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**“Let the Devil’s Prejudice Forever Disappear”: Race and Inclusion in A.J. Tomlinson’s
Church of God**

By
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Master’s Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts in Public History
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Abstract

Born to a Quaker family in Indiana, Ambrose Jessup Tomlinson became one of the most charismatic leaders of the Pentecostal movement during the first half of the 20th century. It was Tomlinson, along with a few other holiness preachers from southern Appalachia who pioneered a movement that developed into one of the largest Pentecostal denominations, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN). Tomlinson believed in a church for all nations, where all men and women of every background could worship as brothers and sisters.

As early as 1909 Tomlinson was ordaining African-Americans, both male and female, as evangelists. By 1916, Tomlinson was ordaining African-American males as bishops and appointing them to overseer positions. In 1923, the Church of God separated and Tomlinson lead a large number of members to create a reformed Church of God (now known as the Church of God of Prophecy). The Church of God of Prophecy continued to include and promote blacks to prominent places of ministry, while the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) succumbed to segregated norms. The Church of God of Prophecy, still based in Cleveland, TN, maintained a fragile fraternity between in white and black members throughout the Jim Crow era. By promoting black ministers to places of prominence, and integrating the organization at the national level, the Church of God of Prophecy became a countercultural movement in direct opposition to the norms of southern segregated society.

This purpose of this thesis is to examine Tomlinson's progressive beliefs concerning race and the inclusion of people of color within Tomlinson's Church of God. This paper will examine Tomlinson's relationships with some of his black bishops and ministers. This thesis will place the Church of God of Prophecy within the historiography of the Pentecostal movement

in the Jim Crow South. It will also examine A.J. Tomlinson and his relationship with black members in the church, as well as his vision of an “all nations church.” This thesis will also analyze the fragile nature of interracial fraternity within the church as it progressed through the Jim Crow era and the Civil Rights movement. A.J. Tomlinson’s conviction that people of all colors were equal in the eyes of God was an ideal far ahead of its time and place. As a result of his vision and actions, the Church of God of Prophecy became a countercultural model of interracial inclusion and fraternity.

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Dedicated to the loving memory of

"Papaw"

John Kinder

(1928-1999)

"Your story is the greatest legacy that you will leave to your friends. It's the longest lasting legacy you will leave to your heirs."

-Steve Saint

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Introduction

Over the past ten years historians have increasingly produced scholarly works on the history of the Pentecostal movement. Each historian is quick to acknowledge the vital role played by American blacks in the early years of the movement. Accordingly, historians all agree that William Seymour, a black holiness minister and son of former slaves, was the father and pioneer of the Pentecostal movement. Each historian has acknowledged and analyzed the interracial fraternity and inclusivity within the early years of Pentecostalism. Even as Pentecostalism spread to the Jim Crow Era South, the interracially inclusive revival meetings and fraternity continued. Unfortunately, historians also agree that, for the most part, the interracial fraternity and inclusion did not last; and most Pentecostal denominations succumbed to segregated norms or splintered along color lines into new denominations.

However, not every Pentecostal denomination assimilated to the racially segregated norms of the Jim Crow South. This thesis will analyze the racial fraternity and inclusion in the Cleveland, Tennessee based Church of God of Prophecy (COGOP), from its founding in 1903 to the later years of the Civil Rights Movement.¹ Based upon the examination of numerous primary

¹ Although the Church of God of Prophecy traces its beginnings to the late 19th century, the church's name was not official until 1953. The name was issued by a judge after a decades long court battle between the COGOP and the denomination from which it separated, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN), in 1923. After the separation, the COGOP was known by several variations of the name Church of God. After the split it was known as the Tomlinson Church of God, named for the founder of the movement A.J. Tomlinson. In the 1930s, in order to legally differentiate between the two Cleveland, Tennessee based organizations, a court ordered that the Tomlinson Church of God be legally called the Church of God, Over Which A.J. Tomlinson is General Overseer. The name only slightly changed in 1943 when A.J. Tomlinson died and his son M.A. Tomlinson took over as General Overseer.

sources I argue that, while other Pentecostal denominations were segregating or forming along racial lines, the COGOP remained not only integrated, but was inclusive of its minority members, promoted black ministers to leadership positions within the denomination and taught that all races were equal.

I also argue that the COGOP remained racially integrated and inclusive primarily because of the beliefs and charismatic leadership of its founder, A.J. (Ambrose Jessup) Tomlinson. Tomlinson was one of the church's founding fathers and its first General Overseer, serving in that capacity until his death in 1943. His annual addresses to the denomination's Annual Assembly reveal a strong desire to be racially inclusive and to not be influenced by the racially divisive culture of the day. Though the COGOP remained largely white, Tomlinson nevertheless strove to create a church that was accepting and inclusive of all races. After his death in 1943, the COGOP, led by Tomlinson's son, M. A. (Milton Ambrose) Tomlinson, maintained his father's legacy by continuing to outreach to and include minorities.

Unfortunately the fraternity between whites and blacks was fragile, and the church did not always live up to its promise. Although the COGOP taught and practiced racial equality and inclusion, it was not able to influence American culture or politics on the issue because of its belief that church members should not actively engage in the political process or social activism. Instead, church ministers and members should focus on winning lost souls and following the church's doctrine. Doing so, they believed, would reveal a model of Christian unity that the world would follow.

Thus the church became known legally as the Church of God, Over Which M.A. Tomlinson is General Overseer. The name remained as such until 1953. The denominational split is discussed in greater detail in chapter 2 of this thesis. For the purposes of clarity and consistency the denomination will be referred to as the Church of God of Prophecy.

With the increasing scholarship on the history of the Pentecostal movement, it is important that the narrative of racial inclusion in the COGOP be placed within the context of the historiography of Pentecostalism. Thus, Chapter One, entitled “Race Relations & the Pentecostal Movement in the Jim Crow South,” is a historiography of race and Pentecostalism in the American South. Although the Pentecostal movement was begun in Los Angeles, Jimmy Wayne Jones has accurately stated that Pentecostalism is “more Southern than American.”² Accordingly, this chapter places race relations in southern Pentecostalism in the context of the movement’s history. This chapter also argues that although historians agree that interracial fraternity existed during the early years of the Pentecostal movement in the South, and that much of the fraternity ceased by the start of the First World War, they have also neglected the ongoing interracial fraternity and inclusivity of the COGOP under the leadership of A.J. Tomlinson.

Chapter two, “‘Our Colored People’: Racial Inclusion and the Influence of A.J. Tomlinson in the Early Church of God,” narrates the early years of the Church of God and analyzes A.J. Tomlinson’s intentional outreach to American blacks and analyze his beliefs on race and the actions he took to include black people within his church. This chapter places Tomlinson and his church within the context of the early Pentecostal movement as a whole, including the noted racial fraternity that initially existed within the movement across the United States. The chapter also illustrates Tomlinson’s desire to ordain black men as bishops and place them in prominent roles within his church. Even though Tomlinson whole heartedly believed in racial equality and interracial fraternity and inclusion, he also struggled with his belief that church members should not be involved in social activism or the political process. This chapter

² Jimmy Wayne Jones, Jr., “Modern Pentecostalism: The Significance of Race, Class, and Culture in Charismatic Growth, 1900-2000 (PhD Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2002), 1.

also examines Tomlinson's struggle to obey the Jim Crow laws of the era, while believing that all races were equal and that his church should be inclusive of all mankind.

Chapter three, entitled "'The Great Speckled Bird:' Prominent Black Ministers and Interracial Fraternity in the Church of God of Prophecy, 1923-1964," analyzes the legacy of racial inclusion within Tomlinson's church during the final years of his leadership, and in the years after his death in 1943. During the 1930s the church instituted doctrine, known as the "Great Speckled Bird" theology, which promoted the interracial church Tomlinson envisioned. The church ordained dozens of black men as ministers and bishops, as well as licensed black women as evangelists and teachers; but the cause of the church focused on evangelism and building church membership. Civil Rights was a secondary, even unspoken, cause. Ministers were encouraged to avoid social activism, and were instead encouraged to pray and pursue the growth of the church. The leadership of the COGOP believed that they were a true representation of the Church of God of the Bible, and that all the answers to social ills and inequalities laid within the church. As a result, most ministers in the COGOP consciously abstained from the social activism of the Civil Rights Movement. Nevertheless, by the time of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, even though the denomination remained mostly white, the COGOP could boast of high ranking black men within the church's leadership, as well as hundreds of black members, ministers, deacons and Sunday school teachers.

Historians have rightfully determined that, although racial fraternity initially existed in its early years, the Pentecostal movement eventually succumbed to the racial disunity that plagued American society in the first half of the twentieth century. However, within the Pentecostal movement, there were denominations and pockets of believers that resisted racism in American culture. This thesis examines one such denomination, and its leadership. It argues that the

COGOP struggled to create a church inclusive of all races of people, albeit imperfectly. Although the Southern based denomination openly accepted and promoted minorities, it struggled to overcome the political climate of the Jim Crow Era. The belief that church members should refrain from political and social activism, even if for a righteous cause, left many minority members feeling unfulfilled. Nevertheless, the COGOP was for many black in the South a beacon of hope in an era of oppression.

Chapter One

Race Relations and the Early Pentecostal Movement in the Post-Civil War South

Until the late 1960s, studies of the Pentecostal movement were limited to denominational historians, whose enthusiasm for their respective church bodies was made clear in their works. Academic historians and theological examinations of the Pentecostal movement began in the late 1960s when Walter J. Hollenweger, a Swiss theologian, published an exhaustive volume on the theological history of the worldwide Pentecostal movement in 1969. *The Pentecostals*, first written in German, became a standard for future academic studies of the movement and is quoted often by subsequent scholars. Vinson Synan, an American historian, followed in 1971 with *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*. Synan brought the focus back to the movement's beginnings in the United States. Though both Hollenweger and Synan were sympathetic to the Pentecostal movement as a whole, Hollenweger serving as a minister in a Pentecostal mission in Switzerland and Synan a lifelong Pentecostal, they successfully introduced the history and theology of the movement to an academic audience.

One of the most important contributions that both Hollenweger and Synan make in their work is acknowledging the importance of African Americans in founding and developing early Pentecostalism. Hollenweger's assessment of American racial issues in the Pentecostal movement is, at best, miniscule, as his work examines worldwide Pentecostalism as a whole. Hollenweger's sentiments on the issue of race and the involvement of African Americans in the movement can best be summed up by the first sentence in the preface to his book: "The origins

of the Pentecostal movement go back to a revival amongst the negroes of North America at the beginnings of the present [twentieth] century.”³ While this simple statement may seem inconsequential, in reality, it acknowledges the birth of a fast growing, worldwide movement that belongs to a group of people only a generation removed from slavery and themselves in the midst of oppressive racism.

Synan expands those sentiments in his own work, spending an entire chapter telling the story of “The Negro Pentecostals.”⁴ Synan goes much further than merely attributing the Pentecostal movement to American blacks. He tells the story of interracial worship and inclusiveness in an era when such happenings were, at best, controversial. “In an age of Social Darwinism, Jim Crowism, and general white supremacy,” Synan writes, “the fact that Negroes and whites worshipped together in virtual equality among the Pentecostals was a significant exception to prevailing racial attitudes.”⁵ Indeed, while the origin of Pentecostal theology is traced to others, the beginnings of the movement itself are attributed to William Seymour, an a black preacher, who led interracial Pentecostal meetings at his Azusa Mission in Los Angeles.⁶ Synan spends much of his short chapter narrating the history of Azusa, thereby recognizing the profound influence that blacks played in Pentecostal heritage. While acknowledging initial inclusivity and the influence of African Americans, Synan also points to how quickly interracial worship deteriorated, especially as the movement moved into the American South.

³ Walter J. Hollenweger, preface to *The Pentecostals*, trans. R.A. Wilson (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1972; Pebody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), citation refers to the Hendrickson edition.

⁴ Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 165-184.

⁵ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement*, 165.

⁶ Ibid, 168-170; Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 65-70; Estrela Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 110-158; Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 104 & 105.

The historiography of Pentecostalism has expanded greatly since Hollenweger and Synan published their works. Robert Mapes Anderson and Grant Wacker have produced broad social histories of the Pentecostal movement in America. Others have written expansive social histories of denomination and biographies of charismatic Pentecostal founders and leaders. All of these works address the issue of race in some manner, though mostly in a cursory fashion. While there has been a great deal of work published since the 1970s, more work is needed to address individual issues concerning race, particularly in the South.

In his 2002 dissertation, “Modern American Pentecostalism: The Significance of Race, Class, and Culture in Charismatic Growth, 1900-2000,” Jimmy Wayne Jones accurately described Pentecostalism’s devolution from the progressive ideals of interracial inclusivity in its early years to its modern backwoods stereotype. Jones writes, “Though it began in Los Angeles and spread across North America, it is more southern than ‘American,’ rejecting much of what came to characterize American culture in the twentieth century.”⁷ While Jones is referring to American culture at large, his statement implies a rejection of some of the interracial inclusivity that occurred during the movement’s early years. Ironically, the movement, whose early years of interracial worship were far ahead of its time, gained much of its identity from a region where racial oppression and segregation were the norm.

Much like southern history as a whole, the history of Pentecostalism in the South is complex, contradictory and often confusing. While many working class Christians, both white and black, readily embraced Pentecostalism, the racially inclusive brand of the movement espoused by Seymour in Los Angeles was not as accepted, though exceptions existed. A few of

⁷ Jimmy Wayne Jones, Jr., “Modern Pentecostalism: The Significance of Race, Class, and Culture in Charismatic Growth, 1900-2000 (PhD Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2002), 1.

Pentecostalism's earliest evangelists in the South had experienced the movement at Azusa, where their racial prejudice was erased by the experience of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost.⁸

The holiness movement in the South was especially receptive to the Pentecostal doctrine.⁹ The Church of God (Cleveland, TN) was a relatively new holiness denomination when it accepted the Pentecostal doctrine in 1908. It initially embraced interracial worship and equality, even ordaining black evangelists and bishops by 1912. Eventually, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) segregated its people along racial lines. The Church of God in Christ, a black holiness denomination, accepted the Pentecostal doctrine after one of its founders, C.H. Mason, visited the Azusa Street Mission in 1906. Like the Church of God (Cleveland, TN), the Memphis-based Church of God in Christ was initially integrated during the years just after its acceptance of Pentecostal doctrine, but soon split down racial lines; some of its white ministers formed what is now the largest Pentecostal denomination, the Assemblies of God.¹⁰

While historians and theologians have published several monographs and articles in the past ten years on the history of the early and modern Pentecostal movement, few solely emphasize the American South. Fewer still provide little more than a cursory glance at racial

⁸ The Baptism of the Holy Spirit, also referred to as the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, the Baptism of Fire or, simply, the Baptism, is believed by Pentecostals to be a spiritual blessing that is subsequent to salvation. Pentecostal theology teaches that the evidence of the "Baptism" is speaking in tongues, though other forms of spiritual power also become evident. They often point to Biblical passages, such as Acts 1:8 or Mark 16:17 & 18, to confirm their beliefs.

⁹ The holiness movement stemmed from the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century. The movement embraced an emotional form of worship. Followers of the movement would tell of dramatic and emotional conversion experiences and worship would at times involve shouting and forms of dancing. The theology of the holiness movement centered on the belief in sanctification, or the belief that God supernaturally removes all desire for sin, making the believer "perfect". Some followers believed in the Wesleyan teaching of sanctification, in which it is defined as a second definite work of grace that took place in a single moment in time, subsequent to the salvation or conversion experience. Other followers believed that sanctification was a lifelong experience, that the believer had to constantly be sanctified from sin.

¹⁰ Estrela Alexander, *Black Fire*, 20 & 21; David D. Daniels, III, "Navigating the Territory: Early Afro-Pentecostalism as a Movement within Black Society", in *Afro Pentecostalism*, ed. Amos Yong and Estrela Alexander (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 57.

issues within Pentecostalism. Randall J. Stephens's 2008 volume, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South*, provides a detailed narrative of the spread and growth of the Pentecostal movement among holiness peoples and churches. Stephens readily applauds the interracial aspects of the early Pentecostal movement, especially that of the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles. Concerning the early Pentecostal movement in the South he writes that "in many ways both black and white southern Pentecostals appear to have agreed" recognizing the theological and physical similarities between Azusa and the movement in the South.¹¹

Stephens provides clear examples of interracial interaction in the South. During the early years of the Pentecostal movement numerous weekly or monthly publications printed sermons, testimonies and accounts of revival services all across the nation. They were published by both blacks and whites, and all were racially inclusive in the testimonies and firsthand accounts they carried. One such publication, *The Bridegroom Messenger*, was an Atlanta-based monthly that routinely printed the testimonies of blacks, as well as stories of interracial worship services being conducted in Azusa. As Stephens points out, the printing of such testimonies and stories was "...remarkable in light of the fact that the nadir of New South race relations had been reached not long before in the Atlanta race riot of 1906."¹²

Interracial inclusivity went well beyond publications. Much like Azusa, southern Pentecostals, whites and blacks, worshipped and prayed together and for each other. "They attended tent revivals together, shared pulpits, and wrote in each other's newspapers," Stephens writes, "On occasion a white man would minister to a mixed congregation and at other times a

¹¹ Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 211.

¹² *Ibid*, 210.

black woman would do the same.”¹³ Stephens briefly highlights the ministry of Lucy Farrow, a black woman who was also a mentor to Azusa founder William Seymour. Farrow traveled extensively throughout the United States preaching the doctrine of Pentecost. Many of her meetings were interracial and whites often went to her so that she might lay her hands on them and pray for them to receive the Baptism.

