

From Inception to Present

The Diminishing Role of Women in the Congregação Cristã no Brasil

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Abstract

This article provides the first historical analysis of the role of women in the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*, the oldest pentecostal church in Brazil and the largest in the state of São Paulo. Drawing on qualitative data, this study also explores the diverse views of church members and their attitudes in regard to the current status of women in the church. Although not long ago women were allowed to preach in the church and to hold ministerial positions such as cooperators, youth cooperators, deaconesses, musicians, music directors, and Bible school directors, in recent decades the role of women has quickly diminished. In addition to providing empirical data on this denominational group, the article engages the wider debate about the role of women in the pentecostal religious context.

Keywords

gender studies – Pentecostalism – *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*

Introduction

Women were instrumental in the establishment and growth of early pentecostal movements. This is especially true in the case of the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*, where women served in a variety of religious roles, such as ministers, deaconesses, teachers, musicians, evangelists, and missionaries. In recent decades, however, the role of women has quickly diminished. Max Weber's analysis of the religion of nonprivileged classes provides a framework within which to analyze the role of women in early Pentecostalism.¹ Weber argued

1 Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. E. Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

that religious groups such as Pentecostals were characterized by a tendency to give equality to women. Nonetheless, this pseudo-equality actually coexisted with the complete monopolization of the priestly functions by men.² Moreover, Weber contended that pronounced receptivity toward women occurred only at the early stages of a religious movement's development before routinization, that is, the process whereby charisma is stabilized into ongoing authority structures.³ This article will show that Weber's arguments are valid and pertinent in understanding the role of women in the case of the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*.

Understanding the historical role of women and the way in which members regard women's current status is important for several reasons. First, the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil* is the second largest pentecostal church in Brazil, with more than 2.3 million members and more than 18,580 congregations.⁴ Still, the low profile maintained by the church makes researching it difficult. Thus, research on this particular church is scant, despite the fact that it is an influential and significant church in the history of Pentecostalism in Brazil. Second, this historical account relates, for the first time, the important role women occupied in the beginning of the church and how their role has quickly diminished. In addition, by surveying members and asking their opinions regarding the role of women, I have been able to provide a unique assessment of members' attitudes toward women's roles in the church today. While several studies surveying attitudes toward clergywomen have been written,⁵ a great deal remains to be learned, particularly about individual denominations in which women used to be part of the clergy and in which traditions were established not only to keep women away from the pulpit, but also to erase their legacies. Finally, the study provides empirical data that suggest that members would

2 Ibid.

3 See Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

4 IBGE 2010. "População Residente, Por sexo e Situação do Domicílio, segundo a Religião—Brasil," Census 2000, p. 1, ftp://ftp.ibge.gov.br/Censos/Censo_Demografico_2010/Caracteristicas_Gerais_Religiao_Deficiencia/tab1_4.pdf. Accessed February 16, 2015. Congregação Cristã no Brasil, "Relatório," Ed. 2012–2013, no 76. Brás: Congregação Cristã no Brasil.

5 Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958); Edward Lehman, *Women Clergy: Breaking Through Gender Barriers* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1985); *Women Clergy in England: Sexism, Modern Consciousness, and Church Viability* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987); Jackson Carroll, Barbara Hargrove, and Adair Lummis, *Women of the Cloth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983); Daniel Adams, *Parishioners' Image of the Ideal Head of Staff: A Major Impediment to Equal Opportunity for Clergywomen in the United Presbyterian Church*, mimeographed, 1984.

support the reestablishment of women in the church's orchestra⁶ and that a significant group exists that would favor the restoration of the role of deaconesses.

In what follows, I review the church's history and its importance in the pentecostal movement in Brazil. I describe the empirical analysis and survey methodology using responses from 593 members of the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*. Then I present the historical account of women in three important roles: as preachers, deaconesses, and musicians. Based on survey answers, I present members' opinions concerning allowing women once again to assume these roles. Finally, I discuss how the church's sociological development can be understood in terms of Weber's analysis of the role of women in the religion of nonprivileged classes.⁷ Although women played a significant role in the early stages of the church's evolution, as routinization and regimentation of community relationships set in, women's participation was suppressed.

