

## **A Sociological Perspective on Women, Ordination and Church Polity: Empowerment or Gender Apartheid?**

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### **Abstract**

*Women have always been an essential part of the life and ministry of the Pentecostal movement but gaining equal status with men in ministry and church polity has been a struggle. In the initial stages of the movement, women were seen as co-laborers with men but this equality was diminished as a system was put in place that relegated women to a second and third tier status compared to men, with restrictions on ministry roles. This study uses an interdisciplinary approach to explore this phenomenon from a sociological perspective, giving attention to relevant historical and theological corollaries.*

*The focus of this study is the gender apartheid system created, maintained and now under deconstruction in the Church of God (Cleveland) denomination. The study examines changes in polity from the time of the earliest female Evangelists' Licenses (which allowed them to preach and administer the Lord's Supper) through a series of restrictions on women's ministry (involved in the transition from 'Prophetic to Priestly eras') and the subsequent gender stratification of ministry roles, through to more recent years where a return to full equality is now possible.*

### **Introduction**

Women have always been an essential part of the life and ministry of the Pentecostal movement. Just as true is the reality that gaining equal status with men in ministry and church polity has been a struggle. In the initial stages of the movement, women were seen as co-laborers with men in spreading the Gospel as there was an impending sense that the second coming of Jesus was near. However, as the Lord tarried and the movement formalized, the liberation that women began to experience was stifled as a codified system was put in place that relegated to women a second and third tier status to men. The current study uses an interdisciplinary approach to explore this phenomenon from a sociological perspective, giving attention to the historical and theological corollaries that inform and provide rationales for the disenfranchisement of women from opportunities to fulfill their call to ministry within the Pentecostal movement. Using a case

study approach, the focus of this study is the gender apartheid system created, maintained and now under deconstruction in the Church of God (Cleveland) denomination.

The term “gender apartheid” is recent to social science and has been applied primarily to the analysis of the structured restrictions on women in Moslem countries, the focus being the treatment of the women by the Taliban when they ruled in Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> This research project is one of the first applications of the term in an analysis within a Christian context. The term “apartheid” has its roots in the system of exclusion established and maintained by the government of South Africa. Within this system there were codified restrictions on individuals based on race. A central restriction on citizens in South African apartheid involved the right to vote: it was the domain of whites only. Like the South African government, the Church of God maintained a restriction on its citizens’ right to vote, but in this case, eligibility for voting was based on gender, keeping it the domain of men.<sup>2</sup> This restriction was in place within the denomination until 1992, though other structured restrictions based on gender remain in place. For the purposes of this study, “gender apartheid” is defined as “a system of differential treatment of women by institutions in terms of authority, status or position, based on their gender.”

### **I. Theological Perspectives**

Certain scriptural passages inform the formation of the theological perspective of the Pentecostal movement. Central to all of them is the promise of God pronounced by the prophet Joel (2:28) in the Old Testament: “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons *and daughters will prophesy...*”<sup>3</sup> The Apostle Peter proclaimed this promise as fulfilled with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the upper room (Acts 2:16), and Pentecostal leaders also saw the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the late 1800s and early 1900s as fulfillment of the promise.

It is significant that a woman was at the locus of the birth of the Pentecostal-Holiness movement. Just after midnight on January 1, 1901 Agnes Ozman, a student at Charles Parhams’ Bible School in Topeka, Kansas, became the first person to “speak in tongues”<sup>4</sup> as a sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. As the outpouring of the Holy Spirit became more widespread geographically, women continued to play a significant role.

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<sup>1</sup> Rita Henley Jensen, “Taking the Gender Apartheid Tour in Saudia Arabia,” *Women’s eNews*, <http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/2212/context/ourdailylives> (accessed November 16, 2007); D. Carlisle, “Afghanistan’s Gender Apartheid,” *Nursing Times* 64:12 (March 25-31, 1998): 16; Sima Wali, “Afghan Women: Recovering, Rebuilding,” *Ethics & International Affairs* 16:2 (November 16, 2007): 15-19.

<sup>2</sup> The word “citizen” is applied to believers in Ephesians 2:19.

<sup>3</sup> Joyce Lee and Glenn Gohr, “Women in the Pentecostal Movement,” *Enrichment Journal* (Fall 1999), [http://www.ag.org/enrichmentjournal/199904/060\\_women.cfm](http://www.ag.org/enrichmentjournal/199904/060_women.cfm).

<sup>4</sup> Charles Barfoot and Gerald T. Sheppard, “Prophetic vs. Priestly Religion: The Changing Role of Women Clergy in Classical Pentecostal Churches,” *Review of Religious Research* 22:1 (1980): 12.

