

CHAPTER IV

STRUCTURE, ORGANIZATION, AND THE COGIC MATRIARCHY

But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things, that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. TITUS 2: 1-5, King James Version

At the core of all organizing activity of the Women's Department of COGIC was the Bible. Though many have rightfully said that the Bible can be interpreted in any manner, interpretation of scripture as a literal text guiding human behavior concerning life, and the doctrine of holiness were crucial for the Women's Department of COGIC to sustain membership and regulate behavior. Mother Robinson's prodigious organizational skills alone were not enough to assure that women would remain in the confines of the Women's Department. There needed to be something else, a spark of conviction that would convince members and new converts that the beliefs of holiness were right, proper for living, and beneficial to all involved. The spark of conviction Mother Robinson employed was the elevation of the position of Church Mother to an office rather than just a title of dignity. By creating the office of Church Mother, the status and recognition accorded to older women who championed and embodied the ideas of holiness was prominent, unique, and a permanent fixture. Combining piety and autonomy, the position of Church Mother became a leadership position. It combined post-Reconstruction black women's leadership, motherhood, womanhood, and Biblical beliefs of women's roles and duties. The Church Mother became the identifying position that was both repository for and articulation of holiness beliefs and behavior as well as disciplinary office. The Church Mother was the iconographic statement of the doctrine of holiness in COGIC, and the agent of how holiness beliefs were codified into theological and social doctrines. The process of how these beliefs and their reception were translated into codified doctrines, resources, and organizational structure in COGIC must be analyzed in order to provide a comprehensive picture of how these factors

worked together to bring status, power, and recognition to women culturally and religiously expected to be subservient to men. The best way to explain how these beliefs taken from the Bible translated into rules and resources resulting in the structure of the Women's Department can be interpreted through two theoretical lenses: Anthony Giddens Theory of Structure and Pierre Bourdieus notion of Habitus and Distinction. Both of these theories provide a theoretical basis for the process in which COGIC women were able to inculcate, explicate, and formulaize doctrines and beliefs of COGIC, in turn using these doctrines to strengthen their organizational structure and raise the status of their female members. The first half of this chapter will deal with structural theory and its application in the COGIC Women's Department, and the final section will deal with Bourdieu notion of habitus and distinction in relationship to the office of Church Mother.

Structural Theory

Structuration theory, best represented by sociologist and ethno-methodologist Anthony Giddens, centers around the idea that anything that happens or exists in social life is generated through enacted forms of conduct .¹ Social structures, generated by the conduct of human actors, or agents, are also the medium of human agencies. These structures, which are organized as rules or resources, exist out of time and space. However, the social systems in which the rules or resources reside are reproduced across time and space, both increasing and decreasing depending on the agent's activities. To inquire into the structuration of social practices, therefore, is to explain how structures come about through action, and how action is constituted structurally.² The term structure, in social analysis, refers to the binding of time and space to practices that

¹Bryan S. Turner, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, Blackwell Companions to Sociology.(Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers LTD., 2000) 93

²Christopher G.A. Bryant, David Jary, ed. *Giddens's Theory of Structuration: A Critical Appreciation*. International Library of Sociology. (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 7

occur in social practices over time and lend themselves to a systematic formation.³ These practices, governed by time- space extensions, provide fields of possibilities for agents actions. They also govern action in the practical consciousness of the agent that organizes their activities.⁴ In short, the persons or agents who act upon certain rules or beliefs, constitute the resources needed to construct the social system. At the same time, the social system constructed acts upon the agents in such a way as to constrain the agents and enable them both to move within that social structure.⁵ This duality of structure, which Giddens posits, can account for the structural properties of social systems to become both medium and outcome of the practices that they organize.

However, the theory of structuration, has some limitations. William Sewell addresses these limitations in an article about the duality of structure. The limitations he recognizes within Giddens's theory is the agency of social actors, or the ability for the social structure of the actors to change the social structure, and the location of structure in the semiotic or material.⁶ According to Sewell, the theory of structure should take into account that rules that bind together structures are actual rules rather than virtual rules. Those actual rules should be regarded as resources rather than rules. Sewell also changes the terminology of rules to schemas, because they are the procedures that are applied in the enactment or reproduction of social life.⁷ Those rules, or schemas can be transported or generalized without regard to the time or location. The rules also constitute preferences for particular world views, that can be transported from one

³Anthony Giddens. *The Constitution of Society*. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1984)17

⁴ Ibid, 17

⁵Ibid, 25

⁶ William H Jr. Sewell "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation." *American Journal of Sociology* 98, no. 1 (1992): 1-29., 3

⁷Ibid, 8. For the purposes of this theoretical discussion, I will use *rules* to describe the regulations for living a life of holiness through the process of sanctification. How women in COGIC respond to these *rules* constitute their *belief* system.

organization or social arena to another.⁸

In addition to the theory of structure, strictness of rules plays a major role in the cohesiveness of a religious group. Lawrence Iannaccone in a article on the strength of strict churches, posits that strict demands strengthen a church by raising levels of overall commitment, increasing rates of participation and enhancing the benefits of membership.⁹ The inherent strictness eliminates “free riders”, those who benefit from the system or structure without putting resources in. In strict churches, rules for dress, behavior, and giving are measures of membership. These rules can also make participation in outside activities more costly to the members, and even threaten their status within their church communities, if the outside participation differs from the strict rules of the church communities.¹⁰

Applying this theory to COGIC, Holiness rules from the nineteenth century were applicable well into the twentieth century in the development of the rules of the Women’s Department. These rules have an effect on the resources available to the Women’s Department. The strictness of the rules in holiness regarding dress and sanctification insures that members will keep the rules if they desire to remain within the group. If rules are subverted, the penalty is censure or in the worst case, expulsion. Rules insure that resources will continue to be produced by those who wish to remain within the group. Resources are shaped by the structures, and specifically, by cultural rules that develop into *beliefs* that undergird the structures. In the case of the Women’s Department, the cultural rules concerning gender roles, combined with race shaped the resources comprised of Church Mothers who are the manifestation and consequence of the enactment of cultural beliefs in COGIC.¹¹ Under Sewell’s understanding of structuration, the

⁸Darren E. Sherkat. “*Preference Structures and Normative Constraints in Movements Outside, Between and Within Church Organizations*” paper presented at Lilly Foundation Conference, *When Church is Not Enough: The Christian Life and Voluntary Organizations*, 1994, 4

⁹Lawrence Iannaccone, *Why Strict Churches are Strong*” American Journal of Sociology, March 1994. 1183

¹⁰Ibid, 1188

¹¹Sewell, 11

definition of structure as both rules (or as he terms, schemas) and resources help to better explain the notion of the duality of structure, and the interrelation of rules and resources. If resources are the effect of rules, then what holds those resources together and reproduces them over time is *belief* in the rules that are proffered. Beliefs and resources constitute structures over time by mutual implication and sustenance over time.¹²

Using this formulation, in the Women's Department of COGIC, women are the agents who model and enforce the rules (doctrines) of holiness espoused by COGIC, and are the means that construct the social system of COGIC. The beliefs are transmitted through the leadership of the Women's Department, the Church Mothers. The social system in COGIC, based upon the fictive familial relationship with the Church Mother as the primary transmitter of holiness rules, changes over time when new women's leadership redefines the embodiment of holiness. The constant that remains over time is the Bible. The Bible is the text in which the rules are laid out, and what is required to remain a 'family member' is belief in the rules outlined in the text. The Women's Department holds the primary responsibility for the definition, transmission, and participation in the belief system in COGIC. The strictness of the rules of holiness ensures that there is a definable, measurable process that results in sanctification. The clear structure and leadership roles allow the Women's Department to take on this primary responsibility for defining and measuring holiness by using Biblical standards. The Women's Department is the medium as well as the outcome of the beliefs and practices within the COGIC. It may appear to outsiders that men are the primary leadership within COGIC because of prohibitions on ordination of women. In actuality, the Church Mothers of COGIC are the primary leadership, because they define the rules of holiness teachings, and regulate them. These practices include dress, Bible interpretation and study, evaluating leadership potential, and articulating doctrinal belief and practice.