History

The founder of the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*, Luigi Francescon, was an Italian immigrant who worked as a mosaic artist in Chicago. Born on March 29, 1866 in Cavasso Nuovo, Udine, Italy, he immigrated to the United States in 1890, became a Protestant, and, in 1892, helped to establish the Presbyterian Italian Church of Chicago.⁸ A few years later, in April 1907, Luigi Francescon witnessed the pentecostal movement at the Baptist Church of Chicago at 943 W. North Avenue, where Pastor William H. Durham preached about the baptism of the Holy Spirit.⁹ Durham had participated in a meeting at Azusa Street and was baptized by the Holy Spirit, so that he received the gift of speaking in tongues.

6 All congregations have musical ensembles resembling a symphonic orchestra, with string, brass, and woodwind sections. The orchestra's role is to assist the congregational singing. Musicians are skilled volunteers who must pass a series of practical and theoretical exams in order to join the orchestra.

7 Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*.

8 Francesco Toppi, *Luigi Francescon: Antesignano del risveglio pentecostale evangelico italiano* (Assemblee di Dio in Italia [ADI]-Media, 2007).

9 It is believed that the pentecostal revival in the United States started on January 1, 1901 in the Bible School of Topeka, Kansas, where Charles F. Parham preached that glossolalia was a sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit, as illustrated in Acts 2. One of Parham's students was a young African American, William J. Seymour, who in 1906 started his own missionary work at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California. This famous address was the epicenter for the spread of the modern pentecostal movement.

After receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Luigi Francescon dedicated himself to spreading the message of Pentecostalism among the Italians in the United States. On September 15, 1907, Francescon was invited to the Tuscan Church¹⁰ by elders Menconi and Ottolini. After he exhorted the congregation to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit, a great manifestation occurred and many souls were filled with the Holy Spirit. That day marked the inception of the Unorganized Italian Christian Churches of North America in Chicago, Illinois.¹¹ In 1910, Francescon traveled to Brazil¹² and established the first pentecostal church among the Italian communities in São Paulo and Paraná. The church adopted the name of *Congregação Cristã no Brasil* (Christian Congregation in Brazil).

In 1927, a General Convention for the congregations in the United States was held in Niagara Falls, NY, under the presidency of Maximillian Tosetto.¹³ The adoption of the Twelve Articles of Faith attempted to promote unity among the churches.¹⁴ In addition, a hymnal titled *Nuovo Libro D'Inni e Salmi Spirituali* was approved to be uniformly used by the churches. This group of churches adopted the name Unorganized Italian Christian Churches of the United States, and it was decided that the General Convention should be held annually.¹⁵

In 1948, a move toward formally organizing the General Convention emerged and the congregations approved a revision of their name to Italian Christian Church of North America.¹⁶ Luigi Francescon opposed this movement and thus withdrew from the General Convention, as did others who supported his position. Francescon feared that the existence of an umbrella organization with a centralized committee and hierarchy would limit the Holy Spirit's

10 It was known as the Tuscan Church because most members were from the Tuscan region. It was molded in the style of the Italian free churches and was also referred to as Grand Avenue Church.

11 Timothy Francis Murphy, *Religious Bodies: 1936*, Vol. 2 (Washington DC: USGPO, 1941); General Council, CCoNA, *Fiftieth Anniversary: Christian Church of North America 1927–1977* (Christian Church of North America, 1977).

12 Before traveling to Brazil, Francescon, Giacomo Lombardi, and Lucia Menna went to Argentina and evangelized in San Cayetano and Tres Arroyos, Buenos Aires. Francescon and Lombardi were jailed and deported to Brazil. See Leonardo Alves, *Christian Congregation in North America: Its Inception, Doctrine and Worship* (Dallas, 2006).

