

FOUNDATIONS



CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY
CONCISE HISTORY, POLITY, DOCTRINE, AND FUTURE

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Foundations—The Church of God of Prophecy
A Concise History, Polity, and Doctrine of the Church of God of Prophecy
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Editor's note: Abbreviations that are used can be found on page 216.

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Dedication

To the late Carl L. and Floresa E. Varlack, my precious Dad and Mom, and to the wonderful and gracious members, ministers, and friends of the Church of God of Prophecy, among whom I have lived and served in the Gospel since 1959.

Wisdom Quotes

“We all got history. Some of us just don’t know it. But it’s there. Just got to look for it” [sic].

Ellen G. Hazard, 83, Historian of the Hazard Family,
Worcester County, MS, January 1984,
Nick Salvatore, *We All Got History*
(NY: Times Books, Random House, 1996), p. 7.

History is the context in which we, as individuals, have lived and do live. An institution like the Church is no different. The Assembly Committee for Biblical Doctrine and Polity states, “It must be remembered that the Church of God of Prophecy did not develop in a vacuum, nor did it come into existence without some connection with the rest of Christianity” (BDP Committee: *1998 Working Document*, page 18, subsection C, The Church of God of Prophecy). Consciously or unconsciously, the Church has made and is making history, and that history should be both preserved and, ultimately, rendered in some written form.

Author

“For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction . . .” (Romans 15:4 NASB).

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Preface

This unit of the Foundations course of the Center for Biblical Leadership is presented with the hope that it will provide a basic knowledge of the beginnings of the Church of God of Prophecy (COGOP), a glimpse of its struggles in development and expansion, and a brief look at its future direction. The COGOP freely acknowledges the headship of our Lord Jesus Christ over His church, and we are dedicated to follow Him faithfully. Our covenant commits us to “. . . walk in the light to the best of our knowledge and ability.”

Although this is a concise work, it does treat aspects of the contributions made by our early leaders toward the recovery of Bible principles and practices as reflected in this Movement. Continuing its growth within the Holiness/Pentecostal tradition, the Church strives to live out the message of the New Testament including our Lord’s Great Commandment and Great Commission.

We appreciate the research that has been done in the preparation and writing of this unit. It is presented with the prayer that it will contribute to a more knowledgeable and competent leadership for God’s people, and as a foundational tool for better understanding of the COGOP and its origins.

Along with the rest of Foundations, this unit would be valuable locally for group or individual study. May God’s grace add richness to what we are presenting here so that our thrust into **His harvest** will be more effective!

R. E. Howard
General Overseer

Foreword

I am thankful, as director of the Center for Biblical Leadership, to be afforded the privilege to write the foreword for this unit of the Foundations Courses of the respective department of the Church of God of Prophecy's International offices.

I am also thankful that a dear friend and colleague of mine since the late 1950s, Bishop Adrian Varlack has written a concise historical narrative to replace the former "*Fifty Joined Together.*" I recommend this unit to interested parties.

The art of historiography is the convergence of the multifaceted experiences that develops in the life span of a people. These experiences include, but are not limited to the forces of culture, socio-political, psychological, and religious dynamics. History is never perfect and always interpretative with a constant need to be revisited as new materials are gathered and accessed. This current unit is a precursor to address and prepare to revisit and enlarge the official history, *Upon This Rock*, which was written by C.T. Davidson.

The COGOP has embarked on a new era of writing her own history as "insiders" as mentioned by Bishop Varlack. For much too long, "outsiders" have written the history of the COGOP. They have written from their own interpretive perspectives, for their respective audiences, and with their own agendas. "For such a time as this" our time to tell our enlarged and corrective history has begun. As an "insider" of 60 years, who wrote the Confessional (Appendix I) in dealing with the issue of exclusivity, I join Bishop Varlack when he states, "It certainly leads to the conclusion that leaders and churches must cultivate great humility, which will always leave room for the admission of wrongs and for God's continuing and gracious correctives." It is my belief and conviction that this Church, which has good people and good leaders, has a destiny to fulfill in God's eternal plan, and therefore my prayer is "Come, Holy Spirit, be our Guide.

Dr. Hector Ortiz, International Director
Center for Biblical Leadership
May 21, 2010

Acknowledgements

A biblical proverb states, “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17 NKJV). Through the years, I have derived immeasurable benefits and blessings from many, many conversations with my contemporaries in Christian service and from the many authors whose works I have, at times, been led to discover (and devour) by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself through the gentle but deliberate guidance of His Holy Spirit. It is with deep gratitude, conviction, and great affection that I give thanks to God the Father for His faithful servants and their invaluable labors. Some of their works will appear in the bibliography.

I have sought and obtained permission to incorporate into Chapter III of this work the article that I prepared on A. J. Tomlinson’s Baptism with the Holy Ghost for the PCCNA Pentecostal/Charismatic Pioneers book, *Servants of the Spirit* (Des Moines: OBC Publishing, 2010). It appears in that work as Chapter 8. I am grateful to PCCNA Chairperson and President of Open Bible Churches, Dr. Jeff Farmer, Book Editor Andrea Johnson, and OBC Publishing for their kind consideration.

I have had the privilege to work together (at the Church of God of Prophecy’s International Offices) with the late Bishops M. A. Tomlinson and Billy D. Murray (former General Overseers) and with Bishop Fred S. Fisher Sr. (General Overseer Emeritus), all of whom were very kind to me. I gained much from their brotherhood, friendship, and Christian love. My thirty-four years serving alongside them helped me to develop several of the insights and assessments I share in the pages that follow. Our current General Overseer, Bishop Randall E. Howard, has encouraged me in the completion of this volume and also in my participation in the PCCNA book above. I am thankful to all of them and to their families whose friendships I hold as a special God-given treasure.

Managing Editor Virginia (Jenny) Chatham of the *White Wing Messenger* is not only a very competent editor, but also a gracious Christian lady. I owe her a debt of gratitude as my special literary friend, teacher, and encourager. She and her staff have been so kind and helpful throughout the years and with this project. A word of appreciation is due to the good folks at the White Wing Publishing House and to the Art Department, respectively, for publishing this work and for making a fledgling author’s first attempt presentable. I thank them all. Of course, any errors of fact in the text are my own responsibility.

Center for Biblical Leadership Director Dr. Hector Ortiz has graciously allowed me to concentrate on this project and encouraged me along the

way with his kind words. I thank him also for the gracious foreword that accompanies this work. His passion for the Church's history and our many conversations while traveling have been helpful. My co-workers at CBL, especially our staff secretary Jeanette Rollins, have all been very supportive. I am grateful to Bishop Larry Duncan, now of Coweta, Oklahoma, who was head of CBL when this project began. He understands well our Church's history and was very considerate and kind. He saw the need for this update. The thousands of CBL participants with whom I have shared parts of this material over the last ten years have stimulated my thoughts and encouraged inquiry. Their love for this Church and their commitment to its future is unquestioned.

The documents of our International Assembly Committees, the Presbytery Working Group, and others have been drawn on heavily, and several of these documents appear as appendices to this work. I have included them as resources for teaching and training purposes, and for general information. I also owe a great debt to earlier Church authors (especially to the late C. T. Davidson and Lillie Duggar) whose works I have consulted in depth.

Jan—my life's partner and friend of forty-four years—along with our seven lovely, godly children and their families, have been my greatest source of inspiration, enjoyment, and peace. They have given and are still giving much to the Lord's service, and, oh, how much I thank Him for them! They have been after me for several years to begin some formal writings, so this short work is my slow start. I have six siblings, several dear friends, spiritual children, and many "mutually adopted" children who have also greatly loved and encouraged me in my life and Christian service and also to write. I acknowledge them all with sincere affection and deep gratitude.

—Adrian L. Varlack Sr., 2010

General Introduction

The last formal, comprehensive (but not necessarily definitive) history of the Church of God of Prophecy (COGOP) titled *Upon This Rock*, Volumes I, II, III, [White Wing Publishing House and Press, Cleveland, Tennessee] was written by the late C. T. Davidson and published between 1973 and 1976. The third volume included the year 1953. Since that time, no official history per se has been done except for James Stone's *The Church of God of Prophecy—History and Polity* (Cleveland, Tennessee: White Wing Press, 1977) used as a college text (Tomlinson College) and described for that purpose as “An in-depth analysis of the entire structure of the Church of God of Prophecy,” along with some shorter works compiled for the Center for Biblical Leadership.¹ All these works drew heavily on the minutes of the various General Assemblies. Unfortunately, the *Assembly Minutes* are not designed to cumulatively bring forward Assembly Rulings from Assembly to Assembly, but rather each stands on its own for matters treated in a particular year. For this reason and because of the transitional nature of the Church's experience of the last twenty to twenty-five years, a work that seeks to update where we are now and the direction in which the changes point, seems appropriate and necessary.

While this book does not purport to be a definitive or complete history, we will highlight certain historical events, review those changes that the Church has made in structure, philosophy, doctrine and its application, practices, and overall polity, including some background to the adjustments we have made and are in the process of making. In assessing trends, we would be remiss if we did not mention some of the more major issues that were attempted but which were not accepted by the General Assembly. We will touch on some of these as well.

To put things in proper perspective, we will re-visit our early beginnings to seek the premise or premises that underlaid the efforts of our forebears. We will follow a rough interpretative, historical chronology, which seems the most efficient way to structure and organize the historical material and ideas involved. We will review the polity, practice, and doctrinal changes the Church has made since 1984. We hope to end with a summary review

¹Examples are *Foundations: Church of God of Prophecy—History and Doctrine*, written by Wade H. Phillips for the Center for Biblical Leadership (White Wing Publishing and Press, Cleveland, TN, 1998), which was not widely used, and *Fifty Joined Together—A concise History and Polity of the Church of God of Prophecy*, by Paul Williamson (White Wing Publishing House and Press, Cleveland, TN, 1999), commissioned by the Center for Biblical Leadership and was used in the same Foundations series.

and assessment of the general direction in which the Holy Ghost seems to be leading us and by using both His divine interventions and the efforts our leaders have made and are making to reflect and crystallize the Church's responses to the Spirit. It is exciting to be part of this process in a classical Holiness/Pentecostal Movement—a Church that believes and is struggling to literally practice collective, active obedience to the blessed Holy Ghost as He renews the COGOP through fresh and corrective interpretations and applications of His Word. In His call to us in our 1984 Assembly, He used the very word “relationship,” which has now begun to dominate much Christian literature and vocabulary. He said that the COGOP, as a people, had “drifted from a vital relationship with Him.” Attempts to restore that relationship, even though feeble and incomplete, are greatly appreciated and honored by the Lord. At least that is the opinion of this writer. As Philip Yancey has written in *Church: Why Bother?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1998), “God likes the sound of our trying.”² I am convinced that he is right.

It is my contention up-front that the Church of God of Prophecy is worthy of the commitment and loyalty of serious-minded believers. In the past, legitimate questions had been raised about many so-called Christian churches—churches which left much to be desired in the way of biblical orthodoxy or true spiritual authenticity. Unfortunately (and mostly undeserving), the COGOP was sometimes classed among them because of certain claims, practices, and traditions. While among some observers and scholars the COGOP was considered to be cultic and at times fanatical, we never did quite fit the labels. However, as has been already recognized by several of our Assemblies and many of our leaders, we did have certain extremes and concepts that needed serious biblical adjustment and correction. The Call to Repentance, which was recognized and approved by the 1984 General Assembly, began a process of reformation and renewal that began to address these issues and that is still ongoing. Changes in leadership and adjustments to leadership structures have been helping the process along.

²Yancey quotes a composer who, when a violinist, complained that his music was too difficult to be played, responded that he was after the sound of someone trying to play it. Yancey also mentions Pastor Earl Palmer. Responding to critics of the church, Palmer cited the Milpitas High School orchestra's attempt at Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Although the discordant sounds from the kids' instruments were very disconcerting to the listeners, Palmer commented that, despite its imperfections, that orchestra is the only way some people will ever hear anything of Beethoven's great ninth. Similarly, he reminded the church's critics that despite the church's failures and struggles, God has made no other primary provision for the Gospel to be heard (see pages 98–100).

Today the Church of God of Prophecy is more widely acknowledged than ever before as a legitimate expression of the body of Christ, one that is now classed as orthodox in the Holiness/Pentecostal tradition. While we are still grappling with several issues, an irreversible process toward greater biblical legitimacy has begun. It is wonderfully heartwarming to witness this day in the Church and to be part of the exciting changes that are taking place. The COGOP has already become more worthy as a solid, biblically sensitive Christian church, and I do not at all hesitate to say how exciting it is to participate in the Church's bright future. I say this because signs of willingness to fully obey God's call have become evident. The COGOP has begun a serious turn to the harvest, a turn which, in and of itself, is causing a look at whether she is ready to take care of and to house God's harvest. In essence, the COGOP has become a **tool of the Gospel** for harvesting in the Kingdom of God, rather than a Church that uses the Kingdom of God as a repository from which to build membership. This is quite a significant turn-around, and indeed it represents an ideological sea change, **a great paradigm shift**. This is one of the things that makes the COGOP more worthy of our commitment, for she is clearly demonstrating her true loyalty to Christ by aligning more correctly with His Word of rightly divided and with the true purpose of the Gospel—the salvation of the lost. This has been her historic commitment.

I believe a serious look at ALL the facts will confirm my previous contention that this Church is a very worthy place from which to preach, teach, and model the Gospel, and, therefore, a church worthy of the commitment of our lives to serve God through her as a channel. Some have a long heritage in the COGOP through parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. But heritage and loyalty alone are not sufficient, in and of themselves, to warrant the investment of a life. There has to be, in addition, a sense that this COGOP is worthy before our Lord as a legitimate expression of His Kingdom. I believe the COGOP has achieved this as this book will try to illustrate. With the participation of the present and future generations, the transformation will continue and be secure for some time to come. Those who are newly acquainted with the Church will also be blessed to witness and be a part of this wonderful, ongoing, historical experience. Not many centrally run organizations are able to restructure, reorganize, and reorient themselves without terrible disruptions and great loss of momentum. The COGOP's has so far been mild, and we give thanks and praise to our Lord, who continues to lead us and teach us by His Holy Spirit. We are a people of the Book, being led by the Spirit!

As will be seen in what follows, the Church is not perfect—far from it! But she strives to be a **house of grace** and not a house of legal demands

that none can successfully keep. She's a place where biblical ideals are upheld and where true holiness is the standard, but where struggling saints can safely make a lifetime commitment to worship, discipleship, and service without the wholesale judgmental condemnation that some may have suffered under in the past.

In 1923, A. J. Tomlinson, the first General Overseer of the Church of God/Church of God of Prophecy, along with several others, sought to correct what was seen as a serious departure from the restoration premise on which this Movement began in 1886 and which was developed and understood more fully in 1903 and subsequently. This departure surrounded the development and enactment of a governing constitution, which, between 1920 and 1923, had created an Official Assembly over and above the churches. This special Assembly and the regular General Assembly had come to be regarded by some as a third authority with the Bible and the Spirit. It was this tendency to make the Assembly's role equal with that of Word and Spirit that became troublesome. This will be discussed in more detail later on. Suffice it to say that although other factors were also involved, Tomlinson and his followers made (or should we say reinstated) a crucial choice to regard only the Word of God and the Spirit of God as supreme within the Church.

It is my conviction that that choice gave the Holy Ghost **the right of way** to intervene and call this COGOP to repentance in 1984. The Church in General Assembly (now International Assembly) accepted the Spirit's call by kneeling in prayer as suggested by the then Questions and Subjects Committee and Moderator. It was the Assembly's way of deferring to the Spirit. As can now be seen in retrospect, nothing less than a total paradigm shift was in the making. In the sections that follow, we will visit some of the history, structural, and organizational changes, biblical reassessments, and touch briefly on the Church's new direction as led by the Spirit and as understood by those who led and those who now lead.

It is my prayer and hope that those who read this book will be inspired by the dedicated service and vision of our forebears—that we will be challenged by their efforts to be biblical including their willingness to walk in God's light; that we will be touched by the glimpses of their family struggles, their steadfast commitment to holiness as they understood holiness, and their zeal for the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His mission to save the lost. And let us “walk circumspectly, with reverence and Godly fear” as we trace the spiritual paths they trod and join our efforts with theirs under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

HISTORY

Beginning Concepts

Outline



- Four Premises and a Covenant
- Struggles, a More Careful Study, and Openness
- Where They Began—a Retrospective
- Implications and Direction—a Perspective

Chapter 1

Beginning Concepts

Four Premises and a Covenant

Just what did the original founders of what became the Church of God of Prophecy have in mind? This question was posed to me in 2001 by our then General Overseer Bishop Fred S. Fisher Sr. Let's try to answer it.

In concluding their review of how the *Worldwide Church of God* (Herbert W. Armstrong) encountered the Gospel of Grace, Larry Nichols and George Mather wrote the following:

Evangelicals continue to experience an identity crisis, struggling to understand how the various denominations together constitute the church. . . . As hundreds of denominations exist today, perhaps the lack of an understanding of the doctrine of the church is a large part of the problem. The autonomy and freedom, which are part and parcel of the modern American identity, do not necessarily coincide with the identity of the Christian as it is to be lived out in the context of the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Perhaps current evangelicalism has contributed as much to this problem as mainline traditions by helping to create conditions that are ideal for the proliferation of cults and sects.³

I begin with this quote because of the question we are addressing—a question that results from the oft-heard statement in recent years, “This church has lost its identity; we no longer really know our purpose.” This matter of the church’s identity is obviously broader than our concerns about the Church of God of Prophecy itself, for as the above reference shows, the church’s identity in view of denominationalism is still a matter for all of Christianity. It was precisely this state of affairs, the lack of the fervency of the Holy Spirit, and the absence of true obedience to and proper regard for the Word of God, that sparked our religious forefathers on their search for truth and to attempt a recovery of the New Testament

³Larry Nichols and George Mather, *Discovering the Plain Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), pp. 86, 87.

church in all its power, functions, and government. Their efforts, which began in the late 1800s, were predicated on three things:

1. The “noble and illustrious reformers” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who launched and inaugurated Protestantism, had “failed to reform from creeds.”
2. “They adopted the law of faith when they should have adopted the law of love.”
3. “They failed to reserve a right of way for the leadership of the Holy Ghost and conscience.”

A fourth point was added, which stated, “They were awakened to the fact that God’s Church existed only where His law and government was observed by His children.”⁴

These four premises, then, were the starting point of our religious forefathers. The initial group met on Thursday, August 19, 1886, at Barney Creek meeting house, Monroe County, Tennessee, and eight persons responded formally to the following obligation:

As many Christians as are here present that are desirous to be free from all men-made creeds and traditions, and are willing to take the New Testament, or law of Christ, for your only rule of faith and practice; giving each other equal rights and privilege to read and interpret for yourselves as your conscience may dictate, and are willing to set [sic] together as the Church of God to transact business as the same, come forward.⁵

Struggles, a More Careful Study, and Openness

In the subsequent sixteen years, in the midst of trials, persecutions, and much opposition, the fate of the little group hung in the balance, factions and extremes developed, and it was not until 1902 in the home of W. F. Bryant of Cherokee County, North Carolina, that another organization (or continuation of the 1886 effort) was effected, under the instructions and supervision of R. G. Spurling, the son of Missionary Baptist Elder Richard Spurling. It was as an Elder that Richard had moderated the organizing meeting of the 1886 Movement since he could set churches in order.⁶ The new (revived) group was called “The Holiness Church at Camp Creek”

⁴*Book of Minutes General Assemblies Church of God* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1922), pp. 7, 8.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 9.

while the earlier one had been known as “Christian Union.” W. F. Bryant was “set forth by the church and ordained, which made the church permanent.”⁷ On June 13, 1903,

. . . we made a more careful study of the New Testament order, and five more accepted the obligation and joined with the faithful little flock to push the work along. Another minister and two deacons were ordained by the church in proper order. The new minister was chosen for pastor, and that year there were fourteen more accessions, and the work went on smoothly and prospered amid some light persecutions.⁸

We know that the new minister referred to above was A. J. Tomlinson,⁹ who had previously visited with this group after having come to the mountains in 1899:

When Tomlinson came to the mountains in 1899, he brought with him the radical wing of holiness restoration, inspired by men like A. B. Simpson, Martin Wells Knapp, Seth C. Rees, G. D. Watson, B. H. Irwin, and Frank W. Sanford. Thereafter under Tomlinson’s leadership, the infant church became more strictly Wesleyan in its view of holiness and built a bridge to the Pentecostal Movement. [R. G.] Spurling’s vision of holiness and deep spirituality, and his teaching of the church as a visible, interdisciplinary body, joined together the basic tenets of apostolic experience and churchmanship.¹⁰

For a time, there was openness among the original leaders as they searched and put in practice, as best they could, what they had learned. We have evidence of advice and statements such as the following:

[Let] the speakers stand out boldly for their convictions, having themselves so clothed with love that no one could be hurt, and always ready to yield to plain Scriptural teaching even though it might cross some former views, the plain Bible teaching, rightly divided, to settle all points.

⁷Ibid., p. 13.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Type-written copy, *Diary of A. J. Tomlinson*, p. 26, COGOP Archives: Entry for June 13, 1903. It reads, “I was ordained a minister of the gospel of the Holiness Church at Camp Creek, N. C.”

¹⁰See “Our Rich Church of God Heritage: Born of the Spirit!” article by Wade H. Phillips, in *Church of God History and Heritage*, Volume 1, Number 1, Summer, 1997 (Cleveland, TN: Hal Bernard Dixon Jr. Pentecostal Research Center).

These were not at all uncommon.¹¹ This openness to the Holy Spirit's leading, this willing to adjust, correct, and conform to the Word of God, characterized much of what the original leaders attempted in the early years. Later, we see the organizational forms and practices with which they struggled begin to take shape and to govern their meetings, as for example when decisions of the Assembly gradually became more important and more dominant. At first, when some who were absent disagreed with what an Assembly had done, it was not uncommon that the same matter was revisited in a subsequent Assembly, usually the next year.

Where They Began—A Retrospective

We are looking at all this in retrospect with the understanding that some of the records reviewed were written after the fact and, indeed, several years later. This is important because, as often happens with history, later stages of development in an organization tend to influence how earlier events are interpreted and characterized. This is true even of those who lived through those events. With this in mind, I would caution that we do not need to treat what they attempted as absolutes. Ideas, concepts, and understandings evolved as the original leaders encountered and engaged one another and as the Church grew and expanded to involve men of differing abilities, persuasions, and callings.

Our Lord Himself withheld “many things” from His twelve disciples because they could not comprehend them until later and left it for the Holy Ghost to guide them into all truth (John 16:12–15). A good example of how the Holy Spirit broadened their horizons about the Gospel and its application is found in Acts 10, where Peter visited the house of Cornelius at the bidding of the Spirit.

What, then, did these brethren have in mind? Perhaps, it is not so much what they had in mind for this Church, but **rather where they began**. They began by seeking to complete what the Protestant Reformation had begun but, in their view, had fallen short of. They began with a fresh openness to the Holy Spirit and a willingness to follow His leading. They began with a restoration of the role of conscience. They began with the principles of **holiness** and **love** to be held in proper balance as characteristics of the Church. They began with the idea that the law of Christ, the law of love, should prevail. They began with a conscious need to reach the world with the Gospel. They began with the principle of unity and oneness among

¹¹*Book of Minutes*, op cit, p. 21.

God’s people. They began with the idea that all aspects of the New Testament church should be re-discovered and restored in practice.¹²

Implications and Direction—a Perspective

Obviously, these brethren did not and could not understand the implications and directions of all that they thought, sought, and encountered no more than the early church knew what it would become and do after Jesus ascended. Revelation of God’s will and purposes in this sense is ongoing under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. This was God’s call to the COGOP in 1984—a call back to a vital relationship with the Spirit and to a renewed burden for lost men and women. From this, the Church’s leadership launched “Turning to the Harvest” in 1994. There is a need for Church leaders to revisit the work done on this new paradigm and to study the brochure carefully once again. I believe that the thrust of this document is in the right direction—toward the continuing purposes that God has for the Church of God of Prophecy even now. More on this later!

¹²See *The Lost Link* by R. G. Spurling, *The Last Great Conflict* by A. J. Tomlinson, and *Book of Minutes*, op cit. for most of these ideas and concepts.

The Name “Church of God of Prophecy”

Outline

2

- Twenty-Eight Years in the Making
- The Emergence of the Name
- An Anthem Is Born
- A Lawyer’s Perspective and Challenge
- The Bible Name and Name Changes

Chapter 2

The Name “Church of God of Prophecy”

Twenty-Eight Years in the Making

Nine years after the death of A. J. Tomlinson (1865–1943) and some twenty-eight years after the filing of the first internecine lawsuit in Bradley County, Tennessee, between the two Church of God factions (over rights to the name), Bishop Milton A. Tomlinson, A. J.’s younger son who succeeded him as General Overseer, explained to the 47th Annual Assembly, 1952, that the case had finally been resolved. He had accepted on the Church’s behalf (since the Assembly was not in session) the judge’s decision to add the suffix “of Prophecy” to the name Church of God.¹³ This change, and its final summation and settlement by the court in March of 1953, made null and void an earlier decision that the Church be styled “Tomlinson Church of God.” The court had ruled this to be the legal name of the Church on April 8, 1929, but reaction from the field, particularly from the State of Virginia, caused the brethren at Headquarters to seek some redress.¹⁴ This petition, filed May 8, 1929, was ultimately denied (Tomlinson Diary, January 1, 1930), but temporary relief was granted to use language that would be agreed on by the Assembly on September 14, 1929, to wit, that the Church distinguish herself by the use of “Church of God over which A. J. Tomlinson is General Overseer,” or preferably, “Church of God, A. J. Tomlinson General Overseer.” The very lengthy Questions and Subjects Committee resolution, which was unanimously adopted rendered its “Fourth” Section, which came after five paragraphs of “Whereas” and three more of explanations as follows:

. . . that the name CHURCH OF GOD is a sacred name to us because it is a Bible name, and to be deprived of the free use of it would so stifle and afflict our consciences that discouragement and despair would constantly grind us down so we would scarcely have

¹³*Minutes of 47th Annual Assembly*, Church of God of Prophecy, 1952, pp. 28–30.

¹⁴*Diary of A. J. Tomlinson* (typewritten): Entries for April 13 and May 15, 1929, pp. 324, 325, COGOP Archives.

the heart and courage to maintain our orphanage work, keep our missionaries and workers on the fields, and maintain the institution in a general way. The name CHURCH OF GOD is a part of our religion, as much so as any other part of the Bible. And it becomes the more sacred to us when it is remembered that it has been purchased with the precious blood of Christ and is eventually to be presented to Him by Himself as shown at Acts 20:28 and Ephesians 5:27.¹⁵

The *Minutes* also note that “When the reading of the resolution was completed, great demonstrations broke out. People wept, laughed, shouted, and groaned.” Stanley R. Ferguson, Overseer of the Bahama Islands, led in a special physical demonstration, as the note put it, “. . . the power taking possession of [him].” The resolution was passed only “When all was quiet again. . . .”¹⁶ One can certainly sense the depth of emotional feeling and intensity of passion surrounding this issue. To our forebears, this was no ordinary matter. But, as noted in the way the *Assembly Minutes* for that year was titled (footnote 15), the case was not settled. It would drag on for another twenty-three tedious years at substantial cost to all parties.

The Emergence of the Name

The name “Church of God of Prophecy,” then, was officially assigned to “The Church of God, M. A. Tomlinson, General Overseer” on May 2, 1952, by the High Court of Chancery in Cleveland, Tennessee. The court stipulated that the suffix “of Prophecy” was to be used in all its secular affairs but not necessarily in its services and internal operations. As stated earlier, it had been known as “The Church of God over which A. J. Tomlinson was General Overseer” until his death in 1943. An incredible twenty years after Bishop Tomlinson re-started with about two to three thousand followers (1923), the issue of the name was still not settled. We will not go into other issues surrounding the lawsuits here. Suffice to say that the right to use the name for A. J. Tomlinson and his followers was obviously a matter of Bible practice. As they saw things, their claims to be the true continuation of the Church of God, which had come to its self-identity between 1886 and 1903, depended on it. Now it was felt that the Church had been lost again with the adoption and maintenance of a constitutional form of Government centered in an official Assembly. This had developed between 1920 and 1923 with the gradual ascendancy of the Assembly

¹⁵*Minutes of 24th Annual Assembly of The Church of God* (over which A. J. Tomlinson is General Overseer, by Permission Pending Further Hearing) 1929, pp. 41, 42.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 43.

Rulings as governing laws almost equal to the Bible.¹⁷ The issue over the name, then, though fought in the arena of secular courts, was more than just a matter of whether ministers' and church reports were getting to the right church headquarters in Cleveland, Tennessee. It was for them a matter of principle, an issue of identity and integrity.¹⁸ The implication of a faithful church versus a backslidden church is, of course, obvious and was directly tied to their concept of being true to the Bible.

A. J. Tomlinson prepared an article titled, "The Covering Removed," which was about the restoration of the Church after a long period of apostasy. Concerning the name, he wrote the following:

The Church, "My Church," the Church of God! Jesus and Paul named it, and who has a right to object to it? We have nothing more to do with naming it than we had in building it at the first. We only accept the name given by them. Paul said he received the knowledge about it by revelation, and he said he followed Christ, and he hands it down to us as the Church of God, and we do not expect to change it for anybody's whims and criticisms. We are going to let it remain just like it is—just like we found it except we are trying to clear off the filth and rubbish that was piled upon it by men who took the reins into their own hands and drove recklessly over it and dumped and belched and vomited as they went.¹⁹

Very early in our history, the Church was said to have "arisen" according to prophecy. After the assignment of the name "Church of God of Prophecy" and M. A. Tomlinson's explanation to the Church's General Assembly, preachers felt further justified using the designation "of Prophecy." It was taken as an additional positive indication that the Church of God of Prophecy was actually the Church prophesied of in texts like Isaiah 2, 49, 54, and 60. In fact, M. A. Tomlinson hinted that the Chancery court judge himself may have recognized that the Church was operating according to prophecy when he chose the suffix "of Prophecy."²⁰ As further reinforcement, open comparisons were made to the twelve spies Moses sent into the land of

¹⁷*Historical Annual Addresses*, Volume I, 1970, pp 218–220.

¹⁸The author recalls listening to Moses Stephens, who was the Overseer of the Church of God, M. A. Tomlinson, General Overseer, for some 26 years (1955–1970) relate the Tomlinson version of the 1923 split in which were the words, "A. J. Tomlinson lost everything, but he saved the beautiful Church of God."

¹⁹As quoted in *The Body of Christ*, A Correspondence Course of the Bible Training Institute, Church of God of Prophecy, 1974, p. 67, paragraph 2. The entire article was printed in tract form, a copy of which is in COGOP Archives.

²⁰*Minutes of the 47th Annual Assembly*, op cit. pp. 28, 29.

Canaan. Two of them, Joshua and Caleb, brought back a good and positive report. It was said that of the twelve elders under the Constitution in 1923, only two stood with A. J. Tomlinson. The allusion to this Old Testament type reinforced the idea of being a Bible people entitled to the name.²¹

An Anthem Is Born

This concept also spawned a song often used in the Church's weekly auxiliary services (especially the Church of Prophecy Marker Association—CPMA) and at other times:

The Church of God—the Church of Prophecy.

The message of the Church of God is spreading far and wide
To the far and distant lands across the sea,
To all the lost, the rich, the poor, wherever they may be,
The Church of God—the Church of Prophecy.

Chorus

She's sailing on and on, gathering up her own,
Spreading out across the ocean blue;
Her banners waving free, making all men see
The Church of God—the Church of Prophecy.

Jesus said other sheep I have, that isn't of this fold,
Them also we must help to bring in;
This is why the ensign waves, making all men see
The Church of God—the Church of Prophecy.

Like Moses did Brother A. J. led the Church for forty years,
And then he died in nineteen forty-three;
His mantle fell on his young son Brother Milton; he will lead
The Church of God—the Church of Prophecy.

Have you seen the bird of the air, as she flies above the earth
Carrying the gospel to the island [sic] of the sea?
This is it St. John saw in Patmos on his knees,
The Church of God—the Church of Prophecy.

And when our work is o'er down here and we go sailing through
To that happy home beyond the blue,
He then will say "Well done, My own, for I am proud of Thee,"
The Church of God—the Church of Prophecy.²²

²¹*Historical Annual Addresses*, Volume I, p. 222, paragraph 2.

²²Written in the 1950's by Wilburn Curtis, known in the COGOP as "Little Willie," Revival Song Pamphlet, n. d., COGOP Archives.

One difficulty encountered in working overseas was that in certain languages (notably of Asian origin such as Japanese and Korean) the name “Church of God of Prophecy” invariably translated as “God’s Church that Prophesies” or “The Church of God of the People who Prophecy.” The impression carried was that this Church prophesied (in the sense of foretelling or pronouncing future blessings) as a regular part of its operations. In those cases, it became necessary to adopt a more accurately reflective name such as “Bible Church of God,” which was used in South Korea with the English title, “The Church of God of Prophecy” below it. Of course, the suffix “of Prophecy” conveyed similar connotations even in English-speaking communities. This author was personally told by one pastor of the Capital Hill Church of God of Prophecy, Washington, D. C. that while mowing the local church’s lawn, he was once approached by a passerby who saw the church’s sign and wanted him to prophesy over him.

In at least two Latin American countries,²³ our Church is known as “La Iglesia de Dios de la Profecia Universal” due to some ministers who left us in earlier times and somehow obtained rights to the name ahead of the Church’s official registration in those countries.

A Lawyer’s Perspective and Challenge

An interesting and lengthy observation about the name Church of God of Prophecy, particularly the suffix “of Prophecy” was made by the late Cleveland lawyer Virgil Carmichael. He had defended the M. A. Tomlinson group (along with Solicitor Daniel Duke) in some phases of the court cases and was speaking before the Church’s 60th General Assembly in Cleveland, Tennessee, Tuesday, September 7, 1965:

I would like to recall with you a few memories. On the second day of May, 1952, I stood before the judge of the High Court of Chancery in the courthouse here in Cleveland. I was representing you and the Church. Many of you were also there—as many as could attend—for the courtroom that beautiful spring day was very crowded.

That was a memorable occasion, important in the history of the Church, for it was then and there that the court finally determined a lengthy lawsuit. The court ordered this Church to add the words “of Prophecy” as a suffix to its name, and to use this suffix in all its secular affairs. In other words, in all its worldly dealings, it was to use the name, The Church of God of Prophecy.

²³The two countries are Guatemala and El Salvador.

You and I were disappointed that morning. We felt helpless in the face of events that had happened before that day—things over which we had no control. But we did not feel defeated. Like Jacob who was disappointed at the end of his first seven years in the service of his father-in-law—Brother Tomlinson, you, and the others of the church continued your work without interruption.

Many years later, I stood on the square in Cleveland watching that same courthouse being torn down. My mind was flooded with memories of events, which had occurred in that building. Foremost in my mind was the memory of your case. As I was standing there, I clearly recalled the words of the judge on that morning some eleven years earlier when he enjoined this Church to use the words “of Prophecy” as a part of its name in all its material, worldly affairs.

As I stood there engrossed in my thoughts of yesterday, I witnessed the tower of that courthouse being pulled down. It fell down into a cloud of dust that boiled up like smoke from a consuming fire. Suddenly I was beset with the thought that material things—secular things, things of this world—all pass away. It is only the spiritual that is permanent and eternal. In that concept I saw that there would come a day when the words “of Prophecy” would no longer be necessary. For these words are purely of this world—the decree of the court said so—and things of this world pass away.

I realized then that the words “of Prophecy” signified the fact that this Church still has work to do. These words are a constant challenge to you. For so long as they are necessary, so long as they are a part of your name, your mission has not been fulfilled. Someday, like that courthouse tower, like all things of this world, those words too, being solely of this world, will fall away.

Someday, as an egg hatches and a chick steps forth into the light leaving the shell behind—someday, just as man goes through the process which we call death, when in his fulfillment the spirit of man steps out of his earthly body into a fuller life (leaving the corpse behind) then some day this Church will fulfill its mission and in that glorious day it will leave the words “of Prophecy” behind, and it will truly be “The Church of God.”

That day, when these thoughts had come to me, I searched out the foreman of that demolition project and obtained a piece of the stout oak wood, which had been a part of the structure of that building. That edifice had stood as a temple of justice for more than seventy years, which is the Biblical span of man’s life. I have had that piece

of oak milled into a gavel. This gavel represents all that remains of that building, the rest of which passed away. Tonight, Brother Tomlinson, I present this gavel to you, to the Church. It is a memory of that building and of that occasion in 1952. But more important, this gavel is symbolic of the fact that only the spiritual is eternal.”²⁴

The Bible Name and Name Changes

Generally speaking, the Church of God of Prophecy has considered “Church of God” as the Bible name for the Church implying both God’s ownership and the Church’s identity as a divine institution. As M. A. Tomlinson explained to the Assembly in 1952 . . .

There has been no change made in regard to the spiritual affairs of the Church. We can preach the Church of God from the Scriptures as we always have. . . . We can use the name Church of God in any manner we desire inside our church buildings as the court has made it clear that he did not want to interfere with our religious worship. . . . The fact is, the Church did not change the name. We could not change the name. Since it is recorded in the Bible as the Church of God, we do not have authority to make a change, but as stated before, the courts of the land have control of property rights, and we were given a name to use in business affairs.²⁵

Current trends throughout the church-world, including its Pentecostal segment, show that as local churches assert their primacy, institutional (read denominational) names are giving way to more local community-oriented designations without regard to any particular Bible name for the Church. Does this tell us something about the importance and relevance of names or about some broader denominational failing in relation to local congregations? I note for example that the 2007 telephone directory in Cleveland, Tennessee, listed both Peerless Road Church of God of Prophecy and Peerless Road Church also in a stand-alone listing albeit in smaller print. The Peerless Road Church listing comes first in sequence. This name was voted in by a quarterly business conference as the congregation’s choice. Of course, the Church’s marquis carries the appropriate subtitle, “A Ministry of the Church of God of Prophecy.” This is a fairly common practice (and a growing one) across the Church of God of Prophecy in North America and some other areas.

²⁴*Minutes of the 60th Worldwide Assembly*, 1965, Church of God of Prophecy, pp. 10, 11.

²⁵*Minutes of the 47th Assembly* op cit, pp. 28, 29.

The views and contentions of our forefathers over the name “Church of God”—its importance, applications, and uses—had more specific and narrower foci on all sides. However, those views and foci are being challenged and, for the most part, exchanged for both a wider and more locally relevant view of how the Church should be labeled. Much of this trend is centered in the positive sense of the Church’s mission as functioning within a particular community. In the negative, there is a detectable tendency, based somewhat in national and world public opinion regarding organized religion (particularly large, centrally run denominations), to distance the local congregation from its traditional denominational identity. Television ministry failures, monetary mismanagement, the sordid sexual scandals in some major church operations and schools that went uncorrected for so long, and the doctrinal tensions over homosexuality as a lifestyle do not encourage a rush to re-embrace corporate identity. What implications (in the long run) this trend to re-localization may have remains to be seen. Of course, from a historical perspective, this surfaces the age-old tensions between the practical outworking of the church—local and the church—universal. In this sense, the Church of God of Prophecy considers herself an integral whole, interdependent both in mission and in governmental functions and operations.

Question: Is Attorney Carmichael’s view that when the Church of God of Prophecy does her work as fully and completely as she should, all man-made, temporary designations will fall away like the old court house building and then she will truly be the “Church of God”?



The Elders in front of the Evangel Publishing Company on
Gaut Street, with A. J. Tomlinson kneeling at far right.

The Search for Greater Truth

Outline



- Initiation 1884–1902
- A New Leader Enters 1903–1922
- A Pentecostal Transformation
- Spirit-Led Leadership and Church Expansion

C h a p t e r

3

The Search for Greater Truth

Initiation 1884–1902

In this, the second post-centennial decade since the events of 1902 and 1903 at the Holiness Church at Camp Creek in North Carolina, we pause to take a brief but interpretive chronological/historical look at the Church of God of Prophecy through the prism of her leaders and their times. I write as one among the millions from far-away lands (footnote 82) who have been drawn to this Movement, influenced and inspired by the leadership and stories of these leaders. Significant dynamics were at work. Strong and, at times, conflicting impulses, managerial styles, personality and social differences, conceptual approaches, and doctrinal divides resulted or culminated in several branches of the Movement, but all sprang initially from the same root—the late nineteenth century quest for truth, holiness, and a recovery of New Testament (read Apostolic) practices.

