Finding Who We Are: The Assemblies of God and Feminism in the 1970s

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May 2010

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The Assemblies of God and Feminism in the 1970s

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The 1970s was a decade of great political unrest and massive social change that touched every aspect of life. The Christian church was not an exception to the shifts taking place in society, and many denominations responded to the rapid changes in American culture. The Assemblies of God was a relatively young denomination during this decade and was still struggling to define itself in some areas, particularly regarding its position on women in ministry. The denomination’s ambivalent attitude toward women in ministry in previous years was further affected by the emergence of a third wave of the women’s movement and a variety of expressions of feminism. This collision of beliefs tended to create a dissonance for many Christian women regarding their role both in the home and in the church. However, the experiences of many women serving in Assemblies of God ministries in the 1970s, and in the years that followed, have shown that it may be possible for Christian women to maintain their religious convictions while still adopting moderate feminist ideology in their daily life.

Through careful examination of texts, one could assert that Pentecostalism and feminism are compatible in certain aspects. This paper will explore the history of the Assemblies of God, particularly in regards to their position on women in ministry, alongside the women’s movement that emerged in the 1960s through the use of church documents and other textual sources. This conclusion, however, is contingent on the basis of the Assemblies of God only and may not be consistent with other Christian denominations. If the experiences of women do not reflect compatibility between Pentecostalism and feminism, though, then the assertion holds less weight and validity. For this reason, the heart of this project lies in oral history and interviews with both men and women who were working in the Assemblies of God in the 1970s. Though limited in number, these interviews provide greater depth to the discussion on the relationship between
Pentecostalism and feminism, and enable one to determine if the literature on both ideologies accurately reflects the reality experienced by women within the church.

From the time the Assemblies of God was birthed in 1914, women have been ordained and licensed for ministry within the denomination. The first General Council passed a resolution that stated: “…we recognize their [women’s] God-given rights to be ordained, not as elders, but as Evangelists and Missionaries, after being duly approved according to the Scriptures.”

Although this passage demonstrates the acceptance of women in ministry, it also shows the clear restrictions placed on women, who at this time were not allowed to serve as pastors of their own congregations in their own right. Not only were women restricted to certain ministry roles within the movement, but they were also denied the right to vote at General Council until 1920, which interestingly is shortly after American women gained the right to vote via the Nineteenth Amendment. During these early years of the Assemblies of God, women in ministry also had restrictions on what they could do as evangelists and missionaries. A letter to a female minister in 1922 emphasizes that the right to administer ordinances in the church listed in women’s credentials, such as burying the dead and performing marriage ceremonies, should only be done “when such acts are necessary.”

The Credentials Committee clearly stated, “They [women] will be expected to do such things only when ordained men are not present to do them or when some such real emergency makes it necessary for them to do so.”

In addition to official documents from the denomination, the attitude within the church could also be gauged by unofficial writings. The *Pentecostal Evangel*, an Assemblies of God magazine first known as *The Weekly Evangel*, included a “Questions and Answers” column.

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3 Assemblies of God Executive Office, Letter from Credential Committee, 1922.
4 Ibid.
written by E.N. Bell, the first General Superintendant of the Assemblies of God. Between 1916 and 1921, nearly a dozen questions were asked that pertained to women in ministry. In his responses to each of these questions, Bell maintains that women are allowed to serve in the ministry; however, he is also very clear in his belief that their participation should be limited. This ultimately led to the assumption that a woman’s main function in ministry was to step in if men were failing to respond to their call to ministry and there was no male to administer ordinances of the church or lead a congregation. In his response to a question regarding a passage in 1 Corinthians, Bell examined the cultural context of Corinth and then stated, “Personally I see no objection according to the customs in America why they [women] should not testify for Christ or preach the gospel. It might be permissible for them to administer the ordinances when absolutely necessary, but there is no scriptural warrant for a woman to do so or to act as a ruler in the church.” Responses such as these contributed to the ambivalent attitude of those within the Assemblies of God toward women in ministry; although women were licensed and ordained, it was hinted that this was not the ideal and was only intended to serve as a second course of action.