Stories like that of Lucy Farrow, of black and white ministers involved in interracial worship and ministry in the early Pentecostal movement, are relatively common. While Stephens is the only historian to publish a volume on the Pentecostal movement in the South, others have approached the subject, if only briefly, as they examine Pentecostalism as whole. Robert Mapes Anderson’s *Vision of the Disinherited* and Grant Wacker’s *Heaven Below* both cover the rise and influence of the Pentecostal movement throughout the United States. Like Stephens, none of these works spends a great deal of time on the issue of race. However, when dealing with race they often do so in a much broader context than that used by Stephens, providing varied accounts of both inclusivity and discrimination.

Robert Mapes Anderson’s 1979 work, *Vision of the Disinherited*, provides a concise yet thorough examination of the Pentecostal movement from the influence of the holiness movement to the charismatic revivals that were occurring in mainline denominations in the 1960s. Anderson is fair in his assessment of the Pentecostal movement. Much like both Vinson Synan and Randall Stephens, Anderson attributes the Pentecostal doctrine to several individuals, but gives William Seymour the credit for the rapid spread and growth of the movement, including its interracially inclusive nature. However, unlike Synan and Stephens, Anderson goes to greater lengths to point out the irregularities and interracial dysfunction that eventually occurred.

¹³ Ibid, 211.

Interracial fraternity was not permanent, nor did racial dysfunction happen all at once. “Rather,” as Anderson writes, “it [racial dysfunction] emerged in one denomination after the other, beginning early in the life of the movement and reaching a peak in the 1920s.”¹⁴ Racial division within denominations was especially prevalent in the South. While almost all southern based Pentecostal denominations were initially interracial, they eventually experienced splits along racial lines or instituted some form of segregation. Even with such divisions, a healthier respect between the races still existed than occurred outside of the movement, especially in the South. “Taken as a whole,” Mapes concludes, “Pentecostals have probably retained as much contact and friendship between racial and...ethnic groups as have the adherents of any other religious community in America.”¹⁵

Grant Wacker comes to much the same conclusion. Wacker’s *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture*, continues in the tradition of Synan and Anderson, but isolates his examination of the movement to its earliest years and its response to American culture. Perhaps more than any other scholar, Wacker addresses the reasons for the breakdown of interracial relations among Pentecostals. Wacker is careful to give credit to the early movement for its inclusivity, but suggests that cultural and theological elements prevented friendly relations between the races from continuing. “When whites stopped to think about what was happening, they invariably pulled away, and blacks, by necessity, followed suit,” Wacker writes.¹⁶ Such a statement suggests that outside cultural factors of the era overwhelmed the inclusive community of the movement. He concludes that the, “Pentecostal culture failed to provide a sustained theology of racial reconciliation for whites and blacks alike.”¹⁷ To back his

¹⁴ Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, 189.

¹⁵ Ibid, 193.

¹⁶ Grant Wacker, 227.

¹⁷ Ibid.

claim, Wacker points to the familiar examples of racial division within Pentecostal denominations, some of which, including the Church of God and the Church of God in Christ, are based in the South.

Wacker, Anderson, Stephens, Synan and Hollenweger recognize the interracial inclusion and fraternity that existed in the early days of the Pentecostal movement. Such beliefs and activity were an oddity in a time of tensions between blacks and whites. Each scholar has acknowledged the hope for racial harmony that the earliest days of the movement provided. They also point to the eventual division between the races. As examples they each turn to the divisions that occurred at the denominational level.

Concise examinations of Pentecostal denominations, some of which were born in the Jim Crow-era South, can be paired with denominational histories and founder biographies to better understand the reality of racial issues in the southern Pentecostal movement. Denominational histories have been published almost since the beginning of the movement. All of them are published within the respective denominations and read like one of the countless volumes of local histories written during the time of the American centennial. They are heavily biased and promote the doctrine of their own church, some of which believed they were God's exclusive church body. They espouse their statements of faith and the scriptural backing for each. Revival locations where Pentecost was first experienced are memorialized as if they were Holy Land locations where Christ once walked. The preachers, evangelists and apostles that lead each movement into an independent denomination are nearly deified. What is not discussed in these volumes is race, or relations between white and black members of each denomination.

Numerous Pentecostal denominations are headquartered, or were formed, in the South. The Pentecostal Holiness Church (PHC), Church of God (Cleveland, TN), and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) are southern born organizations that espouse a common historical link, a connection to William Seymour and the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles. They each began as a separate holiness group, each preached similar theologies, and each practiced, at least for a time, interracial worship and inclusivity. However, while they recognize a common beginning, they each have their own idolized founders and characters, and even have teachings that make each denomination unique. In recent years historians, such as Mickey Crews, R.G. Robins, and Calvin White, Jr., have brought these denominations and their founders into discussion.

Mickey Crew's *The Church of God: A Social History* provides a concise narrative of the complex history of one the world's largest Pentecostal denominations, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN). Crew expands upon the work of Church of God historian Charles W. Conn. Conn's *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God* was originally published in 1955, and followed by two subsequent editions. Conn provides a comprehensive overview of the church's history and the various characters involved worldwide.¹⁸ Crews takes Conn's work a step further by adding academic analysis of the church's place in society and provides a context for the Church of God's place in American culture throughout the 20th century. However, much like previous scholars of the Pentecostal movement, he provides only a cursory narrative for racial issues within the church. Furthermore, much of his discussion of race is delegated to the discussion of the Civil Rights movement and not the interracial inclusivity present in the church's early years. During these years Crews writes that: "Like most southerners, Church of

¹⁸ Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God*, 3rd ed. (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1996).

God members viewed the black man and his role in society through paternalistic eyes.”¹⁹ This statement supports the statements by Grant Wacker that although interracial inclusivity existed and was accepted in the early years of the Pentecostal movement, theology and leadership failed to provide a continuous support for racial fraternity and unity.²⁰ This may be especially true in the Church of God, which found itself divided over a myriad of issues, other than race.

In the present, there are numerous Pentecostal denominations, large and small, that bear the name Church of God in some form. Nearly all of them are groups that separated from the parent denomination, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN). Each proclaims the same common beginning as a small holiness sect in rural, western North Carolina; as well as the same charismatic founder, A.J. Tomlinson.²¹ The minute squabbles and theological differences that spurred these numerous divisions create a complex and confusing narrative that most historians ignore. Tomlinson, either himself or his teachings, are at the center of nearly all of those divisions.

Tomlinson, born to a Quaker family in Indiana, was one of the founders of the Church of God and became its first General Overseer. In its early years the church was part of the holiness movement. However, when Tomlinson received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, under the ministry of G.B. Cashwell, a southern holiness evangelist who had experienced the Baptism at Azusa, the church followed suit and accepted the Pentecostal doctrine. Tomlinson was a profound, if somewhat dictatorial, influence in the early years of the Church of God. Not only did he proclaim the Pentecostal message, he also expounded the theological idea of ecclesiastical

¹⁹ Mickey Crews, *The Church of God: A Social History* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 164.

²⁰ Wacker, 227.

²¹ Harold D. Hunter, “A.J. Tomlinson’s Emerging Ecclesiology,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 32 (2010): 369-389; R.G. Robins, *A.J. Tomlinson: Plainfolk Modernist* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 230.

restorationism. Tomlinson believed that the church, as described in the Book of Acts, had been restored to modern times. He not only believed that it had been restored, but that it was a physical church body, which he called the Church of God.

Tomlinson had a worldwide vision for his church. Within ten years his sect had grown from a handful of small churches in southern, rural Appalachia, to hundreds of churches all across the United States and the Caribbean Islands. From his actions and a few of his sermons, Tomlinson also appears to have believed in equality among the races. By 1909 he was ordaining African Americans, both male and female, as evangelists, and by 1912 he was ordaining black men as bishops, the highest level of ordination within the church. He believed that the message of the church was for all mankind, regardless of color, though he acknowledged that there were certain laws in the American South that prohibited the church from fully realizing its beliefs.²²

By 1923, Church of God elders, who accused him of mishandling church funds, ousted Tomlinson. He refused to accept the charge and penalty, and instead separated to form a new church organization, which he also called the Church of God. Half of the members joined Tomlinson, believing that he was God's chosen vessel to lead the church. Eventually, after decades of legal battles, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) gained sole rights to its name. The Tomlinson sect retained the Church of God name in some form. While he was still alive the sect was known simply as "The Church of God, Over which A.J. Tomlinson is General Overseer." In 1953, ten years after his death, the Tomlinson church officially changed its name to the Church of God of Prophecy (COGOP).²³

²² Conn, 59-174; Crews, 1-23; Alexander, *Black Fire*, 254-258; Hunter, 369-389; Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 139-142.

²³ Conn, 197-276; Crews, 23-30; Alexander, *Black Fire*, 266-268

Several historians have addressed the life, teachings and works of A.J. Tomlinson. Nearly every scholarly work on the Pentecostal movement provides at least a passing acknowledgement of Tomlinson's prominence. However, most neglect to separate the life of Tomlinson from his church or even completely ignore his influence after his expulsion from the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) in 1923. Harold D. Hunter has written a few essays on Tomlinson's theology, but perhaps the most comprehensive work on him was R.G. Robins's, *A.J. Tomlinson: Plainfolk Modernist*. Robins's biography of Tomlinson provides a detailed account of the bishop's Quaker upbringing, his conversion to the holiness doctrine, Pentecostal experience and influence in the Pentecostal movement. Though race is not the central issue in Robins's biography of Tomlinson, he does provide some insight into Tomlinson's belief in racial equality. Though only one page is dedicated specifically to Tomlinson and racial issues, Robins's work is sympathetic to Tomlinson's efforts to create an interracial body of believers. Describing the efforts of Tomlinson and his church, Robins writes, "The sign of the True Church, then, was to be its multicultural composition..." he continues, "Recruitment was not easy, but the Church of God did its best, and when it found minorities it thrust them into the limelight."²⁴

Tomlinson is also briefly highlighted in Paul Harvey's *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era*. While his analysis of Tomlinson and his efforts in racial issues is brief, he supports the conclusion of Robins.²⁵ While Harvey's book is not solely dedicated to Pentecostal history, but rather southern religion in the post-Civil War South, he makes great strides in highlighting the initial interracial fraternity that existed among early Pentecostals in the South. He also includes a brief discussion

²⁴ Robins, 227.

²⁵ Harvey, *Freedom's Coming*, 142.

of the works of Gaston B. (G.B.) Cashwell, whom he calls “the most significant white southern convert” to come out of the Azusa Mission meetings lead by William Seymour.²⁶ Cashwell was not only the evangelist that brought the Pentecostal message and experience to Tomlinson and the Church of God, but he spread the same message across the American South. Harvey concisely narrates the story of Cashwell’s Pentecostal revival meeting in Dunn, North Carolina, where believers of all colors heard the Gospel and the message of Pentecost.²⁷ Just like the meetings at Azusa, blacks and whites worship together without affectation.²⁸

Like Tomlinson, Cashwell is mentioned often in scholarly works on Pentecostal history. However, no major research on Cashwell has been produced; neither has much research been produced on the denomination that Cashwell was instrumental in starting, the Pentecostal Holiness Church. Cashwell’s influence, both in the early Pentecostal movement and in racial inclusivity in the movement, deserve more attention in order to better understand the nature and development of southern Pentecostalism.

Until recently, Charles H. (C.H.) Mason, a black holiness-Pentecostal minister and founder of the Church of God in Christ, was also neglected by historians. Mason had partnered with Charles Price Jones in the late 19th century to form the black holiness denomination, Church of Christ (Holiness). Like G.B. Cashwell, Mason heard of the revival meetings taking place in Los Angeles at the Azusa Street Mission, and soon traveled to the mission to experience the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. Mason experienced the Baptism and returned to the Memphis-based church to proclaim the Pentecostal message. Jones rejected the message and soon thereafter he

²⁶ Ibid, 134.

²⁷ Ibid, 135.

²⁸ Ibid.

and Mason parted ways, each taking a sizeable portion of their followers. Mason formed the Church of God in Christ, which is now the largest black Pentecostal denomination in the world.

Calvin White, Jr.'s recent monograph, *The Rise to Respectability: Race, Religion and the Church of God in Christ*, is the first scholarly work completely devoted to Mason and his church. Like Crew's work on the Church of God, White produces a comprehensive work covering the progress of Mason's church. Though the Church of God in Christ was initially integrated (the church split down racial lines in the early 1910s, the white ministers gathering to form what is now the Assemblies of God), White chooses to focus on the church's impact on the black community. He argues that, "The immense contributions of COGIC to the black church, the holiness movement, and Pentecostalism, beyond a shadow of a doubt, influenced black religious life."²⁹

As all previous scholars of the Pentecostal movement acknowledge, blacks have played a pivotal role in the development of Pentecostalism. While White has illuminated the role of C.H. Mason and the Church of God in Christ in the religious life of American blacks, other scholars have recently published works that expand the scope to include all black Pentecostals. Estrela Alexander in particular has worked to highlight and even preserve the legacy of African Americans in the development of Pentecostalism. Alexander's *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* broadly discusses the role of African Americans in the development of the Pentecostal movement. While she makes the claim that, "Holy Spirit empowerment did not ensure that black believers could overcome the social realities of early-twentieth-century American race politics," she makes it clear that the holiness-Pentecostal

²⁹ Calvin White, Jr., *The Rise to Respectability: Race, Religion and the Church of God in Christ* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2012), 10.

movement provided agency for blacks to endure the hardships of Jim Crow-era racism.³⁰ The message of Pentecost fueled their faith for a better life to come, whether in this life or in the hereafter. She also does not neglect to highlight the efforts of white Pentecostal leaders in the south, particularly A.J. Tomlinson and G.B. Cashwell, to include African Americans in worship and ministry.

Derrick R. Rosenoir's essay, "The Rhetoric of Pentecostal Race Relations: Looking Back to Move Forward," continues in much the same vein as Alexander.³¹ His work highlights the black roots of Pentecostalism, which, Rosenoir says, can "arguably be described as a uniquely indigenous religious movement with distinctly African (American) characteristics and roots."³² Unfortunately, unlike Alexander, he fails to discuss the interracial inclusivity and worship that was occurring during the early years of southern Pentecostalism. Nor does he mention the influence of either Tomlinson or Cashwell. In fact, other than narrating the story of Mason and the Church of God in Christ, Rosenoir fails to discuss the South much at all.

Conclusion:

The history of the Pentecostal movement in the American South is, at best, complex. It is a convoluted story of religious fervor, rapid growth, charismatic characters, miniscule squabbles and division. Conversely, it is a story of unity, faith, and uncommon fraternity between people of all colors in a place and era where such activity was scorned or threatened with violence. The convoluted tale is perhaps the reason that so few scholars have attempted to analyze and narrate it. Nevertheless, it is an important story to tell. Even though much of the early efforts to

³⁰ Alexander, *Black Fire*, 392.

³¹ Derrick R. Rosenoir, "The Rhetoric of Pentecostal Race Relations: Looking Back to Move Forward," in *A Liberating Spirit: Pentecostals and Social Action in North America*, ed. Michael Wilkinson and Steven Studebaker (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 53-84.

³² *Ibid*, 57

incorporate interracial inclusivity ended short of their goal, they should not be forgotten or remembered solely for their failure. Though the racial fraternity did not last in every southern Pentecostal sect, the fact that interracial worship and ministry was taking place in the land and era of Jim Crow is in itself a story of success and hope.

However, it is a story that is incomplete, in particular the story of southern Pentecostals. Until very recently most works were broad, social histories of the movement as a whole. However, the recent work of scholars, such as Randall Stephens, R.G. Robins, and Estrela Alexander, have a narrowed focus. Their work discusses and analyzes Pentecostalism in specific geographic, cultural or biographic contexts. Their work also reveals a continued and growing interest in the story of Pentecostals. Scholars should particularly take a look at the life and ministry of G.B. Cashwell, the “Pentecostal Apostle of the South”; as well as continue to look at the teachings and sermons of A.J. Tomlinson. Race, inclusivity, integration and segregation in southern Pentecostalism should also be studied in order understand how widespread interracial fraternity occurred and why it did not succeed.

Chapter Two

“Our Colored People”: A.J. Tomlinson and Race in the Early Church of God

Just before noon on October 30, 1919, Ambrose Jessup Tomlinson stood before the 14th General Assembly of the Church of God, in Cleveland, Tennessee, to give his annual address as the church’s General Overseer. The address was lengthy and interrupted at times with outbursts of prayerful shouting, weeping and speaking in tongues. Long into the address Tomlinson began speaking on a subject that changed the atmosphere of the audience, if only for a moment. Looking to the full auditorium of Church of God members from all across the nation, mostly Southern whites, he said:

Every subject on the program is of the utmost importance. But it is not expedient for me to call attention to everyone separately, however I feel it my duty to mention one more. We have deviated from our former practice by giving a place on our program for our colored brethren. We have recognized them and loved and fellowshiped them as brothers and sisters and members and given them opportunity for extemporaneous utterances, but this is the first time they have been given a representation on the program. We feel they are due this recognition. They are truly our brethren.³³

Tomlinson continued with a few more lines of reasoning for inclusion of the “colored” people, and as he spoke shouts came from all across the auditorium. Perhaps shouts of “Amen,” but there were certainly shouts of disagreement, and perhaps even anger. Amid the shouts, Tomlinson proclaimed, “*Let the Devil’s prejudice forever disappear* and yet, let us ask God for wisdom about how to do.”³⁴

³³ A.J. Tomlinson, “Ninth Annual Address to the 14th General Assembly-Oct. 30-Nov.4, 1919—Cleveland, TN”, in *General Assembly Annual Addresses, 1911-1927* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2011), 104 & 105.