Five years later, when the Holy Spirit was poured out in Los Angeles, several women connected with the Apostolic Faith Mission on Azusa Street gained recognition with their ministries. Lucy Farrow, who was used of the Lord to pray for people to receive the infilling of the Spirit, later took the Pentecostal message to Liberia. Jenny Evans Moore ministered at the Apostolic Faith Mission both before and after her marriage to the pastor, William Seymour. Florence Crawford assisted with publishing the Apostolic Faith, the newspaper sponsored by the mission. She later founded the "Apostolic Faith" organization with headquarters in Portland, Oregon, one of the earliest Pentecostal denominations in the country.<sup>5</sup>

In its early years, women constituted two-thirds of the adherents of this new movement and served as evangelists, ministers, assistant ministers, missionaries and teachers.<sup>6</sup> With the birth of the Pentecostal movement, the promise of equality in Galatians 3:28 was also believed to be fulfilled: equality between genders, equality between races and equality between social classes. Men and women went forth to preach the Gospel, and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, not gender, was the proof of a person's calling. The Azusa Street Revival gave much hope that Pentecostals would demonstrate that Americans could get past the racial divisions that had been part of the diseased inner core of the nation since its inception. The poor were no longer barred by economic class or lack of education from participating in ministry and from attaining the highest position within religious organizations.<sup>7</sup> However, it did not take long for the hope that was born to be replaced with the racism and sexism that arose as the movement grew and formalized. Pentecostal denominations were organized along racial lines and "stained-glass ceilings" of varying levels for women were put in place in all of these denominations.<sup>8</sup>

Women also played a significant role in the longevity of Pentecostal denominations. "Although many denominations were formed between 1895 and 1950, those that survived and flourished were those with strong Women's Departments. Structures of female influence enabled denominations with charismatic male founders to grow after those founders died; other denominations with high visibility but no structures of female influence almost disappeared."<sup>9</sup> One example of the impact of women on the strength and longevity of a denomination is the Church of God in Christ.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Lee and Gohr, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Barfoot and Sheppard, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Cheryl J. Sanders, "History of Women in the Pentecostal Movement," *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 2 (July 1997), <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj2/sanders.html> (accessed June 30, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Susie Cunningham Stanley, cited by Timothy C. Morgan, "Stained-Glass Ceiling," *Christianity Today*, May 16, 1994, 52.

<sup>9</sup> Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "Together and in Harness": Women's Traditions in the Sanctified Church," in *Black Women in America: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. Micheline R. Malson, Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, Jean F. O'Barr and Mary Wyer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 229. Article originally published in *Signs* 10:4 (Summer 1985).

<sup>10</sup> Anthea Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill: University of California Press, 2007), 1-2.

The theological perspective of gender equality deriving from Galatians 3:28 was utilized by two women founders of Pentecostal denominations. According to Mary Magdalena Lewis Tate, founder of The Church of the Living God, the Pillar and Ground of Truth, Inc. "God does not see sex ... he sees spirit. A woman receives the same Spirit as a man, therefore she can do any work in the church that a man can."<sup>11</sup> Ida Robinson, the founder of St. Sinai Unity Holy Church of America, Inc., "rooted equality in Christ's redemptive act which abolished the inequality resulting from the Fall, replacing it with the equality that man and woman experienced at creation."<sup>12</sup> This latter interpretation was later echoed by Church of God scholar and theologian Hollis Gause.<sup>13</sup>

## **II. Women in the Church of God (Cleveland)**

In the beginning, women in the Church of God (Cleveland) were viewed as equally important as men in fulfilling the Great Commission. A.J. Tomlinson, the first general overseer of the denomination, prayed:

O God, give us an army of men and women who will fear nothing but God. Set them on fire with such holy zeal that no cries of fanaticism, delusion of the devil, manifestation of the flesh, or anything else will check the fervor or impede the progress until this glorious gospel is heralded to the uttermost parts of the earth and the full blaze of Pentecostal power, with its signs, wonders and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost are ablaze and utilized for the glory of God, as at the beginning of the glorious gospel Age.<sup>14</sup>

An examination of the Evangelist's Licenses of Nora Chambers (issued in 1910), the first teacher of the Bible school that would become Lee University, and that of Rebecca Barr (issued in 1907), the first African-American Church of God evangelist, indicates that they were "authorized to publish, preach and defend the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to baptize, to administer the Lord's Supper and the washing of the Saints' feet."<sup>15</sup> The first published list of ministers in 1912 revealed that 12.2% of Church of God ministers were women.<sup>16</sup> However, by that year restrictions on the ministerial licensing and exclusion from church polity were already in place. Initially women were excluded from ordination, and exclusion from ministerial authorities followed. Although praying for the "full blaze" of the gifts of the Spirit (which include "administration" or "leadership"

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<sup>11</sup> Susie Stanley, "Laying a Straw in Her Way: Women in Pentecostalism," *Enrichment* 11:3 (Spring 2006): 2, 110-116.

<sup>12</sup> Stanley, 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> Kimberley Alexander and R. H. Gause, *Women in Leadership: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Cleveland, TN: Center for Pentecostal Leadership and Care, 2006), 25.

<sup>14</sup> A. J. Tomlinson, "Better Obey God Than Listen to Man," *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, May 15, 1910, 1.

<sup>15</sup> David Roebuck, "A Day in the Life of Rebecca Barr: Our First Black Woman Evangelist," *Church of God Evangel*, May 1999, 9.

<sup>16</sup> David Roebuck, "Perfect Liberty to Preach the Gospel: Women Ministers in the Church of God," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 17:1 (Spring 1995): 25.

depending on the translation) Tomlinson's theological interpretation in the area of church governance led to the ban of women from any role in the polity of the denomination and in most church functions.