In 1931, however, the General Council placed more official restrictions on women in ministry; according to the new bylaws women could only serve as evangelists, and the portion regarding ordinances of the church was completely removed from their credentials. These tighter limits were only temporary though; in 1935 the General Council resolved that women “may be ordained to the ministry of the gospel and may serve either as evangelists or as pastors

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5 E.N. Bell, “Question 1031: Please explain 1 Cor. 14:34-35. Why did Paul say it was a shame for women to speak in church?” *Pentecostal Evangel* (June 11, 1921), 10.

as their qualifications warrant,” though the phrase “when such acts are necessary” remained in regards to administration of ordinances.\(^7\)

An exploration of the relationship between women and the development of religions more generally can provide us with a richer understanding of the role of women within the Assemblies of God during these early years of the denomination. Margaret Poloma, for example, begins her research with Max Weber’s theory of women and religion, which says that early stages of church development, regardless of religion, are generally open to the ministry of women but then begin to limit women’s involvement as the church becomes more established. Poloma then applies this to women in the Assemblies of God. It is clear from just a brief survey of early denominational documents that women played a key role in the beginning of the Assemblies of God during the Azusa Street revivals and the early spread of Pentecostalism. The belief that Jesus’ return was imminent made it crucial for everyone, regardless of gender, to be involved in evangelism.

Charles H. Barfoot and Gerald T. Sheppard, who also examined this shift, defined this period during which the church allowed women great freedom and equality with men in ministry as “prophetic Pentecostalism.”\(^8\) Shortly after the Azusa Street revival, it became clear that a new generation of leadership would rise in the church before Christ returned, and the denomination began to regulate ordained ministry.\(^9\) This period of denomination development is referred to as “priestly Pentecostalism” during which “routinization and regimentation of community relationships set in.”\(^10\) Poloma states that this shift to greater priestly functions is also due to

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\(^10\) Barfoot and Sheppard, 4.
“doctrinal problems, unscrupulous preachers, and the need to coordinate mission efforts.” The Assemblies of God thus began to formalize its structure and create guidelines for who could and could not be ordained, and this process in turn pushed women to the margins of ministry in the church.

Another important factor in shaping the general attitude of the church against women in ministry was the affiliation between the Assemblies of God and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). In 1943, the Assemblies of God was extended an invitation to participate in this newly formed association, which was a crucial turning point for the denomination. Until this time the Assemblies of God was generally not viewed as a legitimate church organization because of its more liberal religious beliefs. Therefore, this opportunity to associate itself with recognized evangelical churches was one way to help the Assemblies of God legitimize itself. However, because the denominations involved in the National Association of Evangelicals were overall very conservative, the organization tended to discourage women in ministry. Despite the fact that the NAE’s position on women in ministry was contrary to what the bylaws of the Assemblies of God stated, the denomination began to absorb this mentality as it attempted to become more recognized in mainstream society. As a result the general attitude in support of a gender hierarchy, in both the ministry and in everyday life, was strengthened within the Assemblies of God.12

In the 1950s, a pamphlet by Frank Boyd entitled “Woman’s Ministry,” though not an official document of the Assemblies of God, served as an indicator of the dominant attitude in the denomination toward the issue of women in ministry. After examining the “problem”

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11 Margaret M. Poloma, Assemblies of God at the Crossroads: Charisma and Institutional Dilemmas (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 103.
12 Mark Hughes, interview by Caitlin Babcock, 13 January 2010.
passages (1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12) of the New Testament in this area, the author concludes that it is not scriptural to keep women completely silent in the church, yet he does not promote their position in pastoral ministry either. He states that a woman “may be a missionary, Bible reader, Scripture teacher of children, evangelist, a deaconess, a helper, a servant in the church,” thus emphasizing their limited role in ministry. He also emphasized female submission to men, particularly that of a woman to her husband, when he stated that “[e]very Bible-taught, lovely handmaiden of the Lord will joyfully recognize man’s headship….”

This attitude was reflected in a 1968 Pentecostal Evangel article written by Ernest S. Williams, who served as the General Superintendent from 1929-1949. In this article, he made it clear that although he thought women should be allowed to preach, authority rested in men. As he stated, “Feminine modesty teaches women not to assume the place of rulership.”

One interviewee, who knew Brother Williams, remarked that Brother Williams allowed women to preach at his church as long as he was on the platform while they spoke.

