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and more responses [one from Kay Gardner] (WomanSpirit, Fall Equinox 1980)

Kay Gardner
for those who wish to worship in mixed groups. Participating in a group for women only does not prevent a woman from also participating in groups which include men. It should also be mentioned that there are many American pagan groups which, though not explicitly feminist, are similar to feminist Wicca groups in some respects. These groups are discussed by Margo Adler in Drawing Down the Moon, and men and male Goddess-symboism, as well as women and Goddess symbolism, play significant roles in many of them.

While I obviously disagree with Ruether's critique of Goddess spirituality, I do agree with her that the issues of men and male symbolism will eventually need further attention in feminist religion.

...and more responses...

Really liked the article by the Christian feminist and the replies of Z Budapest et al in the last issue. It's amazing (a-maze!) to me to meet up with feminists who can still hold on to anything Christian! What they're holding on to is probably what little was retained from the Old Religion - but why hold on at all?? The dialogue between them was great - and where else would you get such a thing but in WomanSpirit?

Thanks.

Hannah Blue Heron
Oakland, California

The reactions to the christian feminist articles seem to have taken your attempt to provide a forum for varying viewpoints and turned it into a backstage vendetta of personality differences...while I submerged myself totally in the rest of the issue, I found the discord of self-interest and shallow defenses as irritants...

bathsheba duncan
Hartford, Connecticut

Though the arguments of Reuther, Budapest, Christ and Goldberg on women's religion are provocative, I find some of the defensive and competitive attitudes discouraging. Why must one religion be the "right" one? Is goddess-worship and/or Wiccan tradition the "spiritually correct" religion for everyone? for all women? And just who decides what is or is not "spiritually correct"?

Though reared in a christian religion, I was fortunate to have limited feminist consciousness instilled in me because my background was Christian Science, a religion founded in the 1860's by a strong woman, Mary Baker Eddy. Several aspects of this religion were (and are) woman-oriented: 1) we worshipped a Father-Mother-God (yes, Father still gets first billing), 2) the religion's main teaching is that of the "lost art" of metaphysical healing, 3) in the 23rd Psalm we were instructed to replace the words "the Lord" and male pronouns with the word "Love", 4) the word "Christ" was used to express an idea meaning most, of them are male-identified?

Starhawk has begun to discuss the role of men and male symbolism in feminist Wicca in The Spiral Dance, and though I do not find her image of the Horned God entirely adequate, I applaud her attempt to develop male symbolism and male roles in feminist Goddess worship. My suspicion, however, is that a more satisfying resolution of this problem will have to await the time when large numbers of men become deeply committed to the feminist movement generally and to the feminist spirituality movement in particular. In the meantime, it is clear to me that the image of Goddess within the feminist spirituality movement is profoundly important for women.

Carol P. Christ
San Jose, California

The late 1800's were exciting years for the women who were trying to create new, more feminist forms of religion. As Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Victoria Woodhull et al were fighting for women in the political arena, other women were founding churches where women's gifts were celebrated and explored: Mary Baker Eddy and the power of healing; the Spiritualist Church, founded by the Fox sisters; the Theosophical movement led by Madame Blavatsky, Annie Bessant and Alice Baily, attempting to integrate world esoteric knowledge. I'm sure there are others too; the above religions are still with us. I wish someone would write a book about these women's religions of the late 19th century. It's fascinating to me that so many aspects of those religions are synthesized into many of today's feminist philosophies and religions.

(The Shakers, founded by Mother Annie Lee, were celibate. Men and women lived separately. This religion predates the suffrage movement.)

I have a theory about early christianity...based on intuition mostly.

Mary was a witch, a healer. She bore a male child, Jesus, and until he was 12 years old she and her sister witches were his teachers. He was a good student; he learned "laying on of hands" and the power of Love to heal.

Living in a patriarchal society, Mary knew that if she or any other woman were to go out and teach they would not be listened to. So she sent her son Jesus (mama's boy) out to teach this healing craft of the wise...the old-religion of regeneration and love. He was heard, became a leader of the people and such a political threat to the patriarchal establishment structure that he was killed (they punctured the physical sources of his power, his feet, or his connection with Earth; his palms from which flowed healing energy; and his heart, the source of Love).

Jesus was Wiccan, the high priest of a coven of thirteen. Neither Jews nor Romans could accept this and so Jesus, the man, was destroyed.

I'm sure dialogue on women's religion will continue, but it would be more constructive if it were lovingly offered in the spirit of true competition, which according to Lynette Jerry, should sharpen the senses, not the claws!

Kay Gardner, age 39
Stonington, Maine