According to Tomlinson, "church means government. Christ's government. His Church. Here then is where women are to keep silence. 1 Cor. 14:34 ... There were no women speaking in the council at Jerusalem. No one talking in tongues. They were a judicial body, searching for and applying the laws to the particular case."<sup>17</sup> What followed were official denominational policies that, while encouraging women to preach and serve as ministers and pastors, excluded them from participating in any type of business meeting. It is interesting to note that Tomlinson was inconsistent in the application of his own biblical interpretation. When there was need to establish a Bible school to train ministers for the denomination, he chose a woman, Nora Chambers, to run the school and serve as principal.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, "in 1914, a message in tongues and interpretation confirmed Tomlinson's appointment as General Overseer, which was understood to be an appointment in perpetuity."<sup>19</sup> While there might not have been speaking in tongues at the Council of Jerusalem, Tomlinson made no objection to them to affirm his own leadership role in a business meeting of the denomination. He also seems to extrapolate beyond the data in interpreting "in the churches" in 1 Corinthians 14:34 to mean church business meetings.

### **III. The Transition from Prophetic to Priestly**

The Church of God, like the Pentecostal movement as a whole, experienced what many scholars identify as the transition from prophetic era to the priestly era.<sup>20</sup> The prophetic era was a time when women and men were viewed as equally called and empowered to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Individuals of both genders preached, evangelized, and planted and pastored churches. Once movements within Pentecostalism formalized structures, however, certain duties and positions were classified as "priestly" and therefore for "men only." Given the attempt to find truth primarily in Scripture, males in leadership used historical precedent from the Old Testament to designate roles and duties within the twentieth century as "priestly," and thus the domain of males.

The shift from prophetic Pentecostalism to priestly Pentecostalism occurred within most Pentecostal denominations around 1920, but within the Church of God, the shift occurred in 1907 with the issuance of evangelists' licenses. "Although this form of the license did not identify the

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<sup>17</sup> Roebuck, "Perfect Liberty," 26, citing A. J. Tomlinson, "Christ Our Law-Giver and King," *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, November 1, 1910, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Carolyn Dirksen, "Let Your Women Keep Their Silence: A Historical Analysis of the Role of Women in the Church of God," In Donald N. Bowdle, *The Promise and the Power: Essays on Motivation, Developments and Prospects of the Ministries of the Church of God*. (Cleveland TN: Pathway Press. 1980), 188.

<sup>19</sup> Alexander and Gause, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Barfoot and Sheppard, 4. See Table 1 at the end of this paper.

gender of the evangelist, overseers sometimes added sacerdotal responsibilities to men's licenses, while there is no evidence that they ever added them to women's licenses."<sup>21</sup> At the Assembly that same year, concern arose because there were more female than male members. This fact should not have been surprising as five of the eight founding members of the denomination were women — the founding mothers outnumbered the founding fathers. Additionally, in this early phase of the Pentecostal movement, women outnumbered men 100 to 50.<sup>22</sup>

According to Benvenuti, the watershed year for restricting women in ministry was during the late 1940s when, in an attempt to gain respectability as a movement, Pentecostal denominations joined in the effort to form the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE).<sup>23</sup> This association brought Pentecostals into contact with the sexist and racist perspectives of many evangelicals, reinforcing existing institutional attitudes and behaviors.<sup>24</sup>

This post-World War II time period was also one in which society refocused on the family and was concerned that women return to domesticity. This was equally true within Pentecostal churches which were concerned with "worldly influence" and what liberation for women might mean for the family. This was a cultural war in which "the Church of God proclaimed the importance of God's order as established in creation, particularly the submission of women in this order. By elevating certain roles for women, particularly those related to home and family, women were constricted into an army to save the family; and by denigrating alternative views, women were constricted into a safe, ordered existence. Women in ministry were casualties of that war."<sup>25</sup>

Unlike other denominations, the formation of the NAE in 1948 was not a significant turning point for the Church of God (Cleveland) in terms of restricting women in ministry — the denomination had been structuring in these restrictions from its early years. It is significant that this shift reflects Max Weber's theory that movements of the disprivileged, as the Pentecostal movement was, are "characterized by a tendency to allot equality to women ... [however] as routinization and regimentation of community relationship set in, a reaction takes place against pneumatic manifestations among women, which come to be regarded as irregular and sick."<sup>26</sup> He also posited that "equalization of the sexes in principle ... may coexist with men's complete

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<sup>21</sup> D. Roebuck, "Limiting Liberty: The Church of God and Women Ministers, 1986-1996" (PhD diss. Vanderbilt University, 1997), 152-53.

<sup>22</sup> Barfoot and Sheppard, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Sheri R. Benvenuti, "Pentecostal Women in Ministry: Where Do We Go from Here?" *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 1 (January 1997), <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj1/ben.html> (accessed July 17, 2007); C. M. Robeck, Jr, "National Association of Evangelicals," in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Gray B. McGee (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan. 1988), 635.

<sup>24</sup> Sanders, "History of Women in the Pentecostal Movement,"; Robeck, 635.

<sup>25</sup> Roebuck, "Limiting Liberty," 171-72.

