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“RECLAIMING THE CHURCH OF GOD HERITAGE OF WOMEN PASTORS”

From its inception, the Church of God (Anderson, IN) has affirmed and ordained women as pastors, evangelists, missionaries, and teachers. This paper has five goals: (1) to stress how the Church of God has been part of the holiness movement’s practice of ordaining and recognizing women as leaders; (2) to show how intrinsic women have been to the leadership of the Church of God; (3) to present six clear biblical arguments supporting the ordination of women; (4) to consider 1 Tim 2:8-15 and 1 Cor 14:34-35, which are two cloudy texts used in an attempt to argue against women’s equality in opportunity and office; (5) to stimulate action on placing women as pastors. The paper will not explore reasons for the decline of women pastors except to implicitly maintain that the Church of God has neglected its biblical and theological heritage concerning women in ministry.¹

I. THE HOLINESS HERITAGE OF ACCEPTING WOMEN AS ORDAINED PASTORS

On Easter Sunday 2009, my wife, Susie, and I attended Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in Manhattan. As we walked towards the church we passed an Episcopal Church

¹ Juanita Evans Leonard provides a brief sociological analysis of why the Church of God has lost its commitment to placing women in ministry, “Women, Change, and the Church,” *Called to Minister . . . Empowered to Serve*. Ed. Juanita Evans Leonard (Anderson, IN: Warner, 1989), 152-6.

pastored by a woman. Two ordained women and two ordained men led the inspiring worship at Madison Avenue Presbyterian. I remembered that the Episcopal Church officially began ordaining women in 1976 and the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1956. On the other hand, the Church of God began during the nineteenth and early twentieth-century holiness revival as did other holiness churches such as the Wesleyan Church and the Church of the Nazarene. Most holiness churches, including the Church of God, ordained and granted equal opportunities and offices to women from their inception. However, in recent decades congregations have not been calling women as pastors which is a departure from our heritage. Placement is an essential component of a person's calling. When the church recognizes a woman's call to ministry, but does not facilitate ministerial placement they are effectively preventing that woman from fulfilling God's calling on her life.

John W. V. Smith titled his monumental history of the Church of God (Anderson) *The Quest for Holiness and Unity*.² John and Margaret Smith came to Portland, OR regularly while I taught at Warner Pacific College. In one of our conversations I asked John, "Did you debate whether the word 'holiness' or the word 'unity' should go first in the title?" John paused, in a way only he could do, before answering, "The quest for holiness was primary, so I put 'holiness' first."³

The holiness movement emphasized the doctrine of sanctification as an experience following conversion. Phoebe Palmer popularized John Wesley's holiness doctrine in the United States and insisted that a person who experienced sanctification should testify in public to the experience of holiness or it could be lost. Thus, many women spoke, or testified, in church and in

² John W. V. Smith, *The Quest for Holiness and Unity: A Centennial History of the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)*, [Anderson, IN: Warner, 1980].

public for the first time. Since the distance from testifying to preaching is short, many women in the holiness movement became preachers and evangelists including Church of God women such as Sarah Smith, Mary Cole, and Jane Williams. The holiness movement, including the Church of God, recognized the prophetic spiritual authority of the Holy Spirit. If a person claimed the Holy Spirit called her or him to preach, the Church of God honored that call if their preaching and ministries were fruitful. Prophetic authority was located in the Holy Spirit, not in denominational boards. Most other nineteenth century Protestant churches refused to ordain women because they relied on priestly authority. Prophetic authority, as explained by Susie C. Stanley, “contrasts with priestly authority, in which the authority to minister originates with the ministerial office itself. Priestly authority is conferred when an individual assumes a ministerial office rather than coming directly from the Holy Spirit to individuals.”⁴ As a reformation movement, Church of God leaders believed they were restoring the practices of the Old and New Testaments when the Spirit called women to serve as prophets and in all capacities of ministry in the early church. The Church of God initially relied on a prophetic authority.

Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8 have been foundational promises for holiness women preachers. These passages promise power from on high to those who faithfully wait for and receive the Holy Spirit. Following Phoebe Palmer, who emphasized the power of the Holy Spirit, holiness women claimed a “holy boldness.”⁵ Susie Stanley observes, “Sanctification fostered self-reliance, or holy boldness. The Holy Spirit’s power was consistently understood as a power enabling one to serve, whether by preaching or engaging in social holiness ventures to meet the

³ John W. V. Smith, interview with author and Susie C. Stanley, Portland, OR, 1988.

⁴ Susie C. Stanley, *Holy Boldness: Women Preachers’ Autobiographies and the Sanctified Self* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 7. Stanley’s study of thirty-four Wesleyan/Holiness women preachers addresses their calls, ministries, and motivations for writing their autobiographies. It also covers Wesleyan/Holiness

physical needs of people.”⁶ Holiness women drew upon the power of the Holy Spirit which accompanied sanctification. The power of the Spirit enabled women to overcome any hesitation about preaching and sustained them when their right to preach was questioned. The holiness movement provided support for the Church of God’s conviction that God calls and empowers both men and women.