³⁴ *Minutes of the Fourteenth Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Held at Cleveland, Tenn., Oct. 29-Nov. 4, 1919*, 21, *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Church of God (1911-1954)*, Collection, Hal Bernard Dixon, Jr. Pentecostal Research Center, Lee University.



FIGURE 1: A.J. TOMLINSON AND HIS WIFE, MARY JANE, CIRCA 1919. (IN LILLIE DUGGAR, *A.J. TOMLINSON: FORMER OVERSEER OF THE CHURCH OF GOD* [1964]. COURTESY OF THE WHITE WING PUBLISHING HOUSE, CLEVELAND, TN)

This was the first time the charismatic, yet authoritarian, bishop would introduce the idea of racial inclusion to the young Pentecostal denomination's annual assembly, but certainly not the last. Over the next twenty years Tomlinson addressed the assembly on the topic of racial inclusion five times, not only concerning the plight of American

blacks but Hispanics as well. The 1919 address, however, was not the genesis of his belief or desire for racial inclusion. As General Overseer of the "The Church of God," Tomlinson had ordained black men and women as ministers since 1909. By 1912 he had ordained black men as bishops, the highest level of ordination within the denomination.³⁵

With the Church of God headquartered in Tennessee, it, perhaps, seems a bit out of place for a leader in such an organization to give such acknowledgement to "colored people." In reality it was neither out of place for Tomlinson, nor out of place for the young Pentecostal movement. Tomlinson and his Church of God represent a radical departure from the societal norm in the South that was countercultural to Jim Crow era southern culture.

Nevertheless, although the issue of interracial interaction within the early Pentecostal movement has been explored, A.J. Tomlinson's role in such activity has not been explored to the

³⁵ Church of God Ledger of Ordination Certification and Credentials, 1909-1921, Hal Bernard Dixon Jr. Pentecostal Research Center, Lee University, Cleveland, TN.

fullest.³⁶ While he has not been ignored by historians, his open minded beliefs and efforts on racial issues have not been thoroughly explored, nor has his relationships with black ministers and bishops, within the Church of God, been examined to the fullest extent, nor has his legacy regarding race. Until the late 1960s, much of the history of the early Pentecostal movement was left to denominational historians. One of the foremost experts on the early Pentecostal movement, Vinson Synan, has noted that, “In the period when most holiness and Pentecostal groups were forming into recognizable denominational bodies the racial lines were often very indistinct, with Negroes serving as officials, preachers and church members.”³⁷ Minorities could often find recognition and opportunity that was rarely found in other social settings or churches. In fact, while there are several early leaders who had a hand in forming the Pentecostal doctrine, it is often regarded among historians and Pentecostal leaders that William Seymour, a son of former slaves, was the “Apostle and Pioneer” of the Pentecostal movement.³⁸

³⁶ Tomlinson and his influence in the early Pentecostal movement has not been overlooked by historians. He was not only the first General Overseer of the Tennessee based Church of God, but one the greatest influences in its founding. Tomlinson’s beliefs concerning race, however, are either neglected completely or given a cursory glance. R.G. Robins’ biography of Tomlinson, *A.J. Tomlinson: Plainfolk Modernist*, is a comprehensive look at his life. Robins discuss race mostly in terms of how it is viewed in the religious movements that affected Tomlinson the most. While Tomlinson’s beliefs and actions concerning race are not discussed in depth, Robins recognizes that both Tomlinson’s Quaker roots and his involvement in the radical holiness movement were the factors that motivated Tomlinson’s actions and legacy. Paul Harvey’s volume on religious culture in the American South, *Freedom’s Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Era*, provides a perfunctory glance at Tomlinson’s beliefs and influence on race issues. Likewise, Estrela Alexander dedicates a few pages of her book, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism*, to Tomlinson’s efforts in race relations within the Church of God. Though she provides a bit more than a cursory glance at racial inclusion in the Church of God, her concentration is on the denomination itself, not its founding Bishop. However, though her discussion of Tomlinson is limited, she credits his efforts to bridge the gap between black and white Pentecostals; R.G Robins, *A.J. Tomlinson: Plainfolk Modernist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Paul Harvey, *Freedom’s Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the American South From the Civil War to the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2005), 142; Estrela Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 256-258.

³⁷ Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 165.

³⁸The modern Pentecostal movement is also attributed to Charles Fox Parham, who seems to be the initiator of the doctrine of speaking in tongues. Synan, *Holiness-Pentecostal Movement*, 168.

Within the past several decades scholarship on Seymour has greatly expanded. His early life remains somewhat unclear. Seymour was baptized as a Roman Catholic as an infant, but by the 1890s he found himself in a Methodist Episcopal Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. There Seymour had a conversion experience, but soon left the church and the city of Indianapolis. Both Estrela Alexander and Vinson Synan write that Seymour left Indianapolis due to the unwelcoming atmosphere in the city to blacks, but also because of dissatisfaction with lack of interracial inclusiveness within the church.³⁹ Seymour's path to racial inclusivity and the Pentecostal experience took him through two routes and eventually into history,

In 1900 Seymour moved to Cincinnati and eventually became involved with a radically inclusive religious organization known as the *Evening Light Saints*. Vinson Synan writes that, "While racial discrimination abounded during the late nineteenth century, the Evening Light Saints detested such thinking, and upheld interracial worship as a litmus test of the true church, which would function in holiness and unity,"⁴⁰ Seymour's desire for inclusivity was satisfied in Cincinnati, but he still looked for a deeper spiritual experience with God. By 1905 Seymour became involved with Charles Fox Parham, an evangelist and teacher from Topeka, Kansas. Ironically, the inclusion Seymour found in Cincinnati would not be found with Parham. Concerning Parham and race, James Goff explains that he was "neither a racial reformer nor a champion of white supremacy, but occupied a paternalistic middle ground typical of white ministers from the Midwest."⁴¹ Despite the lack of racial inclusion in Parham's ministry, he was

³⁹ Estrela Y. Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 110-113; Vinson Synan and Charles R. Fox, Jr., *William J. Seymour: Pioneer of the Azusa Street Revival* (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2012), 29-31.

⁴⁰ Synan & Fox, *William J. Seymour*, 41.

⁴¹ James R. Goff, Jr., *Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1988), 111.

nonetheless teaching a new doctrine that intrigued Seymour's quest for a deeper spiritual experience.⁴²

Both through his evangelistic ministry and his Bible school in Topeka, Kansas, Parham was teaching the doctrine of Holy Spirit Baptism with the evidence of speaking in tongues, often simply referred to as the Baptism.⁴³ Parham was one of the first ministers to teach the doctrine, though speaking in tongues had been in practice for some time. Despite his lack of support for racial inclusivity, Parham was nevertheless a profound influence on Seymour who took the doctrine to heart. Before Seymour was able to gain the experience of speaking in tongues, and after only five weeks under the teaching of Parham, he accepted the invitation to become pastor of a small congregation in Los Angeles where he arrived in February 1906.⁴⁴

Despite not experiencing the Baptism, Seymour preached the doctrine to his new congregation, which did not come to support or believe the Pentecostal doctrine. He soon found himself removed from his new post, but continued to preach the doctrine of tongues and Spirit baptism in the homes of supporters. Seymour and his supporters moved into an old deserted structure at 312 Azusa Street in the Los Angeles industrial district. The old building previously served as an African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E) church and served Seymour's small congregation's purpose well. In April 1906, Seymour began a revival meeting that would have a

⁴² Alexander, *Black Fire*, 115 & 116; Synan & Fox, *William J. Seymour*, 59-61; Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 228-233.

⁴³ The Baptism of the Holy Spirit, also referred to as the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, the Baptism of Fire or, simply, the Baptism, is believed by Pentecostals to be a spiritual blessing that is subsequent to salvation. Pentecostal theology teaches that the evidence of the "Baptism" is speaking in tongues, though other forms of spiritual power also become evident. They often point to Biblical passages, such as Acts 1:8 or Mark 16:17 & 18, to confirm their beliefs.

⁴⁴ Alexander, *Black Fire*, 115-117; Synan & Fox, *William J. Seymour*, 59-62; Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 192-193.

profound effect on the new Pentecostal doctrine and affect Christianity worldwide, including Tomlinson and other holiness followers in the South.⁴⁵

Named for its location, the Azusa Street revival mixed the two ideals that Seymour had sought, interracial inclusion and spiritual experience. Vinson Synan writes that, “Visitors to the meeting claimed they could feel a ‘supernatural atmosphere’ within several blocks of the mission.”⁴⁶ Seekers “fell under the power” of the Spirit, danced, sang, preached, prophesied and spoke in tongues. The meetings were unlike anything seen before, both in worship style and the variegated races of people involved. “There was no racial prejudice in the services,” Synan writes.⁴⁷ Blacks, Jews, Chinese immigrants and whites all came together, and worshipped together in the small building. Race was of no consequence and no one was precluded from hearing the Gospel or receiving the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸

Established ministers and common people came from across the nation to see and experience the movement for themselves, some of whom would have a profound impact on the spread of the Pentecostal movement. Among them were C. H. Mason, a black, holiness minister and the co-founder of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), a predominantly black, holiness denomination based in Memphis, Tennessee. At Azusa, Mason experienced the baptism of the Spirit, with the evidence of speaking in tongues. When Mason returned to the South, he testified to his experience and preached the new Pentecostal doctrine. As a result, by 1907 the Church of God in Christ was reorganized into a Pentecostal denomination.⁴⁹ Continuing the racially

⁴⁵ Alexander, *Black Fire*, 115-117; Synan & Fox, *William J. Seymour*, 59-62; Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 192-193; Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 6; Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement*, 105-113.

⁴⁶ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement*, 109.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Frank Bartleman, *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles: As it Was in the Beginning, Old Azusa Mission—From my Diary* (Los Angeles, CA: F. Bartleman), 48 & 49.

⁴⁹ Calvin White, Jr., *Rise to Respectability: Race, Religion and the Church of God in Christ* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2012), 33-35.

inclusive ideals of Seymour and the Azusa revival, the COGIC began ordaining ministers of both races.⁵⁰ G.B. Cashwell, a white, holiness evangelist from North Carolina also made the pilgrimage to Azusa. Being from the South, Cashwell harbored typically southern feelings concerning race, which were challenged by the interracial worship and equality found at Azusa.⁵¹

As a holiness evangelist, Cashwell had been to interracial services before, but nothing compared to the racial inclusivity that he experienced at Azusa. In Azusa he found whites, blacks, Chinese and all manner of other races worshipping together. He also found whites submitting to blacks as they allowed Seymour and his followers to lay hands on them to receive the Holy Ghost baptism. “As soon as I reached Azusa Mission, a new crucifixion began in my life and I had to die to many things,” Cashwell wrote when he returned home to North Carolina.⁵² Cashwell was at first perplexed and cautious of such activity, but soon, as he later noted, “God gave me the victory” and allowed Seymour to lay his hands upon him, received the Baptism, and spoke in tongues.⁵³

Cashwell left Azusa with a “call” to bring the Pentecostal experience to the South where he preached the doctrine to both whites and blacks without prejudice. Of a January 1907 revival meeting he conducted in Dunn, North Carolina, shortly after returning from his experience at Azusa, Cashwell wrote, “Several colored people have received their real Pentecost and speak in tongues...All the people of God are one here. I prayed much that God would give me access to my brethren, and thus I might convince them of His blessed truths.”⁵⁴ He continued to spread the

⁵⁰ Synan & Fox, *William J. Seymour*, 48; Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 227-229.

⁵¹ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement*, 122-124; Alexander, *Black Fire*, 125; Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 201-202.

⁵² G.B. Cashwell, “Came 3,000 Miles for His Pentecost”, *The Apostolic Faith*, December 1906, pg. 3.

⁵³ Ibid; Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 201; Alexander, *Black Fire*, 125; Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 104; Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement*, 123 & 124.

⁵⁴ G.B. Cashwell, “Pentecost in North Carolina”, *The Apostolic Faith*, January 1907, pg 1.

Gospel and the Pentecostal doctrine throughout the southeast United States, where he became known as the “Pentecostal apostle to the South.”⁵⁵ More than just an evangelist of the new Pentecostal doctrine, Cashwell’s widely publicized meetings gained him a high profile throughout the South, especially among holiness leaders drawn to the Pentecostal doctrine and experience. Cashwell’s ministry would be responsible for bringing several holiness leaders and movements into the Pentecostal fold, one of whom was A.J. Tomlinson and the Cleveland, Tennessee based Church of God.⁵⁶

By the end of 1907, word of the Pentecostal revivals at Azusa and in Dunn, North Carolina had spread throughout the nation via numerous holiness publications. Hearing of the Pentecostal experience Tomlinson began to so desire the Pentecostal experience that he wanted nothing else.⁵⁷ Speaking in tongues and other phenomenon associated with the Baptism of the Holy Ghost had been experienced since the early years of the Church of God, when it was still known as the Holiness Church at Camp Creek.⁵⁸ However, Tomlinson had not yet experienced the Baptism, neither was the church officially preaching the doctrine. Tomlinson’s intense desire for the Baptism led him to invite Cashwell to preach the doctrine in a meeting at the conclusion of the church’s annual General Assembly. Cashwell accepted the invitation and arrived in Cleveland, Tennessee on January 10, 1908. On the evening of the 12th, he took the stage at the local Cleveland Church of God to preach about the sought-after Pentecostal experience. As Cashwell preached, Tomlinson fell from his chair and began to shake. Describing the experience, he later wrote, “I did not know what such an experience meant... I was soon lost to

⁵⁵ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement*, 126.

⁵⁶ Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 35 & 36, 104, 228; Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement*, 133 & 134.

⁵⁷ A.J. Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict* (Cleveland, TN: Press of Walter E. Rodgers, 1913), 210; James Stone, *The Church of God of Prophecy: History & Polity* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1977), 26.

⁵⁸ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement*, 133; Adrian Varlack, Sr., *Foundations: Church of God of Prophecy Concise History, Polity, Doctrine & Future* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2010), 35-39.

my surroundings as I lay there on the floor, occupied only with God and eternal things.”⁵⁹ His Pentecost had arrived, and, along with it, the Church of God became a Pentecostal denomination.

Tomlinson was well acquainted with Cashwell, having heard him speak of the Pentecostal experience in various meetings across the South.⁶⁰ He knew of Cashwell’s experience in Azusa, and was undoubtedly aware of the interracial worship occurring both at Azusa and in Cashwell’s Pentecostal meetings. Though Tomlinson never wrote of his beliefs concerning racial issues before 1912, his Quaker upbringing likely predisposed him to accept racial equality, and even inclusion.

Tomlinson’s Quaker upbringing, as well as his politically and socially active family, served as a foundation for his eventual role as a Pentecostal icon and his forward-thinking ideas of race and inclusion. Ambrose Jessup Tomlinson was born just after the Civil War on September 22, 1865, to a family of devout Quakers in Hamilton County, Indiana. The Tomlinson family had migrated from North Carolina to Indiana in the late 1830s, along with many others in the “Great Quaker Migration.”⁶¹ The Tomlinson’s were devout in their faith, including the belief that they should be “above all friends of the ‘colored man.’”⁶² Indiana was a state settled by southerners, and consequently it mirrored the racial beliefs of the old South. The Quakers, including the Tomlinson family, sought to change that attitude through peaceable, yet active, measures. They embraced peaceful abolition, promoting legislation to end discriminatory laws or boycotting goods created or affected by slavery. The Tomlinsons also became involved in the Underground Railroad, assisting escaped slaves as they made their way north. R.G.

⁵⁹ Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict*, 211.

⁶⁰ Stone, *History & Polity*, 26 & 27.

⁶¹ Robins, A.J. *Tomlinson: Plainfolk Modernist*, 63-65; Lillie Duggar, A.J. *Tomlinson: Former General Overseer of the Church of God* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1964), 17 & 18.

⁶² Robins, A.J. *Tomlinson*, 67.

Robins writes of the Tomlinson family legend, in which the family, including A.J.'s father, Milton, assisted a runaway slave escape the clutches of bounty hunters. He writes, "The moral of the legend was the ethical heroism at the core of Tomlinson family values."⁶³

By the late 1800s Tomlinson left his Quaker roots behind to embrace the holiness movement. The holiness doctrine embraced the belief in "Christian perfection" or sanctification, the belief that "God removed all taint of sin from the person's life."⁶⁴ Though it strictly confined the believer to a life of piety, the holiness movement was embraced by all manners of people from varying denominations, sects and races. Followers were taught that the rejection of worldly pleasures would bring an ultimate and eternal freedom in the hereafter. They accepted suffering in this life as a means to build faith in God, believing that their ultimate reward in Heaven was far greater than any oppression on earth. The message drew thousands of poor whites to holiness churches and camp meetings across the nation, particularly in the South. The hopeful message of an eternal reward also drew a large population of oppressed blacks. Much like their enslaved ancestors, they embraced the teaching of piety and suffering on earth in exchange for an eternal reward as a means to endure the hardships and cruelty of the Jim Crow era culture.⁶⁵ Beyond merely accepting the holiness message, it was not uncommon for blacks and whites to worship together in holiness camp meetings.⁶⁶ Though it is unclear whether or not Tomlinson ever experienced interracial worship after his conversion to the holiness faith, the idea of interracial fraternity was a familiar theme.

⁶³ Ibid, 71.