At the same time that women within the Assemblies of God were experiencing greater restrictions in their roles in ministry, a new wave of the women’s movement was forming in American society. In 1963, Betty Friedan published The Feminine Mystique, her groundbreaking work in the area of women’s studies. According to Friedan, this “feminine mystique” that was so widespread in American culture was preventing women from achieving their full potential as human beings in areas beyond the private sphere of the home. In emphasizing the value of femininity, the male-dominated culture actually restricts women to the roles of

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14 Ernest S. Williams, “Paul said, ‘Let your women keep silent in the churches,’ Does this mean a woman should never be permitted to preach?” Pentecostal Evangel, (March 31, 1968), 24.
15 Hughes, interview.
housewife and mother rather than encouraging them to utilize all their talents.\textsuperscript{16} Betty Friedan’s book served, in part, as a catalyst for the third wave of the women’s movement in the United States. At a time when women were slowly beginning to once again consider their role in society, Friedan forced both men and women to consider the millions of discontent and unfulfilled housewives who were suffering from the “problem that has no name.”\textsuperscript{17}

Later that decade, in 1966, Betty Friedan was a co-founder of the National Organization for Women (NOW), which held its first conference in October of that year. During this convention, the delegates, both men and women, elected leaders and drafted a statement of purpose. According to the document, “[t]he purpose of NOW is to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men.”\textsuperscript{18} The Statement of Purpose made it clear that NOW was interested in establishing a partnership-style relationship between the genders instead of a hierarchy in which either gender dominated the other:

> We believe that women will do most to create a new image of women by acting now, and by speaking out in behalf of their own equality, freedom, and human dignity – not in pleas for special privilege, nor in enmity toward men, who are also victims of the current, half-equality between the sexes – but in an active, self-respecting partnership with men. By so doing, women will develop confidence in their own ability to determine actively, in partnership with men, the conditions of their life, their choices, their future and their society.\textsuperscript{19}

Because these feminists were seeking equal partnership with men, they believed that it was possible for women to have greater freedom and autonomy within the biological/heterosexual family structure; however, they insisted that changes needed to be made to this structure to

\textsuperscript{16} Betty Friedan, \textit{The Feminine Mystique} (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963), 43.
\textsuperscript{17} Friedan, \textit{Feminine Mystique}, 32.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
ensure women’s freedom of choice. As a result, moderate feminists, such as those who were members of NOW, demanded equality in education and the workforce as well as legislation to protect abortion and other reproductive rights. Although they demanded political and legislative change at the national level, these feminists recognized that the most change was necessary within the home and family structure.

Not all feminists, however, espoused these same views of the relationship between men and women. In 1968, for example, a group of women, led by Ti-Grace Atkinson, split with NOW and started a new organization called The Feminists. This radical organization supported the abolition of marriage and family altogether rather than just an adjustment to them because they saw the gender roles that these institutions created as the root of oppression. The group also accused NOW of mirroring the hierarchical structure of male organizations, and therefore they opted to have no hierarchical power structure but rather chose leaders by drawing lots. Other feminists, such as Shulamith Firestone and Kate Millet, argued that the traditional family and biological differences created inequality between men and women. For this reason, they advocated the use of technological advances in reproduction, insisting that it could help free women from their biological destiny and offer them greater freedom. In addition, women were not to be confined to the traditional family and should be free to pursue homosexual family structures if desired. As a result, issues such as abortion and homosexuality were just a few of the key topics in feminist discourse.

22 Cohen, 30.
Despite the changes occurring within American society, a significant turn for women within the church did not come until 1978, when Joseph R. Flower, the General Secretary of the Assemblies of God, wrote an unofficial paper regarding women in ministry. Despite the fact that it was not an official position paper by the denomination, it is nevertheless important because it demonstrated a shift in the attitude of national denominational leaders. After noting the cultural context of the “problem” Scriptures, in which he remarks that Christianity had brought greater freedom to women in the time and region in which those passages were written, he states that Paul’s exhortations for women not to speak in church are directed not at women in general, but rather at those women who were using their new-found freedom in Christ to assert power that they were not qualified to have. In addition, Flower’s examination of the Scriptures leads him to assert that any discussion of female submission in the New Testament is in the context of the marriage relationship alone and not of women to men in general. Flower concludes that his findings give “assurance that it is an error to deny women a God-given right of ministry to the church. The Christian church should be in the vanguard of any movement promoting true scriptural liberty for womanhood.”