13 General Council, *Fiftieth Anniversary*.

14 Alfred Palma, *The Articles of Faith* (General Council, Christian Congregation of North America, 1987).

15 General Council, *Fiftieth Anniversary*.

16 Ibid.

action in the church.¹⁷ He remained isolated in the Christian Congregation Church in Chicago, which exists to this day, but kept fellowship with the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*.¹⁸ Francescon had frequent contact with the brethren in Brazil. Between 1910 and 1948 he traveled to Brazil ten times, staying for more than a year on most trips.¹⁹ At the time of his death on September 7, 1964, Luigi Francescon was the senior elder of the Christian Congregation Church in Chicago. His wife, Rosina Francescon, played an important role both as deaconess and as director of the church's Bible school.²⁰

In 1964, the few churches—about twelve—that had continued in communion with Francescon began to have an annual general assembly. Over a period of about ten years, for various reasons, the number of churches decreased to three. By 1976 the Assembly was suspended.²¹ In 1980, Miguel Spina and Vittorio Angare, who were senior elders²² of the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*, visited the United States per invitation of Joel Spina and helped establish the Christian Congregation in the United States by uniting three churches that used to be part of the Unorganized Italian Christian Church of North America. The Buffalo Christian Congregation, the Italian Christian Assembly of Alhambra, and the Christian Congregation in the United States in Chicago participated in the general assembly at which they adopted a common name, Christian Congregation in the United States, and created fellowship among themselves and with the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*. Most recently, the church has expanded to countries in Latin America, North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa as a result of the missionary work of many Brazilian members. This expansion created an international fellowship of congregations sharing the same faith, doctrine, and liturgy. The congregation located in Brás, São Paulo, is the headquarters of the church in Brazil and oversees the ministry of every Christian Congregation abroad.

The *Congregação Cristã no Brasil* follows an organizational model of kinship and patriarchy.²³ Leadership is ranked by seniority rather than charisma or

17 Toppi, *Luigi Francescon*.

18 Ibid.

19 Key Yuasa, "Louis Francescon: A Theological Biography, 1866–1964," PhD diss., University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland, 2001.

20 Francesco Toppi, *Madri in Israele: Donne del movimento pentecostale italiano* (Assemblee di Dio in Italia [ADI]-Media, 2003).

21 Arno Scoccia, personal letter to Leonardo Alves, June 26, 2001.

22 Miguel Spina was the president elder until 1991. After his death, Vittorio Angare became the president elder. Elders are the highest ranking office in the ministry of the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*. Above them are only the council of elders at Brás and the president elder.

23 Reed Nelson, "Organizational Homogeneity, Growth, and Conflict in Brazilian Protes-

competence, and all ministerial roles are unpaid. The organizational style of other pentecostal churches is considered a human interference in the work of God.²⁴ Thus, the *Congregação* is neither affiliated nor does it collaborate with other churches (not even pentecostal ones) or organizations such as the United Pentecostal Church International.

Methodology

To gain a better understanding of members' opinions regarding the role of women in the church, I used the results of an online survey I created using Qualtrics Survey Software. The survey was delivered to members of the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil* through Facebook, Orkut, Twitter, and Yahoo groups between April 5 and October 5, 2012. This was the first survey ever conducted among members of this church. It contained questions regarding practices and traditions in the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*, but for the purpose of this study, I focus only on the questions pertaining to the role of women in the church. Members interviewed were asked to send the link to others who might be interested in participating, thus creating a snowball sample.²⁵ Subjects were not offered any type of remuneration and the survey was conducted in English and Portuguese.²⁶ The survey's link was accessed by 1,020 respondents. The results presented here are from the completed report, which contained the responses of 593 members who completed the entire survey. Selected respondents ranged in age from 14 to 74, with the average age of 44. There were 324 men and 269 women.

It is important to note that the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil* does not conduct any survey of its own and discourages members, especially those in ministry, from taking surveys about the church. This is reflected by the ministerial teaching, "Brothers from the ministry, administration and doorkeepers, who receive surveys about the Congregation (unless by governmental institutions), should

tantism," in W. Swatos, *Twentieth Century World Religious Movements in Neo-Weberian Perspective* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 231–246.

24 Paul Freston, "Pentecostalism in Brazil: A Brief History," *Religion* 25 (1995): 119–133.

25 I was able to attract respondents by constantly advertising the research project and asking members who took the survey to share the link with their friends. I also created a Facebook group to address questions and concerns of respondents who were curious to know more about the content and goal of the survey.