In order to examine these claims more closely, the theological foundations of holiness and its relationship to the gender and racial issues will help to explain how COGIC women became the agents for disseminating COGIC beliefs and doctrines, or rules of holiness. Women of COGIC defined the social and doctrinal life of COGIC through their conduct. Rules regarding

¹²Sewell, 12

proper behavior as ‘becometh holiness’ were primarily ascribed to women, not to men. Depending on how well the women emulated and taught these ideas about holiness enabled them to move within the structure of the Women’s Department, and also constrained them as well. The functionary of Church Mother, far from being only a titular position, was a position that undergirds the denomination and allowed it to grow through the use of the mothers actions to both curtail members and empower members depending on their beliefs and behavior. Gidden’s theory, with the revisions by Sewell, helps us to trace how the Women’s Department historically is the foundational structure for the development of beliefs, codification of doctrines, and organization of the denomination.

The Foundation of the Women’s Department: The Bible

The Women’s Department of COGIC finds its primary rules within the text of the Bible. The Bible, a text promoting holiness, is not a belief in itself. It should be thought of as a repository for the rules that help to define the beliefs or what COGIC members term “the doctrine”. Those rules, interpreted by Church Mothers and other leaders, governed the Women’s Department. The Bible as prescription and proscription, provided the rules, and the Church mother provide the interpretations. In the articles of faith published in 1911 in COGIC, the Bible is the first article of faith.

We Believe the Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both the Old and New Testaments to be the true word of God. That they are God’s revelation of Himself in the works of redemption. That they were written by men as they were moved by the Holy Ghost; that they are able to make wise unto salvation, and that they constitute the authoritative standard by which religious teaching and Christian conduct are to be regulated and judged.¹³

The Bible in COGIC was interpreted as the literal word of God, divinely inspired and the sole mediator of teaching and compartment for church members. It was the yardstick for

¹³ L.P. Adams. "Articles of Faith of the Church of God in Christ." Memphis, Tennessee: 1911. 1

interpreting religious teaching, education, and Christian conduct, which are important areas of concern for the COGIC Women's Department. The basis for all teachings was the Bible, and it was used to inform the practical, spiritual matters of everyday life. For many African Americans, the Bible was the text passed down from their enslaved ancestors, and was the medium for knowing and understanding the will of God.¹⁴ For COGIC women, the Bible was an inescapable text that was foundational to their spiritual and temporal identity as a member of the Women's Department and as a member of COGIC.

The ideas that shaped COGIC's Biblical interpretation originated from the Baptist roots of COGIC founder C.H. Mason. Attempting to form a foundational center for their churches after reconstruction, Black Baptists of the nineteenth century, focused heavily on grounding their beliefs in the text of the Bible to insure that proper theology and doctrines were being taught by their pastors.¹⁵ This focus was honed by white Baptist missionaries like Joanna Moore, who stressed the importance of both the Bible and education. The importance of the Bible should not be overlooked or dismissed in COGIC because of the ecstatic experiences of Holiness-Pentecostal religion. The doctrinal basis for the activities such as dancing, speaking in tongues, healing and other charisms find their basis in the Bible. COGIC literature referred to scriptures such as Jeremiah 31:31: Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together, and 2 Samuel 6:16: David danced before the Lord with all his might.¹⁶ Other texts from Acts chapter 2 (tongues speaking), I Corinthians 13 (spiritual gifts such as discernment), and Isaiah 53:5 (healing) are used to support activities Pentecostals may engage in.

¹⁴Renita J. Weems "Reading her Way through the Struggle: African American Women and the Bible" in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*. Cain Hope Felder, ed.(Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991) 63

¹⁵David Douglas Daniels. "The Cultural Renewal of Slave Religion: Charles Price Jones and the Emergence of the Holiness Movement in Mississippi." Dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1992., 62

¹⁶Elsie Mason, *The History and Life Work of C.H. Mason*, (Memphis COGIC Publishing House, 1924)54. This is a text of a sermon preached by Mason, in which he describes the guidelines for the 'holy dance' in COGIC, defined as "It is not to satisfy the lust of the flesh, or the carnal appetite as the world's dance, but to glorify God and satisfy the soul. The world dances of the world, about the world and to the world."

The admonitions to teaching “sound doctrine”, especially in the Women’s Department is due to the position of the Bible in COGIC as the primary text in which to find the will of God. COGIC members were and are ‘people of the Book.’¹⁷ However, that did not make COGIC men and women fundamentalists. As ethicist Cheryl Sanders terms them, they were “liberal literalists”. The terminology of liberal literalist means that a) on the one hand, the members are liberal because they do not follow uncritical readings of Scripture that support the status quo of those who used the Bible to justify racist intents. Like the Baptist doctrines, the Bible was used in COGIC to promote racial uplift.¹⁸ On the other hand b) COGIC members are also literalists because they do not wish to give up the authority and power of scripture to forces of modernity. In short, they employ a hermeneutic of suspicion towards the use of the Bible as a tool of oppression, yet on the other hand, their interpretations remain mainstream, semi-egalitarian, and praxis driven.¹⁹

The women of COGIC, placing their trust in the foundation of the Bible and its teachings, found themselves in a peculiar space of having to navigate the conflicting interpretations that surrounded them during the early days of the Women’s Department. The Bible was used to support racial inequality and gender roles in southern culture, but for African Americans, it was a tool of liberation and hope for oppressed people.²⁰ The Women of COGIC, in the Prayer and Bible bands, had to employ a sophisticated hermeneutic in order to navigate the various interpretations . By moving between the liberal and the literal, they were able to employ scripture to empower their teaching, and to reinforce those admonitions that believed were detrimental to the delicate balance of gender relations . Mother Robinson used this tactic ingeniously to mobilize women for service and discourage them from pursuing preaching roles:

¹⁷Cheryl Jeanne Sanders. *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 138

¹⁸Daniels, 72

¹⁹Ibid, 138

²⁰Weems, 59

The women were turned over to me and I asked, how many preachers are there? Thirty-two stood up. I asked, who told you to preach? I took them right down to the Bible. One said that God had spoken to her out of the cloud and told her to preach, out of the air, I said, well, the devil is the prince of the air and no one told you to preach but the devil. This is the way I started to work in this church. I began to teach. The saints need to be taught. Do you know this? ²¹

By establishing the Bible as the basis for rules, Mother Robinson positioned herself and the other Church Mothers she appointed as the rightful interpreters of Scripture, and its rules. If another woman thought that her interpretation was incorrect, as in the above example, she could always be refuted on the basis of the older women's interpretation of scripture. A Church Mother's Biblical interpretation as a result of her experience was in line with the premise that holiness groups pair Biblical authority with subjective interpretations of scripture when women attain positions of leadership. ²² COGIC was no exception. The interpretation of scripture by Church Mothers in COGIC was not just random interpretation; rather, it was filtered through the theological lens of Holiness- Pentecostal church doctrines, namely, sanctification.

