasteries in Egypt where their life is for prayer, worship and solitude and visiting a 'spiritual mother' is a well-known practice amongst the pious Orthodox. In addition, the priest's wife takes a role in community, especially with families and advising young women and confronting the considerable problems associated with Christian women wishing to convert to Islam and marry Moslem men.

Anna Karin Hammar later reported that a positive result from the committee meeting in Cairo was that for the first time, the World Day of Prayer service was held in the Coptic Orthodox Church of St Mary in Heliopolis. Dr Hoda Banham, women's co-ordinator of MECC and a woman from the Coptic Evangelical Church led the service, a Roman Catholic priest preached the sermon and a Coptic Orthodox priest said the blessing:

It was considered an achievement by the Protestant women to be in an Orthodox Church. The tense relationships between some of the fundamentalist Presbyterian Christians and Christians from other churches, in particular from the Orthodox church, became obvious during informal talks after the service. From both the Presbyterian and Coptic Orthodox churches some members were matching the fundamentalism of some of the Muslim believers, and women were expressing their concerns at this situation.<sup>89</sup>

The members of the steering committee, attended the women's service and later, together with women active in the church in Cairo, were invited to a public meeting of over three thousand Coptic Christians. The women were seated on the stage opposite the monks and priests of the church while Pope Shanouda was asked questions on morality and Orthodox teachings. It was not made clear whether the women were present as an example of the Pope's commitment to women or whether to be made aware that their role in public was to be silent. At a later private audience, Anna Karin Hammar, in her role as a Director from the WCC, began the discussion with the question regarding women's ministry and sacramental priesthood. Pope Shenouda was more open to expressing his attitudes towards women than many other Orthodox hierarchs but there was a line to be drawn. Pope Shanouda referred to the role of monastics from the early centuries, including women who had taken the names of men when they entered and were known as men. There were manuscripts still stored in monasteries awaiting translations and examination that may reveal far more about the desert mothers. As for his attitude towards the ordination of women he stated that in reference to the recent consecration of Episcopalian Bishop Barbara Harris in America, 'it was not a victory for women or the Church but a breaking of the divine law'.<sup>90</sup> Anna Karin Hammar

<sup>89</sup> Report, Ad.Hoc Orthodox Decade Advisory Group', Cairo, Egypt, 3-7 March 1989.

<sup>90</sup> Notes taken by candidate during the private audience with HH Pope Shanouda III, 28 March 1989.



noted in her report, that 'officially women cannot speak in meetings when men are present, but it happens anyway... many women who spoke were pioneers in their church... it was clear that Pope Shanouda understood and recognized the crucial contributions women are providing to their church and society'.<sup>91</sup>

Criticisms of the Cairo meeting focused on the method of discussion and the final decision of the issues recommended for debate in Crete. Marjatta Venkula, from the Orthodox Church of Finland, criticized the lack of presence of stronger Orthodox women amongst the participants and that the ideas developed needed a stronger Orthodox tone. Orthodox women, she stated, 'had difficulties to make ourselves understood in a somewhat Protestant and feminist atmosphere... therefore the process of work was a little repressive and not as fruitful had it been more authentically Orthodox'.<sup>92</sup> For Venkula, Orthodox women, 'should not use the Western world view, language or quasi-psychological working methods for it prevented the promotion of women's work in the Orthodox Church and the ecumenical movement'.<sup>93</sup> She offered a note of caution in regard to the selected issues for Crete especially on human sexuality, in particular its 'delicate nature' citing the problem faced by women who in their cultural context faced the dilemma on how to discuss such matters without being thrown out of the church.<sup>94</sup> Her concerns were relevant and in keeping with Alexander Schmemmann, who wrote:

in Orthodox ecumenical discussions we find ourselves caught within western presuppositions that the Western experience, theological categories and thought forms are universal and therefore constitute the self-evident framework and terms of reference for the entire ecumenical endeavour.<sup>95</sup>

However, the secondary role of women in society and family, and in church practices, cannot be excused because they are framed within Eastern church experience, theology and thought forms. Given the opportunity to explore the possibilities for serious discussion and new

<sup>91</sup> Cairo Advisory Group meeting, March 1989.

<sup>92</sup> Marjatta Venkula, *The Orthodox Woman and Ecumenical Work*, Helsinki, 31 May 1989, p.2.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>95</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, 'The Ecumenical Agony', in *Church, World, and Mission*, SVSPress: New York, 1979.

recommendations to the Church in the near future, the sub-themes of Ministry, Human Sexuality and Participation and Decision-Making were chosen for the following Orthodox Women's Consultation on 'Church and Culture' to be held at the Orthodox Academy, Chania in Crete. In order to critically analyse these issues, it was understood that women might well assert their validity of experience and refuse to be intimidated in the telling of both the personal and their communal exclusion. The Crete Consultation could well be the first experience of Orthodox women reviewing and questioning patriarchal values and controls. Exposure of cultural practices and attitudes in various traditions could bring Orthodox women closer together as a force for change. The tools of analysis, provided in the main by western scholars, feminist and others, cannot be disregarded when Orthodox women ask the right question of the evidence of discrimination in the Church. The role of Eastern Orthodox scholars, whether in the East or the West, is to find the answer within their context that explains why and how such conditions, attitudes and practices continue to exist.

Since 1981, when the Community of Women and Men in the Church study was the focus of the Sheffield consultation and report, Orthodox women had become increasingly aware of the questions, challenges and demands women were making within other denominations and of the ecumenical movement. Despite the negative attitudes and assertions of patriarchal authority from theologians and clergy during the decade, Orthodox women at the meeting at Cairo, despite their various jurisdictions and experiences, established an agenda that included the complex issue of ministry. Women's ministry needed in-depth theological discussion and the input and scholarship from women and not only theologians and clerics. Women wanted their ministry to be widened and to include all women, not only those who were called to monastic orders or possibilities of the diaconate. It was expected that the issue of human sexuality would address the many aspects and complexities of human relationships and the way in which the Orthodox churches both taught and imposed attitudes of discrimination against women, their sexuality and gender specific exclusions. The final problem was to focus on participation and decision-making process within church life and the extended community in which the church had its authority. In Greece, Russia, Romania and

Egypt for instance, to be a Christian for the highest proportion of the population meant that was being a member of the Orthodox church. However, in the *diaspora*, being a Christian, let alone an Orthodox, quite often means something different and the rules of the church become less important in the wider milieu of society. How the delegates finally addressed the topics to decide on conclusions and recommendations reveals the level of influence and authority of Orthodox teachings, culture and tradition.

## Chapter Six

### Church and Culture : Human sexuality, Ministry and Participation

By the early nineteen nineties there were a few Orthodox women prepared to think and speak theologically, sociologically and historically, whenever they met to discuss the major concerns facing women in the church and society, albeit within traditional parameters of acceptable ministries for women. The barriers to various endeavours to encourage Orthodox women to dialogue in their relationships with women in the Protestant churches are examined in addition to the formulation of Orthodox programmes and action throughout the decade. This chapter analyses the three issues of concern: human sexuality, ministry of women and the participation and decision making of women in the church, that were the focus of discussion and recommendations from the Crete Consultation together with the aims of the Ecumenical Decade through the series of seminars at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey.

#### From Cairo to Crete - setting the agenda

In order for Orthodox women to challenge the teachings of the Church that recognise the 'charisms' of women, but not their intellectual and spiritual equality with men, there is a demand for using a 'feminist hermeneutics of suspicion' of canon law and scriptural interpretation, and a critical analysis of the practices of hierarchy and patriarchy. As Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza declares: 'the adoption of a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' methodology does not pre-suppose a utopian feminist authority and truth but begins with the simple assumption that biblical texts and interpretations are androcentric and serve patriarchal functions. <sup>1</sup> When her assertions are placed alongside the secular claims of Adrienne Rich that:

Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men - by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labour - determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, SCM: London, 1983, p.12.

<sup>2</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*, Virago Press: London, 1977, p.57.

then Orthodox women have many questions to ask of their place within the Church. The Rhodes Consultation had not answered these questions although theologians and clergy alike acknowledged there was need for some new understandings of women's place, but no original nor challenging ideas were forthcoming. The expectations of the WCC Women's Unit was for forward planning resolutions to emerge from the Crete Consultation, and be the catalysts to encourage the best from Orthodox women from the best of Orthodox teachings and practices. Their expectations were not fulfilled, although the topics chosen for debate had possibilities for reform and reformation. Matilda Joslyn Gage had rightly claimed a century before that the result of the Church teaching woman the inferiority of her sex and her natural subordination to man, was that women readily accepted that 'her very entrance into Heaven was made dependent upon some man as mediator between her and the Saviour, as 'the Church has preached'.<sup>3</sup>

During earlier discussions on the role of women in the Orthodox Church, Archimandrite Chrysostomos perceived the lack of the essential characteristic of spirituality which permeated throughout the teachings of the Early Church fathers. The lack of spirituality, he alleged, had lead to 'immoderate, worldly and secular discussions detached from the inner life and spiritual experience'.<sup>4</sup> He expressed his shock at the 'growing popularity of extremist feminist views amongst Orthodox women', who had challenged his worthiness to the priesthood whilst he considered women unworthy of ordination. He further criticized a woman who had declared her worthiness to be a priest and referred to the Holy Fathers of the Church as a band of 'male chauvinists' trying to maintain power of office by constant denigration of women. The Archimandrite was apologetic for being critical of women speaking for ordination, but claimed his comments were a necessary ill.<sup>5</sup> Deborah Belonick also warned the Orthodox faithful against feminist theologians adjusting mainstream Christian thought by 'adding a "woman's touch" in order to wrest Christianity from centuries of patriarchal prison'.<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to find

<sup>3</sup> Matilda Joslyn Gage, *Woman Church and State*, (orig. 1893), Ayer: Salem 1992, p.544.

<sup>4</sup> Archimandrite Chrysostomos, 'Women in the Orthodox Church: Brief comments from a spiritual perspective', in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol.26, no.3, Fall 1981, p.193.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.194.

<sup>6</sup> Deborah Belonick, 'The spirit of the Female Priesthood', in Thomas Hopko (ed.), *Women and Priesthood*, SVSP: Crestwood, NY, 1983, p.136.

who the feminist Orthodox women were during the 1980s but one can suggest that any woman who criticized the hierarchy might well have been named a radical feminist and considered outside the Church.

Already aware of the impossibilities for women of exercising public authority, it is little wonder that the recommendations for action that emanated from Crete continued to be couched in conservative and traditional terminology. Orthodox women would not align themselves either in action or in words with the radical expression of revolt exercised so successfully by their sisters in other communions. This is not to say that all the issues discussed were conservative nor that discussion lacked challenging, or indeed radical ideas during the debates. The issue of human sexuality alone, raised social, ethical, theological and personal dilemmas for women delegates. The influence of culture and tradition, and indeed, whether women were living in the homeland or the *diaspora* directed the discussions in various ways. What emerged overall was the measure of prohibitions against women on account of their gender and fecundity. What lessons women had learned throughout history were from the Fathers of the Church, from glorious Byzantium, the present day theologians influenced by their own ethnic culture and often inadequately trained parish priests. It was obvious for the few forward thinking women in Crete, that women continued to accept their secondary role in the embrace and importance of motherhood, service and submission. Challenges to the church by women who cared and desired change, would meet centuries of entrenched belief and practices, in the local parishes, from the bishop's office and the seminaries and monasteries.

Notwithstanding the conservative position of the Orthodox churches, the programme for the Ecumenical Decade had been endorsed by the WCC Central Committee which included all the Orthodox member churches. The aims of the WCC Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women were made clear to the member churches and church women immediately following the launch of the Decade at Easter 1988. The aims expressed the hope of:

- empowering women to challenge oppressive structures in the global community, their country and their church;
- affirming - through shared leadership and decision-making, theology and spirituality - the decisive contributions of women in churches and communities;
- giving visibility to women's perspectives and actions in the work and struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation;
- enabling the churches to free themselves from racism, sexism and classism, from teachings and practices that discriminate against women, and
- encouraging the churches to take actions in solidarity with women.<sup>7</sup>

The recommendations to the church leaders were wide ranging and as expected were interpreted in many different ways, according to tradition, culture and existing structures of member churches. Whilst it was possible for some churches, especially in North America and Europe, to propose positive actions in solidarity with women, from the beginning the Orthodox churches had great difficulty with the terms used to place the Decade in context with the contemporary movement of women in the church. For the Orthodox, the terms 'solidarity', 'empowerment' and 'oppressive structure', conjured up a Decade of confrontation, change and challenge.

Following the ecumenical meeting in Stony Point, New York, in November 1987 addressed by the Rev. Anna Karin Hammar, Orthodox spokeswoman, of whom three were present at the Crete meeting, expressed their concern with the proposed agenda for the next ten years. They explained at Stony Point, the Orthodox concept of hierarchy as something given 'from above' (by God) and 'from within' (by the Church's members) to those placed in leadership; it does not connote 'power' or a 'power struggle' but something shared and delegated'.<sup>8</sup> Whilst this concept may well have been the theory and even the experience of the delegates from the Orthodox churches at Stony Point, it is an issue for much further debate and criticism by other women.

In his response soon after the launch of the Decade, Rev Dr Emilio Castro, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches expressed the hope that all the member

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<sup>7</sup> EDCSW Statement 1988.

<sup>8</sup> *The Orthodox Church*, November 1987, p.6.

churches would find possibilities to enter the debate in the context of each church's understanding of the different points of theological interpretation and participation of women in the ministry. He emphasized that the WCC would not be providing the guidelines for the debates during the Decade other than the provision of biblical material for theological reflection. He specifically addressed the difficulties of the questions of women's ordination by noting he could hardly suggest the ordination of women in Orthodox churches when they did not recognize his ordination as a Methodist pastor. 'I would expect that theologians male and female inside the Orthodox churches would be explaining and articulating the self-understanding of ministry'.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, Castro suggested that it was long overdue for an ecumenical reflection on the role of the Virgin Mary. In the light of suggestion about the role of Mary, it was a lost opportunity by the Orthodox member churches to promote such a contribution to the ecumenical debate and understanding of the importance of the Theotokos in the liturgical and spiritual life of Orthodox women and men.

In addition to the statements of the above mentioned meetings, there had also been brief though important statements from other Orthodox meetings concerning the 'injustice to women', and 'women in the world and the church'. These statements emerged firstly from the WCC sponsored Orthodox consultation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation in 1987 when the theologians had stated that 'injustice to women all over the world is a sign of the human fall and the disintegration of the creation'. While the Orthodox Church acknowledged the many female saints and martyrs over the centuries and their present roles in teaching and service, nevertheless:

one has to admit that due to certain socio-historical factors, the women have not always been provided opportunities for active participation in the Church's life at parish and diocesan levels.... we must find means to allow the considerable talents of women in the Church to be developed as fully as possible... more opportunities for theological education for women and the opening of career opportunities in the Church for women .<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Christian Conference of Asia Bulletin*, April 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Orthodox Perspectives on Creation, Consultation held in Sofia, Bulgaria, 1987. Reported in *WCC Women in a Changing World*, June 1988 p.11.



The second consultation was held again by Orthodox members in Minsk, Byelorussia in May 1989, where the participants also stated that 'certain traditions still continue to discriminate against them (women) and their full participation in the life of the church and society'.<sup>11</sup> Needless to say, there had been no formal ecclesial pronouncements from the churches in regard to challenging the specific traditions nor indeed mention where women should find their rightful place of 'royal priesthood' within the life of the Church. Unless the clergy and hierarchs speak openly and honestly to women and men, the only change to take place will be women defying family tradition and rejecting any further participation in their discrimination.

### **Crete Consultation - Church and culture, 1990**

The consultation, 'Church and Culture' held at the Orthodox Academy of Crete in January 1990 was organised within the programme of the Ecumenical Decade by the Women's Unit and the Director, Anna Karen Hammer.<sup>12</sup> The delegates reflected and discussed in plenary sessions and workshops the earlier recommendations from the Agapia Consultation of 1976, the aims of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women and the statements from the Inter-Orthodox Consultation on the place of women held in Rhodes in November 1988 together with the three specific issues determined in Cairo.

There were three major addresses presented at Crete, from Father Thomas Hopko, Dr Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Professor Mary Thomas, and a number of smaller presentations from delegates, together with lengthy workshops on the key concerns of Ministry, Human Sexuality, and Participation and Decision-making. The concerns focused on: the need for the renewal of women's ministries, particularly the diaconate; the need to clarify the teachings of Orthodoxy concerning human sexuality and relationships; and the need to examine and broaden women's participation in the church including responsibility for

<sup>11</sup> Conclusions: Orthodox Perspectives on Justice and Peace held in Minsk, Byelorussia in May 1989. WCC Archives.

<sup>12</sup> Church and Culture - 2nd International Orthodox Women's Consultation Report, Crete, WCC: Geneva, 1990.

decision-making. Throughout the discussions, problems of the present day were brought to the fore by women to be discussed by women on behalf of women. However, unlike the work of Protestant and Catholic women since the 1960s, the feminist agenda was still not acceptable to the majority of delegates, even though feminist issues of exclusion, discrimination, violence and sexuality were included specifically in the analysis of the challenges before women in the Orthodox Church. Amongst the delegates many of the women were wives or daughters of priests, or were present as representatives of particular bishops or were in approved positions within Orthodox organisations. The thirty delegates came from India, Finland, America, Greece, Australia, Russia, Romania, Ethiopia, Turkey, France, Syria, Czech Republic, Lebanon, Ghana and England. Once again this was a meeting where mature women would provide the more radical views of church and women in the church including Mary Thomas, a third keynote speaker. A sociologist from India, Mary Thomas was challenging in her quest for more participation of women in the decision-making of the Church including access to theological education.

The only male delegate at Crete, and then only for the first few days, was Father Thomas Hopko, from the Orthodox Church in America. As noted previously at the Agapia meeting, the presence of even one man can change the dynamics of the meeting and some women were reticent about expressing opinions or being critical of the Church. Thomas Hopko was not an entirely un-sympathetic priest and theologian with some regard for the concerns of women albeit within the theological understanding that whilst the sacramental priesthood was only for men on account of tradition and man being the 'image of Christ'. He had also stated that 'the Orthodox were unanimously opposed to the ordination of women while searching for an appropriate theological explanation for their position'.<sup>13</sup> In his responses to the WCC Lima Document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Hopko queried:

How can the Orthodox affirm a multiplicity of ministries in the church when the ministry of lay people, particularly women, is generally so limited and unsupported by hierarchical and bureaucratic structures, and even by the

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Hopko, 'The Lima Statement and the Orthodox', in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol.21,no.1, Winter 1984, p.60.

populace at large?<sup>14</sup>

The keynote address 'God and Gender - Human Sexuality from an Orthodox Perspective', given by Thomas Hopko was extensive, theologically complex and for many delegates, who had not experienced graduate theological education, somewhat abstract in contrast to the papers given by Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Mary Thomas. Both women addressed the issues most pertinent for women prepared to enter difficult and challenging conversations with each other in a concerted effort to move the discussions forward from 1976. Orthodox women no less than any other women in a religious tradition were well aware and experienced in regard to the derogatory teachings from the 'fathers' that were practiced within their tradition from the past, through the present and were intended to carry unquestioned into the future. Many delegates were well aware that Thomas Hopko had for some years been an opponent of women's ordination to the priesthood endorsed by all Orthodox hierarchs. He had claimed in his response to the Lima Statement on Ministry that:

The most divisive issue has to do with the ministerial ordination of women... it raises questions about the priesthood and the episcopate... and also 'the very nature of human beings as created in God's image and likeness... the issue here is about God, and so about Christianity, the church and life itself'.<sup>15</sup>

In her address to the delegates at the Crete consultation concerning the Rhodes Consultation held fourteen months previously, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel claimed that:

Both in the daring and in their intransigence, the conclusions were symptomatic of the internal tensions within the Orthodox theological community in regard to the vexed question of women's ordination. The tensions found expression in Rhodes, but they were passed over in silence in the official report, which is meant to express unanimity.<sup>16</sup>

Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, again with the voice of a western Orthodox, and the added advantage of mature years and experience in parish leadership, tertiary education in theology and philosophy, and ecumenical relationships, appealed to thinking women to contribute to their faith and dialogue with open minds and from their experiences. Her scholarly paper, 'Women and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.62.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.59-60.

<sup>16</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, 'The ordination of women: an ecumenical problem', WCC archives, p.12.

Ministry - Current Developments', reflected her own position that 'we must not be afraid of the truth even when it disturbs us by upsetting our habits of thought'.<sup>17</sup> She called for the Orthodox Church to move forward in order to make progress for women especially by ridding the church of the sexual taboos derived from the Old Testament. She considered that the Rhodes meeting had not gone far enough in its rejection of the idea of a bodily impurity of women, but she asks that 'these things need to be said clearly, so the message will be heard by simple Orthodox who too often remain imprisoned by archaic rules that have no meaning for them'.<sup>18</sup> In addition, she asked for a deeper study of the notion of relationships between difference and identity in human persons, of men and women in the Church and finally clarification of the meaning of Christian priesthood, a concept different from both pagan and Old Testament priesthood.

Notwithstanding the arguments placed before delegates at the Rhodes meeting in 1988, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel differed from the arguments that only man may be the 'icon of Christ'. 'If the hands and the tongue are merely the instruments through which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit accomplish everything, then can they not also be those of a woman?' She claimed no Orthodox sacramental theology forbids it, and asked for Orthodox churches to respect the decision of their ecumenical partners who accepted women's ordination.<sup>19</sup> The comments of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, Metropolitan Anthony and theologians in France have been noticed by women theologians in other traditions. Monica Furlong, an Anglican, has commented that:

Even the Eastern Orthodox churches, by far the most conservative in their attitudes to women, are beginning to reveal more complexity in their attitudes than had been expected, and (citing Metropolitan Anthony) 'showing sympathy with the idea of women's ordination'.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, the sympathetic and prophetic voices of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and associates, especially Metropolitan Anthony, have not been the catalyst for any movement amongst

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<sup>17</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ordination of Women: An Ecumenical Problem*. Recent Developments in the Sphere of the Orthodox church, Crete Consultation, January 1990, p.2. This paper was also printed in *Sobornost* 13:1 (1991) and *Theology*, Vol.97, no.775, (1994)

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

<sup>20</sup> Monica Furlong, *A Dangerous Delight*. Women And Power in the Church, SPCK : London, 1991, p. 10.

Orthodox women for ordination as has been experienced in the Anglican and Catholic communions. In 1986, the bishop had noted at a Synodesmos meeting that 'discussing the role of church laity, especially women, needed theological reflection worthy of Orthodoxy and not so much of the Orthodox thinking on the issue which insults women'. It is of interest that in the same address, the bishop criticised the emphasis on the creation of a liturgical ghetto in Orthodoxy which lead to a 'pyramid heresy' in the church structure leading to oppression. Presumably, the oppression was of the laity, particularly women.<sup>21</sup>

Many of the Crete delegates were grateful that in 1991 a translation of Behr-Sigel's book *Le ministere de la femme dans l'eglise* was published in English for a wider reading audience. Regretfully it was not available at Crete, for her papers written since Agapia indicate a development in her scholarship, theologically, anthropologically and sociologically that is of considerable assistance to any scholar wishing to investigate the issue of women's ministry in the Orthodox churches. She has provided a resource, unusual for the Orthodox Church layperson, that is readable and understandable especially by those not theologically educated. Her work is certainly not the definitive statement on women's ministry, but she goes much further and is much bolder than writers from America for instance, in raising the issue of ministry and participation of women to that of the 'royal priesthood equal to that of laymen'.

Eva Catafygiotu Topping in America, also a mature voice of experience, may be cited as an exception, for she also has written from her scholarship as an authority on Byzantine hymnography, rather than as a theologian, and her work has been both praised and criticized, depending whether one supports new ideas or conservative views. Eva Topping was well aware of the problems ahead for Orthodox women: 'When at last Greek Orthodox women begin to claim our history and our right to equal participation in the life of our church, we will have to challenge age old patterns and ideology and expose sexist prejudices and practices'.<sup>22</sup> Constance Callinicos had recognized the importance of Eva Topping's work when she reviewed

<sup>21</sup> EPS, 86.10.04.