26 Respondents had the chance to select the language in which they preferred to take the survey since some respondents live abroad.

not answer it.”²⁷ In addition, the church has no membership records, no operating manuals or similar documents. The only data containing statistics from the church is in an annual directory, known as *Relatório*, in which one can find the number of people baptized per year, the number of congregations, and schedules of services and addresses for each church in Brazil and abroad. Thus, using social networking sites proved to be effective in finding members of the denomination willing to take the survey. In order to collect a greater sample size, I made the survey available online for six months.

Although this study does not claim to generalize its findings, it achieves a significant degree of correspondence with patterns that emerge from other studies about the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*. The findings of this survey are consistent with other researchers’ personal experience with this religious group and with main published literature on the church.²⁸

The Role of Women

In the past fifty years, the role of women at the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil* has changed drastically. When the church started in 1910, women held several positions of leadership, including ministerial positions of deaconesses, cooperators,²⁹ youth cooperators, Sunday school teachers, musicians, and orchestra directors. The fact that the Azusa Street Mission recognized the charisma of women and men equally played an important role in establishing the position

27 Congregação Cristã no Brasil, *Yearly Assembly Teachings*, “Article 17: Survey about the Congregation,” Brás, São Paulo, 2004.

28 William Read, *New Patterns of Church Growth in Brazil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1965); Nelson, “Organizational Homogeneity”; Reed Nelson, “Organization and Societal Context in Multinational Churches,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1993): 653–682; “Análise organizacional de uma igreja brasileira: A Congregação Cristã no Brasil,” *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 44 (1984): 544–558; “Cultural Environment and Organization Design in a Brazilian Pentecostal Sect: The Congregação Cristã no Brasil,” M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, Salt Lake City, UT, 1979; John Sinclair, *Protestantism in Latin America: A Bibliographical Guide* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1973); Manuel Correa, “Ritual e Representação: o Discurso Religioso da Congregação Cristã no Brasil,” Ph.D. diss., Unicamp, Campinas, Brazil, 1986; Norbert Foerster, “Poder e política na Congregação Cristã no Brasil: Um pentecostalismo na contramão,” *Ciencias Sociales y Religion* 8, no. 8 (2006). The author has also been a member of the Christian Congregation for more than twenty years and can attest to the validity of the information provided.

29 The ministry is composed of elders and deacons, assisted by cooperators. Youth cooperators preside and are responsible for the youth and children services.

of women in the early stages of the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*. As an eyewitness to the Azusa Street services observed: "The Lord was liable to burst through anyone ... someone would finally get up anointed for the message. All seemed to recognize this and give way. It might be a child, a woman or a man. It might be from the back seat or from the front. It made no difference."³⁰ Nevertheless, much as in other pentecostal denominations, women were never ordained as elders, although in principle there was equality. Thus, men have always monopolized priestly functions in the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*. Although women could preach in the role of cooperators and serve as deaconesses, there was a hierarchy to be respected and men were at the top. Around the 1940s and 1950s routinization started to set in and the role of women began to diminish. First, they were no longer referred to as deaconesses but as "sisters of piety." Then women were barred from playing in the church's orchestra. Soon thereafter, women cooperators were asked to stop preaching at the services. The fact that none of these changes was met with opposition support Weber's notion that equality for women rarely continues beyond the first stage of the formation of a religious community.³¹

Presently, women's role at the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil* is very limited. When inquiries are made as to why women no longer play in the orchestra or preach in the service, the typical response is, "This is part of our traditions, the way things are and have always been in the church. We must abide by these traditions." However, traditions that are claimed to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented.³² Thus "traditions" introduced during the past fifty years are used to justify established practices and customs that limit women's role in the church.

Like many denominations, the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil* claims to be fully supportive of gender equality even as women are formally denied access to leadership positions. This stance is justified by an ideology of gender-role complementarity claiming that men and women are equal but have different roles.³³ When questioned about the discriminatory practice of excluding women from the church's orchestra, for example, the late president elder of the church, Jorge Couri, said, "There is no discrimination between men and

30 Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 58.

