

## CHAPTER I

### A PECULIAR SYNERGY

The “proper” place of women in the church is an age-old debate and from all appearances, it seems that it perhaps will be an eternal one- for most mortals at least. This is because too often humanity has looked to the misty heights of theory rather than among the lowly foothills of practical and necessary human service- Bishop O.T. Jones, D.D.<sup>1</sup>

The fiftieth Jubilee Women’s International Convention of the Church of God in Christ was held May 29 through June 2, 2000. The theme, “Holy Women Perpetuating Fifty Years of Historical Facts and Traditional Teaching” was touted boldly from the massive convention souvenir book and banners that furred from inside the Sports Arena of Los Angeles, California. As an observer, I wondered how the convention would live up to its theme. Though I was to be subsequently disappointed by the eventual presentation of the theme, it did not deter me from pursuing my objective: to discover how a women’s organization founded on the role of a Church Mother in 1912 had succeed into the twenty-first century. I was to discover that certain areas had not changed for the Church Mothers, and in others, they had changed profoundly.

This dissertation is a historical, theological, and sociological study of the Women’s Department of the Church of God in Christ. The church was founded in 1897 by Charles Harrison Mason and C. P. Jones. The Church of God in Christ, which I will hereafter refer to as COGIC, started as a breakaway church from the black Baptist convention over the doctrine of holiness. Founders Mason and Jones were later to split over the issue of glossolalia, also known as speaking in tongues, as a sign of sanctification. Mason kept the COGIC name through litigation with Jones for the newly reconstituted Holiness-Pentecostal denomination. In response to a burgeoning population of women, Mason in 1911 decided to create a “Women’s Work” and appointed Lizzie Woods (nee Robinson) to the position of Overseer of the Women’s Work. Her

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<sup>1</sup>Charles H. Pleas. *Fifty Years Achievement, 1906-1956: A Period in the History of the Church of God in Christ*. (Memphis Tennessee: COGIC Public Relations, 1956, reprint 1991)  
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title was changed to General Mother, and in the 1940's to National Supervisor.<sup>2</sup> Robinson was prolific in her work, establishing many auxiliaries and traveling extensively as a result of her duties as women's leader. Later called the Women's Department, the Women's Work is the focus of this dissertation.

On the surface, this may seem to be a basic history of any Pentecostal denomination in the United States. Fraught with doctrinal dissension and confusion, Pentecostalism had many church splits. What differs is the structural working relationship that developed, gender-specific, within the denomination. The Women's Department of COGIC is unique because of its matriarchal structure of women's leadership working parallel to and in partnership with the male episcopate of the church. The dual-sexed political structure of the church allows for a place for women's leadership and expertise within the denomination, despite prohibitions of women in pastoral roles. As a result of this structuring, the Women's Department was able to work as an effective agent to inculcate the holiness beliefs of the denomination through teaching, discipline, and spiritual direction, to both men and women. The central doctrine of the denomination, holiness, was embodied, codified, and institutionalized by the Women's Department. Creating a fictive family through leadership roles modeled after motherhood, the Women's Department of COGIC enabled the male episcopate to function as a social "fatherly" leadership, while the matriarchy functioned as the Biblical leadership. The goal of this dissertation is to establish that despite the male episcopate's role in COGIC as "head" of the church, COGIC Church Mothers are the teachers, enforcers, models, and re-definers of holiness beliefs in COGIC, through their organization and participation in the sanctified life. Without the benefit or constraint of ordination, Church Mothers in the Women's Department were able to codify holiness into a doctrine and expand COGIC from a rural religious group into a compartmentalized, organized church. The Women's Department leadership established liaisons with social, political, and educational agencies that raised the status of both members and the denomination from the margin to the mainstream of African American life. Far from being older women occupying the front pew of COGIC churches, Church Mothers were and are formidable, invaluable resources in

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<sup>2</sup>Bishop Ithiel C. Clemmons. Bishop C. H. Mason and the Church of God in Christ, (Bakersfield, CA. Pneuma Life Publishing 1996)

the growth, foundation, and organizational structure of the denomination.