The American Civil War was over (1865), and this nation of “Manifest Destiny”²⁶ was again searching for the heart of its national consciousness and its place and purpose in history. The old paradigm of being “The New Israel” had been shattered by the war, and men of religious sensitivity and deep spiritual persuasion were searching for the way forward. Approximately one half-generation later (19 years plus or minus), restorationist stirrings would surface in the life of Richard G. Spurling, a licensed Baptist minister. The son of Baptist Elder Richard Spurling, he was a leading and courageous man in his community. He had tried, since 1884, to bring certain reforms to the local church of which he was a member, the Missionary Baptist Church. He, together with a few others, had searched the Scriptures and church history through prayerful and tearful eyes and was convinced that a new reformation was necessary. His pleadings to the local congregation rejected, R. G. Spurling felt he had to act.

²⁶*Webster’s New World Dictionary*, Second College Edition, defines this Americanism as “the 19th century doctrine postulating the continued territorial expansion of the United States as its obvious destiny: term current during the annexation of territories in the Southwest and Northwest [US] and of islands in the Pacific and Caribbean.”

When forming “Christian Union” in Monroe County, Tennessee, August 19, 1886, he and the eight persons who joined him predicated their actions on three main premises: First, the noble and illustrious reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who launched and inaugurated Protestantism, had failed to reform from creeds. Second, the Reformers adopted the law of faith when they should have adopted the law of love. Third, the Reformers failed to reserve a right of way for the leadership of the Holy Ghost and for conscience. A fourth point was added, which stated, “They awakened to the fact that God’s Church existed only where His law and government was observed by His children.”²⁷ These beliefs were fiercely held and fervently taught by Spurling. Although he was indeed a man of some means,²⁸ the infant group struggled to survive until about 1896 when laymen of Methodist and Baptist persuasion took up the radical holiness message bringing revival to the area.²⁹

Spurling eventually learned of this and came to know a little group that had been influenced by this revival and had survived the persecution associated with it. They usually met at the home of William F. Bryant in Camp Creek, North Carolina, just over the Tennessee line. Bryant and Spurling, in an attempt to curb excesses and save their groups, organized the Holiness Church at Camp Creek on May 15, 1902. Spurling’s vision and leadership is notable for its tenacity and persistent quest for New Testament practice during two decades and in the midst of substantial ebbs and flows of the restorationist tide. Though struggling, the Movement that would eventually become the Church of God, Church of God of Prophecy et al. had been born.

A New Leader Enters 1903–1922

Ambrose Jessup Tomlinson (A. J.) was born in a Quaker community near Westfield, Indiana, and into a family with Quaker roots on September 22, 1865. His mother, Delilah Hiatt Tomlinson, was the second wife of Milton Tomlinson whose first wife, Hannah Davis Tomlinson, had passed away on January 25, 1844, one month after the birth of their first child, Abigail. Milton and Delilah were married in November of the same year and had nine children of which Ambrose was the youngest. Five of the nine children preceded their mother in death, three as little children.

²⁷*Book of Minutes, General Assemblies, Churches of God*, pp. 7, 8.

²⁸Mickey Crews: *The Church of God, A Social History* (Knoxville, TN: University of TN Press, 1990), pp. 6–9.

²⁹These men, William Martin, Joe M. Tipton, and Milton McNabb of the same Monroe County where Spurling lived, held a revival in 1896 at the Schearer Schoolhouse in Cherokee County, NC. They were associated with the Fire Baptized Holiness Church of B. H. Irwing. (See *Book of Minutes*, op cit, p. 10, and, the *New Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Stanley M. Burgess, Ed., Zondervan 2002, pp. 640, 804.)

Although little is known about A. J.'s young life, we have glimpses. R. G. Robins writes the following in his biography of Tomlinson:

. . . but three things are clear: he was gifted academically; he continued to face illness and misfortune; and his father at least tried to take an active role in his life.³⁰

A. J. married Mary Jane Taylor at Bentonville, Indiana, on April 24, 1889, and later that year in his home and under conviction through the influence of his wife and a severe thunderstorm, they read the Bible and he prayed until, in his words, “. . . I got a real experience of salvation.”³¹ He claimed the definite experience of sanctification in 1893 and was later baptized with the Holy Ghost. Because of the importance of the leadership of the Holy Spirit in the history of the Church of God of Prophecy, I depart from the beginning narrative to insert here the Pentecostal transformation of Tomlinson's life, the lives of his family, and of the Movement he led.

A Pentecostal Transformation³²

Since his own dramatic experience with the Holy Ghost in 1908 (described below), the Churches he led, Church of God Cleveland, Tennessee, and what became the Church of God of Prophecy also of Cleveland, Tennessee, have continued in the classical Pentecostal tradition.³³ Gaston B. Cashwell, who had his own Pentecost at the Azusa Street outpouring in Los Angeles in late 1906,³⁴ was invited by Tomlinson to preach on the Holy Ghost at the 3rd General Assembly of the Church of God, held January 10–12, 1908.³⁵ Given the Holiness background of the

³⁰R. G. Robins, *A. J. Tomlinson—Plainfolk Modernist* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 79. Note: A. J. Tomlinson's long-term secretary Lille Duggar, once wrote, “It would make an interesting book if a full story of the early life of this man of God had been written” (Duggar: A. J. Tomlinson, 1964, p. 18). Perhaps Robins' well-researched work fills this void.

³¹A. J. Tomlinson, *Last Great Conflict*, 1913: Reprint (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1984), pp. 223, 224.

³²This section on the Pentecostal Transformation of A. J. Tomlinson's life and the Movements that he led was first written and published in the PCCNA's book, *Servants of the Spirit—Portraits of Pentecostal/Charismatic Pioneers*, First Edition: Editor, Andrea Johnson (Des Moines, IA: OBC Publishing, 2010), where it appears as Chapter 8. It is used here by kind permission.

³³*Pentecostals from the Inside Out*: Harold B. Smith, Editor, (Christianity Today Series, Victor Books, 1990). See Chapter 9, by Russell P. Spittler, for references to classical Pentecostals.

³⁴*Azusa Street and Its Legacy*: Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M. Robeck Jr. Editors (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2006), p. 117.

³⁵A. J. Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict* (Press of Walter E. Rodgers, 1913); Reprint, White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1984, p. 233. See also typed copy, *Diary of A. J. Tomlinson*, COGOP Archives, Cleveland, TN, entry for January 13, 1908.

Church's leadership at the time, it is noteworthy how the program for the Assembly read in expectation of Cashwell:

January 11, 1908

7:00 p. m.: Service on Pentecostal Lines. We expect Brother G. B. Cashwell of Dunn, N. C.

January 12, 1908

10:40 a.m.: Preaching or Pentecostal Service

7:00 p. m.: Service on Pentecostal Lines³⁶

Tomlinson had been preaching about the Holy Ghost from the Book of Acts for sometime before he was baptized with the Spirit. He claimed, for instance, that shortly after his very definite sanctification experience, he was "hungry for God" and led in seeking a Pentecostal experience though with little or no cooperation from others. Some even regarded him as fanatical.³⁷ We note also that in the edited version of his Diary, there is an entry dated October 30, 1897, which includes the following sentence:

Received Holy Ghost about March 1896.³⁸

This would have been 12 years before his 1908 experience. Exactly what was meant by his statement, "Received Holy Ghost," given his Sanctification experience above, remains unclear.

In Tomlinson's greatest literary work, *The Last Great Conflict*, which was written about 1913, he states as follows:

In January 1907, I became more fully awakened on the subject of receiving the Holy Ghost *as He was poured out on the day of Pentecost*. I did not have the experience, so I was almost always among the seekers at the altar. The Lord gave great revivals, and souls were converted and sanctified, and some really went through and were baptized with the Holy Ghost evidenced by the speaking in tongues (italics mine).³⁹

³⁶Photocopy of Program Outline for 3rd Annual Assembly of the Churches of East Tennessee, North Georgia, Western North Carolina, (on file) Hal Bernard Dixon Jr. Pentecostal Research Center, Cleveland, TN.

³⁷*The Last Great Conflict*: Reprint, White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1984, pp. 227, 232.

³⁸*Diary of A. J. Tomlinson*, Volume III: Homer Tomlinson, Editor, COGOP Archives, Cleveland, TN, p. 13.

³⁹*The Last Great Conflict*, p. 232.

Tomlinson was a relentless and honest seeker after truth, so we can assume he had some special encounters with the Spirit but not according to the apostles' experience in Acts 2. Five years after he had been baptized in the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in other tongues, he wrote his thoughts about the difficulties of obtaining God's spiritual blessings. Of course, his Diary has numerous early references to his waiting on the Holy Ghost, being led or directed by the Spirit, or that the Spirit worked mightily in various services. This type of language would not have been unusual even for those who remained in the Holiness Movement. The following paragraph seems to be his attempt to systematize by degrees the efforts expended in seeking spiritual experiences:

In God's economy He has made the spiritual blessings difficult to obtain in like proportion. Justification by faith is more easily seen and obtained than sanctification through the blood of Christ. In like manner is the baptism with the Holy Ghost a little deeper down and more difficult to obtain, and much more patience is required in seeking for it, as is the case with the search for gold and precious stones. And the result is that many fail to find the precious experience because so much time, patience, and perseverance is required.⁴⁰

Perhaps this comment reflected his personal, protracted experience of more than a year (1906–1908), seeking the baptism with the evidence of speaking in tongues. One wonders whether this might have been the beginning or at least an embryonic reflection of the three-step approach that developed in the classical Pentecostal altar and in public testimonies during Pentecostal services.⁴¹

In the late nineteenth century, regardless of the common talk among Holiness believers of being led by the Spirit or being filled with the Spirit, there seemed to be that lingering sense that there was always “something more.” For Tomlinson, the defining moment that terminated his search and settled the issue of a true Pentecostal experience, once and for all, was

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁴¹This author remembers growing up in a Pentecostal church in the Virgin Islands where the standard testimony form was “I'm saved, sanctified holy (for some that meant spelling out, “w-h-o-l-l-y”), filled with the Holy Ghost, and feel like going on.” It should be noted that for many Pentecostals, Sanctification as a “second definite work of grace” was not adopted as an intermediate step to Holy Spirit baptism. Even for some classical Pentecostals, this is not emphasized as in earlier times although instantaneous Sanctification as taught and practiced in some Wesleyan traditions is still among their lists of teachings.

Sunday morning, January 12, 1908. While listening to Cashwell's sermon, Tomlinson had a very dramatic and physical encounter with the Holy Ghost. His descriptions are too detailed to mention all here, but after slipping off a chair to the floor at Cashwell's feet, his body was greatly exercised and appeared to be examined as by a physician as he rolled and tossed back and forth experiencing floods of joy and glory. He writes, in part . . .

Then came a very interesting part of the experience. . . . In vision I was carried to Central America and was shown the awful condition of the people there. A paroxysm of suffering came over me as I seemed to be in soul-travail for their salvation. Then I spoke in tongues as the Spirit gave utterance, and in the vision I seemed to be speaking the very same language of the Indian tribes with whom I was surrounded.

Then after a little rest, I was carried in vision to South America. . . . The vision settled on Brazil, and after another paroxysm of suffering or soul-travail the Spirit spoke again in another tongue; then, after a little relaxation, I was carried to Chil[e] with the same effects and results; then in like manner to Patagonia. . . . From Patagonia to Africa and on to Jerusalem, and while there, I endured the most intense suffering as if I might have been suffering similar to that of my Savior on Mount Calvary. I never can describe the awful agony that I felt in my body. After every paroxysm of suffering came a tongue. From Jerusalem I was carried to Northern Russia, then to France, thence to Japan; and then I seemed to get back to the United States, but soon I was taken away North among the Esquimaux [Eskimo]. While there the language of the Spirit spoken through me seemed similar to the bark of a dog. I was carried to a number of other places in a similar manner. . . . With all I have written, it is not yet told; but judging from the countries I visited in the vision I spoke ten different languages. . . . Since having received this wonderful experience—being baptized with the Holy Ghost as they were baptized on the day of Pentecost—God has revealed Himself and given many special manifestations of His presence and power in my life. Three times since, the same power has enveloped me and lifted me up from the floor similar to the way He lifted me up the day He came in to abide. Three times during special manifestations of His presence, truthful witnesses have seen “like as of fire” resting near and around my head.

I have traveled thousands of miles and told the simple story and related my experience to thousands of people and have seen hundreds

baptized with the Holy Ghost; and every one who received Him spake [sic] in tongues as the Spirit gave utterance.⁴²

Tomlinson was obviously a very intense and passionate person, one for whom drama held some attraction as evidenced by his membership as a young man in the Grassy Narrows literary society and his participation in its drama troupe.⁴³ In his search for deeper experiences and for an acceptable ecclesiology, Tomlinson would investigate various denominations and independent groups and attend a variety of public meetings, conventions, or conferences. For example, he visited Frank Sanford's Movement in Shiloh, Maine, at least twice and was baptized by both Brother Gleason, an assistant to Sanford, and by Sanford himself.⁴⁴ He was also present at G. D. Watson's convention in Elwood, Indiana, during May of 1903.⁴⁵ Harold Hunter shows that Tomlinson's travels "introduced him to the ministries of Moody, Robinson, Simpson, Watson, Reese, Knapp, Merritt, Taylor, and others."⁴⁶ These influences, the several periodicals with which we know Tomlinson was familiar,⁴⁷ and his exposure to the radical holiness practices of Quakerism shaped his life, biblical views, Spirit sensitivities, and missionary activities. He became an indefatigable worker. His leadership skills and commanding presence were almost always quickly recognized by others.⁴⁸ He was also quick to apply institutionally what he had learned and experienced personally. In 1913, having not yet been selected as General Overseer for life but well-established in his leadership, he summarized qualifications for admitting members into the Church:

The applicants for membership are expected to accept the teaching of repentance, water baptism (by immersion), sanctification subsequent to conversion, the *baptism with the Holy Ghost on the sanctified life evidenced by the speaking in tongues as the Spirit gives utterance*, the Lord's Supper, feet-washing, eternal punishment for the wicked

⁴²*Answering the Call of God—The Marvelous Experiences of A. J. Tomlinson* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1973), pp. 10–13.

⁴³Letter of A. J. Tomlinson to his friend Ellis Barker as quoted by Roger G. Robins in *A. J. Tomlinson, Plain Folk Modernist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 84, 85.

⁴⁴See typed copy of *A. J. Tomlinson's Diary*, COGOP Archives, Cleveland, TN: Diary Entries for October 30, 1897 and October 1, 1901.

⁴⁵Diary Entry for May 10, 1903.

⁴⁶*The NEW International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements (Revised and Expanded Edition)*: Stanley Burgess, Editor and Eduard M Van Der Maas, Associate Editor (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), p. 1,143.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 1,144. Hunter's article lists *Evangelical Visitor, Tongues of Fire, The Mountain Missionary, The Way of Faith, God's Revivalist, and the Bible Advocate*.

⁴⁸*Book of Minutes, General Assemblies Churches of God* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1922), p. 13.

and eternal life for the righteous, divine healing, tithing and offerings, and the second pre-millennial coming of the Lord. Applicants must sever their connection with churches and lodges, if not already free from them (*italics mine*).⁴⁹

Tomlinson noted various tent meetings, local church services, and General Assemblies that he conducted between 1908 and 1921. The following is one of his early annual summaries of the results of his work:

Held meetings at tent. Closed out tonight after a ten weeks [sic] successful battle. 225 professions and 163 received the baptism of the Holy Ghost; 78 baptized in water; 106 accessions to the church. Quite a number healed.⁵⁰

In the midst of such intense Holy Ghost fervor, the Church grew from its small beginning in 1902 at the home of W. F. Bryant, Cherokee County, North Carolina, to some 666 churches and 21,076 members in 1922.⁵¹ By then, others with as much or more formal education and business acumen as Tomlinson had been brought into the Movement. Sheer size called for better organization. A change to plural leadership was the result of the decisions of several General Assemblies leading up to the introduction of a formal Constitution in 1921. This Constitution was drawn up by the General Overseer and elders in council and presented to the Assembly by the General Overseer both through his address and by him reading it to the Assembly.⁵² After the Assembly's quick acceptance and a thanksgiving prayer to God in recognition of the Holy Ghost, Tomlinson exclaimed, "BEHOLD WHAT GOD HATH WROUGHT."⁵³ After a heart-wrenching nine months,⁵⁴ he found its implementation troublesome to the churches and to his office and concluded that a grave error was made in departing from Bible government. Tomlinson decided to seek the reversal of what he saw as an infringement on the right-of-way of the Holy Ghost and an undue elevation of Assembly rulings and decisions vis-à-vis the place of the Bible in the Church. In short, the Constitution had to be rescinded or

⁴⁹*The Last Great Conflict*, p. 217.

⁵⁰Portions from typed copy of *A. J.'s Diary*: Entry for October 14, 1908, COGOP Archives.

⁵¹C. T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock, Volume I* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1973), p. 604.

⁵²*Ibid.*, pp. 557–562. See also *Historical Annual Addresses, Volume I* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Press, 1970), pp. 163–167, for A. J. Tomlinson's remarks about the subject under the heading "The Seventy."

⁵³*Upon This Rock*, p. 562.

⁵⁴*Historical Annual Addresses, Volume I*, p. 218.

the Church of God would be compromised. He referred the matter to the Committee on Better Government, which did not agree with him.⁵⁵

One can only imagine the turmoil within Tomlinson's breast and the tension in the Assembly. The unfortunate incidents over the next year resulted in a complete break with a majority of the leadership and membership of the Church and a re-start for Tomlinson. With the few that remained, he re-initiated, re-activated, or continued what for him and others were the original principles of the Movement: the Bible as the Word of God—the Church's only law book—and the leadership of the Holy Ghost, which he felt was completely missed in the 1921 Assembly despite his own claims. Daniel Preston, in *The Era of A. J. Tomlinson*, wrote of the break:

The seventeenth Annual Assembly held at Cleveland, Tennessee, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred twenty-two, was the last united Assembly presided over by A. J. Tomlinson.⁵⁶

On August 8, 1923, at a meeting of representatives from several states in Chattanooga, Tennessee, A. J. Tomlinson and his followers made the decision to do the following:

. . . repudiate the Constitution and every other action of past Assemblies that caused the departure from the faith and true biblical principles, and, by God's permission and help, resolve ourselves back into the Church of God under Bible rule and government.⁵⁷

This meeting, along with several subsequent actions, led to the convening of a General Assembly on November 22–27, 1923, to affirm and effect these decisions. Tomlinson's high regard for the direct and deliberate leadership of the Holy Ghost in the affairs of the Church, and his concern that the Church defer to and depend upon the Holy Ghost, is seen in his

⁵⁵*Ibid.* Note: The more practical human and organizational issues (power, management, financial problems, and operational style) are not deliberately ignored but will be treated in brief later on. Interested readers are referred to *Like a Mighty Army (Definitive Edition)* by Charles Conn; *The Holiness Pentecostal Tradition*, Vinson Synan; *A. J. Tomlinson Plainfolk Modernist*, Roger Robins; *The Era of A. J. Tomlinson*, Daniel Preston, and the Centennial Commemorative Issue *White Wing Messenger* June 2003—official publication of the COGOP. See especially articles by Vinson Synan and Adrian Varlack.

⁵⁶Daniel D. Preston, *The Era of A. J. Tomlinson* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1984), p. 139.

⁵⁷*Historical Annual Addresses, Volume I*, p. 219; the reference to "Church of God" here is to the Church in the biblical sense of the name and to the nature of the Church they originally sort to restore on New Testament lines before the Assembly added what they now considered extra-biblical structures.

plea addressed to the Holy Ghost during his address to those remaining loyal to him:

O, Thou heavenly dove, Thou hast been thrust aside and grieved—but we have been grieved too. Wilt Thou accept the place in our midst as instructor, guide, and ruler according to all the divine plan of our Father God? We want Thee to have due honor, and, if Thou wilt only quicken us to service, we here and now renew our pledge of faithfulness to Thee. We want Thy presence; we want Thy wisdom to be displayed among us; we want Thy power to be demonstrated. We do not want our faith to become attached to human wisdom, but we want it anchored to the power of God—Thou, the blessed Holy Ghost. O Thy sacred presence is here. How our souls are delighted with Thee. Please never leave us again. If others do not want Thee, we want Thee to always know that Thou art welcome here. We want Thee to feel free to move about amongst us as Thou seest best for our good and the glory of Jesus, whom Thou camest to exalt and glorify. O heavenly, heavenly Dove, we want to speak good to Thee, we want to speak good of Thee always. We want Thee to direct this campaign that is to go down in history as a last days Church revolution. We know it will go right if Thou hast control. We will not be deceived by spies who may come into our midst. We will not be deceived by traitors who may be among us, for we depend upon Thee. O, Thou Holy One from on high, preserve and keep us for we are not able to keep ourselves without Thee. We will continue to look to Thee; we depend upon Thee at all times.⁵⁸

Not only did Tomlinson's 1908 Pentecostal experience transform his own life, his family's,⁵⁹ and the whole Church of God institution he led through 1922, it was also a major factor in his continuance of the branch that ultimately became known as the Church of God of Prophecy by a Chancery Court decision in 1952.⁶⁰ Tomlinson's plea to the Holy Ghost (above) in his capacity as leader of the Church grounded the work firmly on the twin principles of a) the Bible as the Word of God and (b) the Holy Spirit as Interpreter of the Word and the Teacher, Guide, and Director of the Church. Today both Church of God of Prophecy and Church of

⁵⁸*Historical Annual Addresses Volume I*, pp. 219–220.

⁵⁹Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, p. 368, gives the dates each of the other family members received the baptism as follows: Halcy Olive (a daughter), August 10, 1908; Homer Aubry (son), August 18, 1908; Mary Jane (wife to A. J. Tomlinson), August 21, 1908; Iris Marea (a daughter), July 23, 1909; Milton Ambrose (son), August 14, 1927.

⁶⁰See 1952 *Minutes* of the 47th Assembly, The Church of God of Prophecy, pp. 28–30 for the explanation by M. A. Tomlinson, who succeeded his father as General Overseer in 1943.

God leadership have shown sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit in bringing wonderful reconciliation, fellowship, and cooperation through joint ventures between these two groups once led in unity by A. J. Tomlinson. Both Movements continue to draw nurture from their deep roots in Pentecost as witnessed here.

Spirit-Led Leadership and Church Expansion

When author and scholar Philip Jenkins⁶¹ titled his study of Southern Christianity “The Next Christendom—The Coming of Global Christianity” (Oxford University Press, 2002), his premise surrounded the future of Christianity. Some of his well-educated friends and academic colleagues were skeptical of this theme. Their common assumption was that Christianity is dying and “at best cannot survive in its present form.”⁶² His idea was that there is a new global Christianity on the ascendancy, a Christianity that is not geographically centered in the North (Western world—Europe, North America) but in the South (Africa, Asia, and Latin America), generally known internationally as the “Two-thirds World.” The strength of his argument rests with the explosive growth of Southern Pentecostal churches and of Pentecostalism as a whole. Southern churches thrive, Jenkins says . . .

. . . because of their appeal to distinctly African or Latin American ideas, their ability to work within traditional culture, but these examples of accommodation do not amount to a betrayal of the faith, still less to syncretism. The rising churches can plausibly claim to be following abundantly documented precedents from the founding ages of Christianity. The Bible itself so readily supports a worldview bases on spirits, healing, and exorcism.⁶³

It is precisely in Africa, Latin America, parts of Asia, and since 1992, the Eastern European countries that emerged from the former Soviet Union, that explosive growth has taken place in the COGOP membership. Indeed, it would not be unfair to claim that it was A. J. Tomlinson’s acceptance of the Pentecostal message and, specifically, through the influence of the Azusa Street Revival under African-American William J. Seymour that

⁶¹Philip Jenkins is Edwin Earle Sparks, Professor of the Humanities at Penn State University, and in 2009 became also a Distinguished Senior Fellow at Baylor University’s Institute for Studies of Religion. Among his other works are *The New Face of Christianity* (2006); *God’s Continent* (2007); and *The Lost History of Christianity* (2008). Recently, Jenkins has caused quite a stir with his very controversial comment, during a National Public Radio “All Things Considered” interview, March 18 2010, that the Bible is a more violent book than the Koran.

⁶²Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, pp. 8, 9.

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 127.

helped spark the growth of the Church of God/Church of God of Prophecy in the early years of the twentieth century.⁶⁴ This same emphasis on the work of the Holy Ghost characterizes the growth of the Church of God of Prophecy today. We now return to the subject of the new leadership dynamic.

Having made earlier contact with the humble but courageous mountain folk (R. G. Spurling and W. F. Bryant), A. J. joined the Church on June 13, 1903, and was immediately set forth for ministry and selected as pastor.⁶⁵ This act brought new leadership into the mix for Tomlinson, who was strong on organizational issues, well-traveled, and acquainted with the cities, commerce, and politics of the nation. Besides expanding into several states, the little group, under Tomlinson's Spirit-filled leadership, entered the Bahamas in 1909/1910 through contacts made in Florida.⁶⁶ The year 1906 had seen the first Assembly of the churches to seek more light and knowledge of the Scriptures and to better organize themselves. A. J. Tomlinson both moderated and kept the minutes. He recorded that as evangelism was discussed, "strong men wept and said they were not only willing but real anxious to go."⁶⁷ It is worth noting that Tomlinson, an admirer of the United States governmental system, was not afraid of big organizations, but others in the Movement had had sour experiences in their

⁶⁴A comparison of the statistical data in *COGOP Assembly Minutes* shows that its worldwide membership grew exponentially from 261,641 in 1990 to an astounding 1,334,781 in 2008. In reporting statistics on Pentecostalism as a whole a number of writers follow David B. Barrett's, et al, *World Christian Encyclopedia* 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Barrett, et al. estimate (p. 19) that, by 2005, adherents of Pentecostalism (including Charismatics) would rise to an estimated 600 million, the second largest distinct group of Christians in the world. They are found on every continent and in some 236 nations.

⁶⁵*Diary*: Entry for June 13, 1903.

⁶⁶Edmund S. Barr, a native Bahamian, had received the baptism of the Holy Ghost in a Florida camp meeting under A. J. Tomlinson and left to the Bahamas November, 1909. He commenced evangelistic efforts to establish the Church of God. His close friend and former Methodist minister-pensioner, R. M. Evans, who joined him in the Bahamas about two months later, wrote in *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel* (March 1, 1909 [sic] [1910]), 7, "We . . . immediately looked up Brother and Sister Barr who were . . . making full proof of their ministry. . . . We obtained a cottage and began to cooperate with them immediately" (Quoted in *Reclaiming Our Heritage*, Joseph E. Jackson, Church of God Black Ministries, Cleveland TN, 1993, p. 34). This makes Barr the **first** ever Church of God volunteer missionary (representative) outside the United States, a fact that was officially recognized by a proclamation by then Church of God (Cleveland, TN) General Overseer R. Lamar Vest in 1992 (Jackson 1993, p. 33). Barr was also the **first** Church of God minister of the Black race to be licensed (1909) and was ordained a Bishop in 1912. He served as State Overseer of the Colored work in Florida for 1915 and 1916 when that work was administered separately due to the "race problem" [Conn, 1996, op cit, pp. 116, 117, 150]. See also Michael S. Swann: *2009 Heritage Calendar Church of God of Prophecy Bahamas* (a Chronology), Nassau, Bahamas, copy in COGOP Archives.

⁶⁷*Minutes of Annual Assembly of the Churches of East Tennessee, North Georgia and Western North Carolina* (tract form), p. 4, paragraph 2.

reformation efforts. Yet they, and particularly Richard G. Spurling, had recognized the necessity of some organization when they set the group in order in 1902.⁶⁸

In these men, both the larger organizational impulse and the constraint that tended to prevent organizational excesses met. Both men were students of the Bible and Christian history, with Tomlinson the most widely read, the most competent writer, and the most adventurous. He held his first international campaign in February of 1911 (Bahamas) and led the way in developing principal ministries: a publishing house (1913), a Bible Training School (1918), and an orphanage (1920). In 1904, he had already moved to Cleveland, Tennessee, the largest railroad town in the area (just under 5,000) where with others he organized and assumed the pastorate of a church. Of course, this move also facilitated his busy travel itinerary. His Quaker heritage and abolitionist upbringing had prepared him to deal more equitably with all races than some of his Southern counterparts could in those early years. His early forays into the Caribbean and among Southern blacks were not unexpected. His address to the 1920 Assembly called for a plan to reach out to the Spanish-speaking people and other nationalities, including the translation of the Evangel into their languages.⁶⁹ A section titled “Our Colored People” was part of his address to the 1922 Assembly, and he specifically mentioned the problems south of the Mason-Dixon Line.⁷⁰

Tomlinson’s broad vision, indefatigable zeal, and the great cooperation and evangelistic spirit that was prevalent among leadership, resulted in phenomenal growth. The *Assembly Minutes* of 1922 showed 21,076 members, 666 churches, and almost 1,000 ministers in 30 states, the Bahamas, China, and Jamaica. Property values were approaching \$430,000.⁷¹ But all was not well as we shall see.

⁶⁸*Book of Minutes*, op cit, p. 13.

⁶⁹*Historical Annual Addresses*, Volume I, pp. 144–146.

⁷⁰C. Mason and J. Dixon surveyed the boundary line between Pennsylvania and Maryland (1763–67); this was regarded before the Civil War as separating free states from slave states, or as now, the North from the South—*Webster’s New World College Dictionary*, Third Edition, 1995.

⁷¹*Minutes of the 17th Annual Assembly*, 1922, p. 56.

Failures and Opportunities

Outline

4

Recovery and Redirection 1923–1943:

- Tensions—Two Philosophies
- A Leader’s Dilemma
- Developments in Church Governance
- A Fateful Irony

Chapter 4

Failures and Opportunities

Recovery and Re-direction 1923–1943

Tensions—Two Philosophies

Around 1914, the sense of where this Movement would go (and the extent to which it could grow) had apparently begun to dawn on its leaders. As with any healthy, growing organization, even one with pristine spiritual and biblical claims, social interaction and the dynamics of doing the organization's work create both opportunities for leadership in new areas and opportunistic chances for personal success, which astute persons quickly perceive. The American ideals of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" and "bigger is better" were no less real in the rural South than elsewhere. There was now an expanding kingdom to be ruled, economy to be managed, influence to be had, powers to be exercised, future to be secured, and course to be charted.

Who would do this, how could it best be done, and whether individuals could take business advantage of growing market opportunities became part of the mix. In a very real sense, the struggle that had begun between two non-compatible philosophies of church organization (one tending toward an *overarching centrality—the American Government model*, and the other toward *congregational autonomy in free association/s—the traditional Baptist model*) would eventually come to a head. Of course, there would be other dynamics at work on various levels such as an individual's freedom of conscience to interpret God's Word, one of the initial premises of the Movement.⁷² By and large, these two philosophies and those who espoused them (Tomlinson and Spurling respectively) became determining factors.

⁷²*Book of Minutes*, op cit, p. 8.

The historic tensions between individual freedom and corporate organization, between the rightful assertions of a leader and the perceived interests of the group he leads, between the leader's clear responsibility and the necessary accountability that arises to check potential excesses, are not forces that are easily managed. Indeed, in the secular American model, this tension is a given between the two initiating branches of government, the Executive and the Legislative, and is generally mediated by the third branch, the Judicial. In retrospect, it is somewhat ironic that our first Assembly (1906) decided that it would not be a "legislative or executive body, but judicial only."⁷³ The Word of God was considered law. It only had to be interpreted and applied under the guidance of the Holy Spirit based, of course, on the chosen judicial principle.⁷⁴ This principle was understood as "theocratic," theocracy being "government by direction of God, operated through human beings wholly surrendered to God."⁷⁵

Maintaining this premise proved more difficult as the concept of organization and its constantly evolving and controlling bodies grew. As stated above, 1921 saw the culmination of these tensions with the adoption of a Constitution, which, for all practical purposes, became the central governing instrument of the churches. Its powers rested principally with eighty-three men: a General Overseer, Council of twelve, and Seventy Elders.⁷⁶

A Leader's Dilemma

A. J. Tomlinson, who, as reported above, at first celebrated this concept of organization as a God-wrought achievement, came to view it the next year as a serious departure from the first principles of the Movement, God's Word as law and God's Spirit as interpreter and applicator of that Word. The Assembly was judicial only, a place to search the Word and to crystallize and record findings. Those findings were not to become enforceable laws that rival God's Word or supplant God's Spirit.⁷⁷ The individual's right to interpret God's Word and to obey God's Spirit would be literally obliterated by this decision. Tomlinson, no doubt, saw himself as partly the cause of this departure as well as its victim. He who had searched out, promoted, and encouraged the development of the Church as God's government and had been instrumental in framing that government within the Church, now found himself in a no-win situation. His choices

⁷³*Minutes of Annual Assembly*, 1906 (tract form) p. 2.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷⁵Bible Training Institute Correspondence Course, *The Body of Christ*, 1974 Edition, p. 46.

⁷⁶*The Church of God of Prophecy History and Polity* (Stone, 1977), p. 38.

⁷⁷*Historical Annual Addresses*, Volume I, page 199. See also Davidson's "Writer's Afterword": *Upon This Rock*, Volume I, pp. 647, 648.

were stark: He could propose a correction and be seen as solely interested in retaining the considerable powers, influence, and control he then exercised. The personal cost of this to him and to his family could be enormous. The alternative, letting things remain as they were, was also daunting. His sense of personal responsibility to God to lead aright or more cogently, for having led wrong, gave him no rest over a period of nine months.⁷⁸ He sensed the seriousness and fundamental nature of the departure and determined to attempt to correct it at whatever the personal cost or institutional consequences. He was an intelligent and insightful man, and he knew well extant perceptions of him and his leadership—negative on the part of some, positive on the part of others. He would have been aware that past and current difficulties with church finances could work against him. We cannot treat here all that transpired. Others have treated this elsewhere (see footnote 54), and, as would be expected, events are interpreted in a variety of ways. Much depends, of course, upon the writer’s interests, assumptions, research paradigms, and availability of data or the lack thereof. This is always the historian’s dilemma.

It seems to me, however, that when all the available facts are fairly and humanely considered, A. J. Tomlinson must be fully credited for the man of integrity he proved to be⁷⁹ as well as for his courageous choice in attempting to pursue what had been the initial twin tracks of this Movement for New Testament Christianity—Word and Spirit. His administrative giftedness, evangelistic zeal, and fervent enthusiasm for God and God’s church can be recognized in the two main branches of the group he led—one for twenty years, the other for forty—until his death on October 2, 1943. The Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), in the final analysis, continued the previously mentioned American Government model of organization after the 1922 separation with Tomlinson, refining and adapting theologically and governmentally as they also struggled with

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 217, 218.

⁷⁹Charles W. Conn, in softening the abrasive tone of his earlier writing (*Like A Mighty Army*, 1955, pp. 177–179), made kinder remarks about Tomlinson actions in Chapter 16 of the 1996 Definitive Edition of said book (p. 217). In a footnote (number 14, pp. 220, 221), he also clarified the difference between *misapplication* or *misappropriation* (as defined in *Black’s Law Dictionary*, Fifth Edition, 1990) and the word *embezzlement*, which had been more than strongly suggested among the fifteen charges of the impeachment resolution (footnote 12, p. 158, 1955 Edition) and by Conn’s own characterization of events. “*Embezzlement*,” he wrote in 1996, [is] “a word that connotes dishonesty or even criminality, and was not used or suggested regarding Tomlinson.” On Tomlinson’s integrity as viewed by the courts, see quotes in Preston: Era of A. J. Tomlinson, op cit, pp. 148, 149.

the twin premises of Word and Spirit.⁸⁰ The deep and unfortunate wounds of division and the sometimes ugly and lengthy legal entanglements that ensued did not dampen the evangelistic zeal that was characteristic of the Movement nor lessen the quest for New Testament Christianity. Gradually, more modern in outlook, the Church of God branch also excelled in both the theological and general education fields. It can be argued that these are also early influences of Tomlinson's leadership.⁸¹ As of 2006, the Church of God reported 6.9 million members worldwide in 33,975 churches, in all 50 states and some 131 "Other Lands."⁸²

As noted earlier, Tomlinson re-launched his quest for Apostolic Christianity in 1923 with a few key leaders and two to three thousand followers. His diary entry for February 28, 1924, records that there were 170 ministers on his list "to help us in this great revolution." By 1943, the year he died, the branch he led (now known as the Church of God of Prophecy—the 1952 court decision cited above) claimed some 32,000 members in 48 states, 4 provinces of Canada, and 15 other countries.⁸³ At its 2006 International Assembly, said Church reported some 941 thousand members in 8,511 congregations in all 50 states and 132 countries.⁸⁴ Both church groups have lived out Tomlinson's Pentecostal commitment (1908) and are among the leading points of reference for a maturing Neo-Pentecostalism (Charismatics). These churches are primary

⁸⁰It is somewhat ironic that the very Constitution A. J. Tomlinson sought to overturn in 1922 was repealed by the Church of God Assembly in 1926 in language similar to what the Tomlinson group used in 1923. Here is the last sentence of the measure as adopted by the Church of God after declaring their unwavering faith and unconditional acceptance of the whole Bible rightly divided and the New Testament for the government and discipline: ". . . Be it further resolved that we, in conference assembled, declare ourselves in harmony with the original government, teaching, principles, and practices of the Church" (Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*—Definitive Edition, 1996, p. 237).

⁸¹In 1924, however, he openly sided with "Common People" in a section of his Annual Address: Historical Annual Addresses Vol. I, op cit, p. 251.

⁸²Conn, *Like A Mighty Army*—Definitive Edition, 1996, pp. 543, 544, Table 1; *Minutes of 71st Assembly*, Church of God, 2006, p. 14.

⁸³For data on the 15 countries and Canada, see *Minutes of the 38th Assembly*, 1943, pp. 91, 92, Church of God of Prophecy Archives. For the 32,000 total, see the *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, end of article on A. J. Tomlinson, p. 1,145. It is interesting to note that, in 1943, Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) showed membership of 62,487 in the US and 83,670 worldwide. See Charles W. Conn's *Like a Mighty Army*, Definitive Edition, 1996, Table 51, p. 581. The worldwide membership for both churches (1943) was 115, 670.

⁸⁴*Minutes of the 94th International General Assembly*, Church of God of Prophecy, 2006, pp. 259, 260. Added together, the 2006 worldwide membership for these two churches was more than 7.8 million.

centers for, and bastions of, classical Pentecostalism. The Church of God of Prophecy, which, until quite recently, continued with the earlier all-delegates, unanimous-decision form of the General Assembly as a ruling body in polity and doctrine, also followed the anointed—leader, Spirit—led motif of earlier years in its continued struggle for the right role of the General Assembly as it relates to the Holy Spirit and the Word. That struggle is not over. It is noteworthy that this branch has made notable, non-numerical gains, which, to Kingdom observers and some Christian scholars, ought to be natural outcomes of the Pentecostal message when faithfully practiced: racial reconciliation, true internationalization, the early utilization of indigenous leadership, a collective responsiveness in obedience to the Spirit’s specific correctives (1984 Assembly), and a revival of fervent Gospel evangelism, all in quest of true New Testament standards.⁸⁵ What a legacy has been left us!

Developments in Church Governance

Before passing on, we should attempt to balance the picture and add some details that led to the development of the Church’s early form of government. We will look at this through the role played by J. S. Llewellyn (1878–1934), one of the Twelve Elders, who was deeply involved in the events leading up to and during the disruption of 1923 and that of A. J. Tomlinson himself in relation to these events.

Llewellyn first appears in the Church’s *Seventh Assembly Minutes* in 1912. He was listed in “Attendance Seventh Annual Assembly” among those who had attended “from a distance.” Along with two others, he is shown as having come from Byington, Tennessee. He appears to have had no role in the Assembly.⁸⁶ In the January Assembly of 1913, he gave an address on “Sunday School in Every Local Church,” and was appointed to the Questions and Subjects Committee whose role was to “receive questions and prepare them for presentation.” He was also appointed Overseer of Kentucky and listed among the 1913 bishops for the first time (still at Byington) and obviously ordained sometime between the Seventh and

⁸⁵See *Church of God of Prophecy, 91st General Assembly Minutes*, 2000, p. 26, for a more extensive list and our Appendix A for the Assembly Committee on Biblical Doctrine and Polity’s *Working Documents* of 1998 and 2000 where there is fuller treatment of some of them. On the question of Race Mixing in the COGOP, see *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy*: Harold D. Hunter and Cecil Robeck Jr., Editors (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2006), chapter 16.

⁸⁶*Minutes of Seventh Assembly*, 1912, p. 30. *Note*: Byington is in Knox County on Hwy 131 not too far from Brentwood, TN.

Eighth Assemblies.⁸⁷ In the Second Assembly of 1913, held November 4–9 (to effect a change of date to the fall of the year), Llewellyn was Chairman of the Questions and Subjects Committee. He also participated in the discussion as the Assembly was trying to determine how best to select pastors. In light of later events, his remarks are noteworthy. Responding to comments tending to suggest that the General Overseer could appoint the pastors, Llewellyn said . . .

