

Appendix 3

Consciousness-Raising in the Church

AFTER READING *All We're Meant to Be*, I began wondering how to share my new insights about "biblical feminism" with others. Soon, with optimism and energy I moved into action at the large evangelical church to which I belonged. My first step was to lead my own adult Sunday school class in an examination of women's roles at our church. I announced three sessions: first, we would discuss what women's roles were; then, what they should be; and finally, how to change them. During the opening class I passed out questionnaires to discover people's opinions on what women's roles at our church were and should be, and we discussed those questions. I was surprised to see a couple of board members and older people from other classes attending my class; they made sure that the doctrine of women not ruling men was heard. I shared the research I had done—that 62 percent of the 1,700 members of our church were women; that men held 27 out of 30 positions on the ruling council; that all five pastors and most other official leaders were men. In class discussion we agreed that women predominated in preschool and elementary Sunday school teaching, in clerical work, and in kitchen jobs, but we disagreed on whether this division of labor constituted a problem.

For the second class of the series, I asked four leading women—a church secretary, a pastor's wife, a woman elder, and an active woman—to talk about their experiences as

women at our church. As it turned out, the one most opposed to equality for women (who had said she couldn't talk for five minutes) talked for half an hour. In the few minutes left to her after the other speakers had aired their views, the speaker nearest to being a feminist said almost nothing. Apparently she could not bring herself to tell in public the woeful tale of obstruction of energetic women she had told me in private.

In our final session we never got to the last step: how to change things. Nonetheless, undaunted, I compiled the questionnaires, speeches, and class discussion, and wrote a report containing these results and eleven specific suggestions on how to begin improving opportunities for women. I sent about ten copies of my letter to the pastors and other church leaders. After not receiving any answer for two months, I finally went to see the head pastor and to present my list of suggestions for women at our church. He was friendly but pointed out that he could not take a position from the pulpit. It was his job to mediate among the various interest groups at the church. And as to inviting women preachers rather frequently or hiring a woman for the next pastoral vacancy, those were nice ideas; he would do what he could, but of course his power was limited.

Satisfied that I had made a good start on changing women's roles at my church, I settled back into other activities until an announcement one Sunday jolted me: fifteen people had been nominated for ten positions on the church's ruling council in the annual elections—twelve men and three women. I was appalled. That was no better than the current ratio of men to women; in fact, fewer women were running than had run the previous year. I began working to get a few more women nominated from the floor. I found that many of the leading women had been asked to run, but had refused for various reasons. Some felt that women should not be council members; others were too busy with children and families (though their husbands had had time to serve on the council). Others were afraid of being the only assertive woman in the men's club of council members. Others—including the talented president of the large, active women's group—simply felt inadequate. "Oh no," she said, "I don't know anything. I couldn't be on the ruling council with all those businessmen." Others told me that women under sixty could not get elected, especially

women who might actually speak up in meetings. The few women already on the council tended to regard the office as an honorary reward for years of service—not a place for them to speak and take positions. Every woman had an excuse. I spent one whole day talking and praying with a woman who I hoped would run from the floor, but she finally backed out.

When election night came, two friends and I went to the meeting with a feeling of defeat. We almost nominated ourselves, but decided that that might anger people and hurt the chances of electing women candidates in the future. Instead, I got up during the election meeting, pointed out the imbalance between men and women candidates, and made an impassioned plea for prayer and work to change the balance in the next election.

The positive response from people who had heard me was encouraging. They all said, "Next year!" We agreed that a warm, supportive group was needed, where potential women board members could discuss things holding them back, encourage each other, plan a strategy to elect several women together, and provide on-going support for those elected. This group would be an official subcommittee of a standing committee. When fall came, I put announcements in the church bulletin for the first meeting of the women's committee and made a blue folder for my files marked "Women's Movement at Church." Three of us were present for the first monthly meeting; three for the second; and, for the third meeting, just my best friend and I. In discouragement, we disbanded.

Meanwhile, I led other adult education classes on women's roles in the church. The associate pastor and I taught one series together; he had become a supportive friend. Studying the issue of women in the church, he eventually preached a sermon urging broader roles for women. One Mother's Day I spoke to a class of older, married adults on "Faith of our Mothers" and was moved by feeling sisterhood with the women present and with women throughout church history. Other efforts included putting key books into the church library and setting up a special collection of books on women in the church. I tried to get the church's book sales room to offer Christian feminist books and the lectures given by the assistant pastor

and myself. After a long struggle, the woman in charge finally permitted the suspect materials into her bookroom.

All these efforts were usually greeted with a chuckle or a tolerant smile. Occasionally there was hostility. The goals that I considered so elementary—such as having half the council members be women—were seen as radical.

Finally, my own consciousness became raised to a point where the male-dominated worship service grated on me. I would sit and look at the four male pastors up there in front of the church and at the laymen usually reading the Scriptures, and would find it hard to worship God. When I was served communion by twenty-five males, I would feel anger and be in no state to take communion. At the early service, there might be one or two women serving communion. Even when I gave my offering, male ushers collected it—and the money went to pay a staff that was top-heavy with males. Women on the church staff were at the bottom, and underpaid.