<sup>26</sup> Max Weber, "Women and Religion," in *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. E. Fischoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), E.7, 1.

monopolization of the priesthood and of the right to active participation in community affairs; only men are admitted to special professional training or assumed to possess the necessary qualifications.”<sup>27</sup>

Of the various Pentecostal denominations, the Church of God (Cleveland) seems to most closely operate in line with Weber’s theory: women and men being considered equal in their prophetic role operating alongside male dominance in priestly roles. Like other Holiness and Pentecostal denominations, the Church of God encouraged women to preach and providing opportunities to do so.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, the denomination was quite consistent in approving policies that kept women in second tier status to men in church ministry. In the area of church polity, the door that stood open during the early years of the denomination was quickly closed.

The timeline in Table 2 at the end of this article indicates that women were relegated to second tier status. They were either barred from ministerial positions, were barred from performing certain ministerial duties (the Lord’s Supper, solemnizing marriages), were treated differentially in eligibility for ministerial pensions, or were barred from serving as pastors unless they were supervised by a male overseer, etc. In an ironic twist of logic, although Sunday School was used as a strategic tool for planting churches, women were allowed to be Sunday School Superintendents because that position was determined not to be an office of the church.

According to Dr. Charles W. Conn, Church of God historian, former general overseer and president emeritus of Lee University, the exclusion of women from some positions in ministry had a “sociological rather than a theological basis. ‘We were at a time faced with circumstances where it was taken for granted that women would not hold leadership positions.’ He explains that, in the Church’s early history, women participated fully, but as the denomination developed, it became an accepted, if tacit, practice to fill administrative positions with men, even if there was no theological basis for doing so.”<sup>29</sup>

Even though women were prohibited from being members of the denomination’s Mission Board, “evidence garnered from General Assembly Minutes and Conn’s *Where the Saints Have Trod* indicates that women were responsible for introducing the Church of God in Egypt, Palestine, Grand Turk Island, China, Mexico, Costa Rica, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, St. Kitts, Cuba, Chile, Angola, Honduras, Rhodesia and Tunisia.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Weber, E.7, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Dirksen, 7; Butler, 32-33

<sup>29</sup> Dirksen, 4.

<sup>30</sup> Carolyn Dirksen. “Let Your Women Keep Their Silence: A Historical Analysis of the Role of Women in the Church of God,” In Donald N. Bowdle, *The Promise and the Power: Essays on Motivation, Developments and Prospects of the Ministries of the Church of God* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press. 1980), 178.

In 2004 motions were drafted that would have opened up ordination as bishops to women. These motions were forwarded to the Church of God Doctrine and Polity Committee which produced four position papers — two for, two against — and sent these items to the International Executive Council without comment. The International Executive Council then sent the position papers to the Ordained Bishops without comment. When members of the International General Council attempted to discuss the matter in the business meeting of the 2006 General Assembly, the Council was ruled out of order since the Doctrine and Polity Committee had made no recommendation. The author of one of the position papers against ordination of women as bishops entitled, "The Executive Empowerment of Women," uses logic that differentiates between two words: "among" and "over." In citing biblical examples, when women are filling leadership roles, they are ministering "among" God's people. However, when a man fills the same role, that individual is ministering "over" God's people. In "Should Women be Ordained as Bishops?" the author takes the position that "in view of the common good the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts without regard to gender or position in the church. Thus no woman is exempted from any spiritual gift." Even though one of the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:28 is "administration," "leadership," or "government," depending on the translation, the author argues that there is no biblical basis for ordaining women as bishop because it involves "headship."

There are currently five ministerial licenses in the Church of God: Exhorter, Minister of Christian Education, Minister of Music, Ordained and Ordained-Bishop. The first three are in the bottom tier; Ordained Ministers are second tier, and the top tier is Ordained-Bishop. Women are eligible to ministerial licensure through ordination which gives them the "full right and authority to: 1. Preach, publish, teach and defend the Gospel of Jesus Christ; 2. Do the work of an evangelist; 3. Serve as pastor of a church; 4. Baptize converts; 5. Receive believers into fellowship of church membership; 6 Administer Holy Sacraments (ordinances); 7. Solemnize rites of matrimony; and 8. Establish churches. The ordained minister shall be privileged to sit in the International General Council *without voting privileges*."<sup>31</sup>

In excluding women from eligibility for ordination as bishops, women are prohibited from "use of the following titles while holding these specific positions:

State/Territorial Overseer (or international equivalency): *Administrative Bishop*

International Executive Committee members: *Executive Bishop*

General Overseer: *Presiding Bishop*."<sup>32</sup>

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Conn, Charles. *Where the Saints Have Trod: A History of Church of God Missions* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press. 1959), 20, 67, 76, 98, 110, 117, 151, 178, 192, 256, 266, 268, 274, 279.

<sup>31</sup> "Study Guide for Ministerial Licensure: Supplement to the Minutes of the Church of God 69<sup>th</sup> General Assembly," Cleveland, TN: Church of God Department of Ministerial Development, 204-05.

<sup>32</sup> "Study Guide for Ministerial Licensure," 204.



Excluding women from ordination as bishop bars them from filling administrative positions at the local, state, regional, national and international levels within the denomination.

