



3

Sexism and the Demonic in Church Life and Mission

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You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26-27).

There is a presumption that Pentecostalism is a movement that, from its inception at the turn of the twentieth century, has always facilitated female liberation and empowerment. This presumption arises from Pentecostal praxis, since women have played pivotal roles in the movement's development,¹ as well as from the theology and spirituality of Baptism in the Spirit, which is understood to empower women and men equally. When translated into movement structures, this has meant that Pentecostals have not formally differentiated ministry according to gender distinctions. Thus, in contrast to many of the mainline denominations, they have tended not to instigate formal restrictions against female ordination and neither have they developed sacramental systems that are exclusively masculine.² Yet, while Pentecostal churches might, therefore, be expected to manifest an egalitarian culture, the real experience of Pentecostal women is far from this ideal. In this chapter I will argue that the principal reason women's experience does not match the movement's spiritual rhetoric is found in the underlying tension between universal notions of Spirit baptism and gender specific concepts of male and female roles that derive from supposedly common—

1 See Susan C Hyatt, "Spirit-Filled Women," in *The Century of the Holy Spirit*, ed. Vinson Synan (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001); Elaine J Lawless, *Handmaidens of the Lord: Pentecostal Women Preachers and Traditional Religion*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania Press, 1988), as well as Mark Hutchinson's chapter in this volume.

2 In Catholicism, for example, only men can perform the Eucharist because Christ was male. The difficulty with this position is that it completely misses the significance of two natures Christology, which is concerned not with Christ's masculinity but, rather, his full deity and humanity. That is to say, as fully divine he represent God to us, and as fully human he represent humanity to God. The essence of Christology, therefore, is not Christ's masculinity but his humanity.



sense assumptions about family hierarchies. These assert that men and women are equal in being but different in function, with men born to headship and women to submission. I will then go on to argue that new ways of thinking about gender distinctions are required, not only for the purpose of resisting the forces of sexism, but so that church ministry and mission can be framed by structures and cultures that are truly spiritual and Christ-like.

Tension between Charismatic Spirituality & Gender Role Assumptions

Almost two decades ago, Margaret Poloma, in her analysis of the Assemblies of God in America, identified the tension that lay at the heart of the movement's treatment of women when she observed that, while early "charismatic" Pentecostalism facilitated high female participation in church ministry and mission, this situation had not been sustained. As she noted, "Although there is verbal support for an official position of allowing women in the Assemblies of God to pastor, such a practice is uncommon in reality,"³ especially in senior leadership positions within churches and the movement as a whole. This situation is mirrored in Australia. As historian Barry Chant observes, "over half the Pentecostal congregations functioning by 1930 were established and led by women."⁴ Yet, by 2007, only 26% of credentialed pastors, and less than 6% of senior pastors, were women.⁵ More significantly, there have been no women on the National Executive of the movement (until the appointment of Donna Crouch in 2009), and few in any formal positions across the various state executives. Consequently, although women are heavily involved in ministry within Pentecostal churches, this involvement is generally restricted to particular types of ministry (children's work, youth ministry, assistant pastoring). In particular, women tend to be excluded from positions of church authority.

As is well documented throughout the Christian church, Pentecostals are not alone in this situation. Yet the failure of the movement to realise

³ Margaret Poloma, *Assemblies of God at a Crossroads: Charisma and Institutional Dilemmas*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 112.

⁴ Barry Chant, "*The Spirit of Pentecost: Origins and Development of the Pentecostal Movement in Australia, 1870-1939*," (Macquarie University, 1999), 39.

⁵ ACC National Office, *2007 Church Census*, (Melbourne: Australian Christian Churches, Assemblies of God, 30 October 2007), 3.

gender equality in ministry is disappointing, precisely because it is not (or at least it need not be) constrained by the traditional patriarchal structures of mainline churches. Further, its continued rhetoric is that, unlike the traditional denominations, Pentecostalism is a movement that affirms female equality and liberation. David Cartledge, for example, goes as far as to claim that Pentecostal encouragement of women in ministry is one of the reasons for the movement's success.⁶ Unfortunately, Pentecostal self understanding is not matched by the current reality of female equality within its own authority structures.

The question, then, is why is this so? Why, during the course of the twentieth century, has Pentecostalism, along with charismatic Christianity more broadly, experienced a transition from gendered equality in the church toward a more patriarchal situation, especially given the fact that the broader society has moved in the opposite direction? Poloma, following the sociological analysis of Max Weber and Thomas O'Dea, suggests that the problem is the 'routinisation of charisma' that is inherent to the processes of institutionalisation. According to her, while the charismatic forces that gave birth to the movement facilitated female empowerment, institutionalisation has meant that, "without officially changing its ideology ... the Assemblies of God has permitted its very success as an institution to block avenues once open to women."⁷ The 'routinisation' Poloma envisages arises from what is labelled "mixed motivation." That is, the tension between the values of the original charisma and the satisfaction received by success and prestige, earned by the adoption of prevailing concerns in the surrounding culture, in the context of churches, a culture which is predominately patriarchal.