Perhaps this is a strong assertion. After all, the traditional black church is populated every Sunday by older women who lead the songs, shout, and take homemade pies and chicken dinners to the pastor. Look closer. That woman is probably the one who remembers all the pastors of the church, who can tell you what families have come and gone, and can recite scriptures from memory. She probably also tells the pastor when he is out of line on a regular basis. True, these are things that are not valued in most of today's culture, but the repository of information that a Church Mother has about beliefs, organization, and social strata in the church are inestimable. The Church Mother perhaps is the closest link in the Black Church to African American religious history after Reconstruction. It is the leadership of the Church Mother that has guided countless men and women into the church, and many times, out of the church. She is an understudied figure, perhaps because of her pervasiveness in mainstream black churches such as the Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal, and Pentecostal Churches. Her counterpart does not exist in most White, Asian or Hispanic churches in America. She is a historic treasure, a relic that still speaks forth today.

COGIC provides the best organizational structure to study the role of a Church Mother in the African American religious tradition. Though this dissertation by necessity will deal with COGIC alone, it is hoped that there will be places for others to 'take a tangent' and find different manifestations of the Church Mother in the Black Church tradition. Historians have spent much time documenting the role of the preacher in African American Religion. His cadences, his pastoral roles, and his position relative to women have been explicated. Viewed as the tacit participants in their own subjugation to patriarchal clergy, Black women have been an afterthought, unless they were preachers. However, this dissertation suggests that leading role is sometimes played best when the actor is not the star but the stage manager. The Church Mother playing the role of 'church manager' can provide answers to some of the more important questions regarding gender, race, and religion and their convergence in African American religion. Most of the work to date on the relationship between African American men and women has highlighted work for civil rights or racial uplift. What most historians concur on is that the Black Church developed into and remains a largely patriarchal structure. This work approaches the subject in a different manner. Black women, with the help of men, have created

an enclave of pseudo-patriarchy within the black church. The reality of gender space in the Black church historically and currently is dominated by women, with black men as its support. The shared 'gender space' as one might call it, is really women's space with male participation and service. Males, specifically clergy and leadership, are there to provide legitimacy, proof that the women are submitting to Biblical authority, headship, and cultural gender norms.<sup>3</sup> The complaints of the overpopulation of the church by women belie the fact that men are present to provide validity to the female space, not to actively regulate the spiritual life of the female members.

Titles help in the negotiation of this predominately female space. Men function in the roles of 'fathers' as a foil to the Church Mother. The predominately feminine space within COGIC is titled as well, using the term *mother* for women that have both spiritual and temporal authority. The use of the term *mother* to address women of position or stature within the church suggests a familial relationship that exists not only on the biological level, but also on the spiritual level. By creating a spiritual family, the church, modeling the gender relations of its time, created a family in the midst of unstable conditions such as migration, sharecropping, and racial violence. In COGIC, pastors and Church Mothers could act as a fictive family, able to give guidance in every area of life. In this way doctrine becomes more than belief structure, it becomes rules to remain within the family. By creating an enclave of spiritual family, COGIC used both the female dominated, male sanctioned shared gender space and fictive family to further their pursuits on a spiritual and temporal level.