#### **IV. The Office of Ordained Bishop**

It is interesting to trace the use of the term "Ordained Bishop" within the Church of God. The 1933 General Assembly minutes record the comments of then General Overseer S.W. Latimer regarding the development of the bishop's authority: "The office of Bishop in the Church began with all the simplicity of the origin of the Church. It was a gradual growth and not an instantaneous creation. It was employed at first in relation to the pastor of one church and was equivalent to the pastor or elder ... and as time passed, and the number of churches were multiplied, overseers were placed over the different provinces and in many instances a group of churches was placed."<sup>33</sup>

Within the denomination, the title "Ordained Bishop" was synonymous with ordained minister and was the operative term until the Church of God joined with the National Association of Evangelicals [in 1948], and the denomination dropped the term "Bishop."<sup>34</sup> This move was made by the Church of God to better align itself with the ministerial nomenclature of other denominations. However, the term "Ordained Bishop" was revived at the 2000 General Assembly. The official rationale was that while "the term bishop was dropped from all denominational usage ... as a Biblically centralized body, the church has positions of responsibility which may be more accurately designated bishop."<sup>35</sup> The restoration of the title "Ordained Bishop" enabled the denomination to both ordain women, and keep in place its two-tier gender apartheid system: church governance remained a "men's only" domain.

#### **V. Gender Stratification and the Fall of the Five Walls of Gender Apartheid**

Gender stratification systems tend to be based on differing levels of productivity or differential access to the means of production between men and women.<sup>36</sup> The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was equally accessible to women and men, and individuals of each gender showed themselves equally capable of reaching souls through preaching, teaching, and serving as pastors, missionaries, evangelists, administrators and founders of denominations. With this equality of empowerment of the Holy Spirit and resultant ability to use this empowerment to further the Kingdom of God, there was no justification for the two-tiered and three-tiered systems put in place within Pentecostal denominations.

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<sup>33</sup> Dirksen, 12.

<sup>34</sup> *Minutes of the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the Church of God: 1948* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press. 2004), 27.

<sup>35</sup> "2000 General Assembly Minutes," in *Church of God General Assembly Minutes: 1906-2002* (Cleveland, Tennessee: Dixon Pentecostal Research Center, 2006), 81-82.

<sup>36</sup> Margaret Gonsoulin, "Women's Rights and Women's Rites: Religion at the Historical Root of Gender Stratification," *Electronic Journal of Sociology*. [www.sociology.org](http://www.sociology.org). ISSN: 11983655. 2005. 6. (Accessed August 26, 2007).

Within the Church of God (Cleveland) denomination, however, the walls of gender apartheid began to be taken down toward the end of the twentieth century and into the beginning of the twenty-first century. The following is a brief description of the dismantling of four of the walls with the fifth and final wall — the prohibition of women from ordination as bishops — still to be taken down.

Wall #1: The 1990 General Assembly voted to dissolve the rank of Lady Evangelist, and in its place, creating two ranks of ministry for women: exhorter and licensed minister, the first two ranks of ministry available to men since 1925 and 1948 respectively.<sup>37</sup>

Wall #2: The 1992 General Assembly, in effect, repudiated Tomlinson's theological interpretation of women's role in church polity by granting women the right to speak and vote in the General Assembly.<sup>38</sup>

Wall #3: By vote of the 2000 General Assembly, the second rank of ministerial licensure was changed to "Ordained Minister" thus granting ordination to women. However, the restriction, "It is understood that female ministers are not eligible for ordination as bishops," was kept in place.<sup>39</sup>

Wall #4: At the 2004 General Assembly, motions were forwarded to the Doctrine and Polity Committee and later the International Executive Council that would change the language on the application for ordained-bishop to "applicant" from the word "he" and exchange the word "spouse" to replace the word "wife." The second motion was to delete the phrase, "It is understood that females are not eligible for ordination as bishops," from qualifications for ordained bishops from the Supplement to the General Assembly Minutes.<sup>40</sup>

Wall #5: In fall of 2006, this researcher forwarded the following draft resolution to the International Executive Committee:

WHEREAS the Church of God declared its belief in the equality of men and women in its 2000 Resolution on Racism and Ethnic Disparity; and

WHEREAS the Church of God declared its commitment to ministerial training of men and women throughout the world in its 1992 Resolution on Ministerial Development and Education; and

WHEREAS the Church of God believes gender discrimination to be inconsistent with the teaching of the Bible; and

WHEREAS the Church of God affirms that men and women have important and equal roles in the ministry and church polity;

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<sup>37</sup> "1990 General Assembly Minutes," in *Church of God General Assembly Minutes: 1906-2002* (Cleveland, Tennessee: Dixon Pentecostal Research Center. 2006), 79.

<sup>38</sup> "1992 General Assembly Minutes," in *Church of God General Assembly Minutes*, 79.

<sup>39</sup> "Supplement to the Minutes, no. 8, S57, 2000 General Assembly Minutes," in *Church of God General Assembly Minutes*, 28, 81.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel L. Black, ed. *Minutes of the 70<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Church of God: 2004* (Cleveland Tennessee: Pathway Press. 2004), 58-59.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Church of God commits itself to the equality of men and women in ministry and church governance, making all ordained and administrative offices equally accessible to women and men.