II. A CHURCH OF GOD TRADITION OF WOMEN PASTORS AND MINISTERS

Mary Cole, Sarah Smith, Jane Williams, Christina Janes, Amelia Valdez Vazquez, Esther Kirkpatrick Bauer and Lillie S. McCutcheon exemplify a heritage of ordained women in the Church of God. Consider how God ministered through these ordained women.

Effective women pastors were active in the first decades of the Church of God, Mary Cole left her denomination and affiliated with D. S. Warner and the Church of God. She and her husband began the Church of God ministry in Chicago. John W. V. Smith credits Cole with pioneering “the way to an open door for ministry by many women in the movement.”⁷ Some outside the Church of God opposed Cole’s preaching by throwing eggs at her, putting red pepper on the church stove where she was preaching, and once even shot bullets over her head.⁸

In 1882, Sarah Smith aligned herself with D. S. Warner and the Church of God. At the age of sixty-one, Smith informed her husband she had been called to full-time Christian ministry. He supported her decision. In 1885 Sarah Smith became part of an early evangelistic team led by

history and theology. I am indebted beyond degree to Susie Stanley for her research on and ministry with women.

⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁶ Ibid., 99.

⁷ Smith, *Quest for Holiness*, 71.

⁸ Susie Stanley, *Holy Boldness*, 148 and “Women Evangelists in the Church of God at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,” *Called to Minister*, 49. Cole was about twenty-two when called to ministry, *Holy Boldness*, 105.

D. S. Warner.⁹ Sarah Smith represents those who testified that their experience with the Holy Spirit imparted power to their ministries. Prior to being sanctified Smith felt timid but the Spirit imparted to her “such boldness, (that) everybody, preachers and all, that knew me before, were astonished and wondered how I came into such a blessed experience.”¹⁰ She, and others claimed the Spirit gave them “holy boldness.”¹¹

From the earliest decades of the Church of God, African American women have served as leaders and founding pastors. In a list of “Early Black Leaders in the South As Named in Church of God Ministerial Lists for 1905, 1907,” James Earl Massey lists six women among the thirty-two leaders.¹² Massey’s compilation of “Black Leaders Active in Church of God Life by 1915” includes at least sixty- three women among the 232 leaders.¹³ Massey contends that the strength of the African American constituency of the Church of God in the South can be traced to Rev. Jane Williams. Rev. Williams brought her Charleston, S. C. congregation into the Church of God in 1886. From her church in Charleston, the teaching of the Church of God spread to Georgia, North Carolina and Florida.¹⁴ The missionary home of the Church of God in Detroit, MI began as an interracial fellowship with Christina Janes serving as the first pastor. Massey credits Rev. Janes for securing a building at “Beniteau and Goethe on Detroit’s east side.”¹⁵ The many Church of God congregations in the Detroit metropolitan area owe their beginnings to Christina Janes.

Nilah Meier-Youngman describes Amelia Valdez Vazquez who taught at LaBuena

⁹ Smith, *Quest*, 72; Stanley, *Holy Boldness*, 105.

¹⁰ Susie Stanley, *Holy Boldness*, 94.

¹¹ Mary Cole testified of a “certainty of success,” *Ibid.*, 95.

¹² James Earl Massey, *African Americans and the Church of God, Anderson, Indiana : Aspects of a Social History* (Anderson, IN: Anderson University Press, 2005), 265-6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 267-272.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 32, 34.

Tierra Bible Institute in Saltillo, Mexico for years. She pastored two congregations in Mexico and in 1951 she planted the Hispanic Church of God in Albuquerque, New Mexico.¹⁶

In 1936 the national Board of Church Extension and Home Missions sent Esther Kirkpatrick, later Esther Kirkpatrick Bauer, to hold a struggling congregation together in Washington, D.C. Rather than just do maintenance ministry Rev. Kirkpatrick relocated the church and built the National Memorial Church of God, Washington, D.C. at 16th Street and Taylor Street N.W.

Imagine a pastor whose ministry called forth twenty-eight other ministers and associate pastors, in addition to nine missionaries or leaders in church agencies and schools! Those thirty-seven Christian ministers emerged from the ministry of Rev. Lillie S. McCutcheon who pastored First Church of God, Newton Falls, Ohio from 1945-1988, as recorded by Barry L. Callen.¹⁷ In addition to encouraging their calls and nurturing these young ministers, Rev. McCutcheon grew a strong congregation which ranked among the top givers to the Church of God World Service budget for years. She wrote and preached on the Book of Revelation and was an organizer of the Pastors' Fellowship in 1972. In 1989 McCutcheon wrote an article entitled "God Is an Equal Opportunity Employer."¹⁸ While the Church of God has rightfully recognized Rev. McCutcheon's outstanding ministry, we also should remember two other

¹⁵ Ibid., 54.

¹⁶ Nilah Meier-Youngman, "Hispanic Women in Ministry in the Church of God," *Called to Minister . . . Empowered to Serve*, 73-74.

¹⁷ Barry L. Callen, *She Came Preaching: The Life & Ministry of Lillie S. McCutcheon* (Anderson, IN: Warner, 1992), 324.