The theological premises surrounding sanctification, the outward manifestation process of holiness doctrines, formed the core beliefs derived from the Bible that motivated COGIC Women's Departments beliefs, actions, and purpose. ²³ COGIC, deriving from a split from Black Baptists of the 19th century, took their definitions primarily from Baptist definitions on the purpose and definition of what comprised the church. Black Baptist conventions used the Hiscox directory, a guide for rules in Baptist Churches. These Baptist churches took their definition of holiness or sanctification from Biblical texts outlined in the directory.

²¹“The Voice of Mother Robinson-First General Supervisor of Women, Churches of God in Christ, Inc.” *The Whole Truth*, 1968, 3.

²²Nancy Hardesty, Lucille Sider Dayton, and Donald Dayton, “Women in the Holiness Movement: Feminism in the Evangelical Tradition” in *Women of Spirit*. Rosemary and Eleanor McLaughlin Ruther, eds.(New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979) 241-248

²³Sanctification and holiness are sometimes used interchangeably as definitions to describe holiness Pentecostal churches, or as Zora Neale Hurston coined them, Sanctified Churches. In order to avoid confusion, I am using holiness as the descriptor of the Biblical terminology, while the term sanctification is the process of achieving holiness.

Holiness: this makes a true church, because only such as are born of the Spirit, and become new creatures in Jesus, are suitable persons to be, or can properly become, members of it. They are called “saints”-sanctified ones. “Unto the church of God, which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints. I Cor 1:2 ‘ As the elect of God, holy and beloved.” Col 3:1-2 “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices.” I Pet. 2:5 This holiness may be perfect and absolute as to any one member, much less as to the entire body, Nevertheless it is what the gospel claims and is the prevailing work of those who are united to Christ, as the Branch is to the vine. Being characteristic, therefore, of individual believers, it becomes characteristic of the congregation of believers.²⁴

Interestingly, this text was taken from a book on COGIC history and doctrine, quoted verbatim by the author. The influence of the Baptist doctrines and beliefs about holiness came directly from the directory. Bishop Mason and Mother Robinson used these to inform COGIC beliefs surrounding holiness. COGIC teachings on sanctification also derived from the teachings of Methodist theologian and preacher John Wesley. The doctrine of sanctification, originating with John Wesley, is the belief that there is a second work of grace that God does in the believer’s life that occurs after salvation. Sanctification, also sometimes called Christian perfection, allows the believer to live a life victorious over sin.²⁵ This “sinless” life would include godly discipline, careful self examination, discipline and methodical devotion.²⁶ Sanctification also gives a distinctive ethical identity of being set apart for God, literally, to be made holy, hence, the term holiness.²⁷ In COGIC, this emphasis on the doctrine of sanctification came from the founder C.H. Mason’s experience of sanctification in 1893. The primary text that Mason used regarding

²⁴Charles H. Pleas. *Fifty Years Achievement, 1906-1956: A Period in the History of the Church of God in Christ*. (Memphis Tennessee: COGIC Public Relations, 1956, reprint 1991) 77

²⁵This doctrine of Christian perfection was also called Keswick doctrines, from the area of England it originated in. See Donald Dayton, *Theological roots of Pentecostalism*, 104-106

²⁶For a more thorough description and exegesis of sanctification, see Dayton, p.18, 46-51 and Vinson Synan. *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth century*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1997)., 6-8, 106

²⁷Sanders 58

sanctification was John 17:17, which reads: “Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is Truth”.²⁸ Masons’ definition of sanctification meant that freedom and separation from sin combined with the presence of power in the ministry, or what Pentecostals call the anointing. This anointing, present only in a sanctified person, allowed one to be able to draw others to God, lead revivals, and make conversion experiences happen quickly.²⁹ The experience of sanctification for Mason meant that one would hear God speak through scripture, and would refrain from ‘frivolity’ that took away from Christian witness.³⁰ Masons’ definition of sanctification that he brought into COGIC influenced the idea, through the reading of John 17:17, that sanctification could be found in the word of God, the Bible, because the Bible was the truth.

Mother Robinson, also involved in the holiness movement through her relationship with Joanna Moore prior to joining COGIC, identified with and recognized this materiality of sanctification in the scripture. For Mother Robinson however, her ideas of sanctification also came out of Joanna Moore’s interpretation of sanctification as endowment of power for service. This reformed formulation of the doctrine of sanctification resulted in the self-sacrificing ideals of missions work and building up of the family.³¹ The idea of scripture being a part of sanctification of the believer, therefore, formed an important foundational belief for the Women’s Department. Mother Robinson regarded scripture as the rule for living stating that ‘Everything God wants us to do is laid down in the Bible.’³² The Bible, therefore, becomes the primary text for the rules and beliefs that comprise the Women’s Department. The Bible as the text for rules in COGIC has its basis in the Hiscox directory as well. The directory notes several ‘rules’ from a Biblical basis that were incorporated into the Women’s Department Teachings in COGIC. They are quoted in COGIC documents from the Hiscox directory as follows:

²⁸Mason, 49

²⁹Daniels, 92-93

³⁰Ibid, 93

³¹Daniels, 163

³²*The Whole Truth*, 1968, 3

Resolved, that in our opinion, the use of intoxicating drinks as beverage, and also the manufacture and sale of the same for that purpose, are contrary to Christian morals, injurious to personal piety, and a hindrance to the gospel:...(5) Resolved, we emphatically discountenance and condemn the practice of church members frequenting theater and other similar places of amusement, as inconsistent with Christian profession, detrimental to personal piety, and pernicious in the influence of its example on others (7) Resolved, that we disapprove of Christians connecting themselves with secret, oath-bound societies, as being needless, profitless, and an offense and grief to many good people: and not conducive to piety or to Christian usefulness.³³

The Hiscox directory, based upon Biblical teachings and Baptist notions of membership in the church, was incorporated wholesale into COGIC, and used as a template in identifying behaviors and practices that were not acceptable. Though the use of the Bible in COGIC was similar, what differed was the emphasis placed on particular passages that highlighted the important beliefs of COGIC structure. The core belief of sanctification was paramount to all teachings that originated in scriptures for the Women's Department. The first auxiliary, the Prayer and Bible band, was committed solely to the purpose of prayer and Bible study, If the message of sanctification was the core to COGIC structure and identity, the Bible takes on major significance as the primary teaching text, hence, the heavy emphasis on home Bible studies with the women.

Sanctification

The Bible served as the prime introduction to the beliefs of COGIC through the Prayer and Bible band which met weekly. In these studies, the teachings that were important, sanctification, and how to achieve sanctification through consecration, sacrifice, and cleansing was discussed. Sanctification, the primary beliefs of the structure of the Women's Department, was often expressed in a familiar phrase, "I am Saved, Sanctified, and Filled with the Holy Ghost." This testimony or confessional formula was integral to the teachings of the Women's

³³Pleas, 78

Department.³⁴ Sanctification was an experience that in COGIC, had to happen prior to speaking in tongues. Sanctification meant that one was set apart for the work of the Lord. It also meant that a believer was able to walk free from sin in his or her everyday life.³⁵ In COGIC, one had to experience sanctification before experiencing the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, also known as speaking in tongues. As a foundational belief, sanctification and proof of it operated as a way to differentiate COGIC members from outsiders. Specific steps in the COGIC sanctification process identified women who were allowed to be in the Women's Department, those who were capable of leadership roles as church mothers, missionaries or evangelists, and identify those who were not sanctified so that they could either be 'worked on' or expelled from the community.³⁶

In order for this identification process to work, the steps toward sanctification were recognizable and measurable. The steps towards sanctification were consecration, sacrifice, and cleansing. Each of these steps towards sanctification was found in Biblical beliefs Mother Robinson and other Church Mothers used to test women against the word of God, their suitability for leadership, and role in imparting COGIC beliefs to others.