There's a way of doing the right thing in a wrong way. In the multitude of counsel there is safety. If we are not careful now, we will make one of the greatest mistakes ever made. We can't object to the ability of our General Overseer, but it would be putting too much on him.⁸⁸

On the subject of Divorce and Remarriage, which was still before the Assembly, Llewellyn spoke again as follows:

If we continue this subject another year, provision should be made for the innocent ones concerning receiving them into the church.”

The clerk's entry in the *Minutes* after this remark continues:

He [Llewellyn] continued to show that the wealthy people are forming themselves into trusts and combines, and the poorer class into labor unions. Everything seems to be systematized except a few pentecostal [sic] and holiness people. The picture was drawn so as to show the need of system and order in every department of the Lord's work.⁸⁹

Llewellyn continued on the Divorce and Remarriage study committee even after the Assembly expanded it to twelve.

In 1914, Llewellyn was appointed to three committees: Water Baptism, Divorce and Remarriage, and the Building and Fund Raising Committee. He was clearly growing in prominence. We note also that the Grievance

⁸⁷*Minutes of the Eight Assembly*, 1913 pp. 33, 37, 73, 91. *Note*: Llewellyn, as overseer, is the only delegate noted as present in the November Assembly. No overseer was assigned for Kentucky again until W. F. Bryant was appointed in 1915.

⁸⁸*General Assembly Minutes, 1906–1914—Photographic Reproductions of the First Ten General Assembly Minutes* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1992), p. 267, p. 13 of the actual November 1913 Minutes. *Note*: I have consulted and introduced this excellent reference here as it is the most complete full record of all the early *Assembly Minutes* through 1914. The *Minutes* of the November Assembly held in 1913 (the second one that year) is missing in some photocopy sources at COGOP Archives, but the special Photographic Reproduction volume can be consulted there.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 268, 269.

Committee of 1914 reported that a grievance between J. S. Llewellyn and T. S. Payne was satisfactorily adjusted. The nature of the grievance was not stated.⁹⁰ The year 1914 is when A. J. Tomlinson was selected as General Overseer for life after a prolonged period of demonstrations, speeches, and Holy Ghost messages and interpretations. M. S. Lemons led Bishop Tomlinson to the stand and placed him before the people who shouted their approval. J. A. Davis, W. R. Anderson, and J. L. Scott, all spoke approvingly, but F. J. Lee and M. S. Lemons were more specific:

Lee: “. . . There is such unity and harmony prevailing in this selection that I don’t see any need of ever making any change until God takes him away.”

Lemons: “I think you can all see that God’s approval is on this selection, and I don’t see the use of ever saying anything more about a change.”

The clerk noted after Lemons spoke, “This remark met a unanimous approval.” After this note, the record shows that R. G. Spurling said the following:

“I praise God for Brother Tomlinson. I feel towards him like a father.”⁹¹

In the mind of A. J. Tomlinson and many others, this was a “theocratic choice” done by God Himself and therefore above human tampering. All Bible government would thereafter be seen through this lens.

In 1915, as Llewellyn continued to serve the Church, he was appointed overseer of Georgia, remained on the Building Committee (to which Tomlinson and Lee were added), and delivered an address on “The Rise and Progress of the Church.”⁹² He was still Overseer of Georgia in 1916, one of the named trustees to hold the Church’s Assembly property at Harriman, and delivered the welcome address to the Assembly. He was also appointed to the Committee on Bible Order, which, based on the General Overseer’s suggestion in his Annual Address, recommended that a Council of twelve elders be appointed to serve together with the General Overseer. The initial report provided for the first two to be selected by the

⁹⁰*Minutes of the Tenth Annual Assembly, 1914*, pp.5, 28–30.

⁹¹*General Assembly Minutes, 1906–1914*, op cit., p. 314.

⁹²*Minutes of the Eleventh Annual Assembly, 1915*, pp. 15, 22.

Assembly. The report was approved amid shouts and praises, but when the moderator called for the two names proposed from the floor—M. S. Lemons and T. S. Payne—to be either sanctioned or objected to, the clerk recorded, “All was still as death.” The matter was dropped until the next day when the Committee amended the selection procedure so that the General Overseer would appoint the first two elders and the three would appoint the other ten. Upon being questioned by Bishop Tomlinson as to why the change was made, the Committee explained that they believed this approach to be more like the Bible order than the former proposal, which had authorized the Assembly to select the first two.⁹³

In the Thirteenth Assembly, 1917, Llewellyn gave the welcome and on Friday, November 2, during a brief address, proposed that the General Overseer’s (GO) Address be accepted and also that the recommendations from the Address be made a part of the Assembly’s business. The Assembly clerks noted, “This recommendation was unanimously agreed to with scarcely any delay.”⁹⁴ The General Overseer reported to the same Assembly that they had completed the selection and appointment of the twelve elders. Llewellyn’s name completed the roster, having been chosen among the last set in the elders meeting of March 1, 1917.⁹⁵ There was no Assembly in 1918 due to the nation-wide influenza epidemic that had begun and continued into 1919.⁹⁶ Inserted here are parts of three of A. J.’s diary entries, which give a glimpse of the effects of this epidemic on his family and in the Cleveland area:

June 26, 1918: . . . The Bible school closed April 5, and the Council of Elders followed for several days, little Thelma died. . . .⁹⁷

November 13, 1918: We were deprived of having the Assembly on account of the Influenza epidemic that has been raging for more than two months. Thousands and thousands have died of the plague. Some of our people have succumbed [sic] but not many. We are printing

⁹³*Minutes of the Twelfth Annual Assembly*, 1916, pp. 28, 29, 32.

⁹⁴*Minutes of the Thirteenth Assembly*, 1917, p. 23 .

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁹⁶The worldwide severity of the influenza epidemic is reported in the *World Almanac & Book of Facts* 2010, p. 121: 50–100 million died with some 548,000 of these in the United States.

⁹⁷Thelma was the Tomlinson’s much-loved granddaughter. “Halcy had a daughter, Thelma, who had died [sic] during the influenza epidemic a short while before I knew her. The Tomlinsons—all of them—loved that grandchild very much. They spoke of her quite often, and did this as long as they lived” (From Lillie Duggar’s Foreword to Halcy’s journal.) Halcy wrote in her fifteenth year, 1906–1907. Source: *Our Little Sister Halcy*, published by White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1974, under authority of her brother, Milton A. Tomlinson.

10,000 *Evangels* each week. We held the Council October 22–29. . . . Overseers appointed, pastors appointed. . . . The Bible Training School opened November 11 with five scholars. Many have been kept away on account of the influenza and will be in later. We have had cases in our home for about six weeks. Only Iris and Milton have been down of our own family, but six more friends that came in and took down [sic]. I have prayed for [many] at their homes as high as thirty a day. Many handkerchiefs have been prayed over and anointed and sent to the sick. Telegrams, telephone messages, letters came in by scores calling for prayer. We have never known such an awful time before. The government closed all churches, and public gatherings of every kind. We missed four Sundays, but commenced again last Sunday.

December 27, 1918: . . . A few more students entered the Bible School. One of them, Mrs. Bennie Terrill, was taken sick about a week ago and only lived four days. She died in our home. . . . The town authorities have closed all public services again so we cannot have Sunday school or meeting. It is reported that there are a thousand cases of influenza in town now. Many dying. Whole families sick and in some cases nobody to wait on them. Public school shut down. Our office work is much hindered because most of them have to be out so much, either sick, or have to wait on the sick, or help bury the dead. . . . While I was sick I prayed for many sick . . . I have preached many funerals, prayed for hundreds, and on the go day and night and all times of night. . . . My dear wife has never taken the influenza although she has had the care of fourteen or more cases. God has sustained and held her up. Thanks to His name. He is so good to us.

Returning to Llewellyn's story, we know from A. J.'s diary (November 13, 1918) that overseers and pastors were appointed after the Council of Elders met. Llewellyn was apparently appointed at that time as overseer of Tennessee. The introductory section of the *1919 Assembly Minutes* shows him at the new *Evangel* office giving a talk on the Church's financial system, which was well-received.⁹⁸ He served on the Foreign Mission Committee that same year and gave a further discourse on "The Church, a District

⁹⁸*Minutes of the Fourteenth Assembly*, 1919, p. 3.

[Distinct] Government.”⁹⁹ The content of his speech is not recorded, but the clerks described it as a “wonderful discourse” explaining that “the Lord put His approval on all of the message.” A demonstration of support for the General Overseer ensued after this discourse. There was a message and interpretation, and, through tears, several held up the hands of the General Overseer and his wife.¹⁰⁰ Prior to this, the General Overseer had given his report as Editor and Publisher of the Evangel. Bishop Tomlinson had concluded his report with the following statement:

Would be much pleased to have this Assembly appoint a committee, if you think best, to audit the books [sic].

The *Minutes* show that both M. S. Lemons and J. S. Llewellyn commented. Lemons said . . .

It is reported that Brother Tomlinson makes no report, but we know he does.

Llewellyn said . . .

All kinds of false reports have gone out about Brother Tomlinson, but this is one report that we are thankful for. When you go home, you tell the people that the General Overseer does make reports. [Clerks’ note inserted]: (Many amens by the people.)

Llewellyn continues:

Some people say the Church of God is going down, but I say it is going up. I suggest that we all accept the report.¹⁰¹

Llewellyn was again appointed overseer of Tennessee, which was one of the three largest states for the Church of God with 67 churches, 25 bishops, 48 deacons, and 67 evangelists.¹⁰² He came to the Assembly of 1920 still as overseer of Tennessee and continued to serve as chair of the Foreign Missions Committee. Of course, as one of the Twelve Elders, he had been participating in the Council since 1917. He completed his discourse of 1919 on the subject of “The Church, a Distinct Government.” This time, the

⁹⁹Page 46 of the *Minutes of the Fifteenth Assembly, 1920*, shows that the word “District” here was a typo and should have been “Distinct.” The clerks record Sermon by J. S. Llewellyn, subject, Sequel [sic] to The Church, a Distinct Government—Text Isaiah 9:6. This explains better why the General Overseer is the focus of the attention and demonstrations after Llewellyn’s message.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, pp. 75–78. The other two states were Florida and Georgia (*Minutes*, pp. 62–68).

Assembly clerks give us a better glimpse into his message. Under “Notes from the Address,” they quote Llewellyn’s words. I cite the full text:

The meaning of the word *government* is exercise of authority; administration of law. There are different kinds of government—civil government, church government, and family government. The theocratic government is the government in which God rules. This is the government we want.

We have people today (spiritually speaking) who oppose government; they are spiritual anarchists. As a general thing, when people speak against government, there is something dead up the branch. Look at a church without government; the fact is, it is no church. A church without government has no authority—how can she do business? The Bible says that an elder who rules well is worthy of double honor. If there is no government, who is he to rule over? When you get the real liberty which the Bible speaks about, you feel good in your heart by being ruled by those who have the rule over you.

The world is cursed today with man made [sic] rules, regulations, and government. Some say they accept the idea of God ruling but let man be out of it. We see back in the days of Moses, after they came out of Egypt, that the Lord gave them the law and government, and not until then were they called the church in the wilderness.

How could matters be adjusted when there is no authority, no control, no direction? Why did Paul say to obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls?

The clerks’ notes conclude:

After J. S. Llewellyn delivered his wonderful discourse on “The Church, a Distinct Government,” the mighty power and presence of God was manifested. As it swept over the large congregation, no doubt many saints were made stronger and took on new courage and zeal for the great Church of God.¹⁰³

Clearly, Llewellyn had learned much from Bishop Tomlinson’s prior emphases on the Church as God’s government and was also emulating Tomlinson’s method of continuing into a second year with a very popular theme. Llewellyn was a carpenter-businessman who was once in business

¹⁰³*Minutes of the Fifteenth Assembly, 1920: pp. 46, 47.*

with A. J. Lawson, a one-time Cleveland Realtor.¹⁰⁴ His knowledge of organizational matters is obvious and would have been a natural fit for his role in a fledgling church trying to establish itself for the future. The way that Overseer Tomlinson freely utilized Llewellyn’s services indicates that he [Tomlinson] was well aware of his abilities. Their relationship cries out for much fuller treatment than space here allows. It is obvious, though, that these men had similar rhetorical and managerial skills, which, when rightly employed, were blessings to the Church of God—and the Church knew it. Judging by the frequency and the manner in which Llewellyn continued to approve of Tomlinson’s addresses and to rally the listeners to support his ideas, he must have had great admiration for him up to this time. And from the brief content of Llewellyn’s sermon (above), we can sense that he had a passion for good government and clear authority. He was comfortable and familiar with the subject. This is 1920. As far back as 1913, one can see his bent in the sentence the clerks noted after his comments: “Everything seems to be systematized except a few Pentecostal and holiness people.” He was obviously quite impressive and rather dramatic when he spoke. But now, let’s complete the picture.

On November 8, 1920, it fell to J. S. Llewellyn’s lot to read the first-ever formally written, government-centered “Declaration” (Appendix C) made in Church of God/Church of God of Prophecy history. The clerks noted, “In order to get the contents of the resolution clearly before the Assembly, it was read twice and was unanimously approved.” The declaration was officially signed by A. J. Tomlinson, General Overseer, and E. J. Boehmer, Clerk.¹⁰⁵ In the background, a Church of God minister, J. L. Scott, with a few others, had become disillusioned and defected to form the Original Church of God in Chattanooga, Tennessee. They held a convention on June 26, 1920. Apparently, the issues involved the centralization of the government of the Church with which they disagreed and tithing, which they considered a voluntary practice rather than a New Testament teaching.¹⁰⁶ In addition, one of the Twelve Elders, Sam Perry, also overseer of Florida at the time, had been dealt with by the Council over some discrepancies and lost his place. A. J. Tomlinson mentioned

¹⁰⁴Robins, *A. J. Tomlinson—Plainfolk Modernist*, p. 223; Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, Volume I, pp. 610, 643. A. J. Lawson became General Treasurer for the Church of God (of Prophecy) after the disruption.

¹⁰⁵*Minutes of Fifteenth Assembly*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁶*Foundations: Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1998), p. 34.

this in his 1920 Address under the subject “The Elders,” explaining that no system had been devised by the Assembly for replacement or the filling of vacancies on the Council but that they had found a way to handle the problem.¹⁰⁷ It is noteworthy that Perry joined Scott’s group in 1921.¹⁰⁸ C. T. Davidson reported a personal visit to see Sam Perry in Virginia during the summer of 1934 but found him still upset at the Church and Bishop Tomlinson. Davidson also hints that both Scott and Perry perhaps thought they “could or would draw a large following from the Church of God.”¹⁰⁹ It is my judgment that these factors, plus the two-year lapse from 1917–1919, when there was no Assembly due to the influenza epidemic, the strong growth of the Church in numbers and property, and the expansion of the facilities and functions at Headquarters that created a need for more and more resources, all converged in a situation that demanded a more readily enforceable form of government that would make the Money System first proposed in 1916 and 1917 truly functional. A. J. Tomlinson noted the following in his diary on August 12, 1919:

... Many happenings since I last wrote. Probably one of the greatest is the erection of a building for the *Evangel* office and Bible School room. It is not yet completed, but we moved into some of the rooms Saturday, August 9, and yesterday, August 11. I am having quite a test of faith for the money to complete the building. No one knows my heaviness and apparent perplexities. I tell it to God only, and He is blessedly giving me grace. The Elders in Council advised me to put up the building when they met in April. So I am doing my best. I have borrowed money largely on my own responsibility. I am trusting God to make me able to meet it. Sam C. Perry and J. L. Scott have been discontinued from their ministry in the Church and are giving us some little trouble. They are opposing the Church and its government and doing all they can against us, but God is wonderfully with us and blessing us. . . .

Considering this entry and the issues stated above, the contents of the “Declaration” or something like it begin to seem plausible. By 1920, one could sense the growing need to hold the churches together, to forbid any

¹⁰⁷*Historical Annual Addresses*, Volume I, 132, 133

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁹Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, Volume I, pp. 503, 504.

to leave en masse, to solidify the position of the Assembly as the directive body, to bring efficiency and clear legality to the system, and to lessen the threats both within and without. The list of tweaks introduced seems staggering. Besides the “Declaration” (above), the following were approved:

1. A central treasury at Headquarters where all tithes of local churches would be sent for redistribution by a group of seven to be chosen by the Council.
2. A plan to keep preachers from going home before the Assembly was over unless they had a proper excuse. In other words, those leaving would have to justify their actions or not be in “so good standing with the Assembly.” It would be an issue of permission.
3. A registry of all members of the Church to be located at Headquarters.
4. Only local churches that accepted the teachings of the Assembly would be recognized by the Headquarters of the Church of God.
5. Treasurers to also act as clerks in the local churches.
6. It was agreed to introduce an “envelope tithing system” where churches were in favor but not make it compulsory.
7. A broad resolution granting the General Overseer and the Board of Trustees authority to borrow for any Church purpose (payments of debts now or in the future) and to encumber the Church’s real estate even for ministry purposes.
8. The right granted to the General Overseer and Elders by the Assembly to select and to fill any vacancy for any cause.¹¹⁰

Concerning number one above, Bishop Tomlinson reported (during his Address to the Assembly in 1921) that the Council of Elders “. . . did not feel like taking the responsibility of selecting seven men to do the business since the Assembly had authorized the General Overseer and the twelve elders to take it in hand.” He said that there was some “slight dissatisfaction,” but since the system had only been in place for ten months, this was ascribed to the program’s newness.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰*Minutes of Fifteenth Assembly*, 1920, pp. 43–69.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 28, 29.

One notes the progression in the tightening of the Church's government over the years and the super-exaltation of the Assembly in its role as a governing body. No one was surprised, then, when in 1921, a full-fledged Constitution (Appendix C) was introduced and unanimously adopted in glowing language. The whole Assembly knelt and thanked the Lord. The document was jubilantly ascribed to God as mentioned in chapter II above. However, as the old saying goes, "The devil was in the details."

On the evening of November 2, 1921, at the beginning of the Sixteenth Assembly, the new auditorium described in the *Minutes* as "great and beautiful" was dedicated. It was hailed as a great accomplishment. J. S. Llewellyn prayed at the opening, and George T. Brouayer, a delegate from among the twenty-one at the first Assembly, 1906, spoke about the "little group of mountaineers" that met at the home of Brother and Sister Murphy: "Sixteen years ago. . . . See how we are today," he said. "We have about 20,000 members, and the world is looking on at us." F. J. Lee spoke next and said, "When I began to attend the early Assemblies, one thing that attracted my attention was interpretations—just to think of getting a message direct from heaven. Some saw real visions, and I thought that was wonderful. I was glad about the paper for the Church. Brethren met at my house, prayed, and got victory that the paper should go." The General Overseer preached the dedicatory sermon from 2 Chronicles 20:5–16 and prayed a Solomon-like dedicatory prayer closing with, "In the name of God, in the name of Jesus Christ, His Son, in the name of the Holy Ghost, and the great Church of God, we here and now dedicate this great building to God! Let the congregation say, Amen. Let us all fall on our faces and say we are in the House of God; we are at home."¹¹²

The unfinished building had already cost \$36,096.10, which the General Overseer referred to as "this little bit of amount that some folks think is a big thing." He reported that \$12,900.21 had already been paid. "See," he remarked, "we keep it down to the penny. . . ." It was a euphoric time in an electrified atmosphere in a growing Church! The *Minutes* record, "When the speaker mentioned the debt on [the] Auditorium, the money came in showers without an invitation. Amid shouts and different manifestations, money continued to come."¹¹³ It was in this intense climate that what would become the fateful Constitution was introduced and approved.

¹¹²*Minutes of the Sixteenth Assembly*, 1921, pp. 3–10.

¹¹³*Ibid.*

In view of such liberality and generosity, we must note an important fact mentioned (but not always extensively treated) by a few church historians, including some of those cited in this work. A. J. Tomlinson referred to it in his Address under the subject, “Progression.” He wrote . . .

In spite of the financial depression of the country which has been the means of cutting down the support of the ministers and worked a hardship on almost all the members, the progress of the Church has far surpassed any previous year.¹¹⁴

A report in the press for September 30, 1921, showed that 20,000 US businesses had failed since the start of the year and that 3.5 million were unemployed.¹¹⁵ Coming as it did on the heels of the worldwide influenza epidemic of 1918–1919, this severe post-World War I recession was bad news all around. Economists said that the recession lasted from about May 1920 to November 1921, a full year and a half.¹¹⁶ Inside the “House of God,” it could not have come at a worse time. Church statistical reports of tithes paid into the local churches for 1921 showed an amount of \$79,557 as opposed to \$163,302 for the previous year, a 51-percent decrease.¹¹⁷ By 1922, the Church’s combined deficit on the *Evangel* and debt on the Publishing House had risen to near \$56,000, but only \$31,489 of this was owed to banks. With real assets then estimated at \$140,500 at Headquarters, this should not have precipitated a crisis, but cash flow was a problem. Accounts had fallen into arrears including failure to distribute the tithes to some ministers as the system called for.¹¹⁸

The General Overseer and the Council had met prior to the Assembly of 1922 and counseled about the situation. Human frailties, the practical need for manageable system and order, and the theocratic selection were about to collide! It seemed that an understanding had been reached about

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹¹⁵*Chronicle of the 20th Century* (Mt. Kisco, NY: Chronicle Publications, 1987), p. 283.

¹¹⁶Richard B. Morris, *Encyclopedia of American History* (New York: Harper, 1953), pp 508, 511, quoted in, Conn: *Like A Mighty Army*, 1996, op cit, p. 201.

¹¹⁷Conn, 1996, p. 201; It should be noted here that these numbers reflect what was paid into the local churches. Of course, this would mirror, to some degree, the impact of the unemployment situation. However, the actual amounts, showing as tithes from the churches handled by Headquarters for the three years 1920–1922, respectively, are as follows: 1920: \$16,711 (includes \$6,300 balance from previous year); 1921: \$71,207 (of which all but \$94 was paid to ministers), and 1922: \$59, 874. The increase of 426 percent from 1920 to 1921 reflects the implementation of the central distribution system despite the recession. The drop of 15 percent (\$11,333) from 1921 to 1922 shows how faithfully the people were trying.

¹¹⁸*Minutes of the Seventeenth Assembly*, 1922, pp. 51, 52, 56, 57.

Bishop Tomlinson's failure to properly manage the system, which he was mostly running on his own. His diary entry for September 2, 1921 (painful to read), catalogs the load he was carrying and the emotional stress that accompanied it. In the pre-Assembly meeting with the Council, he was very apologetic about the situation, and, apparently, the brethren had wept together and agreed that the General Overseer would report the matter in full to the Assembly and openly apologize. However, there were other dynamics prior to this date. C. T. Davidson reports that a letter, dated March 28, 1921, and signed by four of the Elders (M. S. Lemons, J. B. Ellis, T. L. McLain, and J. S. Llewellyn) had been sent to the General Overseer requesting a special meeting of the Council (Board) of Elders "for the consideration of important matters," some of which, the letter purports, are of a legal nature. Davidson cites Assembly evidence and rulings that these men had no authority to request such a meeting, but he fails to say whether or not the meeting was called.¹¹⁹ This tips us off that within the Council all may not have been well. There was, no doubt, a difference in opinion about the role of the Twelve-Elder Council, which Tomlinson saw as advisory to his position but which some members of the Council saw differently. These same four men, along with W. F. Bryant, are named in A. J. Tomlinson's diary entry for February 19, 1923, as men he had counted among his best friends but who had turned against him.¹²⁰ In his 1922 Address, he did explain his actions to the Assembly, but his call to repudiate the Constitution and to follow what he explained was the theocratic model based on James' role in the Book of Acts was seen as a snub to the Council of Twelve. From there, things went downhill fast.

In the interests of space, I will summarize here with some opinions about Llewellyn and other matters of the disruption. Davidson [1973, 610] wrote of him that ". . . according to reports, he was a dynamic speaker, influential, persistent, and somewhat of a business man. . . ." Conn [1996, 214] says that Llewellyn ". . . was also able but critical of Tomlinson's

¹¹⁹Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, Volume I, op cit., pp. 543, 544.

¹²⁰R. G. Spurling stayed with the Church of God and not the Tomlinson group when the division came about in 1923. Apparently, he was not actively involved in the events (he was not one of the Council) and rejoined Brother Tomlinson later. From 1931 until his death in 1935, he is listed in the Church of God (of Prophecy) Assembly Minutes among the Bishops. F. F. Johnson did his funeral in place of the General Overseer who was away in Colorado at the time. An extensive and loving tribute to Spurling was written and published by A. J. Tomlinson in the *White Wing Messenger* of June 22, 1935. The article is titled, "R. G. Spurling Passed Over The Tide" (COGOP Archives).

recent management. . . .” Robins [2004, 223] characterizes Llewellyn as “a head-strong carpenter-businessman with his own checkered reputation” and the Council’s “instigator” against Tomlinson. Robins based this opinion, in part, on the Opinion of the Court of Appeals for the Eastern Division of Tennessee, *Church of God vs. A. J. Tomlinson, et al.* (May 1925, pp. 29–32).¹²¹ Whatever the case, it turned out that 1921, while being a year of great growth for the Church, was also the year in which the culmination of its governmental structures that had been adopted over the last seven years would bring its leadership into the crisis of 1922. In that Assembly, the Committee on Better Government did not simply refuse A. J. Tomlinson’s suggestions; they rejected them outright and pluralized his office with new constraints on his personal role. For all practical purposes, he was assigned to field duty and relieved of the managerial responsibilities of the most critical departments at Headquarters. He resigned, then later agreed to stay on for a year because of the pleadings of the people, including some of the Council members. Obviously, he recognized that his “for life” appointment, which he rehearsed during his Address, had been cancelled when the Assembly accepted the report of the Committee on Better Government with its amendments, especially the creation of a new three-man Executive Council. As the new Editor and Publisher of the *Evangel*, chosen by the Assembly and also Treasurer in charge of all the organization’s finances, J. S. Llewellyn would be in charge of the Church’s business together with F. J. Lee, Superintendent of Education—the third with the General Overseer on the Executive.¹²²

In short, what transpired between the Assembly of 1922 and the summer of 1923 is that the seven-member Court of Justice, under the new and amended Constitution, sustained the fifteen articles of impeachment filed by the Council against A. J. Tomlinson under Article 4, Section 11, removing him from office. The two from the Council that sided with Bishop Tomlinson—S. O. Gillaspie, Overseer of Illinois, and George T. Brouayer, Overseer of North Carolina—were also impeached and removed. A. J. Tomlinson never accepted these actions and considered them both illegal and spiritually deficient. Conversely, he began a series of actions and meetings in his role as General Overseer and Representative of the Assembly when it was not in session. He took action with the two “loyal” men from the Council

¹²¹A copy of this document is lodged in COGOP Archives.

¹²²*Minutes of the Seventeenth Assembly*, 1922, pp. 48–51. See also pp. 10–37 for the General Overseer’s Address.

against those who he felt, even under the discredited Constitution, were out of place to have acted against him. He, in effect, also removed them from office and declared F. J. Lee's role as the replacement General Overseer to be null and void. As proceedings within the courts later showed, it was a matter of legal debate as to who had the right to claim to be the original Church of God. Eventually, as noted above, Tomlinson, his followers, and their successors lost the cases over the name. However, when he convened the next Assembly in November of 1923, with the group that remained with him, that Assembly repudiated both the 1920 Declaration and the 1921 Constitution and resolved themselves back into being the Church of God with the Bible as the Word of God and the Holy Ghost as Guide and Director. In other words, they were returning to the theocratic government principle represented by the Office of General Overseer (see pg. 42).¹²³

As stated earlier in this chapter, leadership dynamics and differing church-government concepts and philosophies are not easily managed. One can feel the pain and see some of the errors on both sides. Both J. S. Llewellyn and M. S. Lemons apologized to Bishop Tomlinson before they died for the roles they had played. Davidson [1973, 643, 644] reports that F. F. Johnson, Cleveland pastor of the Church of God over which A. J. Tomlinson was then General Overseer, told of Llewellyn's penitence in a notarized affidavit. Johnson served as pastor from 1932 to 1936. He had taken Brother Tomlinson to see Llewellyn, then on a sick bed. Llewellyn had requested this during one of Johnson's several pastoral visits. When Llewellyn asked for forgiveness, Brother Tomlinson gladly forgave him and told "Joe" it was not necessary to write or distribute the letter he had proposed. It would hurt too many people.

It is noteworthy and, I think, characteristic of the forgiving attitude that is part of A. J. Tomlinson's legacy that F. F. Johnson was asked by Sister Llewellyn to conduct her husband's funeral. He died in 1934. She had asked Pastor Johnson to allow time for some expressions. A. J. Lawson, then General Treasurer of the Church of God over which Bishop Tomlinson was General Overseer, was the first to speak. He assured the attendees that all had been made right between him and J. S. Llewellyn.

¹²³*Historical Annual Addresses*, Volume I, op cit., pp. 218–220. See also *Minutes of the Eighteenth Assembly of The Church of God (of Prophecy)*, 1923.

Of M. S. Lemons (1869-1955), A. J. Tomlinson wrote [Diary, August 13, 1930] the following:

. . . One of the callers yesterday was M. S. Lemons, who came to confess he had done wrong in acting as he did in 1922, and in assisting in starting the lawsuit, and asked me to forgive him. He came again to my home last night and talked a long time, and seems to have a penitent spirit, and shows a desire to make amends for his wrongs, and get straightened up again. I can't tell what all this will amount to yet. . . .

Given the evidence for the buildup to the 1923 crisis, it would not be beyond the pale to suggest that the weaknesses and misfortunes of poor management decisions in the Church's secular affairs coincided with desires for stronger leadership roles among the Council of Twelve. Llewellyn, in essence, became their "point man" as their investigation of the Church's affairs shows. Llewellyn took office on December 1, 1922, as Editor and Publisher of the *Evangel*, and it wasn't long until the investigating committee was formed. In their 1926 Assembly, the Church of God, F. J. Lee, General Overseer, repealed the same Constitution under which A. J. Tomlinson was impeached. What a difference experience makes! J. S. Llewellyn was relieved of his position as Editor and Publisher in 1927 which was one year after the Constitution was repealed. His services had ". . . become increasingly unsatisfactory."¹²⁴

A Fateful Irony

Had more openness, patience, brotherly kindness, and mutual submission prevailed, this painful separation could have been avoided. In the rapid and extensive development of the practical side of the Church's government, I sense that the desire to make everything and everyone subject to specific controls became paramount. This, in my view, did diminish the Spirit's "right of way" to lead the Church. The Church is both human and divine, a fact of which we should never lose sight. Human rulership is imperfect and has been so throughout man's history, in general, and in church history, in particular. In the midst of successes, maintaining an honest and humble place before God and a mutual consciousness of human limitations is difficult even for the most devoted followers of Jesus. It has been so from New Testament times. Our only hope is to continually humble ourselves before God, giving deference and preference to each other as needed. This is the lesson we should take away from this episode. Even though God

¹²⁴Conn, *Like A Mighty Army*, *op cit*, p. 241.

can and does use men and churches despite their shortcomings, divisions, and failures, we must never seek to justify ourselves or to authenticate our organizations by that which the Bible condemns. In the midst of human struggles, turmoil, and the upheavals of church history, we do, at times, and by God's enabling grace, make right choices. A. J. Tomlinson and his followers, in November of 1923, made the corrective choice of again placing God's Word and God's Spirit as the highest authority in the Church. The Church of God, led by F. J. Lee (1875–1928), did the same in 1926 when they repealed the Constitution. Thus, at least in a general sense, the history of the two groups converged along theocratic lines, that is, on the place of God's Word and Spirit within the Churches. This was a gratifying legitimization of both groups with which, I think, our Lord was pleased.

Upon reflection, the government of the Church passed from Congregationalist (at its inception) to centralized (hierarchical), beginning in the General Assembly of 1906. The term and concept of "General Assembly" was applied to, and drawn from, Acts 15 in the New Testament, but precedent was also found in Israel's annual gatherings in the Old Testament. Within the General Assembly itself, the progression continued toward the theocratic model, that is, "government by direction of God," which designation was later expanded to include "through Spirit-filled men." Initially, the principle was held to be reflected in the divine presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Assembly proper, but eventually the "anointed General Overseer" motif became an equal part of the theocratic formation, especially after the issue of his specific confirmation by God (through Holy Ghost messages and interpretation) was accepted and settled. This occurred during the Assembly of 1914. Thereafter, the development of governance within the Church proceeded to the Twelve Elders of 1916, a formal "Declaration" in 1920, and to the approval of the Seventy Elders and full-fledged "Constitution" in 1921.

We cannot escape the irony that A. J. Tomlinson's special emphasis on government encouraged and perhaps armed those who desired a more formal Constitution. Llewellyn was certainly among them. In 1919, he was mentioned in the General Overseer's address as slated to give a particular discourse on Church Government. He used the subject "The Church, a Distinct Government." It can be intimated that there was close collaboration between these two men on this particular subject. At one level, the concept of strong, central Church government, became the *mea culpa* of A. J. Tomlinson. At another, his personal dedication, drive, and organizational skills helped him regain his footing to make the fresh start that developed into the Church of God of Prophecy.

Ambrose Jessup Tomlinson died at his home on October 2, 1943, at age “seventy-eight years and ten days,” with his family at his bedside and his two secretaries, the Publishing House employees, Headquarters workers, and friends at the home.¹²⁵ He was buried October 6, at Fort Hill Cemetery, Cleveland, Tennessee.

Note: A. J. Tomlinson’s brief biography is found in Appendix F.


¹²⁵Duggar, 1964, pp. 760, 761.



Attendees of an early General Assembly on Montgomery Avenue in Cleveland, Tennessee.

**A Period of
Stability**

Outline

A large, stylized, grey number '5' with a white outline, positioned to the right of the text 'A Period of Stability' and 'Outline'.

Consolidation and Crystallization 1944–1990:

- Milton A. Tomlinson Is Chosen
- Milton's Approach to Leadership
- New Ministries Initiated
- Tomlinson Retires
- He Initiates Greater Openness Toward the Kingdom

Chapter 5

A Period of Stability

Consolidation and Crystallization 1944–1990

Milton A. Tomlinson Is Chosen

The mild-mannered and humble-spirited younger son of A. J. Tomlinson, Milton Ambrose Tomlinson, 37 years old, was selected by the overseers on October 7, 1943, to fill the vacancy in the office of General Overseer. He was unanimously approved in the Assembly of September 13–19, 1944. Milton was born October 19, 1906, at the Tomlinson home in Cleveland, Tennessee. He was pastor of the church at Henderson, Kentucky, at the time he was selected. He presided over 46 years of growth, development, and stability within the Church of God of Prophecy. Initially, closely advised and supported by the leading men and administrators who worked with his father, he gradually came into his own after having dealt with the displeasure brought on by his older brother, Homer. Homer had felt that he would succeed his father, but the overseers thought differently. As the Church's overseer in New York, Homer was among those who chose his brother. He submitted to the decision at the time, but later events would prove that he desired not only to guide his younger brother and gain access to the Church's finances, but to be the General Overseer. He parted ways with the Church in November of 1943.¹²⁶ Homer was not the only difficulty for the new General Overseer. The lengthy lawsuits that he inherited had begun in 1924, but he saw them through with grace and patience until 1952 when the Church's name was finally settled. He maintained pleasant relationships with many who were involved in the troubles of the past.

Milton's Approach to Leadership

Milton proved to be a good listener and a perceptive observer of people, and he could be decisive as situations warranted. He seemed to operate on the principle of "bigger and better things for the Church of God," always

¹²⁶C. T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, Volume III (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1976), p. 92.

with an eye on the past, and no doubt, with much family history on his mind. He had great respect and high regard for the legacy left by his “larger than life” father. His approach to leadership on the various pertinent issues included referrals to the Question and Subjects Committee through proposals in his Annual Addresses, a practice developed by his father. When he saw or heard a thought or idea that he deemed beneficial to the growth, expansion, stability, or encouragement of the Church, he would astutely assign the subject to one of his appointed staff for development and, often, for inclusion later in his Addresses. He would also countenance first-hand suggestions from his staff in most areas of the work, for he regarded them as having been anointed by God for the role in which they served. At times, he would channel these through other trusted leaders or through an appropriate committee. By the time issues came to the Assembly floor, he would usually be ready to support them from his Moderator’s chair. He was not always successful in getting issues passed, but his courage in allowing and presenting new things was remarkable. For example, he made a very important theological and literary proposal to the Church in his Address to the Seventy-sixth Assembly in 1981. Under the subject of “Bible Translations,” he proposed that it was time for the Church to adjust its 1961 stand on the King James Version of the Bible as its authority for the doctrine and practice. This was due to the expansion of the Church in so many different languages where this version of the Bible was unknown. The Question and Subjects Committee took up his suggestion and proposed that the Church adopt the Protestant Canon of Scripture consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments in their original languages. All Bibles everywhere are translated from copies of these autographs. His point was well-taken and well-reasoned, but the Assembly did not agree. An Assembly clerk placed a parenthetical note after Section 2 of the Questions and Subjects Committee’s Report that the matter was held over until next Assembly.¹²⁷ The subject was never revisited until the Assembly Committee for Biblical Doctrine and Polity recognized the need to affirm the use of other versions in 2010.

M. A. Tomlinson fielded an integrated and internationalized staff that included Greeks, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Rican Americans, African-Americans, and Caribbean Natives (West Indians) as well as a mix of European-Americans from the West, Midwest, and South. His policies maintained and accelerated the Church’s early commitment to women in

¹²⁷*Minutes of the Seventy-Sixth Annual Assembly*, 1981, pp. 47–50, 134.

ministry, appointing and serving with several during his long tenure. He did not flinch at using men of integrity on his staff even though they had been divorced. His ability to appoint gifted leaders of all races is still reflected in the makeup of the Church's International Offices and certain areas of the field.

New Ministries Initiated

The younger Tomlinson's leadership created an atmosphere of growth encouragement that spawned new and innovative ministries as well as the expansion and modernization of existing ones. He was an avid promoter of youth all his life and a succorer of the elderly and destitute. An advocate of reconciliation in the interests of the Church's future, he demonstrated this by the very neighborly relationships he maintained with Church of God officials and other prominent members who lived nearby. He officially and consistently invited them to the Church of God of Prophecy annual Assemblies. He spearheaded and oversaw the building of a massive Headquarters complex—a ten-thousand seat circular auditorium, a three-story modern office building, the purchase and expansion of a studio and communications center for multilingual broadcasts, the translation of Church literature into several new languages, and the establishment of a minister's assistance program.

On the educational front, he promoted the work and internationalization of Bible Training Institute, a short-term, instructional program for both ministry and laity. A fully accredited liberal arts college offering both Associates and Bachelor's degrees was begun during his tenure and functioned until 1992.

Tomlinson Retires

By Tomlinson's forty-seventh year as Overseer (1990), when ill health caused his retirement, the Church had expanded from twenty to more than ninety nations of the world and was functioning in all fifty states. From a membership of 32,000 in approximately 1,400 churches in 1943, the Assembly statistics for 1990 showed 5,357 churches and 262,000 members.¹²⁸ During this period, the Church consolidated its operational gains, crystallized and solidified its teachings and operational philosophy, and gained ground and respect in the wider Christian community.

¹²⁸*Minutes of the 85th Assembly, 1990* (Church of God of Prophecy), pp. 26, 132.

He Initiates Greater Openness Toward the Kingdom

In the middle to later years of his administration, M. A. Tomlinson countenanced greater openness toward other believers by allowing members of his staff to participate in certain international religious events and forums and by allowing progressive, challenging sermons to be delivered at the Assembly year after year. This somewhat anticipated the turn to the harvest that the Church would take a few years later. With his permission, and while he moderated the business session of the 1984 Assembly, the Questions and Subjects Committee led the entire Assembly in a time of repentance for the Church's drift from a vital relationship with the Holy Ghost and lack of compassion for a world lost without God and under eternal judgment.¹²⁹ Six years later, in April of 1990, he concluded his long and productive administration by calling the International Presbytery together to consider his successor. He passed away in 1995 at the age of 88. This places M. A. Tomlinson among the longest serving Pentecostal leaders of the twentieth century and also one of the most successful.¹³⁰

Note: M. A. Tomlinson's brief biography is found in Appendix F.

¹²⁹Church of God of Prophecy, *Minutes of the 79th Assembly*, 1984, pp. 127, 128. Aston R. Morrison, a Jamaican-Canadian, chaired the Committee that year, and both Billy Murray and Fred S. Fisher Sr., who would follow in succession as General Overseers, were members.

¹³⁰See the May 20, 1995, Special Edition of the *White Wing Messenger* published in his honor.