¹⁸ Lillie McCutcheon, "God Is an Equal Opportunity Employer," *Vital Christianity* 109, no. 4 (May 1989), 14-15. She observes, "Preaching with authority is demanded by God; but the authority is in the Word – not in the preacher – be that preacher male or female." 15; also, "sometimes the secular world more readily acknowledges the position of the woman minister than the church itself. She is recognized to serve in community affairs, chaplaincy at hospitals, and prisons. But this potential reservoir of women in ministry has been only slightly tapped. Let's not rob the kingdom of dedicated ministries because of human traditions," 15.

women pastors—Sarah B. Cox and Elizabeth Sowers—who guided the early volunteer church work of Lillie McCutcheon until she assumed the pastorate at Newton Falls.¹⁹ These women mentored McCutcheon during her call process. These are just a few examples of Church of God women pastors and evangelists.

Despite our impressive legacy of women ministers, only 2% of Church of God pastors in 1985 and 2002 were women. That contrasts with 1905 when women pastored 14% or 50 of our 353 congregations or 1925 when women pastored 220, or 32% of our 685 congregations.²⁰ However, the issue goes deeper than the number of women serving as pastors. Recently a talented high school senior shared her experience of being called to pastor, but as the student looked at the pastors in Indiana she did not see very many women serving. She feared she would not be called to pastor a congregation after preparing to minister. That gifted young woman prepared for another form of service rather than Christian ministry. She lacked supportive role models who guided and inspired Lillie S. McCutcheon. This young woman's experience documents that many of our churches and ministers are not teaching and practicing that the Holy Spirit calls women, as well as men, to serve as pastors and ministers. We need to recover, teach and practice the heritage of women's ordination and placing women as pastors in the Church of God as Randy Huber advocates in *Called, Equipped & No Place to Go*.²¹

Sometimes in our era when it is common for women to speak in public and to be leaders

¹⁹ Callen highlights the ministries of these two mentors, *She Came Preaching*, 62-96. He observes, "Both Sarah Cox and Elizabeth Sowers were strong women and clear leaders. No gender barriers existed here," 64.

²⁰ The 1905 and 1925 figures come from Juanita Evans Leonard, "Women, Change, and the Church," *Called to Minister . . . Empowered to Serve*, 152. The 1985 figure comes from Susie C. Stanley, "Appendix C, Church of God Women Pastors: A Look at the Statistics," *Ibid.*, 175. Both Leonard and S. Stanley utilize Sharon L. Sawyer's "Women Pastors in the Church of God," *Colloquium: Contemporary Christian Comment* 8 (No. 4, July/August 1976), 1-2,7. The source for the 2002 figure is Credentialing Official, Church of God Ministries, telephone interview with author, 2002.

²¹ See Randal Huber, *Called, Equipped & No Place to Go: Women Pastors and the Church* (Anderson, IN: Warner,

in politics, business and education, that leadership is attributed to the late twentieth-century women's movement. The Church of God heritage of women pastors and ministers began in the nineteenth century and precedes secular gains for women in the twentieth century.

III. SIX CLEAR BIBLICAL TEXTS SUPPORTING THE ORDINATION AND PLACEMENT OF WOMEN AS PASTORS AND MINISTERS

The Bible is the key authority for doctrine and practice in the Church of God. Lines from a heritage hymn affirm, "The Bible is our rule of faith, and Christ alone is Lord. All we are equal in His sight, as we obey His Word." Six clear biblical arguments make the case for the equality of men and women in ministry.

1. God called women as leaders and prophets in the Old Testament. Exodus 15:20 recognizes Miriam as a prophet. The Song of Miriam (Ex 15:21) parallels the Song of Moses (Ex 15:1-18). The prophet Micah cites Miriam alongside Moses and Aaron as the three prophets God called to bring the Israelites out of Egypt (Micah 6:4). Throughout the Book of Judges, as in Jgs 4:1 and 4:3, the Bible states, "The Israelites again did evil in the sight of the Lord Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help." God endowed Israel's judges with power to deliver Israel from distress. God called Deborah as the fourth of the thirteen judges of Israel. Jgs 4:4-5:31 describes her ministry as a legal figure, a prophet, and warrior. Deborah, with the help of another woman named Jael, defeated the Canaanites. As a result of Deborah's victory "the land had rest for forty years (Jgs 5:31)." The Song of Deborah in Jgs 5 immortalized Deborah "as a mother of Israel." God called and equipped a woman with the gifts and offices needed to defeat the Canaanites. Men were available, such as Barak, but God called the woman Deborah. 2 Kings 22 records the ministry of Huldah who was a prophet during the reign of King Josiah