<sup>22</sup> Eva C Topping, Greek Orthodox Women USA: Do we stand a prayer', *The Greek American*, 21 April 1990, Paper given at seminar on Women, Ethnicity and Change, Queens College 20 March 1990.

an address given by Topping in San Francisco in April 1990, three months after the Crete meeting. Even more important than Callinicos' comments on the speech were the observations of the women and few men who attended, that indicate how revolutionary such a speech on 'Orthodox Eve and Her Church' was for the Greek women :

What a heroic lot we are... despite the overwhelming negativity of so many of our lives and despite the limitations placed on our growth... for some women it was the first time ever to hear one of "us" speak about "us"... we are not a public race of women, not given to speeches, and certainly not those of scholarly genre. We have been raised to be modest and virtuous, to work behind the male scene rather than forge our way to the forefront and the lectern. <sup>23</sup>

Eva Topping was well known to claim that the Orthodox faith itself was not the problem for women, it was the 'male-only club of clergy and hierarchy' who have buried Woman as Holy Persons. Callinicos reported the various responses received from participants following the address and emerging from the small group discussions. She cites Father Thomas Paris:

the prophet always clarifies for us what we know to be true... (but) as for the subject of women in the priesthood, that is still the special function of the male, as other duties (not elaborated) are the special function of the female. If God wanted it otherwise, He would have come to Earth at a different time in a different society, where women were the dominant one. <sup>24</sup>

Does this mean, that Thomas Paris accepts the teachings of the Early Church Fathers that in fact man is the dominant one, and is deliberately ordained by God? A convert, Carolyn Hughes commented that 'there's a lot more to Greek women than what is said in public. I am a feminist, and at first it was a culture shock to be among these women for they seemed so subservient'. However, it is the comment from Peter Tripp that provided interesting insights into thoughts of some men. Tripp stated that:

the address was very biased because she didn't give the men's side of the argument. The fact was that God created all *Men* equal, and said nothing about women at all. You are second class and should be! ... Can you tell me how it would be possible for me to give my confession to a woman? Or pray if the priest is a woman?

The response from the other men was 'Why not? Women give their confession to men'. <sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *The Hellenic Chronicle*, 5 January 1989, p.11.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

One of the problems throughout all the Orthodox consultations on the ministry of women, has been the lack of supportive voices for Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, especially from women theologically and historically educated and able to participate in spirited debate and dialogue with the conservative voices within the church. Eva Topping has not been a nominee of the Greek bishops to attend the seminars or to address the ecumenical meetings, especially at Bossey. It is understandable why bishops would not put her name forward, but it is not acceptable that the ecumenical movement itself has not called this woman to speak particularly in international meetings outside America. It is therefore not surprising that Protestant and Catholic women who enter into spirited discourse on the issues of patriarchy, ministry and participation could well assume there were no Orthodox women speaking for women in the Orthodox churches.

Lewis Patsavos, Professor of Canon Law at Holy Cross defends the role of the laity and their right to speak and be heard in the church. However, he cautions the need for a clear understanding of roles, prerogatives and limits. Only believing and worshipping laypersons should be permitted to hold positions in the governance of the church, 'and nominal and uninformed Christians should at all costs be excluded'. Patsavos claimed that as the laity become more secularized, it was in danger of going astray from the canonical guidelines, and laypersons in positions of leadership in the church often possess 'scandalously deficient knowledge of the faith, leading to decisions based on criteria incompatible to the Orthodox faith'.<sup>26</sup> A major criticism from Orthodox women concerns the increasing numbers of women graduates in theology (where theological education was possible), as in many other mainstream churches, but the Church has found few places within the patriarchal structures for women to contribute their scholarship for the whole life of the Church.

From across the jurisdictions, the women delegates at Crete expressed considerable concern that even when the Church has set aside time for the laity, especially women, to debate particular issues of ministry and women's service in the community and liturgical life of the

<sup>26</sup> Lewis J Patsavos, 'Leadership and Authority in the Church', *Orthodox Observer*, October 1990. p.16.

Church, it was seldom reported widely unless conservative in nature nor, on receiving the recommendations from such meetings, had there been widespread reaction or action from others outside the consultation. Perhaps the reason can be explained by understanding how the issues emerged from discussions. In October 1982, a symposium 'awaiting the third millennium', was held in St Paul, Minnesota, attended by over eight hundred representatives from the major Orthodox churches in America. Of considerable interest were the opening comments in the report of the meeting that 'eastern Orthodox women are not pressing for ordination to the priesthood'. Whilst the comments of three named male speakers were cited on issues such as ecumenism, interest and conversions in the Soviet Union, and the legacy of monasticism at Mt Sinai, only the comments of four unnamed women panellists were reported in order to alleviate any concerns of 'disquiet of Orthodox women. The women 'expressed contentment with their roles in parish communities as 'complete and fully satisfying'. Furthermore, any 'discord, bred from status-seeking or role-demand would hurt the church' and women priests were only acceptable 'should the consensus of the church precede any move to women's ordination. Their final comments embraced the concept that the priesthood should centre around the role of the Theotokos 'as the original chalice in which Christ was born'.<sup>27</sup>

In 1986 a symposium was held at Hellenic College to launch the first meeting of the Commission on Diakonia of Greek Orthodox Women, which had emerged from the Symposium on Medicine, Psychology and Religion at the same college. However, this was not a meeting of activist women, and included a male representative of Archbishop Iakovos and also Hellenic College. The question must always be asked is how far is the agenda decided beforehand by the men? The report, but not the detailed discussions appeared in the *Orthodox Observer*, newspaper of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, and one could not draw comfort from the issues that emerged.<sup>28</sup> The concerns were conservative, they focused on women's responsibility for others, not her individual place in the church and certainly revealed no evidence of the strong women's movement that was influencing society and the place of women in family.

<sup>27</sup> 'Awaiting the third Millennium', *Orthodox Observer*, 1 December 1982.

<sup>28</sup> 'Orthodox Women's Needs Studied', *Orthodox Observer*, 8 October 1986.



workplace, the professions or education. To ask 'how can the Church inspire mothers and wives to cling to their faith and be comforting companions to their husbands' was a question destined to be ignored by the majority of modern day activists.

In contemporary times the concerns are centred upon more important issues such as the abortion and birth control debate, theological education for women, divorce, domestic violence and abuse that impinge daily on the lives of women. With the opportunity of raising moral and sexual issues in a forum that was sympathetic to openness and radical ideas, was it possible that Orthodox women would finally ask even demand of the Church recognition of their place in the 'royal priesthood' of the Church. The debate on the ministry of women that transpired at Crete was open and the recommendations were far reaching, but the topic of ordination to the priesthood remained on the periphery, not really articulated as a desire of the women delegates present. Was it too early for Orthodox women to speak out about ordination, or was there a reluctance to be labelled a radical feminist should one voice such an opinion?

### **Human Sexuality and the acceptance of 'double standards'**

In 1983, at the WCC Sixth Assembly in Vancouver, Canada, for the first time the opening sermon was presented by a woman, Pauline Webb, a Methodist layperson from England. By focusing on the theme 'The Word of Life' she elaborated in part on the physical experiences of women and their biological formation. A comment was later made on the Assembly, that some of the delegates found it offensive to hear such a close connecting of Christ's blood and woman's blood, (but) for many women it was infinitely liberating. For so long, even down to the present day, our physical being has been tabooed and ostracized in the Church.

In 1988, a woman lecturer in the Greek Orthodox Theological School of Holy Cross in Brookline, Massachusetts was invited to participate in an ecumenical symposium organized by the Roman Catholic College of St Catherine. In her address, the woman, not named in the editorial of the 'Orthodox Observer', was critical of the lack of debate on the issue of female

'uncleanliness' especially by contemporary Orthodox theologians. The editorial was openly hostile to the woman because she had used a public forum to criticise the 'Church for which she supposedly is a teacher and spiritual guide'. More importantly, the issue was raised at a Catholic university, not considered the proper forum for criticisms of her own church. The editorial noted that there were a number of women in the Orthodox Church 'who belong to the religious intelligentsia of our time', however, they were 'not subsidized by the Greek Orthodox Church nor were entrusted with teaching the Church's children'. The editorial concluded that whilst science might have different views for a beneficial result, in theology only one theology was possible, the theology of the Fathers not of any individual.<sup>29</sup> The glaring omission from the editorial was the issue the women raised in the public forum. The issue of female uncleanliness is deeply entrenched in the Tradition and the cultural tradition of Orthodox women and is experienced from forty days until death and even at death the separateness of women can be experienced at a funeral service.<sup>30</sup> What does this say to women about the authority of the Fathers of the Church and the unquestioning acceptance of that authority by its faithful women?

Kyriaki FitzGerald was clear in her understanding of the difficult and sensitive topic on 'female uncleanliness'. In 1986, she had already addressed an Intra-Orthodox Conference on Pastoral Praxis at Holy Cross College, raising exactly this issue with both insights of theological and psychological scholarship. She acknowledged that for centuries little was understood about menstruation and that the lack of personal hygiene of the past was a contributing factor to women themselves feeling unclean. However, with education in modern times, women better understand the function of the natural menstrual cycle. Nevertheless, claimed FitzGerald, women are still taught by others in the church that 'the menstrual period is essentially evil, and therefore, unnatural'. These women will not take communion when menstruating, and there are other more extreme views that women do not attend church, nor receive the blessed bread after

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<sup>29</sup> Editorial: 'Not the Proper Forum For Criticism', *Orthodox Observer*, 11 May 1988, p.16. The woman was Kyriaki K FitzGerald, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Religious Education.

<sup>30</sup> Until some years ago, within the community of Castellorizian Greeks in Perth, Western Australia, the men always went forward to kiss the coffin of the deceased before any women, even the widow and her daughters would wait until all men had passed the coffin. (candidate's personal experience)

the Liturgy nor venerate the icons or the Holy Gospel.<sup>31</sup> As recorded by Constance Callinicos: 'menstruation sets a girl apart, it completely retards her progress toward social growth...she is shackled, confined, ghettoized'.<sup>32</sup> The major difficulty facing women is also a certain modesty which prevents menstruation being mentioned publicly, understanding it is 'private women's business' therefore one does not discuss it.

Anca-Lucia Manolache, Romanian Orthodox theologian, was also one of the first academic women to publicly speak for a forum outside her own church, when she addressed the issue of 'Female Sexuality and Bodily Functions' as a response from her religious tradition for the WCC Study project.<sup>33</sup> Manolache writes of the tradition unchanged for centuries, when Romanian women themselves considered it a sin to receive any blessing or sacrament from the priest before men. Not only do women stand back, she reports, they in fact 'cover themselves and efface themselves piously before their husbands and brothers', so the men may precede them to the altar for communion, unction or confession. Manolache declared that all these attitudes have been inherited from patristic tradition and endorsed by a secular society that had no laws for women until the mid-twentieth century when in 1944 they were given the right to vote. However, women were 'profoundly dependent upon Byzantine canons' because Romanian Orthodox women continue to observe the canons of the Fathers in regard to their female uncleanness, the church maintains through its theologians that woman is inferior, even if this is spoken in terms of 'complementarity'. However, asserts Manolache, the 'complement'-woman is always minor as opposed to the 'complement'-man. She continued her criticism of a church and culture that relies on Genesis 2 understanding of creation, the lack of knowledge about female physiology, false interpretations of menstruation, and the exaggerated concepts that marriage has one sole aim for procreation and motherhood.

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31 Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald, 'Orthodox Women and Pastoral Praxis', in Theodore Stylianopoulos, (ed.), *Orthodox Perspectives on Pastoral Praxis*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press: Brookline, MA, 1988, p.115.

32 Callinicos, op cit, p.131.

33 Anca-Lucia Manolache, 'Female Sexuality and Bodily Functions' according to the Romanian Orthodox Tradition, comments for the WCC Study Project 1986. In 1991 the papers were published in Jeanne Becher (ed.), *Women, Religion and Sexuality. Studies on the Impact of Religious Teachings on Women*, WCC: Geneva, 1990.

Of all the issues facing women in their sacramental life in the church, the issue of 'uncleanliness' is the most demeaning and vexatious. It is hidden, taught from mother to daughter, and relies on a subconscious acceptance by women of their lack of state of grace to receive communion or indeed, participate at all in the liturgy. What does this say to her as a member of the church baptized 'in the image of God'. How can she possibly accept this as truly *orthopraxia* even if the canons deem it to be so?

If women themselves have a proper reverence for things divine, they will be inhibited by it from daring ever to approach the Holy Table, and to partake of the Lord's body and blood when they are in such a state of their menstrual affairs. <sup>34</sup>

The canon law having been written, the enforcement is instilled in the psyche of women, already living and experiencing various insidious forms of patriarchy in their culture and traditions. The absence of a mother or teenage daughter from communion at the end of Holy Week is observed not only by immediate family, but also friends and relatives at Church. It is also suggested that deaconesses eventually lost their rank because of 'their troublesome menses'. It is noted by those who defend the canon laws pertaining to 'the unclean state of women', that in fact men also are considered unclean after 'nocturnal emissions'. One has yet to hear men willingly speak aloud of their acceptance of this unclean state, nor obviously absent themselves from communion particularly at those times when most of the community expect to take communion, at Easter and following the fast of the Theotokos in August.

Kyriaki FitzGerald added in a postscript, according to Canon 4 of the Canonical Letter of Dionysios of Alexandria, as far as men are concerned the decision is 'left to the discretion of the man whether or not to commune after he had experienced 'involuntary nocturnal pollutions'. <sup>35</sup> Furthermore, should nature have allowed this emission without 'obscene imagination and erotic thought, it could be considered a natural way of cleansing the body, then a man is not prevented from coming to communion. <sup>36</sup> No mention is made that whilst man may involuntarily

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<sup>34</sup> Canon II, Canonical Letter of Saint Dionysius the Alexandrian, 3rd Century, recorded in *The Pedalion*, p.720

<sup>35</sup> Kyriaki FitzGerald, *op.cit.*, p.115, n18.

<sup>36</sup> Canon IV, Canonical Letter of Saint Dionysius the Alexandrian, *The Pedalion*, p.721.

emit semen it is perhaps unlikely to be a nightly offence, and his self-imposed exile, if at all, with be merely a small inconvenience. As Monica Furlong claims, 'a Jewish man only had to stay away one day from the sacred space of the Temple, unlike a woman who likely lived in considerable uncertainty most of her life from puberty to the erratic and irregular onset of menopause, enduring both sacred and social exclusion.'<sup>37</sup>

The work from Anca-Lucia Manolache was part of a study of Female Sexuality, coordinated by Marie Assaad in 1986. The study, later published in 1991, was a collection of research papers specifically addressing female sexuality and bodily functions from various religious traditions and cultures. In response to Manolache, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Nicole Maillard were invited to respond to her comments and reflect on the situation within an Orthodox Church in the west.<sup>38</sup> In their paper, 'Orthodoxy and Women in France', they first stated that in France, the diversity of cultural background, language, social status and rite was a feature of Orthodox Church life. Cognisant of the diversity of ethnicity, in comparison to the homogeneity of Romania, the responses to the issue of sexuality come more from modern western European women, than the traditional conservative voices of Romania or Greece for that matter. They rightly draw attention to the difficulty of generalizing the status of women and their subordinate position due to their biological functions when there are so many other complex and ill-defined causes. However, in one specific example of women's suffering through the laws of Church and State, they draw attention to the issue of prohibition on abortion in Romania until a woman had at least four children, knowing that contraception was unavailable for planned parenthood.<sup>39</sup>

In France, Behr-Sigel and Maillard reported the wide diversity of women's participation in the church, their ministry, theological education and community. The paper revealed the openness of the French meetings that had no hesitation in discussions on sexuality, love inside

<sup>37</sup> Monica Furlong, *A Dangerous Delight*, p.30.

<sup>38</sup> Jeanne Becher (ed.), *Women, Religion and Sexuality. Studies on the Impact Of Religious Teachings on Women*, WCC: Geneva, 1991.

<sup>39</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Nicole Maillard, 'Orthodoxy and Women in France', op.cit., p.185.

and outside marriage, maternity and even abortion.<sup>40</sup> Of considerable interest to all Orthodox women contemplating a modern approach to the social and moral issues confronting the church and women, the situation in France is obviously a breath of fresh air. In contrast to the 'grey picture' for Romanian women, the authors write:

The Orthodox Church in France does not see itself cast in the role of moral censor. It is always very cautious where others' morals are concerned, considering there to be a matter of individual personal situations (economy) to be examined in the light of pastoral conversations and participation in the whole liturgical life of the community.<sup>41</sup>

As to the rites that women observe from puberty to menopause, in France, 'perhaps an experimental laboratory', practical pluralism is the rule. Young girls have no idea on the prohibition of communion when menstruating, therefore they do not observe it. Their mothers know of it, but choose to ignore it. Some priests will take a girl child into the sanctuary at baptism, provided the child is a baby, not an adult baptism. Whilst the rite has not been practiced for decades in some parishes, some priests will conduct the rite of purification at forty days after the birth of a baby, but only if requested by the mother.<sup>42</sup> The challenge from Behr-Sigel and Maillard is a very important one in light of the scientific progress of humanity and the understanding of biological functions together with an intellectual approach to the meaning of what it means to be a woman or a man in these times. As the authors allege about the many grey areas concerning rites and taboos:

It is as though for two thousand years our collective unconscious had still not been evangelized by the gospel; in other words, in the Orthodox churches, without wanting to admit it to themselves, people continue to believe that eros, menstrual blood, childbirth - in short, all that is characteristic of woman - belong to the "powers", that is, unclean or dangerous things that are beyond our control.<sup>43</sup>

French Orthodox theologian, Paul Evdokimov, a contemporary of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, had written that modern Christianity was behind the times for whilst the Church has the message of

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40 *Ibid.*, p.188.

41 *Ibid.*, p.188.

42 *Ibid.*, p.189.

43 *Ibid.*, p.189.

liberation, it was others who liberate.<sup>44</sup> He was critical of those theologians who constructed a hierarchy of 'submission' and 'authority' and insisted on the 'silence of women'.<sup>45</sup> In addition to demands for silence, Evdokimov claimed that:

The physiology of woman, her mentality, her gifts - all are transformed into curses by the man. In the Laws of Manu, the laws of Solon, in Leviticus, in the Roman Code or in the Koran - everywhere, woman is viewed as an inferior being, of little value, and without rights.<sup>46</sup>

This rare support and understanding from an Orthodox theologian must have been a revelation for many women in the Orthodox Church in France. Even today, it would be unusual for a male theologian to be so open and critical of how the church, and its clergy and men, view the position and participation of women in the liturgical and communal life of their parish. The diversity of delegates at Crete provided the intimate opportunities to hear stories of the 'double standards' of human sexuality and relationships as they affect women within Orthodox churches. Orthodox women are brought up to accept that their sexual life will be within marriage, and that there is no right nor understanding for pre-marital sexual relationships. Each bride will go to her husband's bed a virgin. In some communities the showing of the wedding sheet to indicate the breaking of the hymen is still endorsed which has led in some instances to ingenious and medical intervention methods of deception. As Constantina Safilios-Rothschild claims:

While "surgical virginity" (a surgical procedure which restores a penetrated and broken maidenhead to its original tight size by stitching it up, is a favourite technique in contemporary Greece for reconciling women's permissive premarital sexual behaviour with the traditional double standard in the sexual code, it is not known to what extent the same technique may be used by Greek-American women who date American boys, but marry a Greek-American man who expects his wife to be a virgin.<sup>47</sup>

J K Campbell concluded from his studies in Surakatsini, Epirus that 'virginity in women (and men) is a quality that provokes the deepest respect and sense of awe... it is obligatory for women, preferred for men'.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World. A Christian Anthropology on the Charisms of Women*, SVSP: Crestwood, 1994, p.19.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.169.

<sup>47</sup> Constantina Safilios-Rothschild, 'The Greek-American Woman', presented at the Greek Experience in America Symposium, 29-31 October 1976, Chicago, Cited in Constance Callinicos, *American Aphrodite*, p.91.

Arranged marriage is the end product of Greek socialization of the female, the culmination, the "payoff", if you will, of years spent guarding us, protecting us, keeping us "clean" and "unused", ready for proud presentation of the untouched vagina, the pure womb, a presentation to the best possible pure-blooded Greek.<sup>49</sup>

J G Peristiany adds that in Cyprus, 'a maiden is considered defiled not only by contact or awareness... but also through the "unwitting arousal of desire". Even if men talk of her'.<sup>50</sup> In Crete, the women spoke of the sexual activity of men as not damaging to their reputations in contrast to the tighter family controls on single women. However, it was recognised that in America this situation was changing, where overall community acceptance of pre-marital relationships had inevitably influenced changing attitudes and lifestyles of single Orthodox men and women who no longer accepted that virginity was the necessary ingredient to prove that one was a decent and moral person.

Whilst the Canons entreat both men and women to guard carefully their virginity, the onus was and is always placed on the woman to preserve her family honour as well as her own. In some countries, it was stated that a Christian husband can legally separate from his new wife if he discovers she is not a virgin.<sup>51</sup> In society, the virginity of men is rarely discussed nor becomes an issue for concern before marriage. These double-standards on sexuality enhance the role of men, and diminish women as possessing a property that will only belong to one man and be given on her wedding night. Eva Figes alleges that this assumption of one man's right and property comes from the past when her role as childbearer was overtaken by man's opinion of himself as the creator of the child, thereby relegating her status to the role of a mere vessel.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, to ensure that any child would unquestionably belong to him, the male controls the sexuality of the woman, by demanding firstly her virginal state, given sanctity by the Church and for that matter, any other patriarchal religion, and thereafter continuing to demand her

48 J K Campbell, 'Honour and the Devil', 1966, p.156.

49 Constance Callinicos, *American Aphrodite*, p.29.

50 J G Peristiany, 'Honour and Shame', 1966, p.182.

51 Crete Consultation Report, p.1.

52 Eva Figes, *Patriarchal Attitudes*, Virago: London, 1981, p.37.



faithfulness through physical and mental control. <sup>53</sup> The marriage bed is entered with love and apprehension by the new wife and love and possession by the new husband.

I had some ideas about married love before I got married. My mother told me 'its something your husband knows about and will teach you... the night before my wedding, my father came into my room. He sat down with me and tried to talk to me. He took my hand and told me "You know, you are going to bleed tonight. You must save the sheet to show your in-laws.... I later found out that the words of the wedding songs for the groom were focused on how " (you will) enter into her". "You will release yourself into the dark-eyed beauty tonight".<sup>54</sup>

The delegates at Crete were well aware of double standards and the leniency afforded men in their societies, not only from the Church, which continues to stand aside from most debates in community. The presentation of women is always an issue in community. Her availability for marriage and her conduct in marriage and motherhood gather criticism if outside the parameters of acceptable demeanour and behaviour. Orthodox women in Ghana, a mission church, experienced the discrimination of menstruation from both the 'old' culture and the 'new' Christian culture and were forbidden to attend a large shrine of Christ located in a forest. Women and men must fast and abstain from sexual relations prior to attending the shrine, a similar rule before taking communion. The priest of the community has instructed the villagers that this practice is from 'before' and not part of Christian culture. However, 'the resistance to changing attitudes comes from women who have internalized them, as well as from men who reinforce them'. <sup>55</sup>

In a small marriage manual prepared for priests in the Greek Orthodox Church in America by Anthony Coniaros, the advice is detailed and traditional. However, whilst addressing his remarks to both the man and woman there is a disturbing emphasis on the leadership of the man. In a section titled 'marriage needs a leader', Coniaros leaves no doubt as to his sentiments, nor indeed, it would seem, those of his fellow clergy:

Every marriage needs a leader, and the leader according to God's word, is the husband, as written by St Paul. In addition, the husband needs to be the leader, the aggressor, he represents the authority of the family, he provides the

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.39.

<sup>54</sup> Constance Callinicos, *American Aphrodite*, p.180.

<sup>55</sup> Crete Consultation, Report II, Human Sexuality, p.8.

necessary leadership. He executes the proper discipline... The wise wife will not try to play the part of the man in her marriage... her deepest anger will be if he allows her to take over the leadership. Most women long for a dominant man .<sup>56</sup>

This brief though powerful advice leaves no doubt as to the position of the husband and his relationship to the wife, regardless of the platitudes of mutual love and respect that also receive attention from the writer. St John Chrysostom, the fourth century 'golden-mouthed' preacher and bishop of Constantinople, wrote homilies on marriage and family life, also based on the teachings of St Paul, which also influence Coniaros, and of course, continue to be important in Orthodox teachings. However, whilst Chrysostom does insist on mutual love and faithfulness to each other in marriage, he also refers to the natural authority of man, and makes it clear where woman is in the relationship, an always willing sexual partner.

When a woman refuses her husband without his consent, great evils such as adulteries, fornication and broken homes may result from this abstinence.<sup>57</sup> When women refuse their husbands they commit a sin 'which outweighs the righteousness of their abstinence. They are responsible for their husband's licentiousness ..'<sup>58</sup>

In addition, priests, theologians and Councils may cite precedence in excluding women from public and sacred spheres by referring to the words of John Chrysostom on *How to Choose a Wife*, which leaves no doubt in the minds of men and women what duties were paramount for women, and these certainly were not in public duty within the Church :

A wife has only one duty, to preserve what we have gathered, to protect our income, to take care of our household. After all God gave her to us for this purpose... our life is composed of two spheres of activity, the public and the private. When God divided these two He assigned the management of the household to women... she cannot give an opinion in the council, but she can give her opinion to the household. God did not assign both spheres to each sex equally, lest there be strife and contention... gave the more necessary and important to the man, but the lesser and inferior part to the woman. In this way He arranged that we should admire the man more because we need his service more, and that because the woman has a humbler form of service she would not rebel against her husband.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Anthony M Coniaros, *Getting ready for marriage in the Orthodox Church*, Light & Life: Minneapolis, MN 1972, p.25.