A. J. Tomlinson moderating a General Assembly.

Transition and Change Outline



New Leadership Direction and Harvest 1990–2000:

- End of an Era
- Billy D. Murray Chosen
- Office of General Overseer and Structural Changes
- Effects of Fiscal Shortages
- A Christ-Centered Focus—Turning to the Harvest
- Murray Retires

Chapter 6

Transition and Change

New Leadership Direction and Harvest 1990–2000

End of an Era

Looking back, M. A. Tomlinson’s resignation most certainly represented the end of an era. A Church that had known only two General Overseers (both from the same family) in its eighty-seven year, post 1903 history, had to now choose a third. It was a time of further struggle, a determinative few days, in which impulses of “stay the course” met the increasingly recognized need for “greater openness and a renewed Gospel focus.”¹³¹

Billy D. Murray Chosen

Despite being selected in an atmosphere where strong opinions were voiced, Billy D. Murray, 60 years old, then overseer of Illinois, prayerfully accepted the position. It was not until after sensing strong conviction from God that he did so, understanding that agreement had been reached through the principle of submission. He immediately stated that he would be General Overseer of all the people without partiality.

Billy Dwayne Murray Sr. was born in Nash County (near Spring Hope), North Carolina, on April 8, 1930. He began his ministry in 1950 and had served the Church in many capacities at the local, state, and international levels. He was Assistant Editor for the Church’s official publication, the *White Wing Messenger*, for twelve years and assisted with the writing needs of General Overseer M. A. Tomlinson under whom he served. At the time of his selection as Tomlinson’s replacement on May 2, 1990, he was serving as overseer of Illinois.

Murray was one who for several years had consistently focused his Assembly messages on Christ’s power to draw people to Himself and thus closer to each other in true biblical unity. He had spoken less of the Church

¹³¹See the printed transcript (book format) of “Overseers’ Meeting for Selection of Interim General Overseer, April 30–May 2, 1990,” COGOP Archives.

as a gathering place and more of Christ as the person to whom and in whom we gather. At the next General Assembly in August of 1990, he was duly confirmed in the position.

Office of General Overseer and Structural Changes

Almost immediately, Murray convened an international committee¹³² to study the office of General Overseer with a view to reforming some of its functions and structure, and to review a number of biblical assumptions that had grown up around it. This study, which came to the Assembly floor and was openly discussed in 1992, began the initiation of the Church's return to plural leadership—a principle that was adopted in the 88th General Assembly of 1994.¹³³ The Assembly had opted in 1991 to both relocate and to move from annual to biennial beginning in 1992. At the same time, Murray had raised the issue of our doctrinal stand on outward adornment in his 1991 Address, especially about the language that appeared in the Questions and Subject Committee's Report of 1944, the year after A. J. Tomlinson's death.¹³⁴

The adornment issue was also resolved in 1994, reflecting the change that it ought to be a matter of Christian conscience with modesty and loving consideration of others. Two cautions were implicit in this ruling: one against the judgmental spirit that characterized certain attitudes and the other against the spirit of undue license exhibited in the pursuit of Christian liberties.

Effects of Fiscal Shortages

Pressing fiscal shortages (as determined at the time) caused the rather sudden closing of the Church's College in 1992 and, in its wake, the discontinuance of Bible Training Institute as a separate department. The thought was to launch, in some form, a ministry/leadership development continuing education program based on the principle of lifelong learning. The new entity (Center for Biblical Leadership) would utilize the structural format of Bible Training Institute to deliver areas of the College's curriculum.

¹³²That committee comprised Jose A. Reyes, a Puerto Rican-American as Chair, Oswill Williams, a Barbadian-Englishman as Secretary, Antonios Charalambou, a Greek-Cypriot, Lesmon R. Graham, a Jamaican, and Wade H. Phillips, an American of European descent. The Assembly that confirmed him had mandated that study after consulting with him (*Church of God of Prophecy Assembly Minutes*, 1990, p. 44).

¹³³*Minutes of the 88th General Assembly*, 1994, pp. 151–155.

¹³⁴The language in question does not appear in the General Overseer's written Address as recorded in the *1944 Assembly Minutes*, pp. 29–57. It is quoted in the Questions and Subjects Committee Report (*Minutes*, p. 106, item 15) as having been said by him to the Assembly.

This would reflect the emerging paradigm of International Offices as more of a resource center in place of the purely directional role it had come to play.¹³⁵

This idea, the fiscal considerations noted above, and the implementation of plural leadership necessitated the restructuring and reconfiguration of the International Offices. In the meantime, Murray's approach left Assembly Committees free to do their work. He was aware that this approach allowed for innovative experimentation and the exploration of new ideas. Not all proved positive though. The liberties granted and duly taken, along with certain proposals by committees, did not always appear to the Church public to have the endorsement of the General Overseer. At times, such proposals had difficulty passing the Assembly. Also, this new leadership style had not yet been well understood or appreciated by some of our people.

A Christ-Centered Focus—Turning to the Harvest

From the beginning, Murray maintained that “Christ is the message; the church is the messenger.”¹³⁶ This change of focus and his passionate plea for the salvation of the lost (a response to the 1984 call to repentance) resulted in the 1994 launch of what would become the Church's twenty-first century paradigm, “Turning to the Harvest”¹³⁷ (Appendix E). It is noteworthy that in some Spanish-speaking countries, this language was modified to “Turning to the *Greater* Harvest” to reflect their existing growth rates. This accelerated Gospel thrust continues to draw the Church into its orbit and to present leadership with lively challenges and some tough choices regarding long-standing administrative practices and even some doctrinal applications. In the meantime, however, the Church continued her growth and expansion, especially into the two-thirds world. Murray was the first General Overseer to plan the Assembly around specific themes: “Jesus Take Charge!” (1991); “Reaching Forth” (1992); “Turning to the Harvest” (1994); “Vibrant Churches Engaged in Harvest” (1996); “Harvesting Together” (1998); “Honoring the Past, Celebrating the Present, Anticipating the Future” (2000).

¹³⁵*Church of God of Prophecy Business Guide* (Revised through 1992), pp. 117–122.

¹³⁶*An Introduction to the Church of God of Prophecy* (International Offices promotional pamphlet) 3rd Printing 1999, p. 11.

¹³⁷A comprehensive, challenging, and bold harvest plan—in brochure form—was presented at the opening of the Assembly by the Harvest Committee appointed by Murray (see 1994 *Assembly Minutes*, pp. 9–12). Committee members were Oswill Williams (Chair), Perry E. Gillum, John Pace, Adrian L. Varlack, William Wilson, and Randy Howard.

Murray Retires

When Murray retired from his ten-year term as General Overseer at the 2000 Assembly, the Church's 1990 membership of almost 262,000 had more than doubled to 546,000, a remarkable achievement. The financial outlook was better, and "vibrant local churches" were appearing on the horizon. The historic primacy of the local church was restored, and the pastoral office gained in stature and respect. Harvesting (and the real challenges it implies) became the Church's primary focus. General Presbyters were in place and functioning in their new roles. In general, younger leadership was at the helm at the international level. The Church's legacy of women in ministry continued and was greatly enhanced. The new direction was set, and signals of the way forward were beginning to appear. (See Appendix D).

Murray's closing Address treated the subjects of Repentance, Integrity, Great Fellowship, God's Primary Institution (the family), Pentecostal Power, and Unprecedented Praying—Unprecedented Growth. He appealed passionately to all local churches to "give a mighty effort to this ongoing harvest endeavor."¹³⁸ "I come to the close of my tenure as General Overseer," he said, "at a time of great growth in the church. For this, we give praise to the Lord. The future looks bright as we continue to advance on every front. God has given us new leadership for moving forward in the power of the Spirit."¹³⁹ Billy D. Murray passed away December 8, 2004.

Note: Billy D. Murray's brief biography is found in Appendix F.

¹³⁸*Minutes of the 91st General Assembly, 2000*, pp. 40–59.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 60.



The General Headquarters property on Central Avenue.

**Into the New
Millennium
Outline**



Signals of the Way Forward 2000–2006:

- Fred S. Fisher Sr. Succeeds Murray
- Maintains Harvest Focus
- Doctrinal and Practical Reforms
- An Innovative Ending
- Randall E. Howard Succeeds Fisher
- Led by the Spirit

Chapter 7

Into the New Millennium

Signals of the Way Forward 2000–2006

Fred S. Fisher Sr. Succeeds Murray

Fred S. Fisher Sr. was installed as General Overseer in the Church's Ninety-first Assembly in 2000. He expressed a consuming burden to see larger, more vibrant local churches, and overall new growth throughout the United States and the world. He spoke of the Church as “an inclusive ship” and the change to his leadership as a “Bend in the River.” He enthusiastically picked up on the harvest paradigm. “Our methods have changed,” he said, “but our message is the same”—Jesus Saves, Jesus Saves.”¹⁴⁰

Fred S. Fisher Sr. was born on October 13, 1934, in Nashville, Tennessee. He began preaching at age sixteen and served the Church at local, state, and international levels. At the time of his selection, he had been serving the Church in the newly created position of North American Presbyter for two years.

Maintains Harvest Focus

Fisher's 2002 Address signaled his support for the pastoral ministry and for the harvest by treating two subjects: *Benefits for the Parsonage Family*, and *Trusting the Judgments of the Pastor*. He encouraged leadership to revisit the “Turning to the Harvest” resource brochure, saying, “In these transitional times, this valuable challenge must not get lost.” His heart is for receiving those whom God receives and sends our way. He stressed that in the New Testament church, long-standing attitudes were prevalent but that God changed many years of thinking with one divine act. He encouraged us in the “More Excellent Way”—the way of Christ—after telling us, “It is Time to Grow Up.” He encouraged the Church to allow

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 79–82.

for differences while neither breaking unity nor becoming distracted from her primary mission. He gave “Our Incredible, Invincible, Indispensable Youth” the boost of their lives by voting with them and encouraging projects to challenge them.¹⁴¹

Doctrinal and Practical Reforms

Fisher allowed two sensitive issues, ecclesiology and membership criteria, to come to the Assembly floor in 2002. Committee work and Assembly discussions had begun on these subjects in 1998 and 2000. Both related directly to the ability of local churches to better harvest and disciple God’s pending bumper crop. While these issues did not receive the required “one accord” agreement, the overwhelming sentiment in the Assembly was that the Spirit was leading us to review and biblically adjust these matters. Convinced of this and having assumed the position that the Church needed to reform in doctrinal, practical, and structural ways in order to reap the harvest in an effective manner, Fisher led the Church to accept a change in membership criteria and in a system of representation by proxy in 2004. In 2006, he tackled one of the Church’s most thorny issues (that of Divorce and Remarriage) and led in correcting and expanding our understanding and application of this doctrine. Of course, the practical implementation details of all these issues are still being worked out within appropriate Church administrative structures.

An Innovative Ending

Simultaneously, Fisher launched as his evangelistic themes, “Passion for People” (2002), “Vision Now—Victorious Future” (2004), and “Vision Now: Victorious Future—Spirit-Driven” (2006). Through these themes, he sought to capture the forward momentum of the Church’s continuing growth in an enhanced effort. He also appealed to the Church’s somewhat dormant interest in higher education by initiating the study and startup of the Tomlinson Center (2004), which continues as an online educational program in conjunction with Lee University of Cleveland, Tennessee. Under Fisher’s leadership, the Church’s membership continued to increase. Statistical data for 2006 showed the Church’s worldwide membership at 940,779 up from 546,000 when he took office in 2000.

Fisher’s fatherly instincts, caring concern, and oft-expressed appreciation for those at the International Offices and elsewhere boded well for the future. Fred S. Fisher left office effective September 30, 2006, in the

¹⁴¹For the full address, see Church of God of Prophecy, *International Assembly Minutes*, 2002, pp. 26–41.

fifty-seventh year of his ministry, having served six years as General Overseer. Although the proposed revision of the Church's generally understood position on an exclusive ecclesiology that was proposed in 2000 and 2002 did not formally return to the General Assembly floor, Fisher's Addresses made clear that to maintain such a position was no longer tenable for the Church in her response to the Spirit's call to repentance.¹⁴² After leaving office, Fisher accepted the interim pastorate of the Clemson Church of God of Prophecy in November of 2006, and settled into it more permanently in May of 2007. This was a "first" for the Church of God of Prophecy and perhaps serves to correct the old image that pastoral work was a step down once one had been an overseer.

Randall E. Howard Succeeds Fisher

Fisher was succeeded as General Overseer by Bishop Randall E. Howard, who was installed at the Ninety-fourth Assembly in 2006. He immediately began to articulate the goals or core values of his administration: Harvest, Leadership Development, and Prayer. By harvest, he means the planting of new churches and the enhancement of existing ones. By leadership development, he intends the practical and advanced training of overseers, pastors, and leaders already in the field, and the raising up and training of new overseers, pastors, and leaders. Prayer, of course, is the cornerstone of all we do, and he is particularly committed to prayer as a fruitful individual discipline and for the whole ministry and Church. We will have more to share on the direction of Howard's administration in the chapter dealing with the Church's future.

Led by the Spirit

The Church's return to her roots in Word and Spirit necessitated reforms and re-structuring as needed and serves to better reflect the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Both Murray and Fisher understood that this was a rising to the apostolic standard in the Book of Acts rather than a corruption of biblical doctrines. What better time to pick up this historic challenge! In the aftermath of what has been for this Church a centennial celebratory period, we have a golden opportunity to hone in on the emerging signals of the way forward. The Spirit is pointing the way and has given us leadership compatible with His divine direction. The seven times repeated challenge is before us: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit sayeth unto the churches" (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29:6, 13, 22). Lead on,

¹⁴²See General Overseer's Addresses, *International General Assembly Minutes*, 2002, 2004, 2006.

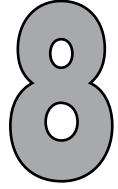
Holy Spirit! Follow on, Church! As we joyfully **“Honor Our Past”** and thankfully **“Celebrate Our Present,”** let us simultaneously and boldly **“Anticipate and Embrace Our Future”** by living out the Church’s twenty-first century paradigm, **“Turning to the Harvest!”**

Note: Fred S. Fisher’s brief biography is found in Appendix F.

Randall E. Howard’s brief biography is found in Appendix F.

POLITY

**Polity and
Practice
Outline**



The Church Practical Efforts to Align With the Spirit:

Introduction

Church Polity Concepts

- The Spirit's Contemporary Leadership
- The Church as a Social Community in the World
- Church Polity as Servant Tools
- The Church—The Representation of God's Authority

Church of God of Prophecy

- The Church's Organizational Structure
- The International Assembly
- Office of the General Overseer
- Plurality of Leadership
- The Primacy of the Local Church
- Ministerial Changes
- Fiscal Adjustments, Freedoms, and Responsibilities

Church Organization—A Hierarchical System

- Executive Administration
- Theological Practice
- Church Properties
- Legal Matters
- Assembly Reaffirmation:
- The Dynamics of Theocratic and Hierarchical Government

Chapter

8

Polity and Practice

The Church's Practical Efforts to Align With the Spirit

Introduction

The government and organizational practices of the Church must be viewed in large part as a living dynamic under the guidance and control of the Holy Ghost rather than simply as a static set of fixed forms and inflexible, unchangeable rules. The Bible itself evidences certain forms, structures, and stated functions of the Church and its leadership, but much of these were culturally conditioned for relevance to those early times. The principle of cultural conditioning in the governmental sense is very important and is one primary reason that the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church is absolutely indispensable. While we do depend somewhat on Church tradition for certain of the forms we follow, we must never become so slavishly beholding or blindly reliant on them until we are unable to adjust them when the Spirit leads us to do so in light of new and changing contextual realities. This basic thought should guide our discussion of the various elements in the studies that follow. A quote from Marvin R. Wilson is appropriate and applicable:

Fiddler [a popular Broadway musical of the 1960s concerning a Jewish father desperately trying to maintain family traditions during changing times], then, will cause Christians to reevaluate their traditions. Christians will [should] see anew the need to sort out those values which may be only hand-me-down, dust-covered relics of the past, having already served their usefulness, from those with timeless and eternal value. This sorting is a complex and never-ending process, requiring the Scriptures, the wisdom of the Spirit, and a lot of common sense.¹⁴³

¹⁴³Marvin R. Wilson, "Our Father Abraham—*Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*," (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), p. 225.

In this section on polity, we will examine governmental, structural, and organizational issues that affect the Church and its leadership and changes that have challenged us in this area. Church doctrine and doctrinal issues such as biblical re-assessments, conceptual revisions, proper exegesis of the Scriptures, recent changes, and a look ahead at other possible issues will occupy another section of this book.

Before we come to COGOP polity, proper, it seems appropriate to say a general word about the Church's organizational presence (identity), witness, and power. The Church has never existed in a vacuum but in the context of the world at large and in local communities in particular. It is my deep conviction that the Church must organize, operate, and function in the world and in these communities under the guidance and direction of God's Spirit. I will use some rather lengthy quotes from Craig Van Gelder (a professor of congregational mission at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota) to underscore my point. I think he has captured well the biblical sense of organization and polity, which the church, in general, should have held throughout history:

Just as the Spirit led the [early] church in developing structures, processes, and leadership roles to fit the various contexts it encountered, **we should expect the Spirit to continue to lead the church in developing organizational forms appropriate to a variety of contexts.** It is our task to take the whole of the biblical teaching and continue to examine the principles and practices that are instructive for the church as it encounters new contexts in today's world. This should be done while reflecting carefully on how the church throughout its history has applied these principles and practices to diverse contexts.

Because the church is a social community that is both holy and human, everything the church does in the world is to bear witness to the purposes of God and [H]is redemptive power. **Church organization—how the church develops its structures, processes, and leadership roles—is itself a form of witness to the world. It witnesses to the fact that here exists a social community that possesses a spiritual character. It is a witness that a redemptive power is possible within a human community.** This witness can be either positive or negative depending on how faithfully the organization of the church expresses its nature and ministry.

This means that church polity-how the church organizes itself-is of crucial importance for the visible church's full participation in the redemptive reign of God. **First of all, church polity must never**

become an end in itself. The church's organizational practices must be maintained as servant tools to shape the church's ministry as it fully lives out its nature. Second of all, church polity must always be seen as contextual and provisional. Maintaining these perspectives is crucial to keeping a proper perspective on the relationship between organization and power¹⁴⁴ (bold emphases mine).

All this means that, in some sense, God's authority is visibly represented or portrayed on earth through the church. "This authority," continues Van Gelder, "finds expression through becoming structured within the organizational life and practices of the church. **Offices, agencies, boards, policies, confessions, and programs are all vehicles for expressing the nature and ministry of the church, but they are neither neutral nor value-free.** All express some aspect of power as they relate to the exercise of God's authority within the church. While they share common characteristics with the forms of other [secular] organizations, in the church [,] they are intended to express the redemptive purposes of God"¹⁴⁵ (bold emphases and brackets mine).

This makes the study, appreciation, evaluation, and continual assessment of these polity matters a vital issue for our times and indeed for all time. Embracing these biblically based concepts will greatly help us in understanding what is happening within the COGOP today as her fresh identity is expressed. We shall see more as we expand some on these ideas below. The Church is a **living organism with organization!** When, as COGOP leaders, we fully comprehend the wider scope and purposes of the Church's structures, policies, and practices, we will fill our God-given roles more responsibly, serve with greater diligence, and be more joyful in our participation. We are on a mission with the eternal God!

Church Polity Concepts:

The Spirit's Contemporary Leadership

Van Gelder makes the telling point that we should expect the Spirit of God to continue to lead the church's organizational development in our

¹⁴⁴Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church, A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), pp. 160, 161.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 161.

day just as He led the church in Bible times. Only the Spirit can cause the church to be relevant and effective in the multiplicity of complex contexts in our world. This means that the church, as a collective body and through its God-ordained leadership, should seek the active guidance of the Holy Ghost in knowing God's will in this area of visible Kingdom recognition—the operational and structural practices of the church as a sign of the Kingdom of God. Under the Spirit's guidance, we are to consult biblical teaching in this area and seek to apply its principles. Simultaneously, we must reflect carefully on the valid historic organizational traditions of the church, traditions that were developed and have proven useful and effective over time. The COGOP is consciously and intentionally trying to do this. We may not have done this consistently in the past, but since our turn to God's end-time harvest, our efforts are indeed notable. We are committed to the Holy Spirit's leadership in all areas of Church life and practice.

The Church as a Social Community in the World

The church is both holy (divine) and human. As such, she is here to bear witness to the purposes of God and His redemptive power in the world. Because of the church's dual nature, she is both observed by the heavenly hosts and is also a social community here on earth to be seen by the world. She is God's display piece in the window of His world and is designed to reflect His glory and His redemptive goal for history. She witnesses to the fact that God's power can be functional and effective within a human community. She is a social community that possesses a spiritual character. There is nothing else like her in this world. Therefore, how she organizes herself (structure), governs her affairs (polity), and develops her ministry roles (leadership) is a form of witness for God over against the organizational forms, governmental practices, and leadership styles of the world. In this area, her witness can be either positive or negative depending on her faithfulness in following the Spirit.

Church Polity as Servant Tools

Two issues that have plagued the church throughout history are power and authority. In fact, during the two millennia since the first coming of Jesus Christ, the church has suffered scandal after scandal in this area. Part of the reason for this failure is that the church frequently forgot that she is a participant in the redemptive reign and work of God as the bearer of the Gospel message of salvation. Because of the human instrumentality involved in church operations, polity must never become an end in and of itself. The ways in which we organize and operate shape the ministries of the church before the world, but these must always be held in their servants' roles. If not, they distort the true nature of the church and thereby bring discredit on the worthy name and mission of our Lord. Human

participation in these aspects of the church necessitates that we always hold the church's polity as contextual and provisional. This means that church polity should be reviewed and tested regularly for God-centeredness and for the reflection of His character. This is the only way under the guidance of the Holy Ghost that the church can avoid the appearance of the misuse of its power and organizational structures before the watching, skeptical world and in the sight of the principalities and powers that are looking on.

The Church—The Representation of God's Authority

The church must faithfully demonstrate or portray the rule of God throughout His Kingdom and in the world. The organizational and operational life of the church helps to model this. The offices, boards, agencies, policies, confessions, and programs of the church are all vehicles to express some aspect of power as they relate to the exercise of God's authority within the church in carrying out His plan. Because of this, they are neither neutral nor value-free. While they have names like the ones used in the secular world, their purpose is vastly different—to express the redemptive purposes of God and to reflect His loving, caring rule. The church, therefore, has an obligation to assure that its practices are biblically sound and faithfully God-centered.

Church of God of Prophecy:

For many years, the Church operated under a strong, central government headed by a General Overseer under three guiding principles: Unity of Government, Unity of Doctrine, and Unity of Purpose. Sometime during the Bible Training Institute years of 1941–1992, the school adopted as its motto, "Bible Training Institute strives not to establish a doctrine, but to establish in the doctrine." The prevailing view was that many things may change, but the doctrine—never! Of course, such a posture did not take cognizance of the fact that doctrine, practices, and government developed over time and that fresh understandings and new light in line with our own Church covenant was inevitable. Practical adjustments and organizational changes had always taken place, but in the second generation, we were content to add new auxiliaries and departments without removing or fundamentally altering any of the old. Those things that we found were impractical, too expensive, or limited in their effectiveness or results were often quietly dropped or left alone to die. When faced squarely, the reality is that we had always been changing (as needed) to be practical and efficient in a fast-changing, modern world despite our protestations to the contrary. Sometimes, practical necessities force the recognition of conceptual changes. For example, once we started seriously "Turning to the Harvest," our concept of exclusivity was challenged as well as the criteria used to

accept new converts into membership. The practical dilemma was once we had won new souls, new families, what would we do with them? And as we sensed that our claim to be the exclusive “body of Christ” was not sustainable in the face of all that God was and is doing with others around the world in His harvest, we were forced to rethink, biblically, the real meaning of church. While I consider that these issues are still somewhat fluid, it is already clear that we had to make (and perhaps will yet make) further conceptual and practical adjustments.

The Church’s Organizational Structure¹⁴⁶

A brief overview of the Church’s basic organizational structure is as follows:

1. The local congregation usually headed by a pastor(s) (appointed by the overseer of a nation, region, or state) with the appropriate committees, officers, and leaders.
2. The district level consisting of a group of local churches in a given area with a district overseer who may or may not be a pastor. The district overseer is appointed by the national/regional/state overseer.
3. The national/regional/state level headed by an overseer appointed by and through the General Presbyter’s and General Overseer’s offices, usually at the International Assembly.
4. The international office level headed by the General Overseer, who is recommended by the International Presbytery and approved by the International Assembly. He serves in consultation with a body of General Presbyters chosen by the International Presbytery as authorized by the International Assembly. Together with the General Overseer as Chair, these General Presbyters form the General Presbytery, which supervises and directs the worldwide affairs of the Church

The International Assembly

A non-existent body in the first few years of the Church’s start-up operations, what has come to be called our first General Assembly, was held January 26, 27, 1906, in the dead of winter when evangelism was much more difficult, especially for churches that depended on open-air meetings

¹⁴⁶For additional details on the COGOP’s organizational and operational structure, see *Ministry Policy Manual*, 2008 (CD), available through White Wing Publishing House (Cleveland, TN).

and brush arbor sites. The birth and progress of the General Assembly is interesting in and of itself. *The Book of Minutes* (1922) has this statement:

Near the close of 1905, the work had so prospered that there began to be a demand for a general gathering together of members from all the churches to consider questions of importance and to search the Bible for additional light and knowledge. Accordingly arrangements were made and the meeting called.¹⁴⁷

We note several things. First, a general demand arose or was sensed to convene a gathering of members from all the churches. It is noteworthy that the minutes of that meeting is titled, “Minutes of Annual Assembly of the Churches of East Tennessee, North Georgia, and Western North Carolina, held January 26 & 27, at Camp Creek, N. C.” Correctly viewed, this was at first a gathering of the churches. Second, their stated purposes were “to consider questions of importance and to search the Bible for additional light and knowledge.” There was some consciousness that others had used occasions like these to formally organize denominations, so a note expressed the hope that “. . . no person or body of people would ever use these minutes, or any part of them, as articles of faith upon which to establish a sect or denomination.”¹⁴⁸ Our third observation, based on a research of the title pages of the *Assembly Minutes*, is that the plural form, “Churches of God,” was used in the title pages of all minutes up to and including 1917. There was no Assembly in 1918 due to an influenza epidemic as earlier mentioned. The 1919 *Minutes* used for the first time “Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Church of God” singular. However, the term “Churches of God” continued to be used by A. J. Tomlinson in his “Prefatory Notes” until the Sixteenth Assembly in 1921. The Preface for the 1922 *Minutes* is considerably shorter when compared to the others, and it makes no mention of “The Churches of God” but refers to the “Assembly” only. The 1923 *Minutes* have no preface. This is the year that what became known as “The Church of God of Prophecy” (1952) actually became a separate body as a continuation of the original Movement and as a correction to the growing powers of the official Assembly as a ruling body over the churches.

After 1923, General Assembly rulings were again relegated to a “record

¹⁴⁷*Book of Minutes General Assemblies Churches of God* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1922), p. 14.

¹⁴⁸*Minutes of Annual Assembly of the Churches of East Tennessee, Etc.*, Folded Tract Form, undated, distributed by White Wing Publishing House, now White Wing Resource Center, Cleveland TN.

of our findings” rather than rules or truth equivalent to the Bible. Over time, however, the Assembly gradually regained its ascendancy as a ruling body, and by 1946, it was officially stated that the “. . . General Assembly in conference be the determining factor to interpret all Bible doctrines and practices of the Church.”¹⁴⁹ It was later referred to as “the highest tribunal within the Church for interpreting the Scriptures and deciding matters of business which affect the entire Church”¹⁵⁰ This principle has been restated as late as 1986 and 1994 with the important provisos of “Under the Headship of Christ as He is revealed in the Scriptures” and “under the guidance of the Holy Ghost” (1986 *Minutes*, pages 36–38; 1994 *Minutes*, page 148). To quote from the 1994 *Minutes* . . .

The primary purpose of the General Assembly is to serve as an interpretative and decision-making body that deals with pressing universal biblical truths and matters of [a] trans-local nature that require definitive decisions in expediting the proclamation of the Gospel. . . . It is the place where the members of the church assemble together under the headship of Christ to search the Scriptures. As the Bible is illuminated by the Spirit, understanding and resolution of differences of interpretations, which tend to be divisive among the churches, will be received. The General Assembly accepts the Bible as its highest authority.

A secondary function of the General Assembly is to decide on administrative actions the church deems helpful in accomplishing the Great Commission. . . . It also provides opportunities for fellowship and inspirational leadership.

The 2004 Assembly decision regarding “official representatives” to the General Assembly using a **proxy system** is still fluid in the sense that its impact, unintended consequences, and the logistical difficulties of worldwide implementation are still to be fully appreciated and worked out. It is my opinion that this decision will have to be revisited, but it was used in the Assembly in 2008. The need for some tweaking of the plan is recognized. In general, what is now our biennial **International Assembly** functions as a place for discussion by the attendees; for decision-making through official proxy-bearing representatives; as an evaluative and promotional center for matters of church-wide import, which may be

¹⁴⁹*Assembly Minutes*, 1946, p. 105.

¹⁵⁰*Assembly Minutes*, 1982, p. 82; see also *Lessons in Bible Training*, Volume II, WWPH 1955, p. 42, item 7.

proposed by inspirational leadership; a practical necessity for greater fellowship; a ruling body under Christ led by the Holy Ghost; and a representative but changing forum for the churches.

Office of the General Overseer

The 1991–92 official study of the Office of General Overseer authorized by the 1990 General Assembly (Questions and Subjects Committee Report, Section 4, paragraph 1, *Assembly Minutes*, page 44) and read and discussed during the 1992 General Assembly stated the following:

We conclude, then, that no evidence exists to show a precedent in the New Testament church for a static office of General Overseer. There is a leadership position of one as “first among equals” but not a solitary and unique office. Christ alone holds a unique office in the church—the solitary head of a many-membered body.

The form and function of the apostolic model of leadership was in all respects under the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit and was essentially dynamic, operating through plural leadership rather than a single power base with one man at the top of a hierarchical structure (Study, page 12, item 8).

This is the source document that resulted in what the Questions and Subjects Committee presented to the Assembly in 1994 under the subject “Plurality of Leadership” in Section D of their Report (1994 *Assembly Minutes*, page 155). The Report was passed and entered into the record. The Office of General Overseer and the views surrounding that office were key issues in 1922 and 1923. The powers of that office as then practiced became an important factor in the division that took place. Subsequently, A. J. Tomlinson’s sons, Homer and Milton, broke fellowship primarily over Homer’s desire for that office. Grady Kent, who left the Church in 1957 and began his own Movement, had issues that included believing that the General Overseer, as a person, was the anointed one over and above the Assembly as an authoritative body. After the selection of Bishop Murray in 1990, a small group left the Church over the way he was chosen as well as because of some of the doctrinal revisions he made and the policies he followed as General Overseer. The implementation of plurality in leadership since 1997 when the first Presbyters were chosen by the International Presbytery has been somewhat tedious, but has gradually been gaining acceptance with the roles becoming more effective. Of course, whenever a new system is superimposed over an existing one, the results are not always satisfactory; but by the grace of God, the Church will eventually transition successfully in the area of governance.

Plurality of Leadership¹⁵¹

The background to plurality of leadership stems from the Study of the Office of General Overseer mentioned before and first took shape in the then Questions and Subjects Committee Report of 1994. The Report called for a re-characterization of the Office of General Overseer (GO) in a plural setting as “primus inter pares” or “first among equals.” The ruling called for beginning the implementation of plurality with at least two General Presbyters (GPs) in addition to the GO, who would himself also be considered a Presbyter. A distinction would be maintained by the method of selection for GO and GPs. Whereas the GO is selected by the International Presbytery (IP) and presented for acceptance and confirmation to the General Assembly, GPs would be chosen by the IP as authorized by the Assembly and only presented or announced to the Assembly. The IP was to devise the system by which this could be done, provide for the GPs to be evaluated, and for replacements as necessary. The same ruling allowed for evaluation of the General Overseer at least every seven years and gave several ways by which the office could be made vacant: death, moral failure, personal voluntary departure, or IP recognition (as a body) that God’s hand was no longer on the individual for that particular work. *Note:* The inclusion of severe disability as one of the personal/body recognitions is, of course, implied.

In its post-Assembly meeting in 1994, the IP created a task force called the “Presbytery Working Group” (PWG) to propose ideas and processes to fulfill its Assembly mandates with respect to the General Overseer’s Office and the choosing, installation, and removal of other General Presbyters. This was done, and the document was considered and approved during two days just prior to the 1996 Assembly. At that time, the IP recognized that it could not meet the Assembly’s implementation deadline of 1996, so it asked (and was granted) permission to begin in 1997. The Assembly language called for “at least three individuals,” one of whom was to be the General Overseer, meaning that at least two others had to be selected. The 1997 meeting could not reach unanimous agreement on two others but finally did when a third was included to serve with the General Overseer. Since the Assembly language included the phrase, “at least three,” it did not strictly limit it to three. In this way, the decision fell within the rule. Together, they became known as the “General Oversight Group.”

During the meeting, the General Overseer, in consideration of the poor

¹⁵¹See Appendix B for a lesson on the Biblical background of Plurality of Leadership.

financial situation that the International Offices (IO) were then experiencing, proposed that the IP select other Area Presbyters using the overseers from each area as a recommending body to the IP. This was done for all areas except North America, which came onboard a year later. A further revision of the selection process and of some of the ideas in the PWG document between the 1998 and 2000 Assemblies resulted in the discontinuance of the term “Area Presbyter”¹⁵² with the practical change that all who were chosen would be “General Presbyters” in the Assembly sense of those who would “. . . work with the General Overseer to provide shared leadership responsibility in carrying out the functions of the General Overseer by developing vision, processes, and plans in accomplishing the Church’s mission.”¹⁵³ This revision, in effect, expanded the then General Oversight Group and changed its name to the “General Presbytery,” which then consisted of ten Presbyters including the General Overseer. This was due to the untimely death in 1999 of the first General Presbyter to be unanimously chosen in the 1997 meeting, Bishop Larry Wilson. In the year 2000, Bishop Perry E. Gillum retired as a General Presbyter; and during the review, the IP continued the service of General Presbyter José A. Reyes for another term. He then became the remaining “at large” member of the General Presbytery and served until 2004. An “at large” office of General Presbyter no longer exists. As of today, the General Presbytery consists of eight persons, namely, the General Overseer and seven other General Presbyters, some of whom live in various regions of the world. At the 2008 International Assembly, a revised and combined document titled “The Governance of the Presbytery” was re-submitted by the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee and duly approved by the International Presbytery.¹⁵⁴ This document, like all others, is subject to revisions by the IP from time to time as practical necessities may warrant.

The Primacy of the Local Church

Beginning with the administration of Bishop Billy Murray in 1990, a fresh focus on the local church and, consequently, an enhanced role for the pastor began. It was Bishop Murray’s general belief that the key to true church growth and effective evangelism was in the local church.

¹⁵²Note: The term “Area Presbyter,” has been somewhat restored to use by the 2008 “Governance of the Presbytery” document, which was accepted by the International Presbytery.

¹⁵³Minutes of the 88th Assembly, 1994, p. 155.

¹⁵⁴For the complete document, see Appendix 2, Ministry Policy Manual, Church of God of Prophecy, 2008, pp. 168–191.

Para-church centers or agencies could help, but the real evangelistic base was the local church in the community where people lived and could be ministered to. The local church was the Gospel's consistent outpost. Accordingly, in both his General Assembly Addresses and in practical policies, Murray sought to re-empower the local congregation to function effectively within its community. This perceived emphasis on decentralization resulted in International Offices reconfiguring itself into more of a Resource Center and the regional/national/state overseer's role more of a coordinating facilitator than a controlling director. Leadership would be more by earned spiritual influence than by set, enforceable, structural forms of power. Murray put teeth into his approach by initiating direct contact with the pastoral office (especially in North America) through letters and videos and by appointing deacons on the then Assembly Ways and Means Committee (now Assembly Committee for Finance and Stewardship), which was to review and revise the Church's financial system.

With the creation of the Center for Biblical Leadership (CBL) and in the wake of the closing of Tomlinson College and Bible Training Institute in 1992, the resource center approach and the primacy of the local church had an official advocate. Of course, the primacy of the local congregation was not a new idea but a resurrected one. As alluded to in the earlier part of this discourse, the COGOP began as local churches that met together once a year to gain better biblical understanding and seek practical solutions to pressing problems that might be hindrances to the effective promulgation of the Gospel. The gradual centralization that took place in the succeeding years made local churches into "receivers" of central initiatives rather than "initiators" of Gospel actions. In other words, over time, churches grew to be overly "Headquarters dependent" and began waiting to receive the next initiative or promotional program.

Not all the consequences or fallout from the resource center idea were foreseen or were readily evident. Perhaps, in hindsight, we moved too drastically from a strong centrally directed system to a more participatory self-initiated one. This seemed to be the case for a large number of churches and for some national administrations. The point is, of course, debatable. No fundamental change is painless! What is clear, however, is that some churches quickly embraced this new openness, and what had been but a slow trickle toward greater local autonomy (interdependence) became a growing flood of freedom at least in some areas of the world. Smaller churches and those geographically farther away from the center showed some ambivalence toward the new changes, but generally even these began to accept the renewed freedoms. They signaled this by adopting local, community-based designations for their church locations as

ministries of the COGOP while, in some sense, maintaining the once indispensable pride of identifying with the Church's "International Headquarters." As stated earlier, the COGOP functions as an interdependent, integrated group worldwide. This is seen as a necessity for biblical unity and a practical means of witness and visibility.

The 1994 "Turning to the Harvest" evangelistically focused Assembly theme and thrust lent further credence to this approach as it quickly became the Church's new paradigm for the twenty-first century.

Ministerial Changes

Plurality of leadership, doctrinal and practical adjustments, polity changes, greater educational competencies, and better biblical exegesis all contributed to the need for administrative changes in Church operations as well as fresh approaches to the pulpit ministries of teaching and preaching. The Assembly Committee for Biblical Doctrine and Polity (BDP) began a review of the Church's theological bases and practical arrangements for the ministry in 1996. This revision resulted in structural changes, the correction of certain interpretations and applications of Scripture, general ministerial requirements and evaluations, the involvement of the local congregations in pastoral appointments and reviews, and in the pastor's compensation. Among the more significant changes are the following:

1. Deacons are no longer "at large" elders per se but are based within the local congregation.
2. Women can now hold unrestricted license and full pastoral authority with the exception of the ordaining of elders.
3. There is a renewed emphasis on the general education and training of ministers in the lifelong sense, on apprenticeships as learning points, and on specialized courses such as Counseling.
4. Ministerial competencies for all levels of ministry were approved by the General Overseer for inclusion in the Church's *Ministry Manual*.
5. Unmarried males who make a commitment to celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom can now be ordained as Bishops provided they meet all other requirements.
6. The office of "Deaconess" has been reestablished within the Church's ministry structure at the local level, but in a somewhat different manner from earlier times.¹⁵⁵

In the overall sense and in conjunction with the primacy of the local

¹⁵⁵See *Book of Minutes*, op cit, pp. 28, 33, for early Church practices and, "An Additional COGOP Distinctive" at Appendix A2.

church (discussed above), pastors are to be far more proactive and involved with the Church's direction and practices than heretofore. Since the latest Assembly Rulings and practical adjustments have always served to supercede, modify, or extend antecedent rulings and practices, several conceptual and administrative realignments are and will be needed from the ministerial point of view. Some of these adjustments will take time.

Fiscal Adjustments, Freedoms, and Responsibilities

As mentioned earlier, the International Assembly in recent years made certain fundamental changes to the Church's financial system. In principle, leaders are to be more directly compensated through those they serve. The pooled offering method was assigned a more limited priority. Required auxiliary donations, which were downsized to the three voluntary "Church Ministry Support" offerings of Evangelism, Education, and Literature Outreach were discontinued at the Ninety-Fifth International Assembly and replaced with a "Harvest and Leadership Development Offering" (HLD) and a "Supplementary Funds (SF) for National/Regional/State Offices" (NRS) provision. The first is to be received monthly and sent, in full, to the NRS office. The second is an encouragement for state conventions to approve additional amounts to be sent in monthly by the local churches specifically for the support of their NRS office. The HLD fund is meant to be used for outreach projects such as ministry education, harvesting souls, discipleship training, leadership development, evangelization, church-planting (*Important Business Acts [IBA]*, 2008, pages 23–25). Heritage Ministries Expense Fund (a set fee according to nations) is for maintenance of Fields of the Wood and other markers. The Mission Fund involves several aspects: Harvest Partners (connected directly with field needs), mission services' and second Sunday offerings, and March and October World Mission Drives. Special projects such as Helping Hands and the One-Child Fund sponsorships are handled separately and are in addition to the above but on a voluntary basis.