31 Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*.

32 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

33 See Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

women, no contempt, because we don't labor in the Work of God with this spirit."³⁴ Yet, women are excluded from access to the church hierarchy and to all positions of leadership.

The following sections will illustrate the important shifts in the status of women within the church over the years. As the first historical account of women musicians, preachers, and deaconesses, this is an important contribution to keeping the legacy of women leaders alive despite the current diminishment in their status. I also present members' attitudes toward women's role in the church today, including their opinions on whether they would support allowing women to serve in roles they previously occupied.

Orchestra

The *Congregação Cristã no Brasil* orchestra was instituted by Luigi Francescon in May 1932. Male and female musicians were equally members of the church orchestra for many years. As an example, Brunna Gitti from Freguesia do Ó, São Paulo, and Elzira Cassoli from Limeira both played the violin in church. Sometime during the 1950s, women were barred from playing any musical instrument in the church orchestra in Brazil, except for the organ. In an interview, Elzira revealed that there were at least fourteen other women who played in church along with her.³⁵ One day the local elder went to each of their homes and told them not to bring their instruments to church anymore. He did not say why; only that the elders prayed and felt that women should not play in the orchestra anymore. Some, like her, obliged and remained in the church. The majority never returned.

The exclusion of women from the church's orchestra is problematic, since the church in the United States and several other countries abroad³⁶ maintained women in their orchestras. This inconsistency created one of the most obvious differences between the Congregation in Brazil and congregations in the United States. Claiming to follow Brazil's lead, the ministries of the Con-

34 Jorge Couri, letter to the author, April 24, 2006. He made similar claims in a conversation with the author, September 15, 2007.

35 Elzira Cassoli, interview with the author, August 14, 1999.

36 Women can play other instruments besides the organ in congregations located in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, Cuba, Jamaica, Guatemala, Bolivia, El Salvador, Colombia, Costa Rica, China, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, Israel, Lebanon, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Austria, Ireland, Italy, Germany, Haiti, San Tome and Prince, South Africa, Angola, and Congo. In November 2014, the ministry in Germany, Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Belgium decided to allow women to play in their orchestras.

gregations in France, England³⁷, Paraguay, and Japan also barred women from their orchestras.

Up to Francescon's last visit to Brazil in 1948, women were probably still part of the orchestra. In a personal letter Francescon's grandson, Louis F. Carrieri, stated:

I have never been in Brazil and was not aware that women did not play instruments other than the organ. I have not been able to find any correspondence on the subject by my grandfather, Louis Francescon ... I do know that in the Christian Congregation in Chicago we have had an orchestra for the last 80 years, and have had women playing violin, cello, clarinet, saxophone and other instruments. Brother L. Francescon was the senior elder until the Lord called him home in 1964 and to my knowledge he never said anything contrary to women playing in the church orchestra.³⁸

Several attempts have been made, to no avail, to learn from the senior ministry at Brás the reason why women were barred from participating in the orchestra. A teaching from 1961 sheds some light on the matter:

There are sisters who study the accordion; however, it must be clear that at the Congregation, it is only permitted for sisters to play the organ. They can and are free to study other instruments, but to play only in their homes. We know that a sister had a revelation to play accordion in the services, this is wrong, as the elders felt for many years to remove them. Are the elders wrong and she correct? The Lord has revealed to the elders to exclude [women] from the musical body, except for the organ, thus impeding any and all opportunity of the enemy to damage the Work of God.³⁹

Since there is only one organ per congregation, a single organist gets to play per service, while male musicians can play every service in their chosen instrument, ranging from the violin to the tuba. In a typical service, the orchestra may have between fifty and one hundred male musicians but only one female

37 There's speculation that the ministry in England will allow women in the orchestra soon, perhaps this year.

38 Louis Carrieri, letter to the author, March 18, 2008.

39 Congregação Cristã no Brasil, *Yearly Assembly Teachings*, "Instrumentos Musicais," Brás, São Paulo, 1961.

organist. To illustrate, at the central church of Campinas, São Paulo, there are five weekly services in which twelve organists have to rotate their chance to play at a given service, while about eighty male musicians have unrestricted permission to play in as many services as they attend. Thus, an organist may get the chance to play only once every two weeks. During musical rehearsals this disparity is magnified. Organists have to rotate and sometimes just play a verse of a hymn so that all other organists present can have a chance to participate in the rehearsal.

