

## Orthodox Women in Ecumenical Dialogue

TENY PIRRI-SIMONIAN

Not long ago I was invited as a staff member of the World Council of Churches to speak to a mixed audience of ecumenical partners and others about the ecumenical journey of women since 1948. I saw my role as *communicator*, interpreting to my audience how women in the ecumenical movement have discerned their place and role in church and society. It was clear to me that my primary loyalty on that occasion was to the movement as a staff member of the WCC.

At this gathering of Orthodox women, I see myself as one of the actors in the ecumenical process of discerning women's place in church and society. My own ecumenical involvement started in 1970 with the World Student Christian Federation and in 1972 with the World Council of Churches. As I sought to define my role in the ecumenical movement, one possibility was to adopt the agenda of my Western sisters in the movement. The alternative was to start from where the majority of Orthodox women in the churches were. It was clear to me that my relationship as a woman to the ecumenical movement was conditioned by the ethos of the Orthodox tradition and the way Orthodox churches responded to a fellowship designed on a Western Protestant model. I opted for the second role, knowing this meant I would sometimes distance myself from current trends in women's thought and groups of solidarity.

I do not believe that these two roles – as “communicator” and as “actor” – are incompatible for one person. In essence, these two roles recount two different readings of the “signs of the times” in the ecumenical fellowship. They come out of the same quest of women to offer their gifts to the church and society. Each is motivated by the desire of women to affirm their vocation in this world as persons created in the image of God. In other words, they are two different ways of telling the same story, two sides of the same coin. When conducted with integrity, these efforts are equally valued by God. Our goal is to hear what the

master said to his slave in Jesus' parable of the talents: “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master” (Matt. 25:21). Our question is: after journeying together for several decades as Orthodox and other Christian women in the ecumenical movement, how can we recognize and multiply the “talent” we are given by God? We do this by using the gift of being created as women in God's image, and by assuming the responsibility that is ours by being called, together with men, to become co-creators with him.

Our journey has shown that we can put our common coin into proper use only by learning about each other, by understanding each other's concerns regarding the journey, by respecting the different speeds with which we move in our common quest, and, finally, by discerning an ecumenical journey for the glory of the triune God and for the imperative of standing up together as Christians for life-giving values and issues. Sharing with each other means listening to each other's stories – the ecumenical story and the Orthodox story. Discerning an ecumenical journey means setting together the common vision arising from our understanding of the church and being part of the church, that is part of the body of Christ the risen Lord.

### The ecumenical story

Already at the time the World Council of Churches was founded in 1948, visionary women had put the issue of women's participation on the agenda. Two Orthodox women were present at the first assembly in Amsterdam, one from the Russian Orthodox Church, the other from the Syrian Orthodox Church in India. It was the latter, Sarah Chakko, who presented a report to the assembly on the “role and status of women in the church”. As an outcome of this report, women's concerns became part of ecumenical thinking; and several years later Sarah Chakko was the first woman to be named as one of the presidents of the WCC.

For the next 25 years the main ecumenical issues for women were “integration of women's concerns into the whole life of the church” and the related issue of the “cooperation between women and men”. Several study processes and consultations were organized during this period, which aimed at attributing a new significance to the understanding of community of women and men from ecclesiological and confessional perspectives. In preparation for the fifth assembly in Nairobi in 1975, a world consultation entitled “Sexism in the 1970s – Discrimination Against Women” was held in West Berlin in 1974. Its final report brought together the reports of working groups on women in politics, women in economic structures and education.

The Berlin meeting raised awareness of women's situation as a universal concern despite differences in cultural, racial, economic and political backgrounds. This awareness led the WCC to recognize that a new understanding of community was needed. In response to this consultation the Central Committee agreed that:

- public support should be given to the United Nations International Women's Year;
- adequate representation of women from member churches should be assured on all WCC boards and committees;
- a fund should be set up for the political, social and cultural development of both urban and rural women, especially those living at the subsistence level;
- a task force on sexism and language should be appointed to help eliminate sexist language, concepts and imagery from all WCC speeches and documents, beginning with the preparatory materials for the fifth assembly.<sup>1</sup>

Nairobi was the first WCC assembly to devote a plenary session to the question of women in church and society. As one of the speakers at this plenary, I had been invited to give a witness as an Armenian Orthodox woman living in war-torn Lebanon. My story was different from the other presentations. I spoke of the spiritual turmoil I felt as a person victimized by a meaningless civil war and incapable of contributing to its peaceful resolution. My voice was the voice of all peace-loving women and men. At the assembly I began to feel that my priority – which was the priority of men and women in the Middle East – was not an urgent priority for women's concerns at that point in time.