⁶⁴ The theology of sanctification dates back to the teachings of John Wesley and was widely embraced by the holiness movement and, subsequently, the Pentecostals. The Wesleyan doctrine teaches that sanctification is a second definite work of grace, following the salvation or conversion experience, available to all who seek it. While many Pentecostal denominations accept this belief, others believe that sanctification is a lifelong process. Tomlinson, and the Church of God accept the Wesleyan teaching; Douglas Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 366-367 n5.

⁶⁵ Harvey, *Freedom's Coming*, 142-144.

⁶⁶ Alexander, *Black Fire*, 76 & 77; Stephens, 82-92.

By 1901 Tomlinson moved to the Appalachian landscape of western North Carolina. Along with his wife and small children, he moved to the rural area after he felt the call of God to the mission fields of Appalachia. Tomlinson supported his family by accepting work as a traveling Bible salesman, which allowed him the opportunity to attend various churches and camp meetings throughout the South. He was also publishing a small monthly entitled *Samson's Foxes*, as well as operating an orphanage by the same name. In the first printing of the little publication Tomlinson proudly proclaimed his purpose, "...for the speedy evangelization of the mountain districts of North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee and the world."⁶⁷ The simple statement is easy to overlook, but it reflects the conviction of a man who saw himself as God's representative to unbelievers in Appalachia, and the world, including all races of people.

On June 13, 1903, while praying atop Burger Mountain near Murphy, North Carolina, Tomlinson received a divine revelation of what he described as "the Church of God of the Bible."⁶⁸ Earlier that year, after a short six month sabbatical in his home county in Indiana, Tomlinson joined a devout group of holiness ministers in establishing the Holiness Church at Camp Creek. Tomlinson believed that the small group of Appalachian believers was the beginning of a movement to restore the Christian church as it was described in the Book of Acts. Shortly after joining the church Tomlinson was offered the role of pastor, which he accepted.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Editorial, *Samson's Foxes*, January 1901.

⁶⁸ A.J. Tomlinson, *Answering the Call of God* (Cleveland, TN, 1913), 17.

While he narrated the story in greater detail later in his life, his diary entry that day simply says: "I was ordained a minister of the gospel of the Holiness Church at Camp Creek, N.C." Diary entry, June 13, 1903, in *Diary of A.J. Tomlinson* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2012), 35; For a more detailed description of Tomlinson's revelation see, C.T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock, Vol. 1* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1973), 312-315.

⁶⁹ It is also believed that at the same time that Tomlinson both joined the holiness group and accepted the role of pastor, the name of the organization was changed to the Church of God. The records are a bit unclear as to exactly when the small organization took the name Church of God. Tomlinson never writes such a thing in his diary, nor do any other records exist from the time. The legend mostly comes Tomlinson's later retelling of the story. Church historian, C.T. Davidson, has written that as late as 1906 the group of churches was still being referred to as the Holiness Church at Camp Creek; Davidson, 338.

The small holiness sect grew significantly under his leadership, including several new congregations from the region of western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, and north Georgia; and soon referred to themselves the Church of God. By the time that Tomlinson received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, under the ministry of G.B. Cashwell in 1908, the church had grown to include congregations from many states.

At the time Tomlinson experienced the baptism with the Holy Ghost in 1908, the Church of God was an all-white denomination, but that changed when he, along with other prominent ministers in the church, traveled to Florida in 1909 to proclaim the Gospel and the message of the Church of God.⁷⁰ He preached in numerous locations throughout the state, but perhaps his most important series of meetings were the ones held in May 1909 at Pleasant Grove. For several nights Tomlinson preached to a congregation of both blacks and whites, many of whom embraced his message. Among those to accept Tomlinson's message at Pleasant Grove, were Rebecca and Edmund Barr, a black couple that would change the racial landscape of the church. Tomlinson licensed both Rebecca and Edmund as evangelists not long after they joined the Church of God, making them the first black licensed ministers in the church. By November the Barrs were in the Bahamas, Edmund's homeland, preaching the message of the church. Their arrival there made them the first Church of God ministers to take the church's message outside the United States.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Tomlinson believed in the theological idea of ecclesiastical restorationism. Tomlinson believed that the church, as described in the Book of Acts, had been restored to modern times. He not only believed that it had been restored, but that it was a physical church body, which he called the Church of God. For decades, the Tomlinson Church of God taught that they were the exclusive and only true church. This message was very much a part of what he preached nearly every place he ministered.

⁷¹ Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God*, 3rd ed. (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1996), 114-117; H. Paul Thompson, Jr. "'On Account of Conditions that Seem Unalterable': A Proposal About Race Relations in the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) 1909-1929," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 25, 2 (Fall 2003): 247; Harold D. Hunter, "A Journey Toward Racial Reconciliation: Race Mixing in the Church of God of Prophecy," in *The Azusa Street Revival and its Legacy*, ed. Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2007), 284; David G. Roebuck, "Unraveling the Cords that Divide: Cultural

Throughout the 1910s, Tomlinson and his followers continued to evangelize to thousands of people of many races. As church membership grew and diversified, so too did the number of black ministers. The church continued to expand in new states and was steadily growing in the island nations. The ledger of ministers lists a substantial number of new “colored” ministers from several states, including North Carolina, Georgia, Florida and Pennsylvania.⁷² The church was carrying on in the interracial tradition of Azusa and the ministry of G.B. Cashwell, the message was for all mankind. However, the church was operating in the land and era of Jim Crow, and it would soon have to confront or conform to the blatant racism that surrounded it.

Not only did black membership begin to grow in the church, Tomlinson promoted black men to prominent positions in church ministry. In June 1912, Edmund Barr received the credentials to establish churches and ordain evangelists, perhaps becoming the first black to be granted such authorization in the Church of God. In fact, Tomlinson made an entry in his diary regarding Barr, one of the few entries in which race is mentioned specifically: “...Held a conference meeting yesterday to consider the question of ordaining Edmund Barr (colored) and setting the colored people off to work among themselves on account of the race prejudice in the south.”⁷³ Tomlinson’s note to his diary hints at the struggle that the church had to face during its early years. From the little he wrote on the subject of race, we can only infer that Tomlinson was very much in favor of interracial worship and cooperation in ministry. Unfortunately, he also understood that certain societal ills barred him from fully realizing true racial harmony.

Challenges and Race Relations in the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee),” (paper presented at the 40th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies), 4.

⁷² Church of God Ledger of Ministers, 1909-1921, Hal Bernard Dixon, Jr. Pentecostal Research Center, Lee University, Cleveland, TN.

⁷³ Diary entry, June 4, 1912, in *Diary of A.J. Tomlinson* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2012), 190; Roebuck, “Unraveling the Chords that Divide,” 7; Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, 150.

The racial prejudice in the South prohibited local Church of God congregations from regularly integrating. Dissatisfied by the status quo, black members began to push to have their own leadership and overseers. This was especially true in the state of Florida, where the church's largest number of black members and congregations was concentrated. By the time Barr was ordained in 1912, he had risen greatly in prominence in the church. He, along with his wife Rebecca, had ministered for quite some time in the Bahamas, where they converted many islanders and brought them into the church's membership. Afterwards they returned to Florida and continued to represent the Church of God. Thus, Barr was the obvious choice for Tomlinson to appoint as the overseer of the "colored work" in Florida.⁷⁴

For a predominately white denomination based in the South in the era of Jim Crow, to appoint a black man to a place of distinction and leadership reveals a desire to reform the accepted norm. However, Estrela Alexander points out that the appointment of Barr to oversee the colored work could also be seen as a step backward. "It was progressive in that it elevated a black man to an unprecedented position of denominational leadership, but regressive in that it signaled the beginning of solidification of racial segregation in the denomination."⁷⁵ While there were undoubtedly members and leadership in the church who believed segregation to be appropriate, Tomlinson was not one of them.

However, Tomlinson's belief that believers should refrain from political matters, and trust only in the work of God, made him an accomplice to segregation by default. He continued to make strides to keep black members in the church, but also made decisions that may have pushed members away. In 1913, Barr was replaced as state overseer of the colored work in Florida with a white bishop, Sam C. Perry. The replacement smacked of the paternalistic attitude

⁷⁴ Roebuck, "Unraveling the Chords that Bind," 7-8; Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, 150; Alexander, *Black Fire*, 253-255.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 255.

that permeated the South, which was not altogether unlike Tomlinson. He viewed the role of General Overseer as that of shepherd and would make decisions based upon what he believed God desired. Regardless, Tomlinson once again appointed Barr as overseer of the colored work in Florida in 1915, a position he held until 1917 when he left the church after being denied ordination as a bishop.⁷⁶

The issue with Barr did not prohibit Tomlinson from continuing to make inroads to include blacks, both in church membership and in the annual General Assembly. In 1919 a section of the General Assembly program was dedicated to black members and ministers to preach, sing and testify. Increasing numbers of black men and women were licensed as evangelists, and black men increasingly received license as church deacons, full ministerial ordination, and as bishops. Nevertheless, black members continued to leave the church, as Tomlinson said “one by one.”⁷⁷

During his annual address at the General Assembly in 1922, Tomlinson once again devoted a significant portion to discuss “our colored people.” He was troubled that so many were leaving the church to join with “an organization of colored people,” most likely the Church of God in Christ, a predominantly black denomination led by C.H. Mason. Tomlinson’s message

⁷⁶ The reasoning behind denying Barr ordination as Bishop is unclear. The Ledger of Ministers from 1909-1921 simply states that Barr applied for ordination, but that the application was rejected because he “later did wrong”. After this Barr seems to disappear from all records, though some church historians believe that he joined the Church of God in Christ. Church of God Ledger of Ministers, 1909-1921, Dixon Pentecostal Research Center, Lee University, Cleveland, TN; *Minutes of the Eleventh Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Held at Cleveland, Tennessee, November 1-7, 1915*, 18, 21, & 26, Minutes of the General Assembly of the Church of God (1911-1954), Collection, Hal Bernard Dixon, Jr. Pentecostal Research Center, Lee University, Cleveland, TN ; Alexander, *Black Fire*, 255 & 256; Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, 150-151; Roebuck, “Unraveling the Chords that Bind,” 5-8.

⁷⁷ From 1915 to 1923, the black membership of the Church of God was in flux. New churches and members continued to be added to the church, but many were also leaving to join with C.H. Mason’s Church of God in Christ (COGIC). The COGIC was in many ways almost identical to the Church of God. It espoused nearly all the same theological doctrines, and preached the Pentecostal message. But, it was predominantly black, which drew in many black Church of God members. A.J. Tomlinson, “Twelfth Annual Address: Seventeenth Annual Assembly – November 1-7, 1922, Cleveland, Tennessee,” in *General Assembly Annual Addresses, 1911-1927* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2011), 181.

sounds like that of a concerned parent, once again revealing his paternalistic tendencies. To Tomlinson, the problem was not the church, it was the era and culture in which the church found itself. He addressed the assembly:

There is a problem confronting us that is yet to be solved. South of the Mason and Dixon line it is difficult to show them all the courtesy that we would like to. It is our purpose to make them feel at home with us and they do in a sense, *but on account of conditions that seem to be unalterable* a number of them are going away from us each year.⁷⁸

Tomlinson's statement disclosed his understanding of the cultural problems, but his actions reflected the theory of religious historian Grant Wacker. Wacker writes that racial fraternity, overall, did not last in many Pentecostal denominations because "Pentecostal culture failed to provide a sustained theology of racial reconciliation for whites and blacks alike."⁷⁹ Tomlinson taught that believers should rely solely on God for every need, including in matters of social oppression. Social action equated prayer and waiting on God, not political protest. Consequently, racism and segregation would not be changed by civil protest, but by accepting the laws as they were and seeking God for relief. The encouragement and consolation to his black brothers and sisters was not enough. Neither was simply licensing nor ordaining evangelists and bishops. Tomlinson persistently stated that, "he [God] put no difference between us and them" when he addressed the General Assembly about race.⁸⁰ He believed in a church where all men could freely worship and experience God, but his church was not living up to that standard.

⁷⁸ *Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Held at Cleveland, Tenn., Nov. 1-7, 1922*, 25, Minutes of the General Assembly of the Church of God (1911-1954), Collection, Hal Bernard Dixon, Jr. Pentecostal Research Center, Lee University, Cleveland, TN.

⁷⁹ Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 227.

⁸⁰ *Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Held at Cleveland, Tenn., Nov. 1-7, 1922*, 26, Minutes of the General Assembly of the Church of God (1911-1954), Collection, Hal Bernard Dixon, Jr. Pentecostal Research Center, Lee University, Cleveland, TN.

Fortunately Tomlinson recognized this, yet it took a major denominational split to do so. In 1923 Tomlinson was removed as General Overseer of the Church of God. Several church leaders had accused Tomlinson of mishandling funds, more or less by taking on too much responsibility. Until this time the General Overseer handled all business matters of the church, and some believed that it was too much for Tomlinson to handle alone.⁸¹ While one of Tomlinson's accusers, F.J. Lee, took over as General Overseer, Tomlinson himself rejected the accusations and the subsequent ouster, and led a large number of members to leave the denomination and reform the Church of God.⁸²

For a short time under Tomlinson's leadership the church actually succumbed to southern segregationist norms. The year before the division in 1922, the General Assembly had approved of establishing a "Church of God Colored Work," in which black members in the United States would have their own General Assembly and Overseer, who would report directly to the General Overseer. Though both sides of the divided Church of God continued the "colored work," at least for a short time, the Tomlinson Church of God, readdressed the situation in their 1926 General Assembly. The members of the Questions and Subjects committee brought a question before the assembly concerning the colored work. They questioned whether or not to continue the segregated colored work, in their words, as "it has a tendency to widen the gap between the colored and white races."⁸³ After a few moments of discussion, the committee deferred to

⁸¹ Some historians suspect that the split originated due, not to misappropriation, but to the racial issues that Tomlinson had addressed in the previous General Assembly. There is suspicion that the elders who lead the accusations were in favor of a much more segregated church, which Tomlinson opposed. Unfortunately, no sources exist to back the suspicion.

⁸² For a more detailed explanation of the 1923 split, which centered on an approved church constitution passed in 1921, see Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, 197-233; Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, 611-647. Charles W. Conn served as General Overseer of the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) in the late 20th century. C.T. Davidson served as a Bishop and church historian in the Tomlinson Church of God that split from the parent organization in 1923. The Tomlinson group eventually was given the name, Church of God of Prophecy.

⁸³ "Twenty First Annual Assembly, September 8-14, 1926," in *Upon This Rock* vol. 2, ed. By C.T. Davidson (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1974), 249.

Tomlinson for a decision. He made the decision to end the work; instead, the Tomlinson Church of God would operate as one distinct body. The 1926 ruling ended what could be referred to as ministerial segregation. Blacks and whites would all be part of the same church, a church of all nations. Though some black members continued to leave Tomlinson's church, others continued to join, many becoming deacons and licensed ministers.



FIGURE 2: THE DESIGN FOR THE "ALL NATIONS FLAG," THE OFFICIAL CHURCH FLAG SUBMITTED TO AND APPROVED BY THE ANNUAL ASSEMBLY IN 1933. (IN LILLIE DUGGAR, A.J. *TOMLINSON: FORMER GERNAERL OVERSEER OF THE CHURCH OF GOD* [1964]. COURTESY OF THE WHITE WING PUBLISHING HOUSE, CLEVELAND, TN)

After 1926 the Tomlinson sect continued to integrate and promote inclusion at the denominational level, leading to a more robust multiracial church. In 1933, the Annual Assembly of the Tomlinson sect adopted a new church banner, a symbol which would reflect his desire for a worldwide church for all mankind. The vibrant flag of red, blue and purple was full of symbolism to the church. When presented to the General Assembly, a list of scriptures that were considered prophetic of the Church of God were presented as well. "All these verses together," Tomlinson said, "tell the story of the flag, and also tell how this last days movement is

going to draw the people of all nations.”⁸⁴ After a few more exhortations, the assembly delegates enthusiastically accepted the flag as their symbol. As the assembly began to break out in shouting, dancing and speaking in tongues, Bishop Stanley Ferguson, a black minister from the Bahamas and close friend to Tomlinson, is reported to have walked across the stage with Tomlinson, speaking in tongues and waving the newly accepted flag.⁸⁵ The Church of God, which Tomlinson has long preached was a church for all men, appeared to be finally living up to its promise.

Conversely, the Church of God led by F.J. Lee continued to segregate further. Seating areas in the General Assembly were segregated by color, as were areas for prayer.⁸⁶ The “Church of God Colored Work” continued to function, dividing American blacks from the rest of the denomination. The “colored work” operated a Bible training school and orphanage, all separate from the main, white, body of the Church of God. While black bishops initially served as overseers of the “colored work,” by the late 1950s white bishops were chosen to serve in this capacity. From all accounts, it appears that the black church never lacked, having everything that the white church had, except the respect of being equal.⁸⁷

A.J. Tomlinson continued to promote the plight and the value of black members from time to time in his annual assembly addresses. The church had continued to grow, continually reaching into new countries. In the United States, however, Tomlinson’s church was

⁸⁴ “The Church of God Flag (Twenty-Eighth Assembly),” in *Upon This Rock* vol. 2, ed. By C.T. Davidson (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1974), 452.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 455.

Bishop Stanley Ferguson became a close confidant of A.J. Tomlinson after the 1923 division. Tomlinson quite frequently visited the Bahamas, where Ferguson was overseer. There Tomlinson seemed to find some relief from the constant barrage of legal battles that had been recurring since the split. When Bishop Ferguson passed away in 1934, Tomlinson ordered that all church flags be lowered to half-staff in honor of his friend. Interview with Bishop Adrian Varlack, Director of the Center for Biblical Leadership and Historian of the Church of God of Prophecy, COGOP International Offices, Cleveland, TN, conducted March 7, 2013.