According to the *Congregação* Orchestra History Guideline, once a musician passes the musical examination and becomes an official musician of the Christian Congregation, the musician is allowed to play anywhere in the world:

4. d) Officialization: All baptized candidates, as long as approved by this exam. After becoming officialized, s/he can play at any congregation.⁴⁰

The Christian Congregation in North America Guidelines and Procedures for the Musical Part also states:

4. Procedures: Officialization

When a brother or sister fulfills all the requirements and passes the exam for officialization, then s/he should be presented to the Congregation. In a regular service, between the testimonies and the Word, s/he will stand up before the people and the local or regional elder will introduce the brother/sister, mentioning his/her name, the fact that s/he has studied and progressed in the musical part, and that from now on s/he is an officialized musician of the Christian Congregation, being allowed to play at any church of our faith.⁴¹

Despite these official documents allowing officialized female musicians to play in any congregation in the world, in practice, visiting officialized female musicians are not allowed to play in Brazil or in any of the countries that have banned women from their orchestras. On the other hand, officialized male musicians are allowed to play at any Christian Congregation in the world. Hence, a double standard in recognizing the validation of an official exami-

40 "Histórico musical e instruções regulamentares para as orquestras da Congregação Cristã no Brasil," Brás, São Paulo, 2006.

41 Christian Congregation in the United States, "Guidelines and Procedures for the Musical Part," Buffalo, NY, September 2002.

nation of the church's musicians is set in place. The officialization of a female musician becomes void outside the country in which she was officialized.

There are exceptions to this rule. In the south of Brazil, women are allowed to play the accordion, as evidenced by a video taken at a regional music practice in Ijuí, Rio Grande do Sul.⁴² Due to the proximity with Guayaramerin, Bolívia, where women are allowed to play in the Bolívia Congregation, the church at Guajará-Mirim, Rondônia, has allowed women to play other instruments in church.⁴³ While some elders consider an officialized female musician's attempt to play in Brazil a rebellious act, other elders frequently allow it. Nevertheless, attempts to play in countries that ban women from the orchestra can be met with hostility and resistance.⁴⁴

In addition, women are rarely appointed to the role of music director. In the past, it was common practice to include women in this role and because of that, there are a few who still conduct the orchestra. In Brazil, only Ana Spina Finotti has this privilege. She is the niece of one of the church's most influential president elders, the late Miguel Spina, and was also married to an important elder, the late Davi Finotti. An officialized organist and organists' examiner, she helped to assemble the church's hymnbook. Today, she is practically the only woman with access to the pulpit in Brazil. Already in her eighties, she still gets up in front of thousands of male musicians to conduct. In the United States, there are few women directors: Normandie Galassi and Aluana Amodeo of Chicago, Angela Crispim of Massachusetts, and Alicia Gonzalez of Texas. In recent years, however, only men have been appointed to the position of music director.

The results of the survey indicate that the majority of respondents, 65 percent, were in favor of women playing other instruments in the church's orchestra (see Figure 1). These respondents said: "Sisters have the same rights as the brothers and we live in a democratic society";⁴⁵ "there is no difference between male and female in God's eyes"; "by the Holy Scripture, they have this right and privilege before God"; and "if they can play in the churches abroad, why not play here in Brazil? We have one faith, the same communion, were baptized

42 See "Ensaio regional ijuí-rs," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uch4uNviSn4>. Accessed May 30, 2012.

43 Jorge Couri, letter to author.

44 An officialized female violinist from the Congregation in the USA was physically expelled from the congregation in Paris, France by elder Avelino Azevedo in 2007 for attempting to play, although she was allowed to play in Reims, France by elder Antônio dos Anjos Soares in 2005.

