

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

As expected, last issue's editorial provoked some response:

Editor,

Thank you for the two articles in the winter 1990 Green Leaf. I identified so much with the search Jamie went through. I love being in a church when a woman is preaching, which I can get only rarely in Orange County. And I shudder and am severely hampered in my worship when I hear God referred to as male (he, father, etc.) more than once or twice per three minutes in a church service. Basically, I don't come back. I worship with Women Church now, which is Catholic in background, and less gospel-centered than I would like, but at least it doesn't jar me totally out of any contact with God. (My husband is a deacon in an American Baptist church, which I try to attend once a month, and the Sunday School there suffices for my daughters. In fact, an EWC member, the Reverend Joyce Smith, has been asst. pastor there for over a year, but she recently accepted a full-time job as a hospital chaplain.)

Your editorial is very well written. And the basic facts of membership drop you address are indeed disturbing.

I am glad CBE has 1300 members now, as EWC had at the beginning, more or less, but I am not willing to do some of the things they have to do to gain acceptance: ignore inclusive language for God, distance themselves from the lesbian issue and anyone even slightly accepting of lesbian Christians, and promise not to rock the evangelical boat on any other social issues if only they will be allowed to have equality as women. In 1974 I was so happy to be accepted as a feminist within evangelical Christianity that I tried to toe the

line on all other issues, and indeed I was ignorant of the existence of lesbian Christians and of the truth that "If god is male, male is god." But now in 1991 I can't envy CBE's membership, paid for at the cost of things I believe in.

I hope women who are within evangelical churches and hungry for the message of Biblical feminism will get it through the ministry of CBE. But I don't care enough about communicating that kind of compromised biblical feminism to put my energy into CBE's work. I trust God will raise up others to that task.

I don't even feel sad that those women can't be reached by the newly renamed EEWC. They will be reached by someone, in God's time. I can no longer communicate with these women without concealing important parts of myself. And I am so tired of holding back, not offending anyone with my feminist views...I've been doing this since 1968 within the evangelical community.

I feel great energy for the new directions EWC is going: for exploring new forms of liturgy, investigating early church history as in Fiorenza's In Memory of Her, probing the depths of women's knowledge and experience in various parts of the world and in other religious traditions...as Ruether did in her speech to last summer's EWC conference. I guess I resonate with Sonia Johnson right now when she says to stop trying to change patriarchy -- to make our own separate world or explore the different worlds women have already made.

When we voted on the name "ecumenical", I voted against it, partly because it is so vague....The meaning of ecumenical was part of the debate before last July's vote, and I believe the intention was to adopt the original meaning of the word -- acknowledging that our membership includes women from the Roman Catholic church and from mainline Protestant

denominations such as the Episcopal church as well as women from strictly evangelical denominations. I don't think we were trying to include "other religions" -- Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Goddess cults, etc. We expect people who join EEWC to agree with our statement of faith, which is orthodox Christianity. On the other hand, I think women who are searching in their faith would be welcome in EEWC, even if they could not confess Jesus as their Sovereign and Savior and even if their current worship community (if any) were not Christian.

"A trend in EEWC away from the basic message of the gospel"? That is a serious charge, but based on last summer's conference and my conversations with members, I don't think that is true. Yes, our understanding of the basic message is changing, but we may be getting closer than we ever were before. "A trend towards glorification of the self rather than of God"? This one totally missed me. Yes, individuals are always going for the glory. Pat Robertson and Tammy Bakker among them, but in EWC I think one gets more work and less glory than in most other Christian organizations.

As for acceptance of occult practices, a positive review of a book that discusses Goddess cults and Voudou doesn't imply anything to me about the beliefs of EEWC members. Nearly all of us were so well-schooled in the past in avoiding Satanic practices that we are not likely to fall for this now.

I like book reviews that tell me what's out there, and once in a while I enjoy feeling uncomfortable as an evangelical in a Goddess-oriented worship service. After all, I've spent 30 years in patriarchal churches, absorbing a heavily male message, and I figure I can learn to appreciate God as female while still keeping my faith in the God who chose to come to earth and to die on a cross.

....To get back to the basic facts of

the declining membership, I am sad about that. The Southwest chapter of EWC recently held a "ritual of closing," and it looks as if the Bay Area chapter may be headed in that direction. I am sad, but I also see hope in many areas: CBE (an offshoot carrying out EWC's original mission), WATER (Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual), Women-Church, and all the new biblical feminist organizations in other parts of the world...I hope EWC will continue because WATER and Women-Church are not gospel-oriented enough for me.

But even if EWC itself disbands, our cause and our faith will continue -- because God is in them. As the liberal rabbi Gamaliel said about a bunch of radicals long ago, "If this undertaking is merely human, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them" (Acts 5:38-39).

-Anne Eggebroten