Consecration

Consecration can be described as setting apart, a diligence to follow after God and the rules (beliefs) of the Bible, placing them first before family or friends. For Mother Robinson, consecration began with the passage of Scripture she used as her consideration in founding the Women's department, Jeremiah 9: 17-20.

Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, consider ye, and call for the mourning women, that they

³⁴Sanders, 58

³⁵Sanctification in COGIC comes out of two streams of 19th century ideas about sanctification, cleansing versus empowerment for service, as discussed in the introduction of this work. What is constant, is the idea that the sanctified person can remain free from the temptations of sin, but differing holiness writers had theories about to what degree one could be sinless in life on earth.

³⁶Sanctification, a theology centered on the experiential, was another facet of Holiness receptivity to women's leadership. See Hardesty, Dayton and Dayton 241-248

may come, and call fro the cunning women, that they may come. “And let them make haste to take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run with tears, and out eyelids gush out with waters. For a voice of wailing is heard out of Zion, how we are spoiled! We are greatly confounded because we have forsaken the land, because out dwellings have cast us out. Yet we have heard the word of the Lord, o ye women and let our ears receive the words of His Mouth, and teach your daughters wailing and everyone her neighbor lamentation.”

This text points to a practice begun by Mother Robinson in the Women’s Department, namely the practice of setting aside time for prayer and consecration to God. The scripture highlights women, the professional mourners taking their place to pray and wail for Israel. In the COGIC tradition, this is the time that women set aside for intense prayer and consecration, called shut-ins. Typical early methods of consecration included protracted overnight prayer times that included fasting and intensive Bible studies. The overnight prayer meetings, called shut-ins, were usually held overnight at the church, starting at dusk and breaking up the next morning . These communal, seldom solitary practices, intensified solidarity and quickly identified those who were unwilling to consecrate themselves. Participants would spend all night in prayer, oftentimes crying out in loud voices, and tears. Fasting usually happened prior to the prayer meeting, and three days of fasting with no food nor water to pass one’s lips was a usual proscription. This practice of fasting, found in several old and New Testament scriptures, was believed to cure one of sickness, bondage, or provide breakthroughs in prayer.

Fasting is another powerful offensive spiritual weapon. Without this weapon you are not fully equipped for battle. Just as we have been equipped with the weapon of prayer, God wants us to be equipped with the weapon of fasting. Prayer and fasting go together to penetrate and to break through every resistance that the enemy has built. Fasting strengthens and intensifies our prayers. As you begin to use your spiritual weapon of fasting, as you humble yourself through fasting and prayer before God, you will break through enemy territories and claim victory in every circumstance. God is calling all of His people saints to “Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly. To sanctify means to set apart for God- a fast to consecrate ourselves for the work He has given us to do, to humble ourselves before God, and to repent of all

sin and disobedience in our lives. Joel 2;15; Exodus 34:38, Leviticus 23:27; Deut. 9:9;

Samuel 7:6.³⁷

The combination of prayer and fasting was used to set a right attitude towards consecrating oneself. For the women of COGIC, this was a very important element in the sanctification process. Since there was not a distinct process of ascending to a position of Church Mother, missionary, or evangelist, consistent consecration meant that you would at least be noticed for a potential leadership position. Participation in numerous prayer and fasting regiments, consistent study of the Bible and attendance at Prayer and Bible Bands would show to the leadership those women who were prepared and spiritually mature to take on additional leadership duties such as a Church Mother or State mother. Consecration insured that the participant would be humble, willing to follow orders, and to obey the Word of God. The method of consecration also subjected women to the scrutiny of the Church Mothers, revealing what areas of weakness existed in their lives. Tarrying for the baptism of the Holy Spirit was also an element of consecration, although only after most of the other criteria for sanctification had been met. Speaking in tongues, though valued and important, was the end of the sanctification processes and not the sole reason for it. The process of consecration was to put aside those things that were not Christlike. The sinful nature had to be conquered through fasting and prayer to become spiritually strong, mature, and able to withstand the temptations of the world and the devil.

Sacrifice

Sacrifice is an associated belief of sanctification. Connected with monetary offerings mainly, sacrifices manifested in the Biblical principle of tithes or offerings to COGIC. In the printed 1926 rules for the Women's work, Mother Robinson outlines the sacrificial ideal. "All members and missionaries are requested to pay their tithes and offerings according to scriptures Malachi 3:8-12, Nehemiah 13:12, Matthew 23:23, St. Luke 11:42. They must attend services in

³⁷ Dr. Sister Pearl Page Brown. *Sewing Circle Artistic fingers, The Church of God in Christ Inc. Women's International convention*, Unk., 15. These are reprints of earlier teachings on prayer and fasting.

their own church.”³⁸By following the Biblical admonitions to give tithes and offerings, women proved they were serious about sanctification by giving funds to the church.³⁹ In the minutes of the 1926 convocation, page after pages of monetary offerings by women to the Women’s Department are recorded, as well as each State Mothers’ contributions to the Women’s Department, and Mother Robinson. Names of each Prayer and Bible Band, Sunshine Band, Evangelists and missionaries were listed, along with the amount of the offering or tithe given to support the Women’s Department and the denomination.⁴⁰ The sacrificial offering of money was an important belief in that it fueled the resources of the Women’s Department and also provided a way to interpret which ministries were well supported by the membership. At times, support had to be extracted from the membership with a bit of cajoling.

Precious ones, it is both unfair and wrong to take up money all through the year for the Home and Foreign Missions, and then use it for other necessities aside from the purpose for which it was intended. Do you think it is right to have an auxiliary treasury in your church which is meant to give missionary assistance both at home and abroad, and then not allow a penny of it to be sent to its proper source? .. Do you think it is right to take the money which is solicited for the missions and pay for cars, for suits of clothes and for different improvements in homes, and then have a very, very little of it find its way to the home and foreign missions Board?⁴¹

Sacrifice may have been an important belief component of sanctification, however, it was often to enforce and regulate. The above quote was taken during the Depression, a time of deep personal sacrifice for many who were without jobs and income.

³⁸Lillian Brooks Coffey. *Yearbook of the Church of God in Christ for the year 1926*, (Memphis, Tennessee, 1926) 107-124

³⁹This practice of offerings and tithes still continues in the Women’s Department of COGIC today, with districts giving offerings to the General Supervisor, the State and local church mother, and the denomination.

⁴⁰Ibid

⁴¹ “Notice, Omaha, Neb”. *The Whole Truth*, October 1931, 14 col.1,

Cleansing

The most important facet of sanctification was the cleansing phase. If a person had been cleansed by the word, the Bible, with outward visible signs, then the work of sanctification could be said to have taken hold of an individual. In Biblical terms, cleansing meant that the ways and trappings of the world, such as alcohol consumption, immodest dress, and coarse speaking would be put aside for more godly behavior. Numerous admonitions and teaching from the Holiness movement were incorporated into COGIC Holiness-Pentecostal understandings of the pathway to sanctification. Outward signs of sanctification would manifest themselves in different styles of dress not associated with the mainstream fashions of the day.