In response to the plenary session, the Faith and Order Commission was asked to incorporate into its study on "The Unity of the Church and the Unity of Mankind" a new emphasis on "The Community of Women and Men in the Church",<sup>2</sup> to be undertaken jointly with the sub-unit on women. This decision was also a call to the churches to start a theological and biblical enquiry into women's insights.

Within the WCC structure, the sub-unit on women in church and society encouraged reflection on spirituality, theology, ecclesiology and community – vital issues for the Orthodox churches as well. The mandate of the study on "The Community of Women and Men in the Church" (CWMC) was to encourage reflection on questions of theology and ecclesiology, participation and relationships which would lead to the unity and renewal of the church. Unfortunately, no Orthodox women were included on the advisory committee which the Central Committee appointed to oversee the work.

In 1976, a consultation in Agapia, Romania, on "Orthodox Women: Their Role and Participation in the Orthodox Church" brought together Orthodox clergy, lay women and men to discuss the questions raised by the CWMC study. The keynote address, "The Meaning of the Participation of Women in the Life of the Church", was given by Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, the prolific French Orthodox historian and theologian. The Agapia meeting identified several concerns, among them training the family for its missionary and liturgical role; the parallel life-style of monastic communities; the limited role women play in church and society and the need for further training so women can increase their skills; the lack of adequate religious training for women, which hinders them from participating effectively in parish councils and Sunday school teaching. Noting that women have always been active in serving the church, the consultation said they should be given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making bodies of the church. Regarding the ordination of women, the consultation recommended that the office of deaconess be studied and "re-activated".

As part of the CWMC process, the WCC distributed to member churches and other constituencies a study guide intended to stimulate sharing and reflection in groups beginning on the local level, then moving into a process of national and regional meetings. So far as I know, the Orthodox Church in America was the only Orthodox church which responded to the questionnaire and prepared a similar study book. The Middle East regional meeting was the only place where Orthodox women were visible and made an input into the study process.

The CWMC study culminated with an historic consultation in Sheffield, England, in 1981, which brought together a tremendous wealth of insights from different cultures and traditions related to the day-to-day life of the churches. Among the key speakers was Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, who gave a paper on the Orthodox tradition as a resource for the renewal of women and men in community. Sheffield concluded with a series of recommendations and a letter to the churches describing a new life in Christ.

The recommendations urged further WCC attention to such issues as the nature of ministry, authority and worship, inclusive community and attitudes in education. The consultation realized that preparing women to participate in the life of church and society is not enough; guidelines were needed to ensure the partnership of women and men in decision-making processes. Sheffield's letter to the churches recognized the situation of women in different churches without attempting to give a "normative theological judgment".

A month after the Sheffield meeting, the WCC central committee met in Dresden. Very few Orthodox women were present at this meeting.

Besides responding to the various Sheffield recommendations and endorsing the follow-up by WCC units, the central committee recommended that the CWMC study be incorporated especially into the Faith and Order programme on "The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community".

In this connection, a consultation in Prague in 1985 focused on what new understandings of the community of women and men in both church and world mean for the unity and renewal of the church. The consultation explored the continuing significance of the CWMC study, looked at new approaches to Bible study from the perspective of women, shared experiences of churches from diverse contexts and considered "fundamental ecclesiological and confessional perspectives", such as the Orthodox and Roman Catholic.

Some participants expressed frustration and pain over the ecumenical discussion of issues related to women and men in the church, arguing that the process was moving too slowly. Others expressed their appreciation of the development of the concept of *koinonia* – "a true community of women and men" – by the Orthodox. They said that "the concept of *koinonia* as a communion in Christ, a community based on relationship to God, where love rules, offers a theological basis for a vision of a community of women and men living in mutuality in the church".