The old twenty percent division of gross tithes collected in the local churches (ten percent to International, ten percent to Regional/National/State) was amended over time so that only ten percent leaves the local church unless otherwise agreed at the NRS convention. The Ninety-Fifth Assembly also adjusted our tithing procedure so that NRS overseers tithe to their respective General Presbyter's Office (*IBA*, 2008, page 23). The same Assembly also formally encouraged all ministers to participate in a retirement program and all churches and church agencies to consider matching plans in their budgets for those paid personnel who serve them. Where no plan exists, overseers, in coordination with International

Offices (Stewardship Ministries) and their respective General Presbyter, are asked to establish an appropriate plan within the laws of their areas. Base allotments for pastors and overseers may be increased (if funds are available) by the relevant task force based on factors that include performance, level of responsibility, and cost of living indices in particular localities. In the United States, a portion of the allotment amount can be designated as housing or parsonage allowance for income tax purposes whether the minister owns his/her home or not. Some other countries may have similar arrangements under their tax laws.

The Assembly challenged the churches under their new economic freedoms to consider four factors:

1. Understand the Church's global mission in today's world.
2. Focus on local ministry while maintaining involvement with national and international projects.
3. Ensure sufficient financial support is available to reduce the number of bi-vocational pastors and [assure] the existence of appropriate pastoral care to meet the needs for growth and maturity.
4. Promote and provide a consistent opportunity(s) to worship the Lord in giving. Churches are admonished to be careful to avoid tendencies and attitudes that are purely self-serving so as to have a balanced concern to bring the Good News to people everywhere.

Church Organization—A Hierarchical System:

Practical evidence that the Church of God of Prophecy is, and has operated on the hierarchical principle of church government includes but is not limited to the following:

Executive Administration

- The General Overseer is selected and commissioned by the General Assembly, the highest tribunal of authority in the Church, after recommendation by the International Presbytery, a body comprising of overseers from around the world, international ministry directors, and trans-local bishops from the International Offices.
- The General Overseer in consultation with the General Presbytery appoints all international level personnel: International Office directors, overseers over the churches in states, regions, and nations.

- Overseers, in turn, appoint their staff and supply, appoint, and/or confirm pastors to the churches sometimes after a process of recommendation.
- All ministers' licenses and ordinations are authorized by the General Assembly, are centrally issued after due process, and must be signed by the General Overseer.
- Ministers are required to report monthly to their state, regional, or national overseer and quarterly to the Church's International Offices. A monthly list of licenses issued and cancellations is published to state/regional/national offices by the General Overseer's Office. Revocations cannot be done without the consent of the General Overseer.

Theological Practice

- The General Assembly is the highest tribunal of authority of the churches worldwide (the Church) and the body that decides all doctrine and polity issues for all the churches regardless of location.
- Three central pillars (principles) govern the Church's biblical approach: Unity of Purpose, Unity of Government, and Unity of Doctrine. This has been taught in the Church's official training institutions and practiced throughout the world.

Church Properties

- The Church's policy is that all church properties, local, state, regional, national, are held for the general good of the whole Church by a combination of local, state, regional, national, and international level (general) trustees. Such properties are administered and maintained by those duly appointed under the Church's central governmental system. Regulations require that the consent of the General Trustees is necessary before property can be encumbered, sold, or otherwise disposed of by local trustees. Such consent is only given in good faith and with the intent of preserving the rights of ownership and use by the Church of God of Prophecy, and such consent does not in any way prejudice or waive its rights when such consent is manipulated, misused, or abused.

Legal Matters

- Because the Church is not a church by geographic location, state, region, or nation, churches needing to incorporate are required to obtain the consent of the state/regional/national overseer, and a copy of any such incorporation is to be lodged with the General Trustees at

the Church's International Offices. Incorporation by any local church must not violate General Assembly rulings or guidelines with regard to holding, encumbering, selling, or purchasing church property or the doctrine and polity of the church.

- All newly organized local churches are required to be reported and to be registered at the Church's central International Offices. No local church, once organized, can be disbanded without the consent of the General Overseer who stands for and represents the General Assembly when it is not in session. Local churches are required to report monthly to International Offices through established channels.
- State/regional/national offices needing to incorporate must have consent from the General Overseer/General Presbyterian (General Presbyterian having jurisdiction) with the same provisions regarding Assembly Rulings, guidelines, holding, encumbering, selling of property, doctrine, and polity as stated above.

These have been the Church's well-established practices over many years and have been generally known, observed, and practiced by both its ministers and members at every level.

ASSEMBLY REAFFIRMATION

THE DYNAMICS OF THEOCRATIC AND HIERARCHICAL GOVERNMENT

The Assembly Committee for Biblical Doctrine and Polity has been requested by the General Presbyters to make a clarifying statement concerning our position on church government. We recognize the delicate balance between our theological/ecclesiastical make-up of the Church and the business structure that we must maintain for legal purposes. From the inception of this Church body at the beginning of the twentieth century, our pioneering fathers realized the powerful dynamics of recognizing that in all ministerial and spiritual operations that we were to pattern ourselves after the theocratic principles of the Bible. At the same time, the wisdom of early Church Assemblies also realized the critical need to develop a system of hierarchical government in all matters of business pertaining to property, monetary operations, and legal matters. This dynamic requires us as ministers and members to confess that this important balance would be needed to function in a secularized society that did not often reflect a belief in a "direct rule of God through Spirit-filled leaders."

We hereby declare this Church to be a body striving to operate under theocratic principles in all spiritual, ministerial, and inspirational areas,

but to recognize that we also function as a hierarchical government to maintain proper order and discipline in all areas pertaining to business and management of our organization.

While this statement is being given to clarify our present type of government, this position has been reflected by past Assembly decisions and court rulings throughout our history.

—The Assembly Committee for Biblical Doctrine and Polity, 2006

DOCTRINE

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Chapter 9

Doctrine

Biblical Reassessments, Revisions, Proper Exegesis:

Introduction

Marvin R. Wilson could well have been speaking about the Church of God of Prophecy when he wrote the following:

In order to change our attitude, we must examine our theological views and change those which are faulty. Unlike God's immutable Word, theology is a human and fallible discipline. Thus it is always open to fresh statement and revision; one must be prepared to write theology with pencil and eraser, not indelible ink. Theology may change or mature as one grows to perceive God's teachings and his work in history more clearly. . . . God still has more insight and correction to bring to His people from His Word. In recent years, many Christians have been open to rethinking and revising unbiblical assumptions they may have earlier entertained concerning such subjects as the gifts of the Spirit, the "health-wealth gospel," and the role of women.¹⁵⁶

Of course, not all of this applies to the Church of God of Prophecy. While she has sometimes vacillated biblically and administratively on this issue, the COGOP is far ahead in the Christian world on the biblical roles of women in ministry. She has been a leader where women's roles are concerned, even among those churches that are in the Holiness Pentecostal tradition. However, in the area of theological changes, Wilson's observations do apply. Thank God, the COGOP is learning this vital lesson as the Spirit leads. It is a new day!

¹⁵⁶Our Father Abraham, op cit, p. 323.

This first section will deal with the history of when teachings were adopted and the readjustments the COGOP has made in the areas below. Later, we will turn to the doctrine proper.

Adoption of “Teachings Made Prominent” and Changes to Teachings and Practices

The first twenty-five of the “Teachings Made Prominent” were agreed upon in the Sixth Assembly, 1911 (*Assembly Minutes*, p. 7; *BM*, pp. 45–47). These were listed for the first time in the *Minutes* of the Seventh Assembly, 1912. The twenty-sixth teaching (Against Wearing Gold for Ornament or Decoration) was agreed upon in the Eighth Assembly, 1913 (*Assembly Minutes*, p. 68; *BM*, p. 126). The twenty-seventh teaching (Against Members Belonging to Lodges) had actually been approved in the Third Assembly, 1908 (*BM*, p. 26), but for some reason had not been included in the official list appearing in the *Minutes*. It was reaffirmed in the Eleventh Assembly, 1915 (*Assembly Minutes*, p. 19; *BM*, p. 202).

The twenty-eighth teaching (Against Members Swearing) was also decided upon in the Eleventh Assembly, 1915, appearing for the first time in the list of teachings in the *Minutes* that year.¹⁵⁷

The twenty-ninth teaching (Against Divorce and Remarriage Evil) was settled upon in the Eighteenth Assembly, 1923 (*Assembly Minutes*, pp. 29, 30). However, it did not appear in the completed list in the *Assembly Minutes* until 1927 (*Twenty-Second Assembly Minutes*, 1927, p. 40).

Prior to 1923, there was another twenty-ninth teaching that appeared and disappeared without any written or traceable explanation either of its approval by the Assembly or its retraction. This teaching (Against Members Going to War) was listed in the *Assembly Minutes* for the year 1917 and was carried forward each year until 1920. Thereafter, it was removed from the list and disappeared from the record. Scriptural texts used to support this teaching were Exodus 20:13; 1 Chronicles 28:3; Psalm 120:7; Matthew 5:38–48; 6:14, 15; 26:50–56; Luke 22:49–52; John 18:10, 11, 36; and Romans 12:19. It can be reasonably assumed that this teaching reflected the views of some of our early leaders, particularly A. J. Tomlinson, who, as earlier explained, had a Quaker background. Most Quakers supported *pacifism*,¹⁵⁸ defined as “a refusal to bear arms on moral or religious

¹⁵⁷*Church of God of Prophecy Business Guide*: 1992 Edition, p. 48.

¹⁵⁸For a good treatment of the Church’s abandonment of “Pacifism,” see Ann Elizabeth Murray’s *Days of Perplexity*: “*World War I and the Church of God*,” unpublished paper (History 401, Dr. Ingle), University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, TN, May 24, 1982.

grounds.”¹⁵⁹ During the Spanish-British War in 1742, John Pickering, Governor of Tortola, British Virgin Islands, was asked to resign from office because he had converted to Quakerism and could not send forces into battle.¹⁶⁰

Tomlinson complained to his diary, June 6, 1918, that the World War I (1914–1918) had . . .

spoiled all his [Homer’s—A. J.’s elder son] plans and mine too concerning him, for I hoped to soon have him helping me in the church and school work.

Homer served in the U.S. and France during the War, returning home in 1919. By World War II (1939–1945), Tomlinson had adjusted his thinking. In response to members’ letters about the war, he explained:

. . . we don’t like war, and we don’t want war. We don’t want to be hindered by the war. But war is upon us, and we have no control over it. Neither do we have control of ourselves as we do in times of peace. If our country calls us into the service, there is not much we can do about it but submit. And this is according to Scripture: 1 Peter 2:13; Romans 13. We are to submit to those in authority. We are not responsible. And it seems in this war, our government is not responsible. Our government did not want war, but it was forced into it, and there is nothing to be done but to defend our country. And that is what we all want done.¹⁶¹

I insert this bit of history here because not many have realized how much of his traditional roots and Quaker beliefs A. J. Tomlinson had to abandon to become a full-fledged radical holiness Christian and church organizer. Water baptism, formal church organization, and participating in war were not the average Quaker’s “cup of tea.”

Advice to Members

Changes in our “Advice to Members” have been made over the years as new contexts and situations confronted us in a changing world. There are still aspects that are in tension with what has become common practice among us since they were written at a time when we were basically a rural

¹⁵⁹*Webster’s New Explorer College Dictionary*, New Edition 2007, p. 688.

¹⁶⁰Charles F. Jenkins: *Tortola—A Quaker Experiment of Long Ago in the Tropics* (Friends’ Bookshop, Bishopsgate, 1923), p. 19.

¹⁶¹*Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes and Important Business Acts of the Church of God of Prophecy: 1906–1971* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1975), p. 464.

church, with leadership strongly influenced by Appalachian mountain culture. Our amendments have been generally good and positive including a strong admonition against those who presented the Advice as doctrines in a harsh and judgmental manner. The latest additions and clarifications pertained to the change in our Adornment teaching and personal Christian ethics, which, the Advice states, should be governed by the following principles:

1. In everything we are to “. . . walk worthy of the vocation wherewith [we] are called” (Ephesians 4:1), not permitting any conduct in ourselves, which would bring reproach on the name of Jesus.
2. We are to “abstain from the very appearance of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22, et al.).
3. In word or deed, “neither give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:27).
4. “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).
5. In matters of conscience, we are to avoid offending others who might stumble over our conduct (Matthew 18:7; Romans 14:21, et al.).
6. We must ourselves keep a clean conscience before God and not violate our own convictions regarding any matter (Romans 13:5, et al.).
7. We must not judge one another in nonessential matters of personal conviction (Romans 14:1–5, 19).
8. We must maintain a moderate lifestyle, which will reflect the inner character of a meek and quiet spirit (Romans 12:1, 2; 1 Corinthians 9:25, et al.).
9. By our conduct, we must adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things (Titus 2:1–10).
10. We must continue to perfect holiness in the fear of God by cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit (2 Corinthians 7:1).¹⁶²

Our recent ruling titled “The Biblical Institution of Marriage” affects one section of the Advice (see *Ministry Policy Manual 2008*, Appendix 3, page 204) so adjustments are being made in what the COGOP teaches. We will take a brief look at this later.

¹⁶²*Eighty-Third Assembly Minutes*, 1988, pp 47, 48, QSC.

Ecclesiology, Identity, Body of Christ

As the COGOP has been coming to grips with where the Holy Ghost has been leading, the corrections made, and those no doubt that will yet be made, it is no longer tenable to defend the position that the COGOP was the sole and exclusive body of Christ. It is contended instead, and rightly so, that the Church is a legitimate and significant part of the body of Christ with much to contribute to Bible-believing Christians in the wider Kingdom of God. Conversely, the COGOP has learned and is learning much from others in the Kingdom as they may be led of the Lord. The Church's legitimacy is because of God's choosing and our covenant commitment to be like the church we see in the New Testament, the church of which Jesus Christ Himself is both head and Savior (Ephesians 5:23)—a Church that operates, in its human dimension, under the rubric of God's Word and God's Spirit, a commitment the COGOP made as a body in the Eighteenth Assembly, 1923, through the then General Overseer's Address.¹⁶³ As **part** of the body of Christ, we will faithfully do our part in the body of Christ while cooperating as fully as possible with those who are Bible-believing and Bible-practicing to reap our Lord's great harvest. Our true identity is in our mission from Christ and includes the principles of fervent love, holiness of life, Christian reconciliation, and biblical unity. These, among others, are vital elements of our particular Gospel witness.¹⁶⁴

Role of the Church Covenant

In view of the above changes in our approach to ecclesiology and the COGOP as part of the body of Christ, it is no longer sustainable that the Church covenant actually places one in the body of Christ per se but rather recognizes the sovereign act of our Lord through the Holy Spirit as He places His children in the body as it pleases Him (1 Corinthians 12:13). The covenant commits us to walk in the light of God's Word to the best of our knowledge and ability, gives visible presence to our participation in the Church, and brings us under its discipline, discipleship, nurture, and mission so that we may effectively participate in the Church's ministry to the community and the wider world while we mature in the Lord.

Membership Criteria

The history of membership criteria or what we once called "tests of fellowship" is colorful. These tests developed over time and by a number of means as practical matters in the administration of the Church. In its

¹⁶³*Eighteenth Assembly Minutes*, 1923, pp. 8, 9.

¹⁶⁴Concepts from the Church's 1994 "*Turning to the Harvest*" promotional brochure, COGOP Archives.

attempts to meet the needs of those who were being saved, and satisfy certain persistent demands for standardized rules, former General Overseers answered questions and made statements—some of which were eventually picked up by the Questions and Subjects Committee and read into the Assembly record. Then, in the Assembly of 2004, we did pass new “membership criteria,” which re-established the biblical practice of receiving people into membership as they are saved. This was clearly the church’s practice in the Book of Acts. This writer was intrigued and blessed when he discovered the persistent calls of A. J. Tomlinson in his Annual Addresses from 1930–1934 for this very practice to be adopted. He saw it as **coming up to the apostles’ standard** rather than letting that standard down.¹⁶⁵ Once again, our “Turning to the Harvest” paradigm confronted us with the issue of adjusting the COGOP’s methods to agree with God’s. It is a blessing that we are doing so. Those who minister as instruments of the Spirit and as ministers in the Church must be careful to signal agreement with the Holy Spirit’s leading by humility and submission to Him rather than lose His holy anointing and be out of sync with God’s activity in His own house.

The Biblical Institution of Marriage¹⁶⁶

For the first time in its history, the Church of God of Prophecy has adopted a fairly comprehensive position on the whole institution of marriage in the context of marriage and family. Some have been so worried about changing the “Against Divorce and Remarriage Evil” teaching that they have not even noticed the positive, pro-traditional family nature of what was passed. We urge, indeed beg, all concerned to take a prayerful look at the whole document for what it says. An honest assessment, in this writer’s opinion, will lead to the conclusion that this treats the whole set of issues seriously and indeed touches on several issues that had not been properly addressed before. Appendix H reviews, in summary, what the recommendations, as passed, do say. However, helpful administrative guidelines should be sought through national/regional/state offices, General Presbyters’ offices, and the General Overseer’s Office in as much as this new ruling needs to be succinctly stated and the areas of our practices that it has affected properly reviewed and clarified.

¹⁶⁵*Historical Annual Addresses*, Volume II (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1971), pp. 101, 134–5, 155–6, 181, 207.

¹⁶⁶The BDP’s “Biblical Institution of Marriage” document as approved by the Assembly is available in full as Appendix 3 in the 2008 *Ministry Policy Manual*, beginning at page 204.

Other Issues—A Look Ahead

In view of what the Church has addressed so far in our slow turn to God's great harvest, there may yet be issues to be addressed, issues of polity and governance, of doctrine and practice, including the addition of some cardinal doctrines we have long held as core beliefs but have never officially delineated, defined, or described. Issues like the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, Jesus' virgin birth, and Jesus' uniqueness as the only way to the true and living God are being challenged today even in some Christian circles. Attacks on certain core beliefs in the early centuries of the church, many of which came from within the church's own ranks, called forth several of the creeds that were attempts by the church to state in brief what she had always believed. Similarly, it is not beyond the realm of possibility today that we will find ourselves in a similar place, needing to clearly state what we do believe in the face of societal departures from Judeo-Christian norms and the attacks around the world from anti-Christ influences. Fasten your seatbelts! Before the glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ, the church is in for a rough ride with assaults on Christ coming from both within and without Christian circles. Also, we can expect more changes within the Church of God of Prophecy as she continues to be led by the Spirit into God's great harvest.

The Church—A Ministering, Maturing Community:

According to the Bible, God's ultimate desire is to create from all nations a reconciled people living within a renewed creation and enjoying the presence of the Triune God. This biblical vision of "community" is the goal of history. . . . We know we have encountered God in that we have been brought to share in community, that is, as we enjoy fellowship with God and participate in the people of faith.¹⁶⁷

God's Mission, Our Enlistment

Our God is a missionary God, and His redemptive mission is to ". . . seek and to save that which was lost" (Matthew 18:11; Luke 19:10). It is God's will and desire to save for, according to 2 Peter 3:9, God ". . . is longsuffering to us-ward [them, you], not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." The Bible pictures us, His people, as enlisted in the cause of redemption with Him. It instructs us to "Go . . . and make disciples of all nations . . ." that ". . . we are laborers together with God . . ." and that ". . . we are ambassadors for Christ . . ." (Matthew 28:19 HCSB;

¹⁶⁷Created for Community, *Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*: Stanley J. Grenz (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), p. 38.

1 Corinthians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 5:20 KJV). The church, then, is God's called out people sent into the world to be the model as God's redeemed community, to proclaim His Gospel to the lost, to provide the channel for the maturity and Christian service of those who believe, and to ensure the Gospel's continuation until Jesus comes again.

The church is missionary by nature because God has sent it on a mission in the world under the leading of the Spirit. It is to bear witness to God's redemptive reign. Just as God is a missionary God, so the church is to be a missionary church. It is to live fully within the active, redemptive, kingdom reign of God in the world as it is led and taught by the Spirit. It is to be a new community that expresses both the intent of creation design and the aspirations of re-creation as it anticipates the new heavens and new earth.¹⁶⁸

The church is God's demonstration plot in the world. Its very existence demonstrates that His redemptive reign has already begun. Its very presence invites the world to watch, listen, examine, and consider accepting God's reign as a superior way of living.¹⁶⁹

A Relational People—Serving and Growing

The church is a relational people that can be pictured in the image of the traditional cross [†] and described in the following words: Communion, Community, and Commission. The vertical bar of the cross symbolizes the church's relationship to God in *communion* and divine fellowship with Jesus Christ, her Head and Savior. The horizontal bar represents her parallel relationship, that is, the *community* of her members, interacting one with another, in fellowship, discipleship, and service (Feet Washing, a good example). The cross in its entirety embodies the saving mission of Christ in the world and our *commission* as being sent by Him as partners (laborers with God) in His mission.

Reformed and Reforming

We reiterate here that the human dimension of the church and its accompanying theology, structures, leadership roles, methods, systems, and programs is always subject to review and revision as the Spirit leads, guides, and reveals the practical implementation and effects of God's Kingdom reign as outlined in the Scriptures. Therefore, the human dimension of the church, her visibility before the watching world, is

¹⁶⁸*The Essence of the Church*, op cit, p. 98.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 100.

constantly both reformed and reforming. The Spirit's presence in leadership is the life dynamic that makes this possible. When her members fail to keep this view in mind, traditions set in, and the church's true posture before the world—the reflection and instrument of God's Kingdom—is marred, and, in some instances, lost altogether. The church, in such cases, fails to be a true Bible church unless she quickly recovers her right relationship to the Spirit before she fossilizes.

Reflecting the Father's Heart as the Father's House

The Father's house must reflect the Father's heart! This is one of the greatest lessons that can be drawn from the biblical narrative commonly called the "The Prodigal Son" (St. Luke, chapter 15). The father's heart is reflected in the unconditional and self-humiliating way in which he practiced his great love for his sons. He humbled himself to greet and protect the wayward, vagabond son who defied his love, left home, and squandered all that had been so prematurely demanded by him. The father gave him a truly gracious, joyous welcome and immediate restoration, a clear demonstration of God's unmerited favor and love for the lost. The community was invited to rejoice with the father!

The father's older son (the stay-at-home good boy, at least, in appearance) in his rebellious self-righteousness and disdain for his wayward brother and for his father's grace-filled love refused to be one who would learn the graciousness of his father's house and forced his father, as the younger son had, to humiliate himself before his guests, leave the party, and come out personally to him. He used the awaited opportunity to vent his pent-up resentment and to accuse and berate his loving, gracious father of being a stingy, old man with the judgment of a fool. Only a fool would show such grace to an undeserving derelict as his younger brother was! But his father humbled himself, even in the face of such an outrage, and lovingly pleaded with his older son to relent and join the grace celebration going on inside the house. Love, mercy, and grace are the leading characteristics of the father's house. The father came out with equal graciousness toward his self-righteous, angry son, but arrogance and self-righteousness seldom find it possible to submit and accept grace. It speaks volumes to us that the story makes no mention of that self-justifying son ever acceding to his father's request to join the party. Even grace finds it difficult to break some hearts within the father's house!

The church is the Father's house, and she must cultivate and be filled with the Father's grace-filled ways in actual practice. The Church of God of Prophecy is gradually doing this as she makes the biblical reassessments, adjustments, and revisions treated in brief above. The Spirit leads, and

the church follows! Once again, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches . . .” (Revelation 2:7 NIV). We now turn to some brief explanations of some of the Church’s doctrine and its criteria for membership. We render them here as the reflected in the new pamphlet—Biblical Principles, Beliefs and Practices (see footnote 170).

The Doctrine Proper—Biblical Principles, Beliefs, and Practices:¹⁷⁰

From its beginnings, the Church of God of Prophecy has based its beliefs on “the whole Bible rightly divided.” We accept the Bible as God’s Holy Word, inspired, inerrant, and infallible. We believe the Bible to be God’s written revelation of Himself to mankind and our guide in all matters of faith; therefore, we look to the Bible as our highest authority for doctrine, practice, organization, and discipline.

The Church of God of Prophecy is firm in its commitment to orthodox Christian belief. We affirm that there is one God eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe in the deity of Christ, His virgin birth, His sinless life, the physical miracles He performed, His atoning death upon the cross, His bodily resurrection, His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and His personal return in power and glory at His second coming. We profess that regeneration by the Holy Spirit is essential for the salvation of sinful mankind. We believe the sinner is brought to an awareness of the need for salvation through the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. We believe that in sanctification by the blood of Christ, one is made holy. We affirm the present, active ministry of the Holy Spirit who guides the Church and by whose indwelling and empowerment we are able to live godly lives and render effective service to God and others. We believe in the oneness and ultimate unity of believers for which our Lord prayed and that this should be visibly displayed that the world may *know*, *see*, and *believe* God’s glory, the coming of His Son, and the great love He has for His people (John 17:20–23). We are committed to the sanctity of the marriage bond and the importance of strong, loving Christian families.

The Church embraces all biblical doctrines as taught in the New Testament and have listed some that may be helpful to believers seeking to mature in Christ Jesus:

¹⁷⁰Due to intervening Assembly changes, a revision of the former tract “Important Bible Truths” became necessary. The work was authorized by the Editorial and Publishing Committee at the COGOP International Offices in 2006. The Assembly Committee for Biblical Doctrine and Polity reviewed and assured the accuracy of the explanations in conformity with applicable Assembly Rulings. A new pamphlet, “Biblical Principles, Beliefs and Practices of the Church of God of Prophecy,” (updated to 2008) was produced and is available through the White Wing Publishing House/Free Literature Department.

Repentance

The presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the world and upon the human heart through the Gospel of Jesus Christ (John 16:8–11) brings CONVICTION, an awareness and acknowledgement of sin against God and the need to confess that guilt with godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:10). In short, repentance means not only being sorry for sin, but a turning from and forsaking the old life (sin habits) for a new walk by faith in God through the Holy Spirit and in company with the people of God (Acts 2:42). The result of repentance is salvation, a work that is both instantaneous (new birth—John 3:3–8) and life-inclusive, beginning with the giving of new life by the Spirit to the believer and climaxing with a glorified body (Hebrews 9:28; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3; Acts 3:19). Repentance results in Justification, Regeneration, and what is called the “Born Again” experience, as explained below.

Justification

“Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1, 2). Justification is both a state and an act: On the part of the repentant one, it is the state of being without offense toward God. On God’s part, it is His act in forgiving the actual sins for which one has repented and declaring the individual accepted in a new relationship. The individual is said to be justified by faith in Jesus Christ; that is, one’s sins are covered (atoned for), and God no longer holds that person accountable for those sins. New spiritual life has begun (2 Corinthians 5:17), a beginning sometimes referred to as “Regeneration.”

Regeneration/Born Again

Regeneration describes the work of God in providing new spiritual life in the believer. Human beings without Christ are “. . . dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1) and must be made alive or regenerated through the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). This giving of new spiritual life through Jesus Christ enables right relationships with God, the ability to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), and is simultaneous with Justification (above). It is God’s gracious act to rekindle the spiritual life lost in Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22), so one may now walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh (Romans 8:1–11). Accordingly, the individual is said to be “Born Again” or born of God (1 John 5:1).

In responding to the double question of Nicodemus, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee,

except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:4, 5). To be born again, then, is to become a new creation in Christ, a child of God, justified and regenerated as a result of true repentance and faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. There is no other way to enter the kingdom. This entrance into a new life of discipleship to Christ (Acts 2:42) engages the believer in actively seeking more of God, fellowshiping and worshipping with God’s people, and intentionally obeying God’s Word as one learns how to “. . . possess his vessel [whole body] in sanctification and honour” (1 Thessalonians 4:4).

Sanctification

Sanctification, like salvation, ultimately spans the entire life of the believer. Initially, it is a work of grace subsequent to being justified, regenerated, and born again. It is an instantaneous work, which both sets one apart for God (1 Corinthians 1:2) and crucifies and cleanses the old nature, enabling the believer to be free from the dominant rule of sin: “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin” (Romans 6:6, 7). “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11). This dethroning of the old nature, this cleansing, this setting apart, places upon the believer the scriptural demand to “mortify the deeds of the body” through the Spirit (Romans 8:12, 13) and to “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication [sexual immorality], uncleanness, inordinate [abnormal] affection, evil concupiscence [desire for earthly things], and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5). Second Peter 3:17 and 18 further encourages growth in God’s grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ: “Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.” There is then in sanctification a responsibility on the part of the believer to “put off” some habits and practices and to “put on” others, which means there must be intentionality to holiness (Ephesians 4:22–32). Sanctification empowers us against sin’s control; the believer responds with a renewed mind to be transformed into the image of Christ (Romans 12:1, 2) and to be holy in life and conduct (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Holiness

Holiness is a command of our Lord: “Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16), the state of being free from sin (sin’s dominance) made possible by God’s sanctifying and cleansing work (Romans 6:11–14;

1 Corinthians 6:11), and further sustained by active, whole-hearted pursuit of a life of Christ-likeness on the part of the maturing believer: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:11, 12). “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:7). “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1). Holiness must also be the Church’s collective goal as the body of Christ to demonstrate “. . . the praises [virtues] of him who hath called [us] out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Baptism With the Holy Spirit

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy [Spirit]. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:38, 39). The baptism with the Holy Spirit as it occurred at Pentecost and in subsequent places in the Book of Acts (8:14–17; 10:44–46; 19:2–7) is a definite experience that is subsequent to the salvation and sanctification experiences or may accompany them in a somewhat simultaneous way. Jesus said to His disciples, “. . . for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:17). This indwelling is a definite, instantaneous experience described in the Scriptures by the word “baptism” and is always accompanied by the evidence of speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance. The baptism is also the Holy Ghost’s enduement of the believer for service in the Kingdom as the church was empowered at Pentecost to go forth with the message of the Gospel: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy [Spirit] is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This experience should not be confused with water baptism, regeneration, or sanctification.

The Holy Spirit is come (has been sent by Christ—Acts 2:33) to “. . . reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment . . .” to serve as the church’s guide and director, and to reveal the things of Christ (John 16:7–15). As such, it is important for believers to seek both the baptism (Acts 2:38, 39) and His fullness (Ephesians 5:18) in order that they may become familiar with His leadership and guidance and cooperatively participate in His work, both for personal Christian maturity and for service in Christ’s mission to the world.

Speaking in Other Tongues

Speaking in (with) other tongues—languages (magnifying God through uttering His wonderful works in languages normally unknown to the speaker—Acts 2:4–8; 11; 10:44–46) is normative in the Book of Acts to describe the coming of the Holy Spirit upon believers as clearly stated in the foregoing scriptural texts. Acts 19:6 also shows the same result (speaking in tongues and prophesying) when the apostle Paul laid hands on twelve believers in the city of Ephesus for them to receive the Holy Spirit. In regulating the order and use of spiritual gifts to the Corinthian saints (1 Corinthians 12–14), Paul also allows for the private use of tongues in prayer to God and indicates that this edifies the individual believer’s spirit (1 Corinthians 14:2–4). The gifts of tongues and interpretation of tongues for public use in the assembled congregation are, of course, to be distinguished from the baptism with the Spirit as applied in the individual’s experience. Paul makes this clear by referring to his own experience (cf. Acts 9:17–19) when he says, “I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all” (1 Corinthians 14:18). While closing his admonition by prioritizing the gift most useful for the public edification of all (prophecy), he was careful to add, “. . . and forbid not to speak with tongues” (v. 39).

Following the biblical pattern in Acts, the Church of God of Prophecy and other classical Holiness/Pentecostal churches teach that speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance is the *initial* evidence (observable by others) of the baptism with the Holy Ghost. However, it is not to be regarded or sought as an “end-all” experience. Daily walking and living in the Spirit (Romans 8:1–14) will continue to build Christian character (the fruit of the Spirit) and should be the desire and practice of every believer.

Fruit of the Spirit

As mentioned above, daily walking and living in the Spirit will cause the fruit of the Spirit to be regularly manifested in the life of the believer. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22, 23). Such fruit cannot be produced by the flesh or by human nature. Indeed, the opposing nature and starkly contrary deeds of the flesh are partly enumerated in the same text with the concluding remark: “. . . they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (v. 21). “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (v. 16). “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light; (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth)” (Ephesians 5:8, 9). The Spirit’s work is crucial to the life of the believer and to the church.

Full Restoration of the Gifts to the Church

In accordance with the Spirit's work, various spiritual gifts are given to and in the church and are manifested through individuals sometimes in an apparently resident manner (repeatedly) and, at other times, spontaneously as by direct unction of the Spirit in a given setting (1 Corinthians 12:4–11; Romans 12:4–8; Ephesians 4:7–16). Although there are historical periods during which spiritual gifts were not as prevalent as other times, there is no scriptural warrant to support the idea that these gifts ceased. Based on the foregoing scriptural texts and others, the Church of God of Prophecy teaches that spiritual gifts exist in the body of Christ and are owned, distributed, controlled, and operated by the Spirit as it pleases Him. The Church does not advocate personal claims to the gifts, but encourages individuals to humbly know and fulfill their callings to Christian service in response to the Spirit's leading and with the abilities He gives. As the church is restored to New Testament power, the gifts of the Spirit are expected to serve to edify the body of Christ in these last days just as those same gifts did in earlier times.

Signs Following Believers

Because of spiritual gifts and the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, miraculous signs and wonders may accompany the works and ministries of true believers. Mark 16:17, 18, 20 records, "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. . . . And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen." While Jesus identified for His apostles what may follow in the lives of those who believe, the import of this text, when balanced against other salvation Scriptures, such as Romans 10:8–13, does not allow for these to occur (whether simultaneously or one by one) in every instance of salvation. However, the Church sees no Scriptural warrant for the ceasing of these signs but believe they have occurred and are still occurring today. "For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by our Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy [Spirit], according to his own will" (Hebrews 2:2–4)?

Divine Healing

God's sovereign grace and mercy, through the atonement of Jesus Christ for all our sins and ultimately for all the consequences of sin, provides for the healing/salvation of our souls as well as our bodies in His work on Calvary. In the tradition of Jesus and His apostles as recorded in the Gospels and Acts (Mark 3:1–5, 9–12, 14, 15; Matthew 10:8; Acts 5:12), the Church believes that divine healing is accomplished by the power of God without the aid of medicine or surgical skills (Matthew 8:14–17). While it is clear that God does not always heal instantaneously in response to all prayers for healing (whether of the individual or of someone else praying on behalf of an individual—see 2 Timothy 4:20), it is also a clear biblical duty of the elders and ministers of the Church to pray for the sick and to visit the sick (James 5:13–18 with Matthew 25:34–40). “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases” (Psalm 103:2, 3). This text specifically addresses the soul, but the whole person (spirit/soul and body) can be divinely healed by the power of God. The healing of persons in response to faith and prayer (Acts 3:11–16) and by God's special mercy (to spare certain of His servants more sorrow, cf. Philippians 2:25–27) is definitely confirmed in Scripture. We have a duty to continue to pray fervently for the sick, humbly leaving it in God's hands to work His sovereign will.

Water Baptism

Water baptism is the act of being immersed in water according to the commandment and instructions of Christ (Matthew 28:19). This ordinance has no power to wash away sins but is the answer of a good conscience toward God (1 Peter 3:21) and represents for the believer an identity with the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord (Romans 6:3–5). Mark 16:16 further reinforces the necessity of this step of obedience: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter told those under conviction what they should do: “. . . Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). Obviously, the apostles literally followed the Lord's instructions, and we can do no less. Baptism, then, is outward evidence of our submission to Christ in salvation and our public declaration that we are His followers. It identifies us with His people in His Kingdom: “Then they that gladly received the word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41; see also 10:47, 48; 16:30–33).

The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a sacred ordinance that our Lord Himself instituted on the night He was betrayed as He ate the Passover with His disciples (Luke 22:14–22). He instructed that this be done in remembrance of Him. It is representative of our communion and fellowship with Him. The apostle Paul reiterated the Lord's instructions to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 11:23–25), adding some helpful details: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily [in an unworthy manner], shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we are not condemned with the world. Wherefore my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another" (vv. 26–33). It is therefore the Church's position that this be observed with all gravity and in an orderly manner. No one should approach the Lord's Table with unforgiven sin in one's heart, and all should consecrate themselves in prayer before and upon every occasion of this observance. The Lord's Supper consists of "the fruit of the vine" (unfermented grape juice as in our practice), representing the blood of Christ, and unleavened bread representing His broken body on the cross. The Church advises that the Lord's Supper be observed at least once a quarter, but to do so more often is certainly compatible with scriptural teaching: "They worshipped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46, 47 NLT).

Washing the Saints' Feet

Feet Washing was instituted by Jesus on the night of the Last Supper and is considered by the Church as a New Testament ordinance that we are enjoined to observe. As the Lord's Supper represents our communion with Christ, Feet Washing represents our common unity (community) with each other as followers of Christ and partakers together with Him. Jesus sent two of His disciples to the home of a special friend in Jerusalem to prepare for the Passover meal (Mark 14:12–17). These preparations would have included a basin, water pitcher, and a towel for the customary washing of

feet. According to verse 17 above, the twelve came with Jesus, but there is no mention of the washing of feet. Luke tells us there was anguish among the disciples as Jesus announced that one of them would betray Him and also that there was a quarrel between them as to who should be the greatest (Luke 22:21–24). Jesus taught them servanthood as their right relationship (vv. 25–27) and demonstrated His posture as a Servant among them by washing their feet (John 13:3–5). In establishing this spirit of servanthood among them, Jesus said, “. . . Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. . . . If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (vv. 12–15, 17). The Church encourages that Feet Washing be observed in the same service as the Lord’s Supper whenever possible and in a decent and orderly manner.

Tithing and Giving

Tithing is the paying of one-tenth of our increase into the treasury of the Church (Proverbs 3:9, 10). The first biblical record of tithing to God’s work began with Abraham, who paid tithes to Melchisedec (priest of the Most High God) of the spoils from his battle with the kings (Genesis 14:18–20), continued under the law, and received the approval of our Lord (Matthew 10:5–10; 23:23). Other New Testament writers reference God’s provisions that they who preach the Gospel should live (be supported) of the Gospel hearers (1 Corinthians 9:6–14; Luke 10:7). See also Hebrews 7:4–10, which gives tithing a certain generational transcendence. The Church considers that the scriptural obligation to tithe is not fulfilled by just giving directly to the poor or to individuals or good causes. While the Church espouses and participates in all such support, her understanding of the biblical practice of tithing is that tithes are paid—brought into the treasury of the Church for the Lord’s work, especially for the benefit of those who minister in the Word (1 Timothy 5:17, 18). God’s blessings and favor will follow in all the productive areas of life (Malachi 3:7–12).

Giving of offerings differs from *tithing* and is done in addition to tithing. Both are part of God’s plan to finance His work on earth (1 Corinthians 16:1–4; Philippians 4:10–19). A spirit of generosity has always permeated the Church from very early times (Acts 4:32–35), and the apostle Paul quoted our Lord to the Ephesian elders in his farewell address, advising them “. . . to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (20:35). Once received into the Church’s treasury, tithes and offerings are regulated through appropriate Church decisions and are administered by authorized Church policies and personnel.

Restitution Where Possible

Restitution is the act of restoring something wrongfully taken or the satisfying of one who has been wronged. Making things right as far as is humanly possible is a natural result of salvation by God's grace as seen in the way Zacchaeus responded to our Lord's saving visit to his house: "And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forso much as he also is a son of Abraham" (Luke 19:8, 9). Where it is impossible to make contact with the person or institution involved, the believer should still exhibit a desire to return what was taken, to restore a relationship, or to seek forgiveness. When necessary, those who make restitution should bear patiently any consequences that may result such as legal sanctions, financial costs, or even rejection by the persons approached. "And herein I do exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).

Pre-Millennial Second Coming of Jesus

Our Lord Jesus Christ is coming back to earth again (Acts 1:11), and the Church understands this coming in two phases. First, He is coming in mid-air to resurrect the dead saints and to catch away the living saints to meet Him so that all who are in Christ can attend the marriage supper of the Lamb: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17; see also 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52). "And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God" (Revelation 19:9). Second, Jesus will return with the saints to reign on earth for a thousand years: ". . . and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection" (20:4, 5; see also v. 6; 5:10; Zechariah 14:4, 9; Revelation 5:10; 20:6).

Resurrection

God's plan for the world includes a time of accountability of all people (living and dead) before His judgment seat. For this reason, all the dead, both righteous and wicked, will be resurrected. As part of the assurance of this judgment, God raised Jesus from the dead and appointed Him judge (Daniel 12:2; Acts 17:30, 31; 24:15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). However, the

resurrection of the wicked dead and their time of judgment will not occur until after the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth with His saints (Revelation 20:4–6). Paul expressed the Christian’s hope in the resurrection this way: “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (Philippians 3:10, 11). We look for the Savior from heaven, Paul says, “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (v. 21).

Eternal Life for the Righteous

In Jesus’ high priestly prayer, He defined eternal life as follows: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). The New Testament everywhere teaches that eternal life is promised to those who believe in Jesus: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (3:16). Those who die in the Lord and those who are serving Him when He returns will receive the reward of eternal life: “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:22, 23).