Rule #4. All members and missionaries must not wear hats with flowers or feathers nor Short Dresses, Split Skirts or Short Sleeves. Young women who have a desire or gift to do missionary work should go to the aged or more experienced women. Rule #5. All members and missionaries must dress in modest apparel as becometh holiness, professing Godliness with good work.⁴²

“Dressing as becometh holiness” was an important factor in determining if a woman was sanctified . Sanctification meant that one’s dress should not be flashy or revealing. The dress of holiness was plain, with no adornment, in keeping with the Biblical admonitions of I Timothy 2: 9-10 and I Peter 3:3, which encouraged dressing “as becometh holiness”. This manner of dress, eschewing ornate garments, feathers and the like, was the appropriate standard for a sanctified woman.⁴³ Mother Robinson’s usual attire was a starched black skirt and white blouse, covering her entire arms down to the wrists.⁴⁴ The same attire was worn by most of the rural women’s

⁴² Yearbook of the Church of God in Christ, 1926, 148

⁴³ Both scriptures advocate modest apparel, non- braided hair, and putting away of gold.

⁴⁴Sherry Dupree, interview by author, Tallahassee, Florida, June 1996. Ms. Dupree had interviewed an older COGIC Mother who had ironed garments for Mother Robinson. The Church mother complained about the heavy starching she had to do to Robinson’s white bouses and black skirts so that “Mother would be satisfied.”

membership of COGIC in the early days, insuring uniformity.⁴⁵ However, the membership of the Women's Department of COGIC resided largely in urban areas as a result of the Great Migration, and the clothing styles in the cities proved problematic in keeping the standards of clothing befitting holiness consistent throughout the Women's Department.

In Isaiah 20, God told Isaiah to walk naked before the people for three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and Ethiopia. He said the Assyrians would come up and take the Ethiopians barefoot and naked, captive with their buttocks showing. Well, this is the time to teach about the buttocks. When the women stoop down you can see their buttocks. We are living in that day right now. So, the women must put their dresses down. The people must be taught. They are getting away from God. Do you not see the women losing their modesty? Don't you see it as a lust breeder? The word says, if a man looks on a woman to lust after her he has already committed adultery in his heart. So, a man just looks at a woman, and would like to be with her, he sees her legs and sees how she looks, he has committed adultery without touching her. The women should keep their dresses down. My nephew is a wicked young man but he said to me, Aunt Lizzie, the mothers ought to get the ankles to give a party and invite the dresses down to it because you can't tell the church women from the street women now."⁴⁶

The crux of the attire of holiness for COGIC women' was not only to emulate holiness in their behavior, but to deter men from being attracted to their bodies. The directness of the quote from Mother Robinson shows the link between sanctification and sexual behavior. If a woman was not dressed in a fashion becoming holiness, sexual sins such as adultery and lust were surely to become prevalent in the men. It was the responsibility of the women to maintain the standards of holiness through their dress. Any split, short skirt or flesh exposed could be a temptation to engage in sex. By regulating women's dress, both men and women would be subject to restraints upon sexual behavior. Even armpits were seen as possible areas for sexual excitement, and long sleeves, even in summertime was the norm.⁴⁷ Poems were written and recited in church

⁴⁵Memphis Corporate Salute to COGIC, 1996, 21.

⁴⁶"The Voice of Mother Robinson-First General Supervisor of Women, Churches of God in Christ, Inc." *The Whole Truth*, unk 1968, p.3. col 5 , 3

⁴⁷ In a discussion with several COGIC women, the reason why short sleeves or sleeveless dresses were frowned upon by COGIC Church Mothers to this day, was that the armpits were

addressing the dress regulations concerning sanctified women.

When I come to church look what I see, real short dresses, slit skirts and rusty knees.
Change the style,
Sometimes that skirt's split front, side and back,
Somebody pass that sister a pin or a tack
When they walk that slit gaps open wide, anyone can see everything inside..
Sometimes that slit is cut up so high, it goes past the knee and you can see the thigh.....⁴⁸

Sanctified women's dress, in addition to repelling adulterous men within the church, helped to protect women who traveled for employment or missionary work. The plain attire of holiness acted as a deterrent to men that attempted to engage or attack women traveling alone that they were respectable women. The prevalent images of black women in the south as seductresses and easy prey for both black and white men alike. Holiness dress not only served the outward identification of a sanctified woman, but provided protection as well. The politics of respectability, coined by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in her work on Black Baptist women, *Righteous Discontent*, can also be applied to COGIC women both as a respectability issue and a theological issue. Taking the politics of respectability, adding the process of sanctification, and incorporating it into the very structure of the Women's Department, the auxiliaries served to reinforce the standards of dressing as "becometh holiness". Auxiliaries like the sewing circle served as a primary means to ensure holy dress. Patterns for modestly cloths or lap cloths to be placed across the lap of a woman with a short skirt in the congregation, dickies for low-cut necklines, fixing the split, and patterns to convert pants into skirts were all employed in the

considered to be suggestive of female genitalia. The analogy was lost upon the author until the realization that shaving of underarms and legs for American women became more of a grooming ritual after WWII, and prior to, women did not shave their underarms. Hence, the analogy.

⁴⁸Poem, Lord, Change the Style, By Lucy Flagg, date unknown. Other interesting lines include, We used to be too modest to show under the arm, but now we expose our pits and call it "charm"

service of sanctified dressing.⁴⁹

Sanctified clothing was not only a sexual deterrent, it also expressed purity and consecration. In some COGIC churches, the Church Mothers wore white every Sunday, although the practice of wearing white began to occur during Women's Day at the General Convocation and then in the 1950's at the Women's International Convention. White and black were traditional colors that indicated sanctification or consecration. Colors such as red or other brights were virtually non-existent in the early days of the Women's Department, red being associated with Jezebel, wife of Ahab in the Old Testament story.⁵⁰ White attire served to surrender all marks of personal style and distinctiveness in favor of being totally identified with the worshiping community and God.⁵¹ Whenever white was worn by COGIC women, it was symbolic of sanctification and purity, not to be confused with any of the racial issues of the day.

If clothing was used as a sexual deterrent, then sexual issues also played a major role in interpreting the beliefs of sanctification. Those who were unmarried, male or female, were expected to be celibate. The Purity Class was the primary vehicle for the interpretation of the beliefs of sanctification in sexual matters, although issues were also taught in the Prayer and Bible band. Biblical admonitions against premarital sex, found in I Corinthians 6 and 7, were regular topics for both Prayer and Bible band and Purity Class. Men and women in the ministry were given strict rules about traveling together on church activities. "Rule #6. That no young missionary to go here and there with any Elder or Brother for missionary work without the consent of their State Mother and pastor." Young female missionaries were paired off with older women as partners in Women's Department activities. Mother Robinson even traveled with her

⁴⁹Dr. Sister Pearl Page Brown. *Sewing Circle Artistic fingers, The Church of God in Christ Inc. Women's International Convention*, Unk., 34. The term "to fix the split" meant to close the split in skirts that were open to allow movement. Hems were also measured at times in the congregation to ensure skirts were of a 'modest length'

⁵⁰Pearl McCullom. "Purity Column." *The Evangelist Speaks*, November - December 1954 1954, 2-3. "Jezebel's main weapon of prey was her Red painted cheeks and lips...the test of ages has proved that Lustful debased advances from the opposite sex is from Red on the Face!!"

⁵¹Sanders, 68-69

daughter Ida Baker to ensure that there would be no whispers about her while traveling.⁵² Sexual impropriety was foremost on Mother Robinson's mind for unmarried women, and for those women who were unmarried, pressure was placed upon them to marry. Mother Robinson even went to great lengths to insure that there would be "no fornication among her people", going as far to have arranged marriages between unmarried couples that she perceived would not be able to "hold on".⁵³ It was incumbent upon the women of COGIC, not the men, to ensure that they were not the seductresses that would lead men astray.