While Poloma's analysis is of value, since it highlights the inherent tensions of institutionalisation, we should be careful not to assume an idealised early Pentecostalism, one that facilitated perfect freedom for women and was later corrupted by its own success.⁸ In fact, it is not the

6 David Cartledge, *The Apostolic Revolution: The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets in the Assemblies of God in Australia*, (Sydney: Paraclete, 2000), 411.

7 Margaret Poloma, 120.

8 There are some difficulties with the common idea that institutionalization is a necessary evil, since this forgets the fact that "institutional forms provide an efficient means to achieve certain recurrent needs within the community." (See Neil Ormerod, "The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 3-30, 16). We should be able to assert that institutionalisation is a valuable and constructive component of human social development. Rather than critique institutionalisation per se, we can critique biased expressions of institutionalisation that not only fail to satisfy

case that Pentecostals merely adopted conservative evangelical attitudes toward women as the movement became mainstream. Rather, from the very beginning, Pentecostalism emerged with an underlying dialectic tension that existed between the charismatic freedom that empowers women (among others) in the context of church mission, and the cultural restrictions of conservative family values which presume fixed gender roles within the framework of the patriarchal nuclear family. That is to say, Pentecostal openness to the universal and liberative empowerment of the Spirit exists (and has always existed) in tension with gender based assumptions about the nature and role of women. Indeed, as Mark Hutchinson notes in his chapter later in this book, even when “the Pentecostal belief that God was God and could call whomever He liked, could trump . . . biblical negatives”, the women pastor took on the “the less threatening role of mother.” As Mary McClintock-Fulkerson states:

The discourses of proper masculinity and femininity are very important in the construction of subject positions for Pentecostal women. Such positions are defined by a culture that considers the hierarchical order of the family to be Bible-based. The chain of command – God over Jesus, over man – continues in the male-headed household where the husband has authority over the wife and children.⁹

This position has a long history in the Christian church (and in society as a whole). Traditionally, the (il)logic of gender stereotypes derived from entrenched assumptions about the inherent inferiority of women. Thus, for example, at its most appalling, Thomas Aquinas attributed the generation of women to a defect in the sperm:

As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence; such as that of a south wind, which is moist, as the Philosopher observes.¹⁰

recurrent needs, but that actually prevent particular individuals or groups from having such needs met.

9 Mary McClintock-Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology*, (West Broadway: Wipf and Stock, 2001)

10 Thomas Aquinas, ST, qu. 92, art 1, ob. 1, Online at <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1092.htm>. As he goes on to say, “So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates.”



As the emergence of the “new science” during the period of the Enlightenment dispensed with the biological errors grounding Aquinas’ sexism and as education of and attitudes toward women began to change, notions of the inherent inferiority of the female gender became increasingly difficult to sustain. By the time Pentecostalism emerged in the early decades of the twentieth century, it was no longer possible to presume that women were any less intelligent or capable than men. Yet despite the insight of the biological sciences and the expanding horizons facilitated by educational developments, the church continued to presume fixed gender stereotypes, as did the society at large, based largely on the idea that family structures and gender roles are divinely ordained. While the language of inferiority was removed, it was replaced with the assertion that men and women are ontologically equal but functionally different – that role subordination of women to men derives from the divine command.

The (il)logic of equal but different and subordinate

Again, Pentecostals were not alone in this assertion, but neither were they free from it (as it sometimes assumed). In theological circles beyond Pentecostalism, it is Karl Barth who most famously insists that, while men and women are fully equal before God, nevertheless “The command of God will always point man to his position and women to hers, ... a man has his allotted place and a woman has hers.”¹¹ Barth is at pains to insist that this divine order, in which A (man) necessarily precedes B (woman), entails no renouncing of the right, dignity and honour of the woman – as A is equal to B even when A precedes B. Yet for Barth it is nevertheless self evident that the revelation of God leaves women with a command:

She, too, has to realise that she is ordered, related and directed to man and has thus to follow the initiative which he must take. Nor is this a trifling matter. Properly speaking, the business of a woman, her task and function, is to actualise the fellowship in which man can only precede her, stimulating, leading and inspiring. How could she do this alone, without the precedence of man? How could she do it for herself and against him? How could she reject or envy his precedence, his task and function, as the one who stimulates leads and inspires? To wish to replace

¹¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, vol. VIII. 4, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), 154.