when Jeremiah also was a prophet in Jerusalem. In 621 BCE Josiah ordered the priest Hilkiah to repair the Temple. Hilkiah found a scroll in the Temple. Not knowing how to interpret the scroll, Hilkiah went to the prophet Huldah who identified the scroll as referring to Judah's covenant with God. Based on Huldah's inspired insight, King Josiah ordered religious reforms that brought revival in Judah. Ironically, at that time Josiah and Jeremiah were close friends but Josiah relied on Huldah rather than Jeremiah to interpret the Temple scroll. As with Deborah, God called a woman rather than a man, when a man, Jeremiah, was available. Nehemiah 6:14 mentions Noadiah, another woman prophet. These four women prophets—Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Noadiah—are important because being a prophet meant being called to speak and lead through the movement of the Spirit. Prophets were Spirit-endowed leaders. Although prophecy was the main office women occupied in the Old Testament, Esther 4:14 notes God enabled Esther to be Queen of Persia so that she might save the Jews from destruction at the hand of Haman. Women filled key offices in the Old Testament. Old Testament women prophets were forerunners of New Testament prophets such as Anna (Luke 2:36) and Phillip's "four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy" (Acts 21:9).

2. Women played prominent roles in the ministry of Jesus and the four gospels.

A familiarity with how some well-known writers within Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures devalued women enables one to appreciate the positive portrayals of women in the Gospels. A word of caution is necessary. These examples do not represent a monolithic Greco-Roman culture or Judaism. There were women leaders and business leaders in Greco-Roman society at the time of Jesus. Also, Christians often cite some Jewish texts to depict Judaism as chauvinistic and completely anti-woman so that Judaism becomes a contrast against which a "woman-affirming Christianity" emerged. For instance, Rabbi Eliezer taught, "rather should the

works of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman.” That saying needs balanced by Rabbi Azzai’s dictum, “a man ought to give his daughter a knowledge of the Law.”²² David M. Scholer notes there “is the evidence that some women held the office of ruler or president of synagogues in ancient Judaism.”²³ There were several forms of Judaism rather than one monolithic Judaism just as there are varieties of Protestantism today. Rather than being a foil to Jesus and the emerging church, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza submits “. . . Judaism had elements of a critical feminist impulse that came to fore in the vision and ministry of Jesus.”²⁴ With this caution against projecting a blanket of anti-Semitism into the study of Jesus and his culture, consider four additional quotations demeaning women in Greco-Roman and some varieties of Judaism.

- ◆ Greek men often repeated “three reasons for gratitude” --- “that I was born a human being and not a beast, next, a man, and not a woman, thirdly, a Greek and not a barbarian.”²⁵

²² Rabbi Eliezer, Mishna Sotah 3:16a. Ben Witherington III maintains that Eliezer’s saying “is said to be a minority one by Jewish scholars,” *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus’ Attitudes to Women and their Roles as Reflected in His Earthly Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 6. Witherington is my source for Rabbi Azzai’s saying, *Ibid.*, 6.

²³ David M. Scholer, “Women,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 881. Scholer’s writings on women in ministry are a rich resource and his ministry with women was monumental.

²⁴ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983, 107. Despite this stated awareness of a feminist impulse within Judaism, Kathleen E. Corley accuses her of regularly using Judaism as a negative foil over against Christianity, *Women & the Historical Jesus: Feminist Myths of Christian Origins* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2002), 12,16, and elsewhere. According to Richard N. Longenecker this quote can be “attributed either to Thales and Socrates by Diogenes Laertius (*Vitae Philosophorum* 1.33) or to Plato by Plutarch (*Marius* 46:1) and Lactantius (*Divine Institutes* 3.19.17)”, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 70.

A Jewish version of the Greek saying is the beatitude, “Praised be God that he has not created me a gentile; praised be God that he has not created me a woman; praised be God that he has not created me an ignorant man.” Leonard Swidler finds that “No less than three separate direct quotations of this prayer occur in three of the most ancient rabbinic collections (Tosephta Berakhoth 7,8; Talmud pBerakhoth 13b; Talmud bMenakhoth 43b),” *Biblical Affirmations of Women* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 155.

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- ◆ The Greek philosopher Aristotle, whose influence lasted long after his death, taught that, “the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male ruler, the female subject.”²⁶ Aristotle taught that society should be organized with men ruling women.
- ◆ Emperor Octavian (24 BCE.-14 CE) instructed his soldiers, “allow no woman to make herself equal to a man.”²⁷
- ◆ Josephus was a first-century Jewish historian who tried to combine Judaism with Roman culture. According to Josephus, “The woman, says the Law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive, not for her humiliation, but that she may be directed.”²⁸

It is no wonder that Ben Witherington III suggests that in antiquity “it was believed that gender, generation and geography determine a person’s identity, which is to say it is fixed at birth.”²⁹ It was best to be born a man in antiquity.

As a prophetic reformer within Judaism, Jesus came into such an oppressive and hierarchical structure valuing and affirming women as leaders, thinkers, and converts. The woman of Samaria was the first person to recognize and confess Jesus as Messiah in the Gospel of John (John 4:7-42). Her evangelistic outreach to the men and women of her city contradicted the teachings of Rabbi Eliezer, Aristotle, Octavian, and Josephus. In chapters 3-4 John pairs and

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²⁶ Aristotle, *Politics in The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Vol. 2. Ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1, 1254.

²⁷ Octavian in Dio, Cassius, *The Roman History: The Reign of Augustus [c. 200 CE]*. Trans. Ian Scott Kilvert (New York: Penquin, 1988), 50.28.3.