The purpose of Holy Women is to LURE men into the body of Christ by lifting him up, and not to LURE them to their own bodies by lifting IT up. So, "Shun THE VERY APPEARANCE OF EVIL" saith the Lord...Oh, you want a nice boy friend or a good husband,. Well, I am most certain you would like one who is true to himself, to God and to you. One who will protect your Moral Standing and look into the Future with you and plan that Ideal Christian Home. One who is everything any woman would desire. NOW, that kind is attracted to you through BEAUTY OF CHARACTER AND CONDUCT. Through your pleasing personality and preparation for life. Through your LIFE and Works in the BEAUTY OF HOLINESS. LIPSTICK, ROUGE AND MAKEUP MAY DO HARM TO YOUR COMPLEXION, BUT THEY MEAN DEATH TO YOUR MORAL RATING AS A SAINT."⁵⁴

"Saint", in COGIC terminology, is used as a term of address, signifying a sanctified individual.⁵⁵ A saint is someone who has gone through all the stages of the sanctification rules,

⁵²Charles H. Pleas. *Fifty Years Achievement, 1906-1956: A Period in the History of the Church of God in Christ*. Memphis Tennessee: COGIC Public Relations, 1956, reprint 1991., 14. Robinson traveled with several women in the beginning before making them State Mothers, then took daughter Ida along.

⁵³ Leila Mason Byas, Interviewed by the author, June 1996. See also DuPree. 473. In an interview with Estella Cobb, by Sherry DuPree, Mother Cobb recounts that Mother Robinson chose her husband, but that they were saved and not offended by this pre-nuptial arrangement.

⁵⁴"Make Up". *Purity Column, The Evangelist Speaks*, Pearl McCullom November - December 1954, 3 the article discussed Jezebel, and her wiles.

⁵⁵See Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church*, 103. and Sanders, *Saints in Exile*,3

and exemplifies it in dress, belief, and behavior. The title of saint sets a person apart as a member of a Sanctified or Holiness-Pentecostal church. Comment such as “there goes a saint”, or “the saints are here,” is a recognition of persons with like-minded beliefs identifiable by dress, lack of makeup, and group behavior. Women, therefore, or saints, embodying the sanctification beliefs, would be able to lure men to Christ, not to themselves by their holy demeanor and behavior. The admonitions in most of COGIC literature regarding sexuality and Christian behavior are directed primarily at the women’s responsibility in being chaste and holy, not attracting men through their dress, makeup and behavior. In order to fulfill the requirements to be called a saint (also meaning sanctified) all manners of adornment that would call attention to self rather than God is frowned upon. In order to be considered attractive, natural beauty was the goal for COGIC women. Makeup or other adornment under Mother Robinson’s leadership of the Women’s Department would have been seen as blatantly sexual in nature, whorish, and unfitting to a holiness woman. The appearance-oriented rules or beliefs regarding sanctification have sexuality at their core. In order to control the physical impulses regarding sexual attraction, married or unmarried, rules were enforced regarding attire and makeup. The emphasis was placed entirely upon heterosexual behavior. With regards to other sexual preferences, the literature of COGIC is silent during this time. All sexual practices outside of the bond of marriage in COGIC would have been considered sinful, like most Black or Evangelical churches of the day.⁵⁶

This did not mean that sanctification rules were always kept. Despite all of the admonitions regarding holiness, plenty of the COGIC minutes were given over to expelling members, male and female, for unlawful marriages and inappropriate behavior. However, the bulk of the pronouncements in COGIC on sanctification came from the Women’s Department and its auxiliaries. Those who did not adhere to the rules were sanctioned or censured by Church Mothers. Loss of leadership would have an adverse effect upon a woman’s standing within the Women’s Department and COGIC.⁵⁷ . Reminders that assisted to reinforce sanctification rules

⁵⁶One of the more famous COGIC chroniclers, James Tinney, was expelled from COGIC in the 1980's due to his sexual orientation. His work in retrieving COGIC documents and stories however, is invaluable, and this author is in debt to him.

⁵⁷Sherkat, 25.

and beliefs were gender, racial, and cultural notions of the time, and printed materials that taught about sanctification. These notions strengthened the Biblical beliefs of sanctification into a solid doctrinal base for the Women's Department, and COGIC.

Gender

In the COGIC Women's Department, a specific interpretation of gender functioned as a belief in COGIC. The cultural roles for men and women of the late nineteenth and twentieth were based upon Biblical interpretations of men as the heads of households. Those roles in turn were presented not as doctrinal teachings, but to emulate what the theological notions of Sanctification would represent in a saint's life. The training of Mother Robinson as a Baptist matron, as well as the influence of her mentor, Joanna P. Moore, provided the foundational basis of motherhood as the primary beliefs of women's roles in COGIC. Mothers' training schools, Bible bands, and the like, were designed to teach women the rules of homemaking and child rearing based on Biblical principles.⁵⁸ By using Moore's monthly publication *Hope*, the Women's Department utilized its teachings concerning women's roles to strengthen the schematic convictions of the Biblical roles espoused for women. *Hope* included sections such as homemaking and care of children, social purity, temperance, and Bible band lessons.⁵⁹ The heavy emphasis on Motherhood as a Biblical adoption stemmed from late 19th century. With greater industrialization, the end of the Civil War, the responsibility for child rearing rested upon the shoulders of the woman.⁶⁰ Newly freed African American women, however did not have the luxury of remaining home. Their husbands also worked long hours just as many of them did, requiring women to take a more prominent role

⁵⁸Joanna P. Moore. *In Christ's Stead*. Chicago, Il.: Women's Baptist Home Mission Society, 1902., 177-179

⁵⁹Ibid, 179

⁶⁰Betty A. DeBerg. *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism*. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1990.) , 23

in the motherhood and domestic duties. Black women incurred double household and domestic duties for both white women's children and households and their own. In addition, the destruction of the nuclear family due to slavery continued to have a hold in the black community of the early 20th century. With migration and the splitting of families, motherhood, whether blood relation or fictive, played an important role in the gender structure of COGIC and the Women's Department.

Mother Robinson also set the standard from scripture what the roles for women were in the church. In the 1926 minutes from the general convocation, the morning session of the ninth day was given to the women, and the topic was "Women's Place in the church". The Scripture references Mother Robinson used were the following: Joel 2:28-29, Micah 6:4; Exodus 15:20; 2 Kings 22:14-20; Luke 8:1-3; Acts 9:36; Acts 18:1-4; and 2 Samuel 16-20. ⁶¹ Gleaning from the references, Mother Robinson seems to infer from the passages women's roles as: Prophetesses (Joel and 2 Kings), helpmeets and providers (Luke, Acts 9:36) leaders (Micah) and Missionaries (Acts 18:1-4.) Each one of these conforms to Holiness- Pentecostal beliefs about women's roles and duties in the church. The scripture reference Mother Robinson was reputed to refer to most often teaching women on their roles, was from Titus.

But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things, that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. (TITUS 2: 1-5, King James Version). ⁶²

Older women were the women that Mother Robinson appointed as State mothers, and local church mothers. Church Mothers, were expected to be holy (sanctified), abstaining from alcohol, not to be false accusers, or a troublemaker. Admonitions against cliques, favoritism, and disobedience were plentiful. The teachings to the younger women to love their husbands and

⁶¹1926 Convocation booklet, 54

⁶²Interview in Omaha, 7/2000

children, to be good keepers of the home, chaste, discreet and obedient summarize succinctly the ideals of Victorian womanhood, Southern womanhood, and Black women's status as upholders of the race and supporters of Black men. Despite all of the beliefs surrounding gender roles however, women who occasionally stepped out of their roles to criticize were summarily described as troublemakers or ignorant.