The Women's Department of COGIC also provides a lens through which to observe the effects of Holiness-Pentecostal beliefs on life. By inculcating beliefs about purity, holiness, and sanctification within the behaviors of everyday life, the women of COGIC were able to support ideas that seemed, at first glance, to be at odds with one another. For instance, the Pentecostal

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<sup>3</sup>R. Marie Griffith. *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).152. The role of men in COGIC, unlike those in Women's Aglow, has a defined episcopal structure that is not subject to (theoretically) the Women's Department. Church Mothers play a major role in appointments, ordination, and other matters regarding men, although this is not codified information, but practice. In Women's Aglow, men provide legitimacy of women through honorary titles alongside the local, state and National Women's Aglow Groups.

emphasis on the Holy Spirit as the empowerment for service led some early Pentecostals to believe that education was not to be sought after. Yet the Women's Department of COGIC placed education as a high priority. The denomination had a school, Saints Industrial School, and emphasis there was placed on teaching the Bible and following after its tenets. The first Women's Department auxiliary, Prayer and Bible band, focused on the teaching of scripture. Preaching almost took a back seat to the 'teachings' that was instilled in both the male and female membership of COGIC. Church Mothers in COGIC harmonized the spiritual hermeneutics with pragmatic sensibility, enabling them to make social and political connections to the larger African American community.

It is also fair to state what this dissertation will not cover. Ordination of women in COGIC is not a salient issue in the time period that the dissertation covers, 1912-1963. There is ample discussion of women's dissatisfaction with men in the denomination, and of their desire to preach. Out of the many reams of primary source material used, not once was the word ordination used in the context of the Women's Department of COGIC. Perhaps this is due to the variety of leadership roles available to women, and the desire to remain Biblically based. Whatever the cause, ordination and pursuit of it have no bearing on this study. Secondary source material about COGIC also is a historiographical problem. Most of the previous studies on COGIC have regarded COGIC as a sectarian, emotion driven, and an uneducated group of black Pentecostals. The work of retrieval, analysis, and documentation in this dissertation will prove these theories unfounded. Finally, comparisons to Womanist or Feminist theologies will invariably be made. However, I have chosen not to deal with these for historical reasons. The Church Mothers of COGIC did not think of themselves in these terms, nor would they agree with parts of the definitions of the terms. To apply late 20<sup>th</sup> century terminologies to persons who were struggling for basic civil rights would be a disservice and misinterpretation of their fundamental goals of being better Christians, living a sanctified life, and freedom from racial oppression.

Only one other monograph exists currently on women's organization building in the African American church, *Righteous Discontent*, by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. The monograph provides pertinent information on the development of the Women's Department in COGIC. Many of the women who participated in the National Baptist Convention were also

proponents of holiness doctrines and started educational works as well.<sup>4</sup> Several articles on the development of Church Mothers in the African American church by Lewis V. Baldwin, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, and others will help to provide a foil to the issues surrounding the construction of a largely honorary position in other African American church tradition to an office within COGIC.

#### Historic Background of the Church of God in Christ:

Founded in 1897 by Charles Harrison Mason and C.P. Jones, COGIC is an offshoot of the black Baptist movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. As black Baptists were introduced to holiness and healing ministries, those who embraced these new teachings were ejected from the newly forming black Baptist conventions. Baptists of the time, including blacks, were cessationists, who believed that gifts of the Holy Spirit the Bible, primarily located in I Corinthians 13, were for the formation of the church and not for the present. Masons' embrace of holiness teachings stemmed from a personal experience. He was healed of a life-threatening illness which affected his outlook on life.<sup>5</sup> Upon preaching the new doctrines of holiness and healing, Mason and Jones were expelled from the Baptist fellowship and began their new church, COGIC, in 1897. After some years of success, primarily in the tri-state regions of Tennessee, Arkansas and Mississippi, Mason caught wind of a new doctrine of the Spirit arising out of a revival in Los Angeles, the Azusa street revival. Eager to go and discover whether was the revival was valid, he asked for Jones permission to attend along with a few other members of the denomination. Mason arrived in Los Angeles in March 1907, and soon after arriving, received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues.<sup>6</sup> Renewed, he returned

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<sup>4</sup>Leaders such as Virginia Broughton embraced holiness doctrines. See, Virginia W. Broughton. *Twenty-year's Experience of a Missionary*, in Sue. E. Houchins, *Spiritual Narratives: The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers*. (New York : Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>5</sup>Mason, Elsie. *The History and Life Work of Bishop C.H. Mason, 1924*, 20-21