²⁸ Flavius Josephus, *Flavius Josephus Against Apion*. Trans. William Whiston. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1960), II, 25.

contrasts her with Nicodemus, a male insider who as a leader of Jewish orthodoxy came to Jesus secretly at night. The Samaritan woman was an outsider representing unorthodoxy yet Jesus asked her for a drink at noon at a public well. Likewise, Luke pairs the prophet Anna with Simeon as the first persons to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 2:25-38), despite a culture which often silenced women in public. Although much of Hellenistic culture generally did not affirm women as thinkers and leaders, Jesus praised Mary of Bethany for dialoguing with him as an intellectual partner (Lk 10:38-42). Jesus made women central characters in several parables, such as the woman seeking the lost coin (Lk 15:8-10) which paralleled the father seeking the lost son (Lk 15:11-32). Luke 8:3 reports that women financially supported the ministry of Jesus.³⁰ All four gospel writers record women as being the “last at the cross” (Mt 27:55-56; Mk 15:40-41; Lk 23:49; Jn 19:25-27) and “first at the tomb” (Mt 28:1-8; Mk 16:1-8; Lk 24:1-12; Jn 20:1-13). Contrary to the culture’s devaluing and often silencing of women, Jesus commissioned Mary Magdalene to announce the resurrection (Mt 28:10). John reports Mary Magdalene proclaiming to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord.” There are at least eighty-eight references to women in the gospels. Such frequent appearances of women in the gospels contrasted with their cultural roles as subservient characters in Greco-Roman society which usually ranked people in a hierarchy based on gender, age, wealth, and social position. Jesus’ openness to women and the women who became key witnesses to him as Messiah³¹ form a second clear argument in the Church of God heritage supporting the ordination and placement

²⁹ Ben Witherington III, *The Paul Quest* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 18.

³⁰ John E. Stanley, “Jesus’ Women Associates – Commentary,” *Women in Ministry Bible Studies* .CD-ROM (Wynkoop Center for Women in Ministry, 2007), 5.

³¹ Schüssler Fiorenza portrays the followers of Jesus as a “discipleship of equals,” *In Memory of Her*, 147, 148, 150. She claims this discipleship of equals “abolishes the claims of the patriarchal family and constitutes a new familial community,” *In Memory of Her*, 147. Corley disagrees stating, “The notion that Jesus established an anti-patriarchal movement or a ‘discipleship of equals’ is a myth posited to buttress modern Christian social engineering,” *Women &*

of women.

3. The experience of Pentecost is foundational for the Church of God because of our emphasis on the Holy Spirit’s ministry. Luke ended his gospel with Jesus commanding the disciples in Jerusalem to “stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Lk 24:49). Then in Acts, Luke notes that disciples went into an upper room in Jerusalem awaiting the power. Among those in the upper room were “certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus (Acts 1:14).” When Pentecost occurred and people “were filled with the Holy Spirit,” Peter explained the meaning of the event by citing Joel 2:28-32. In Acts 2:17 Peter introduced the quotation from Joel by adding the clause, “in the last days it will be, God declares.” Building on Joel, Peter preaches that a sign of the age of the Spirit is that the Spirit will be poured “upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy (Acts 2:17-18).” Pentecost meant that the Spirit was available to all—regardless of gender, age, or social status. Pentecost anticipated and authenticated women’s preaching and prophetic ministries such as Phillip’s four daughters, as cited in Acts 21:9 and Priscilla teaching Apollos (Acts 18:24-26).³²

4. Galatians 3:28, the fourth clear argument supporting women as pastors, is Paul’s policy statement on the equality of women and men in opportunity and office in the church. Paul wrote, “as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or

the Historical Jesus, 1; also, 143.

³² My teacher Marie Strong treated the significance of Pentecost, “The Biblical Vision: An Interpretation of Acts

female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:27-28). Although some claim these verses only apply to a spiritual equality in salvation, the historical context of Galatians addresses the social fact that the promise of the Law has been fulfilled in Christ. Baptism, rather than circumcision, now signifies the sign of belonging to God’s covenant people. One belongs to the new covenant through faith in Christ, rather than circumcision which was only available to men. Christ replaced the Law as the means of redemption. By announcing an equality in Christ between the three pairs of Jew/Greek, slave/free and male/female Paul struck at the heart of the social divisions prevalent in Greco-Roman society.³³

5. Paul’s practice in ministry clearly affirmed women as church leaders.

When discussing the gifts of the Spirit, Paul never restricted the gifts to men but proclaimed that the gifts are for men and women. Paul commended “Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae” (Rom 16:1). The Greek word employed in reference to Phoebe as a deacon is the same Greek word Paul used to identify himself as a deacon (1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; Phil 4:7) and in reference to Apollos (1 Cor 3:5). The best understanding of Phoebe is as a deacon who is a church leader and preacher like Paul, Timothy, and Apollos.³⁴

Junia was a woman apostle. In Rom 16:7 Paul says, “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my

2:17-18,” *Called To Minister*, 1-11.