him in this, or to do it with him, would be to wish not to be a women.¹²

Notwithstanding the Pentecostal affirmation of universal Spirit empowerment, the gender stereotypes evident in Barth can be found throughout the movement right from its inception – stereotypes that have prevailed through to the present. Pentecostals faced the dilemma of recognising the rights and capacities of Spirit filled women, while at the same time accepting what seemed to them to be the plain teaching of biblical revelation. The tensions between these positions is made especially clear in the writings of Mina Ross Brawner, an early American Pentecostal Evangelist who spent some time working with the founder of Pentecostalism in Australia, Sarah Jane Lancaster. As Brawner comments:

Imagine my surprise on being informed by older labourers in the Lord's vineyard that I had now come to a very sharp demarcation between the sexes. That a women might preach, or sing, or pray in public (provided she wore a hat), but she must not anoint with oil when praying for the sick; must not hold office as pastor, elder or deacon; must not teach men (only women and children); must not officiate at the Lord's table nor pass the elements; must not solemnise marriages or administer water baptism. I was further informed that if there was no man present to perform these duties, a women might, in an emergency, do any or all of these things (except solemnise marriages), but, of course, if a man appeared on the scene, she must give way.

Let me put the proposition in plain English – The Divine call, unction, education, natural ability, faithfulness in service, must all be weighted in the scale of sex. And the male sex weights more in the sight of God and the Church, than all these qualifications plus the female sex! Charging God with the folly of anointing and equipping His handmaidens for service, and then disqualifying them because they are what he made them – His handmaidens. It was a new idea to me. I must confess to a momentary feeling of impatience at such an archaic viewpoint. “Can it be possible”, I asked myself, “that I, as a woman, have less liberty under grace than under law? Can it be that my Lord

¹² Ibid., 171.

is less just than my State Government? Or is this only a silly, man-made regulation.”¹³

In a series of articles that were published in 1929-1930, Brawner went on to argue that such gender distinctions were not biblical, that is to say, that gender stereotypes cannot be understood as divinely revealed. Yet despite the spiritual experience of women and their active participation in the mission and ministry of churches, egalitarian theological conclusions remained on the margins, and most assemblies continued to presume, as they always had done, that an ontological equality, highlighted in universal spirit gifting, had to be balanced with affirmation of a functional distinction - one which necessarily subordinated women to men. That this remains true almost one century later is apparent in the ordination statistics mentioned earlier, as well as in the promotion of stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity promulgated in men’s and women’s conferences¹⁴ and in the immense popularity of books such as John Eldridge’s *Wild at Heart*. This text is typical of the gender assumptions that frame conservative Christian attitudes in Pentecostal and Charismatic (PC) contexts, defining masculinity in terms of fighting battles, hunting, and rescuing beauties,¹⁵ and femininity by way of the romantic fantasy of being rescued by a knight in shining armour. A woman is at her best when she is being a woman, says Eldridge, in language that is reminiscent of Barth. He goes on to argue that she is most truly herself when she is fulfilling her natural impulse as waiting to be rescued, led and inspired, and since this is so, her real function (apart from being a mother), is to use her beauty to “arouse, inspire, energise [and] seduce.”¹⁶

Now the fact that such attitudes are inexcusably sexist should go without saying, except for the fact that the (il)logic of ontological equality and functional distinction with female subordination remains entrenched within the cultural horizons of the PC constituency. Just as for Thomas Jefferson it was self-evident that all *men* are created equal, so too, for conservative Christians, has the submissive role of women achieved

13 Mina Ross Brawner, ‘Women in the Word, *Good News*, (Jan. 1929): 9.

14 See, for example, Jacqueline Grey’s critique of Princess theology that has come to frame some women’s conferences. Jacqueline Grey, “Pentecostal Women and the Emergence of a Princess Theology,” *PCBC* 9:2 (2006), Online at <http://pcbc.webjournals.org/>.

15 John Eldridge, *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man’s Soul* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 9.

16 *Ibid.*, 192.

the status of a self-evident and unquestionable truth. The supposedly obvious nature of this position derives from readings of the biblical narrative that have framed Christian attitudes to authority (headship) in the family and, thereafter, in the church. In this volume, it is the task of Jacqueline Grey, Kevin Giles and David Parker to address the biblical blindspots of PC Scripture reading, and to make the case that the bible is a fully liberative and egalitarian text. My part is to comment, briefly, on the structures of family and gender and, thereafter, to show that the idea of ontological equality and role subordination is inherently contradictory.