⁸⁶ Roebuck, “Unravelling the Chords that Bind,” 9.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 9-11; Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, 377-378.

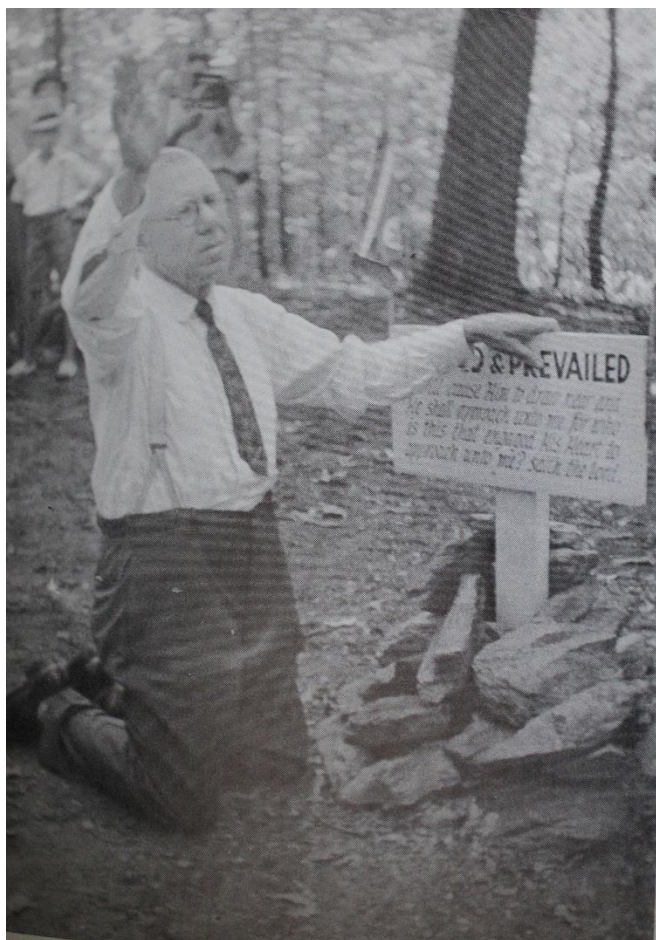


FIGURE 3: A.J. TOMLINSON PRAYING AT THE LOCATION ATOP BURGER MOUNTAIN IN 1941, WHERE HE RECEIVED THE REVELATION OF THE "CHURCH OF GOD OF THE BIBLE." (IN LILLIE DUGGAR, *A.J. TOMLINSON: FORMER GENERAL OVERSEER OF THE CHURCH OF GOD* [1964]. COURTESY OF THE WHITE WING PUBLISHING HOUSE.

predominantly white, and that troubled him greatly. There were pockets of black membership in several states, but he was not satisfied; he desired to see many more come to be members of his church. In 1941, just two years before his death, Tomlinson created the position of General Field Secretary to the Overseer for the Colored race.⁸⁸ In this capacity, black members would not be set apart, but, instead they would have a representative to help the General Overseer reach out further to blacks outside the church.⁸⁹

As a whole, the early Pentecostal movement experienced a brief moment of interracial harmony and inclusivity,

followed by a lighter form of the racial segregation that plagued secular society. Tomlinson, on the other hand, found a way to avoid segregating to a great degree, by persisting in his message that his church carried a message for all mankind.

⁸⁸ A.J. Tomlinson, *General Assembly Annual Addresses, 1928-1943* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2011), 384-385; C.T. Davidson, ed., *Memoirs of Our Ministry* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1949).

⁸⁹ Charles T. Davidson, ed. *Memoirs of Our Ministry* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1949); A.J. Tomlinson, *General Assembly Annual Addresses, 1928-1943* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2011), 385.

Yet Tomlinson was not without fault. His inability to use his prominence in the faith community to act socially, resulted in black members not always being left fulfilled. He could have pushed for full integration within the church early on, by rejecting the idea for a separate “colored work.”

Nevertheless, Tomlinson advocated an open-minded idea of racial equality and inclusivity that was unparalleled, especially in the American South. Even though many black members of the Tomlinson Church of God tended to worship together, and whites the same, Tomlinson was promoting blacks to places of prominence and actively seeking a way to reach out further. Such inclusivity created an organization that was countercultural to the societal norms of a segregated society. Tomlinson, though, was not interested in changing society as much as he was building the church he envisioned in 1903, which included whites, blacks and other races alike. To remind his church members of this Tomlinson said, during his annual address to the 1933 General Assembly, “It is an undisputed fact that we have the every creature message...This includes all the great races of the world.”⁹⁰

⁹⁰ A.J. Tomlinson, *General Assembly Annual Addresses, 1928-1943* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2011), 210.

Chapter Three

“The Great Speckled Bird”:

Prominent Black Ministers and Interracial Fraternity in the Church of God of Prophecy, 1923-1964

A.J. Tomlinson demonstrated his belief in an integrated church through the recruitment and promotion of black ministers, both male and female. He fervently believed that God had anointed him to build the true and only church; and that a sign of that church was its interracial and multicultural appearance. In the introductory notes to the minutes for the 1933 Annual Assembly, he wrote, “The representation of races, nationalities and languages assisted in increasing the interest because this is more proof of our fulfilling prophecy and compares with Jeremiah’s ‘Speckled Bird.’”⁹¹ Tomlinson believed that Jeremiah 12:9 which reads “My heritage is unto me as a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her,” was a prophecy of his church. He used the scripture to create a controversial new theology, upon which he built his church. “The Great Speckled Bird” theology was simple and clear:

“It [the church] will not be made up of white people only, or of colored people only, or of any one race exclusive of all others. But it requires the union of whites, the colored, the browns, the Indians, called the red men, the yellow races—and all under one government, one rule, one faith or doctrine—all one.”⁹²

⁹¹ A.J. Tomlinson, “Prefatory Notes,” *Minutes of the 28th Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Over Which A.J. Tomlinson is General Overseer, Held in Central Ave. Tabernacle, Cleveland, Tennessee, U.S.A., September 13-19, 1933*, Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

⁹² A.J. Tomlinson, “Twenty Second Annual Address to the Twenty-Seventh Annual Assembly—September 7-13, 1932, Cleveland, Tennessee”, in *General Assembly Annual Addresses, 1928-1943* (Cleveland, TN: The White Wing Publishing House, 2012), 142.

Such a doctrine was radical in nature. The early Pentecostal movement witnessed the mingling of races during worship, even in the South, but, as noted by historians of the movement, such activity soon ceased and the movement resorted to the societal norms of separation between the races. “The Great Speckled Bird” Theology made interracial worship and fraternity denominational policy, that would cause the southern based church to be despised by the segregated culture that surrounded it.⁹³ Nevertheless, as Tomlinson’s biographer, R.G. Robins wrote, “they [blacks] and other racial minorities had been written into its evidentiary ecclesiology. The presence of people of color was a validating sign, proof positive that the “middle wall of partition...between the races and the nations” had fallen within the Church of God.”⁹⁴ However, “people of color” were more than a presence in Tomlinson’s Church. They held leadership roles within denominational hierarchy and had access to the pulpit at the Annual Assembly, where at times they challenged whites and blacks to work together in unity.

Bishop Ralph Scotton loved the Church of God. A black minister and North Carolina native, Scotton joined the Church of God of Prophecy (COGOP) in 1930 and ordained as a bishop in 1940. He was a determined worker and minister for the COGOP, serving as both a local pastor, evangelist and denominational representative, traveling across the United States and the Caribbean preaching the Gospel and adding members to the church he loved and believed in. From 1941 to 1952, in his capacity as one of two General Field Secretaries for the Church of God of Prophecy, Scotton traveled over 150,000 miles and preached over 2,000 sermons. “I am

⁹³ A song was created for the church, entitled “The Great Speckled Bird”. The song was published in the denominational hymn book, *Banner Hymns*, used in every church. The tune for the song was adapted from a popular country song at the time.

⁹⁴ R.G. Robins, *A.J. Tomlinson: Plainfolk Modernist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 227.

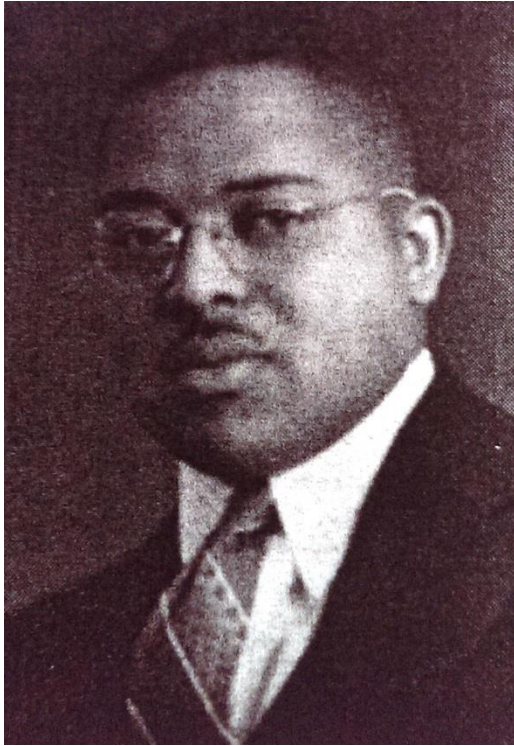


FIGURE 4: BISHOP RALPH C. SCOTTON (IN CHARLES T. DAVIDSON, ED. *MEMOIRS OF OUR MINISTRY* [1949]. COURTESY OF THE WHITE WING PUBLISHING HOUSE, CLEVELAND, TN)

stirred...I have been praying, preaching, fasting and putting forth every effort I knew how to stir up the workers that we might win souls for the Church of God, the body of Christ,” he preached to the Annual Assembly in 1950.⁹⁵ He adhered to the teachings of the church’s founder A.J. Tomlinson; that the Church of God was for all people, including “all the great races of the world.”⁹⁶ He tirelessly promoted the teachings of the Church, believing that perseverance and faith would lead to, not only racial equality, but interracial fraternity.

Bishop Scotton was appointed by A.J. Tomlinson in 1941 to General Field Secretary No. 2, to assist the church and the General Overseer in reaching black Americans and to “keep in closer contact with the race.”⁹⁷ Although Scotton’s ministry focused on black Americans, mostly in the South, he also served as the general representative for the church at numerous district and state conventions, where whites and blacks worshipped together, and preached yearly sermons at the Annual Assembly. Scotton, like nearly all ministers in the church, avoided commentary on political matters, namely racial segregation, outside the church.

⁹⁵ *Minutes of the 45th Annual Assembly of the Church of God Over Which M.A. Tomlinson is General Overseer, Held at Cleveland, Tennessee, September 12-18, 1950*, 19, Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

⁹⁶ A.J. Tomlinson, *General Assembly Annual Addresses, 1928-1943* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2011), 210.

⁹⁷ Charles T. Davidson, ed. *Memoirs of Our Ministry* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1949); A.J. Tomlinson, *General Assembly Annual Addresses, 1928-1943* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2011), 385.

Nevertheless, Scotton was not afraid to use the pulpit to promote racial harmony and fraternity within the church. Racial fraternity was a popular topic at the church's 1941 Annual Assembly. Not only did Scotton give a sermon entitled "All Races in One Mighty Church with Christ the Head for All," General Overseer A.J. Tomlinson devoted a segment of his annual address, as he had in past addresses, to the "colored race." "The middle wall of partition has been broken down by the blood of the cross all have access to God through Jesus Christ alike. All are to be members of his body, the Church..." Tomlinson proclaimed.⁹⁸ The theme continued in Scotton's sermon in 1942, when he pleaded for "the white brethren to lend their assistance as much as possible in winning the colored people to the Church of God."⁹⁹

Several notable historians have acknowledged the interracial fraternity that occurred in the early years of the Pentecostal movement as a whole. Interracial worship was indeed commonplace, even in the South, nor was it uncommon for black ministers to preach to white congregations or to lay hands on and pray for white believers, and vice versa. The same historians also acknowledge two other attributes of racial fraternity and inclusivity in the early Pentecostal movement. One, racial integration was not permanent in most Pentecostal sects. In fact, although many denominations were formed around Pentecostal revival outbreaks, many of which were interracial, most formed as either all white or all black sects. Two, black ministers were rarely put in a place of prominence to challenge white believer's on the terms of racial equality or inclusivity. A few white Pentecostal denominations maintained a small percentage of minority followers, but were often slow to place black believers or ministers in a place of

⁹⁸ Ibid, 384.

⁹⁹ *Minutes of the World Wide 37th Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Over Which A.J. Tomlinson is General Overseer, Held at the World Wide Annual Assembly Tabernacle Cleveland, Tenn., September 9-15, 1942*, 10, Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

prominence or authority within their church. The exception was the Tennessee-based COGOP, which promoted black men and women to ministerial prominence and gave them a platform to promote equality and inclusion within the church. Although equality and inclusion was far from perfect within A. J. Tomlinson's church, it nevertheless served as a countercultural model of racial fraternity that was sorely missing in the early and mid-twentieth century, especially in the Jim Crow South.

As General Overseer, A.J. Tomlinson often promoted racial equality and inclusivity of black men and women in the ministry of the church. Before Tomlinson's ouster and the subsequent denominational split in 1923, he personally ordained numerous black men and women as evangelists and black men as bishops. After the 1923 split, in which a sizeable portion of church members left with Tomlinson to form a new separate sect, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) increasingly came to resemble the cultural norms of racial separation. Church of God (Cleveland, TN) historian, and former General Overseer, Charles Conn, wrote that, "In many ways the Church of God reflected the national frustration and inertia of the times...its consequence was painful."¹⁰⁰ In the COGOP, however, the church was increasingly integrated and inclusionary, especially at state conventions and the Annual Assembly.

Black members played a significant role in the COGOP's Annual Assembly. They were ensured a yearly segment of the Annual Assembly program, for which they were in charge. Prominent and up and coming ministers, male and female, were given a chance to preach, sing and testify. The clerks of the Annual Assemblies would often record that such portions of the program were "victorious," and would note the positive response from the racially mixed audience. Black ministers and members were not solely relegated to one section of the program,

¹⁰⁰ Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God*, 3rd ed. (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1996), 377

but would often take part in other segments of the Annual Assembly. They sang, preached, prayed, served on powerful assembly committees and participated in the annual “All Nations Parade” that would wind through Central Avenue and Ocoee Street in Cleveland, Tennessee during the assembly.

Furthermore, white church leaders, at times, reciprocated the call for racial unity from the assembly podium. At the 1937 Annual Assembly L.A. Moxley, state overseer of Tennessee, and W. M. Lowman, state overseer of Virginia, gave a joint sermon entitled “We Must Keep the Spirit of All the Races.”¹⁰¹ Similarly, in 1938 missionary C.H. Holley delivered a sermon, “All Races to be Members of the Church of God Under One Government—This includes Cuba,” to the Assembly delegates.¹⁰² Both messages echoed the sentiments of Tomlinson, who had long called for racial inclusivity from the assembly podium. More importantly, black ministers were promoted to a place of prominence within the mostly white denomination that was rarely seen in any other organization based in the American South.

Bishop Ralph Scotton was certainly not the first black minister to be promoted to a position of authority within Tomlinson’s Church of God. Edmund and Rebecca Barr were not only the first black man and woman to be licensed as ministers, but are believed to be the first international missionaries for the fledgling denomination. The Barrs joined the Church of God during a camp meeting in Pleasant Grove, Florida where A.J. Tomlinson preached and promoted the Church of God in April 1909. Little record exists of what was spoken at that camp meeting,

¹⁰¹ Greater analysis of these sermons could be made, but unfortunately there are no known existing records of what was said during these sermons. Often only sermon titles were offered in the Annual Assembly Minutes. Charles T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock, Vol. 2 (1923-1943)* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1974), 619; Harold D. Hunter, “A Journey Toward Racial Reconciliation: Race Mixing in the Church of God of Prophecy,” in *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy*, ed. Harold D. Hunter & Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2006), 295; Estrela Y. Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 267.

¹⁰² Davidson, *Upon This Rock*, Vol. 2, 661; Hunter, 295.

but it was enough to convince the Barrs to join the church. Not much more than a month later, on May 31 1909, Tomlinson issued ministerial credentials to both Edmond and Rebecca.¹⁰³ Soon after the Barrs traveled to the Bahamas, Edmond's homeland, to preach the gospel and promote the Church of God, possibly making them the first foreign missionaries in the Church of God. By 1912 Edmond returned to Florida and was fully ordained by Tomlinson to establish churches and grant ministerial credentials. Little is known of what happened to Edmond and Rebecca Barr; no record of them within the Church of God exists beyond 1917. Nevertheless, Barr's historic place in the Church of God opened the door for subsequent black ministers to have a place of prominence and authority within the church.

A.J. Tomlinson befriended, ordained, and promoted numerous black ministers within the COGOP until his death in 1943. One year before the 1923 denominational separation of the Church of God, Tomlinson appointed Thomas J. Richardson, a black bishop, as the overseer responsible for the black churches in the southeastern United States after several of the church's black members and ministry asked Tomlinson to consider establishing a "colored work."¹⁰⁴ Richardson, a North Carolina native, was appointed to be its overseer and granted unprecedented authority in the church. He was a trusted friend of A.J. Tomlinson's, and became a primary ally during the 1923 denomination split and ensuing reestablishment of the Church of God.