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, 28-30

with others (who had not shared the same experience) and tried to convince Jones that this new doctrine was important to the Church. Jones did not agree, and they soon split, engaging in litigation over the church and its properties and the incorporation. By 1909, the litigation was solved. Although Jones kept several of the churches, Mason retained the name COGIC and the incorporation. Setting off on his own, Mason ordained both black and white clergy in the South. The white clergy left in 1914 to form the Assemblies of God. In 1912, Mason formed the Women's Department with Elizabeth Wood (nee Robinson), as the general overseer of women. COGIC experienced its greatest growth during the migratory periods from 1915 onwards, setting up storefronts in areas such as Chicago, New York, and Detroit. With Robinson as organizer, auxiliaries, mission groups, and educational facilities were built on behalf of the church, By 1945, COGIC had the largest church building built by African Americans in the country. Robinson died in 1945 leaving her successor, Lillian Brooks Coffey to run the Women's Department until 1964, while Mason passed away in November of 1961.

In placing COGIC within the framework of American religious history, some information must be shared about the inception of the Pentecostal movement within the United States. Pentecostalism, has been defined as a restorationist movement, an end time revival movement erupting at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with speaking in tongues by Agnes Ozman at Charles Parham's Bible school in Topeka, Kansas in 1901. However, Pentecostalism arises out of several streams of 19<sup>th</sup> century religiosity, restorationist movements, slave religion, holiness and healing movements, pre-millennialism, and the Keswick perfection movements.<sup>7</sup> Most histories of the Pentecostal movement focus on the two major figures, Charles Parham and William J. Seymour. Parham, credited with developing the idea of the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" evidenced by speaking in tongues, is usually referred to as the "progenitor" of the

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<sup>7</sup>The arguments abound on the specific origins of the Pentecostal movement. The scope of the subject is too broad for a full discussion in this work. Since the definitive history of the Pentecostal movement has not yet been written, the following works can provide a fuller background to the various influences upon Pentecostalism. See Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of religion in the Twenty First Century*. (New York, N.Y., Addison Wesley, 1995) also, Walter Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism, Origins and Developments Worldwide*. (Peabody Massachusetts. Hendrickson Publishers, 1997)

Pentecostal movement<sup>8</sup>. Seymour, a student of Parham's, is credited with leadership of the Azusa Street revival, a watershed revival beginning in Los Angeles, California in 1906. Many denominations spring up as a result of the revival, and others, such as COGIC, split off into non-Pentecostal and Pentecostal branches as a result over disputes surrounding the doctrine of glossolalia. With regard to the role of women, the Pentecostal movement's major Scriptural text, the prophet Joel provides a lens in which to interpret the development of women's roles within the Pentecostal movements, and within the COGIC.

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon *all flesh*: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; And also upon the servants and the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.<sup>9</sup>

The scripture passage from the book of the prophet Joel provides the hermeneutical foundation for the formulation of how roles for men and women in Pentecostalism were defined. To understand how COGIC and other Pentecostals viewed the role of gender, an explanation of the hermeneutical maneuvering of scripture regarding gender roles is important to understanding Pentecostal practice and beliefs.

#### Pentecostal Hermeneutics

COGIC, like most Pentecostal groups of this time period, looked specifically to scripture for impetus and direction of their movement. In order to fully understand the usage of the Joel passage by Pentecostals to justify the inclusion of women in the ministry, one must look back from the inception of the Pentecostal movement to its holiness antecedents. The Holiness movement of the nineteenth century arose out the Wesleyan doctrine of "Christian Perfection" developed by Methodism's founder John Wesley. According to Wesley, the doctrine of

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<sup>8</sup>Goff, James R. *Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism*. (Arkansas, University of Arkansas Press 1988)