About that time I learned that only one woman was going to be nominated in the upcoming election of church council members. Quite a few had turned down the nomination, as in the previous year. The news forced me into a serious reevaluation of God's will for me at my church. I had been offered the nomination but had refused it, thinking that my role was to work behind the scenes for the talented, middle-aged women who should be elders, as well as work for the Evangelical Women's Caucus. Should I, at age twenty-seven, be an "elder" on the council of my church and invest most of my time and energy there if elected? My efforts thus far seemed to be swallowed up like pebbles thrown into a lake. The more I thought about it, time and the working of the Holy Spirit seemed to be the only solutions for my church. Perhaps in twenty years . . .

With my new perspective, I questioned the worth of even continuing to be a member there. It often took me a whole week of "quiet times" to dissolve my hurt and hard feelings from one Sunday morning. One day when I went to church confident of being able to love whomever I met, I saw a "Successful Fulfilled Womanhood Seminar" poster and flyers prominently displayed next to the pastor's door (from a Bill

Gothard-related group devoted to teaching submission to wives). I flew into a rage.

I decided to leave that church for two reasons: my spiritual health and the health of the Christian church. I needed a place where I could worship and gain strength in my walk with the Lord. And the Christian church needed to have support withdrawn from any lukewarm church that was afraid to proclaim the Good News to women.

It took me nine months to find a church reasonably in line with God's will for women. Unfortunately, this church is not evangelical. But it is solidly Christian and it is a warm, loving family, where women preach about once a month and participate rather fully in all levels of service. I wrote a letter to all the leaders of my old church, explaining my reason for leaving and saying "The Lord will have to watch over me until the evangelical churches become a more faithful witness to the liberating power of the Holy Spirit."

In the meantime, the church has hired yet another male pastor, the sixth, this time for junior high children.

Appendix 4

The Evangelical Women's Caucus

FEMINISM IS DEFINED in Webster's Dictionary as ". . . the principle that women should have political, economic, and social rights equal to those of men." The Evangelical Women's Caucus is a national organization, with grass-roots chapters, that seeks to unite evangelical feminists in the United States and Canada. The EWC welcomes anyone who considers herself, or himself, both evangelical and feminist—that is, committed to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, to the authority of the Bible as the inspired word of God, and to equal rights for women and men in society, church, and home.

The Evangelical Women's Caucus was formed in 1974 in Chicago at the second Thanksgiving Workshop of Evangelicals for Social Action. It was one implementation of that group's 1973 Chicago Declaration which had stated in part: "We acknowledge that we have encouraged men to prideful domination and women to irresponsible passivity. So we call both men and women to mutual submission and active discipleship." The EWC is committed to enabling women to identify, develop, and use responsibly their gifts for the furtherance of God's Kingdom, without regard to sex-role stereotypes. "We are committed to moving the church toward greater openness to the ministry of women in the church and in the world. We strive for love and justice as both sexes learn to serve one another."

The first major event of the Evangelical Women's Caucus was a national conference on "Women in Transition: A Biblical Approach to Feminism," held over Thanksgiving weekend 1975 in Washington, D.C. More than 360 women and men from 36 states and from Canada attended. They represented a wide spectrum of the Christian church: mainline Protestants, Mennonites, representatives of the holiness tradition, Pentecostals and charismatics, and a few Roman Catholics.

Members of a temporary national steering committee led in the founding of local EWC chapters in Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Albany, N.Y., Minneapolis, San Francisco Bay Area, Detroit, Newark, and Boston. Evon Bachaus of Minneapolis served as national coordinator for one year. Early actions included developing a network and directory of Christian feminists, publishing a national newsletter, compiling informational packets, consciousness-raising in local churches, and holding local and regional conferences.

A second national conference, "Women and the Ministries of Christ," was held in Pasadena, California, in June 1978, sponsored by the Southwestern Chapter of the Evangelical Women's Caucus and Fuller Theological Seminary. About 900 women and men took part in plenary sessions, Bible discussions, study groups, and workshops (95 options!). A national organizational meeting at the end of the conference approved a statement of faith and bylaws for incorporation as a nonprofit organization. These documents can be obtained by sending a stamped, self-addressed legal-size envelope to the national EWC office (P.O. Box 64582, Los Angeles, CA 90064). National dues are \$10 yearly for regular members; \$5 for students and low-income persons. A national newsletter is included in membership.

A small journal/newsletter of biblical feminism, *Daughters of Sarah* (Reta Finger, editorial coordinator), is published six times yearly. Address: 4011 N. Avers, Chicago, IL 60618 (\$3.00; Canada \$4.00).

A second biblical feminist publication, a bi-monthly magazine born in 1978, is *freeindeed* (Diane R. Jepsen and Jan Abramsen, editors). Address: 262 E. Union Blvd., Bethlehem, PA 18018 (\$8.00; Canada \$9.50).

The first thesis on the Evangelical Women's Caucus and its

antecedents, "Feminists in the American Evangelical Movement," was written at Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, CA, by Ina J. Kau, 1977. Another thesis, "From Hierarchy to Equality: A Comparison of Past and Present Interpretations of 1 Cor. 11:2-16 in Relation to the Changing Status of Women in Society," written by Linda Mercadante at Regent College, "has brought to light many fresh possibilities that illumine the apostle Paul's feminism without diminishing his authority" (Clark Pinnock). Available from the writer, c/o Regent College, 2130 Wesbrook Mall, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1W6 (\$6.50).