<sup>57</sup> St John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, Homily 19, trans.Catherine P Roth and David Anderson, SVSP: Crestwood, 1986. p.27.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

Delegates reflected the wide ranging examples of double-standards in Orthodox communities and family life, perhaps no more poignant than the story from Syria involving extreme jealousy and physical abuse from a husband. The abuse continued regardless of the woman's appeal to her brothers who insisted she remain in the home with her husband. The violence reached its inevitable end when the woman was stabbed repeatedly by her husband in the home in front of her children. This tragedy had a positive result in that Syrian Orthodox women had become more vocal in asking for separation and eventual divorce, with the support of their families, from such impossible situations. <sup>60</sup>

In India, the double-standard extended to fidelity in marriage, where a wife was expected to receive her husband silently and readily after any number of infidelities, while any act of infidelity on her part had serious consequences that could lead to divorce and even her life. The dowry system and inheritance laws in India have been challenged by Syrian Orthodox women. While family estates are now divided among the children of the deceased, not just among the sons, there are instances when the daughters are forced to sign that they have received their portion even if this has not happened. The problem of the dowry continues, not only to the extent of the amount of money and goods demanded, but the manner in which the dowry is determined, based solely on the qualities of the male, calculated in accordance to his education, wealth and social status. The dowry system, though against the ruling of the Supreme Court, continues across Indian society, and in many instances, the failure to bring sufficient dowry into a family has resulted in the murders of young brides by burning, drowning or hanging to appear as suicide.

Kate Millet claimed as early as 1971 that there was a great deal of guilt regarding sexuality placed upon women. 'Such was the cumulative effect of religion and custom that women were still denied sexual freedom which in turn meant biological control over her body through the "cult of virginity", the double standard, prescription against abortion and often

denial of contraception'.<sup>61</sup> There is perhaps no more contentious moral or ethical issue for women in society in general, or the Church in particular, than open discussion on family planning, contraception and abortion. Orthodox women who have an opinion or a stance on pro-choice as far as abortion is concerned would find any forum difficult to speak out on such an issue. Notwithstanding the strong and unyielding view of the church, there are Orthodox women who question the right of the church to control their bodies and regard family planning and termination of a pregnancy as private and between husband and wife. Orthodox women, like many other women, admit to diverse and strong personal attitudes about their rights, and question the 'right to life' argument 'which too often sounds hypocritical in the mouth of the church, which has for most of its history managed to co-exist with war, genocide and capital punishment'.<sup>62</sup>

At Crete, for the first time, women were discussing issues that affected their intimate lives, family relationships and brought to the forefront their attitudes and concerns for moral and personal issues that are diametrically opposed to Canon Law of the church. Unlike the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, while maintaining that children are the result of a loving sexual relationship within marriage nevertheless, considers the child the extension of the 'oneness' of the couple. It is not the prime reason for marriage, as the church teaches that sexuality and intimacy between the couple is to be enjoyed as gift, not necessarily only enjoyed to procreate. The issue of contraception reflected both cultural and traditional values placed upon the numbers of children reflecting the virility of the husband, and therefore even after five or six children men refused any responsibility for contraception, and were often aided by the Church in their particular country teaching that abstinence was the only contraception. Women were often forced to seek an abortion knowing they could ill afford either the strength of another pregnancy nor did they have the ability to feed and support yet another child. The delegates recommended the theologians of the Church should study and consider rewording the prayers said after the woman had involuntarily miscarried, as presently

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<sup>61</sup> Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics*, Abacus : London, 1971, p.54.

<sup>62</sup> Susan Howell and Linda Hurcombe, *Dispossessed Daughters of Eve. Faith and Feminism*, SPCK : London, 1987, p.51.

the prayers suggest that somehow the woman is to blame for the loss, and seems to indicate anything involved with death is also connected with the fallen state of humankind. The women suggested that prayers of comfort were far more appropriate than aggravating the sense of guilt a woman might already feel. There were positive recommendations on human sexuality from the women delegates in Crete, but a decade later they have not been acted upon by the Church nor taken up in a courageous manner by Orthodox women in any meaningful way in the various jurisdictions. It remains an unresolved issue for yet another generation of Orthodox women.

### Ministry and the Royal Priesthood

The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order held in Montreal in 1963 was the first occasion when women's ordination was seriously proposed for consideration by the major churches at an ecumenical meeting. Janet Crawford asserts that 'many Orthodox found themselves confronted with this question for the first time in their lives'.<sup>63</sup> From this meeting, a Study Encounter - 'The Meaning of Ordination', was commissioned for the WCC and member churches. John Zizioulas claimed that:

Although Orthodox theologians could find no reason against such ordination... the entire matter is so deeply tied up with their tradition that they would find it difficult to endorse without reservations the rather enthusiastic statements of the working paper.<sup>64</sup>

Susannah Herzel referred to the issue of women's ordination as a 'crucial ecumenical problem', and a key to general debate on church renewal. She alleges that 'to this day it constitutes one of the biggest hurdles to the unity envisaged by the ecumenical movement'.<sup>65</sup> Over the next few years, the ordination to priesthood and the validity of women's ministry became major issues of tension between the member churches of the WCC, not only the Orthodox but also a wide range of Protestant evangelical churches and, until the nineties, the Church of England and its various communions. Melanie May considered the text of the 1982 Lima document on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* as most significant. However, she cautioned that while the statements on ministry affirmed the 'diverse and complementary gifts' of all Christians, most of

<sup>63</sup> Janet Crawford, *Rocking the Boat*, p.178.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.180.

<sup>65</sup> Susannah Herzel, *A Voice for Women*, WCC: Geneva, 1981, p.66.

the study focused on the tradition of Apostolic succession, that is, the ordained ministry, which was by its very composition able to be almost completely void on women's ordination.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, she was critical of the text that on one hand called for churches to review their choice of candidates for ordination on the grounds of physical handicap, or because they belong to a particular race or socio-economic group, but on the other hand did not call for review on the practice of denying ordination to women.<sup>67</sup> She completed her criticisms with an acknowledgment that the Lima Text in itself was a remarkable document standing as 'a marker on the road to church unity'. However 'its failure to recognize contemporary controversies among the churches - particularly those related to the role and image of women' was also remarkable.<sup>68</sup>

The Lima Text was an important document for the ecumenical movement and continues to be a point of reference in ongoing consultations between member churches as they grapple with the difficulties of church unity. The Orthodox churches responded to the document in various ways, as previously discussed, and their influence was well known within the Women's Unit and amongst women and feminist theologians in the ecumenical movement. The arguments against women's ordination were well known by Orthodox women delegates privileged to be graduates in theological studies. The ordination to the priesthood has not developed within a women's movement as experienced in the Anglican, Catholic and Protestant traditions. However, there have been over decades increasing calls for the re-introduction of deaconesses, and this discussion was not absent from the Crete Consultation.

The possible re-introduction into the service of the church of women serving as deaconesses has been in discussion since before the turn of the century. Although tentative plans were made in Russia in 1905, the hopes for decisions in 1917 were thwarted by the Revolution. In June 1917 in Moscow, an All Russia congress of Clergy and laity gathered to adopt resolutions calling for reforms and the need for introducing important decrees affecting

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<sup>66</sup> Melanie May, *Bonds of Unity*, p.116.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117.

preaching, monasticism, and 'the activization of women in the church'.<sup>69</sup> The *sobor* resolution adopted on 20 September 1918 was for 'recognizing the usefulness of the active participation of women in serving the Church in all fields corresponding to their particular qualifications'.<sup>70</sup> The participation would include membership of parish councils and serving as church wardens; attendance at diocesan conferences, and the right to hold offices in educational, charitable, missionary and economic institutions of the church. The resolution also stated what women would not be able to do including holding offices in diocesan councils, or the judicial or administrative institutions of the church. However, while not having the status of clergy, in exceptional circumstances women could serve as chanters and readers on a par with men. As far as particular roles in ministry, the *sobor* was positive in the proposal for the re-introduction of the institution of deaconesses.

Dimitry Pospelovsky maintains 'had not the synod been forced to abruptly discontinue its session, owing to the shortage of funds caused by the nationalization of the Church's bank accounts, the re-institution of deaconesses would most probably have been approved.'<sup>71</sup> Since 1954 when Evangelos Theodorou wrote his important thesis on the ministry of deaconesses, many writers and theologians have re-examined the same evidence from the earlier documents and historical archives.<sup>72</sup> The Church, except on very rare occasions, has ignored the discussion or noted the issue only in order to still the voices of contemporary theologians and women scholars. How can women look confidently at any of the ensuing years of papers and discussion and accept that any meaningful progress has taken place. The same issues and dissension exist between the understanding of ordination and laying of hands in the final decade of the twentieth century as it did last century. What is required is serious discussion in the Holy Synods as to what order of deaconess does the Church of today need.

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<sup>69</sup> Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, Volume 1, SVSP: Crestwood, 1984, p.34.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.

<sup>72</sup> The most recent publication: Kyriaki K FitzGerald, *Women Deacons on the Orthodox Church, Called to Holiness and Ministry*, Holy Cross : Brookline, MA, 1998

The authority of the hierarchs and the discipline exerted over theologians control the words and actions within the Orthodox churches. 'The patriarchy is hierarchy' writes Sandra Schneiders and as such accepts 'it is divinely sanctioned, and has sacralized responsibility, authority and power'.<sup>73</sup> How can women possibly challenge sacred authority and power, let alone be permitted opportunities to assume such authority or power? Women remain confident only of exerting their own particular style of authority in the private sphere, far distant from the rituals of sacred space, a context created from the councils and synods where women were excluded.

As far as the contribution of women in the public sphere is concerned, Canon Law makes transparently clear the many admonitions and restrictions on her participation in the liturgical life of the church. Pauline teachings are paramount in ensuring her secondary status in public prayer life. Canon LXX specifically invokes Paul: 'Let it not be permissible for women to talk during Holy Mass, but in accordance with the words of Paul the Apostle 'let your women remain silent ... If they wish to learn anything let them ask their husbands at home (1 Cor.14:33-35). In addition, women were not to teach nor have authority over men for Adam was first then Eve who deceived him. Their one chance for redemption was through child-bearing. The interpretation of the Canon continues to explain that not only should women be silent within the church proper, but also amongst the 'congregation of' believers anywhere; and still more they be prohibited from chanting either in a choir of their own or along with men'.<sup>74</sup> The interpretation also asserts that teaching and chanting are inconsistent with the nature and destiny of a Christian woman, just as are the priesthood and the bishopric because Eve ruined everything by teaching Adam first in Paradise.<sup>75</sup> To continue the rule and reason to exclude women from any public praise the explanation continues:

Female choirs are an innovation involving many perils and capable of leading to

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<sup>73</sup> Sandra M Schneiders, *Beyond Patching, Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church*, Paulist Press: New York, 1991, p. 23.

<sup>74</sup> *The Pedalion*, Canon LXX . p.373.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.374.



many scandals, for woman's voice is more attractive and more pathetic than man's... the voices and faces of female choirs ... represent a theatrical mind rather than a modest ecclesiastical mind... Effeminate songs and trills and excessive variety of tones inclines to whorish songs .<sup>76</sup>

In order to make the importance of man's voice as the 'norm', the interpreter explains that even God prefers man's voice which indicates contrition and repentance of the heart. Man is pleased to see pretty faces and listen to melodies but 'God looks into man's soul in the depths of the heart and delights in his reverence, which is manifested by humbleness of behaviour'.<sup>77</sup>

Notwithstanding the admonitions of Canon Law specifically written against women's voices being heard during the Divine Liturgy, this has been one area where women have not only contributed their voices in the choir and in religious education in schools, they have also become choir directors, composers and teachers. This surely has been an example of *economia* by the Church. In Finland, Russia, Bulgaria, Georgia, France and America, women are actively involved in liturgical choirs. In America, Greek Orthodox women were the core of the first church choirs, and in later years with tertiary education and music degrees they have filled positions as organists, directors and administrators. In 1990, George Raptis supported the prominence of women in America such Anna Gallos, who was composer of liturgies, hymns and suite for organ, chimes and mixed voices based on the themes from the Greek Orthodox funeral service, and a conductor and music lecturer for decades; and Ann Koukios who founded the Byzantine singers in 1983, committed to presenting various chant styles of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, despite the commitment of hundreds of women to choirs, it remains a precarious situation for women, for at any given time, or on the direction or whim of the Archbishop, a woman could easily be removed from her position, either singing in the choir or directing the choir.

In a series on the Doctrine of the Holy Priesthood for *Orthodox Observer* in America,

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.375.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p.375.

<sup>78</sup> George S Raptis, 'Greek Orthodox Women in Music', *Orthodox Observer*, 7 February 1990, p.7.

Fr Chronopolos, then Chancellor of the Diocese of Chicago left the reader in no doubt about the separate role of women and men:

According to biological nature, as well as Holy Scripture, the male gender "yenna" begets and the female "tiki", bears. In other words, the male gives life and the female nurtures and develops that life. The two roles are mutually indispensable and the one cannot accomplish any sustenance of life without the other...<sup>79</sup> Women cannot be a priest, because they would be crossing over to a male role, thereby confusing the male-female relationship.<sup>80</sup>

John Chryssavgis asserts that the most significant person who maintains her position in the 'royal priesthood' is the Virgin Mother of God claiming that: 'the energy spent on anti-apostolic proposition for the ordination of women would be of more benefit to all if it were directed to a more fervent devotion to the Theotokos...who was never a priest in the ministerial sense'.<sup>81</sup> Chryssavgis denies that the priesthood is a 'profession' which of course women could carry out with the same competence as men, nor was it a 'privilege' from which women were excluded. He states that the hierarchical structure is in fact a reversal of the world, that is, 'the ordained being the servant of all', which theoretically and theologically might be the case, but in practice is rarely the experience women find in the church. He further claims that ordination was not a sign of male chauvinistic superiority but a ministry, 'a service at the feet of the Lord'. In response, as women are expected and usually are, the servant of all, they may in fact desire most prayerfully to also be in 'service at the feet of the Lord'. To further claim, as Chryssavgis concludes his comments, that for women to declare a personal desire to represent as 'an icon of Christ' was to commit a certain heresy is to once again admonish women for questioning their calling and also diminishes their desire for service.<sup>82</sup> As ordination to the priesthood has always been recognized as a 'calling from God to serve', how can the church deny that women can be so called, whilst always accepting that all priests were called?

The niche the Church carves for its women is too narrow and confining. A Greek Orthodox woman on leaving the Church in America, became an Episcopalian because "it is a church that is *learning* that the daughters of our Lord have talents that are

<sup>79</sup> *Orthodox Observer*, 5 May 1982, p.6.

<sup>80</sup> *Orthodox Observer*, 19 May 1982, p.7.

<sup>81</sup> John Chryssavgis, 'The Royal Priesthood (Peter 2:9)', in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol.32, no.4, 1987, p.376.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p.377.

as diverse and valuable as the talents of His sons .<sup>83</sup>

Her words are all the more poignant when understanding the commitment of Dr. George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury on the occasion of the first ordination of twenty-two women in Canterbury Cathedral on 8 May 1994, when he preached the following message:

You are giving yourself to God... a gift of yourself as a woman ordained as a human being, as is a man... Your priesthood should and will express you as a person and make the priesthood of our Church more inclusive of humanity than it has ever been .<sup>84</sup>

However, the member churches were well aware of the depth of disapproval of Orthodox hierarchs and clergy of the ordination of women, when at the Seoul Convention in 1990, many Eastern and Oriental Orthodox did not attend the service when Bishop Barbara Harris preached, (the first consecrated woman Episcopal Bishop from America), 'as a sign of protest at the inclusion of a female bishop as a main speaker'.<sup>85</sup> Not even ecclesiastical politeness would allow the Orthodox to listen to a consecrated woman preach the word of God.

The delegates at Crete discussed ministry in the church, including sacramental and diaconal ministries, and ministries of the royal priesthood. In these deliberations the recommendations from both Agapia and Rhodes were taken into account to guide the discussion. At Agapia, Metropolitan Emilianos Timiadiš had acknowledged that 'the place assigned to women was all too often marginal, dictated by men, too narrow and with limited opportunities for change'.<sup>86</sup> The delegates recognized that many community ministries were already undertaken by women, were not officially blessed by the church, but were expected to be taken up by women for the church. Whilst endorsing the traditional roles of motherhood in the family, he extended the meaning to also incorporate a sense of the spiritual, social and cultural albeit relying on the argument that women carried the grace of life thereby 'she

<sup>83</sup> *Greek Accent*, 6 (May-June, 1985), p.4. Cited in Eva C Topping, *Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy*, p.108.

<sup>84</sup> Dr George Carey, 'If We Love God's Will, We Take the Shape of it', The Archbishop of Canterbury's Sermon on Ordaining Women to the Priesthood at Canterbury Cathedral, in *One in Christ*, Vol.XXX, no.3. 1994. p.270.

<sup>85</sup> Janet Crawford, *Rocking the Boat*, p.462.

<sup>86</sup> Emilianos Timiadiš, 'The Concern for women in the Orthodox Tradition: New Challenges', *Agapia Consultation*, 1977, p.30.

incarnates self-emptiness and sacrifice'.<sup>87</sup> Both attributes, it is suggested, that surely relate directly to the sacramental and pastoral life of a priest. Timiadis called for women to be admitted to the minor orders of acolytes and readers, the restoration of the diaconate for women, and for new orders to be created for the full participation of women in a changing society.<sup>88</sup> The delegates were cognisant of these comments and endeavoured to incorporate such encouraging words especially from a bishop in their deliberations.

In 1990, Constance Callinicos, a Greek-American feminist and activist for women's rights published *American Aphrodite*, the culmination of interviews and recordings made during the period 1978 to 1982, with many Greek women who had either migrated from Greece after the First World War, or were the daughters of those migrant women. In the late eighties she interviewed younger women by asking the same questions she had addressed to the older women. In the telling of the poignant, angry and often defensive stories, Callinicos revealed the many personal, cultural and spiritual dilemmas these women faced as women in a Greek culture and Greek Orthodox religion:

I have spoken to no young Greek American woman who does not call for drastic change... for integration of women into public authority and real leadership in all arenas; scholarly, sacred, political, organizational. The Greek American world must cease to view its women as auxiliaries and assistants.<sup>89</sup>

If this is the modest call of women for changes in a country with possibly the most liberal laws for its women citizens, then it cannot be assumed that the situation is any better, and is most probably worse in other countries of the *diaspora* of the 'New World'.

In 1990, there were many changes taking place throughout the Orthodox world, amongst them the war in the Middle East and the disintegration of the Soviet Union that was overwhelming the churches of Russia and Eastern Europe. The churches were ill equipped to respond positively to the changes demanded by the people, and the growing secularisation of the societies in the West. All these situations provided opportunities for women. The debate on

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.35.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.35.

<sup>89</sup> Constance Callinicos, *American Aphrodite*, p.17

the ministry of women and the royal priesthood again focused in the main on the re-introduction of the diaconate, especially on the recommendation that the diaconate as a sacramental order should be re-examined in light of the expectations of the diaconate, including the roles of male deacons. The male diaconate has in this century been almost reduced to a liturgical function without other responsibilities to the social wellbeing of community. In addition, questions were raised as to why the diaconate should not be available to married women, especially as most of the educational, catechetical and medical ministries were already being undertaken by women. Sunday school for young children, where the most important introduction to the faith is taught, has traditionally been the domain of women although it is unexplained why she is considered by many clergy as not suitable as a teacher to adults or tertiary students. The question of women's access to the sacramental priesthood was briefly discussed and revealed a wide diversity of opinion on the matter. In the end, the safe and nondescript recommendation, guaranteed pleasing to the hierarchs responsible for the presence of many of the delegates, was for continuing discussion on the matter by women and men theologians.

### **Participation and decision-making of women in the Orthodox Church**

Mary Thomas, the third speaker at Crete, a member of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church spoke of the church as 'becoming everywhere androcentric in its hierarchy and bureaucratic in structure, an attitude against the principle and theology of participation in the Church'.<sup>90</sup> In a country where a woman had risen to the most senior political position when Indira Ghandi served as Prime Minister, preventing women from participating as members in parish and diocesan assemblies, and denying them access to theological education, was for Mary Thomas, humiliating to all women. Whilst acknowledging that the Patriarch had accepted that girl babies should be processed into the sanctuary as were boys, the other reform for women had been permission to read the Bible in Sunday liturgies (Holy Qurbana). However, this invitation would always have to come from the priest, and she noted that women had not been invited to read in her diocese, although she had read in an Orthodox Church outside India. In a bold move, Mary Thomas raised the controversial issue of inclusive language, an issue that has

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<sup>90</sup> Mary Thomas, *Visions for Participation and Decision-making*, Crete 1990, p.2.

raised considerable ire amongst Orthodox theologians, who emphatically state that God has no gender. Thomas Hopko had also addressed the difficult issue of inclusive language specifically on the gender of God by categorically stating that 'while God is "incomparable to anything creaturely" - and "gender is a creaturely category" - God "wills to be Abba/Father to all men and women"'.<sup>91</sup> However, at the same time, the Orthodox remain insensitive to the objections from feminist theologians that if God has no gender, then why is all the language of the church framed in masculine image and masculine authority. Whilst Orthodox women may accept the theological insistence that the Holy Trinity be referred to in terms of 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit', too few Orthodox women have the opportunity for theological education in order to explore the theology of the church. For women the reality is that all authority is assumed by men, whether in vestments or in theology, and is normal and God ordained.

The Community of Women and Men Study that concluded at the Sheffield Consultation in 1983, had been the focus of the issues of ministry, participation and language by many of the member churches, including particular diocese in the Orthodox jurisdictions. Although the relatively new concept of 'inclusive language' in theology was discussed by the Orthodox women in Ras Beirut, Lebanon and Paris meetings, the comments recorded reflect the church position on this problem, not personal thoughts or experiences as related by other women with a more radical feminist perspective on language. The Greek Orthodox women in Ras Beirut wrote: 'we cannot understand the necessity for raising the issue about the identity of God. Christ came in history as a man and taught us to pray : "Our Father who art in Heaven"; whilst the Orthodox group in France affirmed that:

The true meeting with God takes place beyond all images and all words, in the silence that is not mute... Orthodox iconography never represents God the Father. The divine paternity would not be represented by a sexual image... and should not be imagined as a bearded patriarch .<sup>92</sup>

A further affirmation on Orthodox understanding of God from discussions from groups in the Orthodox Church in America, stated 'we would never think of questioning that God was the

<sup>91</sup> *EPS*, 90.02.26.

<sup>92</sup> Melanie May, *Bonds of Unity*, p.149. Both the reports from Lebanon and France were written in French. The English translation was done by Dr May for the publication *Bonds of Unity*

Father, and could never conceive of God as Mother...' <sup>93</sup> 'The issue of language continues to attract derogatory comment from many Orthodox theologians in their arguments against the ordination of women, and has become a major threat to membership of the WCC by some Orthodox churches. <sup>94</sup> In response to the *Inclusive Language Lexicon* published in 1983, John Meyendoff asserted that 'any translation is always an interpretation, but this translation departs from the intention of the writers. It is a deception... it shows a deplorable attitude and will bring in more dissension between the churches'. <sup>95</sup> Deborah Belonick, in her examination of the theology behind inclusive language, called upon the Orthodox to analyse the tenets of feminist Christians whose theology was not in harmony with the movement of the Holy Spirit, and were causing extreme distortions in the faith. 'Feminist Christians accept beliefs about scripture, terms for God, anthropology, Christology and the Resurrection which are disparate with Orthodox Christian thought and doctrine'. <sup>96</sup>

The issue of changing New Testament language about God was deemed a serious ecumenical crisis at the WCC Central Committee meeting in Hannover in August 1988. George Tsetsis, Ecumenical Patriarchate representative at WCC stated that the changes 'could lead to a new heresy which could be worse than any others of the decades'. He added his approval for the EDCSW that began in April 1988, by warning that if changes in language about God were part of the Decade agenda it could turn out to be 'a decade of disintegration of the WCC'. <sup>97</sup> The issue of language led to inappropriate words spoken at the San Antonio Conference on Missions and Evangelism in 1989, when the Coptic Orthodox Bishop Antonios Markos of Kenya had stated on behalf of the fifty three Orthodox delegates present that:

Faith in the Triune God... has been the basis of Orthodox participation in the World Council of churches. We cannot accept any tampering with the language of the Bible... to make it conform with contemporary thought about ordaining women. Whilst fuller participation of women in the church should be studied,

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p.150.