45 Responses written in Portuguese were translated by the author, who is a native speaker.

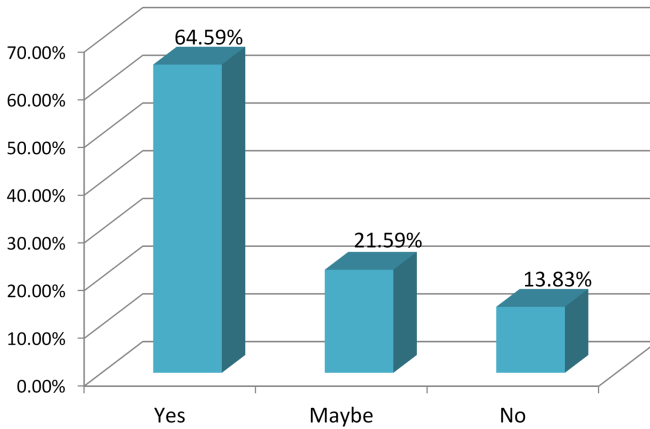


FIGURE 1 *Would you favor sisters playing other instruments (e.g. violin, viola, cello, etc.) in church?*

in the same way and we follow Christ in the same doctrine.” Another respondent said, “Gifts are given by God, we see many sisters who are very talented in the musical part, and many are repressed, being only allowed to play the organ, even if they have the gift of playing another instrument, resulting sometimes in organists who are frustrated. ... This rhetoric that in other countries sisters play due to necessity is not honest. Since the beginning of the church, our sisters were musicians.” Yet another respondent pointed out that “women should play as they play in other countries. I was in Chile in September 2009 and I congregated in the city of Arica. There I saw a sufficient number of musicians in the church, there was no need of women musicians, and still, they were there. This invalidates the argument of ‘no need’ used in Brazil; besides, there are many regions in Brazil with an obvious need of musicians and even so, women musicians are not allowed to play there. The only reason why the sisters don’t play in Brazil is this: The present ‘Council of Elders’ do not want it, period. The orchestra of the *Congregação* has two characteristics: It is the largest in the world, and the only one that cannot organize women musicians within it.”

Overall, members displayed a positive attitude toward female musicians. There was, however, a small percentage of respondents who were against them and said they should be permitted “only when there is a need” and that “there is not a place for them, since the church already has so many musicians, allowing women to play would increase drastically the number and they wouldn’t be able to fit in the orchestra.”

Another respondent said, “I don’t agree, although it has nothing to do with the fact that ‘women should be silent in the church.’ I don’t agree because I

believe that 'in a team that is winning, we should not change players.' Things are good the way they are; if we allow them in the orchestra problems could arise. ... Also, there is no physical space for them in the orchestra. I don't consider myself radical or a misogynist, but things can be changed only if no problem will arise from it." Said another respondent, "In Brazil, there is no need. If there is a need then, yes, but only until a brother can play instead of a sister. We have many brothers willing and available to study music. It doesn't look good for a sister to play another instrument. I believe that the CCB orchestra is spiritual and there should be communion. What if a couple decides to be musicians? The sister will have to play every service and what if they have children? Who will take care of that poor child? The child would disturb the orchestra. Also Brazil is a tropical country and it is hard even for some organists to follow the teachings regarding clothing (sleeves, cleavage, short skirts), at least the organ is more discreet."

These comments indicate a general misogynist view regarding the role of women since there is an assumption that women are solely responsible for the care of their children in church, that they should dress in a certain way, and that they can become musicians only if there is a need and no man to do the job. In many ways, religious sexism is an extension of secular sexism. Persons who have a misogynistic orientation will certainly manifest it in church.⁴⁶

Some attitudes toward women playing in the orchestra can be seen in Figure 2. Although a minority felt strongly that woman should not play, it is promising that the majority had a positive attitude toward women playing in the orchestra.

Preaching

Holiness and pentecostal denominations account for the largest share of all clergywomen, where women are seen as spiritual and professional role models.⁴⁷ When the pentecostal movement that gave rise to the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil* began in the United States, many women were part of the clergy. Antoinette Macchia was blessed by M. D'Angelo in Gary, Indiana, where she pastored and preached the Italian-speaking service for at least ten years until

46 Nancy Nason-Clark, "The Sexual Division of Labour in British Protestant Churches: An Empirical Study of the Attitudes of Clergy," presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, Washington, DC, 1985; Lehman, *Women Clergy in England*.