³³ Richard Longenecker’s *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* uses Gal 3:28 as the key lens through which to read New Testament ethics citing Gal 3:28 as “that great Magna Carta of the Christian faith, 94.

Klyne R. Snodgrass depicted Gal 3:28 as “the most socially explosive statement in the New Testament,” “Galatians 3:28: Conundrum or Solution?,” *Women, Authority & the Bible: An Evangelical Breakthrough on the Biblical Debate*. Ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 161. In her “Response” to Snodgrass, Susie C. Stanley agreed and traced the history of interpretation of Gal 3:28 by holiness advocates for women’s equality such as Adam Clarke, Phoebe Palmer, B .T. Roberts, W. B. Godbey, Alma White, and Lillie McCutcheon, *Women, Authority & the Bible*, 183-188. This book stands as a milestone in the attempt by some evangelicals to move towards the equality in office and opportunity for women long taught by many holiness churches.

David Scholer provides an excellent statement of the differences between Paul’s view of women and Roman and Jewish culture in “Galatians 3:28 and the Ministry of Women in the Church,” *Theology, News and Notes* 45 (June 1998): 19-22.

relatives, who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.” “Junia” is a female noun in the earliest manuscripts of the Greek New Testament whereas Eldon Jay Epp notes that the male noun “Junias” does not appear in Greek or Latin in the Greco-Roman era.³⁵ When commenting on Rom 16:7, early church fathers such as Origen of Alexandria, Jerome and John Chrysostom understood Junia to be a woman apostle.³⁶ It was probably Aegidius of Rome (1245-1316 C.E.) who first substituted the male name “Junias” for “Junia.”³⁷ Aegidius reasoned that only men could be apostles, hence the Bible must be mistaken in calling Junia an apostle. In Rom 16:3, 6, 12 Paul greeted Prisca (Priscilla), Mary, Trypaeba, Tryphose and Persis as “workers in the Lord.” Paul also greeted the mother of Rufus, Julia, and the sister of Nereus making a total of ten women co-workers mentioned in Rom 16. Paul credits Prisca as co-leader with Aquila of “the church in their house” (1 Cor 16:19). In Phil 4:2-3 Paul commends Euodia and Synthche “for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel.” Paul recognized women as public preachers, prophets and leaders in public prayer (1 Cor 11:5). Paul valued women as leaders equal to men in office and opportunity for ministry.

6. Jesus, the Holy Spirit and Paul ignited a social revolution regarding gender equality that only began to be realized in the New Testament era. The Bible presents a

³⁴ As noted by Mary Cole in 1914, *Holy Boldness*, 135-6.

³⁵ In a detailed exercise in textual and linguistic criticism, Eldon Jay Epp shows that while the feminine name “Junia” was a common Roman/Latin name, the masculine name “Junias” does not appear in the Greco-Roman era, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 23-25, 57.

³⁶ Beverly Roberts Gaventa cites Chrysostom on Junia, “How great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle,” “Foreword,” *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*, xi. Epp lists sixteen Greek and Latin commentators who understood “Junia” as a feminine name, *Junia*, 32.

³⁷ Epp, *Junia*, 35. Epp provides charts showing that “Junia” as a feminine noun appeared in all the Greek New Testaments, but one, from Erasmus in 1516 to the Nestle New Testament in 1927, 62-63. Epp lists whether “Junia” as feminine or “Junias” as masculine appeared in forty-one English translations from Tyndale in 1525/1534 through the *New Living Translation* in 1996, *Junia*, 67. Epp’s text will become the definitive work on “Junia” as a feminine name in Rom 16:7. Mary Cole understood Junia as a woman apostle, *Holy Boldness*, 136, 240, note 95.

foundation of equality in opportunity and office upon which the Spirit and the church have built. Parallels exist between women in ministry and slavery. For instance, some New Testament passages, such as 1 Tim 6:1 and Eph 6:5-8, accepted slavery as a social institution, although I believe Paul urged Philemon to free Onesimus. Eventually many churches realized that slavery goes against the freedom proclaimed by Jesus and Paul and denies the God-given dignity and worth of persons. Slavery did not end in the United States until The Thirteenth Amendment was passed in 1865 although the Bible planted the seeds of freedom centuries ago. Likewise, the biblical practices and teachings on women as church leaders were seeds whose potential continues to develop as the Spirit leads the church to reclaim and restore features of the New Testament church. These Old and New Testament passages are clear texts supporting equality for women in opportunity and office in ministry.

IV. WHAT ABOUT THE CLOUDY TEXTS OF 1 TIM 2:12 AND 1 COR 14:33-35?

Don't these verses forbid women to preach? In October 1995, Lorie Salerno, an ordained Church of God minister, preached in chapel at Messiah College. After chapel she engaged in a question and answer session with students. A woman student quickly asked, "How can you dare to preach when 1 Tim 2:12 and 1 Car 14:33-35 forbid women to preach? Aren't you familiar with these verses?" Rev. Salerno smiled and replied, "You know I get asked that question frequently. It wasn't until I after started preaching outside the Church of God that someone first asked me that question. I never had heard that question in the Church of God because my church accepts women as preachers. I decided to study 1 Tim 2 while I continued to trust my experience of God and the church's recognition of my call. I know I have been called."³⁸ Mary

³⁸ Lorie Salerno, class interview with author, October, 1995, Messiah College.