<sup>94</sup> Inclusive language has been cited as one reason for their self-imposed 'suspension' of membership by the Bulgarian, Georgian Orthodox churches.

<sup>95</sup> *Newsweek*, 'Scrubbing the Scriptures', 24 October 1983.

<sup>96</sup> Deborah Belonick, 'Feminism in Christianity', in *Theosis*, September 1985, pp.1-6.

<sup>97</sup> *EPS*, 88.08.83.

their ordination to the priesthood is not for us subject to discussion .<sup>98</sup>

Elisabeth Behr-Sigel also referred to the comments from Bishop Markos in her address, adding that the Bishop also claimed that 'for us, the ordination of women is not a subject for discussion, since it is <sup>is</sup> contrary to the Christological teaching, the ecclesiology, the Tradition and the practice of the Church of the first centuries...' <sup>99</sup> Once again, when faced with the issue of women desiring more participation and decision-making rightfully enjoyed as laity, the church theologians immediately turn to the issue of ordination, which they can flatly reject without consideration. Consequently, whenever women raise issues of participation, language, sexuality and public ministry, the theologians and bishops assume that ordination to the priesthood is the underlying intent. There is a genuine resistance by Orthodox theologians and clergy to listen to women, for to hear them could mean change. However, as the silence imposed on women by religious teachers over the centuries has been broken in other communions so it will happen in the Orthodox churches.

The questions asked by Monica Furlong, an Anglican writer and journalist writing in *The Tablet* in May 1989, on the language of the Church, should be addressed in the Orthodox. These questions should not threaten the church hierarchy nor bring into disrepute the women who question. The structure of language, be it Greek, Russian or Ethiopian, may or may not be exclusive of the feminine; however, in the *diaspora* where English is increasingly the language of liturgy and communication, there are language difficulties for Orthodox women, no less than women in the Protestant and Catholic traditions. Monica Furlong reflected on the patronising attitude of many church leaders who do not listen, never have listened and intend never to listen to women on the use of language. She asked on behalf of Anglican women 'for some attempt by men in the Church to enter imaginatively into the place in which women find themselves, to know how it feels to be continually addressed as 'brethren' or 'man' or without result, endeavour to speak where one has been silenced for two thousand years'.<sup>100</sup> Ianthe Pratt, in the same edition, noted that 'language

<sup>98</sup> *The Washington Post*, 3 June 1989, p.D19.

<sup>99</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *op.cit.* Crete Consultation, p.1.

<sup>100</sup> 'Men, women and language', *The Tablet*, 13 May 1989, p.565.



has a profound psychological significance and affects our attitudes towards self and others'.<sup>101</sup> In both the liturgical language and in prayers, homilies, and sermons given by the priest, 'man' continues to be normal, and many women perceive their exclusion into second-class status. The effect of ecumenical relationships has at least resulted in all publications emanating from the World Council of Churches and its related bodies, using inclusive language although always with caution and care when it comes to the Orthodox.

For Orthodox women already aware of the impossibilities for women of exercising public authority, it is little wonder that the recommendations for action that emanated from Crete continued to be couched in conservative and traditional terminology. Orthodox women would not align themselves either in action or in words with radical expressions of revolt exercised so successfully by their sisters in other communions. This is not to say that all the issues discussed were conservative nor that discussion lacked challenging, or indeed radical ideas during the debates. The issue of human sexuality alone, raised social, ethical, theological and personal dilemmas for women delegates. The influence of culture and tradition, and indeed, whether women were living in the homeland or the *diaspora* directed the discussions in various ways. What emerged overall was the measure of prohibitions against women on account of their gender and fecundity. What lessons women had learned throughout history were from the Fathers of the Church, from glorious Byzantium, the present day theologians influenced by their own ethnic culture and often inadequately trained parish priests. It was obvious for the few forward thinking women in Crete, that women continued to accept their secondary role in the embrace and importance of motherhood, service and submission. Challenges to the Church by women who cared and desired change, would continue to meet centuries of entrenched belief and practices, in the local parishes, from the bishop's office and the seminaries and monasteries.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.563.

### **Bossey Seminars – Feminist and Orthodox Spiritualities**

By the final decade of the twentieth century the participation of Orthodox women in the ecumenical movement and within the Orthodox Church had grown considerably from the first survey on life and work of women in the church in 1947. Orthodox women were studying theology in mainstream universities when unable to be admitted to Orthodox seminaries. Some Orthodox women applied on their own behalf to attend seminars, not requesting the bishop's approval or his nomination. These included Orthodox women committed to social justice, political action, and equality and access into the professions and the workforce, and others committed to ecumenism in women's meeting groups and justice issue forums. In other words, Orthodox women, through education and global information networks were finding their place in the 'women's movement' by themselves. The Bossey Seminars formed an important bridge for Orthodox women to meet and dialogue with Protestant and Catholic women in a neutral place with an agenda not determined by nor requiring authority from the patriarchy. The three seminars revealed not only the depth of spirituality to be found in all traditions, but the revelation of biblical exegesis and the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' brought new understandings as Orthodox women struggled to be open to each others traditions.

The commitment of the WCC Women's Unit to encouraging more participation of Orthodox women in the ecumenical movement and particularly in dialogue with other church women on the multitudinous issues facing women in church and society was not restricted to the endorsement and support for the Consultations held in Crete (1990) and followed later in Damascus (1996) and Istanbul (1997). During the Decade, the programme of seminars was promoted and organised between staff at WCC and the faculty at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, situated 20 kilometres from Geneva at the Chateau de Bossey at Celigny. While individual Orthodox women attended seminars focused on particular problems arising from the programmes at WCC, there were three specific seminars set aside to promote dialogue between Orthodox and Protestant women.

Teny Pirri-Simonian, Armenian Apostolic Church and staff person in WCC Unit II, Churches in Mission, Health Education and Witness and Rev Dr Beate Stierle, Associate Director at Bossey and an ordained pastor and theologian in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany, were the prime organisers and facilitators of the three seminars held in 1992, 1994 and 1997., together with some assistance and contribution of the Women's Unit through the Director, Aruna Gnamadason, a member of the Church of South India. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the symbolic collapse of communist control in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the diversity of the women attending the seminars was more apparent than previous experiences of ecumenical dialogue. Not only Orthodox women were participants from Romania, Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic and Slovakia), Poland and Bulgaria for example, but also Protestant women from the same countries able to attend having been nominated by their member churches and able to procure passports without the difficulties of the past.

The themes of the seminars shared a common purpose -to explore the feminine images, feminism and spirituality in Protestant and Orthodox traditions. The programmes were ambitious and on occasions fraught with theological and sociological 'dangers' as women were brought together to discuss issues ranging from the highly personal to controversial and entrenched traditions and cultures. There was an exchange of views of traditional and feminist theology concerning ministry of women and differing roles of women in monasticism. For women from the Orthodox churches to hear feminist theologians and ordained ministers from North America and Western Europe refer to God as 'She', to address the delegates with new concepts of Bible studies and revelations of biblical women, and assert that their ordination to the priesthood was theologically not only possible but had happened was a new experience at times overwhelming for some younger Orthodox women. For Protestant women, the emphasis on culture and tradition, the veneration and love of the Ever-Virgin Mary, the veneration of icons, and the presence of patriarchy so evident in Orthodox practice and theology presented difficult concepts, and impatience with what was perceived at times as the subordinate role that Orthodox women accepted for themselves without question. Between the extremes of

misunderstandings and tensions emerged a tentative dialogue between women that for centuries had been the province of men, clerics and theologians from both traditions. However, 'the disappointment was the reluctance of the forum to deal with the really difficult issues... the opportunities for real and honest exposure for theological exploration were not pursued'.<sup>102</sup>

The co-ordinators for the Bossey seminars invited Elisabeth Behr-Sigel to be keynote speaker in May 1992, and despite her mature years she was able to continue the theme for the next two seminars to 1997 when she celebrated ninety years. She acknowledged her presence as an Orthodox veteran on the discussion of feminist values and ecumenical meetings, but her words were fresh and new to the majority of Orthodox women, and almost unknown to the Protestant delegates. Behr-Sigel was one of the few Orthodox women to acknowledge the work of Eva Topping 'who was more bold than most and more direct in her criticisms of misogyny'. Behr-Sigel asserted that the feminine models of the Theotokos and the women saints were not enough to placate the questions of women of today and urged women to 'awake from their dogmatic sleep and be prepared to do experiential theology'. Behr-Sigel may have well had in mind a particular woman who had spoken to Constance Callinicos on her relationship as a woman to her God:

For 'Electra' the reflections on where she was located in the church was brought home with an experience at a Vesper service on the eve of the death of the Theotokos. She realized that whilst the women were the majority faithful in the pews, they were not participants, they were observers and responders.<sup>103</sup>

They watched, somehow absorbing what little godliness they could manage to catch hold of in the fallout of what was happening in that closed, tight circle of gold-bedecked men holding prayer books, singing to praise God and to a Holy Woman, the only one we had really.<sup>104</sup>

'Electra' explained the profound effect this revelation had on her by leaving her open to reflect deeply and sincerely about her religion and her God. To consider the question, asked so often

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<sup>102</sup> Feminine Images and Orthodox Spirituality Seminar, Bossey, May 1992, in *MaryMartha*, Vol.2, no.2, 1992, p.12.

<sup>103</sup> p.129.

<sup>104</sup> p.130.

by many women throughout the centuries, but perhaps no more searching and questioning than in this century:

Do I belong in a place that filters my relationship with my God through so many layers of male mediators who are supposed to know the secret of what God is, what he thinks about women (me) and how I should talk to him. Furthermore, they tell me, or I have somehow divined through all the teachings I have sat through since a child, God is Greek and he is a man. <sup>105</sup>

Elisabeth Behr-Sigel accepted that whilst Orthodox clergy and hierarchs were perceived as misogynistic and unyielding at the same time western feminists were impatient and wanted to instigate changes including the ordination of women, which Behr-Sigel claimed was 'a dialogue of the deaf'. <sup>106</sup> She defended the right of women theologians to use feminine images when speaking of God noting that they also 'exist in Orthodoxy but have not been developed'. The first seminar was an opening of dialogue and willing exchange from Orthodox women, but still permitted cautionary comment from Metropolitan Georges Khodre of Lebanon, one of three men present, who declared he was not apologetic of the Orthodox attitudes which had developed under centuries of Turkish rule nor the structures that were administered by the rules of Islam. In response to Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, he advocated specific ministry roles for women, such as the wife of a priest, the *khouriyye*, while 'not a declared ministry, had a real role to play for she is not like the wife of another man, she has a real spiritual presence'; or an abbess of a monastery, who had real pastoral roles to play, not only within the monastery but also for those around the monastery. Maha Milke Wehbe, the wife of a priest in Lebanon added that the role of the *khouriyye*, required:

A solid spiritual life, nurtured by prayer, consulting her spiritual father and her husband... to build her virtues of silence and humility... and be ever ready to proclaim that she is a 'handmaid of the Lord'. <sup>107</sup> The role we have to play requires total devotion and sacrifice which can be asked of those who are not concerned with it. <sup>108</sup>

<sup>105</sup> p.131.

<sup>106</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, 'Feminine Images and their spiritual significance in the eastern and western traditions and churches through their ecclesial life in a world of constant change'. Paper given at Bossey Seminar, May 1992. np. Personal papers in possession of Leonie Liveris, Perth, Australia.

<sup>107</sup> *MaryMartha*, Vol.2, no.2, August 1992, p.6.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

In order to provide some continuity and hopefully progress through the Bossey seminars there were a few Orthodox women who attended two or three of the seminars and included Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, Kyriaki FitzGerald, Leonie Liveris and Mother Maria Rule.

<sup>109</sup> Of considerable interest to delegates in 1992, was the presentation by Kyriaki FitzGerald, who as a theologian and a psychotherapist, presented a paper by using the methodology of modern feminist theologians, grounded in the life of a woman saint well known to the Orthodox women. In the tradition of hagiography, especially pertaining to women, the repentant sinner is one of the most common examples of redemption and forgiveness and Mary of Egypt is no exception. Using her professional expertise together with her theological scholarship, FitzGerald raised the issues of sexual abuse, prostitution and marginalisation. The oppression of hermeneutics over the centuries of interpretations that impact on the daily lives of women or contemporary times have not always allowed women to perceive themselves in the lives of biblical women nor in the lives of women saints. The reality is only of the past and redemption only for the women of history. By using the contemporary moral issues for the church and society that impact so starkly on the lives of women, and men in some instances, the message of redemption and holiness was brought closer to reality and understanding to the women. However, the disappointment at future seminars and consultations was that FitzGerald did not continue this particular method of hermeneutics, by relating the past with the present, as though such confrontational exegesis has no place in modern Orthodox theology. Kyriaki FitzGerald was well placed to be a 'prophet' for Orthodox women, a position that is 'yet to be'. Nevertheless, she has become a woman's voice to the Patriarch, and in 1997 was responsible for the invitation for the Consultation held in Istanbul as guests of His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomeus I.

The delegates at the various Bossey Seminars expressed their difficulties in coming to terms with one another's traditions and worship. The seminars were merely a beginning for future ecumenical relationship that had not had the space or opportunity for women to develop in the past. It was an opportunity for Orthodox women, not all a part of the

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<sup>109</sup> I also attended all the Bossey Seminars as well as the Crete and Istanbul Consultations.

ecumenical circuit and the usual bishop's delegates to participate in this new though tentative experience. The Orthodox women delegates, particularly from Eastern Europe Orthodox churches, new to the ecumenical spirit, were often reluctant to attend services in the Bossey chapel when led by a Protestant pastor. It was not made clear whether their objections were the chapel itself, the woman pastor or that she was Protestant. There was a polarisation of the delegates which led to certain tensions, not so much a clear division of Orthodox/Protestant rather it was feminist/orthodox. Antagonism to the term 'feminist' was expressed not only by Orthodox women but also conservative Protestant women. However, the positive effect experienced by a number of women was expressed by a young theologian from the Georgian Orthodox Church following a bible study presented by an Orthodox and a Protestant theologian:

This is the first time I have heard two women theologians speak of the Gospel. Every word was painted in bright colours. I have only heard from priests, I enjoyed both presentations - for they were from tradition, and out of the possibilities for my life. <sup>110</sup>

The seminars raised awareness of diversity and challenged stereotypes; revealed the broad spectrum of women's agenda whether in social or spiritual matters; they were a part of an ongoing process for some women as they experienced global perspectives on moral, social and religious issues. While most women were positive in their responses to whether the seminars were worthwhile, there were criticisms that remain important issues between Orthodox and Protestant women. Protestant pastors, especially from Eastern Europe expressed disappointment that more Roman Catholic women were not delegates to provide a bridge between the theologies and practices of the churchwomen. They criticized the Orthodox as being too dogmatic and unwilling at times to express their own opinions about particular issues. Through these seminars the concept of the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' was raised by various speakers, who urged the participants to examine the texts of scripture and the writings of the Fathers and liturgical practices to ask 'how is God portrayed, how are the

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<sup>110</sup> Leonie B Liveris, 'Feminist and Orthodox Spiritualities', Bossey Seminar, 9-19 May 1994, in *MaryMartha*, Vol.3, nos.3/4, October 1994, pp.45-46.

scriptures used, and do they truly speak to me'. The seminars were a beginning for many Orthodox women, their first encounter with feminist theology and feminist theologians.

In addition to the Bossey Seminars which brought together Protestant and Orthodox women during the 1990s, some Orthodox women in Europe were also participating in other forums such as the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women (the forum that had emerged from the WELG in 1979), European Women's Synod, World Day of Prayer and the European Association of Women Theologians. Mihaela Rabu and Liliana Andronescu, both active in the Romanian Orthodox Church in Bucharest, and their work in AIDRom - Ecumenical Association of Churches from Romania, are also on committees for WCC and Ecumenical Forum of Christian women. As Rabu reports: 'I believe it important for women, Eastern European Orthodox women, to be as visible as possible after their faith had been "put on hold" for almost fifty years. <sup>111</sup> In 1994, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thebes and Levadia hosted a meeting of over 300 Orthodox women, from the former Eastern European Orthodox churches, Finland, Cyprus, Greece and the Orthodox *diaspora* of Western Europe on The Orthodox Woman and inter-Christian Dialogue in a United Europe.

<sup>112</sup> Teny Pirri-Simonian reported that:

In today's Europe, Orthodox women need to be equipped with the knowledge of the theology of the Church and its traditions; they need to re-discover their vocation as members in the Body of Christ; they should be inspired by the women in the holy Scriptures and pray with the community of saints to build the new community, the new Europe. <sup>113</sup>

In 1997, two hundred women theologians met at the Orthodox Academy of Crete for the Conference of European Society of Theological Research. In her report, Eleni Kasselouri, Greek Orthodox theologian from Thessaloniki, addressed the theme 'Sources and resources of feminist theologies' and asked how feminist theologians refer to and use the texts, and where do they stand in relation to traditional authority of the churches?'. For the first, she

<sup>111</sup> Mihaela Rabu, 'Orthodox Women and the Women's Net', in *MaryMartha*, Vol.6, Spring-Summer, 1998, p.26.

<sup>112</sup> Teny Pirri-Simonian, 'The Orthodox Woman in the United Europe', 4-6 November 1994, Levadia, Greece, 31 October 1994.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8



asserts Orthodox women theologians became visible and their theological contributions were notable. <sup>114</sup> Eva Adanziloglou, Greek Orthodox theologian at the Aristotle University in Thessaloniki accepted that: 'feminist theology clearly concerns all areas of theology... in my faculty there are now theses dealing with feminist issues, including my own on women in the theology of the Apostle Paul, the thesis by Constantinos Yokarinis on ordination, and courses in Feminist Hermeneutics by Professor Vasiliadis'. <sup>115</sup>

The Consultation in Crete was an expansion on the issues tentatively and courageously raised at Agapia in 1976. Only one man was present at Crete, Father Thomas Hopko, leaving the women delegates to decide the arrangements, focus on the issues and debate their diverse views and experiences. Once again, the delegates were well educated, they were professionals, teachers, theologians and active in church affairs from choirs and women's parish groups to lecturing at colleges, psychotherapists, church historians and ecumenists. The recommendations focused on issues that matter to the daily lives of many Orthodox women, whether personal and spiritual or pastoral and community. While a strong network of women emerged from the Consultation, the recommendations from Crete have suffered the same 'fate' as those from Agapia. Certainly they were noble and far sighted while conservative enough not to challenge too strongly or disrespectfully, the hierarchy nor the authority of the Church. However, a Decade after the Crete Consultation, and nearly twenty five years after Agapia, both serious attempts by WCC Women's Unit and the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey to encourage ecumenical dialogue between Orthodox women and with Protestant women, what can be claimed to be meaningful progress for women in the Orthodox churches? The issues of women's ministry or sacramental priesthood, the use of more sensitive and theologically inclusive language and the issue of human sexuality, all concerns that emerged throughout the three Bossey Seminars for Orthodox women, became the reasons for the Orthodox churches to seriously reconsider their membership of the World Council of Churches in 1998.

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<sup>114</sup> Eleni Kasselouri, 'Long Journey towards a true dialogue. 7th Conference of European Society of Women in Theological Research', in *MaryMartha*, Vol.6, Spring-Summer, 1998. p.14.

<sup>115</sup> 'Appeal to Women Orthodox Theologians, *AFERT*, February 1995, pp.6-7.

## Chapter Seven

### Militant Conservatism and a Movement of Orthodox Women

In this final chapter it is necessary to review the programme and outcomes of the WCC Assembly in Canberra in 1991 in order to place in context the decade of changes in the WCC and the relationship both within the hierarchy and the laity of Orthodox churches. In the late nineties, two Orthodox women's consultations on the theme of 'discerning the signs of the times', took place in Damascus and Istanbul respectively. Once again the consultations were part of the commitment of the WCC Women's Unit and incorporated in the Ecumenical Decade programme. The programme was intended to encourage consciousness-raising in all the member churches concerning the participation, ministry and identity of women in the church. This chapter analyses the reports of the 'Living Letters', visits to the Orthodox churches and reflects whether the Orthodox heeded the aims and recommendations of the Decade. This chapter explores the process of the two meetings, and compares the aims of the Decade with reflections on Agapia, and considers how far Orthodox women had grown in solidarity with each other in the Church.

Many Christians throughout the centuries have found their spiritual and cultural home in the Orthodox churches. However, there is an increasing influence of some neo-Orthodox converts entering the Orthodox churches citing the Orthodox as safe havens particularly from modernism and feminism. These new elements within the Orthodox churches have come at a time when there are tentative efforts by Orthodox women to voice concerns and name the problems in the Church. This chapter examines the reasons and the problems for the church. Finally, this chapter reviews the isolated attempts by Orthodox women and women's groups across the jurisdictions to become involved in the wider movement of women in the Church, despite antagonism and financial constraints from community and hierarchy, through programmes and publications aimed at consciousness-raising of women's issues and feminist hermeneutics for Orthodox women.

### WCC Seventh Assembly, Canberra, 1991 - 'At such a time as this'

This section examines the tensions that arose from the WCC Assembly in Canberra in 1991. These tensions remain influences on recalcitrant attitudes of hierarchs in regard to women's issues in the Orthodox churches. In February 1991 another milestone in the work and accountability of the programmes and achievements of the World Council of Churches took place in Canberra, Australia. Janet Crawford correctly and succinctly gathers together the situation for and participation of Orthodox women in the ecumenical movement at the beginning of the 1990s:

The increased presence and development of the Orthodox churches in the WCC has developed over the same period that women's presence and participation has increased. Discussion on the role of women in the church, pressure for equal representation of women in all the structures and work of the WCC, the ordination of women as an item on the ecumenical agenda, have all been initiated by Protestant members of the WCC, and on these and other issues related to women's participation the Orthodox have frequently found themselves in a minority position. The development of feminist theology and its articulation within the WCC has posed new challenges to Orthodox tradition. Thus issues of women's participation have contributed to tensions between the Orthodox and other member churches, tensions documented and discussed.<sup>1</sup>

The gathering of nearly four thousand delegates, staff, guests, advisers and visitors for the Seventh Assembly in Canberra was once again a momentous event for the World Council of Churches. There were a number of situations which affected Orthodox women by process and outcomes, that continued to affect the way in which the Ecumenical Decade was observed by some Orthodox, but in most cases ignored by their churches. At the Pre-Assembly Women's Meeting (PAWM) Constance Tarasar, an appointed Orthodox delegate to the Assembly was invited to give the Homily at the opening ecumenical service. Tensions arose throughout the PAWM meeting as difficult issues, relating to injustice, suffering and the relationships of women, spilled into the Assembly itself. The tensions also centred on the ordination issue for many women and later male clerics and the presence of women in the plenaries, chairing the sessions and preaching the Gospel. However, from the Orthodox

<sup>1</sup> Janet Crawford, 'Rocking the Boat...', PhD thesis, 1995, p.28.

women there was a solidarity of opinion that would not cause concern for their hierarchies.

Romanian Orthodox nun, Mother Filoteia commented:

Women play an important role in the Orthodox church since the discovery that the role of the laity can be as important as the role of the clergy. For the Orthodox, ordination was linked to apostolic succession, while for Protestant, ordination was a mantle of leadership. <sup>2</sup>

and there the argument had been both placed and left by the Orthodox Church.

Constance Tarasar, reflected on the tensions during the Assembly, firstly by declaring that contrary to Assembly rumours, 'the Orthodox were not on the verge of withdrawing so much as asking for a complete re-thinking and re-evaluation of what their place was within the WCC'. <sup>3</sup> Secondly, she again professed her sense of continuing to be 'the only different voice', (twenty years after the Missouri meeting), which raised questions as to how open Orthodox women have been in their ecumenical relationships. Constance Tarasar expressed her concerns for women in situations of family abuse, inequality in the workplace, discrimination in decision-making processes, but 'like most Orthodox women she did not have a problem with the ordination of women'. <sup>4</sup> The concern of conservative women and indeed their churches, about some feminist perspectives of the Decade led Stefanie Yazge to write 'Orthodox women are the object of our ecumenical partners' pity', and insisted that such an attitude (or self-perception) must be addressed during the Decade if the Decade is to be in solidarity with Orthodox women'. <sup>5</sup> However, it must be asked how restricted in their expressions of fellowship within ecumenism have Orthodox women been by their bishops? How important was it to be present, if it was only to placate the demand for gender and laity balance, as determined by WCC, rather than being an activist for change? How useful was ecumenism for Orthodox women as participants in the movement for church unity when they seem little able to express themselves in open forums. Is the absence of critical feminist

<sup>2</sup> *Assembly Line*, No. 1, 8 February 1991, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> *Assembly Line*, No. 10, 19 February 1991, p.3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>5</sup> Stefanie Yazge, 'From One Orthodox Woman's Perspective', in Melanite May (ed.), *Women and Church*, W Eerdmans : Grand Rapids MI, 1991, pp.66-69. OCA Delegate to Crete Consultation.

voices from Orthodoxy simply their exclusion by bishops when asked for the names of women to be invited or nominated as delegates for such meetings. Valerie Zahirsky, from the Orthodox Church in America, later reflecting on the Canberra Assembly wrote: 'Orthodox women should be present at ecumenical meetings to manifest a vibrant, joyous faith that does not compromise its own basic teachings ...and can meet intellectual and theological challenges'.<sup>6</sup> No-one would deny that all such contributions are important, but is there a place in ecumenical meetings for the dissident, provocative or challenging voices as well, not only conservative and repetitive voices of women well known from hagiography, culture and tradition in Orthodox history?