The recommendations from Prague acknowledged that some voices had not been heard in the CWMC process. To stimulate discussion in those circles, it was proposed that "'case studies'... be carried out among Orthodox groups in different parts of the world". A study guide should be prepared, including "issues such as marriage, family life, the role of Mary, monasticism, etc. This study guide should be oriented towards regional groups in order that cultures other than Europe and North America be taken seriously." Furthermore, explorations of ecclesiological issues should "listen to and incorporate the experience of the church where it lives as a minority in the midst of people of other living faiths". Finally, Prague recommended, Faith and Order should consider how the ground-breaking work on "Scripture, Tradition, Traditions" from the fourth world conference on Faith and Order (Montreal 1963) could be developed "in such a way as to contribute to a fuller theological framework for ecclesiology".<sup>3</sup>

During the United Nations Decade on Women (1975-85), the WCC had encouraged member churches to give public support. However, when the UN Decade ended, there was a recognition that the churches had not sufficiently addressed the injustice within their own bodies and that an impetus was needed to encourage the churches to overcome the

barriers to expressing solidarity with women. Thus on Easter 1988 the Ecumenical Decade – Churches in Solidarity with Women was formally launched as a way of reaffirming the WCC's commitment to "work for the full equality and partnership of women and men in the churches". The aims of the Decade were the following:

- empowering women to challenge oppressive structures in the global community, their country and their church;
- affirming – in shared leadership and decision-making, theology and spirituality – the decisive contributions women are already making in churches and communities;
- giving visibility to women's perspectives and actions in the struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation;
- enabling churches to free themselves from racism, sexism and classism and from teachings and practices that discriminate against women;
- encouraging churches to take actions in solidarity with women.

A second Orthodox women's consultation sponsored by the WCC, entitled "Church and Culture", was held in 1990 in Crete. Its aim was to provide Orthodox women an opportunity to discuss the goals of the Decade and to link these goals with their own situation in church and society. Three broad areas were discussed: ministry, human sexuality, participation and decision-making. The following is a summary of the recommendations:

- Ministry: A renewal of the diaconate is needed. The diaconate as practised in the early church, which was identical for women and men, has disappeared. The female diaconate has completely disappeared, and the male diaconate has come to be restricted to liturgical functions. Renewal of both will enrich the ministry of the church.
- Human sexuality: The church should acknowledge and study the sexual double standard for women and men, particularly the cultural implications of this for questions of human sexuality. The church should also address this double standard in its counselling of young people.
- Participation and decision-making: Conciliarity is the essential characteristic of the church's communal life. In the conciliar process, each baptized member of the church is responsible for the church and the unique gifts given to each person are necessary for building up the church. The gifts of all baptized should therefore be respected in the church. The church needs to clarify the scope of women's participation in its communal and liturgical life and, in its understanding of participation and decision-making, to separate the requirements of the faith from the tangled web of tradition, custom and culture.

Since 1990, the dialogue between Orthodox women and their sisters in other parts of the ecumenical family has continued through a series of seminars organized by the WCC Education office and the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey. These seminars (in 1992, 1994 and 1997) sought to provide a forum in which a constructive dialogue on spiritual and ecclesiological issues and matters concerning worship and the community of women and men in the church could take place. The themes of the seminars were (1) *Feminine Images and Orthodox Spirituality*; (2) *Orthodox Spirituality and Spirituality Expressed by Feminist Theologians*; (3) *Authority and the Community of Women and Men in the Church*.

The seminars proved challenging and enriching for both the Orthodox participants and other Christian women theologians. Since Orthodox churches displayed some reservations about the CWMC study and the Sheffield recommendations, these seminars have offered Orthodox women an opportunity both to reflect on and clarify the questions and concerns raised by the study and to hear the points of view of their Christian sisters.

This, then, is the historical context for the two consultations of Orthodox women in Damascus (1996) and Istanbul (1997). The immediate context was the mid-Decade process of assessing how the visions and hopes of the Decade were being expressed on local, national and regional levels. Two consultations were organized in order to recognize the cultural diversity of Orthodox women and to provide an opportunity for women representing all Orthodox churches to participate.