In the first place, the common sense nature of gender roles is only self-evident if one presumes that the family structures that ground our notions of masculinity and femininity are permanent. In fact, however, the only self-evident reality of family life is that its nature is rooted in history and culture. Thus, for example, the various forms of pre-industrial family were essentially economic units, framed around the idea that the family, under the authority of the patriarch, had collective responsibility for the economic affairs of the household.¹⁷ But while agrarian and mercantile societies were organised according to domestic economic units, the move to an industry and wage-based economy separated work from home and, with the movement of married couples into the city, lessened the influence of the extended family and gave rise to the dominant Western model of the conjugal or nuclear family – the model that church today assumes to be “natural.”¹⁸ In terms of gender roles, the result of the disentangling of the domestic and economic realms was, at least in the early and middle decades of the twentieth century, to further alienate women from the ‘masculine’ domain of the workforce, and entrench the presumption that the man has the financial and, therein, leadership responsibility in the home, while women are restricted to the role of serving the husband and raising the children. In such a context female subordination may seem to be “natural,” “obvious” and, in Christian perspective, “biblical” when, in fact, it is merely a product of the expectations of history and culture.

17 Neil Ormerod and Shane Clifton, *Globalization and the Mission of the Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2009), ch. 4. See also Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalization Is Reshaping Our Lives* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 72-74; Merry E. Wiesner, “The Early Modern Period: Religion, the Family and Women’s Public Roles,” in *Religion, Feminism and the Family*, ed. Anne Carr and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 150-152.

18 Don S. Browning, *Marriage and Modernization: How Globalization Threatens Marriage and What to Do About It*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 34.



Secondly, and more damningly, the assertion that men and women are equal in dignity and being before God, fully embodying the divine image, is completely undermined by the supposedly complementary affirmation that the natural order requires female submission to men. While proponents try to avoid the charge of sexism with repeated avowals that men and women are equal in being, the refusal to relinquish stereotypical delineations of roles is the equivalent of traditional presumptions that women are inferior to men. In what follows I shall clarify why this is so.

In terms of dignity before God, which seems to be what is meant when people use the ‘equal but different’ argument,¹⁹ there is a sense in which a dog (or any animal), shares with us a fundamental stature as a creature that also has inherent dignity. While our equality with canines derives from our shared creatureliness, our difference is constituted by certain fundamental qualities and capacities that make us particular types of creatures. Obviously, it is the case that the specific nature of those qualities and capacities qualifies the ‘being’ of humanity and of the ‘canine’, a fact that makes it apparent that the mere claim to a shared dignity is not enough – that the dignity of being is not disconnected to the potentiality that constitutes its fundamental characteristics. While we may object to comparing women with canines, the ‘equal but different’ argument does not allow them to be fully compared to men either. The underlying issue is what is meant by being? What is it that constitutes the essence of human nature and that distinguishes us from other creatures?

While the answer to this question has been the subject of ongoing philosophical discussion over the course of millennia, Christian tradition has grounded its understanding of human nature and being in the notion of *imago dei* – the assertion that women and men alike are created in the image of God. Although the meaning of image of God is itself a contested notion, at a minimum it incorporates the assertion that humanity shares: i) a rational and ethical capacity, ii) a unique function which entails the exercise of dominion, or delegated authority, over the earth, iii) a relational orientation directed toward God and human inter-subjectivity, as well as iv) a dynamic capacity, the ability to transcend the constraints of the present and, in the grace of the Spirit of

¹⁹ Such is the argument of Piper and Grudem and even Barth.



God, become like Christ. More could be said, but the point is that the concept of *imago dei* highlights those characteristics that make us truly human, characteristics that cannot be delineated along gender (or racial, or economic) lines.

Those advocating the patriarchal paradigm claim that, notwithstanding the shared *imago dei*, women are necessarily subordinate to men. This position gets argued in three ways. The first is represented by Barth, whose argument is essentially arbitrary. Indeed, he struggles to identify precisely what it is that makes men more equipped to lead than women, conceding that “we cannot describe or define this differentiation,”²⁰ and further admitting that we must reject “every phenomenology and typology of the sexes.”²¹ His reason for this is precisely because he is aware that such typologies (i.e. fixed categorisations of what it is that constitutes masculinity and femininity) undermine the *imago dei*. So, ultimately, all he can do is rely on what he considers to be a divine command, which he insists gives rise to a relationship between a man and a woman that rests upon an irreversible order, one in which the male precedes (and therefore rules) the female. This argument is mirrored in the PC community when it is recognised that women and men are equally gifted and empowered by the Spirit, equally capable of ministering and, therefore, equally eligible for ordination but, nevertheless, women must be subject to male headship in the home and, by way of extension, in the church, because “the bible says so.” Whether it is Barth’s theology of revelation or PC bible fundamentalism, the problem is not only that the Scriptures are not as conclusive on male headship as is sometimes presumed, nor the fact that cultural bias informs these supposedly revealed conclusions. Rather, the underlying issue is that the arbitrary nature of these conclusions necessarily undermines any preceding claims to equality. That is to say, it is simply not possible to insist upon female subordination without implying that such subordination arises because men have certain capacities and abilities not shared by women.

