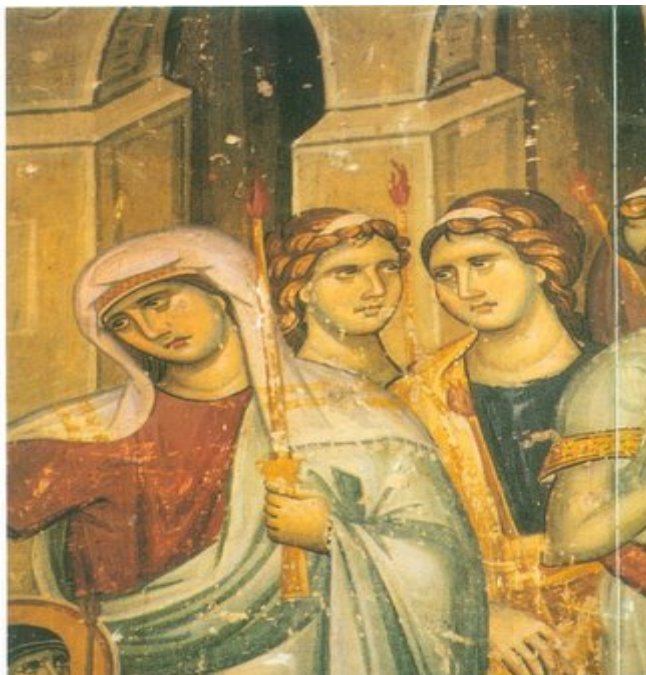


HOLY METROPOLIS OF DEMETRIAS
VOLOS ACADEMY FOR THEOLOGICAL STUDIES



INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATION
*A project of Women in Church and Society Program
of the World Council of Churches*

“Many women were also there ...” (Mt.27,55)
The Participation of Orthodox Women in the Ecumenical Movement.
Past, Present, Future.

Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Greece
8-12 June, 2008.

In the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held in Porto Alegre, Brazil from 14-23 February 2006, orthodox women's participation was more than visible. Orthodox women participated as delegates, official observers, lecturers, co-opted staff members, stewards, mutirao participants. Many factors have contributed to that progress: historical, political and economical changes, especially in Eastern Europe, which have influenced not only the social but the cultural and religious reality; theological challenges coming from other Christian Traditions, about the role of women in the churches and the foremost issue of women's ordination; many initiatives taken by ecumenical bodies and organizations to the direction of encouraging and improving the participation of women in their decision making bodies.

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The participation of orthodox women to the Assembly has created a sense of optimism for the future but on the other hand an obligation for a deep self criticism. How much progress and change really has there been in the last decades, after Agapia Consultation (1976), and are the changes sufficient to ensure that the progress will have mobility for the future?

An emphasis must be given on the positive role that the WCC has taken all these years in providing opportunities for orthodox women to meet and discuss issues. From the beginning of the WCC, an effort to increase their role and encourage their vocations has been on the agenda of various units. Additionally, through their participation to WCC meetings, seminars and publications orthodox women were able to meet with each other across ethnic, national and cultural differences.

In 1976, 40 participants arrived at the Agapia Monastery for the first Orthodox Women's Consultation to discuss their participation in the Orthodox Church. As Elizabeth Behr-Sigel said some years later "for the first time in Christian history women were called to reflect together, in dialogue with bishops and theologians, on their vocation and specific ministry". Especially in the period during the Ecumenical Decade - Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998)- two main gatherings, among many other Bossey Seminars or inter-christian meetings, were held, hosted the first one by Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East in Damascus (1996) and the second by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in Istanbul (1997), both under the theme: *"Discerning the Signs of the Times"* (Matt. 16:3): *Women in the life of the Orthodox Church*".

Both final documents reflect the fact that "there are some occasions when the role and the presence of women, as well as their work, is not always validated for the value it has....we recognize with deep concern how social injustices such as poverty, illiteracy and invisibility may affect Orthodox women and women in general in our part of the world."

Have these concerns and challenges from women modified churches in order to reform attitudes and practices that for centuries deemed woman to be 'other'? Or how can the diversity of voices due to cultural differences and needs continue in the 21st century with the same sense of responsibility and commitment in the frame of ecumenical movement, especially nowadays that orthodox churches, in common with other Christian communities, facing the urgent problems of migration, poverty, trafficking, violence and social injustice?

The aim of Volos Consultation is twofold: on one hand, the re-evaluation of orthodox women's participation in the ecumenical movement and of the way this participation has influenced local orthodox communities and Churches and on the other hand, how the previous experience can be used

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in planning future initiatives and activities that will enrich and empower the presence of orthodox women in local and ecumenical contexts in order to contribute to the overcoming of human barriers and divisions and make “earth and heaven full of God’s glory”.