With the fall of the fifth and final wall, the denomination will fulfill its original proposition put forth by founder Richard Spurling, which was to embrace “a radical Christianity which emphasized four tenets: A desire to be free from man-made creeds and traditions; a willingness to accept the New Testament as their only rule of faith; a commitment to give each other equal rights and privileges to read and interpret Scripture; and a willingness to sit together as the Church of God to transact business.”<sup>41</sup>

### Conclusion

The “Timeline of Restrictions on Women Ministers” (Table 2) which resulted from this study is the clearest indication that the term “gender apartheid” applies to the institutional behavior of the Church of God (Cleveland). At first, the denomination began with an egalitarian approach to men and women in ministry. However, it did not take long for the Church of God to parallel other Pentecostal groups in constructing restrictions on women’s access to ministerial and church polity roles as it formalized its denominational structure and policy.

A reason for hope is that the system of gender apartheid practiced by the Church of God (Cleveland) is in fact currently under deconstruction. A vote at the 2008 General Assembly, or a subsequent one, could bring down the final “Wall of Gender Apartheid” and remove all restrictions on women who seek to fully fulfill the call of God upon their lives. Once the structure of restrictions is no longer in place, the greater challenge will be the hard work of changing male-biased institutional culture and practice.

On a personal level, it was an honor for the author to have been a part of ministry of Dr Bebe Patten for 34 years. The manifestation of the Holy Spirit was definitely there as a proof of her calling. Her ministry included serving as preacher, evangelist and missionary to the “heathen in America.”<sup>42</sup> Additionally, she was: founding pastor of Christian Cathedral, a position she held for 60 years; founder, president and later chancellor of regionally accredited Patten University; founder and president of Patten Academy, a WASC-accredited K-12 school; and founder and president of Christian Evangelical Churches of America, Inc., a Pentecostal holiness denomination. If there was ever a person, male or female, who exemplified the intended work of

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<sup>41</sup> Carolyn Dirksen. “Let Your Women Keep Their Silence: A Historical Analysis of the Role of Women in the Church of God,” In Bowdle, 168.

<sup>42</sup> Bebe H. Patten, “Should a Woman Preach?” *Christian Evangelical Churches of America: Trumpet Call* 32, April 1994, 1.

God through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and bestowing of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, it was Dr Patten.

In order to fulfill the trajectory of Scripture to affirm the equality of women and men in Christ, the trajectory of the work of the Holy Spirit to empower all believers for the work of the Kingdom of God, and the intended trajectory of the Pentecostal movement to model God's best in the equal affirmation of all individuals, regardless of race, gender or economic class, there must be equal affirmation of women and men in all works of the church.<sup>43</sup> This would then align the church with the equal empowerment God bestowed through the fulfilled promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Anything less is an affront to the work God is doing in the lives of individuals of both genders.

In researching and writing this project, the words of evangelist Mae Eleanore kept coming back to me: "for God-fearing, intelligent, Spirit-filled women, upon whom God has set his seal of ministry, to have to sit and listen to men haggle over the matter of their place in the ministry is humiliating to say the least."<sup>44</sup>

As a lifetime member of the Pentecostal community and an adherent to the Gospel which it holds dear, it is my hope that the Pentecostal movement, whether at the local church level or especially at the denominational level, fulfills its mandate as the "church of the Holy Spirit," realizing Christ's ideal of equity across race, gender and economic class.

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<sup>43</sup> Lee Haines, "Women in Ministry: Challenging the Cultural Obstacles," James Watkins.com. <http://watkins.gospelcom.net/women.htm#article>, (Accessed July 29, 2007).

<sup>44</sup> Benvenuti, 2.

**Table 1: Priestly to Prophetic Transition**

Prophetic	Priestly	
<b>1907</b>	<b>1920</b>	<b>1948</b>
Church of God	Pentecostal Movement	National Association of Evangelicals

**Table 2: Church of God (Cleveland Tennessee)  
Timeline of Restrictions on Female Ministers<sup>45</sup>**

Year	Restriction
1907	Concern that there were more female than male members of the Assembly (2 <sup>nd</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1). Women eligible for evangelist license but excluded from ordination (2 <sup>nd</sup> Assembly Minutes, 2). Evangelist's licenses issued to women did not automatically include additional sacerdotal authorities that were included in licenses issued to men (Roebuck, "Limiting Liberty," 29).
1909	A woman qualifies for the position of deaconess if her husband is a deacon. By making this decision, the General Assembly decided that women could not be ordained. This action also had the effect of eliminating the position of deaconess (4 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 2-3).
1911	R.G. Spurling, M.S. Lemons and G.C. Barron engage in discussion of possible sanctions for women's offense of "speaking in the church" (6 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 9).
1912	M.S. Lemons states in that it is official Church of God policy that in business meetings "women must keep quiet, and under no circumstances hold any important office" (7 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 12-13).
1914	Women prohibited from performing baptism (10 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 26). New evangelist forms issued: one for men and another for women with restriction of