Certainly, all the member churches speak from a given understanding of creeds and articles of faith of their own communion, but within each of those guidelines of faith exists personal and spiritual relationships with God and the understanding of being both believer and reformer in the faith. The search for justice and equality and inclusion by women in the Church universal, is a *tour de force* for women delegates and WCC personnel that has accelerated through the ecumenical movement and member churches since 1948. From Vancouver in 1983, the focus on ordination of women had emerged from the pre-assembly meeting at The Well and became part of the catalyst for approval by the Central Committee in 1987 for an Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women. The Canberra Assembly, taking place three years into the programme revealed there were many recalcitrant churches who had still to commit themselves to the Decade rather than continuing to see the Decade as 'women in solidarity with women'.

In the Ecumenical Decade plenary presentation, it was encouraging for women to hear Olga Ganaba, a delegate from the Russian Orthodox Church, claim that the Decade was open to the possibilities of transcending the brokenness of community between women and men, a brokenness which had created economic injustice and poverty as an increasingly

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<sup>6</sup> Valerie Zahirsky, 'Ecumenical Gatherings: Should We Be There', in *MaryMartha*, Vol.1, no.2, May 1991, p.20. Delegate to Bossey Seminar 1992, Crete, Damascus and Istanbul consultations, and WCC Assembly Canberra, 1991. Past-President of St Vladimir's Seminary Alumni.

woman's issue, racial injustice leading to violence and humiliation of women and men and a community that manifested in sexism, in oppressive structures that crushed the spirit of women.<sup>7</sup> It was from Gamba that delegates heard the call to 'struggle against the ideas, traditions, historical circumstances and social conditions which in practice acquire the form of discrimination of women'.<sup>8</sup>

At the Women's Tent, created for women visitors and participants to provide a respite and reflection space for women, including raising issues of sexuality, violence against women, ministry and participation, Orthodox women were invited to participate in a panel discussion on 'Meeting with Orthodox Women'. Mother Filoteia Cosma, a Romanian Orthodox nun, Valerie Zahirsky, the President of the Alumni of St Vladimir's Seminary in New York and wife of an OCA priest, and Teny Pirri-Simonian from Lebanon (and staff person at WCC) reflecting on the war years and experiences of the Armenian Apostolic Church, shared the podium with women from other traditions, from the 'North' and the 'South', to speak as women who are the church and who are the community of God. Notwithstanding the comments and participation by Orthodox speakers during the Assembly, the main point of departure from the sense of unity of purpose and commitment in the WCC was the accusation of 'syncretism' from the Orthodox following the opening plenary addresses on the theme of the Assembly, 'Come Holy Spirit - Renew the Whole Creation'.

The keynote speakers were to be His Beatitude Parthenios, Patriarch of Alexandria and a young woman theologian from the Presbyterian Church in Korea, Professor Chung Hyun-Kyung. However, Patriarch Parthenios, was unable to attend and his address was read out thereby losing the important personal dialogue between speaker and his thoughts and words and the listening audience. For the Orthodox delegates and participants the time of the Assembly was difficult especially in view of the USA attack on Iraq in response to the invasion of Iraq into Kuwait. A number of Middle East countries were affected by natural alliances, and some delegates were unable to attend. The Patriarch reminded the participants

<sup>7</sup> WCC Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Document No.PL13.3, p.4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.4.

that 'on the day of Pentecost all we see and hear is wondrous. By the Holy Spirit we are taught to theologize, to make our faith come alive'.<sup>9</sup> He spoke of the need for unity and forgiveness:

May we not continually rehearse the same old clichés, reckoning that we are the carriers and bearers each one separately and all together, of our own history and tradition which is "of this world" with all our habits and practices, which have solid worth and excellence but are also overlaid with errors...<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps nowhere else at the Assembly, other than the 'painful and perceived lack of eucharistic hospitality' at the Orthodox Divine liturgy celebrated on the second Sunday of the Assembly, were the differences between conservative Orthodoxy more at odds with Protestant delegates, even though many delegates supported the concerns expressed from the Orthodox churches. The ramifications from the presentation by Dr. Chung have continued to be fissures in ecumenical dialogue for the last decade.

In contrast to the deeply theological and profound address of Patriarch Parthenios, the presentation from Dr Chung appealed to the senses, and was filled with music, movement, Asian theology and youthful passion. Dr Chung entered the plenary session with young dancers from Korea together with indigenous Australians. She firstly invoked the names of persons in history who had undergone a tragic death, she burned the list of names and let the ashes drift upwards. She made a strong plea for the reunification of North and South Korea, her homeland. She rejected a 'traditional macho God who rescued 'good guys' and punished 'bad guys'. Rather she appealed to the compassionate God who wept for life in the midst of the cruel destruction of life. She called for harmony with the environment; change from the organization of life with dualism - body/spirit, man/woman, black/white, rich/poor; and from the culture of death to the culture of life. Chung Hyun Kyung urged the Assembly to use the energy of the Holy Spirit to tear apart walls of division and the culture of death that separates.<sup>11</sup> Finally she shared her image of the Holy Spirit from her Korean

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<sup>9</sup> Parthenios, Patriarch of Alexandria, *The Holy Spirit*, Document No. PL3.2. WCC. Seventh Assembly, Canberra February 7-20 1991, p.3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p.4.

<sup>11</sup> David Busch. *Assembly Line*, 9 February 1991, no.2, p.1.

cultural background, an image 'from the gut feeling deep in my people's collective unconsciousness that comes from thousands of years of spirituality'.<sup>12</sup>

The accusation of 'syncretism', perceived by the Orthodox delegates as moving away from what being 'Christian' meant, added another problem issue together with the ordination of women, inclusive language and gender distinctions. Archbishop Kirill of Smolensk (Russian Orthodox Church) said that by embracing 'liberal, radical and contextual theologies', as reflected in syncretism and the ordination of women, the WCC was creating new church divisions, and called for a radical reversal before ecumenical hopes were exhausted'. The General Secretary, Rev. Dr Emilio Castro rejected any notion of syncretism, saying other religions have no interest in blending with Christianity adding that Christian theologians have 'a right and a duty' to push the boundaries of thought as they seek to relate the Christian message to their cultural contexts'.<sup>13</sup>

In Canberra, the Orthodox delegates insisted on a private meeting of all Orthodox delegates, assembly visitors were included, to discuss the address by Dr Chung and formulate their complaint to the WCC. The press were invited to leave as were the few observers standing in the gallery above the assembly hall. Orthodox participants believed it was becoming increasingly problematic to be members of the WCC as the language of the WCC became even less 'patristic and theological' and moved further away from the original aims of the 1948 WCC. However, in the midst of speaker after speaker voicing their deep concern about the theology being spoken in the WCC, Professor Nicholas Lossky from the Russian Orthodox community in Paris said: 'We must find the note of optimism in this meeting, we must be realists and see the global scene. We remain members because Orthodox participation and witness is important in this Assembly. We now hear Protestants speak of the Holy Spirit, this is our influence and we must stay to share our insights'.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> WCC Seventh Assembly, 8 February 1991, Document No. PL 3.3.

<sup>13</sup> EPS, 91.02.66

<sup>14</sup> The candidate was an accredited visitor at the WCC Assembly in Canberra and attended the closed meeting of Orthodox delegates and accredited visitors. References taken from notes during the meeting, 16 February 1991.



The question to be asked, which has no answer officially recorded, is whether the plenary address from Professor Chung was more challenging and perceived as more 'synergetic' because the presenter was a young woman from Asia, than if the same sentiments had been developed in traditional theology by a more mature, robed and serious male cleric or theologian from Europe. In a far more ecumenical endeavour to listen to voices of women from Protestant and Orthodox theologies, Professor Chung and Demetra Jacquet, a Greek Orthodox educationist and counsellor with a Masters of Divinity and an activist in church affairs at all levels, were invited to debate at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1993. Demetra Jacquet, rather than reiterating the objections of her bishops and hierarchs to the address and presentation by Professor Chung in Canberra, stated in a conciliatory way that: 'Asian feminists' sensitivities to the complementarity of the Taoists, the ordering principle of the Confucians and the Zen process of paradoxical illumination, give them an experiential empathy with Eastern Christianity that is unavailable to our western sisters...<sup>15</sup>

### **Authority and discipline**

In the matter of nominations for the next WCC Central Committee 1991-1998, the name of Professor Mary Thomas, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, with four other Orthodox women, was proposed. She was one of forty-five Orthodox women delegates, eminently qualified; she was a laywoman, Professor of sociology, from the 'south', and involved in ecumenical work in the All India Christian Women's Council working on poverty, abuse and powerlessness of women in society as well as work with women in her own church. Her nomination created problems for her church and her bishop, Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios, a retiring President of the WCC. Mary Thomas was asked to withdraw her name from nomination in favour of a priest, whose election had already been published in India before the Assembly:

She saw her nomination as a challenge and a moral responsibility to accept.

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<sup>15</sup> Demetra Jacquet, 'In Solidarity with Orthodox women', Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 8 March 1993, p.20.

Her refusal to withdraw, was viewed as disobedience and disloyalty to the Church and its hierarchy and she was accused of being guilty of having participated in a communion service celebrated by 'Protestant Priests'. This service was in fact the Liturgy, where she read a bible passage during the service.<sup>16</sup>

Mary Thomas did not withdraw her name, but her resignation from Central Committee came soon after her returned to India following the Assembly. For the display of church politics, a retiring President of WCC, and past Moderator of the United Church of Canada, Rev. Dr Lois Wilson made known that in her opinion: 'the politics of WCC stink to high heaven and I do not think it was what Jesus had in mind'.<sup>17</sup> The only pleasing outcome for women was the replacement on Central Committee of another Orthodox woman, not the priest. Another example of Orthodox women not participating in Central Committee came to the notice of WCC Executive in 1994 during the Mid-Decade team visits, 'Living Letters', to member churches in America. Nancy Basamjian, Orthodox graduate and member of the Armenian Apostolic Church in America was elected onto the Central Committee in Canberra. However, she had not attended any of the Central Committee meetings and instead, Bishop Viken Akazina had substituted for her on every occasion. Regardless that Nancy may have been nominated because of gender distribution, and with some reluctance, or there were financial difficulties for the Church, nevertheless she was a suitable and qualified member and should have been present. The team raised the issue whether this was occurring in other member churches, not just the Orthodox churches, and agreed to forward their concerns to the WCC General Secretary Konrad Reiser.<sup>18</sup>

At the following WCC Assembly in Harare in December 1998, the same problem of gender ratio that confronted the Nominations committee in 1991 was again an issue for Orthodox churches. Once again, an Orthodox woman nominee, Silva Ghazelian, attempted

<sup>16</sup> STREE, November 1991. Edited for publication in *MaryMartha*, Vol.2, no. 1, April 1992, p.12-13. Mary Thomas was not the only person accused of improper and 'heretical' behaviour. His Eminence, Archbishop Stylianos, Greek Orthodox Primate of Australia was targeted by the St Paul Brotherhood (based in Melbourne). The Divine Liturgy celebrated on 17 February 1991 was video-taped by his opponents, and later 'cut and paste' methods suggested that the Archbishop had co-celebrated with priests in other churches and with women priests.

<sup>17</sup> *Western Impact*, Vol.11, no.2, March 1991, p.11.

<sup>18</sup> Mid-Decade Reports, Armenian Church in America, USA, p.24.

to withdraw her name in favour of an Orthodox male priest, after Archbishop Aghan Baliozian (Armenian Apostolic Church) asked the Assembly to replace the nominating committee's female candidate. The moderator, Soritua Nababan, expressed anger that 'women are so oppressed they feel they must acquiesce to those who are in authority over them... It pains me'. The Assembly rejected the new nomination by a large majority. The moderator of the committee regretted that some churches refused to replace male nominees with female delegates making it difficult to balance the committee as recommended from previous Assemblies. In an interesting twist, the moderator suggested a vote whether to accept the proposed resignation, but it was withdrawn when Fr George Tssetis (representative of Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople) noted her nomination had already been accepted by the Assembly. However, Tssetis added, 'whether she resigns is a matter for a future time'.<sup>19</sup> At the conclusion of nominations, the Orthodox churches had the highest percentage of membership, 24.6 per cent. A powerful block vote on particular issues that will continue to be contentious on every agenda of the WCC Central committee in regard to gender equality, ordination of women, inclusive language and homosexuality.

Following the Canberra Assembly in early 1991, the new Central Committee met in October 1991 to formulate the programme of work and discuss new structures, especially in light of financial difficulties. The processes of nominating members of Central Committee to serve on the four formal Commissions was extended to include other persons as designated by the balance between, clergy and laity, men and women, youth, 'north' and 'south'. to provide expertise from outside to assist the work of the commissions and the secretariat for the commissions and WCC personnel. In Australia, the General Secretary of the Australian Council of Churches (now the National Council of Churches of Australia), Rev David Gill, announced that two persons had been nominated and accepted by the Central Committee at the October meeting.<sup>20</sup> Rev John Brown from the Uniting Church (Commission on Mission and Evangelism) and Ms Leonie Liveris, Greek Orthodox laywoman, (Commission on

<sup>19</sup> WCC Eighth Assembly Media Report, Press Release No.39. 11 December 1998.

<sup>20</sup> Report, Rev. David Gill, First meeting of WCC Central Committee, Geneva, September 1991.

Justice, Peace and Creation) were both well known in ecumenical councils and committees, and the response to both nominees was positive. John Brown served the Commission on Mission and Evangelism for the next seven years. However, the practice of WCC in regard to appointments to staff and Commissions required the approval of the Head of the nominees' church and was not forthcoming for Leonie Liveris. Notwithstanding letters to Archbishop Stylianos, pointing out her service within the Orthodox Church, to the ecumenical movement and as Executive Officer of the ACC Commission on the Status of Women,<sup>21</sup> the Archbishop let it be known through his secretary Fr John Chryssavgis, that he would not endorse the Central Committee acceptance of her nomination. Despite internal lobbying at the WCC it was not possible to override the Archbishop's decision.

The decision from the Archbishop was not surprising given the reprimand Liveris had received in 1989 when her comments in a general newspaper interview focused on women in the Church were sub-titled 'for the Orthodox, patriarchy rules...'. In response to questions concerned with feminism and women in the Church, she claimed that 'the worlds of Orthodox and feminist theology were mutually exclusive... the issue of women's ordination is theologically impossible... and that ultimately being an Orthodox woman meant leaving many things at the door of the church when you join'.<sup>22</sup> A complaint was sent to the Archbishop by the local priest, without reference to the 'offender' which brought the following response from the Chancellor, Very Rev. Miltiades Chryssavgis, writing for His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia:

The tone of your comments is such that you appear to disagree with the Orthodox position... you cannot allow room for doubt and disagreement... you should always consult (your priest) ... for joint statements. To fail to do this would betray not only disobedience on your part, but would also create complications and embarrassment among our faithful... His Eminence asked me to convey to you if you do not feel happy with the tradition and theology of the Orthodox church, this

<sup>21</sup> Private correspondence, Leonie Liveris to Archbishop Stylianos, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, 6 January 1992; 18 February 1992.

<sup>22</sup> *The Weekend West Australian*, March 1989, Magazine, p. 1.

means you have not been incorporated in it and you should think again about your spiritual status .<sup>23</sup>

While there was an immediate response to the Chancellor, refuting the imputation that somehow she was not permitted to speak without the permission of a local priest, nor in fact share her opinions outside the Church, there was no further correspondence from either the Chancellor or the Archbishop. In her reply Leonie Liveris wrote:

I was approached for comment because of my known deep involvement in matters concerning the role and status of women in the wider community as well as in the Church... I am concerned at the implication that it is not permissible in the Greek Orthodox Church within Australia to raise questions that have in fact been openly debated in pan-Orthodox consultations, such as Agapia in 1976 and Rhodes in 1988 on the role and status and possible ministries for women wishing to serve their Church .<sup>24</sup>

The silencing of women in the church has a long tradition whether from the authority in the Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant churches. The denigration of the worth of women's words, and the swift action to stifle critical comment or outrage has been experienced throughout the centuries and continues until the present day. Women academics are rarely appointed to major faculties of theology, though often eminently qualified with reputations earned through decades of scholarship and research and publications. Orthodox faculties do not appoint women as systematic theologians and most universities and seminaries appoint women in language studies, pastoral psychology or education theory and very seldom as eminent church historians, theologians or ethicists to positions of influence.

In the spring semester of 1997, a scandal erupted at Hellenic College/Holy Cross School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts. An archimandrite (monastic priest) from Greece, studying for his Masters in Divinity was involved in the sexual assault of another male student. The matter was reported and the Disciplinary Board recommended the student return to Greece and not be permitted to graduate. The Dean of the college, Fr George Dragas, delayed the response to the Board for two months, allowed the priest to graduate

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<sup>23</sup> Personal correspondence from Very Rev. Miltiades Chryssavgis on behalf of Archbishop Stylianos, 13 April 1989.

<sup>24</sup> Private Correspondence, Leonie Liveris to Fr Miltiades Chryssavgis, 25 April 1989.

and return to doctoral studies in Greece. He furthermore issued a report exonerating the priest and accused the disciplinary board of distortion and coercing testimony.<sup>25</sup> Subsequent to the incident, four clergy/academics on the disciplinary board were dismissed from their tenured positions, and the administration changed to be directly responsible to Archbishop Spyridon. Dr Valerie Karras, a Masters graduate from Holy Cross, church musician and historian, was a staff person at Holy Cross. Outraged at the treatment of four professors, she became a 'whistle-blower' and reported the situation to the appropriate accreditation authorities in the State of Massachusetts. On 11 July 1997, just prior to the Divine Liturgy in the chapel at Holy Cross, Fr George Dragas interrupted the chanters which included Valerie Karras, and publicly berated Karras for her involvement in the complaints to the outside authorities.<sup>26</sup> On Sunday 27 July 1997, she was prohibited from chanting in the choir, and later during the liturgy was refused communion. The editorial comment in *Voithia* was supportive of Karras and declared:

Dragas is not Karras' spiritual father, nor is she under any ecclesiastical discipline. Despite being informed of this, Dragas continued to refuse her the communion cup. This represents a crossing of a boundary between personal disagreements over fair dealing and Church governance and communion in the Church.<sup>27</sup>

The day before Karras filed the formal complaint with the attorney general of Massachusetts she was told that she could leave the school with full pay before her contract in the Office of Institutional Planning and Special Reports expired on 31 August 1997.<sup>28</sup> Karras stated quite plainly for the reader where she stood on the matter:

I have been the victim of attempts by "Church officials" to restrict my participation in my profession, particularly in speaking engagements at professional and lay conferences, and even my liturgical participation (to the point of having been refused communion by someone with no authority to do

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<sup>25</sup> References to this incident and subsequent hearings, dismissals and complaints were posted on the *Voithia* website (<http://www.voithia.org>) over a period of many months. This is a composite resume of the events as compiled by the *Religious News Service*, 1 July 1997.

<sup>26</sup> *Voithia* website, 11 July 1997.

<sup>27</sup> *Voithia* website, 27 July 1997.

<sup>28</sup> Valerie Karras, Letter to *Voithia* website, 3 November 1997. In November 1997, Bishop Isaiah asked the Orthodox Christian Laity organisers to un-invite Karras from presenting a paper at their conference at Hellenic College.

so)... I consider these actions to be vengeful, mean-spirited, and un-Christian conduct on the part of those responsible, including hierarchs...<sup>29</sup>

The censure of women is not difficult for clergy and hierarchs to administer for women find few advocates on their behalf to confront their disciplinarians. As experienced at Holy Cross, even tenured professors of thirty years academic and teaching service to the Church were effectively silenced with one letter from the Archbishop, let alone the dismissal and exclusion of a laywoman who dared to question the probity and actions of hierarchical authority.

### **Ethnicity and Orthodoxy**

The delegates at Orthodox consultations and three Bossey Seminars and occasionally as nominees to Central committee and Commissions, have been an interesting combination of a majority 'cradle'-Orthodox and those who entered the Orthodox Church for various reasons. For the 'cradle'- Orthodox there is always the knowledge reinforced by the Church, that they are members of The Church from Apostolic times, seemingly without change and without compromise. Brought up within the Tradition of Church, and family tradition, there is a familiarity with custom and *praxis* that will rarely become part of the 'convert's life within the Orthodox communion, and then only develop with the most zealous intent to somehow disrobe oneself of a previous identity. The intensity of claiming one's culture and ethnicity is experienced in the *diaspora* as immigrant churches in the early years fought to establish their place in an often hostile foreign society. To be Greek, Ukrainian, Russian or Serbian, for example, was to be an Orthodox Christian, and within the church both the glories and the sufferings of past millennia continued to be memorialised in church doxologies and celebrated in dance, song and food in the presence of clergy and hierarchs.

For the Orthodox believer, within a particular ethnic or national church, much of their knowledge is implicit and is known without teaching and absorbed without questioning. For the Church, writes Fr Leonidas:

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Valerie Karras was appointed Associate Professor in the Department of Theological Studies at the Jesuit university at St Louis University in Louisiana and commenced her employment in the Fall semester 1998.

No priestly act is of more far-reaching consequences than a conversion to Orthodoxy. It crucially determines for all time the convert's personal status, his (sic) marital rights and restrictions as well as his (sic) religious allegiance. If a pledge of unqualified loyalty to the Orthodox church is subsequently betrayed, the result is disastrous, not least for the priest involved.<sup>30</sup>

It is often that pledge of unqualified loyalty to the Orthodox Church that stifles dissent or questioning but can also encourage personal resistance to many teachings and practices against women creating tensions within family and community relationships. Between the two chrismated groups in Orthodoxy there are always tensions in the relationship. In an attempt for inclusion, the convert, most often a woman who has entered through marriage and takes on Orthodoxy in a passive manner, may be more zealous or more critical of Orthodox practices. In recent years some new zealots have created problems for 'cradle-Orthodox' women working for change, by insisting on head scarves as correct rather than optional, and not taking communion when menstruating where there has been an accommodation in some communities for some time on this issue. Not every convert wishes to adapt to an ethnic identity for they already have their own and they observe with watchful and questioning eyes the customs and traditions manifested within the Church and learn to criticize those practices that do not always reflect their understanding of Church. This perceived aloofness in itself creates suspicion and hostility from those deeply embedded in ethnic religious tradition and sure of its right place. Such tensions, for the convert, 'cause inner conflicts that lead either to compromises that shatter the soul or to a hopeless struggle'.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps aware of the growing resentment expressed by cradle-Orthodox, particularly in America, the comments from Fr George Johnson in July 1998, may in the future help to balance out the growing disaffection between the two groups:

We who are converts to the Faith in adulthood have a particular labour to perform. We bring baggage. In our fresh zeal and desire for perfection, we tend to lift items of this baggage to the level of moral or even theological principle' such baggage includes the tendency to trust to the tradition as found in books rather than living tradition... we enforce what is read and dismiss what is done'.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Father Leonidas, 'To convert or not to convert', in *Voice of Orthodoxy*, Vol.9, no.5, May 1988, p.56.

<sup>31</sup> Lev Zander, *Western Orthodoxy*, St Tikhon Press: Soth Canaan, PA, 1961, p.11.

<sup>32</sup> Fr George Johnson, editorial, *Orthodox America*, Vol.XVIII, no.1 (157), July 1998, p.1.



In the early decades of the WCC, Lev Zander claimed there was a need to:

Free Orthodoxy from the historical and national provincialism that weighs it down and it will be western Orthodoxy, both convert and those in *diaspora* who must endeavour to throw off the brocade of mediaeval Moscow as well as the eloquence of Byzantium'.<sup>33</sup>

Too often, the brocade and the eloquence become more than symbols, they have become Orthodoxy thus making change and criticism difficult. For women in the modern era, the feminist movement of the past thirty years has had profound influence on perceptions and practices within the society and within the churches. Orthodox women, their lives changed in secular society, cannot ignore the changes taking place in the sister churches of Protestant and Catholic communions. However, in the 1980s, the increasing number of converts to Orthodoxy came with a defined antagonism to the changes in the Church that were encouraging women to participate more fully in the sacramental and community life of the Church.