<sup>9</sup>King James Version, Joel 2:28-29



Christian Perfection was the belief that a Christian could live a life free from sin by embracing Christian maturity and entire sanctification. Entire sanctification, the crucial component, was an experience subsequent to justification in which the Christian individual could submit entirely to God's will, and be given the mind of Christ. Christian maturity followed entire sanctification and was considered to be a process in which the believer would grow in grace and model a life of Christian perfection.<sup>10</sup> By embracing a process in which Christian perfection was the ultimate goal, the emphasis on living a holy life could be attained only through the process of sanctification. Sanctification became a crucial element in the preparation of those who hoped to serve within the Holiness Movement and Holiness-Pentecostal traditions. Those Pentecostals who embraced holiness doctrines believed that in order to receive the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit", one must have the experience of being "sanctified" first. Sanctification, rather than speaking in tongues, was the "crisis" experience in Wesley's three fold vision of soteriology, and for Holiness Pentecostals in COGIC, it was the crisis experience.

Evangelical historian Donald Dayton concludes that the emergence of the ordination of women in the church and the range of theological issues surrounding the practice will never be fully understood until the history and theology of holiness and Pentecostal traditions are more fully absorbed into mainstream discussions.<sup>11</sup> Dayton suggests a series of theological arguments that are useful in understanding the ministry of women in holiness and Pentecostal traditions.

- An emphasis on the Holy Spirit, producing prophetesses who are 'God's Mouthpiece'
- An emphasis on experience, and non-traditional forms of endorsement by the clerical hierarchy and education
- Radical or Low church movements emphasizing "sacramental" rather than priestly concerns.
- Emphasis on the "perfectionist motif" in religion rather than the impact of sin.
- Sectarianism and marginal religiosity that finds room for new practices such as ministries for women.
- A liberal standpoint that claims women have the "right" to preach (this falls in line with nineteenth century liberation movements such as abolitionism and suffrage).

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<sup>10</sup>Faupel, D. William. *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought*. (Sheffield England, Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). 57-58.

<sup>11</sup>Dayton, Donald, "Yet Another Layer of the Onion: or Opening the Ecumenical Door to let the Riffraff in" *The Ecumenical Review*, 40: (January 1988): 108

Each of these factors comes together in the Holiness movement of the nineteenth century, providing a way for women to pierce the traditional barriers against women preaching and teaching. The emphasis in holiness theology on the work of the Holy Spirit and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for service could not be limited to the traditional nineteenth century gender roles. Women who embraced holiness teachings held camp meetings, preached in tents and churches, conducted revivalistic meetings and healing services. The Holiness movement provided women the launching pad to use for justifying their place in the new movement of Pentecostalism. Yet the idea of the Holy Spirit's empowerment had not fully embraced the Joel passage, until its reinterpretation by Pentecostals. But how did this reinterpretation occur, and what was its benefit to women, who were already ministering in the Holiness movement?

The catalyst of the change in interpretation in the holiness movement came about in the late nineteenth century. Previously, the idea of "entire sanctification" suggested that there was a second work to salvation requiring a deeper commitment to God from the believer. This "entire sanctification" was emphasized in the Holiness movement by changes in dress, an emphasis on purity, and a setting apart or removal from the world. There were holiness proponents who thought that sanctification should be evidenced by a spiritual manifestation. Upon Charles Parham's study of Scripture, he determined that manifestation to be speaking in tongues. The new "holiness heresy" as Donald Dayton terms it, split the movement apart, and the tongues' group became the Pentecostals. Since this idea of speaking in tongues is also found in the Acts 2 chapter that repeats the Joel passage, the Pentecostals therefore, could justify the inclusion of women into ministerial capacities because the outpouring of the Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues, was proof of the 'entire sanctification' of a believer, for the end time purposes. Men and women filled with the Holy Spirit were equipped to preach and participate in the activities of the Holy Spirit. The Baptism in the Spirit was the authority that early Pentecostals looked to for legitimization of leadership roles. Pentecostals' theology set the Holy Spirit as the agent in control of speaking in tongues. Therefore, the Holy Spirit was the endorser of ministers, male or female. This egalitarian focus on the empowerment of the Spirit acted as a deconstruction mechanism for both sexes. Having no gender, the Holy Spirit, allowed for the emphasis of the

work and empowerment of the Spirit to be initially divorced from gender issues.