<sup>45</sup> The sources for this chart are Kimberly Alexander, "The Almost Pentecostal: The Future of the Church of God in the United States," in *The Future of North American Pentecostalism*, eds. Eric Patterson and Edmond Rybarczyk, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007); Kimberly Alexander, "Women and Ordination: Church of God Responses." Position Paper prepared for consideration by the International Executive Council of the Church of God (Cleveland), January 2006; Daniel L. Black, ed. *Minutes of the 70th General Assembly of the Church of God: 2004* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2004); Daniel L. Black, ed. *Minutes of the 71st General Assembly of the Church of God: 2006* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2006); *Church of God General Assembly Minutes: 1906-2002* (Cleveland, TN: Dixon Pentecostal Research Center, 2006); Mickey Crews, *The Church of God: A Social History* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1990); Dirksen. "Let Your Women Keep Their Silence,," David Roebuck, "Limiting Liberty: The Church of God and Women Ministers, 1986-1996," PhD dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1997.

	ministerial authorities granted on the women's form (Roebuck, "Limiting Liberty, 30).
1916	Women lose right to vote in the General Assembly with the formation of the Council of Elders. Ordination made prerequisite for membership in Council of Elders and election to national and district denominational leadership positions. Unless otherwise stated, it was also a prerequisite for any standing board or committee (7 <sup>12h</sup> Assembly Minutes, 28).
1919	"Women are to take no open active part in discussing or deciding questions, but should always be there and silently pray God give wisdom and direct the men, and show forth God's glory in being the glory of the men" (14 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 56).
1921	Women excluded from membership in newly formed court of Supreme Justices (16 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 63).
1922	Newly created positions of Editor and Publisher, and Superintendent of Education designated for "competent men" (17 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 49-50).
1924	"Lady Ministers" with a bobbed hairstyle advised to cease ministerial activities until their hair grew out (19 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 47).
1925	Women Evangelists prohibited from the authority to "administer the Lord's supper, feet washing, baptism, etc." (20 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 40).
1926	Women prohibited from being selected to the Board of Education of the Bible Training School whose first teacher and principal was a woman (Nora Chambers) (21 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 33). Women excluded from membership on the Missionary Board (20 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 34). Women excluded from being selected as one of the Twelve Counselors (21 <sup>st</sup> Assembly Minutes, 37). Separate forms for male and female evangelists established. Women allowed to do the work of a prophetess or female minister of the Gospel but could not establish churches or baptize new believers (Dirksen, 10).
1929	Women could not participate in hearings of wayward members (24 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 22).
1933	Women excluded from committee to assist the denominational Editor and Publisher in deciding what constituted "unsatisfactory accounts" (28 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 43).
1936	Local "Ladies Willing Workers Bands" not allowed to disburse funds without the pastor's consent (31 <sup>st</sup> Assembly Minutes, 35). Wife of the General Overseer to direct the denominations Ladies Willing Workers' Bands by virtue of her husband's office (Crews, 42).
1940	Women excluded from membership in "General Board of Trustees, State Board of Trustees in various States, territories and countries, and Local Board of Trustees" (35 <sup>th</sup>

	<p>Assembly Minutes, 32-34).</p> <p>Motion to refer to committee the new statement on dress was defeated because traditionalists objected “to [the] inclusion of five women on the committee, or the committee consulting with women” (COG Bishop’s Council Minutes. September, 430-431).</p>
1942	<p>Women excluded from membership on the Council to the General Overseer (37<sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 36).</p>
1943	<p>Women excluded from expansion of responsibilities of evangelists expressing preference for their state overseer, a privilege that was granted to “colored bishops and male evangelists” (38<sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 31).</p> <p>Women excluded from participation in the leadership group representing the Church of God at the 1944 convention of the National Association of Evangelicals (38<sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 32).</p>
1944	<p>Women excluded from membership on the denominational Sunday School and Youth Literature Board (39<sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 30).</p> <p>Women excluded from membership on the Supreme Council (39<sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 37).</p> <p>Amended language makes water baptism the domain of “ordained or licensed male ministers” (39<sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 30).</p>
1946	<p>Women excluded from eligibility for ordination provided to “licensed male evangelists” who have four years of active ministry experience. Codified in 1948 (41<sup>st</sup> Assembly Minutes, 27).</p>
1948	<p>Women excluded from change in ministerial licensure from “licensed evangelist” to “licensed minister” that is codified for men. This exclusion denies women the right to sit as non-voting attendees at the General Council that men are granted (42<sup>nd</sup> Assembly Minutes, 27).</p> <p>With the recall and dissolution of the deacon license, women are excluded from being selected to “counsel with and work under the pastor in carrying on the local church work” (42<sup>nd</sup> Assembly Minutes, 27).</p>
1950	<p>Limits placed on pensions of female ministers (43<sup>rd</sup> Assembly Minutes, 16).</p>
1952	<p>Pastors’ wives are prohibited from being appointed as their assistants (44<sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 31).</p> <p>“Solemnizing the rights of matrimony” added to restrictions on female ministers (44<sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 32).</p>
1954	<p>Executive leadership of the Ladies Willing Workers’ Band is removed from women (President) and vested in the pastor who automatically becomes chairman (45<sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 31-32).</p>