Other unofficial writings in the 1970s further demonstrate the mixed feelings about women in ministry despite some change in attitudes at the top, so to speak. In 1975, two articles were published together on the topic of female ordination, one in favor of and the other against women in ministry. These articles, written by a male and female respectively, provide an excellent example of some of the key arguments on both sides of the issue. Paul King Jewett, arguing in

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24 Ibid., 4.
25 Ibid., 22.
   Elisabeth Elliot, “Why I Oppose the Ordination of Women,” Christianity Today (June 6, 1975), 12-16.
favor of the ordination of women, asserted that males and females were created in the image of God to be in partnership with one another. He even stated that “since the Church is the bride of Christ and therefore feminine to him, one could just as well reason that the universal priesthood of all believers should find its individual expression in the woman *rather than* in the man, an inference that the theologians, as males, have never drawn.”

Jewett also refutes the argument that female pastors would be a distraction to the congregation because if this were the case, then females should not be permitted in worship at all, and the argument also does not consider the fact that male pastors could in turn be distracting to females.

Elisabeth Elliot, on the other hand, argues that the question of female ordination has only been raised due to the cultural climate in the 1960s and 1970s, and she relates all interaction between men and women to the subordinate relationship of the Church to Christ. Elliot’s argument is based on her assumption that the kingdom of God is necessarily hierarchical in nature.

While some individuals were just studying the issue of women in ministry, others had begun exploring the relationship between feminism and Christianity in daily life. In their 1974 book *All We’re Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women’s Liberation*, Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty explore the idea of what it could mean for a Christian woman to be liberated. Their idea of Christian liberation is rooted in Jesus’ radical attitudes toward women. In a culture where women were truly treated as second-class citizens, Jesus spoke with women, worked with them, and even asked them first to give testimony to his resurrection. The authors clearly outline their idea of the identity of liberated Christian women:

*The liberated Christian woman learns to appreciate her worth as a person created by and for God, possessing unique gifts bestowed upon her for use in honoring him.*

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27 Jewett, 9.
28 Ibid., 8.
29 Elliot, 14.
30 Ibid., 13.
and benefiting mankind. She is not content to settle without thought into the constricting pattern society expects of its members who happen to have been born female. Instead, she is free to know herself, be herself, and develop herself in her own special way, creatively using to the full her intellect and talents.\(^{31}\)

Just as Brother Flower had argued the necessity of women using their gifts in ministry, Scanzoni and Hardesty assert that in denying women positions in ministry, the church is wasting gifts that could be used to further the kingdom. They point out that many women are already using certain gifts in careers such as counseling, and for one to say that a woman, as a pastor, could not fulfill this requirement of the job is absurd when one considers that women are succeeding in these roles in the “secular” realm.\(^{32}\) The authors also argue that the spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament were not intended for men alone, and for this reason, women who have received these gifts should be allowed to utilize them within church ministry just as men are able to do. This position was echoed by Mark Hughes, a professor at an Assemblies of God university:

> A man had given a paper on one of the exegetical problems, like women keeping silent or something like that, and he kinda finished by saying, “Here is this gifted woman…and God has called her into the ministry. But her church won’t credential her. What is she going to say to God when she steps before the great White Throne Judgment and God says, ‘What did you do with those gifts I gave you?’ Is she gonna say, ‘The church wouldn’t let me use them?’...When we say that only men can be leaders, then we cut our human resources in half.”\(^{33}\)

The idea of the liberated women does not end with ministry, however. The liberated Christian women should experience this freedom in all areas of life, including marriage and childrearing. Because she recognizes her “unique gifts,” she is an individual with her own interests and passions, just as her husband and children are. For this reason, the authors promote a democratic

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32 Scanzoni and Hardesty, *All We’re Meant to Be*, 175.

33 Hughes, interview.
and egalitarian structure of marriage rather than the traditional hierarchical structure.\textsuperscript{34} Although the biological structure of the family is maintained, relationships within the family, particularly between the husband and wife, should reflect the importance and unique abilities of each individual within the family unit.