While not doubting the many genuine converts are seeking their spiritual life in the Orthodox Church, many others have related their conversion directly to the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Church of England (Episcopal Church in America); women offering the sacraments and leading the community, and pastoral roles which include leadership and authority in the parish and diocese. Converts have come into a church that was not only a place of stability and militant conservatism but willing to welcome not only individuals but also families, parishes and ordained priests of the Anglican and Evangelical Protestant communions. These converts were determined to adopt the 'old and pure' ways of being truly Orthodox. These 'new' Orthodox have become most formidable opponents of the women's movement and suggested changes in the status of women in church and society. There is a fervour in their conversion to return to the practices of the past, the purity of Orthodoxy, that focus on how women behave, obey Canon Law and the 'headship' of their husbands. In the United States and England, the commitment to unchanging canon law and dogma of the Orthodox church has placed clergy converts in particular in a strong position of

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13-14.

influence in communities where theological education is limited and understanding of Church is linked with a particular culture, tradition and ethnic identity.

New converts welcomed into the Orthodox Church by most clergy and hierarchs are encouraged to express their views particularly in regard to the support of the traditional role of women and the moral issues of the day.<sup>34</sup> After his conversion, William Olmhausen, a former Episcopal priest in Milwaukee, wrote that 'Anglicans are coming home to Orthodox Christianity away from twisted morality and the female priesthood'.<sup>35</sup> A notable Evangelical convert in the United States, Frank Schaeffer, appears regularly at Diocesan meetings throughout the country, and endorses the conservative attitude on moral issues within the Church including the limited gender roles for and participation of women. His addresses are promoted on cassette and video throughout Orthodox parishes in a church not known for charismatic priests or challenging theologians. In contrast to the experience of many converts, in some communities, the new 'convert' can even have a perceived value above those born into Orthodoxy because of his or her complete obedience to the instructions of the priest and an expressed desire to adhere to all the laws and customs now being openly questioned by educated and liberal thinking women and men.<sup>36</sup> The emergence and influence of 'neo-Orthodox', alongside traditional and conservative Orthodox theologians and clergy has created new barriers for women, endeavouring to escape from being a silent and silenced majority.

At a time when many Orthodox women are educated not only in such professions as medicine, psychiatry, sociology and anthropology and the areas of social welfare and political reform, they are also making a scholarly though limited contribution as learned theologians,

<sup>34</sup> The most notable converts have come in from the Evangelical Church in USA who were accepted into the Antiochian Orthodox Church and their pastors ordained Orthodox priests. Some priests and parishes from the Church of England have been accepted into the Coptic Orthodox Church in England and ordained.

<sup>35</sup> William Olmhausen is now an Orthodox priest in Wisconsin. Franklin Billerbeck (Ed.), *Anglican-Orthodox Pilgrimage*, Conciliar Press: Ben Lomond CA, 1993, p.5, 14.

<sup>36</sup> See: Thomas Doulis (Ed.), *Journeys to Orthodoxy, Essays by Converts to Orthodox Christianity*, Light & Life: Minnesota, 1986; Virginia Nieuwsma (ed.), *Our Hearts' True home*, Conciliar Press: Ben Lomond, 1996.

iconographers and historians within the life of the Church. Orthodox women are finding their scholarship reveals the positive efforts and achievements of women of the church and they are moving into the ecumenical dialogue with Protestant and Catholic women with assurance and a rising quality in the debates. This new found confidence has grown out of two and three generations of migration in the *diaspora*, especially in North America and the influence of a modern Europe where the political realities have led to closer liaisons between many countries including the Orthodox homelands of former USSR and Eastern Europe. The new woman of the late twentieth century is faced with a backlash of conservatism and fundamentalism emerging not only in the homelands for a number of reasons, and a particular form of fundamentalism being found within convert communities in the *diaspora*.

In the Antiochian Orthodox Church in America, one half of the priests are 'converts' to Orthodoxy and in this church whole parishes have converted with their priest particularly in California. The parish of Ben Lomond, with twelve priests and seventeen deacons, was for some years the shining example of believers finding their true faith as the Evangelical Orthodox Antiochian Church. Many wives who have written of their original conversion into the church have become the fundamentalists of Orthodoxy. However in 1998, a number of convert priests were defrocked or disciplined by Metropolitan Philip, who had originally exercised *economia* to welcome them into the Antiochian Orthodox Church in 1989. The action came after the priests questioned their bishop as to why, as English speaking and American educated Orthodox, they had to return to the Antiochian liturgical language and music of the Middle-East. <sup>37</sup>

However, despite much zealousness from 'neo-converts', there also have been examples of men and women entering the Orthodox church, and brushing aside the 'cobwebs of history' in order to reveal the brightness of the faith. To achieve this revelation scholars such as Bishop Kallistos Ware, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, and Susan Ashbrook Harvey have provided the Church the richness of their historical research and wisdom of their analysis and

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Antiochian Orthodox Church Website, [www.antiochian.com](http://www.antiochian.com)

theological exegesis along with a deep sense of commitment to the Orthodox faith. These scholars travelled their religious journeys from Anglican, Lutheran and Baptist churches, and have 'added' to the tradition of their earlier church life. It is interesting to note that from these scholars has also come a deeper insight into the possible ministries of women and for women. At the Harare Assembly in December 1998, the General Secretary, Dr Konrad Reiser spoke of 'the hope inspired by recent research into the ordination of women, published by two eminent Orthodox theologians, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Bishop Kallistos Ware'.<sup>38</sup> Since the seventies Kallistos Ware has shifted his adamant opposition to ordained ministries for women and together with Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, they have forged a new understanding of theological dogma concerning the nature of the sacramental priesthood.<sup>39</sup> On the one hand Elisabeth Behr-Sigel declares that:

To affirm that all women are, because of their sex, unqualified to receive the pastoral charisma (as assumed by the male priest) would seem to go against the spirit of Christ and of St Paul... The cultural context of the times prevented official expression of this spiritual equality. Today the cultural context is favourable to it - in the West at least.<sup>40</sup>

However, she warns that: 'Men and women who, liberated in and through Christ, feel freed from various stereotypes and taboos, must avoid offending the 'weaker one' because these, in other domains, can actually be the 'strong' ones, spiritually. So, we must be careful, courageous and patient.'<sup>41</sup> Kallistos Ware acknowledges his own point of view on the issue of the ordination of women had changed considerably since 1978 when he wrote 'Man, Woman and Priesthood': 'Let us not imagine that everything has been clarified. It is manifestly not the case, neither for us as Orthodox, nor for other Christians'.<sup>42</sup> At that time, he wrote that 'in Orthodox eyes, at any rate, the chasm developing over the ordination of women was a 'chasm of horrifying dimension'.<sup>43</sup> We Orthodox, he claimed 'are influenced

<sup>38</sup> ENI- 98 - 0565.

<sup>39</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Monseigneur Kallistos Ware, *L'Ordination de femmes dans l'église Orthodoxe*, Cerf, 1998. 96pp.

<sup>40</sup> Excerpt of the above text in *Terre des Femmes*, Vol.14, no. 1, 1999, pp.43-47. Translated for candidate by Colin Williams, Perth. p.46.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.46.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>43</sup> Kallistos Ware, 'Man, Woman and the Priesthood of Christ', in Thomas Hopko, *Women and the Priesthood*, SVSP: Crestwood, NY, 1983, p.11.

chiefly by two factors: the witness of tradition and the iconic character of the Christian priesthood'.<sup>44</sup> Kallistos Ware maintained in 1998, that there were three complex questions to be studied on the ordination of women - from Tradition, from anthropology and from the priesthood itself. He asked 'must all traditional ecclesiastical practices be seen as sacrosanct parts of the tradition of faith? Both circumcision and slavery have been abolished. Could we not also abolish the taboo surrounding the ordination of women priests?' Tradition by itself, he continues, does not explain the reasons for excluding women, nor does he accept that anthropological argument can fully explain or solve the question of whether or not women can be ordained Orthodox priests. 'Our Orthodox anthropology is still evolving'.<sup>45</sup>

Another convert and scholar Susan Ashbrook Harvey, Professor in Religious Studies at Brown University in Patristics, both Greek and Syriac, is a member of the Antiochian Orthodox Church. She rightfully asserts that the ordination of women to the diaconate should not be a question for today as it existed and is canonically a part of church history. 'I think the question of the ordination to the priesthood is where I would put my sights. While this may not happen for a few hundred years, someday it will be'.<sup>46</sup>

The reason is not because of women and their place in society but because the priesthood is something to which the Holy Spirit calls the individual, and the Holy Spirit calls whom the Holy Spirit will... Women are called to the priesthood - we know this, we see this. Women leave churches that don't ordain women if they must have that call fulfilled. <sup>47</sup>

However, the opposition to any possibilities for the ordination of women to the priesthood has been expressed by many other scholars and theologians, with varying reasons ranging from extreme misogyny to the taboo issues of culture and tradition. For a British convert, Vladimir Moss, the demand for revolutionary changes for women came after the advent of the female contraceptive pill which encouraged a lust for pleasure which had no

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44 Excerpt of text, op.cit. p.47.

45 Ibid., p.47.

46 Teva Regule, An interview with Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *The St Nina Quarterly*, Vol.1, no.4, Fall 1997, pp.5-8.

47 Ibid., p.8.

consequences for their immoral behaviour and created many other demands for their rights<sup>48</sup> The rise of feminism led to the 'the perverseness of female "priesthood" who fulfilled the prophecy of St John of Kronstadt who had a vision that: some sort of abominable, vile, disgusting black woman, all in red with a star on her forehead. She spun around the altar and cried out "freedom", and the people joined her rejoicing and clapping and shouting and whistling<sup>49</sup>

Moss insisted that man is more intellectual and more aggressive, therefore he, like Christ, must lead and take the initiative to wage war on the devil, while woman is more emotional, sensitive and intuitive, and must respond to the man in love, and like the Church be sensitive to the will of her husband.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, to ensure that women understand his position in regard to their place in the Church Moss reminds the reader that: 'Christ on becoming man, had to become male. For as the fairy tales of all lands testify, it is the man who saves; the woman is saved'.<sup>51</sup> Andrew Phillips also put forward his views relating that : 'the very concept of a woman-priest would never occur to the Orthodox mind, the idea is as blasphemous as an icon showing the Mother of God dressed in jeans or an icon of a Saint lighting a cigarette'.<sup>52</sup> The rambling anti-feminist rhetoric of Vladimir Moss and Andrew Phillips in the 1990s is not peculiar to them. Knowledge that their views are supported by many other Orthodox believers, particularly with such vehement opposition to women having any roles of leadership and authority, let alone sacramental roles, that they might share with men in the church, is a problem for women and their quest for ministry and equal participation in the Orthodox Church.

<sup>48</sup> Vladimir Moss, 'Orthodoxy, feminism and the new science of man', in *Orthodox America*, Vol. XVI, no.7-8, 1997, p.13. Author of 4 volumes on Saints of Anglo-Saxon England.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13. Cited from 'Pravoslavnaya Rus', No.20 (517); in V Moss, *The Imperishable World*, Gresham Press: Old Woking, 1980.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>52</sup> Andrew Phillips, 'Some reasons why the Orthodox Church does not admit women to the priesthood', *Orthodox Life*, No.2, March-April 1993, p.43.

### **'Living Letters' - the Decade response from the Orthodox churches**

By 1993, midway through the Ecumenical Decade it was obvious that the Decade had developed as 'women in solidarity with women', and the decision was made for team visits to all member churches to assess the programme. The member churches endorsed the 'Living Letters' visits, the first time that the WCC teams were to visit nearly every member church in their diocese or parish. As recorded in the letter to the member churches:

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth that they were 'a letter of Christ, written not with ink but the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts'. In a real sense, those who take part in the visits will be 'living letters' from the churches to each other.<sup>53</sup>

During the first five years the reports arriving at the Women's Desk in Geneva contained details of meetings, seminars and consultations which shared common concerns for women within the member churches. For the Mid-Decade programme the decision was made to focus on four main concerns until the EDCSW presentation at the Harare Assembly: violence against women; women's participation in the life of the church; global economic injustice and how women in particular are affected by it and racism against women, were chosen as definitive problems to be addressed in all member churches. The agenda for the 'living letters' was to listen to each situation in each church from the hierarchs, clergy, laity and especially from the women.

During 1993-94, seventy-five separate teams of four persons visited nearly every member church of WCC in their own country, reports were compiled and edited and sent to the member churches after final approval by the Women's Unit in Geneva. The attitudes and practices of discrimination and violence, physical, psychological and spiritual, against women through culture, tradition and biblical understandings, were glaringly obvious to many team members and it was difficult to restrain the criticism in many reports. However, the main intention of the team visits was to provide a catalyst for future change and self-examination by both clergy and laity within the church community, to encourage the churches to commit

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<sup>53</sup> *Living Letters*, Mid-Decade consultations for EDCSW, 1993. pamphlet.

to being in solidarity with their women, encouraging their full participation, ministry and wholeness as a human person baptized in Christ.

Over 330 churches, sixty-eight National Council of Churches and 650 women's groups and organizations were visited, including many of Orthodox churches in the homeland and in the *diaspora*. The responses to the visits varied, and the reception by the church hierarchs also varied. Despite many approaches and indeed, arrangements, a team visit was not made to the Church of Greece, and yet this church had much to report on the growing number of women monastics, women theological students, academics and writers, deaconesses', and lay pastoral ministry. The reports from Orthodox churches confirmed the strength of traditional values of home and family and community at the same time as revealing the age-old practices of exclusion from the sacramental and participation in the decision-making structures of the church. From the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India to the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia, there were few instances of women's participation that indicated radical changes following all the upheavals and challenges of the twentieth century. Again and again, the team were reminded of age-old arguments that 'men are specially gifted for holy service while women could not be'; 'we heard of women in the pulpit as being dangerous because they "seduce" men'; 'the training of young girls emphasises the role of quiet obedience in the Church'. Although the principal of the Orthodox seminary in Kerala was a former staff person at Bossey for whom the Decade was familiar, nevertheless women students were excluded from theological education.<sup>54</sup> Though the meeting with the Orthodox church representatives and hierarchs in Australia was 'extremely hospitable', the team were not reassured in any way that Orthodox women served any roles other than purveyors of traditional hospitality and service:

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Mid-Decade Reports, India, 3-20 March 1994. Orthodox Syrian Church, Kerala.



The meeting with the Orthodox was nerve-wracking. Both women team members felt marginalised and were distressed by the style of Orthodox support for women in the church and their denial of roles (for women) other than those which were supportive of the patriarchy. <sup>55</sup>

The team did not meet separately with women from the Syrian, Armenian or Coptic Orthodox churches, but a survey conducted by the Australian Council of Churches for the Mid-Decade indicated there was encouragement from their churches to participate in decision-making and administration in councils, state boards and at general meetings. The Syrian Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic churches recognise the order of deaconesses, and according to the report there were ten Syrian deaconesses in Australia actively involved in pastoral work in their diocese. However, the report does not discuss what order of deaconess, who are unlikely to be 'ordained', but rather delegated for charitable and welfare work in the parish and amongst women and children. In addition, the report noted that women were encouraged to be involved in formal theological education in the Coptic and Armenian churches, and there is presently a woman lecturer on the faculty of the Australian Coptic Theological College in Sydney. <sup>56</sup>

Representatives from the Philoptochos societies and youth ministries and church leaders of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in America revealed that it was the problem of women's ordination and homosexuality that had called attention to women's place in the church. The Director of the Department of Church and Society, Fr Milton Efthimou began his comments emphasizing that in Orthodox Tradition if something did not exist in the early church, it couldn't be valid for church life today and continued to emphasize that the Orthodox Church did not ordain or invest women to the diaconate. 'While the question has long been on the agenda, it could only be instituted by a unanimous agreement of a pan-

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<sup>55</sup> Mid-Decade Reports, Australia, 9-18 April 1994, Armenian Apostolic, Antiochian and Greek Orthodox Churches. 'We felt, a very despondent team, though we were assured that it had been a better meeting than most similar exchanges with the Orthodox'.

<sup>56</sup> 'The Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women: A mid-point assessment of Australian churches'. No response was recorded from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia. ACC: Sydney, unpublished information paper. 9 April 1994.

Orthodox Council - which might be convened sometime in the future'.<sup>57</sup> The team were critical of this rather unsatisfactory encounter as they did not have any opportunity to speak to the women separately so only one view was presented, although the team felt it was probably the majority view of Greek Orthodox women. They were disappointed that no Orthodox woman theologian was present at the meetings who may have challenged the representative group to be more critical on ecclesial matters. However the team were informed quite bluntly that the church would censure any woman who might question church views and practices related to women.<sup>58</sup> With respect to contemporary moral and social issues being faced in society and all the churches, one team member reported:

Current social and legal pressures on clergy misconduct and homosexuality will force them onto the agenda but issues of women's full participation, domestic violence or women's choices on abortion etc don't seem to demand any focus. We don't know if it might have looked different if we had ever met any women alone<sup>59</sup>

However, the desire by the team to meet Armenian women alone was achieved. Two women were graduates from an Orthodox seminary and were employed as co-directors of the Department of Religious Education. One woman indicated in private conversation that she had been seeking ordination for fifteen years but had yet to find a priest to take the issue to the Council of Bishops. The report did not make it clear whether this was ordination to the priesthood or the diaconate. As with many churches of WCC, there were official denials by Orthodox clergy that domestic violence was a problem in their church, although the Armenian women at the meeting recognized that the 'Armenian Church faced all the same issues as those that other churches and society at large encounter, issues which created division, debate and controversy within the church'.<sup>60</sup> The team expressed some frustration that while the clergy emphasized that they had invited women to the meeting so the team could speak with them directly, the priests proceeded to speak for the women not allowing possible dissenting voices on the many issues raised from the Decade programme.<sup>61</sup> The visit

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<sup>57</sup> Mid-Decade Reports, USA, 25 October 1994, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America. pp. 21.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>60</sup> Mid-Decade Report, USA, n.d. October 1994, Armenian Apostolic Church, America.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.23.

to the Orthodox Church in America received the following comment: 'we were positively surprised about the inclusivity of the OCA as this is not common knowledge in ecumenical movement. It was a joy to discuss, worship and share fellowship with people from various levels from the Church'<sup>62</sup>

The team had opportunities to meet with Metropolitan Theodosius, Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, students and graduates in theological studies and met with two special gatherings of female students and graduates. From OCA the team were made aware that the ecumenical approach to society issues were difficult for the Orthodox. In terms that emphasized the expressed concerns from the first meeting for the Decade in late 1987, criticism was again directed at the language used for the Decade, such as power, hierarchy, patriarchy, which had a different understanding amongst the Orthodox. In a very important comment that belies the sense of ecumenical co-operation, the team added 'the OCA has therefore not actively advocated and participated in the Decade'.<sup>63</sup> It is precisely the practice of the Orthodox members withdrawing from challenging questions being raised in the ecumenical movement, that creates exasperation on one hand and frustration on the other. Do the Orthodox hierarchs, as a matter of internal policy, use their structures and authority to ensure that Orthodox women are prevented from honestly raising issues of leadership, hierarchy and patriarchy in ecumenical forums? To determine, without entering into debate, that the terms have different meanings, does not assist their Protestant sisters to a better understanding of the richness of the Orthodox faith nor how Orthodox women live within the church.

The differences in understanding on many issues has not prevented male Orthodox theologians, laity, or hierarchs from entering into ecumenical dialogue with Protestants and Roman Catholics at the highest level of church administration. Ecumenical dialogue between the Orthodox churches and Anglican, Lutheran and the Roman Catholic churches is well publicized and read with interest by many Orthodox scholars and theologians. The increasing

<sup>62</sup> Mid-Decade Report, USA, 19-20 October 1994, Orthodox Church in America, p.46.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

co-operation and membership of Orthodox women in the Middle East Council of Churches and the Ecumenical Christian Women's Forum in Europe and various ecumenical programmes in individual European countries such as Romania, France and Finland raises questions as to why American women are not likewise involved in their ecumenical relationships. Is this actually a situation of church hierarchs deliberately not appointing challenging women to participate, in addition to asking whether Orthodox women in America, regardless of the Orthodox jurisdiction, are more conservative and traditional in their ties to culture and faith.

Following the Canberra Assembly in 1991, Teny Pirri-Simonian was critical that the ecumenical worship and bible studies by women and for women were primarily based on New Testament women but 'it was a painful experience for Orthodox women to see the absence of the Mother of God and women saints and martyrs from prayers and reflections.<sup>64</sup> Orthodox women did speak at Canberra and they were invited to be participants in the Decade programme. Teny Pirri-Simonian claimed that the WCC had failed to provide a process whereby all member churches could engage and 'rethink the rightful place of women in their midst on the basis of their own theologies and traditions'.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, it was the programmes of WCC that gave valuable open space for Orthodox women to speak for themselves in ecumenical meetings. Not all Orthodox women agreed with the maintenance of traditional roles nor the theologies that are specific to enforcing such roles. The constant references to the role models of women saints, ascetics, missionaries and martyrs of the early church are not so easily accepted nor perceived as specifically relevant by late twentieth century women struggling to make sense of their daily experiences and perceptions as 'second in everything', continuously endorsed by contemporary church fathers. The working group organizing the team visits provided 'advisory notes' for team members when they visited the Orthodox prelates. It was recommended that local Orthodox women should as far as possible be included in discussions as they ordinarily had no chance to discuss women's issues

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<sup>64</sup> Teny Pirri-Simonian, 'Challenges of Canberra. An Orthodox woman's perspective', in *MaryMartha*, Vol.2, no.1, April 1992, p.7.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

even with their own bishops; it was advisable not to stress the feminist movement; sensitivity was called for on the issue of the ordination of women; and that while a deaconess might be an appropriate part of a team visiting in the Middle East and Greece, her presence was not advisable for teams going into Eastern Europe and Russia.<sup>66</sup>

The team visits certainly varied and the responses depended on the openness to the questions to the hierarchs and comments by Orthodox women. The team visited smaller Orthodox churches in Europe and the responses were as varied as those from the Protestant member churches. In Poland, where the Orthodox are a small minority in a strongly Roman Catholic country, the team expressed some surprise at the defensive attitudes concerning the denial of ordination of Orthodox women while stating at the same time their strong defence of Tradition in the church. The woman leader, a theologian, said clearly that 'women do have their own opportunity to become spiritual leaders in the church by joining a monastery where they are fully recognized'.<sup>67</sup> In Slovakia and the Czech Republic, Orthodox women had the opportunity to attend theological seminary in Presov and Olomouc to train as teachers, catechists and social workers. The Dean of the Theological Faculty in Presov declared that 'there were women on staff, though not in theology, half of the two hundred students were women, with eight graduating in 1996, and 'some of the women's diploma dissertations are so good, and so interesting, they are to be published'. It was made clear there was a definitive division of roles and labour of women and men. The team commented that the restrictions of women's roles were not seen as violence against women's rights and though many priests still see women as second to men, although not in a bad way, they insisted there was no violence at all perpetrated against women in the church.<sup>68</sup> A visit to the Archbishop Dr Krikorian of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Austria brought a surprise and welcome response concerning the ministry of women. 'He sang the praises of the women who form the

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<sup>66</sup> Minutes of meeting of working group on women, Geneva, 28 October - 1 November 1992. Three Orthodox women were members of this committee: Lilian Andronesco (Romania); Marina Missukka (Finland) and Maha Milke Wehbe (Lebanon)

<sup>67</sup> Mid-Decade Reports, Poland, 28 November - 5 December 1994, Polish Orthodox church.

<sup>68</sup> Mid-Decade Reports, Slovakia and Czech Republic, 1994 Czechoslovakian Orthodox Church.

backbone of his congregation and whom he personally would like to see in the ordained ministry, but the objections were still too strong'.<sup>69</sup>

The team referred to the four hours spent with His Holiness Patriarch Abuna Paulos and members of the Holy Synod of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in October 1995, as frank and open although, their views on the participation and ministry of women remained traditional and focused on service. The Holy Synod expressed concerns about the nature and character of the current discussions in the WCC on moral issues. The team were informed that while no women were able to attend the theological college, women were invited to participate in seminars and courses in church administration. In addition the team were told that within both the theological and cultural heritage there was a deep respect for women and their roles in society and family. The hierarchs and clergy emphasized the growing monastic life at the Sabata Monastery where nuns had moved from a life of prayer and contemplation to working to support communities and had undertaken the administration of orphanages for girls and boys financed by the European Union, under the auspices of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In parish life, women laity took an active part in Sunday schools and choirs, and were elected members of parish, district and diocesan councils where they were able to discuss pastoral concerns, social issues and human problems directly with members of Holy Synod.<sup>70</sup>

The reports were encouraging from Finland, Russia, Georgia and Romania, where women were able to attend seminary and many graduated to teach in schools and young adult groups. Other women sang in church choirs and in some cases were the choir directors and also composers of sacred music and liturgies. Sophie Keburia, a teacher of Art History at the Tbilisi State University in Georgia, reported that many young women were studying at the Theological Institute of the Georgian Patriarchate<sup>71</sup> and some of the young women students and graduates from those seminaries attended the Bossey Seminars and the Istanbul

<sup>69</sup> Mid-Decade Reports, Austria, 1994. Armenian Apostolic Church.