The end time focus of early Pentecostalism fueled the notion that women were just as equipped as men to minister in all roles. The key phrase in the Joel passage ‘in the last days’ suggested a different time, a time that was centered on the urgency to evangelize the world before the return of Christ. Early Pentecostals had also been influenced by nineteenth-century dispensational teachings which focused on 1900 as a key point in the march of time for the return of Christ. The claim of Pentecostals that acknowledged the first tongue speaking occurred January 1, 1901, lent credence to this end time fervor.<sup>12</sup> Traditional boundaries between male and female began to dissolve as the intensity and fervor of the eschatological visions were emphasized. When the revival at Azusa Street became full blown, gender roles were suspended. It was normal for the *Apostolic Faith*, the newspaper of the Azusa street mission, to report men “tarrying” at the altar as they waited for the baptism of the Spirit, or women speaking “boldly” in prayer sessions. Women who participated in the revival received affirmation and support for their spiritual endeavors. The leader of the revival, William J. Seymour, allowed both men and women to hold administrative positions at the mission, and his reliance on women to lead services provided a prime example for those entering into the mission. The *Apostolic Faith* regularly touted women as co-workers in the ministry. Seymour gives an explanation of how women were able to be included in the preaching aspects of Pentecostalism.

Before Pentecost, the woman could only go into the ‘court of the women’ and not into the inner court. The anointing oil was never poured on a woman’s head but only on the head of kings, prophets and priests. But when our Lord poured out Pentecost, He bought out all those faithful women with the other disciples into the upper room, and God baptized them all in the same room and made no difference. All the women received the anointed oil of the Holy Ghost and were able to preach the same as the men.<sup>13</sup>

Seymour equates the outpouring of the day of Pentecost as the day in which women were given the power and authority to preach just as the men were. Initially, this reading of

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<sup>12</sup>Goff, 68-70.

<sup>13</sup>William J. Seymour, *The Apostolic Faith*, January 1908 , 2

scripture by Pentecostals allowed for the participation of women. Early Pentecostal hermeneutics were at the intersection of millennial fervor, eschatological visions, and changing social mores. The very idea of speaking in tongues seemed to herald a new time for Pentecostals, one that in reading Acts/Joel indicated that the end times were upon them, and the last outpouring of the Spirit could not be limited to the social constraints. The ‘Spirit’ was moving beyond the barriers of convention to do a new thing, empowering people for the return of Christ. The baptism of the Holy Spirit, whether male or female, meant that the reception of the gift followed traditional holiness rubric of empowerment for ministerial service.

Yet empowerment for service did not translate into the traditional ordination track in Pentecostalism. Concerned with eschatology and eschewing “denominationalism”, Pentecostals did not consider women’s preaching to be synonymous with ordination. Mark Chaves in *Ordaining Women* describes Pentecostalism’s loose coupling between “rule and practice to account for Pentecostal women’s access to leadership positions.”<sup>14</sup> He recognizes that the openness in both Holiness and Pentecostalism to female preaching overstates the issues of gender equality within these groups.<sup>15</sup> The initial early distrust of Pentecostals towards organizing into firm denominational structures allowed for fluid forms of gender polices allowing women to undertake leadership roles. Pragmatic concerns such as church planting, missionary work and fund raising allowed women to assume roles traditionally supported by ordained men. Where ordination became an issue in Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God, Pentecostals who clung to their Holiness movement roots exhibited different responses to women’s participation.

