Editor's Note to Chapter 3

At the time of its formation in 1914, a third of the Assemblies of God's ministers and two-thirds of its missionaries were women.¹ In 1944, women accounted for 67 percent of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel's ordained clergy.² While initially Pentecostalism was theologically rooted in the eschatological Pentecost Proclamation Joel 2 proclaimed in Acts 2, the praxis was a radical, egalitarian gospel that offered the possibility of sweeping aside centuries of silencing, which is an act of epistemic violence, according to Gayatri Spivak.³ Such implications would test the movement’s mettle, where in many participants came from more traditional denominations accustomed to patriarchal hierarchies. Male leaders entered into a complicated dance of stepping in and out of traditional assumptions, clumsily attempting to coordinate disparate positions, swinging back and forth from extreme postures, and sometimes promising to partner with one ‘truth’ while devoting the dance to its rival.

Testimonial quieting or silencing is a type of oppression experienced, according to Patricia Hill Collins, by African-American women when an audience fails to identify the speaker as a knower based upon a stereotype which impedes her ability to offer testimony.⁴ Pentecostal women, both black and white, have encountered this same oppression in their struggle to fully embrace the Pentecost Proclamation: “Your sons and daughters will prophesy.”

To women leaders, the silencing and duplicity became increasingly challenging, and many, confused and frustrated, gave up the quest to be heard altogether, turning over their positions to males. Others seemed passively content to let their male partners take the lead. Some held onto power and attempted to press through, but their efforts would increasingly pale against burgeoning cultural and religious forces rising up to silence them from both within and outside of the movement. By the end of the WWII, the numbers of

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³ Because of Spivak’s work and the work of other philosophers, the reality that members of oppressed groups can be silenced by virtue of group membership is widely recognized. See Kristie Dotson, “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing,” Hypatia 26, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 236.
⁴ Kristie Dotson, ibid., 242.
women in Pentecostal leadership had declined precipitously.⁵ Assemblies of God assistant superintendent Gayle Lewis “portrayed the ideal AG woman as ‘Unnamed—Yet Serving,’ saying their women were selfless and nonassertive. E.S. Williams voiced concern, reminding Evangel readers that the place of the wife had always been in the home.”⁶

Eventually, Pentecostal organizations, exemplified by the Assemblies of God, resembled little more than conservative fundamentalist denominations, except for their distinctive embrace of glossolalia. Nevertheless, following WWII, the distant, uncomfortable memory of large numbers of women testifying from the pulpit had been nearly forgotten. It was not until other traditional denominations began to reassess their own patriarchalism and seek after historical models that the institutional memory was jogged.

More recently, great strides have been achieved, but ones not led by Pentecostal/charismatic women. A decade-long, landmark Barna study concluded in 2010 found that the number of senior female pastors in denominational churches had doubled, and from 2010 to 2015 indicators have continued to suggest an upward surge that has not begun to plateau. From 1999 to 2009 women senior pastors increased from 5 to 10 percent, but 58 percent of these women came from traditional denominational churches. Overall, where the numbers of senior female clergy had increased to 12 percent for all congregations, these gains were not directly reflected in more conservative evangelical churches where just 9 percent of clergy were women. Pentecostal and charismatic churches would be represented in this 9 percent.⁷ However, 8 percent of female senior pastors in the Assemblies of God places it near the bottom of all churches that were measured, with only the Southern Baptist Convention, which voted to rescind and prohibit all female leadership in 2000, lower at 4 percent.⁸

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⁵ The Pentecost Proclamation argued that the same Holy Spirit at work in males was also at work in females, which leveled the field of participation. However, when the anticipated soon return of the Lord seemed delayed, and the immediate relevance of the passage was diminished, the need for an adequate anthropological response to the theological objections by more baptistic gender hierarchalists surfaced. Such objections were based upon Pauline passages.

⁶ Barbara Liddle Cavaness, *Factors Influencing the Decrease in the Number of Single Women in the Assemblies of God World Missions* (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 2002), 324.

⁷ “Number of Female Senior Pastors in Protestant Churches Doubles in Past Decade,” Barna Group (September 14, 2009). Used by permission.