<sup>70</sup> Mid-Decade Reports, Ethiopia, 3-9 October 1995. Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

<sup>71</sup> Sophie Kebura, 'The Georgian Voice', in *MaryMartha*, Vol.5, no.1, Summer 1996-97, pp.23-24.

Consultation in 1997. In Russia, the team were impressed with charitable work of the sisters in churches and monasteries noting that their: 'extra-ordinary inner freedom and self esteem are striking features of the sisters. This is probably the secret of their immense capacity of self-giving, loving care and prayer life'.<sup>72</sup> However, in an endeavour to praise even the smallest gesture of including women in lay ministry, there were occasions when the team reports were somewhat effusive and non-critical of very obvious patriarchal meetings and the manipulative agenda of those meetings. The team noted that despite the absence of women from the leading structures of the Church, the Hierarchy or the Holy Synod, they did hold other leadership positions such as co-rector of a theological seminary (as choir conductor and music instructor), Mother Superior of monasteries, leaders of parish councils, directors of publishing houses and executive positions in the Department of External Church Relations<sup>73</sup>.

In April 1988, before the fall of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev publicly stated:

A new law on the freedom of conscience will reflect the interests of religious organizations. They are tangible results of new approaches to state-church relations in the conditions of *perestroika* and democratisation... we are restoring in full measure .. the principles of attitude to religion, church and believers... Designed to perform purely religious functions, the church cannot keep away from the complicated problems that worry mankind (sic), or from the processes taking in society .<sup>74</sup>

Since *perestroika*, the theological seminaries had increased their enrolments, including the admission of women students. At St Tikhon Theological Institute in Moscow, more than half the students were young women who were receiving a full theological degree, not only in music or education. Nathaniel Davis reported on his visit to Russia the growing number of convents in Russia following the new political tolerance. While under Nikita Krushchev, many nunneries had been closed and the sisters forced to work in factories to survive as even the sale of their needlework for church vestments and altar cloths was declared illegal during these years.<sup>75</sup> After the new era of Patriarch Pimen of Moscow and Mikhail Gorbachev after

<sup>72</sup> *Living Letters, A Report of Visits to the Churches during the EDCSW*, WCC: Geneva, 1997, p.18.

<sup>73</sup> Mid-Decade Reports, Russia, 8-17 November 1995, Russian Orthodox Church.

<sup>74</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev: 'Church and State in the USSR', *EPS* 88.06.119

<sup>75</sup> Nathaniel Davis, *A long Walk to Church*, Westview: Boulder, CO, 1995, p.152.

September 1990, Davis claims there were increasing numbers of monasteries and convents, and some monastics returning were monks and nuns forced to find secular lifestyles in the 1960s.<sup>76</sup>

In Romania, in the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest there were three hundred young women studying alongside twelve hundred male students preparing for ordination.<sup>77</sup> The team reported that while the society was opening up for change, the Church hierarchy remained reluctant to move too quickly in responding to the aspirations of the laity and women in particular. The team found that many Orthodox women were far more ecumenically minded than their Church, and were not only co-operating with other churchwomen but had participated in the European Women's Forum as well. The team were sympathetic to the recent past history of Romania and the devastating inheritance of the policies imposed on the nation by the Ceaucescu regime. However, hope was expressed more in the contribution that the women would bring for the future rather than what changes the hierarchy and clergy would accomplish. Women were in fact 'doing it for themselves and each other'. It cannot be claimed that the Mid-Decade reports from the various teams were filled with glowing accounts of progress for women nor a real sense of the Churches in Solidarity with Women. There were changes, many for the better, but few women claimed it was because the hierarchy and the synods had taken note of the aims of the Decade and acted accordingly. In most cases the development of humanity, the global interlinking of women's groups and organizations, networking through new technologies, and political freedom such as the collapse of the Soviet bloc can be claimed to be the catalysts for improvements women are experiencing in the Orthodox churches.

At the WCC Eighth Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe in December 1998, Orthodox hierarch Metropolitan Ambrosius of Oulu, Finland, acknowledged the important contribution the Decade had given to the member churches by revealing that the exclusion of women from the decision-making processes and power structures limited the full potential of women's

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.155.

<sup>77</sup> Mid-Decade Reports, Romania, 5-13 September, Romanian Orthodox Church.



contributions to the church. While the Decade did not attempt to challenge in a negative way those church traditions which do not ordain women, Ambrosius asserted that 'there had been hesitation by many churches to receive and work with the programme because it was perceived as 'a feminist movement - though we may need that too'. During the team visits and afterwards, he continued, 'many men, myself included, were shocked to realise - for the first time - how much violence and economic injustice against women, whether it is culturally conditioned or not, exist inside and outside churches all over the world'.<sup>78</sup> While such words of encouragement are welcome for women to hear, it must be asked why such sentiments were not audible during the Decade. Pacifying words from the church hierarchies and, too many times, conservative and traditional women's groups, were addressed to women after the revelations of the Decade that church women in particular experienced discrimination, violence, economic deprivation and racism not only in secular society but also in their families and church communities.

The 'Living Letters' revealed a theology of the suffering of the cross to which many women accepted that suffering in silence was a Christian way of life, it was her redemption and salvation. Supported by this theology, too often preached from the pulpit, violence was perpetrated against women, in silence, within the family and from society in general. The violence was not only physical, it was emotional and spiritual. Women spoke of church leaders, and in turn the men of their families, preaching their given authority, their headship, and their leadership over women as God-given and scriptural. At the end of the Ecumenical Decade, the 'Living Letters' revealed many truths to the member churches. The question is whether the Orthodox churches will heed the reports and take up the issues raised by women in the churches to re-examine long practiced exclusion of women in ministry and participation in leadership within the churches. The publication 'Living Letters', though published in the official languages of the WCC, is unlikely to be widely distributed by the church administrations throughout the Orthodox churches as a working paper for the future of women in the church.

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<sup>78</sup> Metropolitan Ambrosius of Oulu, Finland, 'Participation of Women in the life of the Church, Harare Assembly, Document No. DB5.

### Damascus and Istanbul Consultations

The Executive Director of the WCC Women's Unit Aruna Gnanadason with Nicole Fischer, Mid-Decade co-ordinator of the 'Living letters' programme within the Ecumenical Decade, together with Dr Kyriaki FitzGerald as the Orthodox theological adviser, were enthusiastic and committed to supporting two further consultations for Orthodox women before the WCC Eighth Assembly in Harare, in December 1998. The experiences and tensions of the Bossey seminars had already provided an insight into the issues and concerns most pertinent to Orthodox women in ecumenical dialogue. For the first consultation, the WCC co-ordinators wanted to move away from the strong and very often conservative voices of Orthodox women in the '*diaspora*', and listen more closely to the concerns and aspirations of Orthodox women in Asia, the Middle East and Africa. In order to provide such opportunities, the two cities chosen, Damascus and Istanbul, were both within countries where Christianity was a minority religion in a Moslem environment but where the majority Christians were members of Orthodox churches.

In October 1996, the second international Orthodox women's consultation during the Decade took place in Damascus, Syria, and focused on the theme 'Discerning the Sign of the Times'. (Mt 16:3) Women in the life of the Church'.<sup>79</sup> Unlike most women's consultations in other member churches under the auspices of the Ecumenical Decade, a number of men were present, both as delegates and speakers with Fr Thomas FitzGerald and Fr Nicholas Apostola from America presenting papers. The hospitality was offered by His Beatitude Ignatius IV, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, and His Beatitude Ignatius Zakka Iwas I, Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and all the East. Both families of the Orthodox were represented by hierarchs and by the delegates. All the delegates to Damascus were formally appointed by their hierarchs to represent their own church, not as nominees from the Women's Unit. As experienced in many other member churches, such representation of

<sup>79</sup> Report: Discerning the Signs of the Times: Women in the Life of the Orthodox Church, WCC Ecumenical Decade Churches in Solidarity with Women, Damascus, Syria, 4-10 October 1996.

church delegates rarely allows for the critical dissident and rarely is a feminist voice raised effectively in such a forum.

Orthodox women delegates, too often 'favoured women', are the voice, opinion and subsequent reporter to the clergy and hierarchy. The woman may be replaced from her position of influence without notice, should she raise contrary issues or opinions to that of patriarchy and authority. She is quickly excluded and her gifts of discernment are easily dismissed as the 'voice of feminism' or the 'voice of modernism and the West' which have no place in the structure nor institution of the Orthodox churches. The criticisms directed by Orthodox women against the feminist theologies from Protestant traditions in the West are rarely contrasted or compared with the feminist theologies and theories of women in the Catholic tradition. It is suggested that in fact the arguments placed before the Catholic hierarchs are most relevant for Orthodox women. Whilst the Catholic church is not a member of the WCC, there are Catholic members of the Faith and Order commission and many Catholic feminist scholars are well known and their work both quoted and criticized during ongoing discussions and deliberations of the commission, which of course, also has Orthodox theologians as members.

Many of the same issues raised in Agapia and Crete were discussed once again at both Damascus and Istanbul Consultations. For some women it was the first time for such questions to be raised as the previous work and recommendations were unknown in their women's work. The delegates expressed the positive news of women's ministry in monastic life, service in local parishes and diocese, the study and teaching in rare instance of theology, and the continuing witness to philanthropic, charitable, educational and medical services either within the church or with other national and international bodies. However, despite the 'good news', there were significant issues that had changed little in twenty years of ecumenical relationships, the Sheffield recommendations, membership by some women's groups of the Christian Conference of Asia, the Middle East Women's Desk, and the coordinating work of the Women's Unit from Geneva. The women expressed their

'disappointment' that opportunities to study theology remained very scarce and available only in a few jurisdictions; that attitudes and discriminatory sacramental practices affecting females had not officially changed except in the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India; and that women's service was expected though rarely acknowledged and easily dismissed.

An encouraging development that emerged in the consultations that indicated a more open and global view of church and society by Orthodox women, was the concern expressed that the Church ought to be accountable for its attitudes and practices in regard to alleviating the social injustice suffered by women through poverty, illiteracy and invisibility to the members of the church.<sup>80</sup> Speakers from Egypt, India and Lebanon reflected on the overwhelming problems facing women in their societies simply because they were women. Again, the ministry of ordained deaconesses was discussed by women, with no recent reports that the issue was before any Holy Synod in any jurisdiction. Only the Coptic Orthodox Church could claim action on this issue, tentative though the action was. In recognition of the growing levels of education, including theological education in some of the churches, a new recommendation was forthcoming for women spiritual advisers and canonists to be included as advocates in Spiritual Courts in all the churches.

The delegates recommended that more clergy and more male lay leaders be encouraged to participate in such consultations 'in order to increase their pastoral awareness regarding women's concerns'. The question must immediately be asked as to why this had not been happening within the churches? The only reason the consultation was taking place was due to the encouragement and in indeed the insistence of the WCC Women's Unit, predominantly Protestant women, who provided the agenda, and of course, the majority of the funding. The idea that it was essential for men to attend women's conferences to learn of their concerns, indicates the lack of confidence and the lack of courage Orthodox women have to actually commit themselves to change, use feminist theologies, and call into question the patriarchy and their authority, whether clergy or laity. It is not a question of the east and the

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<sup>80</sup> Damascus Consultation, 4-10 October 1996.

west. Not all feminist hermeneutics have been derived from American or European radical or liberal feminists. Radical voices have emerged from Asia and Latin America and the Pacific when women have embarked on assessing their situation in church and society. In comparing the recommendations from Agapia it is difficult to ascertain why so little progress has been made. The issue of ministry is not on any Holy Synod agenda, the priest is not announcing the end of discriminatory practices in regard to women and communion, women are not the readers and chanters, women remain outside the sanctuary, and outside the decision-making processes that can make a difference. Of course women continue to serve, but will their daughters?

Such was the effect of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's paper in 1976, that it could still be reprinted, sometimes modified and sometimes edited, in yet another journal in 1995, and receive as much interest and generate new awareness amongst Orthodox women readers.<sup>81</sup> What does this say to the level of debate and scholarship of inquiry and research about women and their place and participation in the life of the Orthodox church? The questions posed by Behr-Sigel remain relevant and challenging, because there have been few instances where Orthodox women have taken the leap forward to adapt her suggestions for scholarly analysis or even feminist theological examination of particular issues for further study. Orthodox women continue as submissive auxiliaries of church, community and family organisations, waiting anxiously in the wings for an invitation to join, subject to others' rules, regulations, guidance and parameters. The Church Fathers had already decreed how limited participation would be possible for women, and with modern day willing servants ever anxious to impose the rules for their advantage, when *economia* is applied for the inclusion of women, it is selective and only when it remains advantageous to patriarchy and male authority. Michael Brett-Crowther, reflecting on equal ministry of women and men priests, in Roman Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox churches maintains that 'to allow women to take on the burden of authority in the sacred mysteries and other functions of pastor, prophet and

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<sup>81</sup> *Contacts* 100 (1977); *Sobornost* (1977); *The Ministry of Women in the Church* (1991); *MECC Perspectives* 1991, and *ECHOES*, 1995, and *Theology*, 1996.

priest seems nothing less than realistic response'.<sup>82</sup> Interestingly, he queried 'whether in the light of Islam tradition that has long repressed women, then Churches in those lands should ordain women and make them examples of the justice and charity which the act of ordination implies'.<sup>83</sup> One can only conjecture on such influences should ordination of women for instance, take place in the churches in the Middle East.

The media statement following the Meeting in Istanbul in May 1997, the final Orthodox consultation of the Decade was claimed to 'issue very strong recommendations'. However, it is still difficult to determine how the recommendations were very different to Agapia and Crete meetings. After twenty years, the menstruation/unclean issue together with selective exclusion from the sacred remained the same and tertiary theological education was still being discussed as well as philanthropy and charitable works within communities and sometimes general society. One significant advance was in the willingness of a number of the delegates to pursue discussion with a speaker, Constantinos Yokarinis, who had completed his doctoral thesis on 'the priesthood of women in the context of the ecumenical movement'. Since the original study in 1947, and even Agapia in 1976, there had been an inference from most Orthodox women, that the priesthood was of little concern, and it was the ordination of the diaconate that was most relevant to their needs. No action groups had been established, there were no leading dissident women calling for ordination as in the action of Anglican and recently Catholic women. So it is ironical that a thesis on the priesthood of women in the context of the ecumenical movement would be written by a male theologian, and submitted to the Faculty of Theology of Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki. Constantine Yokarinis presented a paper on his thesis in English, which was the first time most delegates knew of his work.<sup>84</sup> Yokarinis acknowledged that 'the debate about a priesthood of women has had a long history... and still has a dynamic presence in the

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<sup>82</sup> Michael Brett-Crowther, 'An Equal Ministry', in *Theology*, Vol.XCVI, 1996. pp.26-38.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>84</sup> "The Priesthood of women in the context of the Ecumenical Movement. A new perspective of Orthodox theology', Constantinos Yokarinis was invited to present findings on women's ordination to the priesthood and episcopacy from his original doctoral thesis. The thesis has been written in Greek, and it is hoped that translation and publication in English will be possible in the next year.

Church's life, threatening to destroy all efforts for the restoration of Church unity'.<sup>85</sup> The clearly theological nature of the thesis puts the discussion... beyond the considerations of this thesis except to point out that Yokarini demanded that 'if we really want the Kingdom of God to come, as we pray, then it is an imperative need to abandon our sexist views'.<sup>86</sup>

At the conclusion of the two consultations Kyriaki FitzGerald stated that 'the most remarkable result is that at least on a symbolic level, we have a global consensus regarding a number of important concerns that affect Orthodox women. This may prove to be of immediate and future service to the Church'.<sup>87</sup> It remains to be seen how prophetic will be her words. In 1998, a memorandum was submitted in Athens to the Holy Synod by theologian Giorgos Moustakis calling on the leadership in the Autocephalous Church of Greece to consider a proposal for the ordination of women in the lower ranks of the clergy 'where they could prove of great assistance with worship and religious life'.<sup>88</sup> In October 1999, Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania, while repudiating a report that he had ordained three Orthodox women as deacons (not deaconesses), nevertheless added 'that he favoured a discussion of women's ordination as deacons, and would raise the issue "at the right time" with other Orthodox archbishops and patriarchs... (while) the priesthood is not in question, the diaconate is an open possibility'.<sup>89</sup>

### **Orthodox women doing it for themselves**

Orthodox women have been participants and observers in the WCC since 1948 with very few involved on the fringes of the women's movement in the churches. The second-wave feminist movement of the seventies, the emergence of scholars in feminist theology in Protestant and Catholic tradition, and later the Community Study and the WCC Ecumenical Decade influenced and motivated some Orthodox women to engage in research, writing and

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>87</sup> 'Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew hosts International Conference for Orthodox Women', *The St Nina Quarterly*, Vol.1, no.4, Fall 1997, p.15.

<sup>88</sup> *Athens News Agency*, 31 October 1998.

<sup>89</sup> ENI, 99.0391.

speaking for change, women's participation and inclusive ministry within the Orthodox Church. As discussed in earlier chapters the participation was tentative, often defensive and only occasionally productive. The struggles in homeland churches and the *diaspora* were particularly difficult in the post-war years where survival and reconstruction of damaged societies were the foremost concern for the women. In Greece it was the civil war; in Russia the continued communist programmes against activists whether in the church or society at large which in turn affected Orthodox believers in Bulgaria, Romania, Yugoslavia, Poland and Czechoslovakia.

In the *diaspora*, many of the Orthodox were refugees from the war zones, and women were intent on re-creating a 'home from home' environment both in their communities and in the church. Nevertheless, organizations were established by the women to support the church and the needy within community, establish parochial schools, raise moneys to build new churches and maintain language classes to instill the culture and tradition of the homeland, whether, Greece, Russia or Romania. Orthodox women had few opportunities, and in the *diaspora*, the opportunities often took longer for women to avail themselves of them than in their home country. Not until the seventies would most Orthodox women take for granted their right to proceed through high school to university and into a profession.

Tatyana Mamonova was a child in Russia during the Second World War. For some years she observed the discrimination against women in a system that promised and promoted an ethos of equality, which Mamonova experienced and believed, did not exist.<sup>90</sup> She was inspired to begin a women's free press where women could write about their concerns and ideas for improving life for Soviet women. The *Almanac: Woman and Russia* was first printed in 1979, but by the third volume Mamonova and two other feminists were stripped of citizenship and expelled from the Soviet Union. The other two women Natalya Malakovskaya and Tatyana Goricheva formed a group Club Maria in order to pursue their

<sup>90</sup> Tatyana Mamonova, 'The USSR: It's Time We began with Ourselves', in Robin Morgan (ed.), *Sisterhood is Global*, Anchor books: New York, 1984, p.683.



main goal for religious freedom.<sup>91</sup> Mamonova was supportive of religious freedom but did not agree that the Russian Orthodox church would manifest freedom for women:

With its conservative stances on birth control, abortion, and homosexuality, the Church is just another patriarchy... Since the women of Club Maria hold views which are strongly nationalistic, the Russian emigre press was quick to champion their cause; they recognized an ally, that is, a group which, however bravely it challenges the totalitarian regime in the USSR, does not pose a threat to the patriarchy.<sup>92</sup>

Mamonova was quite right that the Russian Orthodox Church was patriarchal in structure, and was no less authoritarian in its canon laws than the Soviet regime in its civil law. Hardship and control by ruling authorities, both state and church, have been the experience of Russian people for centuries. The social and moral issues facing women and men of modern times continued to be dealt with by the Church with the same unyielding rules with little, if any, compromise. Praise and admiration are quite rightfully given especially for the women who maintained their faith and faithful practices during the decades of communist rule.

In 1990, Mary Ann De Trana attempted to follow up on the work of Club Maria (or the Maria Group) founded and dedicated to the Theotokos and the women involved in the movement for change after they were expelled from Russia. De Trana was critical of the reception in America of early Russian Christian feminist writings. She was particularly critical of Robin Morgan, a contributing editor of the feminist journal *Ms.* and subsequent editor of *Sisterhood is Powerful*, and especially the deliberate omission of articles that were distinctly Christian in content citing Mamonova's words: 'Orthodox women are now attempting to christianize the feminist group Marya, which advanced the ideals of the Virgin Mary. We consider these ideals inappropriate for contemporary women.'<sup>93</sup> De Trana added her comment: 'When the American feminists encountered a brand of feminism different from their own, it seems they choose to bury it with silence, rather than expose it to fair and open debate'.<sup>94</sup> It is not surprising that feminists, including Christian feminists were somewhat

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.687.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p.687.

<sup>93</sup> Mary Ann De Trana, 'Christian Feminists in the Soviet Union', in *SVTQ*, Vol.34, no.1, 1990, p.96.cites comment of Tatyiana Mamonova, *Women and Russia*, p.xxi.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p.97.

reticent accepting a brand of feminism which indicated such a strong commitment to Mariology, together with the authority of ordained clerics. The image of Mary had, for many women in Catholic tradition, become one of an unrealistic and submissive expectation of women by the church, and was undergoing considerable analysis and feminist hermeneutics at the time of Morgan's publications.

There is a suspicion of theology and church dogma surrounding the personhood and mystery of Mary which remains in many feminist groups, and is a focus of inquiry by women researchers and scholars concerned with the particular perceptions of her life and ministry, and how it continues to be perpetuated by the church patriarchy. Not all histories, teachings or theologies directed to and preached of Mary, have provided an enlightened or helpful role model for women in their struggles in the daily reality of life within the Church, society and the family. Orthodox women have been far more reticent than their Catholic sisters in addressing the theology of the Theotokos, and take more heed of the authority of the church that having 'pronounced is forever pronounced'. It is a complex subject and considering the tradition and Tradition of the Orthodox church, dissension on interpretations or endeavours to apply feminist hermeneutics outside the accepted teachings to such a complicated part of the faith has been relatively ignored or avoided by Orthodox women scholars and theologians.

From the late sixties and seventies, the concerns of feminist church women together with feminists in secular society, who wanted to explore and expand their views and new theories of the status and lack of participation women experienced in society, manifested in a deluge of publications and networks of communication. Church women were caught up separately in the women's movement and learned early on that, communication, apart from the authority given by the hierarchs or indeed, the local priest, was an opening of the floodgates of women finding their voices and speaking of their most innermost crisis of faith. Church women, in all traditions, found their publications, organised their seminars and workshops, and began to engage in theology, although in the early years many educated

women had not studied theology or been able to enter theological colleges for study. Activists sought out the work of emerging women theologians who were responding to the 'women's question' raised in secular groups, and were directing their own theological studies towards the question of inclusiveness, ordination and gender problems confronting the church.

While Mary Daly had opened the flood gates of dissent and criticism in the late sixties, it was during the seventies that Protestant and Catholic women were encouraged to meet, write, discuss and demand from the Church as they had from society. Some of those women maintained their presence in the Church, but many were eventually unable to reconcile the conclusions they had come to after their research, during their relationships with other women, and the discipline and obedience expected and demanded by church hierarchy. The hierarchs questioned their right to write and speak of new ideas, new theologies and new found women's authority - the authority of life itself. Where did Orthodox women find themselves during the turbulent years? Feminism had been useful to open up opportunities for all women to gain university entrance and professional status in the community. Feminism was alright to claim equality with men, opportunities in the workforce, the right to earn and spend, the right to be participants in the political, social and cultural life of societies. However, while Catholic and Protestant women carried their feminist concerns back to their churches, by asking the same question of Christian tradition and ordained authority, they were less than well-pleased with the responses. The reaction and action by many women was to leave the church structures, some left the faith, but many endeavoured to find their faith experience and life in relationships, personal and spiritual, with other women and very occasionally with men and clergy who empathized with the desperate need of women to participate equally in their Christian faith.

Whether there has been a quiet and steady exit of Orthodox women from the church for reasons of church teachings and practices, this has not been a topic of research to this point in time. Noticeably, like most other churches, there is a decreasing number of younger

women attending church on a regular basis. There are important days in the Orthodox church calendar where even the disinterested woman makes the effort to attend for example her father's nameday, her saint's day, during Lent and Easter, perhaps at Christmas, and more especially for family baptisms, weddings and funerals. Many young women and men attend church during Great Lent, quite often the only time in the year, in order to participate in the Eucharist after a period of fasting which is imposed and is the responsibility of the mother in the household.