Despite the fact that more people were beginning to publish writings that supported women in ministry, there remained an ambivalent attitude that affected how women viewed themselves and their calls to ministry. Margaret Quinn, a pastor who did not feel her call to ministry until she was in her forties, described her surprise at being called to ministry and the resulting transition within her family. Although she was using her two music degrees in that capacity within the church, she said:

I won’t say I was super happily involved in that, but at forty I just kind of reached a point of feeling like if I have to do this the rest of my life I don’t know if I wanna live the rest of my life! [chuckles] …it was just a thought that it wasn’t rewarding. At the same time I was walking with a friend through a grief process…and I was also preparing worship materials for a women’s retreat. And those processes just pulled me. They just called to me. And after I’d get the kids off to school I just couldn’t wait to sit down and stuff just poured out of me to write. And sitting by the bedside with that friend during a difficult pregnancy was again a heart to heart feeling, a feeling of passion, about vocation, or about that activity. So I just started seeing this contrast between what I was doing, which was music in the church and teaching piano a lot - and I would just feel a sense of dread when the cars would pull up in my driveway for my next student - and I would feel this heart-pounding sense of passion when I did these ministry tasks.

After this experience she approached an older female friend who she says “gave voice to this formless angst that I was feeling…she said, ‘Do you think you might be experiencing a call to ministry?’ [unclear] Me? Called to ministry?”\textsuperscript{35} Margaret’s background is very different from those women that Betty Friedan had interviewed for \textit{The Feminine Mystique}, and yet the struggle that those women felt between their family and a career is echoed in her description of how she

\textsuperscript{34} Scanzoni and Hardesty, \textit{All We’re Meant to Be}, 107.
\textsuperscript{35} Margaret Quinn, interview with Caitlin Babcock, 14 January 2010.
came into ministry. While many within the church may have been encouraging the traditional hierarchical family structure in years preceding this incident, Christian women were not exempt from feeling the pull to utilize their gifts and talents outside the home.

Although the Assemblies of God officially supported women in ministry and general support was beginning to increase, the denomination still tended to support policies that discriminated against women. Sandra Peters, a pastor’s wife, described her experience with Gospel Publishing House, the Assemblies of God publishing company, during the 1970s:

He [her husband] had an invitation to write God’s Word for Today…and I was working in the district office as a secretary. He said “Answer this, tell them I’m not interested.” “I’d love to do that!” “Well, do it if you want to.” So I did it and put his name on it [chuckles] and sent it in. A little while we get a letter – “That was so well written we’re increasing pay because we didn’t have to have it edited.” …So we thought, well isn’t that funny. So then, in a little while…he gets another phone call – “You know you did such a good job with that, would you write an adult Sunday school quarter?” So he said, “Well I have to tell you, I didn’t write that, my wife wrote that. And I’m not a writer at all, I’m not interested, I’m an administrator…and they said, “Oh that’s too bad, we don’t use women to write adult courses”….And so, they didn’t. They didn’t let me. A little while later, I get a call to write a book about women – they wanted a book about women written by a woman…I wrote it in the latter part of the seventies. There’s still the rationale that women will write differently than men. They didn’t want a woman to write a Sunday School course…36

Sandra chuckled as she told the story yet stressed the difference between how men and women were treated in terms of who could and could not author certain materials. She noted that Gospel Publishing House allowed women to write books and course materials for women and children, but not for men or adults in general. When asked about her response to the whole situation, she simply stated, “We laughed about it.”37

Beyond the question of whether or not women had a right to work in ministry, issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and family structure were key points of discussion for those within the

36 Sandra Peters, interview with Caitlin Babcock, 14 January 2010.
37 Ibid.
church, just as they were for feminists in the women’s movement. During the 1970s, the Assemblies of God released several statements regarding these types of controversial subjects in response to shifts in American culture. In 1971 the General Council issued a statement on abortion which says, “[a]bortion has been catapulted into the forefront of spiritual and ethical problems confronting the church today, and the issue has been nurtured in a general climate of moral relativism, a growing sexual permissiveness, and a threatening population explosion.”38 The denomination affirmed a position against abortion for purposes of convenience, yet recognized that there may be some medical occasions where it may be necessary to “safeguard the health or life of the mother.”39 This statement was then reaffirmed at General Council in 1977. A position paper adopted at General Council in 1979 made the Assemblies of God position against homosexuality very clear. The first sentence of the report declares, “Homosexual behavior, whether male or female, is one area which reflects an alarming erosion of national moral standards.”40 The position is rooted in an interpretation of Scripture that views homosexuality as a clear aberration of God’s plan for humans and their sexuality. The condition of the church and American society as a whole was of great concern to the Assemblies of God, and it made its concerns very clear through series of position papers and resolutions. However, despite its reaction to these cultural shifts, the denomination did not issue any official statement specifically on feminism or the women’s movement.