	Women excluded from membership on the General Council (45 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 33).
1956	All male ministers, regardless of rank permitted to perform marriage ceremonials (46 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 26).
1958	Assembly codifies the role of female minister as an “evangelist” (47 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 27).  Unlike male ministers, women serve as pastors but under the supervision of the district pastor “without the authority to baptize believers, receive believers into fellowship of church membership, administer the Holy Sacraments, or solemnize rites of matrimony” (46 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 26).
1962	Women excluded from membership on the denominational Radio and Television Board of Directors (49 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 33).
1964	Women excluded from membership on the denominational Evangelism and Home Missions Board (50 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 53).  Women excluded from voting in the selection of the Church and Pastor’s Council of local churches (50 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 57).  Women excluded from voting in the selection of the Church Clerk of local churches (50 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 60).  Women not eligible for selection to the position that would become director of development of Lee College (50 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, Supplement, 38).
1966	Policy change to make it easier for military chaplains to be ordained while “it is understood that the ministerial status of lady evangelists remains unchanged” (51 <sup>st</sup> Assembly Minutes, 57-58).  Women are given the right to vote for positions they are not eligible for: Church and Pastor’s Council and Church Clerk (51 <sup>st</sup> Assembly Minutes, 57-58).
1970	Women excluded from the voting constituency of the General Assembly which is codified as “all male members and ministers of the Church of God” (53 <sup>rd</sup> Assembly Minutes, 27).  Women excluded from membership on State Boards of Youth and Christian Education (53 <sup>rd</sup> Assembly Minutes, 41).
1972	Title “ ‘Lady’ Evangelist” routinely assigned on credentials of female ministers (Roebuck, 164).
1976	Women excluded from voting for the membership of local church Finance Committees (56 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 53).
1978	Statement of Equal Rights: “The Church of God holds firmly to the Christian concept that all persons, male or female, stand equal before God. While specifically created to complement each other as a family unit, with each having unique functions; in this



	relationship, man and woman, individually, maintain, under God, equal rights and equal responsibilities as to volition, status, opportunity, remuneration and accountability” (57 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 46).
1984	Eligibility for attendance at the General Assembly expanded to all Church of God members but the voting constituency remains “all male members present” (60 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 41). Women excluded from the committee charged with reviewing the Supplement to the Church of God General Assembly Minutes for “the purpose of deleting obsolete statements, words, headings, etc., and of organizing the information in the Supplement” (60 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 45).
1986	The names of women ministers (as are male ordained ministers) from foreign countries are not requested for inclusion in voting for Executive Council members (61 <sup>st</sup> Assembly Minutes, 21).
1990	104 years after the founding of the denomination, women regain their right as members of the voting constituency of the General Assembly (63 <sup>rd</sup> Assembly Minutes, 69-70). Women excluded from administrative duties in trial procedures that are part of ministerial discipline (63 <sup>rd</sup> Assembly Minutes, 72). Women become eligible for the ministerial ranks of exhorter and licensed minister but continue to be barred from ordination (63 <sup>rd</sup> Assembly Minutes, 79).
1994	Women gain right to vote for local church Finance Committees (65 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 86).
2000	Ministerial ranks are reconfigured and retitled to “exhorter,” “ordained” (formerly “licensed”) and “ordained-bishop” (formerly “ordained”). This shift enables the denominational leadership to maintain the top tier of ministerial licensure a “men’s only” domain (68 <sup>th</sup> Assembly Minutes, 81-82).
2002	General Council votes not to place on the agenda of the General Assembly a measure that would allow women to serve on local church councils (Alexander, 2007, 22).
2004	General Council votes not to place on the agenda of the General Assembly a measure that would allow women to serve on local church councils (Alexander, 2007, 22). “A motion from the floor to remove references to gender with regard to the highest rank of ministry, Ordained Bishop, was tabled for further study” (Alexander, 2007, 22).
2006	For procedural reasons, the motion from the floor to remove references to gender with regard to the highest rank of ministry, Ordained Bishop, was not put to a vote (Roebuck, 2007, Inquiry by researcher to Dixon Pentecostal Research Center).

**Table 3: Church of God Ministers  
Breakdown by Rank and Gender<sup>46</sup>**

**United States and Canada**

Rank	Male	Female	Total	% Female
Ordained Bishop	7000	<b>0</b>	7000	0%
Ordained	3257	<b>928</b>	4185	22%
Exhorter	4057	<b>1591</b>	5648	28%
Minister of Music	117	<b>108</b>	225	48%
Minister of Christian Education	52	<b>97</b>	149	65%
Total	14,483	<b>2724</b>	17,207	<b>16%</b>

**Worldwide**

Rank	Male	Female	Total	% Female
Ordained Bishop	10,533	<b>0</b>	10,533	0%
Ordained	7,175	<b>1330</b>	8505	16%
Exhorter	11,332	<b>2874</b>	14,206	20%
Minister of Music	128	<b>111</b>	239	46%
Minister of Christian Education	56	<b>106</b>	162	65%
Total	29,224	<b>4,421</b>	33,645	<b>13%</b>

<sup>46</sup> Source: Church of God Business and Finance Office [August 7, 2007 Data].