¹⁰³ Church of God Ledger of Ministers, 1909-1921, Dixon Pentecostal Research Center, Lee University, Cleveland, TN. ; David G. Roebuck, "Unravelling the Chords that Divide: Cultural Challenges and Race Relations in the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) (Paper presented at the 40th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Memphis, TN, March 10-12, 2011), 4 & 5; Alexander, 255 & 256.

¹⁰⁴ The assembly minutes after the 1923 separation listed Richardson as overseer of the "Southeastern Region," but was referred to in conversation as the "colored work." *Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Assembly of the Church of God Held at Cleveland, Tenn., Nov. 1-7, 1922*, 57, *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Church of God (1911-1954)*, Collection, Hal Bernard Dixon, Jr. Pentecostal Research Center, Lee University; Alexander, 257 & 258; Hunter, 287.

Thomas J. Richardson was ordained as a bishop in the Church of God in 1919.¹⁰⁵ As overseer of the “colored work” Richardson was given the same authority as that of a state overseer, which meant he was given the ability to establish or disband churches, grant ministerial credentials and appoint pastors.¹⁰⁶ His ministry was focused on converting black Americans and increasing the membership in the Church of God, yet he was also a highly visible figure in the international church body. He delivered sermons, sang with his wife Mamie, served on the Bible Government committee in several Annual Assemblies, and appointed to the denomination’s council of seventy elders.¹⁰⁷

Tomlinson and Richardson developed a close relationship during the first half of the 1920s. A few letters between the two reveal a trusting relationship, words of encouragement and advice. During the tumultuous denominational split of 1923 Richardson remained a steadfast supporter of Tomlinson’s. “I am with you,” he wrote to Tomlinson in September of that year, “I am a member of the Church of God as found in the New Testament...I have never accepted anything else.”¹⁰⁸ Tomlinson reciprocated in kind, stating “I am glad you say you are with us,” and expressed a strong desire to have Richardson’s name on a brief signed by those who sided with the General Overseer at a called council in August 1923, because “it would give it more prestige” and perhaps convince more black members to side with Tomlinson and the reformed Church of God.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Church of God Ledger of Ministers, 1909-1921, Dixon Pentecostal Research Center, Lee University, Cleveland, TN.

¹⁰⁶ A.J. Tomlinson to Thomas J. Richardson, May 25, 1923, Tomlinson-Richardson Correspondence, Church of God of Prophecy Archives, Cleveland, TN (hereafter cited as Tomlinson Richardson Correspondence COGOP).

¹⁰⁷ Charles T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock, Vol. 1* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1973), 577 & 636; Charles T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock, Vol. 2 (1923-1943)* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1974), 85, 91, 97, 165, 233 & 234; Alexander, 257 & 258; Hunter, 286-288.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas J. Richardson to A.J. Tomlinson, September 17, 1923, Tomlinson-Richardson Correspondence, COGOP.

¹⁰⁹ The 1923 split was discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. The “Call Council of the Church” was held on August 8-10, 1923 in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the denomination’s “departure from the Bible Church” by adopting a constitution at the 1921 Annual Assembly. Tomlinson later felt the adoption

The letters between Tomlinson and Richardson reveal Tomlinson's cautious support of an integrated and inclusive church in the years surrounding the denominational split. In the height of the division, and after Tomlinson and his supporters had reformed their church, Richardson wrote to Tomlinson expressing a plan to conduct a tent meeting in Cleveland, Tennessee, the home of both Church of God sects. Fearing interruption from white leaders and members of the opposing group he wrote,

“I am afraid some of the white people will interfere and ruin the meeting...I don't know whether they will interfere with the colored people or not if you were to come. You will have to decide and do the best you can. Know that I love you and would love to see you have a great meeting here among the colored people, but while this terrible fight is on, I don't know how you will make it.”¹¹⁰

Tomlinson's support and love for his church's black members is undeniable. His desire for an integrated and inclusive church was the center of numerous Annual Assembly addresses, and the granting ministerial of credentials to black men and women, as well as promoting black men to high office, reinforce the sincerity of that desire. Nevertheless, Tomlinson also believed that he needed to make concessions, especially in the years just before, and during, the division, in order for the Church to be truly successful. Thus, black churches reported to their own overseer, not the white overseer in their respective states, and Tomlinson would caution ministers like

of the constitution was a wrong decision and recanted his support. This led, in great part, to the denominational split and Tomlinson's ouster. A large portion of the church members and ministers sided with Tomlinson, believing he was God's chosen vessel to lead the church, and reformed the Church of God. The split led to decades of court battles that finally ended in the early 1950s. The document signed by the Richardson and other prominent ministers and leaders, who sided with Tomlinson, reaffirmed what they believed church government out to be and rejected what the elders council had done to Tomlinson. Charles T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock, Vol. 1*(Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1973), 630-636. A.J. Tomlinson to Thomas J. Richardson, September 20, 1923, Tomlinson-Richardson Correspondence, archives of the COGOP.

¹¹⁰ Tomlinson is not writing about white citizens of Cleveland in general. His mention of the “terrible fight” indicates that his comments are directed to the leaders of the elder council of the Church of God, which he had just separated himself from. A.J. Tomlinson to Thomas J. Richardson, July 20, 1923, Tomlinson-Richardson Correspondence, COGOP; Hunter, 290.

Richardson to be careful to schedule meetings in certain places, because the “white people may interfere.”¹¹¹

A.J. Tomlinson had great respect for Bishop Thomas Richardson, yet by 1927 Richardson left the Church of God, returned a few years later, but never regained the prominence he once had. In fact, little record of Richardson’s involvement in the church exists past late 1926. In part Richardson left because the 1926 Annual Assembly of the Tomlinson Church of God chose to disband the “colored work,” because “it has a tendency to widen the gap between the colored and white races.”¹¹² Although, the church was taking a giant leap toward full integration, it came at the expense of one of the church’s strongest allies.¹¹³

While there appeared to be a mutual understanding between white and black members of why the church and its leadership was so cautiously welcoming of black Americans, it was a lost opportunity to develop a stronger racial fraternity. In some ways Richardson represented an era of cautious and incomplete integration in the Church of God. Although he departed, the elimination of the “colored work” created greater opportunity for more complete integration, racial inclusion, fraternity and opportunity for many more black ministers to rise to prominence.

Interracial fraternity and inclusion went beyond ministerial ordination and appointments. The church’s publications routinely published articles and editorials covering the exploits of black members and ministers in the church. *The White Wing Messenger* was the source for all the happenings in the Tomlinson church.¹¹⁴ Tomlinson, long a believer in the power of print, began the weekly paper in 1923, not long after the division between the two Church of God

¹¹¹ A.J. Tomlinson to Thomas J. Richardson, July 20, 1923, Tomlinson-Richardson Correspondence, COGOP

¹¹² “Twenty First Annual Assembly, September 8-14, 1926,” in *Upon This Rock* vol. 2, ed. By C.T. Davidson (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1974), 249.

¹¹³ Hunter, 292 & 293

¹¹⁴ Hereafter referred to as *White Wing*.

factions. The pages of the weekly contained testimonies of members and ministers, announcements for upcoming meetings, theological editorials from the General Overseer, obituaries of departed members and an assortment of other church news. Just as the church had worked to be more inclusive of its black members, so too did its publication. All members were allowed equal access, regardless of race; nor was news and testimonies of black members relegated to the back page. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s race was rarely regarded in the *White Wing*, but when it was, it was in terms of interracial activity and fraternity. “The Lord blessed and heaven smiled upon us. There were saints white and colored from various churches,” read a front page submission to the *White Wing* about a district meeting in North Carolina.¹¹⁵ Reports and comments such as these were not uncommon, especially when it came to reporting on state and district meetings.

Ignoring racial boundaries in the Jim Crow South, members and ministers often submitted testimonials about interracial meetings or promotions for upcoming meetings where whites and blacks would come together. C.L. Taylor, state overseer of North Carolina, used the *White Wing* to invite all to attend the Church of God state convention in North Carolina in 1939. Addressing the needs of those traveling to the meeting he wrote, “Plans are being made to give lodging and breakfast free for both white and colored.”¹¹⁶ Bishop E. C. Rider, the state overseer of Mississippi during the 1930s, submitted an exhaustive testimony of his travels to the various district conventions in his state in 1935. The first convention was for a district of “colored churches”, held in Van Vleet, Mississippi, at the home of Greene Bafford, a church member.

¹¹⁵ “District and Unity Meetings Blessed,” *White Wing Messenger*, April 14, 1934, *White Wing Messenger*, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

¹¹⁶ “North Carolina State Convention,” *White Wing Messenger*, May 6, 1939, *White Wing Messenger*, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

Although the meeting was attended by only a few, Bishop Rider wrote enthusiastically of the meeting's success, "The power of God came down," he wrote.¹¹⁷

More glowing were the almost yearly reports from the state conventions in East Texas. Black membership in the Tomlinson Church of God in East Texas was large and the annual conventions there were interracial, both in worship and fraternity. A.J. Tomlinson described the interracial convention in a 1937 *White Wing* editorial: "The large tabernacle was filled with a speckled congregation, which reminded me of Jeremiah's speckled bird, demonstrating the all nations Church."¹¹⁸ The black membership in East Texas was active, and known by one Bishop as "some of the best workers in East Texas."¹¹⁹ The reports submitted to the *White Wing* from year to year portray a vibrant Pentecostal convention. The "fiery song service" and messages, such as "Get Filled with the Holy Ghost Before it's Too Late," produced an energetic atmosphere described as a "touch from heaven."¹²⁰ Much like the annual denominational assemblies, the state convention in East Texas included a service conducted by their black churches, which almost always included a healing service. The healing services were perhaps the most racially harmonious sessions, black ministers laying hands on whites to pray for healing and vice versa. Such services were noted as "full of fire and zeal."¹²¹

Not limited to recollections of recent conventions, the *White Wing* often posted happenings and success of local churches and leaders. When not in convention season, editors

¹¹⁷ E.C. Rider, "1935 District Convention Campaign in Mississippi," *White Wing Messenger*, August 3, 1935, *White Wing Messenger*, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

¹¹⁸ Tomlinson is referring to the scripture, Jeremiah 12:9. Tomlinson interpreted the scripture as a prophecy that described a future church made up of all races. A.J. Tomlinson, "More Conventions Passed," *White Wing Messenger*, April 24, 1937, *White Wing Messenger*, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

¹¹⁹ Clive Jared (Retired Bishop in The Church of God and former State Overseer of several states), in telephone interview with the author, February 26, 2014.

¹²⁰ Alice Griffin, "Glorious State Convention, East Texas," *White Wing Messenger*, July 30, 1943, *White Wing Messenger*, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

¹²¹ Ibid.

printed news of special events or local church milestones on the front page. The front page of the October 9, 1937 issue of the *White Wing* featured a story on a black pastor, J.R. Smith, and his congregation in Miami, Florida, which raised over \$2,000 to pay off a church debt and avoid foreclosure.¹²² Numerous issues covered revivals and special meetings taking place in black churches or the travels of prominent black ministers. Bishop Scotton and his successor, D.M. Deadrick, a native of East Texas, were often featured on the weekly's front page in stories describing their travels and ministry. The *White Wing* was a reflection of the church it was created to promote, espousing and practicing the beliefs of its founder; including Tomlinson's fervent belief that people of all races were welcome and meant to be a vibrant part of the church and its mission.

Minorities were certainly a vibrant part of the church and continuously promoted to positions of prominence. They were celebrated in success, whether it be raising funds for a local church, preaching an energetic sermon, establishing new churches or leading entire regions as an overseer. Black members were often awarded prize banners for various projects, and recognized



FIGURE 5: THE STATE AND NATIONAL OVERSEERS IN 1932. A.J. TOMLINSON IS SEATED IN THE FRONT ROW, SECOND FROM THE LEFT. BISHOP STANLEY FERGUSON IS STANDING IN THE SECOND ROW, FOURTH FROM RIGHT. (IN LILLIE DUGGAR, *A.J. TOMLINSON: FORMER GENERAL OVERSEER OF THE CHURCH OF GOD* [1949]. COURTESY OF THE WHITE WING PUBLISHING HOUSE, CLEVELAND, TN)

¹²² J.R. Smith, "Miami Church Raises \$2, 037.30 Debt," *The White Wing Messenger*, October 9, 1937, *White Wing Messenger*, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

for such at state conventions, the Annual Assembly or in the pages of the *White Wing*. The Annual Assembly minutes and reports in the *White Wing* routinely report the titles and audience responses from energetic sermons preached by its black ministers. Even in death, several black members were memorialized in the pages of the *White Wing* or eulogized by white bishops who worked and prayed with them.

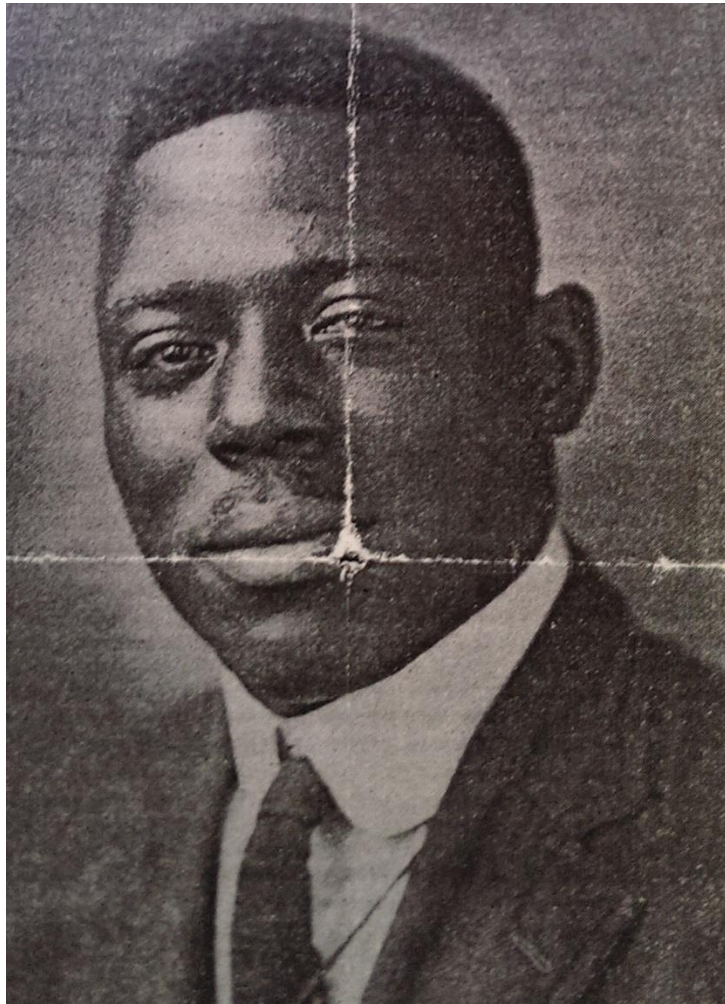


FIGURE 6 "OUR MISSIONARY HERO," THE PHOTOGRAPH OF BISHOP STANLEY FERGUSON THAT WAS FEATURED PROMINENTLY ON THE FRONT PAGE OF THE AUGUST 4, 1934 EDITION OF THE *WHITE WING MESSENGER*. (*WHITE WING MESSENGER*, AUGUST 4, 1934. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE WHITE WING PUBLISHING HOUSE, CLEVELAND, TN)

Bishop Stanley Ferguson, national overseer of the Bahamas and native Bahamian, achieved near legendary status in the Tomlinson church during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Ferguson was appointed as the overseer of the Bahamas in 1923 at the age of 29, just shortly after joining the Church of God. He began his ministry in 1918 as a Baptist, and within a few years joined the young Pentecostal denomination. He became a close ally of A.J. Tomlinson, especially during the years just after the 1923 division. Bishop Ferguson's influence spread well beyond the Bahamas. He ministered across the United States and

remembered as “dearly loved by the people everywhere.”¹²³ Ferguson’s presence at the church’s Annual Assembly was such that Bishop Homer Tomlinson, son of A.J. Tomlinson, said of him, “It seemed that all of us held him in such love and esteem that we felt if he had arrived from the Bahamas the Assembly was ready to get under way.”¹²⁴ When Bishop Ferguson died in July 1934, the headline of the following *White Wing* read, “Stanley R. Ferguson, Overseer of the Bahamas and Hero of Many Battles Dies at His Post.”¹²⁵ Included on the front page, prominently placed in the center, was the Bishop’s photograph under the heading “Our Missionary Hero,” along with two obituaries to the deceased Ferguson. Never before had any minority been so prominently featured on the front page of the *White Wing*. Nor was the death of any other church leader so mourned, with the exception of A.J. Tomlinson.