There was also reaction to the condition of society and American culture among the Protestant evangelical churches in general. The National Association of Evangelicals, for example, adopted a paper entitled “Saving the Seventies” at the 1970 conference in which the

organization listed several issues that presented conflict for the church, such as drugs, the condition of the youth, and Christian family life. After determining to “continue to present the cause of evangelical Christendom” to the nation, several resolutions were passed that presented the position of the evangelical church on these issues. Most indicative of the church’s position is in their statement on Christian family life: “Someone has said, ‘As goes the family so goes the nation.’ If this is true the outlook for America remains increasingly gloomy, for in many ways wholesome family life seems to be disappearing from the American scene….Many Christian homes no longer stand in sharp contrast to those of the world.”

Although there was no mention of the role of women in this resolution or the others included in these NAE minutes, the implication in this resolution is that the traditional family structure is the key to healthy Christian families that can positively impact the nation during that decade. Other Christian organizations expressed highly conservative views on feminism and its effects on the family and American society. In 1978, the Texas Eagle Forum, a branch of the National Eagle Forum established by Phyllis Schlafly, published a pamphlet entitled “Christian Be Watchful,” in which the authors expose the dangers of feminism to traditional culture. Although they do explain what some feminists believe, their argument is weakened by the fact that they do not distinguish between the different varieties of feminism. For example, the article states that “most Americans are not being told the whole story….The basic intent of the movement is to overthrow the ‘establishment’ and restructure American society.” As previously discussed, however, this was not the case among feminists. While some feminists did desire to “restructure American society,” this was generally characteristic of the more radical feminists. Moderate feminism, as it was

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advocated by organizations such as NOW, preferred to maintain the institutions and just make changes within them. The pamphlet also addresses many of the key issues of the debate between feminists and Christians in general, including homosexuality, abortion, federal child care, and a shift in sex-role stereotyping.\textsuperscript{43}

Although there seems to be a wide range in issues involved in the debate between feminists and anti-feminists, they are ultimately wrapped up in one’s view of family and marriage. Many Christians often have a more traditional view of family and see value in having a hierarchical structure within the marriage relationship. For this reason, they viewed feminism and the women’s movement as detrimental to American society, and they believed that it was responsible for shifts in cultural trends, such as rising divorce rates and increased drug use and teen suicide, because women were not staying at home with their families.\textsuperscript{44} Feminists, however, felt that changes had to be made in the traditional family structure in order for women to experience true freedom. As previously mentioned, this belief took various forms for different feminists, but the ultimate goal for all groups was some type of change that would free women from the sole role of homemaker. Despite the tireless efforts of feminist groups, however, change in family structure during this time was less than dramatic. Several studies completed through the 1980s revealed that greater equality in work opportunities and household responsibilities had still left women with the bulk of the work in the home. Various explanations have been offered for this phenomenon. One is that among feminists themselves there are a wide variety of explanations for women’s oppression, and therefore they cannot agree on a solution for it.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 4.
Others point to the fact that many feminists continued to raise a family, even while working outside the home, thus affirming their support for motherhood.\textsuperscript{46} Yet another explanation is that there has been little change at the institutional level, and men who choose to be more involved in their families do not receive support from institutions or their peers.\textsuperscript{47} Regardless of the reason, what remains is that changes within the household have remained largely insignificant as women continue to be, more often than not, the ones responsible for the effective management of the home.

This conflict in issues involving marriage and family was therefore very prevalent among Christian women as well, including those in the Assemblies of God. When asked if she experienced any opposition from men when she returned to seminary to pursue her calling, for example, Margaret Quinn stated that she didn’t face any opposition from men but explained the challenges that it presented to her marriage and family:

…it was a struggle within my marriage because my husband had married a musician and this represented a huge change and challenge financially and time-wise, and we were half-way through raising our kids, and is this a mid-life crisis, and I was working in another denomination at that time as a musician, and how is this going to work, and that’s where my sense of call came during that time. So there were a lot of issues for us to work through as a couple and if it hadn’t been such a passion I’m sure I would have given up because I too could see all the challenges. And I was excited to go back to school but I knew it would be hard…but I resonated with that passage in Jeremiah which he said there is something like a fire burning within me. And I couldn’t not do it…I could not turn away from the call. It was more passionate than my impelling to get married, it was more passionate than the feelings I had for my children – and those are big experiences. So it came viscerally enough that I could not turn away from it. And that, that sustained me. That plus this wonderful wise older woman speaking into my life over and over, not directing me, but listening and reflecting with me. That’s why I’m in ministry. The call and the non-directive but highly supportive mentoring speaking into my life.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{48} Quinn, interview.
Although the 1970s revealed the ambiguity of the Assemblies of God position on women in ministry and the debate surrounding it, by the late 1980s, a greater number of popular articles had been written in defense of women in ministry. One author, in a 1987 article titled “Let Georgia Do It,” asserted that because women are being denied positions in ministry, the church in turn is being denied gifts and abilities that could be used to spread the gospel. As he stated, women ministers were needed “not to compete with men but to complement their work and to increase the corps of gospel ministers.”\(^{49}\) In his opinion, if a woman is more qualified than a man for a position in ministry it should not be denied to her simply because she is a female.\(^{50}\) Other articles in Assemblies of God publications described the cultural context of the Bible in which women were very restricted and the immense freedom that Jesus, and in turn Christianity, brought to all women.\(^{51}\) Articles such as these helped to increase support for women in ministry and demonstrated a growing trend towards a more unified opinion of the church in this matter.

In 1988 a request was made to the General Council for an official position paper on the role of women within the denomination. This request notes that although the Assemblies of God had credentialed women since its beginning, the number of female ministers was actually declining at that time. In addition, it describes the difficulty faced by women in training for ministry who had no clear statement from the denomination that supported their role in ministry. Although the request highlights many defenses that were already present in Brother Flower’s paper from 1978, it makes it clear that his paper was not an official statement by the church and that “an official position paper would make clear that the acceptance of women in ministry is an Assemblies of


\(^{50}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{51}\) Joyce Wells Booze, “Jesus and Women,” *Pentecostal Evangel* (February 15, 1987), 4-6.
God stance and should be accepted by all ministers who are credentialed with us. It would provide our women with something to place in the hands of those who oppose their role.”\(^ {52} \)

An official position paper was finally adopted by the General Council in August 1990. It clearly outlines the historical position of the Assemblies of God and carefully examines those passages of Scripture which the petition had requested. The official position thus concludes “…that we cannot find convincing evidence that the ministry of women is restricted according to some sacred or immutable principle….To the degree that we are convinced of our Pentecostal distinctives – that it is God who divinely calls and supernaturally anoints for ministry – we must continue to be open to the full use of women’s gifts in ministry and spiritual leadership.”\(^ {53} \)

Despite the publication of an official position paper regarding women in ministry, the Assemblies of God continues to wrestle with lingering attitudes against female ministry. This struggle becomes clear after talking with just a few individuals. Margaret Quinn aptly noted how much “inertia” there tends to be within institutions that attempt to make changes. She also described the difference in attitudes of church members based on age. She has noticed that many members in her congregation over the age of thirty-five tend to be surprised that women are increasingly involved in ministry, while the majority of those under age thirty-five are not bothered by the idea of women in ministry and pastoral positions.\(^ {54} \) Several of those interviewed also described the historic position of the Assemblies of God on women in ministry and, despite the release of an official position paper nearly twenty years ago, said that many within the church are still reluctant to adapt their views of women in ministry. Mark Hughes revealed that even today many young male students want to uphold the gender hierarchy, not only within the church


\(^ {54} \) Quinn, interview.
but within other social institutions and daily life as well. Female students at this Christian university also have had trouble shifting their views of their own position in this hierarchy:

…I’ll see this attractive woman, wonderful personality, bright, promising – she’s not being asked out on dates. And I try to be careful with that. There’s nothing wrong with being single - I try to communicate that clearly to my English and Theater majors – but most do want relationships and at least they’d like to date. So I’ll say, “You know, I saw you in chapel kind of acting kinda silly with so-and-so.” And she said “Yeah, that’s because if I come off too bright he won’t ask me for a date.” [pause] I think there is less of that now than there was in the 70s, maybe quite a bit less of it, but it’s not gone yet.  

