

Editorial:

## Pentecostal Women in Missions and/or Women in Pentecostal Missions

The role of women in ministry is still a controversial topic in some Christian circles. Pentecostals, while typically conservative theologically, have been very open to the role of women in ministry from the beginning of the Modern Pentecostal Movement (which did not set well with other conservative Christian groups). There are several reasons for this. First, the role of women in ministry is predicated on the attitude of Jesus toward women (Clark); Jesus was a liberator of women in the Greco-Roman-Jewish world in which He lived. Pentecostals have historically been (and still are) Christocentric in their theology (e.g. Jesus as Savior, Jesus as Baptizer, Jesus as Healer and Jesus as Soon Coming King), and thereby, ‘as Jesus walked, we walk’. Second, a more robust engagement of the passages about women in the Bible demonstrates a lack of a clear denial of women in leadership roles (contra many who interpret I Cor. 14:34-35, and I Tim. 2: 11-15 as opposing women in ministry<sup>1</sup>) and a clear affirmation through exemplars of women in ministry/leadership (e.g. Miriam, Deborah, Phoebe). Pentecostals were/are ‘People of the Book’, and their understanding of the Scripture certainly informed their perspective. Third, Pentecostal history is filled with tales of many pioneer Pentecostal women, both single and married, that planted churches, established schools and orphanages, and reached out to the lost, dying and hurting (e.g. Aimee Semple McPherson, Christine Amelie Gibson, Maria Woodworth-Etter, Carrie Judd Montgomery, Lillian Trasher). These women had a keen sense of a divine call into ministry. For them (and us), the question was and is as one early Pentecostal noted “God Almighty is no fool—I say it with all reverence—Would He fill a woman with the Holy Ghost—endow her with ability—give her a vision for souls and then tell her to shut her mouth?”<sup>2</sup> This sense of God’s call, leading and empowerment, and its evidencing in the actual ministry, both affirmed and confirmed the women’s work in ministry.

Whereas this is true in Pentecostal history as a whole, this is also true in missions. There are many places in the history of missions that it was the women who opened the initial doors into a location, among a people group or among the outcasts (e.g. Amy Carmichael, Lottie Moon, Gladys Aylward). This trend is also found among pioneer Pentecostal women who worked in various missionary contexts.

The goal of this issue is to highlight both Pentecostal women in missions and women in Pentecostal missions. Pentecostal women in missions insofar that this issue highlights the women as Pentecostal in their beliefs and lifestyle. A Pentecostal spirituality permeated their lives and ministry in whatever capacity they were thrust into. Whether their missionary activity and ministry included life as wives (Kowalski), mothers (Bowdoin), single women (Brogden), or as women in general (Krstulovich), all live(d) in a Pentecostal framework. This issue also highlights women who operated in Pentecostal missions. By this it is meant a mission embedded in a Pentecostal spirituality, a passion for the lost, dying, and hurting, and organized in a classical Pentecostal missions agency (at least eventually). Women have been formable in their role in missions in the Assemblies of God (Kowalski), Church of God, Cleveland, Tenn. (LeRoy and Roebuck), and Church of God in Christ (Goodson). Some of these women, while becoming ‘Spirit-filled’, retained their influence within their pre-spirit-filled missions work and agency like Lilius Trotter (Brogden), while others like Lillian Trasher, who pioneered a work and was active early in the Church of God, Cleveland, Tenn., (LeRoy and Roebuck), and later the Assemblies of God (Brogden), demonstrated unique pioneering endeavors in Pentecostal agencies. While the denominational affiliations were important for support (financially and prayerfully), the affiliation did not define them. These women were first and foremost followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were women of prayer, women of the Spirit, and women, as wives and mothers, and as single women, of great Kingdom effectiveness and impact. It is our hope that this volume both honors those who have gone before, and challenges the next generation, not to try to ‘fill the shoes’ of these mighty women of faith and ministry, but rather to take strides to ‘stand on the shoulders’ of these saints who have gone before. All to the glory of God.

Paul W. Lewis, Editor

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<sup>1</sup> See Deborah Gill and Barbara Cavaness, *God’s Women: Then and Now* (Springfield, MO: Grace & Truth, 2004); and Craig Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1992), among many other works.

<sup>2</sup> From Mae Eleanore Frey, quoted in Edith Blumhofer, compiler, “Selected Letters of Mae Eleanore Frey.” *Pneuma* 17 (Spring 1995): 77 (67-87).