_____ asked Eld. Mason to advised the council what disposition to make of Sister Strickland as she ans Eld. Roberts was involved in the matter with Eld. Kirvin and she is out of office on account of it and Eld. Roberts is not in office and besides this Sister Strickland threatens to sue the brotherhood. Elder Mason answered that she could not sue one is in office for any definite time. Overseer advised council not to trouble themselves about she threatens as she is a woman and she speaks many things that are unsound.⁶³

Bishop Mason did not think much of Stricklands' threats, and considered her unreliable because she was a woman. It is unclear whether Mason had a particular position on women in general, yet this statement suggests that he considered them to have a specific place in the denomination, and that their rights were not equal to men's. Women of COGIC, while having a degree of autonomy, found their status defined by the gender structures of the early twentieth century. The Bible provided the schematic guidelines for gender beliefs within the women's Department of COGIC, but the reinforcement of the beliefs came from the surrounding Victorian and fundamentalist cultural norms.

The construction of gender roles for black women cannot be separated from racial issues. Racist ideologies placed African American women in peril. Black women, employed as domestic workers, teachers, factory laborers and the like, found themselves classed differently than white women, especially in the South on the basis of their skin color. Black women were subjected repeatedly to ill treatment on the part of their employers and men, both black and white, as a result of negative stereotypes. Portrayed as shiftless, promiscuous, and sassy, even black

⁶³*Minutes of the General Convocation of the Church of God in Christ*. Memphis, Tennessee, 1919-1932. 78. Strickland had been the recording secretary since the early 20's . It is unclear why she wanted to sue, but litigation in COGIC was nothing new.

men joined in the criticism and stereotyping of black women. Said one preacher: "It is often the case, that by failing to be a keeper at home, and to preserve herself chaste and pure, she (black women) forfeits the love and respect of her husband, and this renders his marriage distasteful and repulsive."⁶⁴ The quest to form Black women into the image of true womanhood and gendered ideals had racial overtones. By molding Black women into the image of womanhood, based on Biblical constructions of the family, black men could escape from the emasculated images of Uncle Tom and Sambo to become truly masculine, truly Christian.⁶⁵ With Jim Crow, and the pressures of uplifting of the race, women often found themselves in various predicaments. Arenia Mallory found herself in that very situation while traveling to take her job at the COGIC Saints Industrial School, in Lexington, Mississippi.

All colored change cars here! Arenia came alive with shock and anger. She had known what she might have to face if she went south. Even her mother had warned her. They'll hang you if you go down there and meddle around. ..Arenia felt somehow degraded as she gathered up her bags and struggled out into the cold Memphis night. The conductor's rough voice, rougher than his hand had been, followed her along the platform, Ooo-weee! Just look at that good lookin' coon.⁶⁶

In southern railway transport, the ladies' car was reserved for white women only, and those black women who attempted to ride in it were summarily chastised and moved. Mallory, who was able to ride the car in the North, was made to move upon her arrival in the South. The story, although written by one of her assistants, highlights the situation clearly. Though dressed as a saint, comporting herself, she was still a victim of sexist and racist overtones from the white

⁶⁴Deborah Gray White. *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves*. (New York: London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999.) 64. Though a quote by an AME bishop, the relevance to the woman as the 'homemaker' transcends the denominational boundaries.

⁶⁵Patricia Morton. *Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women* Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies, Number 144. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) 45

⁶⁶Dovie Marie Simmons, Martin, Olivia L. *Down Behind the Sun: The Story of Arenia Conelia Mallory*. (Memphis, Tennessee: Riverside Press, 1983) 10

conductor. Such was the lot of COGIC women, caught between the rules of the Bible and the rule of man. The only solace and hope that could be offered, was to trust in the Biblical teachings that enabled the women to see themselves as worthy.

The Bible, therefore, provided the foundational beliefs of sanctification and gender to the Women's Department structure. The interpretation of Scripture through the theological lens of sanctification made holiness the standard of social behavior and action within the Women's Department of COGIC. Consecration, sacrifice and cleansing, practices of the sanctified life, began as beliefs or rules of behavior for the "saint". These practices, such as prayer, fasting, modest dressing and chastity, introduced rules to enter the structured organization of the Women's department. These rules helped to define the expectations of the Church Mothers for their members, articulated the theological stance of the denomination, and set apart members from other religious groups. Those women who chose to become saints adhered to the beliefs in the hopes that they would be allowed to take their place within the structure of the Women's department. Beliefs, found in the Bible and taught by Church Mothers, served in the beginning as guidelines, and were codified into doctrinal statements once the resources of the Women's Department became organized. By the 1926 Convocation, a set of rules for the Women's Work had been published for the Women's Department, and these rules or beliefs had found their way into the doctrinal statements of the Women's Department.⁶⁷ Those rules in turn, helped to define the resources available to the COGIC Women's Department. Resources, in the form of Church Mothers, Missionaries, Evangelists, and Teachers, mobilized to support and reinforce the beliefs through participation in the Women's Department Structures.

Resources Generated by the Women's Department

The Biblically based rules in the Women's Department of COGIC carried intrinsic

⁶⁷ These rules, which I have partially listed in the section on sanctification, clearly mirror and sometimes quote scriptural passages that the rule or belief is derived from. They are to be adhered to strictly by COGIC members.

rewards of service. Not only could Sanctified women serve in her home and the church, she could serve God through her work in the Women's Department. The recognition of being a Church Mother or Evangelist rendered considerations of ordination minuscule. Just as the Bible acted as repository for the beliefs that the COGIC women's espoused, it also acted as a resource to the Women's Department. The Bible as text was a resource tool of the Women's Department in the understandings of the holiness and Gender beliefs COGIC espoused.⁶⁸ Interpreters, however, were needed in order to understand the rules that were contained in the Bible. The Women's Department provided the interpreters that could convey the beliefs and worth of the Bible to potential women's Department members. These resources were in the form of Church Mothers, State Mothers, Evangelists and missionaries.

Human Resources in The Women's Department

Without the agency of women, the foundational doctrines (beliefs) of the Women's Department and COGIC would not have gained a strong firm foundation unless a centralized person articulated them. At the inception of the Women's Department, Mother Robinson as Overseer to women had the express role of foundational resource to articulate holiness beliefs. In order to formalize the structure and to make sure that the proper beliefs were being articulated to the new organization, she began to travel extensively, appointing women's leadership along the way. By traveling to 40 states instructing women how to begin Prayer and Bible Bands, she exemplified the type of resource that would be acceptable to the Women's Department and COGIC. Robinson took the responsibility for ensuring the resources by choosing the first women appointed to state Mothers. Those women chosen would have to adhere to the rules of holiness doctrine.⁶⁹ State Mothers had the primary responsibility for transmitting the beliefs to women within the auxiliaries in their states, ensuring that the membership followed the rules closely, and recruiting members who were most likely to embody principles of sanctification. As the organizational structure began to grow, women at every phase of the structure were

⁶⁸ Sewell, *A Theory of Structure*, 12

⁶⁹ Sewell, 12

introduced to the teachings (beliefs) that were important to maintain uniformity of the resources and the women who represented them. From Sunshine Band for the youth, to Purity class for teenagers, to Prayer and Bible Band for the adult women, the repetition of the various ideals of holiness were able to seep into the human resources, taking root. The modeling of these beliefs by the prominent placement of the Church Mother ensures that not only would those beliefs be reinforced in a Sunday morning service, they would be reinforced throughout the week's services and interactions between members and Church mothers. The Church Mother became the living text that embodied the beliefs, and became the resource mechanism for choosing leaders and members who were able to articulate holiness beliefs clearly.