The manner in which most Black Pentecostal denominations handled the issue of women, however, varied from their white counterparts. Many Black Pentecostals (and some white denominations such as The Pentecostal Holiness Church), keeping close ties with their holiness backgrounds, had no limitations on women in the ministry. Denominations such as The

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<sup>14</sup>Mark Chaves. *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 25-26

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 114

Pentecostal Assemblies of the World and Mt. Sinai Holy Church of America allowed for the ordination of women to the ministry, and some even allowed women to become bishops.<sup>16</sup> However, COGIC did not move in this same direction of freedom for women. In the earliest by-laws and constitution of the denomination, no mention is made of gender prohibitions on ordination and ministry. The unwritten rule was that women were not to be ordained. The earliest sermons by leader Bishop Mason make no mention of women roles at all. So how did Mason approach the participation of women in the COGIC?

### Holiness Groups, Public Ministry and Women's leadership

Groups such as COGIC that have their antecedents in the Holiness movement of the nineteenth century have particular factors that allow their receptivity to women's participation in leadership and public ministries. These factors, suggested by Nancy Hardesty, Lucille Sider Dayton and Donald Dayton, are the following:

- (1) Theology centered on experience (conversion and sanctification as a second work of grace);
- (2) Biblical authority along with the subjective interpretation of Scripture in line with experience;
- (3) An emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit;
- (4) freedom to be experimental;
- (5) reformist or revolutionary outlook that questioned the status quo;
- (6) a tendency to form sects with organization flexibility and recognition of the need for gifts and leadership offered.<sup>17</sup>

COGIC and the Women's Department allow for each of these factors as a pivotal part of women's participation and service in the denomination. The status of women in COGIC is based upon Biblical models and authority, with the hermeneutic varying between different leadership. Conversion and sanctification play a major role in choosing women to serve in the

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<sup>16</sup>Felton Best, "Loosing the Women: African American Women and Leadership in the Pentecostal Church". Paper Presented at the Society of Pentecostal Studies, November 1994, Wheaton, Il.

<sup>17</sup>Nancy Hardesty, Lucille Sider Dayton, and Donald Dayton, "Women in the Holiness Movement: Feminism in the Evangelical Tradition". Ruether, Rosemary and McLaughlin, Eleanor, eds. *Women of Spirit*, (New York, NY. Simon and Schuster, 1979), 214-248

Women's Department, proof thereof being a non- negotiable qualification for service. The freedom to be experimental manifests itself primarily in the practices, primarily of worship or teaching, as long as the teaching or experience can be Biblically based and justified. The reformist outlook, grounded in sanctification for Holiness-Pentecostals, shuns modernity and establishes Biblical guidelines for living. The point of divergence in COGIC is that grounding in sanctification requires that women help to embody the redefined outlook. The role and duties of the Church Mother in COGIC articulate the modeling and doctrines of the sanctified life for women and men. The history of the Women's Department will chronicle how that modeling and articulation developed, and how it was redefined by new women's leadership.

### **Summary of the Dissertation**

Chapter two provides foundational information as to the gender and racial foundations of the Black Church in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the role of the Church Mother in the Black church at large and specifically in COGIC. Chapter three is a historical overview of the establishment of the COGIC Women's Department by the first national Mother, Lizzie Robinson, the establishment of the various auxiliaries, and introduces the other important leaders within the Women's Department, Arenia Mallory and Lillian Brooks Coffey. Chapter four is a theological and theoretical discussion of the roles that Church Mothers uphold in the embodiment and structuring of holiness through the process of sanctification in the Women's Department. Chapter five is an in-depth look at the three leaders, Robinson, Mallory and Coffey, and their activities within and without the Women's Department. Chapter six of the dissertation chronicles the death of Mother Robinson, the ascension to leadership of Lillian Brooks Coffey, and the broadening of the role of the Women's Department within and without the denomination. Chapter seven consists of review, analysis of the Women's Department in COGIC, and end of Coffey's life as second General Supervisor and National Mother.