Cole was often asked the same question.³⁹ Salerno and Cole's experiences have been shared by most ordained women.

1 Tim 2:8-15 must be read in its historical context, as should all Scripture. 1 Timothy was probably sent to the church in Ephesus. Ephesus was the site of two heresies. A shrine to Artemis the Great Mother deity was at Ephesus (Acts 19:24-35). Witherington's study of inscriptions from Ephesus shows that "educated high-status women" exercised leading roles in civic offices and religious rites at temples in Ephesus, including the temple of Artemis.⁴⁰ Also, Gnosticism was emerging as a heresy at Ephesus. Gnostic teachings regarding women were diverse and beyond the scope of this paper.⁴¹ It is important to be aware of these false teachings involving the Artemis cult, the role of high-status women in the Artemis cult, and the rise of Gnosticism, as we consider the following six items regarding 1 Tim 2:8-15.

The crux of the issue lies in 1 Tim 2:12 which reads, "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority (*authentain*) over a man; she is to keep silent." First, what is the meaning of *authentain*? Catherine Clark Kroeger offers an alternative translation of 1 Tim 2:12, "I do not allow a woman to teach nor to proclaim herself author of man."⁴² Kroeger's translation attacks the Gnostic heresy that a female goddess was the source of creation and men. Her translation

³⁹ Opponents to women preachers used 1 Tim 2:11-12 and 1 Cor 14:33-35 against Mary Cole's right to preach, *Holy Boldness*, 138.

⁴⁰ Ben Witherington III, Witherington. *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians. Vol. 1: A Social-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 218-219

⁴¹ The following are three anti-woman Gnostics texts. The Gospel of Thomas, saying 114, reads, "Simon Peter said to them, 'Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.' Jesus said, 'I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven,'" *Nag Hammadi Library*, 130. The Dialogue of the Savior exhorts, "destroy the works of femaleness," *NHL*, 237. The Second Treatise of the Great Seth warns, "And do not become female lest you give birth to evil," *NHL*, 336.

Some Gnostics esteemed Mary Magdalene as the favorite disciple of Jesus because he used to kiss her often on the mouth, The Gospel of Philip, *NHL*, 138. The Gospel of Mary pits Mary against Peter for leadership of the apostles and has Peter assert that Jesus "loved her more than us," *NHL*, 473.

⁴² Catherine Clark Kroeger and Richard Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Women: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 103.

deserves more study and debate. Second, Linda L. Belleville and Witherington offer helpful translations and interpretations of I Tim 2:12. Both note that the verb *authentain* “occurs only here in the New Testament”.⁴³ Witherington provides rich linguistic evidence indicating that “the translation dominate” is the appropriate one here.”⁴⁴ In a similar manner, Belleville suggests:

A reasonable reconstruction of I Timothy 2:11-15 would be as follows: The women at Ephesus (perhaps encouraged by false teachers) were trying to gain an advantage over the men in the congregation by teaching in a dictatorial fashion

This interpretation fits the broader context of I Timothy, where Paul aims to correct inappropriate behavior on the part of both men and women (I Tim 2:8,11). It also fits the grammatical flow of I Timothy 2:11-12: “Let a woman learn in quiet and submissive fashion. I do not, however, permit her to teach with the intent to dominate a man. She must be gentle in her demeanor.” Paul would then be prohibiting teaching that tries to get the upper hand—not teaching per se.⁴⁵

Drawing upon the discovery of high-status women mentioned in inscriptions from Ephesus, Witherington concludes the problem at Ephesus is “untrained and unauthorized women, who need to be learning.” Instead these women are “seeking to teach and indeed to domineer men.”⁴⁶ Continuing, he regards the matter “as an abuse or an unauthorized use of power . . . they assumed they already had. These are the women whom Paul is currently not allowing to teach, but neither does he rule out, if they indeed learn and submit to the teaching, that they might one day be authorized to do so.”⁴⁷ For Belleville and Witherington 1 Tim 2:11 addresses a misuse of authority by women not yet schooled in Christian doctrine. Once they became

⁴³ Linda L. Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority: I Timothy 2:11-15,” *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, Ed. Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis and Gordon D. Free (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 211. Witherington shows that the word is found only “four times before the New Testament,” *Letters and Homilies*, 227.

⁴⁴ Witherington, *Letters and Homilies*, 228.

⁴⁵ Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping,” 223.