Of course many patriarchalists argue precisely that, with the second line of argument asserting that men *are* uniquely designed by God with the capacity to rule and women with the capacity to submit and serve. The difficulty here is that the characteristics necessary for leadership are those characteristics that define the human being, the *imago dei*. This becomes apparent whenever one attempts to delineate those capacities

20 Karl Barth, 151.

21 Ibid., 152-153.

that frame leadership in general, and male leadership in particular. Take, for example, a selection of *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader* set down by one of the most prominent leadership guru's in PC communities, John Maxwell.²² According to Maxwell, leaders must have character, charisma, commitment, communication skills, competence (such as intelligence etc.), courage (and when you run out of 'c's'), discernment, focus, generosity, initiative, passion, positive attitude, self-discipline, servanthood, vision and so forth. What should be obvious in reviewing this list, or any similar set of descriptions, is that the requisite qualities for leadership are not gender specific. More tellingly, if we were to try to identify specific qualities that women, by virtue of their gender, do not have (character? charisma? discernment?), we actually end up denying their capacity to image the divine, and in so doing deny their very humanity. This is also the case when we try to identify characteristics of women not shared by men (intuition? emotion? empathy?) Apart from the fact that such qualities should be added to Maxwell's list, men who are unable to share in these sort of characteristics are surely less than Christ-like.

Patriarchalists argue, in response to the sort of logic I have put forth, that the affirmation of role subordination does not imply the inherent inferiority of women, in the same way that structures of leadership in churches do not imply any inferiority. The cleaner is equal to the senior pastor, despite the subordination that arises by way of their different roles. What is missed in this argument, however, is that the functional subordination of the cleaner to the pastor speaks only to the skills, gifts and experiences of particular people, saying nothing about the potentialities that constitute the essence or being of a whole class of people. That is to say, the cleaner is not subordinate because he is of a certain colour or class, since that would be racism. Neither is his subordination permanent and universal, since it is possible for him to attain the skills and experience to move beyond the role of the cleaner, even, ultimately, for him to become pastor. And even if his particular gifts do not equip him to take on the unique functions and authorities of pastoral ministry, there is every chance that he has another set of gifts and experiences that may see him take further responsibility in another endeavour, even in one that places him in a position that is senior to that of the pastor (e.g. as captain of the community soccer team). At the very least, conservatives would insist upon him being head of the home,

²² John C Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader: Becoming the Person Others Will Want to Follow*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1999).

whatever his wife's qualities. This is very different to what is being claimed of the role subordination of women to men, a subordination which applies to a whole class of people irrespective of individual gifts and talents, and which is supposedly permanent and universal, since males must always lead and women must always submit, at least insofar as leadership in the home and church is concerned. For this reason, the (il)logic of 'equal but different and subordinate' has to be labelled for what it is – sexist.²³

The third patriarchal argument locates the priority of the man in the realm of the Spirit, arguing that men are called by God to exercise spiritual authority in the home and church. This designation has become increasingly prominent as conservatives have attempted to find some realm that might be said to constitute male headship in the midst of an increasingly egalitarian society. At its most ironic, prominent PC women leaders such as Joyce Meyer fulfil global leadership functions, doing things that churches would historically have considered the domain of men, all the while claiming to be under the spiritual authority of their husbands.²⁴ But while Meyer's protestations of her submitting to male spiritual leadership have to be understood in the light of her broader modelling of female empowerment, and as a concession to conservative voices that question the validity of her ministry,²⁵ the underlying concept is problematic. At its most explicit, advocates of this position, such as John Piper and Wayne Grudem, argue that the man's role is to act *as* Christ and *for* Christ with respect to the wife and family,²⁶ taking the initiative to give them moral and spiritual leadership, and protect them "from the greatest enemies of all, Satan and sin."²⁷ Yet, apart from the

23 For further analysis of the argument set out in this section, see Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, "Equal in Being, Unequal in Role": Exploring the Logic of Women's Subordination," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Leicester, England: IVP, 2004).

24 Joyce Meyer, *The Confident Women: Start Today Living Boldly and without Fear*, (New York: Warner Faith, 2006), 28.

25 Thus, while asserting her own submission to her husband, she also applauds those who have tried to fight for women's rights.