Many of the recommendations from the first consultation in Damascus reaffirmed those made in Agapia and Crete. The participants celebrated the fact that more women were being allowed to study theology and teach in Sunday schools. They noted with satisfaction that some women were participating in decision-making bodies in parishes. However, they regretted that the re-establishment of the order of deaconesses – though accepted in principle by several churches – was not moving fast. The participants also acknowledged with pain that the response of the church to questions of human sexuality within the framework of faith and culture seemed to be stalled.

The restatement and reaffirmation of earlier recommendations indicates the slowness of the reception process both by the churches and the women themselves. Nevertheless, it is important that the participants expressed the need to continue such meetings, organized in the future by the women from Orthodox churches themselves.

### **The Orthodox story**

Orthodox participation has been marginal to the life of the WCC and the ecumenical movement. In addition to the problems arising out of

their social and political situation, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and the Middle East, the Orthodox churches have had reservations about the WCC's programmatic priorities. This has been further complicated by a tendency within the WCC to treat Orthodox participation as a token presence rather than an enriching resource. Naturally, then, the contribution of Orthodox women has remained limited as well.

Statistical information on the participation of women in WCC events is limited, and there is even less about the participation of Orthodox women. As noted earlier, there were two Orthodox women at the WCC's first assembly in Amsterdam in 1948. Thirteen attended the sexism consultation in Berlin in 1974. At the WCC's fifth assembly in 1975, 22 percent of the delegates were women, and an assembly plenary session was devoted to women for the first time. As mentioned above, I was the only Orthodox woman to take part in it. There were apparently three women on the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church. The participation of Orthodox women in Sheffield consisted of one keynote speaker (Elisabeth Behr-Sigel), one WCC staff member (deputy general secretary Marie Assaad, from the Coptic Orthodox Church), some women from the Middle East and the USA and a man and a woman from the Russian Orthodox Church.

Intensified participation by Orthodox women as assembly delegates began with the sixth assembly (Vancouver 1983), where there were at least one or two women on every delegation, depending on its size. Here we may note the evolution of the participation of Russian Orthodox women in WCC assemblies. At the fourth assembly (Uppsala 1968), there was one woman, Nina Bobrova – a staff member of the Department on External Relations and a longtime member of the WCC central committee. At the fifth assembly (Nairobi 1975) there were three women; and in Vancouver there were ten women.

One Orthodox response to the CWMC study and to the Ecumenical Decade came in an inter-Orthodox theological consultation on "The Place of the Woman in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women", organized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Rhodes in 1988. Its conclusions highlighted theological approaches to the mystery of the Incarnation and the church, the priesthood of Christ, the "Adam-Christ" and "Eve-Mary" typologies, the male character of the "sacramental" priesthood, and Christ and the Theotokos in the recapitulation of humanity. It also singled out two special concerns: the equality and distinctiveness of women and men; and fuller participation of women in the life of the church. The report ends with a section on the challenges posed by feminist theology in non-Orthodox churches, writ-

ten by the US Orthodox woman theologian Kyriaki FitzGerald. Unfortunately, the Rhodes consultation did not set up a process to follow up the implementation of its recommendations, nor did it establish procedures to measure their impact on women at the parish level.

Within the ecumenical movement the contribution of the Orthodox churches to ecumenical thought – through the concepts of *koinonia* and laity, through trinitarian theology, through their understanding of the sacramental nature of membership in the Body of Christ, of the priestly nature of the Body of Christ, of one spirituality in the Body of Christ and of the saintliness of all the baptized – is widely acknowledged. All of these Orthodox ecclesiological and theological approaches shed new light on the understanding of the community of women and men in church and society. Unfortunately, these important contributions have not been sufficiently and substantially pondered by Orthodox women and men in recent times.

Orthodox women are aware that it is thanks to the WCC that women from the two families could come together to affirm the common basis of their theology, to reflect together, to deepen their faith together and to raise sharp questions which will help them continue their pilgrimage in this world. It is also thanks to the WCC that all Christian women can discover their differences and commonalities and grow together.

### **Discerning together ecumenically**

What can be learned from the two “stories” – the ecumenical and the Orthodox? The first point I would underscore is that trust-building is the precondition to planning a journey together, both among Orthodox women and ecumenically. This means assuring one another that we know who we are, what our histories are, what our traditions say to us and what our stereotyped images of one another are. It also requires expressing our respect towards one another irrespective of differences in thinking and acting. Finally, it involves affirming that we are all committed to building a community in diversity among women.