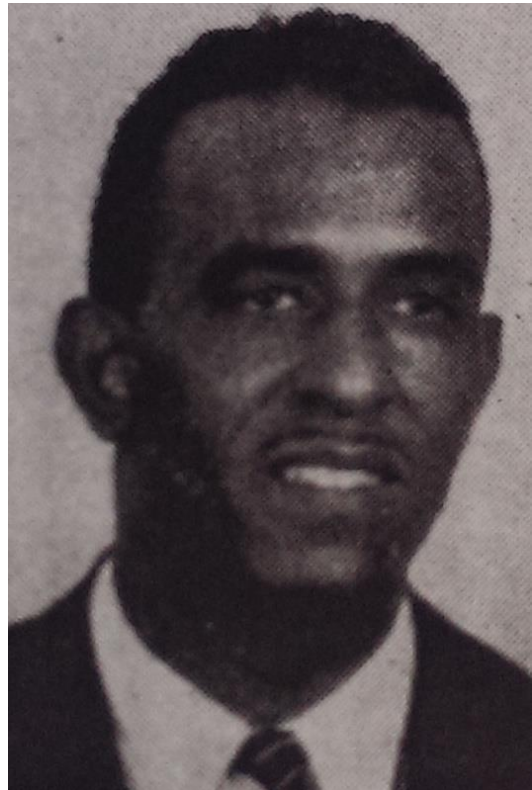


FIGURE 7: BISHOP D.M. DEADRICK (IN CHARLES T. DAVIDSON, ED. *MEMOIRS OF OUR MINISTRY* [1949]. REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION OF THE WHITE WING MESSENGER, CLEVELAND, TN)

The rise in prominence of several black ministers and bishops in the COGOP can be documented through the Annual Assembly minutes and the *White Wing*. Dee Mitchell (D.M.) Deadrick, Dorothy Deadrick and Pattie K. Scotton were often cited and praised for their

¹²³ “Beloved Overseer of the Bahamas Died in the Faith,” *The White Wing Messenger*, August 4, 1934, *White Wing Messenger*, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

¹²⁴ Homer A. Tomlinson, “Stanley R. Ferguson, Beloved Bishop of the Bahamas, Gains Immortality,” *The White Wing Messenger*, August 4, 1934, *White Wing Messenger*, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

¹²⁵ *The White Wing Messenger*, August 4, 1934, *White Wing Messenger*, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

accomplishments in ministry. The Deadricks were a married couple from East Texas, and both ministers. Like Ralph Scotton, Thomas J. Richardson, and Stanley Ferguson, the Deadricks were tireless promoters of the Church of God. So too was Pattie K. Scotton, also the mother of Bishop Ralph Scotton, who served as pastor of several local churches and was often involved in the denomination's healing services at the Annual Assemblies.

D.M. and Dorothy Deadrick were both introduced to the COGOP in the early 1930s by Bishop J.N. Hurley, state overseer of the church in East Texas. Hurley, a white bishop, along with the Deadricks, played a large role in building the church's black membership and the interracial fraternity that took place there. Clive Jared, a white bishop in the COGOP, remembered Hurley's leadership. Jared said, "He would go over to the other side of the tracks and go door to door. He had holes in his shoes, but he had compassion and would gladly go to the blacks...He didn't have to."¹²⁶ D.M. Deadrick, a graduate of Samuel Houston College, began his ministry as a youth minister at his home church in Palacios, Texas.¹²⁷ He was often noted for his boostership of the Church of God and its youth ministry, winning several award banners and notoriety at East Texas state conventions and the Annual Assembly.¹²⁸ Deadrick was "highly respected" and rose quickly in prominence in the denomination.¹²⁹ He pastored several local churches, received his ordination as bishop in 1936, and accepted a statewide

¹²⁶ Clive Jared (Retired Bishop in The Church of God and former State Overseer of several states), in telephone interview with the author, February 26, 2014.

¹²⁷ Charles T. Davidson, ed. *Memoirs of Our Ministry* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1949).

¹²⁸ Velma Byers, "Best Convention Ever Held in East Texas—Wonderful From Beginning to End," *The White Wing Messenger*, May 12, 1934; Alice Griffin, "Glorious State Convention—East Texas," *The White Wing Messenger*, July 31, 1943; Adrian T. Griffin, "God Blesses in East Texas," *The White Wing Messenger*, September 29, 1945, *White Wing Messenger*, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO; *Minutes of the Worldwide Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Over Which M.A. Tomlinson Is General Overseer, Held at the Worldwide Annual Assembly Tabernacle, Cleveland, Tenn., U.S.A., September 12-18, 1945*, 59, Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

¹²⁹ Clive Jared, in telephone interview with the author, February 26, 2014.

leadership role in Tennessee in 1948.¹³⁰ In 1952 Deadrick achieved denominational prominence when he was appointed as General Field Secretary No. 2, succeeding Bishop Ralph Scotton.¹³¹

Like her husband, Dorothy Deadrick also rose to denominational prominence. She often preached in state conventions and the Annual Assembly, served as director of the state youth camp in East Texas, and assisted her husband in his ministerial duties.¹³² “She was one of the most outstanding lady ministers I knew,” recalled Bishop Clive Jared, who gave the eulogy at her funeral.¹³³ She promoted strong Sunday School programs, and testified to their success in “bringing the message to the colored people in East Texas.”¹³⁴ Dorothy Deadrick believed that the Church of God was a church for all people, especially minorities. At the Annual Assembly in 1946 she gave a sermon focused on winning more blacks to the church. Even though she did not directly address the issue of segregation she spoke to those in the audience who were sentimental to the segregationist policies of the South. The exact wording of her sermon is lost, but the clerk for the Annual Assembly recorded that:

“This was a wonderful message and the speaker showed a determination to do her part to do her part to help master the problem of getting the message to the colored race. She stated this is one of the many problems the Church of God must master because the colored race is included in the commission of Jesus. She said she had been taught that those who are in need are our neighbors. The colored race is in need of the gospel message and they are our neighbors.”¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Davidson, ed., *Memoirs of Out Ministry* (1949).

¹³¹ *Minutes of the 47th Annual Assembly, Church of God of Prophecy, September 9-15, 1952, World-Wide Assembly Tabernacle Cleveland, Tennessee*, 103, Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

¹³² Charles T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock: Volume II, 1923-1943* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1974), 545, 560, 724, 782-783, & 825; “Church of God of Prophecy Camp to be Held at Fairgrounds in Angleton,” *The Brazosport Facts*, June 4, 1960, 10.

¹³³ Clive Jared, in telephone interview with the author, February 26, 2014.

¹³⁴ *Minutes of the World-Wide 38th Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Over Which A. J. Tomlinson is General Overseer, Held at the World-Wide Annual Assembly Tabernacle, Cleveland, Tenn., U.S.A., September 8-14, 1943*, 49, Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

¹³⁵ *Minutes of the 41st World-Wide Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Over Which M.A. Tomlinson Is General Overseer, Held at the World-Wide Annual Assembly Tabernacle, Cleveland, Tenn., U.S.A., September 11-17, 1946*,

Her message was not overt in nature, but using scripture and playing on the audience's belief in the church, Dorothy Deadrick challenged assembly delegates to accept blacks as neighbors and to reach out to them.

Similarly to Dorothy Deadrick, Evangelist Pattie K. Scotton often preached and participated in the Annual Assembly. Evangelist Scotton focused on divine healing and assisted with the Annual Assembly's healing services. The September 15, 1940 edition of the *Chattanooga Times* highlighted her involvement in an article about a healing service.

“Pattie K. Scotton of High Point, North Carolina, a negro evangelist started off the healing service after the Reverend D.R. Holcomb, a minister who testified that he had lived twenty seven years trusting God to heal his body, had told of the belief of the saints in the principle of divine healing. Pattie Scotton, standing on the pulpit without any musical accompaniment, then led the congregation in ‘I Need Thee Every Hour.’”¹³⁶

In other assemblies Evangelist Scotton gave sermons on divine healing and passed out prayer cloths to assembly delegates.¹³⁷ The healing services mirrored the early meetings of the Pentecostal movement, interracial in nature, with blacks and whites both participating and seeking prayer for ailments. Consequently, Evangelist Scotton and other black ministers participating were subconsciously participating in a countercultural movement that ignored the edicts of a segregated culture.

By and large the Church of God of Prophecy provided opportunity for black ministers to rise to great prominence in the denomination. In 1949 the church published *Memoirs of our*

58, Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

¹³⁶ *Chattanooga Times*, September 15, 1940.

¹³⁷ Prayer cloths were small strips of cloth that were anointed with oil and prayed over by church elders. The cloths were distributed to church members, who would take them home to sick family members or those who could not attend the healing service. The cloth served as a point of contact from church elders to those who were sick and unable to come to the assembly for prayer. *Minutes of the 31st Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Held in Central Ave. Tabernacle, Cleveland, Tennessee, U.S.A., 1936*, 64; Charles T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock: Vol. II*, 824. Charles T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock: Vol. II*, 764.

Ministry, which highlighted many denominational officials, ordained bishops, evangelists, and deacons. There was no distinction of color, no separate section for its black members. Instead, much like the *White Wing*, the book was integrated and individuals were listed according to rank and level of ordination; the only way to distinguish color was the photographs provided for each minister. Twelve black men were listed as bishops, along with dozens listed as evangelists. Many black women, too, were listed as evangelists. Worship in state conventions and Annual Assembly, ministerial ordination and church publications reflected the vision of A.J. Tomlinson of an integrated church.

The case for racial unity was not only pushed by A.J. Tomlinson, but was, in several instances promoted by other influential white ministers in the church. Bishop L.V. Jones, a district overseer in Mississippi, submitted a call for “colored preachers” in the December 21, 1935 edition of the *White Wing*. “There is approximately 200,000 people in this district. About 70 percent of these are colored people,” Jones wrote, “This is a needy place. We do not have a colored Church of God person in this district. Oh, please, send me some colored preachers. This is an S.O. S. call.”¹³⁸ The 1937 Annual Assembly sermons by Bishops L.A. Moxley and W.M. Lowman, both overseers of southern States, called for unity among the races, as did Bishop C.H. Holley’s assembly sermon in 1938.¹³⁹ During the 1941 Annual Assembly a short program portraying A.J. Tomlinson’s prophetic vision of the church as a “great speckled bird” was put on

¹³⁸ L.V. Jones, “Colored Preachers Needed, Who Will Hear the S.O.S. Call?,” *The White Wing Messenger*, December 21, 1935.

¹³⁹ Charles T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock, Vol. 2 (1923-1943)* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1974), 619; Harold D. Hunter, “A Journey Toward Racial Reconciliation: Race Mixing in the Church of God of Prophecy,” in *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy*, ed. Harold D. Hunter & Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2006), 295; Estrela Y. Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 267.

by Tomlinson's son Homer. The program, broadcast by radio by WAPO Chattanooga, demonstrated "the Church of God for all races and nations of people."¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, church members would often caravan together to the Annual Assembly, including whites and blacks together, which was demonstrated in a photograph submitted to the *White Wing* in 1934.¹⁴¹

Undeniably, racial fraternity existed in the Church of God of Prophecy. In no other predominantly white denomination could blacks be elevated to such places of authority, especially in the Jim Crow South. The



FIGURE 8: UNIDENTIFIED GROUP OF WHITE AND BLACK MEMBERS FROM EAST TEXAS TRAVELING TO THE ANNUAL ASSEMBLY (*WHITE WING MESSENGER*, SEPTEMBER 29, 1934. REPRODUCTION WITH PERMISSION OF THE WHITE WING PUBLISHING HOUSE)

integrated worship at state conventions and the Annual Assembly, support of prominent white ministers and mutual respect from many local church members created a model of racial fraternity unparalleled in a segregated culture. Unfortunately, even with an official doctrine of racial integration and promotion of such by its leadership, the interracial fraternity within the Church of God of Prophecy was far from harmonious, nor did it foster a policy of civil rights that extended beyond the denomination.

Although, state conventions and the Annual Assembly functioned as integrated gatherings, there were no integrated local churches. Mirroring churches across the nation, local churches were segregated, as were many local district conventions. One reason for this, is that

¹⁴⁰ Charles T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock: Vol. II*, 768 & 769.

¹⁴¹ *White Wing Messenger*, September 29, 1934, *White Wing Messenger*, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

the law in many southern states dictated that the races worship separately, even though blacks had regularly worshipped with whites while under slavery.¹⁴² Also, Bishop Clive Jared believed that “churches were separated by color because black worship was so different.”¹⁴³ And so it was, even amongst the emotionally charged atmosphere of typical Pentecostal worship, black Pentecostals were even more vibrant and emotional in their worship. Nevertheless, there was “mutual respect amongst whites and blacks,” Jared says.¹⁴⁴

A.J. Tomlinson was a tireless promoter of interracial fraternity and an integrated church, but even he acknowledged that it was not always possible in the South to “show them all the courtesy that we would like to.”¹⁴⁵ As much as Tomlinson attempted to fully integrate the church, he was unable to draw large numbers of blacks to the denomination, leaving membership overwhelmingly white, many of whom, including church leadership, were southern. Tomlinson remained distressed by this until his death in 1943. Drawing blacks and other minorities, he believed, would only prove that his church fulfilled the prophecy of a “Great Speckled Bird.” Nevertheless, blacks were not drawn to Tomlinson’s church as they were to the mostly black Church of God in Christ (COGIC). “One by One” blacks were leaving the church, Tomlinson declared at the 1922 Annual Assembly.¹⁴⁶ Although promoted to places of authority within the church, potential black members were still drawn to black Pentecostal denominations.

Furthermore, although many black members of Tomlinson’s church stayed, many also left

¹⁴² Jerrold M. Packard, *American Nightmare: The History of Jim Crow* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002), 93 & 94.

¹⁴³ Clive Jared, in telephone interview with the author, February 26, 2014.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

¹⁴⁵ *Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Held at Cleveland, Tenn., Nov. 1-7, 1922*, 25, Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

¹⁴⁶ A.J. Tomlinson, “Twelfth Annual Address: Seventeenth Annual Assembly –November 1-7, 1922, Cleveland, Tennessee,” in *General Assembly Annual Addresses, 1911-1927* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2011), 181.

seeking greater fulfillment or because they were disappointed in the progress of interracial harmony that Tomlinson all but promised.

When Tomlinson died in October 1943, the church could boast of numerous black bishops, evangelists and deacons; as well as interracial worship and services at the Annual Assembly and state conventions. Although whites and blacks often sat apart from each other at the assembly, they still participated with whites in various ministry programs during the meeting and played a large role in the divine healing service.¹⁴⁷ After his death, under the leadership of

his son M.A. Tomlinson, the church continued the same practice in the Annual Assembly, but separate state conventions for blacks and whites began to take place throughout the South. Until 1940 the state

conventions for the Church of God of Prophecy in the state of Georgia were

integrated. But in 1941 state leaders began holding separate state conventions for blacks and whites.¹⁴⁸ By 1953, separate state conventions for “colored” members were held in Georgia,

Virginia, Alabama, Louisiana, Tennessee and Mississippi, with no reason given in church

records.¹⁴⁹ Perhaps the growing and violent racial tension in the southern states forced church

officials in those states to segregate the conventions. Yet, as tension between whites and blacks

increased throughout the South in the 1940s and 1950s, relations between the races in the Church

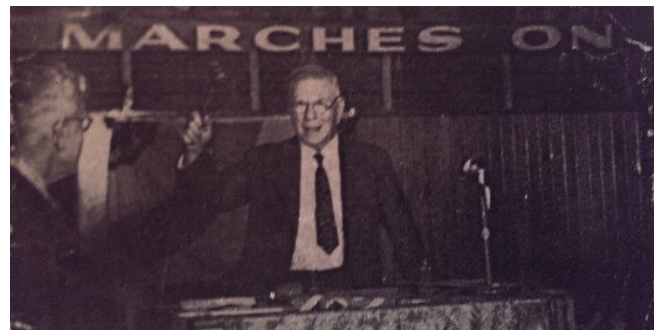


FIGURE 9: A.J. TOMLINSON AT HIS FINAL ASSEMBLY IN 1943, JUST WEEKS BEFORE HIS DEATH. (ON THE COVER OF THE *MINUTES OF THE WORLD-WIDE 38TH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CHURCH OF GOD, OVER WHICH A.J. TOMLINSON IS GENERAL OVERSEER, SEPTEMBER 8-14, 1943*. REPRODUCTION WITH PERMISSION OF THE WHITE WING PUBLISHING HOUSE, CLEVELAND, TN)

¹⁴⁷ Clive Jared, in telephone interview with the author, February 26, 2014.

¹⁴⁸ Lucy Scotton, “Glorious State Conventions: Georgia (Colored),” *White Wing Messenger*, July 31, 1943, *White Wing Messenger*, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

¹⁴⁹ “Secretaries and Workers from Headquarters Rush to the Field to Boost State Conventions,” *White Wing Messenger*, June 19, 1948; *White Wing Messenger*, July 17, 1948, *White Wing Messenger*, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

of God of Prophecy also strained. “Sometimes they [black members] were insulted by white members,” recalls Bishop Clive Jared.”¹⁵⁰

The church lost its greatest advocate for racial reconciliation and harmony when A.J. Tomlinson died. M.A. Tomlinson, as General Overseer, continued to ordain black ministers and promote them to places of authority within the church, but was not as vocal in regards to full integration and racial reconciliation. The loyalty of the members to the teachings of the church, including racial inclusion, was, at the same time, a weakness and a strength. The church was committed to not being involved in social or political issues. Rather than seeking to change the political and social climate, ministers preached and taught that change would come through “sticking to the doctrine” and a vibrant church of God.¹⁵¹



FIGURE 10: M.A. TOMLINSON WAS SELECTED AS GENERAL OVERSEER AFTER HIS FATHER'S DEATH IN 1943. HE SERVED IN THAT CAPACITY UNTIL 1990. (IN CHARLES T. DAVIDSON, ED. *MEMOIRS OF OUR MINISTRY* [1949]. REPRODUCTION WITH PERMISSION OF THE WHITE WING PUBLISHING HOUSE, CLEVELAND, TN)

Members of all races believed the teachings of the Church of God were the cure for the world's problems, including racial segregation. At the 1946 Annual Assembly, Bishop Alexander Gilmore, a black minister from North Carolina, said during a sermon, “I am satisfied in the Church of God. I love its government, I love its teachings, I love everything about it. It is my determination to remain in the Church of God. Let every one of us determine within ourselves to stick to the Church of God because I know it will win after while. I know the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid

¹⁵¹ *Minutes of the World-Wide 40th Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Over Which M.A. Tomlinson is General Overseer, Held at the World-Wide Annual Assembly Tabernacle, Cleveland, Tenn., U.S.A., September 12-18, 1945*, 59, *Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy*, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

purpose of God will be accomplished.”¹⁵² Ministry was not to focus on social or political change, but on converting souls, bringing them into the Church of God and preparing them for the imminent return of Christ. During his sermon at the 1950 Annual Assembly, Bishop Ralph Scotton said, “I am full of crying right now. We want the spirit of winning lost souls to get hold of us...The body of Christ has the message of the last days. It has the message the world needs. Obedience to this message will get souls ready to meet the Lord.”¹⁵³

Although the roots of the Civil Rights Movement were religious in nature, most Pentecostals remained uninvolved. The exception was the Church of God in Christ, which became involved in the movement in the early 1960s after a change in denominational leadership.¹⁵⁴ Compared to other Pentecostal or holiness denominations, the Church of God of Prophecy was not much different in terms of involvement in social or political matters, beyond advocating for a life of holiness, prayer, bible reading and attending church.¹⁵⁵ On the whole, Pentecostals were convinced that the second coming of Christ was imminent and that to trifle in “worldly” matters was a waste of time.