With declining interest in the Church, regardless of denomination, by a majority of women who often perceive the church as irrelevant, archaic, male dominated and fundamentalist in teachings about moral and ethical problems of the present times, the activists in most churches are now women who remember or participated in the early waves of feminism in the seventies and eagerly adapted to the challenges and hermeneutics of feminist theology. However, even this involvement and scholarship has not prevented a generation from leaving the church, nor being concerned with teaching Christian religion to their children. However, as Elaine Storkey stated : 'at least the modern women at present gives away what she no longer accepts as religious truth; for women of tomorrow with no teaching there is no opportunity to know and reason, nor accept or reject religious truth - there is a void'.<sup>95</sup> The rejection of being afraid of not being in the church, the perception that rituals are meaningless and archaic together with changing personal lives have lessened the control of the Church, and more especially the control of male priests over women's private and sexual lives.

Nevertheless, even with declining numbers of feminist activists, there remain sufficient women to act on behalf of women on the social and moral dilemmas facing them every day. The Church administration and hierarchs have not been the supporters for women on sexual abuse or domestic violence for example, but have hastened to speak on ordination, abortion and homosexuality as moral and theological issues for the Church, which disenfranchise

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<sup>95</sup> Elaine Storkey, interview with Lyn Gallagher, ABC National Radio, 'Religion Report', 15 October 1997.

women from the discussion. At Agapia, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel referred to a conference on abortion held in France, to which no woman was invited to speak or participate.<sup>96</sup> Bereft of status, facilities, financial assistance and the imprimatur of the priest or bishop, women in the churches have started journals, written books, established networks and desktop publishing in order to provide a space for women to speak out for themselves on moral, theological and social concerns. While Orthodox women scholars, historians and researchers in biblical and theological disciplines have published articles and books through out many decades, it was the nineties before specific journals and networks emerged to work for and on behalf of women in the Orthodox church.

Following the Crete Consultation, the Orthodox Women's Network was established and in late 1990, the Ecumenical Decade Grants provided funds to commence the publication of a journal, *MaryMartha*, to be the responsibility of the editor in Australia. The journal was not aligned with any particular Orthodox jurisdiction and published articles on historical and contemporary work of Orthodox women, and women in the ecumenical movement. The first edition was circulated at the Canberra Assembly, and with funds diminished and no possibility of replenishment, the final edition was published for the Harare Assembly in 1998. The contributions to the journal were wide ranging, and with no censorship from clergy or hierarchs, revealed opinions on domestic violence, abortion, ideas and possibilities for new ministries for women, and criticisms of the lack of participation beyond traditional acceptance of women in church life. Piety was not the main ingredient in the context of issues raised and the journal attracted financial contributions and articles from women active in the church and women who experienced isolation from the church community. For Constance Callinicos, the issue of pro-choice was both political and personal. As a woman who had a family of her own, she reflected the dire straits of her own mother who through desperation at the onset of yet another pregnancy to a man who refused to use birth control, sought the services of an illegal abortionist which nearly cost her life. Callinicos attacks the priests who piously read

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<sup>96</sup> Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, 'The Meaning of the Participation of Women in the Life of the Church', in Constance Tarasur and Irina Kirillova (ed.), *Orthodox Women. Their role and participation in the Orthodox Church*. WCC: Geneva. p.17.

the "Prayer of Abortion", demand the "sinner's" confession and then forgives her "sin". She asked:

Who will forgive your transgressions against women dead of illegal abortions, against orphaned children, your offence against God when you read a "cleansing Prayer" over the head of a child-woman whose only sin seems to have been the sin of self-preservation? <sup>97</sup>

The reports from Crete, Damascus and Istanbul consultations were widely circulated in *MaryMartha* and for the first time a considerable number of Orthodox women knew such meetings had taken place, and that women had made recommendations to their churches out of forums that had credibility. The editor of *MaryMartha* also disseminated ecumenical news of women in other member churches of WCC churches in order to encourage Orthodox women to dialogue with other church women. <sup>98</sup> Another journal *The St Nina Quarterly*, the publication for the Women's Orthodox Ministries and Education Network in America also received seeding funds from the Decade grants and remains in publication but also with precarious financial arrangements. Occasional editions have been subsidized by an Orthodox parish or diocese. The journal has only women on the Editorial Board, and the Honorary Board has a bishop and two male theologian priests amongst the members. *St Nina Quarterly* attracts articles from women theologians, iconographers, musicians and historians in America and is an advocate for the education of women about the church; but the journal does not contain confronting articles of dissension or difficult moral, social and ethical dilemmas.

Another journal which began under the auspices of the Antiochian Evangelical Orthodox Mission, *The Handmaiden*, has had limited editions through financial difficulties and is a journal which appeals to the more conservative and tradition bound Orthodox woman and therefore no doubt appeals to many clergy as well. In 1992, in Denver, Colorado a group of women established Women in Orthodoxy as 'a monthly exploratory study group

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<sup>97</sup> Constance Callinicos, 'For Women's Lives: on the subject of choice', in *MaryMartha*, Vol.1, no.3. 1991, p.10.

<sup>98</sup> *Editor*, Leonie Liveris. The journal reached over six hundred individuals, Orthodox seminaries and organizations across 32 countries, including Catholic and Protestant women and scholars interested in what Orthodox women were writing about their issues in the Church.

for Orthodox Christians dealing with women's experiences and understanding of Orthodox theology and practices, and of their emerging identities as Orthodox women in our American society'. The course was available either by participating in group meetings in Denver or through a correspondence course.<sup>99</sup>

The nineties has been an active time for a few Orthodox women in America. Although the W.O.M.E.N. network sponsors the *St Nina Quarterly*, and there is interest across the jurisdictions for the publication, the wave of outspoken strong feminist voices that other churches experienced in the seventies is still absent from Orthodox women's activities and publications. Individuals declare themselves feminists, and refer to feminist theologians in their work but many more are antagonistic and defensive against the allegations of misogyny, patriarchal authority, sexism and discrimination that many Protestant and Catholic women have long researched and written.<sup>100</sup> More conservative networks are active and growing through HomePages on the Websites such as the St Macrina Orthodox Sisterhood and are open for discussion between Orthodox Christian women. The discussion areas focus on such issues as:

being a submissive and virtuous wife, dressing modestly and covering the head, homebirthing and midwifery, techniques for raising pious children.... living in voluntary "poverty", reading the lives of the Married Saints and imitating early Christian ideals...<sup>101</sup>

The global networks established by a few Orthodox women have worked through widespread journals such as *MaryMartha*, but on the parish or diocesan level the women's network has focused on small meeting groups to study scripture, the sacraments and philanthropy within the parish, all with approval from the parish priest. Clergy Wives networks have been established to assist *matushkas*, *presvyteras* and *khourryes* to be 'better' clergy wives and serve the parish in a more meaningful way, as their ministry in the church. In

<sup>99</sup> Pamphlet: 'Women in Orthodoxy, 'Who is the Church? Who am I? How are we one?, 1992.

<sup>100</sup> Women in Orthodox Ministry and Education Network  
<sup>101</sup> [www.xenia@homestead.org](mailto:www.xenia@homestead.org). [1997, 10 October].

addition, small groups have revealed underlying problems that have been dormant and new tasks are undertaken by qualified women in parishes to better address the issues.

Women in Healing Ministries, is a group of Orthodox psychotherapists and counsellors concerned with the issues of sexual and clergy abuse and domestic violence that are not unknown in Orthodox parishes, and increasingly the concerns are brought to the notice of clergy and bishops. However, as in other churches, it has been women who have started the counselling ministries and have raised the problems to their communities. In 1997, in response to the growing self-movements, albeit minuscule and scattered, the OCA Tenth All-American Council reported that the Education and Community Life Ministries Unit was developing opportunities for women to utilize their talents in the church,<sup>102</sup> while the Antiochian Orthodox Church Website included news of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian women of North America whose mission was for religious programmes, humanitarian concerns and raising of funds for a specific project adopted by the women each year.<sup>103</sup>

In Europe and Russia the issues are not so widely or openly discussed, and women meeting together within the church though aware of the problems, are more focused on ministry and service within the structure of the church as discussed in the 'Living Letters' visits. In Britain, the Oxford Women's Group, which began in 1988 has raised issues on single people, friendship, the Church and sex, grief, pornography and authority in the Church. The group are nearly all 'converts', perhaps a reflection of the particular community of Oxford and the university. Anastasia Heath reflected that 'amid all the flux of gender roles in the West today, both women and men feel a certain fear and uncertainty towards each other, and there is benefit in setting aside time for single sex discussion and reflection'.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, despite an understanding of the need for such discussions, unlike Catholic and Protestant women, Orthodox women are cautious in their critical language and there are no

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<sup>102</sup> *The Orthodox Church*, Vol.33, no.9/10, 1997, p.6.

<sup>103</sup> Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, [www.antiochian.com](http://www.antiochian.com)

<sup>104</sup> 'Experience of the Orthodox women's Group in Oxford', *MaryMartha*, Vol.2, no.4, May 1993, p.6.



ongoing activist movements of Orthodox women to expose the power and authority of patriarchy, although some individual women are outspoken in their work and writings.

It is unlikely that even feminist Orthodox women will publicly claim at this time, as Catholic feminist religious Sandra Schneiders asserts: '(catholic) radical feminists have identified patriarchy in general and hierarchy in particular as irredeemably sinful structure whose transformation is demanded by the gospel'.<sup>105</sup> However, Orthodox feminist writers should be encouraged by the recommendations from the Rhodes consultation in 1988, when the delegates recognized that the 'challenge of the feminist movement should be particularly addressed as one of the manifestations of real life issues raised within society today'. Though noting that not all feminist issues were theological issues, it was conceded there was cause for consideration for the use of inclusive language, the emphasis placed by feminist theologians on the exegesis of specific Pauline teachings, and the idea of submission of women because of their specific sexual identity.<sup>106</sup>

The Decade, the Consultations and the Bossey Seminars have been catalysts for a few progressive minded Orthodox women across the various jurisdictions. However, unlike the structures of many other member churches, laywomen will never have the voice of authority given to laymen, clergy or hierarchs to express concerns in synods and councils. Women will present the yearly progress and community problems, certainly reporting on religious education, maintenance of traditions and culture, and teaching in church day schools. The exclusion of women from full participation in the Orthodox churches will continue as the global network and communication between women remains voluntary, unfunded, fragmented and rarely sustained without the impetus of the ecumenical movement and especially the Women's Unit. Women will not become activists for change, to question culture and exclusion, without permission of their clergy and bishop, the patriarchy who

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<sup>105</sup> Sandra Schneider, *Beyond Patching. Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church*, Paulist Press: New York, 1991, p.25.

<sup>106</sup> Conclusion of the Inter-Orthodox Consultation on the Place of the Woman in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women, Rhodes. 1988.

have the theological, moral and traditional authority of the Church. The women who feel and experience exclusion will leave.

## Conclusion

Since 1948, when the World Council of Churches was established, there have been Orthodox women involved in the Council, a few as staff persons, some as Central Committee members and more women, across the jurisdictions, who have been involved in consultations, seminars and meetings. In 1998, when the WCC Eighth Assembly was held in Harare, Zimbabwe to mark the fifty years since the first Assembly was held in Amsterdam, were there any reasons for Orthodox women to celebrate change and advancement in their status and participation in the Orthodox Church? While the awareness of and commitment to women's issues and social justice within church and society has been made only too clear to member churches of WCC since its inception, such awareness and change also provided the Bulgarian and Georgian Orthodox churches with reasons to leave the Council. At the Harare Assembly questions were finally asked by member churches - what do the Orthodox churches want?

This thesis was written from within a feminist perspective utilising primary resources and official documents revealed through research in the WCC archives and libraries in Geneva and the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey. The material in this thesis has not been presented from a theological, anthropological or sociological perspective. Rather the evidence presented throughout has been the voices of women, a historical presentation. The evidence has been the voices of women from the beginning of the WCC relating their stories and experiences from their culture and tradition as Orthodox women in homelands and the *diaspora*. Women's voices lost in the dark abyss of silence have been brought to light throughout the thesis despite the complicity in the silence by the hierarchy of the church and patriarchy of community. Women are reminded continuously they are 'other', and to be content with roles of nurturing and service regardless of their talents, education, socio-economic environment and spiritual presence.

From the early ecumenical meetings organized under the auspices of the Faith and Order Commission, church women have steadfastly demanded their right to be included in the full life of the Church. Orthodox women participated with Protestant women during the decades examining various questions raised in church and society, albeit often with an agenda not perceived as relevant by the hierarchy of any member churches. The Pauline teachings that insisted on the headship of man and the submissiveness of women have been entrenched in all churches, and it has taken the women's movement and the feminist movement to raise the expectations of women in all spheres of society and finally, in the Church. Notwithstanding the centuries of Tradition so eloquently espoused by theologians and church historians, the work of various departments of WC and the Women's Unit have instigated and promoted programmes for change, by focusing on various aspects of church teachings and practices that have affected and excluded the participation of women in the church.

The ecumenical movement, including such organizations as the YWCA, provided Orthodox women with opportunities for service on a wider scale. Women such as Sarah Chakko, Athena Athenassiou and Marie Assaad were all activists in the YWCA. Other women served in the International Red Cross and they came to the notice of the Women's Unit through their ecumenical friendships with Protestant women. They recognized the commitment and leadership qualities of these Orthodox women and promoted their names to the WCC for inclusion as invited delegates to various consultations. This practice continued well into the 1990s, when Orthodox women continued to find places for inclusion in other women's organizations and secular society when there was no place for their work and leadership within their Orthodox community.

From the early years the perception that all women really wanted was ordination to the sacramental priesthood has shadowed any moves by Orthodox women for change to their status in Orthodox communities. While activists and feminists would support such a move, the issue, in fact has not brought about a worldwide movement of Orthodox women

for such a change as has occurred with some success in the Anglican, Methodist and Lutheran member churches of the WCC. However, despite resistance to discussions on women priests, there has been an increasing number of historians and theologians intent on examining archives and Orthodox Tradition and the arguments put forward for the re-introduction of the order of women deacons that existed in the first one thousand years of the Church. This interest led to Patriarch Dimitrios I convening a meeting in 1988 in Rhodes, Greece, of theologians and scholars to discuss 'The Place of Women in the Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood'. The responses in the final analysis did not present radical reforms, nor put forward suggestions for ordination, nor in some cases, was there recognition of women's diaconal ministry in the past let alone for the future.

The 'nature' of woman was a constant reference throughout the papers, and remains an issue for profound in-depth discussion and research for future scholars. The perceived and theologically endorsed attitudes from many sections of the Church and Orthodox society concerning the 'unclean' status of women remains a detrimental and negative concern for over half the members of the Orthodox communion. It effectively denies women access to the 'holy', whether the eucharist, entrance to the church or the sanctuary, and is a precursor argument that separates her person from the fullness of participation in the life of the Church. Both the Church and Orthodox women themselves need to be educated about biology, in particular the normal menstrual cycle. The hierarchy and women will need to work together to change attitudes towards human sexuality, reminding themselves that Jesus had healed the bleeding woman who touched him without considering himself unclean as a result. From different consultations, Orthodox women raised the issue of 'double-standards' when discussing human sexuality and this is also a major field for future research for Orthodox scholars, women and men.

The issue of the ordained diaconate for women has been under discussion since the beginning of the century. The thesis has examined the various possibilities and probabilities for the diaconate as debated by women delegates and scholars at various consultations.

While the Church of Greece, Coptic Orthodox Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church have spoken, and indeed, prepared women for this ministry, there is no definite programme for the ordination of women deacons in the Orthodox Church. As it is a ministry that existed in the past, it needs only to be 're-introduced'. What is needed is a bishop to make the decision for the ordination. However, such is the manner of the Orthodox, that decisions are not taken unilaterally so the matter may well continue in limbo for decades to come. The debate needs to be taken up within theological seminaries, to which it is hoped, many more women will be admitted as students in the near future. Women have indicated the need to re-examine what is actually meant by the diaconate and whom might be called to serve in this ministry.

The thesis has revealed that communication between women, the church and their bishops and clergy has not been an ongoing or positive experience. The work of women through the WCC consultations has not been accepted by their priests and bishops, and too often useful, challenging and scholarly work has remained in the archives of churches and libraries. The WCC Women's Unit has been a positive influence for Orthodox women. The Unit has financially supported Orthodox women from different jurisdictions, countries and societies, to meet at consultations in order to discuss issues of ministry, participation, sexuality, culture and tradition. Too often the delegates have been nominees of conservative bishops and progress has been far too slow and laborious to ensure meaningful changes for Orthodox women in the church.

The Agapia Consultation, was the most challenging meeting, although guarded carefully by male theologians and hierarchs in case the issue of ordination should be raised. Subsequent consultations at Crete, Damascus and Istanbul together with the Bossey Seminars provided opportunities for women, often without any prior ecumenical engagement, to meet with other Orthodox women and Protestant women to discuss feminism, feminist spirituality and Orthodox ministries. These were meetings of tension, learning and growth. The concern for the future must be the changing relationship of

Orthodox churches with the WCC. How will Orthodox women be encouraged to meet with each other within their own jurisdiction is one problem, to meet between jurisdictions is another. However, the most important and detrimental effect of the strained relationship and without the positive encouragement from the Women's Unit, could be the loss of meeting places for Orthodox women to meet with other Christian women. This thesis has revealed evidence from Orthodox women both concerned about and committed to their participation in the life of the Church and their community. While most of their participation has taken place as determined and permitted by the patriarchy, and under the authority of the bishops and clergy, there are growing signs of the times, that a few Orthodox women have acted upon their own volition for change and wish to continue in their work. The exclusion of women from full participation in the life of the Orthodox Church, endorsed by tradition and Tradition, remains entrenched by the authority of ordained hierarchs in the Church and patriarchal structures in Orthodox societies. The 'woman question' remains a problem for women, and will remain so until such time as the hierarchy and laity, confront and acknowledge that the question is a problem as long as women are excluded from full participation in the Orthodox Church.

## Appendix 1



## Appendix 2

### Orthodox member churches of WCC

- Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East (USA)  
His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV (His Grace Mar Aprim Khamia)  
Morton Grove, Illinois, USA
- Armenian Apostolic Church  
Archbishop Nerses Bozabalyan, Locum Tenens of the Catholicate of All Armenians  
Kumkapi, TURKEY
- Armenian Apostolic Church (Lebanon)  
His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia  
Antelias, LEBANON
- Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Poland  
His Beatitude Sava, Metropolitan of Warsaw and All Poland  
Warsaw, POLAND
- Church of Cyprus  
His Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostomos of Cyprus  
Nicosia, CYPRUS
- Church of Greece  
His Beatitude Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece  
Athens, GREECE.
- Coptic Orthodox Church (Egypt)  
His Holiness Patriarch Pope Shenouda III  
Heliopolis, EGYPT
- Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (Turkey)  
His All-Holiness Bartholomaios I, Ecumenical Patriarch  
Istanbul, TURKEY
- Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church  
His Holiness Abune Paulos, Patriarch of Ethiopia  
Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA
- Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa (Egypt)  
His Holiness Petros VII, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria  
Alexandria, EGYPT
- Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East (Syria)  
His Beatitude Ignatios IV, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East  
Damascus, SYRIA

- Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem  
His Beatitude Diodoros I, Patriarch of Jerusalem  
Jerusalem, ISRAEL
- Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (India)  
His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews II  
Kottayam, INDIA
- Orthodox Church in Japan  
Archbishop of Tokyo and Metropolitan of All Japan  
Tokyo, JAPAN
- Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania  
His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania  
Tirana, ALBANIA
- Orthodox Church in America (USA)  
Primate, His Beatitude Metropolitan Theodosius  
Syosset, New York. USA
- Orthodox Church of Czech Lands and Slovakia  
His Beatitude Dorothej, Archbishop of Prague and Metropolitan  
Prague, CZECH REPUBLIC
- Orthodox Church of Finland  
His Eminence Archbishop John of Karelia and All Finland  
Kuopio, FINLAND
- Romanian Orthodox Church  
His Beatitude Patriarch Teoctist  
Bucharest, ROMANIA
- Russian Orthodox Church  
His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia  
Moscow, RUSSIA
- Serbian Orthodox Church  
His Holiness Patriarch Pavle  
Belgrade, SERBIA
- Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East  
His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I, Syrian Orthodox Patriarch  
Damascus, SYRIA  
and  
His Beatitude Baselius Paulos,  
Catholicate Aramana,  
Kerala, INDIA

### Appendix 3

#### Women's Unit of the WCC

- 1949            Commission on the Life and Work of Women in the Church
- Chairman            Sarah Chakko, India  
 Secretary            Kathleen Bliss, England
- 1953            Department of the Man-Woman Relationship in Church and Society  
 1954            Department on the Cooperation of Men and Women in Church and Society
- Executive Secretary
- 1954            Madeleine Barot, France  
 1966            Rena Karefa Smart, Sierra Leone.  
 1967            Brigalia Bam, , South Africa
- 1969            WCC Sub-Unit on Women in Church and Society  
                   'Women's Desk' of the WCC
- Directors
- 1969            Brigalia Bam  
 1979            Constance Parvey, USA  
 (the Women's Unit located in Unit III, JPIC, Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation)
- 1980            (Marie Assaad appointed Deputy General Secretary. Chair. of Unit III)  
 1983            Barbel von Wartenberg, Germany  
 1987            Anna Karim Hammar, Sweden
- Executive Secretary/Director
- 1991            Aruna Gnanadason, , India.

## Appendix 4

### Selection of WCC Women's Consultations and Turning Points

1947	The Life and Work of Women in the Church Study
1948	WCC First Assembly, Amsterdam, Netherlands.
1954	WCC Second Assembly, Evanston, USA.
1958	The Service of Women in the Church, Ibadan, Nigeria.
1958	The Christian Approach to Women's Questions - Freedom of Marriage - Freedom of Work, Geneva, Switzerland.
1960	Towards Responsible Cooperation Between Men and Women, Our Christian Responsibility, High Wycombe, England
1961	WCC Third Assembly, New Delhi, India.
1964	Sexual Ethics Today, Founex, Switzerland.
1967	The Christian Women Co-Artisan in a Changing Society, Taize, France.
1968	WCC Fourth Assembly, Uppsala, Sweden.
1970	What is Ordination Coming To?, Geneva, Switzerland.
1974	Sexism in the 70s - Discrimination against Women, West Berlin.
1974	Pastoral Care of Those Confronted with Abortion, Monbachtal, FRG.
1975	WCC Fifth Assembly, Nairobi, Kenya.
1975	UN International Women's Year.
1976	Orthodox Women : The Role of Orthodox Women in the Church and in Society, Agapia, Romania.
1978	Consultation of European Christian Women, Brussels, Belgium.
1978	Women in the Media, Beirut, Lebanon.
1978	Women in Church and Society, Cairo, Egypt.
1978	Ministry, Mariology and Biblical Hermeneutics, Geneva, Switzerland.
1979	Ordination of Women in Ecumenical Perspective, Klingenthal, France.
1980	Theological Anthropology: Towards a Theology of Human Wholeness, Niederaltaich, FRG.
1980	Marie Assaad appointed Deputy General Secretary, WCC.
1981	The Community of Women and Men in the Church, Sheffield, England.
1983	WCC Sixth Assembly, Vancouver, Canada.
1988	Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women launched
1988	'The Place of the Woman' in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women, Rhodes, Greece.
1989	Orthodox Women's Steering Committee, Cairo, Egypt.
1990	Orthodox Women's Consultation : Church and Culture, Crete, Greece.
1991	WCC Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia.
1992	Bossey Seminar: 'Feminine Images and Orthodox Spirituality'.
1994	The Orthodox Woman in the United Europe, Levadia, Greece.
1994	Bossey Seminar: 'Feminist and Orthodox Spiritualities'.
1994/5	Mid-Decade visits of "Living Letters": to member churches of WCC.
1996	Orthodox Women : 'Discerning the Signs of the Times', Damascus, Syria.
1997	Orthodox Women : 'Discerning the Signs of the Times', Istanbul, Turkey.
1997	Bossey Seminar : 'Authority and the Community of Women and Men in the Church'.
1998	WCC Eighth Assembly, Harare, Zimbabwe.

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*World Council of Churches Central Committee, Minutes of the thirty- ninth meeting, Hanover, Federal Republic of Germany, 10-20 August 1988, WCC : Geneva.*

*World Council of Churches Central Committee, Minutes of the thirty-sixth meeting, Geneva, Switzerland. 9 -18 July, 1984, WCC: Geneva*

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