⁴⁶ Witherington, *Letters and Homilies*, 232.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 232.

trained and obedient to emerging theology, these women could become teachers of men. Kroeger, Belleville, and Witherington regard Paul as the author of 1 Timothy. Third, possibly the author of 1 Timothy 2 is a later disciple of Paul.⁴⁸ This Pauline disciple has compromised the radical freedom and equality of Galatians and Romans because the church in Ephesus in a specific historical moment needed order. Fourth, other problems appear in the cloudy text of 1 Tim 2:8-15. Should women be forbidden to wear gold, pearls or expensive clothes as verse 9 teaches? Ironically, the college student who accused Rev. Salerno of disobeying the Bible by preaching was dressed in expensive designer clothes and adorned with jewelry. 1 Tim 2:15 states women “will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty?” How does one explain salvation through works, such as through childbearing, in 1 Tim 2:15 in light of the Protestant principle that the just shall be saved through faith as stated in Rom 1:17, Gal 2:15 and Eph 2:8? Fifth, 1 Tim 3:8-13 includes women as deacons. Sixth, according to Acts 18:26 Priscilla and Aquila “explained the Way of God” to Apollos in Ephesus. Acts 18:26 is a clear text illuminating the cloudy text of 1 Tim 2:12.

In conclusion, it makes sense to view 1 Tim 2:12 as a cloudy text best understood as intended for a very specific historical situation in Ephesus. Rather than base our theology of women in ministry on 1 Tim 2:8-15, the Church of God historically has interpreted this isolated cloudy text in light of the clear passages illuminating women in ministry.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Raymond E. Brown estimated that the vast majority of modern scholars agree that 1 Tim was written after Paul’s lifetime, “Who Wrote Titus and 1 Timothy,” *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 662-668. This decision rests on its unique vocabulary, the differences between Paul’s theology elsewhere and in 1 Tim, his clear practice of women in ministry elsewhere, and the parallels of 1 Tim to Roman household rules.

⁴⁹ For another edition of interpreting 1 Tim 2:8-15, consult John E. Stanley, “Texts Need Interpreting Part Two: Six Principles for Interpreting Biblical Texts in Tension,” *Faith and Gender Equity: Lesson Plans Across the College Curriculum* Ed. C. Jeanne Orjala Serrão and Susie C. Stanley (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007): 111-118.

As to 1 Cor 14:33-34, which commands women to keep silent in the churches, this is a passage addressed to the first-century church specifically in Corinth because of the disorderly aspects of Corinthian worship. 1 Cor 11:5 notes that women do pray and prophesy in church meetings in Corinth. Women spoke in church meetings so the silence advocated in 1 Cor 14:33-34 was not a universal rule even in the Corinthian congregation. 1 Cor 11:5 is a clear text that recognizes women as prophets and makes 1 Cor 14:33-34 an isolated cloudy text which must be applied in the historical context of disorder at Corinth, not across the centuries, and obviously not all the time, even in Corinth in light of 1 Cor 11:5.⁵⁰

1 Tim 2:11-15 and 1 Cor 33-34 are cloudy texts best interpreted in light of their historical settings. These two isolated texts do not obscure the many clear biblical texts from the Old and New Testaments which support women as teachers of and preachers to men and women.

V. WHAT IS AT STAKE FOR THE CHURCH OF GOD?

The Church of God has a strong historical, theological, and biblical heritage for ordaining and placing women as pastors and ministers. If we can reclaim and implement that heritage more young women will answer the call to ministry as did Mary Cole, Jane Williams, Amelia Valdez Vazquez, and Lillie McCutcheon rather than enter other fields of service like the Indiana student who was discouraged because she lacked mentors and models.

More is involved for the Church of God than the calling of women to ministry. As Charles E. Brown, Editor of Church of God publications in 1939, wrote, “As a matter of fact,

⁵⁰ Sharon Pearson reached the same conclusion in “Biblical Precedents for Ministry,” *Called To Minister . . . Empowered to Serve*, 21. Pearson defines the “silenced speakers” of 1 Cor 14:33-36 as involved in “agnostic teaching”, 22. Her description of “agnostic teachers” seems more like Gnostics. Regardless, 1 Cor 11:5 is a clear text which illumines the cloudy text of 1 Cor 14:33-35.

the prevalence of women preachers is a fair measure of the spirituality of a church, a country or an age. As the church grows more apostolic and more deeply spiritual, women preachers and workers abound in the church; as it grows more worldly and cold, the ministry of women is despised and gradually ceases altogether.”⁵¹ It has been seventy years since Brown penned that prophetic observation. Has the Church of God become “more apostolic and deeply spiritual” or has the Church of God leveled off in spiritual vitality? Are all potential clergy aware of our heritage of women in ministry? Do Credentials Committees and Area Administrators work hard to place women pastors? Do we educate congregations on our heritage? Are we still open to prophetic authority or have we become captured by a priestly authority amid our congregational governance? Are we keeping track of how many women leave the Church of God to fulfill their calling in other churches? Are we aware of the heartache these women, their families, and their home congregations experience as they leave the church that nourished them but refused to place them as pastors? Have we as a church counted the cost of the leadership we have lost? Placing women as pastors is a matter of justice, a matter of fidelity to our holiness heritage, and a measure of the church’s willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit into growth and mission.

⁵¹ Charles E. Brown, “Women Preachers,” *The Gospel Trumpet* 59 (No. 21, May 27, 1939), 5, 13. Reprint ed. *Vital Christianity* 109 (No. 4, May 1989), 17.

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