Personally, I have learned many things through my contacts within the ecumenical movement and in inter-Orthodox relations. These contacts have pushed me to study more deeply the ecclesiology, theology and tradition of my own church, to seek answers to the questions coming from the ecumenical movement within my own tradition and within the larger Orthodox family, and to discern ways of enriching my commitment to women’s concerns in church and society. My ecumenical contacts have helped me to understand my own roots better; and they have also made me more tolerant towards other points of view.

For example, the ecumenical concern for the ordination of women led me to research the question of the diaconate in my church. I discovered that the diaconate of women as an ordained ministry continued into our century. Similarly, I have been helped to understand the Orthodox concepts of ministry and laity in the church.

The search for spirituality through images and symbols in the church has encouraged me to find out more about my patron saint, St Herepsimé. Recently, I discovered with joy that St Nina and St Herepsimé started their journey together. St Herepsimé and another companion, St Kayané, who remained in Armenia, were the first Armenian Christian martyrs; from their blood the Armenian Christian nation was born in 301.

I am sure as we continue this journey together, first as women representing the two Orthodox families together, we shall discern our vocation in this troubled world. I am also convinced that our discernment cannot be complete unless we show good will and love to our sisters in the ecumenical movement and seek to learn from their experiences.

The Orthodox women’s meetings in 1996 and 1997 have taken place on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the WCC and in the context of the conclusion of the multi-year study process on the Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC and preparations for the Council’s eighth assembly (Harare 1998), with its theme “Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope”. The coming together of all this with the end of the Ecumenical Decade – Churches in Solidarity with Women, and the need to set new priorities in this area make this an ideal moment to discern the future together and a great opportunity for Orthodox and other Christian women to give value to our common gifts by setting a common agenda for the next period.

To arrive at a common agenda, I propose two steps. The first is to deepen our reflection on certain concepts and themes. The ones I will suggest here come out of my personal experience, study and reflection. Some of these are common to all Christian women, but need prior reflection separately in their confessional families. Some are pending questions arising out of the 1981 Sheffield report. Some arise from various Christian confessions and have been raised by women during the Bossey seminars mentioned earlier. My discovery of the different interpretations given to these themes and concepts has enriched my ecumenical experience.

1. *Ecclesiology*. What is the church? What is the place of inclusive community – of lay and feminist paradigms of community – in the church? What do Orthodox perspectives on these have to say to women in the ecumenical movement?

The WCC's Vancouver assembly (1983) called for "the development of a community of healing and sharing within the WCC and the member churches where women, men, young people and children, able and disabled, clergy and laity, *participate fully* and minister to one another". "Participation" was defined as implying "encounter and sharing with others, working and making decisions together in styles that enhance inclusiveness, and living together as people of God".<sup>4</sup> Some women within the ecumenical movement have criticized this definition of participation as too broad and too weak. Personally, I find it to be very close to the Orthodox women's experience of church and community. Would an interpretation of this statement by Orthodox women bring a new dimension to the understanding of participation? Furthermore, the phrase "living together as people of God" suggests the beginning of the journey towards salvation. According to the Orthodox understanding, salvation happens in community with God and in relation with others and God. Would a discussion by women on these two approaches contribute to the better understanding of the community of women and men in church and society?

2. *Images and symbols*. Both Orthodox and other Christian women understand the importance of images and symbols in defining oneself in relation to the other. An important first step towards respecting each other's differences and learning from each other's traditions and experiences is understanding what these images and symbols represent and what they mean to different women. Some of the issues that come up in this connection are inclusive language (the symbolism and power of language); the place of icons in the church and in the lives of Orthodox women; the Mother of God, Theotokos, the beginning of new humanity; the Orthodox women saints, prophets, martyrs and what they say to women today.

3. *Understanding each other's ecclesiology within the context of the world today*. Ecumenical reflection on church unity has shown that many tensions around such important issues as scripture and community in fact arise from different understandings of ecclesiology. To what extent do these tensions influence women's solidarity in the ecumenical movement?