Eternal Punishment for the Wicked

How we live our lives in this present world determines our destiny in the next, our eternal reward (Daniel 12:2; Romans 2:4–9). The unconverted and the wicked are doomed to eternal punishment from which there is no escape—no liberation, no annihilation: “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matthew 25:46). “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thessalonians 1:7–9).

Abstinence From all Liquor or Strong Drink

“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1). “But they also have erred through

wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment” (Isaiah 28:7). “Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags” (Proverbs 23:20, 21). Because of these and other biblical texts, the Church of God of Prophecy teaches abstinence from the use of intoxicating beverages. Scriptural teaching is, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). We are also advised, “That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour” (1 Thessalonians 4:4). (See also 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:10; 10:31; Galatians 5:21.)

Concerning Tobacco, Opium, Morphine, Etc.

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1). “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy [Spirit] which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). The use of tobacco in any form is forbidden as well as the habitual use of narcotics or other habit-forming drugs. Addictions and enslavements to drugs or other substances are incompatible with the surrender of our bodies to the Lord as holy vessels of honor for His use (Romans 12:1, 2; 1 Thessalonians 4:4). “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Concerning Food and Drinks

The New Testament makes no rigid rule concerning what foods a Christian shall eat or drink with the exception of strong drink and addictive and enslaving substances: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ” (Colossians 2:16, 17). Thus, we have no right to judge what our brother or sister eats or drinks. The legal restrictions of the Mosaic Law concerning these were not extended into the Grace Dispensation: “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy [Spirit]” (Romans 14:17). (See also 1 Corinthians 8:8; 1 Timothy 4:1–5.)

On the Sabbath

The Book of Genesis tells us that on the seventh day God ended His work and blessed that day and sanctified it (Genesis 2:2, 3). This was, no doubt, His preparatory plan to set Israel apart as a special people, for to

them He gave the Law, which included the observance of the Sabbath. Jesus' corrective to the Pharisees' strict observance of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27, 28) placed people above enslavement to the day and asserted His Lordship over the day. As such, the Church of God of Prophecy teaches that observance of that day per se was not carried over into the Grace Dispensation. Sunday is not the Sabbath, but merely a day set aside to give special attention to the worship of God. In the Early Church, they referred to Sunday as "the first day of the week" and later as "the Lord's Day" or "Resurrection Day." Therefore, worship on Sunday is also very appropriate. Christians are required to keep every day holy rather than just one particular day. The Jewish Sabbath was also a type of Jesus Christ who is presented in Scripture as our rest (Hebrews 4:1–11). "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Colossians 2:16, 17). (See also Romans 14:5, 6.)

Adornment

Scripture does not prohibit the use of a cultural wedding symbol due to marital, social, and cultural conditions, nor does it establish its necessity. In certain instances, the marriage symbol or emblem may strengthen the marriage arrangement and order, and thus its use is not for ornamentation. Therefore the cultural wedding symbol or emblem, though not necessitated, may be worn due to marital, social, and cultural situations in order to preserve the headship principle and the integrity of marriage (Genesis 3:16; 1 Corinthians 11:8; Ephesians 5:22, 23). Scripture neither prohibits (absolutely) nor necessitates the use of ornamental adornment. It does give strong precautionary principles for its use such as *modesty*, *shamefacedness*, and *sobriety*, and calls attention to the ornament of the inner man, that of "a meek and quiet spirit" (1 Timothy 2:9, 10; 1 Peter 3:3, 4). Ornamentation must not be used in any way that lends itself to idolatrous, occult, or lustful practices (Isaiah 3:18–22; Acts 8:9; 19:19; 1 Corinthians 5:10; 6:9; Galatians 5:19–21; Revelation 2:20–23). It is also important to remember that adornment includes more than jewelry alone. To apply the prudent principles of Scripture (both for those who wear and those who do not), an overriding principle is found in Romans 14:13: "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's [sister's] way."

Membership to Lodges/Secret Societies

The Bible is opposed to the people of God being unequally yoked together with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14–18); it is opposed to deeds done in secret, and it demands the complete and undivided loyalty of God's children: "Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the

synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing” (John 18:20; see also Luke 16:13). Many secret societies/organizations require the taking of an oath of secrecy, and oath-taking is expressly forbidden as we shall see in the paragraph below. See also Ephesians 5:11–13 concerning secret acts.

Wholesome Speech of the Believer

The taking of an oath is a vain thing and is condemned in the Scriptures. An affirmation to the truth of anything is sufficient and usually accepted even in courts of law: “‘But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil’” (Matthew 5:34–37; see also James 5:12). The term “swearing” is also used of profanity, which the Bible teaches against: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29; see also 5:4).

Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

Genesis 1:26, 27; 2:18–25; Deuteronomy 6:7; Matthew 5:32; 14:3, 4; 19:3–12; Mark 10:12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:2, 3; 1 Corinthians 5:1–5; 6:9–18; 7:2, 11; Colossians 3:18–21.

Marriage and Family

The Church of God of Prophecy affirms the biblical teaching that marriage is sacred and should not be entered into lightly without proper preparation. Marriage was originally instituted by God as a properly recognized covenant relationship between one man and one woman for life. The Church affirms the biblical family as a father and mother in wedlock who may procreate children. The Church further asserts that the home, including the extended family, is to be guided by love, discipline, and other nurturing aspects as taught in God’s Word. Because the Church is committed to the sanctity of marriage and human life, we diligently stand against abortion, incest, abuse, euthanasia, adultery, divorce, homosexuality, and lesbianism, which we believe are contrary to God’s original design as expressed in His Word. All biblically unlawful unions such as same-sex, incestuous, or polygamous marriages are renounced by the Church even if they are recognized as legal by civil governments.

Divorce and Remarriage

Concerning “divorce” in the above context, the Church means the breaking of a legitimate, lawful, biblical marriage and holds firmly to

the principle that such divorces are not God's will, especially between Christians. Forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing should be sought as a first priority in order to preserve marriages and prevent divorce. The Church also recognizes that despite biblical teaching and honest human effort, divorces do occur sometimes against the will of one or the other party. Therefore, the Church recognizes (in a pastoral sense) those causes, in addition to death, that would be recognized as ending a previously valid biblical marriage. In such cases, delineated below, marriage partners would not be classed as adulterers even though remarried:

1. If persons were divorced and remarried for any reason prior to their personal salvation and have demonstrated a willingness to seek restitution (forgiveness from the offended spouse) and restoration where possible.
2. If a divorce occurred because of a spouse's habitual, adulterous behavior and efforts to bring reconciliation are no longer possible.
3. If divorce occurred because of spousal or child abuse such as incestuous behavior that seriously endangers the life and health of the spouse or family and violates the sanctity of holy matrimony.

Under no circumstances should Christians or church members initiate or seek divorce without completely exhausting all biblical and counseling avenues to restore, rebuild, and sustain their marriages. Marriages that clearly violate biblical standards (such as incestuous marriages) may be appealed to the presbytery for specific consideration. All divorce and remarriage cases not falling within the categories described above should be referred for counsel and resolution to the Pastor and local church leadership, the State/Regional/National Presbytery, or the General Ministerial Presbytery (which includes the General Overseer and General Presbyters) as may be appropriate.¹⁷¹

Church Membership Criteria

The Church of God of Prophecy holds the biblical principle of genuine repentance toward God (an individual's experience of salvation) as its qualification for Church membership in accordance with the early church's practice and God's own activity in adding to the church daily those who

¹⁷¹See "The Biblical Institution of Marriage" Final Document, Church of God of Prophecy, *Ninety-Fourth International Assembly Minutes*, 2006, pp. 152–177. See also "The Family Manifesto" originally written and owned by "FamilyLife," and specially adapted (with permission) by Family Ministries for inter-church use by the Church of God of Prophecy, International Offices.


were being saved (Acts 2:41, 47). By genuine repentance is meant Godly sorrow for sin, confessing, turning from, denouncing and forsaking sin, and exercising faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, “Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25). “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (10:9, 10). Salvation is both instantaneous (new birth, regeneration) and the all-inclusive work of redemption, beginning with regeneration and culminating with the glorified body (Hebrews 9:28). In terms of “being added to the church,” the instantaneous aspect of salvation is evident and a public commitment (“I will/I do”) to the Church covenant as administered by an authorized Church of God of Prophecy minister, in an appropriate church setting, is necessary. The covenant reads the following:

Will you sincerely promise in the presence of God and these witnesses that you will accept this Bible as the Word of God, believe and practice its teaching rightly divided, the New Testament as your rule of faith, practice, government, and discipline, and walk in the light to the best of your knowledge and ability?

Membership in the Church denotes acceptance, which is the basic need of every new believer. Ministry leadership and the Church must endeavor to give members this sense of belonging. The Church also advocates that new members be immediately placed in an effective, ongoing, discipleship process by the pastor and local church (Acts 2:42), a process that includes nurturing and discipline, to help them become mature (2 Peter 3:18), discover the spiritual gift or gifts that will be exercised through them for the edification of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14), and to learn to make disciples of others (Matthew 28:19, 20). As we continue in the harvest, a program of extensive discipleship requiring great wisdom and loving care by leadership and people will help all our members mature in Christ.

FUTURE

The Future Into All the World Outline

A large, stylized number '10' is positioned on the right side of the page. The '1' is a solid grey vertical bar, and the '0' is a grey oval with a white outline. The text 'The Future Into All the World Outline' is arranged around the '10', with 'The Future' and 'Outline' on the left and 'Into All the World' in the middle, partially overlapping the '1'.

- A Historic Call to Evangelization
- Responding in Obedience
- Explanation of Core Values
- International Office Philosophies
- Unprecedented Growth

Chapter 10

The Future

Into All the World:

A Historic Call to Evangelization

From its inception, the Church of God of Prophecy has been an evangelistic, missionary-minded Church. Although beginning in an area that was considered the mission field or “Third World” of the United States, the Southern Appalachian Mountain Region,¹⁷² early leaders of the Church saw themselves as instruments of God for world evangelization through a restoration of New Testament Christianity, particularly the Church as seen in the Book of Acts. It bears repeating that when evangelism was discussed at the home of J. C. Murphy, Cherokee County, North Carolina, at the First General Assembly in 1906, “. . . strong men wept and said they were not only willing but anxious to go.”¹⁷³ Over its hundred-year-plus history, the Church has expanded to every state of the United States and some 130 other nations and territories of the world.¹⁷⁴ Despite the lack of resources, occasional financial losses and other fiscal problems, educational setbacks, and leadership failures at various levels, the harvest passion of the COGOP has remained undiminished. Visionary leaders of recent times have continued to push past all difficulties in their response to the call of the Spirit in 1984. That call initiated a renewal of the Church relationship with the Holy Ghost and a revitalization of her global outreach efforts. She has recaptured her burden for a world lost without God and under threat of eternal judgment.

¹⁷²Deborah Vansau McCauley, *Appalachian Mountain Religion—A History* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995, pp. 7–9). McCauley says, in part, “American Protestantism in particular has historically and consistently interpreted the worship practices, belief systems, and church traditions of mountain people as the religion of a subculture of poverty and the product of powerlessness and alienation.”

¹⁷³*Book of Minutes*, op cit, p. 16.

¹⁷⁴See Table 3 for a Chronology of the nations where COGOP is presently operating. The year of entry is indicated opposite each nation, territory, or area.

Responding in Obedience

The Church began her collective response to this call under the administration of M. A. Tomlinson and continued that response through the tenures of Billy D. Murray, Fred S. Fisher Sr., and now into the new administration of Randall E. Howard, which began in 2006. The period from 1984 to the present has been rightly called a period of transition and change for the COGOP, which, as has been pointed out earlier in this book, has made great strides toward refocusing and retooling for the Harvest. These efforts represent a collective (corporate) obedience to the Spirit, and the resulting correctives are noteworthy features within the Church today. This ability to hear and to respond to God’s call is indeed refreshing and rewarding. It is the solid foundation of a hopeful future. It is also a living witness and a much-needed model of group obedience within the larger Kingdom of God.

Explanation of Core Values

The current administration’s commitment to the core values of “Prayer, Harvest, and Leadership Development” is clear. General Overseer R. E. Howard states the following:

Our vision is who and what we want to be: The Church of God of Prophecy will be a Christ-exalting, Holiness, Spirit-filled, all-nations, disciple-making, church-planting Movement, with a passion for Christian union.

Our mission is what we must do: Empowered by the Holy Spirit through prayer, we will plant churches and equip leaders to carry out the biblical mandate to make disciples of all peoples of the world, to the glory of Christ our Lord, head of the Church.

Emphasizing these further, Bishop Howard wrote . . .

We will be empowered by prayer. We will harvest by planting churches and carrying out the biblical mandate to make genuine disciples. We will develop leaders by equipping them and by becoming a disciple-making church. We have intended in these three years to bring a different level of focus so that with guided passion we would know that all we do must have the mark of the Harvest upon it, must be empowered by prayer through the Holy Spirit, and must be pressed through the ranks of our Movement by leadership developing leaders that hold these values to be vital.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵See General Overseer’s State of the Office Presentation, October 2009, p. 1 (on file).

International Office Philosophies

Among the International Office Philosophies to which this administration subscribes are the following:

1. Focus on Core Values
2. Plurality (exercised and modeled)
3. Service Orientation (to General Presbyters, Regional [National/ State] Overseers, Pastors, and Local Churches)
4. Focus on Leaders (not laity)
5. Prioritize Ministries by Values (all things benefit, but all things are not equal)
6. Affirm Vision, Inspiration, Faith, and Integrity
7. [An apparent] Love for This Movement—cynicism is frowned upon (critical evaluation is appreciated, encased in love for the [Church] family)
8. Giving Back to the Field (is anticipated)
9. Synergism—working to move toward the goal.¹⁷⁶

These, then, are some of the indicators of the way forward for the Church of God of Prophecy well into the twenty-first century. The Church's future is secure in her commitment to be obedient to the call of the Spirit and to fulfill her biblical mandate of reaping God's end-time harvest.

Unprecedented Growth

Today the COGOP is growing internationally at an unprecedented rate. In actuality, the Church is returning to her roots in Word and Spirit, and, in historic tradition, she continues to reform and re-structure as needed to reflect the Gospel of Jesus Christ always with a view to the apostolic standard in the Book of Acts. What better time to pick up this historic challenge! This centennial celebratory period is the golden opportunity for Church leaders to hone in on the emerging signals of the way forward. The Spirit is pointing the way and is providing the international level leadership and structure compatible with His divine direction. The seven times repeated challenge is “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit sayeth unto the churches” (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29;3: 6, 13, 22). Lead on, Holy Spirit; follow on, Church! The Church of God of Prophecy joyfully **Honors her Past** and thankfully **Celebrates her Present**. Simultaneously, and boldly, she is also **Embracing her Future** by living out her twenty-first century paradigm: “Turning to the Harvest.”

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 1, 2.

Chapter 11

Reflections and Conclusions

We Should Tread Softly

As indicated in the introduction, this volume is a deliberately limited work designed to help readers, learners, and Church members grasp more clearly certain aspects of the Church of God of Prophecy and its legitimacy. A larger work is certainly both necessary and warranted and will follow as time and opportunity permit.

The basic premise with which I began was that the COGOP is a worthy Christian church, a place where those who serve Christ can safely invest their lives and resources in contributing to the building of the Kingdom of God. The point of the COGOP's legitimacy has been a sensitive one due to the disruption in the earlier work of A. J. Tomlinson (1923) and his bold restart in that same year. It was out of his struggle to regain his footing that the COGOP emerged. Some have questioned, in retrospect, whether A. J. could have done differently; perhaps, but at what price? His son and successor in office, M. A. Tomlinson, wrote in the newly added introduction to the Church's reprint of A. J. Tomlinson's magnum opus:

His lifetime selection on November 4, 1914, was so strongly confirmed by Holy Ghost manifestations that A. J. Tomlinson would not renounce this high calling even to prevent a Church disruption in 1922 or the almost overwhelming persecutions that followed.¹⁷⁷

Wisdom dictates that historians and evaluators tread softly when judging such situations. The many dynamics, premises, personalities, and motives that led to what may be seen as drastic measures are not always fully known nor have we stood in the shoes of those who were involved. And those of us who carefully study history and try to render some accounts of it are never without bias even in our methods of approach.

¹⁷⁷*The Last Great Conflict*, op cit, p. 14.

A Vital Question: Change and Readjustment?

On the other hand, some have questioned whether successive generations of leaders in the COGOP have the right to readjust its organizational structure, realign some of its doctrines, practices, and concepts, and redirect its future purposes. These, too, are legitimate concerns, but I think they are adequately answered by at least three facts:

1. The restoration Movement, led by R. G. Spurling, W. F. Bryant, and A. J. Tomlinson (1886–1903 and beyond), itself began as a corrective to church history.
2. The COGOP itself was birthed [re-born 1923] as a corrective to what was seen as a fresh departure from sound Bible premises however then understood. Therefore, correctives are part of its spiritual DNA.
3. The COGOP's clearly stated commitment to walk in the light of God's Word as led by God's Spirit provides solid ground for ongoing change and realignments with God's purposes in building His Kingdom. Consequently, the Church may, from time to time, better understand those purposes. It would be irresponsible and a dereliction of duty not to make corrections when led by the Spirit to do so. Would not this premise also apply to all true Christian churches?

When Divisions Occur

Biblical scholars and commentators have traditionally been willing to rationalize the breakup of the missionary partnership of Barnabas and Paul over John Mark (Acts 15:36–41) by saying that out of this quarrel came two legitimate missionary teams led by Paul and Barnabas respectively.¹⁷⁸ With the passage of time, history itself seems to forgive the major earlier church splits such as the East/West division of 1054, the protest of Martin Luther and his case at the Diet of Worms in 1521, and the creation of the Church of England (Anglican) in 1534.¹⁷⁹ But not so with more recent and contemporary separations! In this age of global electronic communication and a largely skeptical secular press, church divisions are not so easily

¹⁷⁸See for example, John R. W. Stott: *The Message of Acts* (Intervarsity Press, Leicester, 1990), p. 253, citing Calvin and Bengel; *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries—Acts: I* Howard Marshall, R. V. G. Tasker, General Editors (Intervarsity Press, Leicester, 1980, Reprint 1994), 258; **Quicknotes Simplified Bible Commentary Series, Volume 10—Acts thru 2 Corinthians**: Dr. Peter Barnes and Dr. Mark Strauss, Editors (Barbour Publishing Inc. 2008), 65.

¹⁷⁹For a brief but solid treatment of these periods, see Mark A. Noll's *Turning Points—Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1997 and 2000), chapters 6–8.

forgiven or forgotten. Indeed, Holiness/Pentecostal Movements have provided so much fodder for this grist mill that it is all but impossible to expect unbiased treatment or any legitimization of religious squabbles. However, the question remains: How and when does a religious group or leader become authentic in separating from a larger body, mother church, or from fellow-leaders when irreconcilable differences arise? When is such a division justified in the eyes of God and before the watching world? These are hard questions—so hard in fact that no human mind, no, not even history itself, can adequately answer them. But God’s grace and His patience with His struggling children appertains! Without these, the Church, any serious church, cannot be validated.

In the religious language of separations (at least those occurring within the United States), one repeatedly hears echoes of the opening paragraph of the American Declaration of Independence in 1776.¹⁸⁰ A. J. Tomlinson actually used the term “a declaration of independence” when referring to the actions that he and those with him took in 1923.¹⁸¹ All groups, revolutionary or separatist, must eventually appeal and commend themselves to the goodwill of the world around them whether by written declaration or in practical operations. History and human experience teach us that there are, at times, legitimate reasons to divide or to separate. While arguing that artificial divisions in the Christian church are harmful and should be avoided, the late A. W. Tozer makes the telling point that divisions are sometimes necessary:

If good men were all for union and bad men for division, or vice versa, that would simplify things for us. Or if it could be shown that God always unites and the devil always divides, it would be easy to find our way around in this confused and confusing world. But that is not how things are. . . . In a fallen world like ours, unity is no treasure to be purchased at the price of compromise. Loyalty to God, faithfulness to truth, and the preservation of a good conscience are jewels more precious than [the] gold of Ophir or diamonds from

¹⁸⁰The opening paragraph of the U. S. Declaration of Independence reads, “When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the declaration” (*The New York Public Library Desk Reference*, Second Edition: Prentice Hall, 1989, 1993), p. 795.

¹⁸¹*Diary of A. J. Tomlinson*, entry for September 10, 1923, as cited in Duggar: Op cit, pp. 208–210.

the mine. For these jewels men have suffered the loss of property, imprisonment, and even death. . . .¹⁸²

To this, we may also add the loss of position and influence, which was the case with A. J. Tomlinson.

Exoneration, Integrity, Personal Forgiveness

Those who felt it necessary to remove Tomlinson from office proffered a litany of charges mostly related to his business management and monetary issues (with some suggestion of dishonesty included at the time) but with a good dose of insubordination thrown in.¹⁸³ As has been shown elsewhere in this work, A. J. was fully exonerated of any charges or even hints of dishonesty. His integrity was fully attested by the then business community of Cleveland, and by some of those who were his initial accusers, particularly Llewellyn and Lemons. He freely forgave them both. In the long years of considering the legal issues before them, Tennessee's courts also found no evidence of dishonesty in Tomlinson's dealings. Later developments within the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) such as their 1926 Assembly reversal and abandonment of the famed "Constitution," which Tomlinson sought to overthrow in 1922, adds credence to his case that the creation of an "Official Assembly" within the General Assembly was indeed a serious error.

As C. T. Davidson has written, there were mistakes on both sides. Once the simmering contentions broke into the open, the forces of division did their work. For Tomlinson, the real issues were the biblical integrity of the Church of God itself and his God-approved role in its leadership. That is how he saw it. On both counts, nothing less than theocracy was at stake, represented by the place of God's Word, God's Spirit, and God's anointed leader within God's house! In his view, the Constitution and a number of prior Assembly actions had erased all this, and it could only be recaptured by a new beginning, a "Declaration of Independence" as it were, a return to the prior methods that preserved the place of the Bible and the Spirit. These had openly brought God's approval on the Church in the past.

Burdens of Leadership and the Price of Service

Tomlinson was clearly passionate about leading conscientiously before the Lord. Few would doubt his sincerity. We must also not forget the self-condemnation that one as honest as Tomlinson would have heaped

¹⁸²A. W. Tozer: *God Tells the Man Who Cares* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications Inc., 1970), pp. 45–47, 49.

¹⁸³Conn, *Like a Mighty Army* (1955 Edition), op cit, p. 178.

upon himself for having led the Church wrongly. We are aware of his errors in taking on too much by the extra-biblical way he regarded the Office of General Overseer, which view he developed and adopted largely in his study of church history. The Church has rightly adjusted and tempered this view by better exegesis of the Scriptures. It is clear that Tomlinson personally assumed too much of the devastating physical load of the Church's administration. He sustained this load over a lengthy period, and, in retrospect, the weariness and high level of stress over the years clearly affected his judgment. He obviously disregarded his health and perhaps became unaware of what was happening both within him and around him. This is not at all unusual for persons that are highly motivated, personally devoted, and passionately immersed in their life's vocation. Unknowingly, attitudes may creep in that even justify anger, sharpness of speech, and, at times, harsh treatment of even those we love. The pressures of life, when added to selfless public service, can cause all this and more even in Christian leaders. Longevity in office, coupled with personal and undeniable family sacrifices, can bring a familiarity and sense of possession that can be blinding to the growing dynamics and complexities of the Lord's work especially when one has been used mightily in the development of that work.

I believe the Church greatly honored A. J. Tomlinson and rightly so! He was truly an indefatigable and dynamic leader. That same Church must certainly share the responsibility for unduly overloading him and of expecting more of him than was reasonable. Indeed, a number of his fellow-leaders and other elements of the Church that so heavily depended on him and admired him ultimately became his accusers with devastating effect. A cruel twist of fate perhaps, but such is, at times, the painful way of life and service. We may freely admit that the Church erred, but how does that Church repent and make amends to a man and his family? Individuals make restitution to the best of their abilities, but how does the Church do so effectively? The best that can be done is for the Church to operate in a chastened spirit and with humility recognizing that institutional wrongs against its ministers are not only possible but very difficult to correct. Another question raised by these events both for leaders and for the Church is, how are decisions on which all present agreed (sometimes unanimously), decisions that were openly declared pleasing to and approved by the Holy Ghost, so lightly or readily set aside when difficult circumstances arose or when institutional or personal interests interposed? This not only applies to decisions about the General Overseer and his office, but all decisions regarded as wrought by God

in various Church contexts. It certainly leads to the conclusion that leaders and churches must cultivate great humility, which will always leave room for the free admission of wrongs and for God's continuing and gracious correctives.

A weary and loving A. J. Tomlinson, no doubt, experienced the pain of his own leadership failures and the aggravations of working closely with others, some of whom who were not very understanding and had their own purposes in mind. A. J. did not always handle these pressures well. His biographer and secretary of twenty-five years, Lille Duggar, wrote sympathetically and appropriately:

It is possible that some may feel that A. J. Tomlinson was a little rough in expressing himself in his diary, and especially during the time of the disruption in 1922 and 1923, and during the lawsuit that followed . . . two things should be remembered. . . . The first one is that a diary is personal property. It is not written for others to read, and in it feelings of the person writing are often expressed without reservations. . . . The next to remember is that during the upheaval in the Church, conditions were rough indeed. . . . He [Tomlinson] could not have painted a darker picture in words than the conditions were that actually existed.¹⁸⁴

Legitimacy of the COGOP—Commitment to Spirit and Word

That being said, the legitimacy of A. J.'s work in the several institutions that survive him is beyond question. God's gracious and forgiving hand has been evident in how He has blessed the COGOP throughout the years. God's own presence and sovereign activity within the Church is her ultimate legitimacy despite the frail human vessels that He uses in the process.

Ambrose Jessup Tomlinson was a great, honest, and honorable servant of God, one that God used mightily. His devoted life and lasting legacy are now rightly being recognized by scholars and historians alike. His indefatigable zeal, systematic work, and organizational skills have helped to bring much needed credibility to the fast-growing world of Holiness/Pentecostalism. He was a true God-enabled leader! On another front, his Gospel work is confirmed and vindicated by developments within the last organized Church he led. The Church of God of Prophecy is considered among the most integrated churches, both racially and internationally. This is true at all levels of her operations and in practical terms. She leads

¹⁸⁴Duggar, *A. J. Tomlinson*, op cit, p. 14.

the way among major Pentecostal denominations in the treatment, placement, and biblical authority of women ministers; she operates administratively and socially as an integral whole, a truly all-nations Church around the world; she is unswervingly committed to modeling and promoting the principles of biblical unity (Christian union) despite the severe difficulties and challenges of church history and of the multicultural nature of the world. These and other distinct developments (see Appendix A) make the COGOP a truly worthy place of life and service.

Finally, the Church's foundational commitment to Spirit and Word—Word and Spirit, is not only a bequest of Tomlinsonian leadership, but is the ultimate badge of biblical identity. In this a right and worthy choice was made, one upon which succeeding generations can safely build. All serious-minded churches should join the struggle to be directly led by God's Spirit into the faithful practice of God's Word. This is the ideal to which the Church of God of Prophecy aspires as she continues cooperating with God as He pursues His incredibly merciful, redemptive, missionary work of saving mankind and building His Kingdom. "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:21).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

The Church of God of Prophecy [Intrinsic Strengths]

It must be remembered that the Church of God of Prophecy did not develop in a vacuum, nor did it come into existence without some connection to the rest of Christianity. To the contrary, one quest of the Church of God of Prophecy is to continue the spirit of the Reformation in seeking to better understand the design and role of the church, in order to measure to the full intent that Christ has for His body. This is no small challenge in light of the vast ocean of efforts that have gone on before by *other* God-fearing individuals. The Church of God of Prophecy considered that its origin is in the New Testament when Jesus called “unto him whom he would: and they came unto him. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach” (Mark 3:13, 14). The modern history of the Church is closely intertwined with many of the major religious Movements that have swept across America and the world. The Church has a rich heritage rooted in the Protestant Reformation, including the efforts of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and others. More particularly, it is a legacy of what is called the “radical reformation.” Radical reform groups such as Anabaptists, Mennonites, Baptists, and Quakers contended that the major reformers had fallen short of a complete restoration of God’s church. The radical reformers, therefore, sought to fully restore the church on deep spiritual experiences, personal piety, and strict moral discipline.

As earlier stated, groups of radical reformers immigrated to America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; their ideas found fertile soil and flourished in the colonies. In America, and elsewhere, they emphasized experiential salvation, God’s love, and practical holiness. To them, love and holiness were the hallmarks of the true church in contrast to the complicated and formal creedalism prevalent in their day. Great revivals, some marked by Pentecostal manifestations, occurred among the radical reform groups, especially the Baptists and the followers of George Whitefield and John Wesley (Eerdmans, 1977, p. 618). Following in this tradition, the forefathers of the Church of God of Prophecy viewed their work as a continuation of the Reformation effort to restore the Apostolic church. Such an effort is still the task of the Church today and informs this effort to better understand the Church.

Striving to be “the Church of God” as well as helping to “make all men see, what is the fellowship of the mystery” are challenges that any group of Christians should find humbling. The Church of God of Prophecy has labored hard during the last century and sought the Lord intensely to

embody this vision. As adjustments have been made to align or realign ourselves to these purposes, we understandably, at times, have been frustrated or confused. Because each generation has had its own unique expectations or societal pressures, the heritage of this body has often been clouded over. To clarify some of the current confusion, it is imperative that each present generation hear positive reinforcements of those valuable contributions made to the Great Commission by the Church of Cod of Prophecy.

1. A Commitment to the Bible as the Inerrant, Infallible Word of God

From the beginning of our roots as a Church, we have been committed to honor and obey God's Word in practice, government, and discipline. Our position has always held to the belief expressed in 2 Timothy 3:16, 17: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." We continue to believe that every person who joins our fellowship must affirm this same commitment to God's Word by a visible expression to the Lordship of Christ and to the apostles' doctrine (Ephesians 2:20; Acts 2:45). The strength of this corporate body continues as it was in the beginning to be marked by this commitment to God's Word.

2. The Biblical Principle of Love

From the earliest recollection of our Church's history, we have had a powerful underlying principle of love and care between our brothers and sisters in the Lord. What has impressed people about the Church has been the immediate acceptance and love they felt from our people, even when individuals were from different cultures, races, nations, languages, or customs. Jesus taught that this would be one great identifying mark of His disciples when He said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). We must continue to foster and expand this strength to make our attitude and focus more inclusive toward believers.

3. Universality and Wholeness

While some may misread that our present emphasis on "strong and vibrant local churches" (Murray, AM, 1996, p. 89) is to imply self-absorbed or independent local churches, this is clearly not the case. Historically, this body has demonstrated an awareness of the completeness and presence of the Church that transcends local, state, or national boundaries. While some have prided themselves in their congregational style government, we have held a healthy view of the body as both universal and interdependent. Pastors who continue to teach this interdependence to their congregations

will eventually increase people's respect for their own Church leadership. We can glorify the head of the church, Jesus Christ, by exhibiting to the world this relational tie between our churches. As Colossians 2:19 says, "Each part of the body must be knit together and holding firm to the Head, which is Christ."

4. A Conscious Acknowledgment of the Role of the Holy Spirit

From early in her history, the Church of God of Prophecy has preached, experienced, and relied upon the Holy Spirit. Not only have we recognized and taught the full restoration of the spiritual gifts to the Church, but we have endeavored to keep our leadership and government subject to His direction and His will. At times, we have faltered because of our humanity, but this dependence and wooing of the Spirit is a historical fact that must be continued if we are to remain His people (R. M Pruitt, *Fundamentals of the Faith*, 1981, p. 298). This animating characteristic is spoken of by the apostle John, who wrote, "Hereby, know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (1 John 4:13). The Holy Ghost's governance in directing the Church is a powerful distinctive of the Church of God of Prophecy. The emphasis on theocratic process has been a principle that has kept the Church from drifting further into political Movements that characterize many other church groups. This is not to say that we have not suffered from the inroads of carnal political tendencies in our past and present history. However, the constant striving for theocracy (God-rule) has truly buttressed our attempts to follow the direction of God.

5. The Principle of Biblical Unity

The Church of God of Prophecy has maintained a real sense of the importance of a functional, relational unity among believers, a unity that is observable by the watching world (John 17:20–23; Ephesians 4:1–6). Unity meant for the Church more than just spiritual unity but recognizable unity that serves as a real witness to the world. While we have attempted to develop and keep this unity with our people, we cannot deny the stress as we move toward greater diversity among ourselves. However, this emphasis has fostered a "recognizable presence" of the Church in an international sense. By correcting the emphasis on our traditional exclusive viewpoint, we are being more open to broader fellowship in the Kingdom of God without abandoning biblical qualities of holiness. As the Spirit guides us in this area, the Church can better reflect and model the true dimensions and dynamics of unity.

6. A Historical and Genuine Emphasis on Personal Holiness

Following in the spirit of the Great Reformation, the Church of God of Prophecy has been convicted with the message of personal holiness in

the life of every believer. While expressions of that holiness (externally) have sometimes been altered or restored from one generation to the next, the Church has preserved and respected a definite need for both its inward reality and outward expression. Teaching and preaching holiness are key elements that distinguish our ministers as “guardians of the faith,” which was once delivered to the apostles. Today, we have both a history and continuing identity as a Pentecostal Church and, just as significantly, a “holiness Church.” Hebrews 12:14 instructs us to “Follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”

7. A Strong Commitment to the Principles of Biblical Marriage

The Church takes a very strong, positive position on the questions of marriage and family as compared to today’s societal norms. The biblical ideal for marriage is one man, one wife for life, in a loving, caring, sharing union that becomes the proper, stable environment for bringing up children in the fear, nurture, and admonition of the Lord. We believe that marriage is a commitment and/or covenant publicly made before the proper legal authority by two biblically, eligible persons, male and female, who promise each other a life of fidelity, love, and self-sacrifice until death parts them. Love is an enrichment of marriage but is not its only basis. The public promise counts for much and is a word that should be kept as a vital part of the relationship.

The family is God’s primary institution for human society and consists of a father and a mother properly married in God’s sight, which marriage may produce children. The Church recognizes that due to sin, the misfortunes of life, and the deterioration of morals in human societies, single parent families, step-families, and dysfunctional families are a reality. The Church applauds those parents who strive to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, no matter what their circumstances. She seeks to minister to them and to undergird them in living responsibly, purely, meaningfully, and productively. The Church teaches against premarital sex and any and all inordinate arrangements such as same-sex relationships, whether homosexual or lesbian, and does not recognize any form of legitimacy for these immoral practices, whether societal or legal. We recognize that those in such situations and/or having such practices are in need of salvation and forgiveness and that they can be saved, cleansed, and delivered by the grace and power of God.

8. Racial and Cultural Harmony in Diversity

From the turn of the twentieth century, our spiritual fathers showed a capacity to accept different races and cultures, to relate and work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and submission for the common cause of the Gospel. Beginning with men like A. J. Tomlinson, Stanley Ferguson,

and Pablo Garcia (Davidson, Vol. II, 1974, p. 228), the message of Christ was carried freely among the races, cultures, and people of various languages of the world. Today, this same harmony and diversity prevails in almost every part of the world. In 1996, the North American Association of Pentecostals/Charismatics recognized the Church as an historical and present model for other churches on issues of racial harmony, ethnic advancement in the ministerial ranks, and development of indigenous leadership. This “racial harmony in diversity” was not presented as an accomplished fact, but because so many other groups have done so poorly in race-related matters. While the Church of God of Prophecy cannot claim to have been perfect in this matter, nor can it claim to be free of any such problems currently, her quest for equity can serve to show how much more could be done among God’s people.

9. International Representation and Participation

From the beginning of this century, our leaders made a distinctive effort to evangelize and include other nations in the Church. International recruitment, involvement, and participation in everything from government to worship was accomplished and cultivated without the disruptive strains and pressures that usually develop in most international organizations. This acceptance and harmony has been unparalleled even in other Christian organizations. This particular strength of our spiritual body received its pattern from the New Testament. Matthew 28:19 had proclaimed that believers were to teach (or make disciples of) all nations. In fact, Peter declared in Acts 10:34, 35, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.”

10. A Historic Restorationist Impulsive [Impulse] to Be the New Testament Church

We have always understood that the Church is to model the patterns found in God’s Word. The history of the Church of God of Prophecy has been one of seeking to be better aligned by how the church is identified and functions according to the Scriptures. There has been a willingness to be submissive to the Spirit, to admit past mistakes, or to return to prior positions when we found ourselves to have drifted from God’s design. As we continue to mature as a body, there will be the need to continue to see ourselves in the light of the perfect image of Christ. Second Corinthians 3:18 reveals that there will need to be constant change until the Church can manifest the nature of the one who purchased her with His own blood. A distinctive trait of our Church has been to correct past errors and keep striving to be the Church He wants her to be (Davidson, Vol. II, 1974, p. 54).

Central to this commitment is how the Church covenant is framed, giving primacy to acting in accord with the new covenant of Jesus Christ. The covenant calls for the Church to “walk in the light to the best of your knowledge and ability.” This commitment is witnessed by the great effort that is currently going on in attempting to correct, realign, and explore new depths in the Word of God. Trauma has been experienced by many of our people, yet the vast majority of them have remained faithful in the midst of confusion and doubt. The basic reason for this is related to the fervent desire to “be” the Church of the Bible.

The Church of God of Prophecy is part of the impetus of the Spirit that brought the classical Holiness/Pentecostal Movement into existence. Reformation and restoration Movements have had a long history that spanned several centuries. There have been many “sacred moments of divine visitation” that have become hallmarks in moving toward the Church in its fullness. Such a visitation was experienced by A. J. Tomlinson in 1903, on June 13, at the place we now call “Fields of the Wood.” History records such a visitation when Martin Luther understood that “justification by faith” was the only way to receive salvation in AD 1514. Another “sacred visitation” is recorded May 24, 1738, when John Wesley had his spiritual experience at the Aldersgate Street Church in England. These places are visited by thousands each year as important locations in God’s progressive manifestation to mankind. A. J. Tomlinson’s experience at the Fields of the Wood shows that God’s hand has been on this small group that is striving to “be” the Church of the Bible. The sacred visitation principle can be applied to Luther, Wesley, Tomlinson, and others in the quest to seek more of God and find a place in God where true worshipers could approach the Almighty.

11. An Evangelical Fervency to Gospel Outreach

Throughout the history of the Church, we have experienced a desire to harvest lost souls through personnel, financial resources, training, and administrative efforts. A call has repeatedly been issued over the last one hundred years by our leadership to make renewed efforts to reach into the harvest of the nations (Murray, AM, 1996, p. 86). This corporate commitment has been without regard to race, culture, or nationality. Thus, people have been converted and churches founded by us in more than 105 nations. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit has always been the major force behind this push to see the Gospel spread throughout the world. The Spirit has been directing us to harvest just as He did the early church (Acts 1:8).

12. A Pattern of Early Involvement of Youth in Ministry Responsibilities

Almost without parallel, young ministers in the Church found themselves accepted and utilized without fear of refusal because of their age and formal education. The Church of God of Prophecy developed a biblical and historical distinctive that recognized young people (just as David in the Bible) as called directly by God, used by God without prejudice to educational opportunity, but based solely on the Holy Ghost anointing, their willingness to serve, and their readiness to prepare themselves by studying God's Word. Young people can be proud to belong to a Church that believes in their ability to contribute to the cause of Jesus from an early age. Like Paul declared to a young pastor long ago, the Church still offers the challenge to every new generation: "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12).

13. A Common People's Church

The Scriptures tell us that the common people heard Jesus gladly (Mark 12:37). His message of reassurance to John the Baptist was sent to him while in prison with the phrase, "And the poor have the gospel preached unto them" (Matthew 11:5). The Church of God of Prophecy has historically echoed the same attitude. In his 1985 Annual Address, the late Bishop M. A. Tomlinson reminded the Church, "The poor of this world were given prominence in the ministry of Jesus, and His Church must exemplify His love to all men" (*Assembly Minutes*, 1985, p. 40). The Church has been a Church of all nations and a Church for all nations.

These contributions by the Church of God of Prophecy are factors that help demonstrate her value and importance. Thank God that the Church of God of Prophecy has not lost these distinctives and strengths. This present generation must continue to build upon these wonderful attributes. This Church must respect and continue its godly heritage! As American Historian George Bancroft warned, "It is when the hour of conflict is over, that history comes to a right understanding of the strife, and is ready to exclaim, 'Lo, God is here, and we knew it not'" (Bancroft, *History of the United States*, 1834–1876).

Source: Assembly Committee for Biblical Doctrine and Polity 1998 Working Document, Section Two, C, pages 18–22

APPENDIX A2

An Additional COGOP Distinctive

By

Adrian L. Varlack Sr.