26 John Piper and Wayne Grudem, "An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2006), 64.

27 John Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2006), 37.

fact that the notion of male spiritual authority cannot be found anywhere in the Scriptures,²⁸ the difficulty is the presumption that men, again by dint of their gender, are better qualified than women to model Christ and resist evil. But do we really want to say that men are more prayerful, more discerning and more spiritual than women, especially when it comes to the life of the family? And, if we do make such claims, are we not undermining that which constitutes the core of the *imago dei*, the ability of graced humanity to be encountered by God, to be invited into relationship with the Father, mediated directly through Christ in the power of the Spirit? If such relationship is an inherent possibility for men, but only a possibility for women in a derived fashion, as mediated by their male 'superior', then women are inferior to men, and we have returned to the conclusion of Aquinas and the medieval church.

It should be clear by now that assertions which suggest that men and women are 'equal but different' (when that difference requires the universal and permanent subordination of women) are not only illogical, but positively demonic. PCs have always understood themselves to be engaged in a spiritual battle, one in which the power of God's Spirit enables the defeat of demonic forces of powerlessness and oppression. At its best, this spirituality is not abstract and disembodied but, rather, is grounded in the concrete reality of day to day life. In this context, the demonic can be understood as being constituted by those spiritual forces that resist and oppose the life-giving power of the Spirit of God in all creation, oppressing individuals and insinuating themselves into the social structures, cultural values and religious ideals that frame human life. Spiritual warfare entails the discernment of spirits, and the casting out of the demonic under the authority of the name of Jesus. I am arguing that patriarchal oppression of women, especially in churches, should be understood as demonic, precisely because it entails resistance against the work of the Spirit in and through women. That is to say, in creating a tension that resists the empowering force of Spirit baptism, the concept of equal but subordinate stands in denial of the work of the Spirit in women. If this language seems impertinent, then while I speak for and to the PC (Pentecostal – charismatic) community I will not be PC (politically correct). Sometimes the theologian has to take a

²⁸ References to Ephesians 5:23 for this purpose are spurious, since they fail to take account of the broader flow of Paul's argument in 5:21-6:9, or recognise that what is being asserted here is not male spiritual authority (a term that is not used) but, rather, the need for men to be like Christ in giving of themselves for their wife – a self-giving that according to the text is mutual not one way.

more prophetic stance, especially when demonic ideas have insinuated themselves into local church and movement-wide authority structures and into the broader culture of the PC movement worldwide.

Rethinking equal but different

At this point, I am going to reorient the thrust of my argument in a direction that may seem to contradict all that I have been saying up until this point, by making the case that the mission and ministry of churches (and, for that matter, families) demands the full and equal participation of women at all levels of authority precisely because women *are* different to men. Now, bear with me as I attempt to clarify both what I do and do not mean.

Contrary to what might be presumed, nothing I have argued above is meant to assert that men and women are the same. There are, of course, obvious biological differences, although before emphasising these, it should be noted that, biologically, men and women share much in common and, further, biological distinction is in no way limited to a person's sex. In fact, people share many things in common with family members of the opposite gender that might distinguish them from other people whose gender they share. Indeed, the question as to whether I am more similar to my sister than I am to my male friends highlights the complexity of the matter at hand, as well as the impossibility of arriving at any predetermined conclusions.²⁹ Further, it should be clearly stated that biological differences do not necessitate substantial functional distinctions. While it is true that men cannot give birth or breastfeed, it is nevertheless the case that almost all other functions pertaining to the health and flourishing of families can be equally performed by either parent, unless, of course, we want to assert that men do not reflect God's image as nurturer, (although I have already made the case against such demonic presumption).

Yet notwithstanding the argument I have been making, various sociological studies, addressing all sorts of disciplines, have observed differences in the priorities and approaches that tend to be taken by men and women. Thus, for example, various studies have found support for the position that women and men differ in ministry styles. Edward

²⁹ The fact that I have three brothers and no sisters should not undermine the point of the illustration!

Lehman suggests that men are more likely to use power over their congregations than women, and prefer “rational structure in decision making.”³⁰ According to Lehman, women, by contrast, are more likely to try and involve and empower their congregants to manage much of the church’s business, as well as being more prone to employing open-ended, unstructured, and inclusive discussions and dialogue in decision-making processes, using “intuition” as much as rationality.³¹ Similarly, the research of Barbara Finlay suggests that female ministers are more likely to seek ministry involvement in smaller churches and communities, which reflects “women’s basic desire for strong interpersonal relationships with their parishioners or clients.”³² Studies investigating female involvement in corporate life give rise to similar conclusions. According to Joan Eveline and Lorraine Hayden, for example, “Women emphasize cohesiveness. They are much less individualistic and spend time fostering an integrative culture and climate. . . . Group activities are more highly valued by women than men.”³³

The difficulty is the seemingly stereotypical nature of these conclusions, which might appear to lend support to arguments of patriarchalists which contend that men, given their preference for rationale structures in decision making, should take precedence in the leadership of home and church. Apart from the false prioritising of “reason” over “intuition” and “intersubjectivity” (or relationality), to which I shall return presently, what needs to be recognised is that these trends are gender based tendencies and not gendered absolutes. What this means is that whatever these studies imply, they cannot be used to pre-determine what might turn out to be the priorities and orientations of any particular women or man. Further, as Rosemary Radford Ruether so elegantly observes, “there is no biological connection between male gonads and the capacity to reason, . . . just as there is no biological connection

30 Edward C. Lehman, *Gender and Work: The Case of the Clergy*, (New York: State University of New York, 1993), 182-185.

31 *Ibid.*, 184.