4. *The centrality of the eucharist*, especially for our discussion on building community in the church. How does this contribute to the understanding of ministries in the church in an open ecumenical women's dialogue?

5. *The Orthodox understanding of the "sacramentality of all the baptized"* in the context of the ministries of women in the church. How does this concept relate to the notions of hierarchy and authority in the church?

6. *Faith and culture*. This issue has been on the ecumenical agenda since the early days of the movement. It has been extremely controversial in relation to certain practices of the church regarding women. How can women break through these tensions?

7. *Story-telling as a method of learning*. Talking to the past tradition (through liturgy and through the lives of the saints) and using that tradition to gain insight into the present and the future are important elements of how Orthodox women live and express their faith in different cultural contexts. Other Christian women theologians may affirm identity within the framework of community through three-generation story-telling. How similar or different are these two approaches? It could be helpful to look into these two approaches and discover the types of "spirituality" they engender.

These are just a few examples from my experience of possibilities for discerning together. I am sure that the moment real dialogue begins between Orthodox and other Christian women in the ecumenical movement, the learning experience will be enriched by many new themes and concepts. Such dialogue should help us to discover similarities and affirm differences; and it should help to move the ecumenical process further ahead. To assure the success of this dialogue, it is absolutely necessary that the reflection take place in mutual trust and within a space where differences can be stated frankly and heard properly.

The second step I would suggest reiterates a recommendation from the Vancouver assembly which has not to my knowledge been implemented:

The Orthodox churches should take the initiative to provide simple study material and information on the Orthodox church and the role of women, for the benefit of non-Orthodox women and men. This information would greatly strengthen the understanding and sisterhood between women of different confessions. The WCC should assist in this exercise. While the position of Orthodox women needs to be respected, the ordination of women must still be kept actively on the ecumenical agenda.<sup>5</sup>

In order for women's participation in church and society to become a concern of the whole church, the women in the ecumenical movement must not drag Orthodox women behind them. Nor should Orthodox women feel isolated from the movement. The WCC should provide the space for open and sincere dialogue among women. At the same time, no matter how limited our resources are, we Orthodox women should start discussing among ourselves. As recommended in Vancouver, women should work together to produce study materials that will help women in the fellowship to build right relationships with one another.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> As summarized by Ans J. van der Bent, *Vital Ecumenical Concerns: Sixteen Documentary Surveys*, Geneva, WCC, 1986, p.199.
- <sup>2</sup> Cf. *Minutes of the 29th meeting of the WCC central committee*, August 1976, p.96.
- <sup>3</sup> Cf. Thomas F. Best, ed., *Beyond Unity-in-Tension: Unity, Renewal and the Community of Women and Men*, Geneva, WCC, 1988, esp. pp.162f.
- <sup>4</sup> David Gill, ed., *Gathered for Life* (official report of the WCC's Vancouver assembly), Geneva, WCC, 1983, p.255.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58.

## Defining Ourselves as Orthodox Women

MARIE ASSAAD

The topic assigned for this presentation – to survey recent developments and challenges related to the participation of women in church and society – is of course an impossible one, especially perhaps at a time when women and their role in development is a central issue in international discussions. Those who have followed the five major United Nations conferences of the 1990s – Rio de Janeiro (environment and development), Vienna (human rights), Cairo (population and development), Copenhagen (social development) and Beijing (women) – know that the most intensive discussions and disagreements during the deliberations in these international forums have centred on women, their rights and responsibilities.

To make the assignment manageable, I shall limit myself here to comparing what was revealed by two 1985 studies of the World Council of Churches with the preliminary results of the extensive programme of team visits the WCC undertook in 1994-95 at the midpoint of the Ecumenical Decade – Churches in Solidarity with Women. I will then share some of my experiences from working with women at the grassroots since my return to Egypt from Geneva in 1986.

### **Few signs of change**

The 1985 studies were undertaken in connection with the end of the United Nations Decade for Women. One, based on a set of questions sent to the churches, was designed to assess the nature and extent of women's participation in the churches. The second, entitled "Women, Religion and Sexuality", sought to discover how various world religions define the role of women and deal with women's bodies and women's sexuality. The eight women – from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia-New Zealand and Europe – who took part in this study were adherents of eight different religious traditions (Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Christian – Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic). They were the-