The Inclusion of Women in Ministry

Women were included in the Church's ministry from quite early although their roles and functions were somewhat limited. For example, female licensed evangelists, like lay ministers, could preach, teach, and publish the Gospel, but they could not baptize converts or add them to the Church. In addition, women could be the pastor of a church but could not conduct the Business Conference part of the pastor's responsibility. This was on the premise that women as a whole were not allowed to participate in business decisions of the Church whether local, district, regional, or international based on what is now recognized as a misapplication of 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35. Our practice was a greatly modified version of the standard Baptist tradition of ascribing to this scriptural text the complete prohibition of women in roles over their male counterparts. Our Church's balance in this area is seen in the publication (very early) of a tract entitled, "Women Preachers" by Mrs. Larkin Taylor with an afterword in support by A. J. Tomlinson. Our Church also did not hesitate to use women in the pastoral ministry as explained above.

This all changed with the Church's biblical review of ministry roles in 1996.¹⁸⁵ There are now no restrictions to women's participation in all aspects of Church ministry with the exception of the ordaining of elders, which is still considered as a biblical role for males. However, appointment of females in leading positions at the international level of the Church began as early as December 1929 when Clara T. Mabe of Virginia was selected as General Women's Missionary Band Secretary. Mittie Lea Adams was named the first General Victory Leaders Band Secretary in 1932, followed by Willard H. Boyles who served seventeen years from 1934 to 1951. Indeed, according to appointment records at the COGOP International Offices, Eliza V. Martin was appointed by A. J. Tomlinson, General Overseer, as Missionary to Barbados from 1935 to 1941. She is listed among the appointed overseers for those years. A more extensive treatment of this subject is certainly warranted and will be forthcoming.

¹⁸⁵*Minutes of the 89th Assembly*, Church of God of Prophecy, 1996, pp. 39, 40.

APPENDIX B

Plurality of Leadership

By

Billy D. Murray

General Overseer's Introduction to Plurality

The Eighty-eighth Assembly in 1994 adopted the Report of the Questions and Subjects Committee, which called for Plurality of Leadership in the Office of General Overseer. This would be begun initially by the selection of at least two General Presbyters, who, along with the General Overseer, would form this plurality. These two or more Presbyters were to be selected by the General Presbytery, which consists of all bishops who serve under appointment of the General Overseer.

Following the 1994 Assembly, the Presbytery remained in Louisville for another day to discuss the implementation of this Assembly decision. After considerable discussion, it was decided to select a Presbytery Working Group, coordinated by Adrian L. Varlack, to work out the details of the selection of Presbyters. This group of nine bishops has devoted their time and prayer in pursuit of the correct procedure concerning this matter of developing plurality in leadership.

This is a bold step for the Church in that it is a change from what all of us are familiar with. Some have felt for a long time that the Church was taking its cue for singular leadership more from the Old Testament pattern of Moses' leadership than from the New Testament order. For example, there was much preaching that depicted Moses as a type of A. J. Tomlinson, and then Joshua to be a type of M. A. Tomlinson.

We are certain that Moses was a type of Jesus Christ. Moses was a mediator between God and the people. He received from God, and what he received, he gave to the people. Jesus is fulfilling what Moses was in type. The church today does not need another Moses. Jesus Christ is our Mediator, and He is the singular Head of the church. This is not to suggest that we do not need earthly leaders because we do indeed. However, we must not think of any leader as being the Head of the church. Headship belongs to Jesus, and Jesus alone. We are seeking a better understanding of the New Testament order of leadership.

In the Assembly of 1990, I promised to appoint a committee of international composition to make a study of this subject. This was done, and that committee to study the Office of General Overseer presented to the Assembly of 1991 a report of their findings. Those present will recall

their interaction with the Questions and Subjects Committee before the entire Assembly as they presented their scriptural conclusions that the New Testament called for plurality of leadership in the Office of General Overseer.

The Questions and Subjects Committee continued their study of this subject for three more years before bringing to the Eighty-eighth Assembly in 1994 the specific recommendation that was adopted, to which reference is now being made. Some have wondered whether this decision of the Assembly has my support. The answer is yes. I do not feel intimidated or threatened by this Assembly action. I believe all of us want what God wants. This decision was not a proposal that there be three General Overseers. Only one person will carry that designation. In areas of responsibility, however, where the burden of making heavy decisions must be borne, the additional Presbyters would help carry that burden. I view the designation of General Overseer to be more of a functional position rather than a biblically called-for office such as bishop, deacon, or elder. These Presbyters would assist in carrying out the necessary functions that are demanded. The burden of the General Overseer's Office as it presently functions is a heavy one. If there is a means for lightening this burden, while at the same time bringing its function more in harmony with the New Testament order, it should be welcomed by whoever assumes this responsibility in the future. As I understand it, there will still be the General Overseer, selected by the Assembly, while the Presbyters would not be selected by the Assembly but rather by the Presbytery. This makes a clear distinction between the General Overseer and the Presbyters, who would form the plurality of leadership.

It is my feeling that to proceed in this direction without causing undue anxieties among our people, the majority of whom never attend a General Assembly to hear issues discussed, will require a massive educational effort. The Church membership will need to be thoroughly informed. We must remember that of over 300,000 members, only ten to fifteen thousand of these attend the General Assembly. With this in view, I have asked the Presbytery Working Group to share with you the following presentation.

Plurality of Leadership— A New Testament Principle

Presentation Prepared by the Presbytery Working Group 1996

Introduction

The Eighty-eighth General Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy (July 1994) adopted the recommendations of the Questions and Subjects Committee regarding the Office of the General Overseer. In section IIA (paragraph 1), we read, “. . . he [the General Overseer] is responsible, in conjunction with the plurality of leadership (defined in Section D), to carry out the following functions. . . .” In the opening paragraph of section D, we read, “To facilitate a plurality of leadership, this plurality is to begin with at least three individuals. One of these will be the General Overseer. The others will be recognized as General Presbyters. . . . They will work with the General Overseer to provide shared leadership responsibility in carrying out the functions of the General Overseer by developing vision, processes, and plans in accomplishing the church’s mission. . . .”

This presentation has been prepared at the request of the General Overseer by the Presbytery Working Group (appointed by the General Presbytery during its July 18, 1994, meeting in Louisville, Kentucky), and is an attempt to bring some clarity to the concept of “plurality of leadership.”

I. The Body Principle

“The New Testament is our rule of faith, practice, government, and discipline” is quite a common expression among us. In company with many “biblical” restoration Movements, we take the church of the New Testament as our model, and it is right that we should do so. The best example in the New Testament (and unique to the New Testament), out of many references to the church in terms of form and function, is the metaphor, the “body of Christ.” “Body” is used to describe the church in more than 30 references (including 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4, 5; Colossians 1, 2; and Romans 12).

The apostle Paul’s use of the “body principle” to illustrate the operation and working of the church of God is instructive in helping us to see the following:

1. The unity and common experience of the body—to avoid individualism and the formation of superior attitudes (Romans 12:5).
2. The variety of different functions in a body—to bring balance between over-valuation or under-valuation of any one function (1 Corinthians 12:14–19).
3. The cooperative and complementary function of a plurality of members in the body—to instruct those who covet preeminence (Ephesians 4:16).
4. The necessity of membership in the body—to guard against a spirit of independence among those who think they don't need others (1 Corinthians 12:14, 20).
5. The importance of “uncomely” parts that have crucial functions to perform—to instruct those who think others don't need them (1 Corinthians 12:22–24).
6. The incompleteness and inadequacy of the body as something in and of itself (that is, without a proper relationship to its head)—to instruct those who tend to glory in the Church rather than in Christ. “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:21).

The world system of leadership with its emphasis on power and position (human hierarchies) is seen at once to be irrelevant in the context of the body of Christ. Jesus gave us a model example of functional leadership for His church in Mark 10:35, 45, concluding with this thought: “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” What good is “ministry” if it is merely a certificate (license), or a position in the Church's organization that is not more than an appointment? Jesus called the ministry of the church to servanthood and service. It will be noticed also that in both theology and experience (or precept and example) the headship of Jesus was preeminent at every given point in the body.

II. Office, Function, Position

In the New Testament, there is some distinction between “office,” “function,” and “position.” To illustrate, in the New Testament there is the office of apostle. Several men were at the same time called to this office, but in the course of time, they were positioned in different places and at different levels of administration and oversight. Paul was called to be an apostle. His apostleship was permanent, but his position varied from

regional to local oversight. Moreover, he had to voluntarily respond to God's call on his life and seek for divine strength to function effectively according to the calling of his office and relative position.

A biblical **office** is divine, the **position** of the office is relative, the **function** is voluntary or discretionary. To illustrate further, a bishop or elder (or presbyter) is an office; a national overseer or the General Overseer is a position of that office, doing the actual work of the elder is the function of that office.

Further, in order to avoid the manmade concept of "office" as static institutional position, the sense of the original language should be understood as "ministry" and/or "work." Thus, for example, 1 Timothy 3:1 could be better understood as "If any man desires the work [or ministry] of a bishop he desires a good work." Office is appropriately interpreted to mean ministry and work according to God's calling—not a static position in the Church's organization. (See also Luke 1:8, 9; Romans 11:13; 12:4; 1 Timothy 3:10, 13; Hebrews 7:5, where all the original words translated "office" in the King James Version emphasize "service/work/function/ministry.")

III. Biblical—Historical Perspective

At this stage in our history, after several decades of our present form of government, we recognize the difficulty with regards to a call for major changes in our governmental form. Certainly our history has shown that few forms generate as much concern as the Office of General Overseer.

The need for reformation and renewal, however, acknowledges that we are called by God to new dimensions of faith as befitting the age in which we live, and to a free responsibility to obey the leading of the Holy Spirit as He opens to us a more clear understanding of God's plan revealed in the Scriptures. There is a basic assumption (and the Church has always upheld it in principle), which we need to be reminded of, that the Holy Bible is the sole foundation and blueprint upon which to construct Church reform, renewal, revitalization, and restoration. Those of us who profess Scripture to be God's inspired Word to man are duty-bound to construct our concepts and practices of Church structure on the only true and reliable teacher—God's written Word. Only by returning to our source of life and light can we discern authentic Christianity toward which we are striving. At the same time, every step in a new direction is a step of faith. The recognition and acknowledgment of a biblical principle does not necessarily carry with it a complete understanding of its full implementation. As we walk in the light that is given to us, more light will shine on our path.

The present widely held perception of the Office of General Overseer as the "apex of the pyramid" or "the top of the ladder" has resulted from

tradition and some misinterpretation. The leadership example of Moses was often cited as being relevant to the position of General Overseer, and that James, the Lord's brother, was Moses' New Testament counterpart. In this, we recognize a departure from the new order of Christ's government and administration and a return to the old system under Moses.

This departure was due, in part, to a failure to properly recognize that Moses was a type of Jesus Christ, which is clearly recognizable in such passages as Hebrews 3:1–7: “. . . Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honor than the house. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. Wherefore as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear his voice. . . .”

The functional role of leadership took upon itself a new significance in the coming of Jesus Christ. What God had illustrated in Old Testament leadership by types and shadows, He brought to reality in Jesus. Thus, the New Testament understanding of leadership must be reflected in the light of Christ's present headship. His status and presence becomes the guarantee of the Church's direction and ultimate victory. One [A] legitimacy of His chosen leaders is the ability for others to see the headship and character of Christ through them.

The changes of leadership as they are reflected in the New Testament may show more fluidity than their counterparts in the Old Testament; however, Christ's active headship alleviates problems that may generate in changes of human leaders. As Head of the church, He is the Savior of the body; the Church's ultimate perfection is rooted in Him and not human leadership (Ephesians 5:23–27).

In the early church, there was little difficulty in recognizing the human leadership chosen by Christ to lead the church. The apostles had been personally selected by Jesus to provide such leadership. Among the apostles, it is also apparent that Christ was moving in specific individuals to provide leaders among the leadership. The Book of Acts, the Epistles, and early church history record the role played by this general leadership as well as the role played by its leaders.

In the church's early days of expansion through the Gospel message, it is apparent that Peter assumed this role of leadership among the apostles.

Thus, we see him conducting the meeting in Acts 1:15 in the selection of Matthias, his early preaching (Acts 2), and his role in the Gospel's expansion to the Gentiles (Acts 10).

At some point, James, the brother of the Lord, assumed this position of leadership. The apostle Paul recognized this leadership in Galatians 1:19; 2:9; and 1 Corinthians 15:7. Peter also acknowledged James' role as evidenced in Acts 12:17: "But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go show these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place." In Acts 15, James also played a key role in the Council at Jerusalem.

Apparently, after the death of James and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, it appears that the apostle John assumed such a leadership role. Church history indicates that John went to Ephesus where he wrote his general epistles (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History). John, in identifying himself as the "elder" in 2 John 1, shows his significant role in leadership. These three men, each with his own giftedness and personality, were used to provide functional leadership to the Church in the changing situations it faced, rather than occupying a hierarchical and unique office of authority and power.

Indeed, it can be seen from the example of Acts 6:1–3; 15:4, 6, 22; and 16:4 that the mode for general leadership in the New Testament was more collective than via the ministry of a particular apostle or elder. These Scripture passages indicate that it was "the twelve," and later, "the apostles and elders," who were involved in the major decisions that impacted on the Church.

The consideration of leadership in line with the New Testament Church gives rise to the possibility of a more "plural form" of leadership (for example, several leaders working in one accord and sharing responsibility), as compared with our rather static structure, and the concentration of general leadership embodied in only one man.

We can conclude, then, that no evidence exists to show a precedent in the New Testament church for a static office of General Overseer. There is a leadership position of one as leader of leaders, but not a solitary and unique office. Christ alone holds a unique office in the church—the solitary Head of a many-membered body.

IV. New Testament Paradigm

The form and function of the apostolic model of leadership was in all respects under the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit and was essentially dynamic,

operating through plural leadership rather than from a single power base with one man at the top of a hierarchical structure.

The Church of God of Prophecy emphasizes theocratic government. The term “theocracy” means “God-rule.” As we see it manifested in the Old and the New Testaments, it is divine rule through human instrumentality. Furthermore, it is the acknowledgement and realization of God’s immediate presence in the church for guidance and direction.

Theocracy can only happen when the church acknowledges and accepts Jesus’ omnipresence and sovereignty over and in the Church, that is, the abiding presence of His headship. He alone is Lord (Colossians 1:16–18).

The terms “apostles” and “elders” (or “presbyters”) are used throughout the New Testament to describe leaders in the church at both the local and general level. We can see that beginning with the earliest references in the Acts of the Apostles, universal leadership was the responsibility of the “twelve” as a unique group; and we know the “twelve” were apostles.

There was, however, a development in line with the general growth of the church, which led to an additional group of leaders who were called “elders” (or “presbyters”—“elders” being a translation of the original word and “presbyters” being a transliteration) (Acts 11:30.) Thus, by the time the general council convened in Acts 15, the leadership of the church is said to be composed of the “apostles and elders” (Acts 15:4, 6, 22).

It seems apparent that in time the apostles also came to be known as elders insomuch that Acts 21:18 records, “And the day following Paul went in with us unto James, and all the elders were present.” While no mention is made of the apostles in this passage, it is evident that they were included in the reference to “elders” (Acts 21:25). It may be seen that the apostles John and Peter referred to themselves as “elders” (2 John 1; 3 John 1; 1 Peter 5:1).

Whereas the twelve apostles served uniquely for a specified time, it is evident that this body of elders in the New Testament church was designed as a feature of church government to be perpetuated (Acts 14:23). Of the approximately 69 uses of the word “elder” in the New Testament, twice it is used in a *relational* sense (Luke 15:25; Romans 9:12), seven times it is used of an older person and/or elder in an *official* sense (1 Timothy 5:1, 2, 19; 1 Peter 5:1, 5; 2 John 1; 3 John 1), and about sixty times, it is used in an *official* sense in its plural form as seen in the following examples:

1. The relief money was sent to the *elders* (Acts 11:30) in time of famine.
2. They ordained *elders* in every church (Acts 14:23).
3. There were *apostles* and *elders* at the Council concerning the Gentiles (Acts 15:1–5, 22, 23; 16:4).
4. The *elders* of Ephesus (Acts 20:17, 28).
5. The *elders* of Jerusalem (Acts 21:17, 18).
6. The *elders* are to rule (1 Timothy 5:1, 17–21).
7. The *elders* of the Church to anoint with oil and pray for the sick (James 5:14).
8. The *elders* exhorted by Peter, an elder, to oversee the flock of God (1 Peter 5:1–5).
9. *Elders* to be ordained by Titus in every church and city (Titus 1:5).

It is apparent, however, that certain men were prominent even among the apostles and elders. In Galatians 2:9, Paul makes reference to James, the Lord’s brother, Cephas, and John as “pillars” in the church, and Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James are the chief speakers in the Acts 15 general council. Moreover, it seems apparent that at a given time, one man held a principal position “in” the church, or among the churches, notwithstanding that Christ ruled over all preeminently. Thus, though they all held the office of elder, one served positionally as chief. The position as “chief elder” seems to have been held first by Peter, certainly among the Twelve (Matthew 16:18; 17:24; Mark 3:16; 5:37; Acts 2:37–40), then by James, the Lord’s brother, after Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 21:18; 12:17; Galatians 2:9, 12), and perhaps later by John (Revelation 1:1, 4; 2 John 1:12; 3 John 1:1). Other examples are those of the following:

1. Paul and the Elders of Ephesus (Acts 19:10, 11, 18:11; 20:17–35).
2. Timothy and the Elders (1 Timothy 3).
3. Titus and the Elders (Titus 1:5).

In view of the above, and the words of Jesus when He said to His disciples, “and whosoever of you will be chiefest . . .” (Mark 10:44), it is evident that in terms of position there is a principal elder even among the leaders in the church, but this man is distinguished by position, not

by office. That is to say, his calling and ministry is the same as all other elders, but he is positioned as a leader among the leaders.

Conclusion

Throughout history, God has worked through forms of government that were not always in perfect harmony with His divine pattern (e.g., allowing for kingship in Israel). However, this does not mean that God put His seal of approval on human limitations and failures. God would put His anointing on leaders serving within such imperfect systems of government because their service was necessary for the good of the people, but such an anointing on God's servant did not "hallow" the system (Ex. God's anointing on King Saul—1 Samuel 10:1, 10, etc.). It is the Lord's desire that we aim toward the divine ideal. But even then, it is possible to have all the right form of government, as to the mechanics of it, and lack the life of the Spirit! It is possible to have [develop] organization and structure without organism, [that is] without life. Organization without organism makes all decent and in order—and dead!

With all our striving after the ideal, it is imperative that the Spirit of Christ, the spirit of grace, love, and humility be manifested in every believer's attitude. It is tragically possible to build "according to the pattern," and God never to put "the glory" there to seal it!

APPENDIX C

Declaration

15th Assembly, November 3–9, 1920, Cleveland, TN

Be it known to all people everywhere that we, The General Assembly of the Churches of God, now convened in business conference, at Headquarters in the city of Cleveland, Tennessee, set forth the following declaration:

First: That the minutes of all previous Assemblies are a true official record in substance and in fact as kept by the authorized clerks of said Assembly [sic] and published by those fully and legally authorized to do so, and not the product or individual statements of A. J. Tomlinson, the General Overseer.

Second: That the names of all the local churches recorded in various minutes including this one are the result of the faithful services of the ministers and representatives of the General Assembly and when thus received by the said representatives of the General Assembly, they then became and composed a part of the General Assembly. We, therefore, do not recognize the right of any local church to withdraw from the General Assembly as a whole, but those who prove disloyal to the Government and teachings as promulgated from time to time by the General Assembly or otherwise disorderly are to be dealt with in individual manner and excluded as a member of said church.

Third: That all ministers, whether General Overseer, elders, bishops, deacons, or evangelists have been and are construed legal representatives of the Church of God while in harmony with its government and teaching.

Fourth: That the General Assembly of the Church of God is that organized body with full power and authority to designate the teaching, government, principles, and practices of all the local churches composing said Assembly.

Fifth: That the name of this church is the Church of God, which is sometimes referred to as, with headquarters at Cleveland, Tennessee, only with the purpose of distinguishing it from other churches calling themselves the Church of God, but that it is no part of its name.

Sixth: That one of the first principles accepted in the earliest history of its organization was that we accept the whole Bible rightly divided, which is today one of its most sacred principles; therefore, we meet together in annual conference to search the Scriptures and put them into practice. Our teachings and faith are the same as originally accepted in its original organization and all of the changes in government and management have been duly authorized by the General Assembly in its various annual sessions.

This was read and unanimously approved by the Fifteenth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God on the 8th day of November, 1920.

A. J. Tomlinson, General Overseer,

E. J. Boehmer, Clerk

Constitution

Preamble

We, the Church of God, the ministry and membership of the General Assembly of the Churches of God in conference assembled at Cleveland, Tenn.

In order to form a more perfect union, establish the principles of Theocratic Government, set forth the teaching, principles, and practices as heretofore interpreted by the General Assembly as further herein provided and for the general welfare of its membership do ordain and establish this constitution for the General Assembly of the Churches of God.

ARTICLE 1

Purpose of Organization

Section 1: This organization is and shall be known as the General Assembly of the Churches of God.

Section 2: The object and purposes of this organization is to propagate the doctrine, principles, and practices of the Church of God as set forth in the New Testament as interpreted by the legally authorized officials of this organization, which interpretations may be found in the minutes of the annual sessions of the General Assembly, also filed at the business headquarters of the Church of God.

Section 3: To promulgate rules and regulations to govern the local churches of said organization, and otherwise promote the general interest of the General Assembly.

Section 4: To search out the Bible plans of government and discipline and interpret the same.

Section 5: To provide a general government in which is vested full power and authority to dictate and promulgate rules and regulations from time to time to govern the local churches by said Assembly.

Section 6: To provide a general convocation for the mutual fellowship, spiritual development, and general welfare of its membership.

ARTICLE 2

Membership

Section 1: The membership of the General Assembly is and shall be composed of all the local churches as recorded in the minutes of said Assemblies.

Section 2: When a new church is set in order by any legally authorized minister of the Church of God, this new church as a product of his labor becomes a member of the General Assembly and shall be subject to the government, teachings, principles, and practices as promulgated from time to time by said Assembly.

Section 3: No local church shall withdraw from the General Assembly as a whole, but such members of said local church who may become disloyal or otherwise disorderly, shall be dealt with and excluded from membership in such local church.

ARTICLE 3

Government

Section 1: The government of this organization is and shall be Theocratic in form as interpreted by its officials.

ARTICLE 4

Officers

Section 1: The officers of the General Assembly of the Churches of God are and shall consist of General Overseer, general secretary, council of twelve elders and other seventy elders, presbytery, state overseers, and trustees.

Section 2: The duties of the General Overseer shall be the general supervision of all the work of the General Assembly, and to sit as chairman of said Assembly when in session.

Section 3: The duties of the general secretary shall be to keep a careful record of the General Assembly and act in conjunction with the General Overseer in execution of any and all legal documents authorized by the General Assembly.

Section 4: The duties and powers of the council of the twelve elders shall be to consider all questions that may properly come before them pertaining to the general interest and welfare of the Church of

God. It is, and shall be so understood, that the twelve in conjunction with the General Overseer shall be the supreme council.

Section 5: The duties of the seventy elders shall be to faithfully represent the government and teaching of the Church of God in their various fields of labor and to sit in joint session with the twelve in the Assembly to make final decisions on questions that shall come before said Assembly.

Section 6: The twelve elders and the seventy elders shall together with the General Overseer be understood and so construed to be the official Assembly while in joint session, which shall have full power and authority to designate rules of government, teachings, and principles for the local churches, those present to constitute a quorum.

Section 7: The duties of the trustees of the General Assembly are and shall be to hold in trust all property belonging to the General Assembly for the full use and benefit of said Assembly, and to see that no property or part of the same shall be converted to any other use than that which is in harmony with the plan and purposes, government, and teachings of said Assembly.

Section 8: The presbytery and their duties—The General Overseer and state overseer shall constitute the presbytery in the respective states or provinces, who, after all investigations necessary and other proceedings provided and authorized by the General Assembly, shall have full power and authority to license or ordain candidates for the ministry.

It is further understood that it shall be within the power of the presbytery to take final action in revoking the license or ordination of any minister for any reason or cause satisfactory to themselves.

Section 9: The duties of the state overseer are and shall be to have the oversight of his state or territory and as much as possible conduct or order a general evangelistic campaign over his state during the year; to see that every church is supplied with a pastor as much as lieth in his power. In short, oversee every interest of the work in his territory.

Section 10: The term of all officials shall be fixed by the General Assembly while in session.

Section 11: Any official is subject to impeachment for an offence rendering him unworthy of the position that he occupies.

ARTICLE 5

Judicial

Section 1: There shall be a supreme judicial body composed of seven of the twelve elders who shall decide all matters which shall properly come before them, whose decision shall be final.

Section 2: There shall be a judicial body who [sic] shall sit in the various states where churches are established to consider all matters coming under their jurisdiction said body shall be composed of the state overseer, one of the seventy elders, and one bishop.

Section 3: It shall be the duty of the board designated in Section 2 to examine all candidates for the ministry, and if found satisfactory they shall refer them to the presbytery for license or ordination.

Section 4: It shall be the duty of the board designated in Section 3 of this article to try all ministers for any offence committed within the state where they shall convene; if for any reason their decision should be unsatisfactory to either of the litigants, he shall have [the] right to appeal to the body mentioned in Section 1 of this article.

Section 5: It is and shall be within the power of the local church to try its members for any offence contrary to the government, teaching, principles, and practices of the Church of God. Their jurisdiction, however, is limited to lay members only.

Section 6: No business conference or any act shall be legal unless presided over by a legally authorized moderator.

Section 7: Any lay member of the local church who has been tried for any offence and convicted and excommunicated who, for any reason, may feel that he has been improperly or illegally dealt with, shall have the right to appeal from such decision to the body set forth in Section 2 of this Article. And if, for any reason, he may be dissatisfied with the decision of this body, he shall have the right to appeal to the body set forth in Section 1 of this article.

Also, if there be a litigation between two or more members of a local church, and if, for any reason, they be dissatisfied with the decision of the local church, they may have a right to appeal to the board set forth in Section 2 of this article, and if for any reason, they should be dissatisfied with the decision of the board set forth in Section 2, they may have the right to appeal to the board set forth in Section 1 of this article.

ARTICLE 6

Finance

Section 1: It is and shall be recognized as an accepted principle and as a part of God's financial plan that all the membership shall pay tithes of their net earnings or income.

Section 2: It is and shall be ordained that the tithes are for the support of the ministry only.

Section 3: For the love of the Gospel and for the general welfare of the Church, it shall be the duty of the membership to make freewill offerings from time to time as the needs may require.

Section 4: It shall be the duty of all persons intrusted [sic] with finance belonging to the Church of God for any purpose, as treasurer of said church, to deposit the same in a reliable bank to the credit of the Church of God.

Section 5: The power to regulate and operate the financial system shall be vested in the supreme council.

ARTICLE 7

Education

Section 1: A Bible Training School shall be maintained as long as advisable, for the education of our ministers and workers, which shall include the extension department of the Bible Training Correspondence Course and any other educational pursuits that the General Assembly may from time to time deem necessary.

ARTICLE 8

Amendments

Section 1: As the work of this organization progresses and the number of churches increase, the General Assembly may create new and other positions and fill them as needs may require.

Section 2: This constitution may be amended by a unanimous agreement of the official Assembly in any regular session.

After General Overseer read the constitution, he asked the Assembly if they wanted it reread or if they wanted any explanation. Following the reading were a few questions, explanations, and deep consideration, after which T. A. Richard suggested that the Assembly accept the constitution as a whole. It was unanimously agreed to accept it. General Overseer said, “In order to show our appreciation of His presence and it seeming good to us and the Holy Ghost, let us all kneel before the Lord and reverence Him.” All knelt and thanked the Lord. After prayer, all stood and praised God while the orchestra was playing. The General Overseer exclaimed, “BEHOLD WHAT GOD HATH WROUGHT.”

Source: Minutes of the 16th Annual Assembly, 1922, pp. 60–65.

APPENDIX D

General Overseer's Plea for Forgiveness on Behalf of the COGOP

Remarks of General Overseer Billy D. Murray at the Peerless Road Church of God of Prophecy Session of The Church of God's Solemn Assembly, Monday, January 9, 1995, 5:30 P.M.

In 1984, the Holy Spirit moved powerfully in our General Assembly, calling the Church of God of Prophecy to repentance, and we have sought to understand the full implications of this divine reprimand. We were reminded that we had drifted in many ways from a vital relationship with the Holy Ghost, that we were thus lacking in a deep compassion for the lost.

Much confession and prayerful repentance has been done, yet we continue to pray for the kind of relationship to be fully restored that pleases the Lord. In recent months, our minds have been drawn to our relationship with other Christian groups, which in some cases lacks the warmth of genuine fellowship that we feel would be pleasing to our Savior and for which Jesus died.

For all sectarian attitudes we have held and exhibited, attitudes which are unholy and spiritually divisive, we ask God's and your forgiveness. A lost world awaits the witness of genuine Christian unity, which expresses truly the love of the Savior who remains their only hope. It remains that all men will know we are true disciples of Christ by the love we express toward one another and toward the lost.

We admit our guilt of an institutional pride, which does not reflect the humility of this world's only Savior. Please forgive us for any lack of true fellowship you may have felt. It is our desire that we work in unity toward reaching this perishing generation, remembering that Jesus died that "whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Looking back with a view from heaven one day, we will be glad we laid aside petty bickering over issues not essential to salvation.

APPENDIX E

Turning to the Harvest

Preface to this Appendix

As part of the Church's response to the Holy Spirit's "Call to Repentance" (1984), the COGOP leadership introduced "Turning to the Harvest" (in both brochure and guidebook forms) at the Eighty-eighth International Assembly held in Louisville, Kentucky, July 11–17, 1994. The importance of the Church's commitment to God's great harvest cannot be overstated. Indeed, this commitment is nothing short of a paradigm shift in the Church's operations. To highlight this reality that the Church embraced in 1994, the wording of the main elements of "Turning to the Harvest" is being reproduced below. The guidebook and brochure were designed and produced by a specially tasked Harvest Committee (see footnote 137) appointed by then General Overseer, the late Billy D. Murray. Subsequent General Overseers Fred S. Fisher Sr. (2000–2006) and Randall E. Howard (2006 to present) have maintained this harvest focus. A copy of the guidebook and brochure are on file at the COGOP Archives.

TURNING TO THE HARVEST

Communiqué

Many things clamor for our attention; consequently, it is easy to become distracted from what is important. We confess that much of the time, the harvest of souls for whom Jesus died has not been our priority. Now, in repentance for having allowed distractions to divert our minds from souls who are perishing, we resolve to turn from all that is trivial to our primary task of getting this glorious Gospel to a lost world. By God's grace, we hereby commit ourselves to be a correctly focused people engaged in the harvest into which Jesus has sent us. His promise is, ". . . and lo I am with you always."

The Harvest

Under the leadership of the Holy Ghost, these operational principles will guide the Church of God of Prophecy in Turning to the Harvest:

Harvest: Plan

Harvesting is a purposeful work. It will not just happen. Every local church will develop and implement a suitable plan to harvest their community. Additionally, all internal structures and resources of the Church of God of Prophecy will be focused on reaching people with

the Gospel. [*Note:* Here, specific Church-wide goals and objectives were enumerated.]

Harvest: Purpose

God, in His sovereignty, has set members (every one of them) in the body as it pleased Him (1 Corinthians 12:18). We, the Churches of God of Prophecy, are here to do our part in the body of Christ to reap His harvest. In pursuing this, we resolve to faithfully and humbly reflect scriptural principles in a new, Christ-centered thrust into the harvest. These principles include fervent love, holiness of life, Christian reconciliation, and biblical unity—vital elements of our Gospel witness.

Harvest: People

The Harvest is people. Jesus instructed His disciples, “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to Harvest” (John 4:35). As Jesus looked on the field, “he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). Thus, the Lord sees the harvest (people) as lost sheep in need of the Good Shepherd (Isaiah 53:6; Luke 15:3–7; John 10:14–16).

Harvest: Participants

Harvesters are men and women who bring lost people to Jesus Christ (John 1:41, 42; Matthew 9:38). Harvesting, a kingdom endeavor, includes all who are sent by the Master (Mark 9:38–40; John 4:13–42). It is essential that harvesters work together in unity that the world may believe (John 17:20–23; 2 Corinthians 5:17–21).

Harvest: Passion

The harvest will only be reaped as men and women are moved with compassion for people. Jesus’ passion was to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10; Matthew 18:11). This passion was the essence of His earthly ministry, the reason for Calvary, and is still evident today (John 4:32–34, 10:11, 20:21). His passion must be our passion, His burden our burden, His heart our heart as we endeavor to reap His harvest.

Harvest: Priority

Today’s harvest must be reaped or all—we and it—will be lost. Through the years, we have been distracted from harvesting by forms, structures, personalities, divisive issues, improper emphases, and such like. We must now genuinely apply the litmus test of advancing the

cause of harvesting to all decisions, activities, and expenditures, and become singular in our mindset to reach lost humanity.

Harvest: Power

Reaching men [women] for Christ cannot be done apart from His power working in us. Jesus clearly stated, “. . . without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5 NKJV). Admitting our need to be empowered by the Spirit, we will give ourselves to prayer, fasting, and other spiritual disciplines. Acting upon His promises, we commit to aggressively challenge the enemy’s kingdom as we turn to the harvest. “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Turning From . . .

Ten Years Ago (1984)—The Lord called the Church of God of Prophecy to corporate repentance, “. . . confessing that we have drifted in many ways from a vital relationship with the Holy Ghost, confessing a self-centeredness lacking in deep compassion for a world of people who are living now under the judgment of God to eternal damnation.” Since that time, the Lord has continued to work with us, making of us the people He desires.

RECOGNIZING THAT HARVESTING WILL BE AN ENDEAVOR OF SACRIFICE . . .

We turn from—selfishness, self-preservation, and self-gratification.

RECOGNIZING THAT HARVESTING WILL REQUIRE EMPOWERMENT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT . . .

We turn from—anything that is grieving Him in our midst.

RECOGNIZING THAT HARVESTING WILL REQUIRE UNITED EFFORTS . . .

We turn from—all that impedes genuine cooperation and fellowship among brethren.

RECOGNIZING THAT OUR PRIMARY MISSION IS TO BRING MEN AND WOMEN INTO GENUINE FELLOWSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST . . .

We turn from—all secondary issues and trivial concerns which Satan has used to distract us.

RECOGNIZING THAT HARVESTING REQUIRES THAT THOSE HARVESTED BE GIVEN FELLOWSHIP IN A STRONG LOCAL BODY . . .

We turn from—all that would hinder the full potential of the local church as taught in the Scriptures.

RECOGNIZING THAT HARVESTING WILL REQUIRE GREAT FAITH, VISION, AND BOLDNESS . . .

We turn from—small thinking and fearfulness to attempt that which is worthy of our God.

Turning To . . .

Today (1994)—The Church of God of Prophecy gratefully acknowledges God’s dealing with us and purposefully commits anew to be one of God’s instruments in reaching lost humanity for Jesus Christ. We are convinced that God is causing us to “lift up our eyes” and get involved with the world of lost people around us.

RECOGNIZING THE NEED FOR DETERMINATION, DILIGENCE, AND THE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES WORTHY OF THE HARVEST . . .

We turn to—implement policies and practices that are people-oriented and Gospel-focused.

RECOGNIZING THE WORK AND GUIDANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT . . .

We turn to—complete submission and obedience to Him in all things.

RECOGNIZING THAT TODAY’S HARVEST REQUIRES THE URGENT, CONCERTED, COOPERATIVE LABOR OF THE WHOLE KINGDOM OF GOD . . .

We turn to—act upon the Great Commission in a spirit of cooperation and service, without regard to who gets the credit.

RECOGNIZING OUR HEAVENLY FATHER AS THE LORD OF THE HARVEST . . .

We turn to—heartily acknowledge all that our Lord has done and is doing among His people in every nation.

RECOGNIZING THE GIFTS AND MINISTRIES WHICH GOD HAS PLACED IN THE LOCAL CHURCH . . .

We turn to—release the potential of the local church and of every member to minister to their communities the gifts God has given them.

RECOGNIZING THE IMMINENT RETURN OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST . . .

We turn to—a commitment of sacrificial love, prayer, training, and quality church life that all may hear the message of Christ.

APPENDIX F

Biographies of General Overseers

AMBROSE JESSUP TOMLINSON: 1865–1943

Ambrose Jessup Tomlinson was born September 22, 1865, near Westfield, Indiana, to Milton and Delilah Tomlinson. He was anemic at birth but exhibited unusual stamina throughout his life. His Quaker grandparents actively opposed slavery. His paternal grandfather, Robert Tomlinson, also denounced war and capital punishment. His early life was that of a typical farm boy in Westfield. His immediate family was not much involved with church services or related activities. He described a spiritual experience at age twelve (he heard his name called three times), but when he attended Westfield Academy, he concentrated on athletics and drama. During these high school days, a number of his classmates professed Christian commitment as a result of a revival, but he refused to follow their example. He later became involved with politics, and it was only after almost being struck by lightning that, as a new groom (he had married the former Mary Jane Taylor on April 24, 1889), he turned to the Scriptures and at age 24 made a full commitment to Jesus Christ and the Gospel. He began to practice divine healing in his own life after having learned of it from a Carrie Judd Montgomery tract.

Tomlinson engaged in Sunday school work and contributed to the growth of a nearby Quaker congregation. He became acquainted with J. B. Mitchell, who had attended Oberlin College after being converted under the ministry of Charles G. Finney. Ambrose learned firsthand about the Oberlin views on sanctification, missions, and the distribution of clothes and Bibles to the poor. Within a few years, his travels introduced him to the ministries of Moody, Morrison, Robinson, Simpson, Watson, Knapp, Reese, Merritt, Taylor, and others. When he attended God's Bible School, Mount of Blessing, at Cincinnati, Ohio, fellow students placed the sign, "The Prevailer," over his door. Thereafter, Tomlinson committed himself to Bible and tract distribution for the American Bible and Tract Society. In 1899, he centered his activities in Culbertson, North Carolina, where, in April of 1900, he organized an orphanage. He also began publishing a religious paper called Samson's Foxes, one of several he would initiate

throughout his career. In his search for a Bible-believing people, he contacted several different Movements eventually feeling more at home with those of Holiness persuasion. His published papers reflected this view. He consequently came in contact with some Holiness leaders in western North Carolina, a group who had organized themselves in May of 1902 as the Holiness Church at Camp Creek. He had had at least four or five years of contact with Holiness people in the area.

After an intense time of prayer during the morning of June 13, 1903, Tomlinson joined the Holiness Church at Camp Creek with the understanding that this was the Church of God of the Bible. Richard Spurling Jr. and W. F. Bryant, leaders of the group, immediately recognized Ambrose's leadership abilities and selected him pastor of the church while they turned to evangelism. By 1904, Tomlinson was pastoring three of the four affiliated congregations and editing their publication called *The Way* as well. He was himself an avid reader and a student of church history as seen from his use of the ante-Nicene Fathers and Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History.

Tomlinson was also familiar with most of the Evangelical, Holiness, and, later, Pentecostal periodicals of his day. He was a prolific writer as evidenced in his journal which was started in 1899, the daily church book record, the pocket memorandum, the 1913 book, *The Last Great Conflict* (his magnum opus), and his numerous articles in official church publications. By the end of 1904, he was living in Cleveland, Tennessee (population just under five thousand), where with others, he organized and pastored a church all the while traveling extensively.

When the churches met in 1906 for what was considered the first Assembly, A. J. Tomlinson served as both moderator and clerk. They adopted the name "Church of God" the next year. At the fourth annual meeting, Tomlinson was selected as the first General Moderator of the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee). The title was changed to General Overseer the next year. He held the position until 1923 when a division in the work left him with a few congregations (adherents numbering about 2,000–3,000) as he led what was to become the Church of God of Prophecy, the name assigned by the courts in 1952, nine years after his death. After his "baptism with the Holy Ghost" in 1908, he continued his travels, holding revivals and camp meetings and organizing churches. His first international campaign was in February of 1911 in the Bahamas. He led the way in the Church of God as principal ministries were developed, a publishing house was built (1913), a Bible Training School started (1918), and an orphanage began (1920). He constantly wrote in support of female ministers and utilized them in strategic church positions.