Despite the fact attitudes within the church are slow to change even today, many of those that were interviewed felt that the women’s movement and feminism did have a positive impact on the Assemblies of God and are hopeful for continued change in the future. Mark Hughes noted that he did not sense any opposition to women in ministry from the current president of the university. He stated that this leadership, as well as a new generation of leaders within the denomination, are going to play a critical role in helping to change how members of the Assemblies of God view women in ministry: “If you have somebody at the top creating a vision and opening up some space, then I think it’s possible.” Each interviewee recognized that it will take time for significant transformation to occur within the Assemblies of God before women are openly welcomed, and encouraged, to enter full-time ministry, but each also had a definite sense of hope that this change is coming.

Although the available literature and conversations with several men and women in the Assemblies of God has revealed the positive link between the denomination and feminism, Margaret Quinn most effectively described the potential for this close relationship:

I remember probably feeling initially critical of the movement, thinking [pause] what’s the big gripe, oh women – those women are too assertive, they’re acting ‘like men’ [pause], I’ve never encountered discrimination. I think I was just coming

55 Hughes, interview.
56 Quinn, interview.
from a pretty solitary, insular place in which I could not perhaps understand some of the concerns. But, so I don’t know at what point my attitudes changed but maybe as I read the stories of all the women who had really experienced discrimination and if I had pushed harder or had felt called to things at that time, whether it was ministry or whether it was another occupation where there was a definite ceiling…I probably would have had more of a gut identification with the issues for which they were putting themselves on the line. But I know, and certainly long before right now, have identified with the need for people to be pioneers in areas of oppression. Just like the civil rights issue, the people who struggled for just full human rights suffered, were misunderstood, and, oh my goodness, the Church itself preached against their freedom and justified that position with decontextualized Scriptures. And so I came to see the women’s movement that way. Not all the women represented my values, not all of them were people that I could heroize in every way but their basic impulse for justice for half of the human race is a very biblical impulse. And it grieves me that the Church is often such a late responder to God-issues, to fundamental biblical issues…instead of an initiator. Instead of being in the vanguard they’re often a late responder to cultural phenomena that in my opinion God has to use secular means to get the church eventually to come alongside and understand that it’s part of God’s heart. I think that justice and compassion are just the heart of heart of heart of God. So I don’t think you can say, “Oh I’m a Christian and I don’t care about equal opportunities for women.” I don’t think you can be a Christian and not be a feminist in some way, even if you’re not comfortable with using that word, because if you are attempting to have a heart like God and you are reading biblical witness, you have to see that over and over and over God cared about the victim, God cared about those who were oppressed, God cared about the alien, God cared about those who had less access to God. And back when a woman did not have a vote, my goodness, they couldn’t vote their conscience. Back when blacks couldn’t get work, my goodness, they couldn’t fulfill the potential that God had created them with. Back when women couldn’t be in occupations for which they had been naturally gifted, they can’t fulfill the potential that God created them with. So, maybe what I feel is that it’s almost unfortunate that there weren’t more Christians in that very first expression of feminism because Christians should be there. They do not have to embrace every expression of them, they do not have to be saying we hate men, they do not have to be saying we don’t want any rules or any boundaries…we negate all those values – no, like the way we bring our Christian values into everything we say that God is true and everywhere we find truth we find a piece of God. And to see a movement and the expressions of justice is to see the heart of God, then we add to that impulse of justice our other values, our values of loyalty and of covenant and of sexual integrity. And we can add those other values without throwing out that core value they [feminists] represented of justice for half of God’s created beings. …we [Pentecostals] believe that the Spirit can come and not contradict Biblical witness but continue to amplify and bring new wisdom and bring wisdom for this time and this place and this people and that the Spirit can bow in fresh ways and have a new word to say. So theoretically, at least, we of all people ought to be able to say, “This is a God-thing.”
We can shape it and bring more of our core values to contextualize this issue, but the issue is one we ought to be able to be open to – not be threatened by it.57

While it is evident that there is still much more change that needs to occur within the denomination, the Assemblies of God has certainly made progress in its attitude toward women in ministry and how it responds to females pursuing pastoral positions. The women’s movement of the 1970s can be seen as a catalyst for assisting the denomination in returning to its original conviction that women should be allowed to serve in ministry, not as subordinate to men but as equal partners in the kingdom of God. Despite the fact that many values of Pentecostalism and feminism do not overlap, the fundamental belief of both in the equality of men and women as human beings makes them ideologies that enable females to develop their gifts and live as whole beings emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually, both in the home and in the church.

57 Ibid.
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