



Photo: Wolf Kutnahorsky, Berkeley Studio, United Church of Canada

What's in the World Council of Churches

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L'auteure suggère que le Conseil mondial des Eglises, un organisme oecuménique, peut et doit exiger des femmes qu'elles l'utilisent pour accomplir une transformation sociale. Bien que les actions du Conseil soient lentes et frustrantes, elle donne cinq raisons pour lesquelles les femmes devraient y agir: assurer une présence féminine dans les discussions sur l'unité; remettre en question les vieilles opinions; permettre aux opinions et à la participation des femmes de pénétrer les bureaucraties et les structures ecclésiales; accéder à un réseau international; transformer l'Eglise en une vraie communauté de foi. Elle conclut que pour assurer la création d'une ère nouvelle, toutes les femmes devraient s'engager dans la foi.

The experience of attending the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches leads me to conclude that there is both a potential and a demand for women to use the WCC as a vehicle for social transformation. If the WCC is not

for Women?

used it will block (with other faith communities) the needed transformation of society from patriarchal systems and structures to a holistically integrated human organism.

It is tremendously frustrating to participate in the work of the World Council of Churches because of the snail's pace of movement in an ecumenical body. Conflicting experiences, understandings, and interpretations are intense and gut-wrenching. The encounters with differing expressions of faith, differing cultures and languages, differing social/political/economic contexts multiply the strain of working together at the local denominational or ecumenical setting. So why bother, one might ask.

I would suggest five reasons:

1. We must ensure that the unity of the Church is not at the expense

of women. The ecumenical vision is "that all may be one." The "one" could be entirely masculine if unity is pursued without the legitimate struggle of women to determine their rightful place in the Church. If women leave the discussion of unity to men, the concerns of women may be dismissed as an obstacle to be tossed aside.

2. Through new visions of women, people can be challenged and disturbed in their understanding of what it means to be "people of God." Women like Carter Heyward, Rosemary Ruether, Dorothy Sölle, Letty Russell, and many others are critiquing our past understanding and suggesting alternate ways of describing the reality of God's presence with us.

3. The wisdom and insights gained from working in women's groups are needed by Church bureaucracies and structures. The practice of shared leadership, consensual decision-making and non-hierarchical management techniques seems to be more in keeping with the gospel than the models presently in place. The experi-

ence of women in combining task and maintenance functions (getting on with the job while caring for the individuals) in their group work could benefit the existing systems.

4. Access to an international network is another important reason for women to participate in the WCC. Opportunities for women to experience global sisterhood are few and far between. When they do take place, we begin to see the commonalities of our place in society. The specific problems may be different, but the root causes are remarkably similar — devaluing of women's work, stereotypical

attitudes about women's abilities, taboos related to the participation of women, and so on.

5. Most importantly, we can transform the Church. The full participation of women will enable the Church to be what it was intended to be — a community of faith, a community that draws equally on the gifts of women and men, that rids itself of the barnacles of gender-specific taboos and rituals.

Anyone who anticipates quick change will be enormously frustrated. However, faithfulness to the vision of a new age and perseverance in the task of ensuring its ar-

rival requires the involvement of all women of faith.

Further Reading:

Betty Thompson. *A Chance to Change: Women and Men in the Church*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982.

Constance F. Parvey, ed. *The Community of Women and Men in the Church: The Sheffield Report*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983.

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By His Wounds You Have Been Healed*

1. Peter 2:24

O God,
through the image of a woman†
crucified on the cross
I understand at last.

For over half of my life
I have been ashamed
of the scars I bear.
These scars tell an ugly story,
a common story,
about a girl who is the victim
when a man acts out his fantasies.

In the warmth, peace, and sunlight of your presence
I was able to uncurl the tightly clenched fists.
For the first time
I felt your suffering presence with me
in that event.
I have known you as a vulnerable baby,
as a brother, and as a father.
Now I know you as a woman.
You were there with me
as the violated girl
caught in helpless suffering.

The chains of shame and fear
no longer bind my heart and body.
A slow fire of compassion and forgiveness
is kindled.
My tears fall now
for man as well as woman.

You, God,
can make our violated bodies
vessels of love and comfort



to such a desperate man.
I am honoured
to carry this womanly power
within my body and soul.

You were not ashamed of your wounds.
You showed them to Thomas
as marks of your ordeal and death.
I will no longer hide these wounds of mine.
I will bear them gracefully.
They tell a resurrection story.

Anonymous

† In a Toronto church the figure of a woman, arms outstretched as if crucified, was hung below the cross in the chancel.

* Reprinted from *No Longer Strangers: A Resource for Women and Worship*, ed. I. Gjerding and K. Kinnamon. Ecumenical project of Lutheran World Federation, World Council of Churches, World Student Christian Federation, and World Young Women's Christian Association, 1983.