32 Barbara Finlay, “Do Men and Women Have Different Goals for Ministry? Evidence from Seminarians,” *Sociology of Religion* 57, no. 3 (1996): 311-318. See also the hypothesis of Lesley Stevens, who says women have a ‘different voice’ to men, and that in comparison to clergymen, “clergywomen share an orientation that is relational and centered on care for others.” Lesley Stevens, “Different Voice/ Different Voices: Anglican Women in Ministry,” *Review of Religious Research* 30, no. 3 (1989): 262-276.

33 Joan Eveline and Lorraine Hayden, “Women’s Business: Connecting Leadership and Activism,” in *Centre for Women and Business, Discussion Paper Series*, (Perth: The University of Western Australia, 2000).

between female sexual organs and the capacity to be intuitive, caring, or nurturing.”³⁴ As she goes on to say, characteristics like reason and intuition are more a function of right-brain and left-brain capacities, which are likely to result from processes of socialisation that, for example, direct women towards taking on nurturing roles in the family in their adult life. That is to say, because women in society are generally more involved in nurturing family life, it follows that they will tend to prioritise relational values. But whether processes of socialisation or other biological/brain related developmental factors have generated the very real tendencies described above, true psychic integration entails balancing right and left brain function, which might thus be understood as constituting one of the goals of our being transformed into the image of Christ. That is to say, the ultimate goal for all people, female and male, is not the priority of one orientation or the other, but the development of right *and* left brain, rational *and* intuitive capacities.³⁵

The way to ensure that this is possible is to insist upon the sort of equality between women and men that ensures full and equal participation in all authority structures that frame the culture of home, church and beyond. Given that sociologists can identify gender based tendencies, there is a real problem if particular tendencies come to dominate the social and cultural values of institutions, principally because those people that tend to prioritise *alternate* values are excluded from positions of power and influence. This problem is particularly acute for churches. If the power structures that tend to direct the so-called male world can be described in terms of power, prestige and self-sufficiency (the results of prioritising so-called reason over and against intuition and intersubjectivity), then this stands in stark contrast to ideals of the gospel of Christ, the ‘good news,’ which the church is called to proclaim. This good news can be understood as the defeat of the egoism that has come to frame the social life of sinful humanity, with its pursuit of power, prestige and self-sufficiency, and the establishment of an eschatological Kingdom in which human flourishing is constituted by self-giving and loving community. In this Kingdom, which models itself on the perichoretic relationality of the triune God, intersubjectivity is the highest value. With this in mind, what does it mean if the church deliberately excludes women (that group of people that sociologists tell us tend to be ‘less individualistic and emphasize cohesiveness and the fostering of an integrative culture and

³⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, 10th anniversary edition, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 111.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 109-115.

climate³⁶) from positions of power and influence?

With the exclusion of women from virtually all positions of senior leadership in most churches and denominations, there necessarily results a failure on the part of each church to fully inculcate the ideals of their Spirit empowered constitution as the body of Christ. This is not to imply that men are more sinful than women, since that would be a gender stereotype that does injustice to men and ignores the vital theological fact that women and men alike are subject to sin. Rather, it is to assert that the exclusion of women from positions of power and authority generates a potential imbalance that impacts the whole community. Consider, for example, the potential impact of the fact that until 2009 there are no women on the national and state executives of the AoG in Australia and America (as elsewhere in global Pentecostalism), and few women in positions of senior authority in local churches. What does this say about these institutions and their priorities if men tend to prefer reason, self-reliance, power and prestige, being less concerned with intuitive spirituality, inter-personal relationships and communal values? Surely rationality is not more important for institutional decision-making than intuition and intersubjectivity, or vice versa. And while I am not saying that men are incapable of emphasising community, nor that they should not do so, it seems likely that the man's ability to balance reason and intersubjectivity is enhanced if those that tend to seek out these latter values, i.e. women, are not excluded from positions of influence.