At the time of his death on October 2, 1943, the church Tomlinson led had grown to a membership of just under 32,000. His wife, Mary, and three of his four children (Homer, Iris, and Milton), survived him in death. Another daughter, Halcy, died at a young age in 1920. His younger son, Milton, succeeded him as the duly chosen General Overseer. A. J. Tomlinson's last entry in his diary (September 3, 1943) included the line, "Great things close by now," a reference to the last General Assembly he would moderate, September 8–14, 1943. At his instruction given some five years earlier, his secretary of twenty-five years began the closing entry in his diary October 2: "A. J. Tomlinson, General Overseer of the Church of God, passed on to be with the Lord, whom he loved and served faithfully for many years, October 2, 1943, at 10:00 a.m. . . . Brother Tomlinson did not speak for several days before he went to live with the Lord, but no greater testimony than his could be left on record. He directed every session of the Thirty-eight Annual Assembly . . . and the wonderful success of this meeting was principally due to his efforts and wise guidance. He was full of fire and victory during the entire Assembly." He served in the leadership of the Church from 1903–1943.

CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY INTERNATIONAL OFFICES
Cleveland, Tennessee, USA

Ref: A. J. T./1199

MILTON AMBORSE TOMLINSON: 1906–1995

A. J. Tomlinson passed away in 1943, leaving a huge void in the Church's leadership. During the presbytery meeting following Tomlinson's death, after much discussion and prayer, a message in tongues and interpretation was given, which said, "Bring forth the younger son." The younger son Milton (M. A.) Tomlinson, was born on October 19, 1906, and was about to turn 37. He was a pastor in Kentucky at the time of his selection to serve as General Overseer. At the subsequent General Assembly in 1944, this selection was overwhelmingly approved. M. A. Tomlinson sought to perpetuate and fulfill his father's vision for almost forty-seven years.

The vision of an "All Nations Church" reaching around the world and including members of every race and language was the driving force for a continued mission effort. This resulted in the expansion of the Church of God of Prophecy from 20 countries into more than 90 countries under M. A. Tomlinson's leadership. During that same period, the number of local churches grew from just under 1,400 to more than 5,500. His commitment to work under the guidelines of the General Assembly and his ability to recognize and appoint gifted leaders of all races were hallmarks of his ministry. The quality of members in the Church of all nations and races is to this day reflected in the operation of the General Assembly and the leadership on the general level.

Before going into the pastoral ministry, Tomlinson was a printer by trade and had a love for the publishing ministry. Under his leadership, new publishing operations (White Wing Publishing Houses) were built in the United States and several other countries. New publications and Christian education materials were developed with a focus on the Full Gospel message. The ministry of the White Wing Christian Bookstores is also an outgrowth of this publishing ministry. Tomlinson oversaw the building of a 10,000-seat tabernacle for the then annual Assemblies, a new Headquarters building, and a recording studio for the radio, television, and music ministries. The office complex is the current location of World Headquarters, the White Wing Publishing House, and home to the Voice of Salvation radio and TV ministries (begun in 1955), which reached around the world in several languages.

During Tomlinson's administration, the Church saw the expansion of the Homes for Children ministry (five orphanages outside the U.S.) and the Bible Training Institute's ministry of 64 short-term schools) into many locations around the world. The Youth Camp and Retreat Ministries expanded both nationally and internationally, and a fully accredited college offering both Associates and Bachelors degrees was developed. Another

notable achievement was the Ministerial Aid Department, which assisted retired ministers and their widows, along with then active ministers in planning for their retirement. The development of Fields of the Wood, a biblical theme park to mark the beginnings of the Church in North Carolina, was another ongoing project (begun in the 1940s) that he faithfully maintained.

In May 1990, at age 83, M. A. Tomlinson announced his retirement due to physical limitations. He served from 1943–1990. This places him among the longest serving Pentecostal leaders of the twentieth century. He passed away April 26, 1995, at the age of 88.

COGOP International Offices/2001

BILLY DWAYNE MURRAY SR.: 1930–2004

Billy Dwayne Murray Sr. was born in Nash County (near Spring Hope), North Carolina, April 8, 1930. His parents, Willoughby and Florah Murray, were farmers, and Billy grew up on the farm with six siblings—four sisters and two brothers. He accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior at a very young age during a revival in his community and quickly joined the little “holiness church” along with his mother, discovering that it was called “The Church of God of Prophecy.” He was a bright student—a “natural-born intellectual”—and ended high school as President of his senior class, and was voted “Most Likely to Succeed.” After graduation, he enrolled in Kings Business College, Raleigh, North Carolina, but his was not to be a life of secular business.

On August 13, 1949, Murray married Oma Lee Hensley, whom he first met when she visited his area as a traveling State Youth Secretary for the church in North Carolina. To this union was born Billy Dwayne Jr., Susan, and Beth, all now married. A devoted husband, father, and grandfather, he set a good example of hard work, integrity, and godly devotion before his children, grandchildren, and those he led in Christian service.

Bishop Murray began his ministry in 1950 and was licensed by the Church in 1951. After this, he served as a State Secretary and held pastorates at Selma, Leaksville, and Bethany, North Carolina. He moved to pastor the Riverside Church (now College Park) in Greenville, South Carolina, in 1966. While there, he was appointed to the Church’s International Offices (then General Headquarters) and remained as General Sunday School Secretary until 1972. He authored the popular “Called to Teach” course, an instructional and motivational guide to the teaching ministry. He was transferred to the position of overseer of Tennessee during the Assembly of 1972 and served until 1977 when he was called back to International Offices as Assistant Editor for the Church’s official publication, the *White Wing Messenger*. He performed his editorial duties with consummate skill and diligence for 12 years, assisting with the many and varied clerical and writing needs of the General Overseer’s Office, which was the chief administrative office of the Church.

September 1989 saw Murray appointed as state overseer of Illinois, a position he held for a brief eight months due to his selection by his peers, May 2, 1990, to replace the late Bishop M. A. Tomlinson, who was retiring after a record 46-plus years of service as General Overseer. Murray had to assume office as interim General Overseer right away and was duly and overwhelmingly confirmed in the position by the Assembly on

August 13, 1990. While serving as Assistant Editor, he had preached twelve precedent-setting messages to capacity crowds in General Assemblies (1978–1989), sermons that undoubtedly influenced the Church in a more harvest-oriented direction, which embraced what God was doing among His people throughout the world. That direction became the hallmark of his ten-year administration. With the Lord’s hand evident in his leadership but not without the difficulties that accompany change, Murray steadfastly maintained that “Christ is the message; the Church is the messenger.” He labored tirelessly to focus the Church on a world of lost people. These efforts are most clearly seen in his urgent call in 1994 for the church to embrace “Turning to the Harvest” as its passion, a passion that would result in “Vibrant Local Churches.” In the course of this paradigm shift, he led in “pluralizing” the Church’s leadership and in restructuring its International Offices. He encouraged leadership development and lifelong learning while focusing on the “primacy of the local church” as the Church’s presence for ministry in each particular community.

The ten years of Murray’s administration (1990–2000) saw the Church expand its presence from 90 countries and territories to more than 120. Membership grew one hundred and nine percent from 261,641 to 546,600. After retiring from office on August 1, 2000, he continued to minister from his home base in Charlotte, North Carolina, supporting the Church in every way possible. He was promoted to glory on December 8, 2004, while in the loving care of his precious family. As the previous General Overseer Bishop Fred S. Fisher Sr. has appropriately observed, “This Church will never know in our lifetimes all the good Billy Murray has done, but she will eventually come to thank him for the vital role he has played.” Well said!

The Church of God of Prophecy International Offices
December 10, 2004

FRED S. FISHER SR.: 1934–

Fred S. Fisher Sr. was born October 13, 1934, in Nashville, Tennessee. He was converted to Jesus Christ at age eight in a Methodist church, and later rededicated his young life to the Lord. At age 13 he received the baptism with the Holy Ghost and began preaching three years later at age 16. He attended Howard High School in Nashville, and later (1951) he graduated from the Church of God of Prophecy's Bible Training Camp (BTC) in Cleveland, Tennessee. He pursued higher education while in full-time ministry after seeing the great need in his Gospel work. In 1971, he obtained an Associate's degree in Liberal Arts from Johnson County Junior College, and in 1975, he graduated from Mid-America Nazarene College with a Bachelor's degree in Religion and History. He completed his Master's degree in Public Service Counseling at Western Kentucky University in 1979.

Following BTC in 1951, Fisher moved to South Carolina to begin revival work. At that time, he met Betty Jane Bunton, and they were married on September 14 of the same year. To this union was born Fred Jr. and Yvonne (Vonnie). Fred Jr., at the time of this writing, was a licensed minister in the Church. His wife Latricia, and their two children, Alea and Alex, reside in Kentucky and have been active in youth ministries at the state level. Vonnie married Steve Gilmer, who presently serves as the state overseer of North Carolina for the Church of God of Prophecy. They have two sons and daughters-in-law, Stuart and his wife Casi, and Kyle and his wife Stephanie. The Stuarts gave the Fishers their first great-grandchild, Mallory, the "miracle baby."

For 14 years, Fred Fisher Sr., with his wife Betty, served as pastor of some six churches in South Carolina, did state auxiliary work, office work as secretary to the state overseer, and served as a district overseer over several churches. In 1965, the Fishers moved to Tennessee and served in the pastorate of the Wildwood Avenue Church of God of Prophecy for five years. His ministry as a state overseer spanned 28 years from 1970–1998: six years in Kansas, eight in Kentucky, seven years in South Carolina, and seven years in Virginia. In 1998, his peers recommended him to serve as the first North American General Presbyter, a newly created position in the Church's move to plural leadership. He served until the 91st International General Assembly selected him as General Overseer following the retirement of the late Bishop Billy D. Murray in 2000. Fisher filled this position with honor and distinction until September 30, 2006. He told the Assembly the following as he took leave:

In the words of the old song, “I’ll be somewhere working for my Lord.” Betty and I . . . want to be useful in the work of God for the rest of our lives.

Upon returning to South Carolina, which the Fishers regard as their home state, they kept their word and served an interim period in the pastorate of the Clemson Church of God of Prophecy from November 2006. In May 2007, they agreed to accept the pastorate on a full-time basis. Fifty-six years of Christian service have brought them full circle. In the process, they have traveled the United States and the world over and met countless thousands of God’s people from every continent of the globe. In his recently published book, *Heart Sounds—From My Heart to Yours*, Bishop Fisher wrote the following:

We will not be able to fill God’s house if we only sit on the premises without going out to this needy world and sharing the Gospel of God’s love. God’s promises are sure if we will be the servants.

Indeed, in his six years as General Overseer, Fisher personally participated in adding several thousand members to the Church around the world. At the beginning of his tenure in 2000, the Church’s worldwide membership stood at 546,600 in 120 countries and territories. With his continuation of the harvest paradigm and his efforts in promoting and encouraging growth, the Church’s worldwide membership grew seventy-two percent to 940,779 in the now 132 nations and territories where the Church ministers. His emphasis on growing larger, stronger local churches, his clear desire to strengthen the pastoral role, his evangelistic “Passion for People,” his zeal and commitment to the work expressed through “Vision Now—Victorious Future” and as a “Spirit-Driven” Church, were infectious. He encouraged and launched a renewed higher education program for our ministers and young people through the Tomlinson Center connected to Lee University of Cleveland, Tennessee. The doctrinal corrections and applications he supported positioned this Church more fully within the larger Kingdom of God to reap God’s great end-time harvest. His relational, cooperative, and open approach to other international church leaders helped to further integrate the Church of God of Prophecy into the Bible-believing, orthodox Christian community. He began his General Overseer tenure with the imagery of a barge rounding a “Bend in the River,” picking up momentum and closed it with an appeal to the Church to “Keep throwing out the lifeline [to] catch men and women for Christ.” His legacy in this Church is assured!

International Offices
Church of God of Prophecy, Cleveland, Tennessee
September 12, 2007

RANDALL E. HOWARD: 1954–

Bishop Randall E. Howard, was born on July 12, 1954, and presently serves as General Overseer, having been selected during the Ninety-fourth International General Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy in 2006.

Prior to being selected as General Overseer, Bishop Howard served as Global Outreach Director for twelve years, providing oversight of the missions, radio, television, evangelism, and orphanage ministries of the Church. These ministries are perhaps known better by their titles: Harvest Partners, Global Outreach Committee, Pan de Vida, World Impact, One Child Fund, Helping Hands, and Men and Women of Destiny. Other ministry involvements on the international ministry level include the following:

- Serving on the founding staff of the Center for Biblical Leadership
- Director of Evangelism, Sunday School, and Children’s Ministry
- Campus Pastor at Tomlinson College (1987–1991)
- National Evangelist and Coordinator of the Sharing Eternal Life Ministry

Bishop Howard also served local church ministries both as a pastor of the Charleston, West Virginia, Church and as youth pastor of a local church at Newport News, Virginia.

Bishop Howard obtained a Bachelor’s degree in Accounting and Spanish Education from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He also holds a Master’s Degree in Christian Formation from the Church of God Theological Seminary, and in 2008, he was awarded the “Alumnus of the Year” Award by the Seminary.

Bishop Howard and his wife Bess (Stoup) Howard of Newport News, Virginia, have three children, Lauren, Ben, and Brett. Lauren is married to Jay Harding and they have given the Howard’s their first grandchild, Eva Kathryn.

Source: Office of the General Overseer
April 6, 2010

Ref: ShMck/DS
1979.

APPENDIX G

Cleveland Businessmen Certify A. J. Tomlinson's Integrity October 19, 1923

To Whom It May Concern:

We, the undersigned businessmen of Cleveland, Tennessee, hereby state that we have known Mr. A. J. Tomlinson for several years, and have always found him honest and straightforward in all his business transactions with us.

Mr. Tomlinson bears an excellent reputation in this community for integrity and character, and we consider him an honest, upright Christian gentleman.

C. W. Harle, President, Merchants Bank
E. S. Petty, Cashier, Merchants Bank
M. C. Petty, Employee in Merchants Bank
Frank J. Harle, Cashier, Cleveland National Bank
J. E. Johnston, President, Cleveland National Bank
J. T. Huffine, President, Peoples Bank
Bethel C. Brown, Postmaster
J. F. Harrison, Assistant Postmaster
Myers Chittenden, Postoffice Clerk [sic]
Fred R. Simbro, Postoffice Clerk [sic]
James L. Byers, Postoffice Clerk [sic]
Carl Grigsby, Postoffice Clerk [sic]
Joseph J. McNabb, Postoffice Clerk [sic]
Clarence M. Grigsby, Postoffice Clerk [sic]
James G. Cate, Mayor of Cleveland
W. O. Horner & Son, Jeweler and Optician
John W. Taylor, Insurance and Real Estate Agent
Jesse V. Price, Prop. Cleveland Shoe Store
Will L. Rogers, Editor and Publisher, *Cleveland Daily Banner*
G. U. Cooper, Bookstore
J. R. Cate, Guarantee Clo. Co. [sic]
Clifford Clark, Men's Clothing
U. P. Simmons, Furniture Co.
D. W. Chase, Furniture Co.
R. P. Sullivan, M. D.
C. T. Speck, M. D.

W. M. Bryant, Hardware Co.
Walter E. Rogers, Commercial Printing
F. C. Lukemeyer, Furniture Co.
W. L. Humphrey, County Judge
W. M. McCoy, Foreman, Barnes Mfg. Co.
J. L. Jones, Cleveland Coal and Feed Co.
J. S. Seaborn, Wholesale Lumber Dealer
J. R. Henderson, Henderson-Lusk Mfg. Co.
J. V. Puckett, Bookkeeper, Henderson-Lusk Mfg. Co.
J. L. Bivins, Shoes and Furnishings
Gid Hawk, R. H. Hawk & Son

Reproduced from *The Church of God—A. J. Tomlinson, General Overseer, Bureau of Information, 1923, A. J. Lawson, General Manager:* on file, **COGOP Archives**.

APPENDIX H

Summary of Recommendations

“**The Biblical Institution of Marriage**” Final Document as passed at the 94th International Assembly: Teaching to be listed, “**Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage**” with Scriptures on page 8 of document, Section I, Number 1 (Full Document in 94th Assembly Minutes, 2006, pp 152–175).

Section I Recommendations, Page 8

1. Marriage—**Originally designed by God as one man one woman** in a [publicly acknowledged] covenant relationship for life (the **Biblical Ideal-An Affirmation**).

2. **Family Affirmation**—Father and Mother [in wedlock] who procreate children; the **extended family endorsed; home is** to be guided by love, discipline, and other nurturing aspects to include all members of the family under the pattern of God’s Word. **Diligently teach** against abortion, incest, abuse, euthanasia, adultery, divorce, homosexuality/lesbianism, as **contrary to God’s original design**.

3. Troubled marriages [partners] should, **as a priority, seek forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing** between injured parties for the sake of [with a view toward] **restoring the marriage and family at all cost**.

4. Divorcees should **be encouraged** to maintain an **open door for reconciliation and healing** so the Lord may intervene to restore the marriage.

5. **Forgiveness** is to be sought even in cases where no clear possibility of reconciliation or restitution exists.

6. **Pastors** are to **provide counseling** as far as possible, and **seek** [and refer counselees to] **credible Christian counseling** in order to save marriages.

7. The Church is to **make available** [helpful] **resources** and **institute an aggressive program of ministerial training** in both **pre-marital and marriage counseling**.

Section II Recommendations, page 13

1. The **Church renounces** all **biblically unlawful unions** such as **same-sex, incestuous, or polygamous [marriages]** even if these are legal in the eyes of local, state, or national governments.

2. A person [male] with a **God-called commitment to celibacy/singleness for the sake of their ministry** in the kingdom may be **ordained as a bishop**.

Section III Recommendations, pages 20, 21

1. Annulment of marriages that violate biblical standards is now allowed.

2. Situations beyond human ability to repair or reconcile are to be left to God's sovereignty. Do not require what people are unable to do.

3. Accept the biblical principle of forgiveness for all sins [except sin against the Holy Ghost]. Ongoing discipleship by the pastor and local church is a must. A program of extensive discipleship is to be developed by the Church's International Offices.

4. The International Presbytery is to use discretion in the ordaining of ministers to insure the maintenance of biblical standards. An ordained minister is to be held to a higher standard than other members of the body. A bishop who commits adultery cannot be reinstated as a bishop. He may be re-licensed as a minister after a satisfactory restoration process.

5. The **definition of "fornication"** (86th Assembly, AM, 1986, page 44) is supplemented to specifically include **homosexuality, bestiality, and sexual immorality**.

ALV83006/110206/207

APPENDIX I

Statement of the Assembly Committee for Biblical Doctrine and Polity to the 91st General Assembly, Wednesday, July 12, 2000.

Introductory Note: The Statement, in the form of a Confession, was drafted by Committee Member Hector Ortiz, approved by the Committee, and read by him to the Assembly on the Committee’s behalf prior to the presentation of **Section II** of its report on, **Ecclesiology—A Study of the Nature, Organization, Mission and Function of the Church**. It is recorded on **Page 27 of the 91st Assembly Minutes, 2000**.

The record concerning this statement in the Minutes (for the above date) is as follows:

“2:11—Hector Ortiz stated that the committee had labored hard to bring this document to the Assembly and in order to be faithful to the items that had to be researched took some sleepless nights. He continued that the members of the committee all have previously believed in exclusivity; all seven have been part of that belief or persuasion, but all seven have wrestled with this concept. The committee serves under the biblical text, not above it. Brother Ortiz related that he was asked to draft the following statement as to how the committee feels:

“A Confession”

With honor and respect to the triune God, we, the Committee for Biblical Doctrine and Polity, desire to embody the scriptural admonition of confessing our faults to each other (James 5:16). We acknowledge that in our zeal and love for the ecclesia of God, we had strayed into an exclusivity mind-set that did not reflect an authentic expression of the body of Christ. For this we bow before our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus, with penitent hearts and entrusting our souls to Him who is and was and is to come (Revelation 1:4).”

Note: Committee members that year were:

Melvin Hyatt, Chairman	Walter Doroshuk
Hector Ortiz	Basil Richards
Adrian Varlack	Jimmy Fox
Wallace Pratt	

TABLE 1

List of General Overseers and Their Terms of Service

Name	Life Years	Term of Service
Ambrose Jessup Tomlinson	1865–1943	1903–1943 ¹
Milton Ambrose Tomlinson	1906–1995	1943–1990
Billy Dwayne Murray	1930–2004	1990–2000
Fred S. Fisher Sr.	1934–	2000–2006
Randall E. Howard	1954–	2006–

¹A. J. Tomlinson was appointed pastor of the Holiness Church at Camp Creek the day he joined it, June 13, 1903. He was the effective leader of the Church/Churches from that time on and was chosen General Moderator (later changed to General Overseer) from the first Assembly in 1906 until his death in 1943. He, therefore, served a total of 40 years in the leadership of the Church of God (of Prophecy).

TABLE 2

List of General Presbyters Under Plurality of Leadership

First General Oversight Group (1997–2000)¹

Billy D. Murray	General Overseer (1990–2000)
Larry B. Wilson	General Presbyter (1997–1999) ²
Perry E. Gillum	General Presbyter (1997–2000) ³
José A. Reyes	General Presbyter (1997–2004) ⁴

Area Presbyters Selected (1997)⁵

Sherman O. Allen	Africa
Daniel J. Corbett	Asia/Oceania (1997–2006) ⁶
Clayton Endecott	Europe/Middle East
Miguel A. Mojica	South America (1997–2008) ⁷
Felix Santiago	Central America/Spanish Caribbean ⁸
Brice H. Thompson	Caribbean/Atlantic Ocean Islands ⁹

Area Presbyter Selected (1998)¹⁰

Fred S. Fisher Sr.	North America ¹¹
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¹In 2000, the Presbytery Working Group at the direction of the International Presbytery revised its 1996 Working Document to provide that all General Presbyters with the General Overseer (the General Presbytery) serve as the oversight body of the Church’s worldwide operations. They meet twice a year (presently in April and October) under the Chairmanship of the General Overseer.

²Larry B. Wilson died in office June 29, 1999, and was not replaced on what was the General Oversight Group. He had been unanimously chosen by his peers as the first General Presbyter.

³Reyes and Gillum were chosen together by acclamation after the International Presbytery could not settle on just one of them. The Assembly language had said that Plurality should begin with “at least three” including the General Overseer, so the choice of three General Presbyters was within the authorized limits.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Since the International Presbytery was already in session and the Church was under financial constraints, General Overseer Billy Murray suggested that Area Overseers confer and recommend persons to the International Presbytery who could serve as Area Presbyters. All those recommended had been serving as Mission Representatives to their areas.

⁶Corbett was replaced by David L. Browder, who had been serving as Overseer of Western and American Samoa, Fiji, Hawaii, and India.

⁷General Overseer R. E. Howard served as South American Presbyter 2008–2010.

⁸Mexico, although geographically considered as part of North America, is grouped with this area for Church administrative purposes.

⁹This division includes Bermuda and the Bahamas (Atlantic Island nations) and the French-speaking areas of the Caribbean including Haiti.

¹⁰North American Overseers set up a one-year study group to propose how the North American Area Presbyter’s office should be approached, hence their recommendation was delayed until 1998.

¹¹Fisher became General Overseer in 2000 and was replaced as North American Presbyter by Sam Clements.

TABLE 3

**Missionary Expansion of the Church of God of Prophecy
Chronology of Countries and Territories
by Region and Organization Date
(Based on Statistics, 2008 COGOP Assembly Minutes,
pp. 153–157, and IO Sources)**

Africa

Sierra Leone	1934
Botswana	1965
South Africa	1967/1976 ¹
Nigeria	1971
Zimbabwe	1976
Ghana	1977
Malawi	1977
Swaziland	1977
Zambia	1977
Cote D'Ivoire	1978
Kenya	1978
Tanzania	1978
Democratic Republic of the Congo	1979
Liberia	1979
Mozambique	1979
Uganda	1981
Rwanda	1982
Benin	1985
Cameroon	1985
Burkina Faso	1987
Lesotho	1988
Togo	1991
Ethiopia	1996
Gabon	1998
Republic of Congo	2000

¹Through the efforts of South African Blacks, the COGOP expanded within South Africa to win Whites and Coloreds among the Afrikaans-speaking population in 1976. The Church's then Zulu leader, Clifford Mngadi, made the acquaintance and administered the covenant to Barend P. Botha of Bloemfontein, et al. Mngadi informed the World Mission Department that the group led by Botha would have to be administered separately due to then extant apartheid regulations.

Mali	2000
Namibia	2000
Sudan	2001
Angola	2002
Burundi	2002
Central African Republic	2002
Chad	2002
Gambia, The	2002
Guinea	2004
Niger	2004
Djibouti	2006
Equatorial Guinea	2006
Guinea-Bissau	2006
Senegal	2008

Asia, Australia, Oceania

Hawaii USA	1952 ²
Philippines	1952
Australia	1956
India	1957
Thailand	1968
South Korea	1969
Indonesia	1971
Samoa, American	1978
Samoa, Western	1978
Japan	1982
Malaysia	1983
Pakistan	1991
Fiji	1994
Sri Lanka	1998
Myanmar	2004
Singapore	2005

²Although Hawaii is the 50th state of the United States, the COGOP administers it as part of the Asian, Australian, Oceania region due to its location in the Pacific and its proximity and accessibility to the Asian/Pacific nations. The Year of Entry is the first date of the appointment of a state overseer. See North American Region for entry dates for USA and Canada as nations.

Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Island-Nations/Territories

Bahamas	1909/1910 ³
Jamaica	1923
Virgin Islands (US/British), ABC Islands	1926/1948 ⁴
Haiti	1931
Turks and Caicos Islands	1932
Barbados	1935 ⁵
Leeward Islands/French West Indies	1951–1992 ⁶
Bermuda	1954 ⁷
Trinidad and Tobago	1954
Guyana	1956
St. Vincent and The Grenadines	1958
St. Lucia	1959
Grenada	1964
Cayman Islands	1978
French Guiana	1991

³Edmund S. Barr, a native Bahamian and close friend of R. M. Evans, arrived in Nassau, Bahamas, in November 1909, following an A. J. Tomlinson Camp Meeting in Florida where he had received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. Full of the Holy Spirit, he immediately began services although the Church was not formally organized until 1910. In recognition of Barr's work, the COGOP and Church of God Bahamas both celebrated their 100th Anniversaries in 2009. For more on the Barr/Evans story, see footnote 66.

⁴The COGOP in St. Thomas, USVI was set in order by A. J. Tomlinson himself on New Year's, 1926, at 2:00 a.m. after a Watch-night—New Year's Eve service. He was on a missionary trip to the VI and Barbados in response to letters. The Church was named, "The Church of God at Saint Thomas, VI, Headquarters, Cleveland, Tenn. USA, A. J. Tomlinson, General Overseer" (Diary entry, January 1, 1926). The 1948 date is for the ABC Islands, commonly known as The Netherlands Antilles.

⁵Although A. J.'s Diary shows that he organized the COGOP in Barbados with 130 members in 1926 ("the biggest landslide in one service for the Church I believe I ever witnessed" as he put it), and he left the potential of a total of 300 members in seven churches (Diary entries for January 25 and February 4, 1926); no Assembly appointments were made for Barbados until 1935 when, notably, Eliza V. Martin was appointed, probably the Church's first-appointed female Missionary. She continued to be appointed through 1941.

⁶We supply here entry dates that could be identified in IO appointment records for some countries and territories in this grouping: Montserrat, 1935; St. Kitts and Nevis, 1949; Antigua, 1950; Anguilla, 1951; Dominica, 1954; Guadeloupe, 1985; Martinique, 1986; Suriname, 1992.

⁷Bermuda, usually grouped here, is presently being administered with the USA Northeast Region and does not appear in this category in the 2008 Minutes.

Central America and Mexico

Costa Rica	1932
Cuba	1935
Dominican Republic	1940
Puerto Rico	1940
Mexico	1944
Panama	1946
Guatemala	1951
Honduras	1952
El Salvador	1954
Nicaragua	1962
Belize	1980

Europe, Commonwealth of Independent States, Middle East

Cyprus	1931
Greece	1931
Egypt	1935
Germany	1950
United Kingdom (England)	1952
Israel	1965
Portugal	1976
Finland	1981
Spain	1981
Belgium	1983
France	1985
Bulgaria	1991
Ukraine	1992
Russia	1993
Kazakhstan	1995
Malta	1995
Belarus	1996
Italy	1996
Romania	1996
Azerbaijan	1999
Hungary	1999
Netherlands (Holland)	2001
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2004
Georgia	2004
Macedonia	2004

North America

United States	1886–1903 ⁸
Canada	1931

South America

Argentina	1955
Peru	1955
Uruguay	1957
Brazil	1965
Venezuela	1968
Colombia	1973
Bolivia	1974
Chile	1975
Paraguay	1977
Ecuador	1982

⁸Three dates and three names are significant for the Church in general and for the USA in particular: 1886 (Richard G. Spurling, Christian Union); 1902 (Spurling and W. F. Bryant, Holiness Church at Camp Creek); 1903 (Bryant, Spurling, and A. J. Tomlinson, again the Holiness Church at Camp Creek). Tomlinson, who joined the Church June 13, 1903, was ordained by Spurling and immediately selected as pastor, all in one day. The COGOP traditionally dates its official beginning to 1903 although 1886 and 1902 are also significant dates in the Movement's history.

TABLE 4

COGOP World Mission Secretaries/Global Outreach Directors

Names	Years of Service
Fred F. Johnson	1938–1943 ¹
Vernon H. Smith	1943–1946
Dorlan H. Queener	1946–1963
Charles G. Hawkins Sr.	1963–1974 ²
Adrian L. Varlack Sr.	1974–1994 ³
Randall E. Howard	1994–2006 ⁴
David Bryan	2006–Present

¹The title of this position was “Foreign Mission Secretary” from 1938 through 1963.

²The Church’s International Finance Accounting and Reporting System, was established. The title of the position was changed by Assembly ruling from “Foreign Mission Secretary” to “World Mission Secretary” in recognition of the worldwide activities of the Church.

³International Leadership Conferences in the various areas of the world were initiated during this period.

⁴The Church’s Harvest Partners program was proposed and implemented. The title of the office was changed from World Mission Secretary to Global Outreach Director during the International Office restructuring between 1994 and 1996.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used within the book.

A. J.:	A. J. Tomlinson
AM:	Assembly Minutes
BDP:	Assembly Committee for Biblical Doctrine and Polity
CBL:	Center for Biblical Leadership
COGOP:	Church of God of Prophecy
GO:	General Overseer
GP/GPs:	General Presbytery/General Presbyters
HLD:	Harvest and Leadership Development
IBA:	Important Business Acts
IO:	International Offices
IP:	International Presbytery
N/R/S:	National/Regional/State
PCCNA:	Pentecostal Charismatic Churches of North America
PWG:	Presbytery Working Group

REVIEW OUT-TAKES

This list of 90 review out-takes from the text are of the “Fill in the Blanks” variety (with the exception of No. 78) and may be used as a Study Guide or Open-book Exam as may be appropriate. The Answer Keys are available from the Center for Biblical Leadership (CBL).

General Introduction

1. While we [COGOP] are still grappling with several issues, an _____ toward _____ has begun.
2. In essence, the COGOP has become a _____ of the _____ for _____ in the Kingdom rather than a Church that uses the _____ as a _____ from which to _____ up its _____.
3. Heritage and loyalty alone are not _____ in and of themselves to warrant the _____ of a _____.
4. The Church strives to be a _____ and not a _____.
5. The Church in _____ (now _____) accepted the Spirit’s call by _____.

Chapter I

6. Our religious forefathers attempted a recovery of the _____ in all its _____, _____, _____.
7. Their efforts were predicated primarily on three things:
 - 1) The noble Reformers had failed to _____.
 - 2) They adopted the _____ when they should have adopted the _____.
 - 3) They failed to _____ for the Holy Ghost and Conscience, but a fourth point was added.
 - 4) They were awakened to the fact that God’s Church existed only where His _____ was _____ by His children.
8. They began:
 - 1) By seeking to complete what the _____ had begun.
 - 2) With a _____ to the Holy Spirit and a willingness to _____.
 - 3) With a _____ of the role of conscience.
 - 4) With the principles of _____ to be held in proper balance.

- 5) With a _____ need to _____ with the Gospel.
- 6) With the principle of _____ among God's people.
- 7) With the idea that _____ of the New Testament church should be _____ and _____ in practice.
9. This was God's call to the COGOP in _____, a call back to a _____ with the Spirit.
10. Revelation of God's will and purposes is _____ and under the _____ of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter II

11. The name "_____ " was officially assigned to "The Church of God, M. A. Tomlinson, General Overseer," on _____, _____ by the High Court of Chancery, Cleveland, Tennessee.
12. In two Latin American countries, the Church is known as "La Iglesia de Dios de la Profecia Universal." The two countries are _____ and _____.
13. I realized then that the words "_____ " signified that this Church still has work to do.
14. The COGOP considers "_____ " as the Bible name for the church implying both _____ and the _____.
15. The Church of God of Prophecy considers herself an _____, interdependent both in _____ and _____ and operations.

Chapter III

16. In an attempt to curb excesses, W. F. Bryant and R. G. Spurling organized the Holiness Church at Camp Creek, _____, _____.
17. Ambrose Jessup Tomlinson was born on _____, _____ into a family with Quaker roots near Westfield, Indiana.
18. A. J. Tomlinson had a defining moment that settled the issue of a true _____ experience on _____, _____.
19. A change to _____ was the result of the decisions of several General Assemblies, leading up to the introduction of a _____.
20. Tomlinson's plea to the Holy Ghost in _____ (as leader of the Church) grounded the work firmly on the twin principles of (a) _____ and (b) _____ as _____.
21. A. J. Tomlinson, having made contact with the humble but courageous mountain folks (R. G. Spurling and W. F. Bryant), joined the Church [Holiness Church at Camp Creek] on _____, _____.

Chapter IV

22. The period 1923–1943 is called “_____.”
23. The struggle between two non-compatible philosophies, _____ and _____, would eventually come to a head.
24. Historic tensions between _____ and _____, between the _____ of a leader and the _____ of the group he leads, are forces not easily managed.
25. Tomlinson re-launched his quest for _____ in _____ with a few key leaders and two to three thousand followers.
26. From _____, there was a two-year lapse when there was no General Assembly due to an _____.
27. In 1922, A. J. Tomlinson explained his actions to the Assembly but his call to _____ and to follow [the former] _____ was seen as a snub to the Council of Twelve.
28. What transpired between the _____ and the _____ was that a seven-member Court of Justice under the _____, sustained fifteen articles of impeachment (as filed by the Council) removing A. J. Tomlinson from office.
29. A. J. Tomlinson never accepted these actions and considered them both _____ and _____.
30. In their _____, The Church of God, F. J. Lee, General Overseer, _____ under which A. J. Tomlinson was impeached.
31. It is noteworthy that a _____ is part of A. J. Tomlinson’s _____.
32. Had more _____, _____, _____, _____ prevailed this painful separation could have been avoided.
33. The Church is both _____ and _____, a fact we should never lose sight of.
34. Maintaining an _____ place before God and a mutual consciousness of _____ is difficult even for the most devoted followers of Jesus.
35. We cannot escape the irony that A. J. Tomlinson’s _____ encouraged and perhaps armed those who desired a more _____.

Chapter V

36. In his _____ address, M. A. Tomlinson proposed under the subject of “Bible Translations” that it was time for the Church to _____ _____ on the King James Version of the Bible as its authority for doctrine and practice.
37. M. A. Tomlinson fielded an _____ and _____ that included African-Americans, Greeks, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Rican Americans, and Afro-Caribbean/Atlantic Ocean Islands citizens (English and Spanish) as well as European-Americans from the West, Midwest, and South [of the United States].
38. In the middle to later years of his administration, _____ countenanced _____ toward other believers by allowing members of his staff to participate in certain _____ and forums.

Chapter VI

39. _____ was one, who for several years, had consistently focused his _____ on Christ’s power to draw people to Himself and thus closer to each other in _____.
40. The office of _____ was studied with a view to _____ some of its _____ and to review a number of biblical _____ that had grown up around it.
41. From the beginning [of his administration], Murray maintained that “Christ is the _____; the Church is the _____.”
42. The historic _____ of the local church was restored and the pastoral office gained in _____.

Chapter VII

43. Fred S. Fisher Sr. spoke of the Church as “an _____ ship” and of the change to his leadership as a “_____ in the river.”
44. He allowed two sensitive issues, _____ and _____, to come to the Assembly floor in 2002.
45. The Church’s return to her roots in _____ and _____ necessitated _____ and _____ to better reflect the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
46. The _____ is pointing the way and has given us _____ compatible with His divine direction.
47. As a Spirit-led Church, we joyfully _____ our past, and thankfully _____ our present, and boldly _____ and _____ our future.

Chapter VIII

48. Just as the Spirit led the early church in developing _____, _____, and _____, we should expect the Spirit to continue to lead the Church in developing _____ appropriate to a variety of contexts.
49. The Church is a _____ with organization.
50. Under the Spirit's guidance, we are to consult _____ in the area of Church polity.
51. How the Church organizes herself (_____), governs herself (_____), and develops her ministry roles (_____) is a form of witness for God.
52. Two issues that have plagued the church throughout history are _____ and _____.
53. Church polity should be _____ regularly and _____ for _____ and the reflection of His character.
54. While church offices and structures have names like the secular world, their purpose is vastly different—to express the _____ of God and to _____, caring rule.
55. The Church's first General Assembly was held _____ - _____, in the dead of winter when _____ was more difficult.
56. After _____, General Assembly rulings were again relegated to a "_____ " rather than rules or truth _____ to the Bible.
57. The background to _____ stems from the study of the office of General Overseer.
58. The _____ is selected by the _____ and presented for _____ and _____ to the General Assembly (International Assembly).
59. General Presbyters are chosen by the _____ as _____ by the Assembly and only presented or _____ to the Assembly.
60. At the _____ International Assembly, a revised and combined document titled, "_____", was re-submitted by the BDP and approved by the International Presbytery.
61. The local church is the Gospel's _____.
62. The COGOP functions as an _____, _____ group, worldwide.
63. In 1994, "_____" quickly became the Church's new _____ for the twenty-first century.

64. The Assembly Committee for Biblical Doctrine and Polity began a review of the Church's _____ and _____ for the ministry in _____.
65. _____ who make a commitment to _____ for the sake of the Kingdom can now be ordained as _____ provided they meet all other requirements.
66. The Assembly challenged _____, under their new _____, to understand the Church's _____ in today's world.
67. The COGOP is operating (and has operated) on the _____ of church government in executive administration, _____, [registering of] _____, and _____.
68. We recognize the _____ between the _____/_____ make up of the Church and the _____ that must be maintained for legal purposes.

Chapter IX

69. A. J. Tomlinson had to abandon much of his _____ and _____ beliefs to be a full-fledged radical holiness Christian, and _____.
70. The Church's legitimacy is because of _____ and our _____ to be like the church in the _____; a church that operates in its _____ under the rubric of _____ and God's Spirit.
71. The [membership] _____ us to walk in the light of God's Word to the best of our knowledge and ability, gives _____ to our participation in the Church, and brings us under its _____, _____, and _____.
72. In the Assembly of _____, new membership criteria _____ the biblical practice of _____ into membership as _____.
73. Those who minister as _____ of the _____ and ministers in the _____ must be careful to _____ with the Holy Spirit's leading by _____ and _____ to Him.
74. Our God is a _____ God and His _____ is to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Matthew 18:11; Luke 19:10).
75. The Church is a _____, which can be described in the following words: _____, _____, and _____.
76. The Church is the _____, and she must _____ and be filled with the Father's _____-_____ ways.

77. The COGOP is firm in its commitment to _____ Christian belief.
78. Memorize and write out the Church membership covenant.
79. Membership in the Church _____, which is the basic need of every _____.

Chapter X

80. From its inception, the COGOP has been an _____ Church.
81. At the first Assembly in _____, “. . . strong men wept and said they were not only _____ but _____ to go.”
82. The Spirit’s call of _____ initiated a renewal of the Church’s _____ with the Holy Ghost, and a _____ of her _____ efforts.
83. The Church began her _____ [to the Spirit’s call] under the administration of _____, and continued that response through the tenures of _____ and into the new administration of _____.
84. The Church’s _____ is committed to the Core Values of _____, _____, and _____.

Chapter XI

85. The _____ led by R. G. Spurling, W. F. Bryant, and A. J. Tomlinson (during the years 1886 to 1903 and beyond) itself began as a _____ to church history.
86. The COGOP was birthed (_____) as a _____ to what was seen as a _____ from sound Bible premises.
87. The COGOP’s clearly stated commitment to walk in the light of _____ as led by _____, provides _____ for ongoing change and _____ with God’s purposes in building His Kingdom.
88. The Church of God of Prophecy is considered among the most _____ churches, both _____ and _____. This is true at all levels of her _____ and in _____ terms.
89. All _____ churches should join the struggle to be _____ by God’s Spirit into the _____ of God’s Word.
90. The COGOP continues _____ as He pursues His incredibly _____, _____ of saving mankind and building His Kingdom. “Unto _____ by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end, Amen” (Ephesians 3:21).