Church Mothers were older women who had been in the denomination for a number of years. They had been studying scripture in Bible Band groups. By linking the Prayer and Bible bands, Robinson linked together two major sources for the dissemination of the beliefs regarding holiness. The resource mechanism used the Bible, in turn generated human resources through those receptive to the teachings of holiness. In order to remain a part of the group, women showed their understandings of the beliefs through their dress and behavior. The leadership that Robinson chose became the embodiment of the sanctification beliefs by emulating them every day. Women who dressed in long skirts, long sleeved blouses, unprocessed hair and no makeup would be excellent candidates for positions as Church Mothers. Their internal spirituality would be gauged through the theological lens of sanctification. Those who were not participants of the various auxiliaries faithfully would not be chosen as resources for the Women's Department. Of course, time would also have to be spent in Prayer and Bible Band, and other auxiliaries of the Women's Department. Service and sacrifice were tantamount to gaining a position as a Church Mother. Those women who were able to embody those traits were the ones chosen for leadership as State Mothers, and local church mothers.

The structure of the Prayer and Bible Bands also provided men as resources to the Women's Department. Men who were participating in local prayer and Bible bands led by Church Mothers were the ones groomed for pastoral roles.⁷⁰ In order to receive a pastorate

⁷⁰Lelia Mason Byas, Interviewed by the author June 1996. The Prayer and Bible bands were training schools in COGIC Doctrine that acted as the early 'seminaries' for both Church

however, they were had to wait until women, in their roles as Church Mothers or Missionaries, requested pastors for the ministries they had started. The practice of ‘sending back for a pastor’ was one in which women started evangelistic ministries in areas where there were no COGIC churches. When a core group of members continued to come, they would request that a man who had been trained through the structure of Prayer and Bible Bands be sent to take up the pastoral leadership of the newly formed church.⁷¹ That man, trained from the Bible Bands would have the foundation to continue to preach the doctrine of sanctification as understood by COGIC to the new converts.

The Women’s Department structure created resources through the agency of women, as well as men and children. The Women’s Department provided the structure in which the beliefs of the Bible pertaining to sanctification and gendered race constructs were taught. It also was the tool that helped to hone the doctrines of sanctification over time. These doctrines continued to be taught despite the changes in leadership over time, and reinterpreted and reiterated for new generations of COGIC men and women. The role of the Church Mothers was routinized by reinforcing the dominant beliefs of sanctification throughout the organizational structure. Routinizing the role of Church Mothers helped to complete the codification of the doctrine of sanctification within COGIC. Through strong reiteration of the doctrine by Church Mothers, the beliefs over time were kept intact. The position of the Church Mother as resource was reinforced because they were the primary teachers working with ordained pastoral leadership to insure that the doctrines were kept intact and followed. Those who did not follow them were chastised or ejected from the denomination. In this manner, though the Church Mothers did not hold an ordained position, their position relative to the ordained men of COGIC was critically important because of their roles as repositories and teachers of the doctrine core to COGIC beliefs, holiness. The Church Mothers, as primary resources, and the rules of sanctification, doctrine, combined to create a durable structure that was able to continue to convey the beliefs of holiness for COGIC.

Mother’s, evangelists, missionaries, and young pastors.

⁷¹See Pleas, 33, 67 the practice of women digging out churches, then sending for pastors in common in both Pentecostal and Baptist churches.

Habitus and COGIC

The consistency and durability of structure that arises from the participation of Church Mothers within the denomination in the Women's Department are best described by theorist Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus. The theory recognizes the mutual reproduction of beliefs and resources that constitute temporally durable structures, or habitus. The conditioning that results, holiness rules, produces a durable structure of rules that organize practices.⁷² In the case of the Women's Department, learning and emulating the practices of sanctification through the Church Mothers created a social identity recognizable inside and outside of the denomination, mainly, a "Saint", with an identifiable doctrine, holiness, achieved by sanctification. The practices of holiness, through sanctification beliefs of consecration, cleansing and sacrifice, are embodied by the social behaviors of the women who participated in the Women's Department. This practical world or world view, acts as a motivating or cognitive structure for a world in which all the procedures, paths, and results are mapped out.⁷³ The embodiment of the habitus of sanctification created a social world in which the beliefs were codified by identifiable, physical behaviors that acted as living templates to articulate sanctification doctrines.⁷⁴ These behaviors, outlined by modest dress, modest speech, and non-adornment of the person, give outward signs of an internal belief structure that on the one hand, was individual, yet an aspect of the corporate social system of COGIC. Those who did not follow in this pattern of dress were readily identified as outsiders and were not 'saints'. Those who wished to become a saint had to follow the dress code rules, or face ejection from the Women's Department structure.

⁷²Pierre Bourdieu, "Structure, habitus, and practices" in Bryan S. Turner, *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, (Malden, Massachusetts, Blackwell LTD, 2000.) 96

⁷³Ibid, 97

⁷⁴ Turner, 494. The mannerisms, dress codes, speech of holiness women of the time provides sufficient examples of how holiness through embodiment was codified into doctrine. With continual visual reminders of the garb and behavior of sanctification, the theology was routinized into the Women's Department as to the definition of a sanctified woman or saint. Over time, the dress may have changed that described holiness, but the core definition remained the same.

By making the individual bodies of women conform to ideas surrounding sanctification, the identity of the Women's Department and the identity of the denomination as a Holiness group was also made. Through self construction of the body to conform to COGIC's imagery of holiness based on their Biblical understanding, the 'self' of the denomination and the Women's Department was also constructed. This individual and corporate self construction in COGIC, was thereby codified into doctrinal statements or beliefs regarding holiness. These beliefs worked together to admit those who were willing to accept them, saints, and to omit those who would not commit to their embodiment in their person. Codification of Sanctification in COGIC did not occur merely because the chief leader, Charles Mason, articulated them in sermons. The doctrines of COGIC became codified because of the Church Mother's emulation, articulation, and embrace of these ideas and images in her person. The process of codification of holiness happened through the sanctification practices of the saints. This embodiment of the Women's Department of the habitus of sanctification, produced a history in which the past experiences of attaining sanctification codified the correctness of the practices of dress, purity and behavior. Therefore, the past was and is present in the future of the Women's Department, even when dress and comportment of sanctification would change with new leadership.⁷⁵ The work of the Women's Department in establishing the foundation of obedience of its members to sanctification provided the basis for sanctification to become a codified doctrine in COGIC. The structure of the Women's Department insured the reconstruction of women's persons into the embodiment of the sanctification beliefs of COGIC, through their exposure to the doctrines in the auxiliaries of the Women's Department.

Summary

Using Bourdieus theory of habitus alongside structuration theory helps to explain how the practices of the Women's Department shaped the beliefs of holiness in COGIC. Without the auxiliaries of the Women's Department, the sanctification and gender beliefs of the denominational leadership would not have had such a widespread acceptance and dissemination.

⁷⁵Bourdieu, 98. This change can be best exemplified in the change of leadership in the Women's Department from Robinson to Coffey as General Mother. See Chapter six.

Once the office of Church Mother was created, with corresponding auxiliaries, the teachings of sanctification and gender, based on the Biblical beliefs, could be effectively taught and embodied. Those who embraced the teachings in their individual dress and behaviors were rewarded with positions as Church Mothers, Missionaries and Evangelists. Those who did not were ostracized by the Women's Department. The interactions of both the beliefs and resources created a system within the Women's Department that acted to both sustain and grow leadership and members. In Chapter five, these changes that occurred with the change in leadership will be shown to continue to sustain the structure of the Women's Department, and at the same time allowing it to expand and form alliances with like-minded organizations.