¹⁵² *Minutes of the World-Wide 41st Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Over Which M.A. Tomlinson is General Overseer, Held at the World-Wide Annual Assembly Tabernacle, Cleveland, Tenn., U.S.A., September 11-17, 1946*, 58, Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

¹⁵³ *Minutes of the 45th Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Over Which M.A. Tomlinson is General Overseer, Held in the World-Wide Annual Assembly Tabernacle, September 12-18, 1950, Cleveland, Tenn., U.S.A.*, 20, Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

¹⁵⁴ The COGIC remained distant from the Civil Rights Movement until the death of C.H. Mason, the church’s founder, in 1961. The new presiding bishop, J.O. Patterson, Jr., directed the mostly black denomination to take a more proactive role in the movement. For a detailed narrative and analysis of the COGIC’s role in the Civil Rights Movement see, Calvin White, Jr., “‘Dar He’: COGIC and the National Civil Rights Movement,” *The Rise to Respectability: Race, Religion, and the Church of God in Christ* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2012).

¹⁵⁵ For a more comprehensive narrative on race and the Pentecostal movement as a whole see, Cecil M. Robeck, “The Past: Historical Roots of Racial Unity and Division in American Pentecostalism,” *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 14 (May 2005): www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj14/robeck.html.

As the Civil Rights Movement, led by ministers such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Reverend Ralph Abernathy, spread across the South, the Church of God of Prophecy remained largely silent. None of its prominent black leaders joined in the movement, and no record of official statement on Civil Rights exists. Although not a presence in the Civil Rights Movement, black ministers were still able to take to stand in front of an interracial audience at the church's Annual Assembly and seek help ministering to the unreached "colored people" or remind members that they were all one, an opportunity that few predominantly white organizations in the South allowed.¹⁵⁶ Bishop E.L. Jones, General Field Secretary and successor to Bishops Ralph Scotton and D.M. Deadrick, reminded state overseers in 1961, "Overseers, you are responsible for your state, white and colored...I go to help you, but still the work in your state is your responsibility...let us work together."¹⁵⁷

The Church of God of Prophecy was a rare anomaly in the Jim Crow South. It was rare in that its leadership, especially A.J. Tomlinson, promoted the idea that the races were equal in stature through the "Great Speckled Bird" theology, and that it ordained and promoted dozens of black members to places of prominence and authority. The church's national leadership was fairly consistent in its approach to racial inclusion and fraternity, yet it was greatly lacking in consistency at the local level. Local churches remained segregated and black members were not always treated equally by white members. Nevertheless, it allowed its black ministers to appeal

¹⁵⁶ *Minutes of the 45th Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Over Which M.A. Tomlinson is General Overseer, Held in the World-Wide Annual Assembly Tabernacle, September 12-18, 1950, Cleveland, Tenn., U.S.A., 21; Minutes of the 55th Annual General Assembly, September 13-19, 1960, World-Wide Assembly Tabernacle, Cleveland, Tennessee, The Church of God of Prophecy, 33, Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.*

¹⁵⁷ *Minutes of the 55th Annual General Assembly, September 13-19, 1960, World-Wide Assembly Tabernacle, Cleveland, Tennessee, The Church of God of Prophecy, 33 & 34, Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.*

to and instruct the church's white members and ministers to reach out to and take care of blacks, from the Annual Assembly pulpit.



FIGURE 11: SEVERAL DENOMINATIONAL LEADERS COMMEMORATING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST ASSEMBLY OF THE CHURCH OF GOD. BISHOP RALPH SCOTTON STANDS TO THE FAR LEFT AND BISHOP D.M. AND DOROTHY DEADRICK STAND JUST TO THE RIGHT OF THE FLAGPOLE. (*WHITE WING MESSENGER*, FEBRUARY 14, 1953. REPRODUCTION WITH PERMISSION OF THE WHITE WING PUBLISHING HOUSE, CLEVELAND, TN)

No other white denomination could boast of black ministers in such high positions of authority. Ministers and bishops, such as Ralph Scotton, D.M. and Dorothy Deadrick, and E.L. Jones, preached and taught that the Church of God of Prophecy was

a safe place for blacks. They believed that following the church's teachings would lead to the social and political change that those outside the denomination were seeking. They understood the church to be imperfect, but believed that loyalty to the teachings and unity amongst the members would bring about perfection, and that the whole world would see it. Although imperfect in terms of racial relations and harmony, great attempt was made to create fraternity amongst its black and white members. Many black members remained with the church and the church continued to reach out to them, as well as to Hispanics in the American southwest. Desiring to reach out to others races, the church established a Field Secretary position to assist the General Overseer in reaching Hispanics in 1953, just as it had created a position to reach out to American blacks. Although crude and prejudice in modern terms, the church believed the best way to reach blacks was through black ministers, and the same for Hispanics. Nevertheless, it maintained that the church should be unified under the common goal of winning lost souls and

building the “true church.” An article in a 1965 edition of the *White Wing* reminded church members, “To have racial distinction would be against the will of God or the purpose of the Church...the speckled bird has many different colored feathers, and so is the Church of the last days.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in David E. Harrell Jr., *White Sects and Black Men in the Recent South* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971), 95-96.



FIGURE 12: A.J. TOMLINSON (CENTER) AND SEVERAL UNIDENTIFIED CHURCH MEMBERS, CIRCA 1934. (COURTESY OF THE CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY ARCHIVES, CLEVELAND, TN)

Conclusion

When A.J. Tomlinson died in 1943 the Church of God of Prophecy's reach expanded well beyond its southern Appalachian roots. The church established a presence in nearly every state and several foreign nations. Although the overwhelming majority of the church's membership was white, there was a strong presence of American blacks, making Tomlinson's "Great Speckled Bird" close to a reality. Not only were blacks members of the church, they were ordained as evangelists, deacons and Sunday School teachers; and black men were promoted to places of prominence in denominational leadership. Few other organizations based in the South could boast of such a history in the Jim Crow era.

Racial inclusion and integrated worship was not unheard of in the Pentecostal movement. Academic and denominational historians trace the roots of the Pentecostal movement to the revival meetings at the Azusa Street Mission, led by the son of former slaves, William

Seymour.¹⁵⁹ Attendees at the Azusa meetings included Blacks, whites, Jews, Chinese and other ethnic immigrants, many of whom traveled from across the nation to experience the emotional and energetic meetings.¹⁶⁰ Several holiness ministers from the South, including Bishop C.H. Mason, the co-founder of the predominantly black holiness Church of God in Christ based in Memphis, Tennessee; and G.B. Cashwell a white holiness evangelist from North Carolina. Both ministers experienced the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and returned to the South preaching and promoting the doctrine.¹⁶¹

For a short time the interracial worship and inclusion that took place at Azusa continued in Pentecostal meetings in the South, yet soon yielded to the segregationist edicts of southern society. A Dunn, North Carolina meeting led by G.B. Cashwell was notably integrated, and C.H. Mason's Church of God in Christ ordained white ministers before 1914.¹⁶² Begun far from southern Jim Crowism in Los Angeles, Pentecostalism nevertheless became, as Jimmy Wayne Jones writes, "more southern than American."¹⁶³ Yet exceptions to the rule remained. As other Pentecostal denominations accepted segregation between whites and blacks, A.J. Tomlinson and

¹⁵⁹ A.J. Tomlinson also acknowledged William Seymour's significant contribution to the Pentecostal meeting in his book *The Last Great Conflict*. A.J. Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, republished 2011), 105; Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 165-184; Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 65-70; Estrela Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 110-158; Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 104 & 105; Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 192-193.

¹⁶⁰ Frank Bartleman, *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles: As it Was in the Beginning, Old Azusa Mission—From my Diary* (Los Angeles, CA: F. Bartleman), 48 & 49.

¹⁶¹ G.B. Cashwell, "Came 3,000 Miles for His Pentecost", *The Apostolic Faith*, December 1906, pg. 3; Calvin White, Jr., *Rise to Respectability: Race, Religion and the Church of God in Christ* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2012), 33-35; Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 201; Alexander, *Black Fire*, 125; Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 104; Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement*, 123 & 124.

¹⁶² G.B. Cashwell, "Pentecost in North Carolina", *The Apostolic Faith*, January 1907, pg 1; Alexander, 20 & 21.

¹⁶³ Jimmy Wayne Jones, Jr., "Modern Pentecostalism: The Significance of Race, Class, and Culture in Charismatic Growth, 1900-2000 (PhD Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2002), 1.

his Tennessee-based Church of God persisted that the true church would be made up of “all the great races of the world.”¹⁶⁴

A.J. Tomlinson’s Church of God became a countercultural exception to the segregated and oppressive culture of the Jim Crow South. More than just church members or local church ministers, black men were personally ordained by Tomlinson as bishops and some were promoted to denominational leadership. Furthermore, Tomlinson routinely devoted sections of his annual address to the delegates of the church’s Annual Assembly to promoting the inclusion of the “colored people” of the church. Few predominantly white organizations based in the South could match the attempts made by the Tomlinson church to reach out to blacks.

Nevertheless, Tomlinson was not always effective in drawing blacks to his church, and was not in favor of making a political stand for the social injustice of segregation. Tomlinson acknowledged the “race prejudice of the south.”¹⁶⁵ In 1922 he relented to the call for a separate “colored work” in the Church of God, which resulted in a segregated black sect of the church in the southeastern United States. Tomlinson believed that the racism permeating the government and culture of the South prevented the church from showing black members “all the courtesy that we would like to.”¹⁶⁶ It was not the church’s place to become involved in politics and should be “subject to the powers that be in whatever country we are placed.”¹⁶⁷

When the Church of God suffered a major denominational split in 1923 it was, for all intents and purposes, segregated, despite Tomlinson’s desire for integration and inclusion. The

¹⁶⁴ A.J. Tomlinson, *General Assembly Annual Addresses, 1928-1943* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2011), 210.

¹⁶⁵ Diary entry, June 4, 1912, in *Diary of A.J. Tomlinson* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2012), 190.

¹⁶⁶ *Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Held at Cleveland, Tenn., Nov. 1-7, 1922*, 25, Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Collection, Hal Bernard Dixon, Jr. Pentecostal Research Center, Lee University, Cleveland, TN.

¹⁶⁷ Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict*, 49.

two Church of God factions remained segregated until 1926 when one group would return to a more integrated and inclusionary model. The group led by F.J. Lee officially retained the name Church of God. It also retained the “colored work,” which continued until well after the Civil Rights Act of 1964.¹⁶⁸ The Tomlinson Church of God, however, rejected the idea of the “colored work” in their 1926 Annual Assembly, because “it has a tendency to widen the gap between the colored and white races.”¹⁶⁹ The move to end the “colored work” put Tomlinson and his church on the path to a multiracial and inclusive church that was unmatched.

Tomlinson became a tireless promoter of integration within the church until his death in 1943. He believed that the true church would include all races and that such a church was prophesied in the Book of Jeremiah 12:9, which says “My heritage is unto me as a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her.” The “Great Speckled Bird” theology became a cornerstone for Tomlinson and the Church of God of Prophecy. Several black bishops were elevated to high ranking positions in the church. Black ministers, both male and female, participated throughout the Annual Assembly program, and black men often served on powerful assembly committees.¹⁷⁰

Not all church members were accepting and the church still struggled with prejudice and segregation at the local level. Nevertheless, Tomlinson and many other church leaders persisted

¹⁶⁸ David G. Roebuck, “Unraveling the Cords that Divide: Cultural Challenges and Race Relations in the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee),” (paper presented at the 40th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies), 9.

¹⁶⁹ “Twenty First Annual Assembly, September 8-14, 1926,” in *Upon This Rock* vol. 2, ed. By C.T. Davidson (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1974), 249.

¹⁷⁰ A.J. Tomlinson, “Prefatory Notes,” *Minutes of the 28th Annual Assembly of the Church of God, Over Which A.J. Tomlinson is General Overseer, Held in Central Ave. Tabernacle, Cleveland, Tennessee, U.S.A., September 13-19, 1933*, Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy, Collection, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.; A.J. Tomlinson, “Twenty Second Annual Address to the Twenty-Seventh Annual Assembly—September 7-13, 1932, Cleveland, Tennessee”, in *General Assembly Annual Addresses, 1928-1943* (Cleveland, TN: The White Wing Publishing House, 2012), 142; R.G. Robins, *A.J. Tomlinson: Plainfolk Modernist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 227.

in their promotion of racial integration and inclusion, believing that perseverance and faith would lead to equality and fraternity throughout the denomination. The leadership believed that would and should be a model for the rest of the world to follow. Thus it was not the church's place to involve itself with "worldly" affairs. Instead the world would see the perfection of the church and follow.¹⁷¹ Such a theme continued throughout the Civil Rights Movement, in which no COGOP leader is documented to have taken part, white or black. Although purposefully distanced from the Civil Rights Movement and social protest, the distinction between the COGOP and other organizations, religious or otherwise, was its commitment to racial inclusion.

The COGOP stands out amongst Pentecostal denominations because of its inclusionary model. It is far from the largest organization or the most recognized. Yet, in regards to race relations, while other denominations were separating along color lines, or segregating completely, the COGOP continued the interracial traditions of the early Pentecostal movement. Historians of American religion have acknowledged Tomlinson and the COGOP's commitment to racial inclusion.¹⁷² Unfortunately much of the acknowledgement is cursory and fails to fully examine and analyze the COGOP narrative to the fullest.

Although its reach was far beyond the South, the COGOP was based in the South and much of its membership was southern; and as such, it adds to the complex narrative of southern history. Most of southern history has focused on race relations and the bitter divide between black and white Americans. Unarguably, racism permeated southern society and blacks were denied their civil rights and oppressed in every way. Nevertheless, countercultural oddities

¹⁷¹ Tomlinson provides an extensive description of the church's role in the world in, Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict*, 97-116.

¹⁷² Stephens, 240 & 241; Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 141 & 142; Estrela Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 254-258.

existed in the South that rejected the segregationist norms. Randall Stephens suggests that Pentecostalism as a whole was countercultural and eventually influenced mainstream southern and American culture in terms of social and political conservatism.¹⁷³ Unfortunately, long before the influence of Pentecostals in the establishment of the religious right, southern Jim Crowism influenced Pentecostal leaders and much of the movement segregated along color lines. The exception was the COGOP, which remained a truly countercultural example to southern segregated society.

While southern political leaders called for and violently defended segregation, A.J. Tomlinson promoted racial unity and equality, the Annual Assembly of the COGOP was integrated, as were state conventions. While southern blacks often struggled to find prominent positions in movements and organizations in the region, the COGOP was promoting black men to prominence in the denominational hierarchy. As many southern white ministers endorsed racial segregation, bishops, ministers and missionaries in the COGOP promoted racial unity and called for a multiracial church. Although the racial fraternity in the church was fragile, it nevertheless stood out as a hopeful possibility.

The weakness of the COGOP was its inability to impact secular society with its interracial model or to influence the Civil Rights movement. Even after Tomlinson's death, the church continued to be "subject to the powers that be."¹⁷⁴ The church's multiracial example could have impacted southern culture or an asset to the Civil Rights movement. Yet the church's strong belief to be "in the world, but not of the world" silenced its influence and perhaps hid it from recognition. Still yet, it remains a piece of the complex histories of the South and American religion.

¹⁷³ Stephens, 6-8.

¹⁷⁴ Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict*, 49.

The COGOP narrative is incomplete, as it was extraordinary in several other ways. The church not only elevated black Americans, but actively sought to build its membership amongst Hispanic Americans. Just as black men were promoted to prominent positions in church leadership, so too were Hispanic men. Women also influenced the church and played a large role in church ministry. Women served as local church pastors, promoted church missions and Sunday School, preached at the Annual Assembly and even served as the head of certain departments within the denomination. The sources are rich and nearly unexplored. The church's publications, including the *White Wing Messenger*, which has been in continual publication since 1923, are rich with examples of multiracial inclusion and the progressive involvement of women.

The Church of God of Prophecy was far ahead of its time in terms of racial inclusivity. Its founder, A.J. Tomlinson believed that such inclusivity was a sign of the true church. Thus he actively pushed for interracial fraternity and sought for charismatic black ministers to place in leadership. The fraternity was often fragile, and the lack of secular political or social activism frustrating. Yet it largely succeeded in its efforts to create a "Great Speckled Bird," a church of all nations. More impressive was its ability to do so while based in the segregated South. As a result, the narrative of the COGOP adds to the complex nature of southern religious and cultural history.

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