By way of a further illustration, consider the recent transitions in certain PC constituencies toward the so-called Apostolic style of church structure and governance. Under the apostolic model, these churches have moved away from the traditional Pentecostal grass-roots understanding of ministry, with its attendant structures of democracy that reflect notions of the priesthood of all believers (gender inclusive), and have replaced them with hierarchical structures that locate church power in the hands of the senior pastor and "his" board of governance (typically also men). Many of these churches have grown rapidly, making particular advances in terms of technological, political and economic efficiency and effectiveness, but it can also be shown that the potential cost is the reduced emphasis on the sort of communal values that are at the heart of smaller local churches — although this is not necessarily so, and any pre-determination made about a specific large or small church is as likely to

36 To paraphrase Joan Eveline and Lorraine Hayden.

be incorrect as is any pre-determination made about any specific women or man. Notwithstanding the above caveat, given the nature of many of these Apostolic churches, women, who tend to value relationality more than the practical elements of polity and economy, are increasingly alienated from church governance and are, for the most part, assigned more subordinated roles. The consequence of this alienation is circular. Lack of female involvement in the higher levels of church leadership leads increasingly to the undermining of intersubjective values, which further excludes women, and reinforces the stereotyping of gender distinctions. The result is that the churches diminish the communal and relational emphasis that might derive from the full empowerment of women, and individuals, men and women alike, are prevented from “recovering aspects of [their] full psychic potential that have been repressed by cultural gender stereotypes.”^{37,38} To comment briefly on a matter tangential to this argument, the prominence of women’s conferences in this global Apostolic movement does necessarily help the situation, since these conferences often seem to reinforce stereotypical concepts of gender priorities and roles.³⁹ As a result, they have done little to encourage churches to include women in the higher authority structures of the church.

All of this suggests that, when reframed, the idea of equal but different could actually encourage, rather than discourage, female participation at all levels of church life. It is this insight that stands at the heart of the emergence of Trinitarian or *communio* ecclesiology during the course of the twentieth century. If the church is understood as being constituted by the Trinitarian life, then it is conceived of as a community that prioritises unity in diversity, that insists upon mutual (rather than unilinear) submission and self-giving, and that actively resists any form of oppressive and destructive hierarchy. As Miroslav Volf asserts, ecclesial unity mirroring the trinity should proceed not from the monarchy of the “one-[man!]-rule, . . . but by a polycentric and symmetrical reciprocity

37 Rosemary Radford Ruether, 113.

38 This paragraph is adapted from my own research, set out in Shane Clifton, “Pragmatic Ecclesiology: The Apostolic Revolution and the Ecclesiology of the Assemblies of God in Australia,” *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 9 (2005): 23-47. See also the forthcoming book, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition Analysing the developing ecclesiology of the Assemblies of God in Australia*, publisher being finalized.

39 See Jacqueline Grey, Online at <http://pcbc.webjournals.org/>.

of the many.”⁴⁰ Whatever the shortcomings of Trinitarian ecclesiology,⁴¹ the important point is that unity in diversity is fundamental to the life and mission of the church. If the notion of “equal but different” leads to the exclusion of women from certain realms of the life of the church (as it does in far too many mainline churches and PC communities), then unity in diversity is in fact being denied, and the church is setting itself up in a manner that is against its own nature. Uniformity should not be constitutive of church life. If, however, we prioritise unity in diversity, and celebrate and empower difference, then, not only are we able to recognise that difference cannot be limited to artificial constructions of gender, but that diversity should be the hallmark of church leadership structures and cultural horizons. That is to say, churches that are seeking to minister the gospel to a staggeringly diverse humanity, which is ideally becoming one in Christ (Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, black and white, rich and poor, old and young and so forth – Gal. 3:26-28), must reflect that diversity in their institutions, and model that unity. This is particularly true for Pentecostal communities that prioritise the Spirit, and that understand ministry in terms of Baptism in the Spirit as a universally empowering reality.

Conclusion

Taken altogether, we can conclude by recognising that pursuit of the empowerment of women against the demonic biases of patriarchal individuals, churches and cultures is not just a matter of overturning sexist attitudes that are opposed to the gospel, although that is imperative. Equally important is the recognition that the very life and mission of the church demands, not only that we resist patriarchal exclusion of women but, also, that we take proactive measures to ensure that old ways of thinking and behaving are put aside. PC movements in particular need to resist self-congratulatory comparisons with mainline churches, and find ways to ensure real diversity (not only in terms of gender) in every level of leadership. Perhaps then we will find ways of resisting the politics of power, prestige and self-sufficiency that too readily find their way into churches, and seek instead to develop a ministry and mission that

40 Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 217.

41 See my own critique Shane Clifton, “Pentecostal Ecclesiology: A Methodological Proposal for a Diverse Movement,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 15, no. 2 (2007): 213-232.

prioritises mutual self-giving and the establishment of deep fellowship and true community. Men are no less capable of achieving this than are women, but men will not achieve it while they exclude women from full participation. True community is necessarily inclusive.