47 Margaret L. Andersen and Dana Hysock, *Thinking about Women: Sociological Perspectives on Sex and Gender* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997).

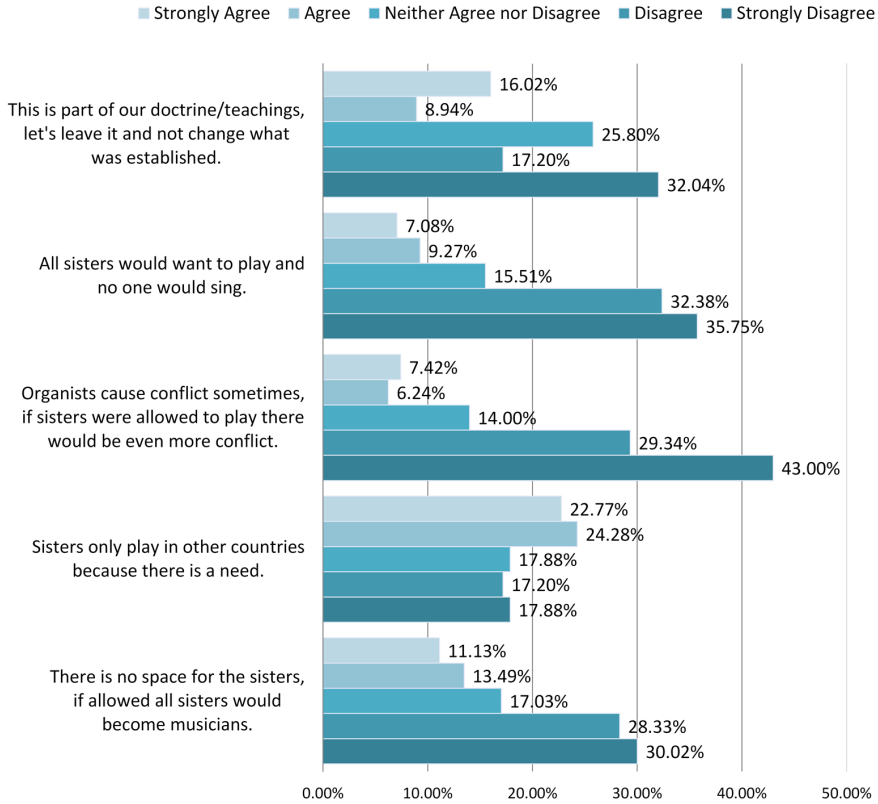


FIGURE 2 Attitudes toward sisters playing other instruments in church

the Italian service phased out.⁴⁸ Likewise, a directory of elders and churches of the *Congregação* from 1923 lists the name of two women preachers, Sorella A. Romanelli from Ginosa, Italy and Angelina Paretto from Rome, Italy. It is important to note that elders, too, were listed for these churches—Carmelo Malvani in Ginosa and D. Gaeta in Rome—which invalidates the argument that in the absence of a male preacher, a woman could preach out of necessity.

In addition, many women were youth cooperators in the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*.⁴⁹ The Church Convention of 1936 had a section entitled “Young People Services,” which stated that “these services are exclusively for young

48 Frank Macchia, email to author, March 14, 2013.

49 Presiding the services and ministering the Word of God were sis. Alvina (Santo André, circa 1937), sis. Julieta (Burgo Paulista, circa 1950), sis. Esther Freitas and sis. Maricas (Brás, until 1975), and sis. Luzia (Honduras and other Central American countries, circa 1970–1980's).

people, and we believe that it should be ministered by sisters, consecrated to this beneficial end.”⁵⁰ In 1972 a teaching confirmed their ministry:

Regarding the sisters who are youth helpers, they have the liberty to preach the Word in the services for the young people. Since the beginning the Lord has used them. Let the gift of God operate.⁵¹

Even though this teaching is still valid, women who are youth helpers are no longer offered the chance to preach, and those who served as cooperators were asked to stop ministering. This was the case of Maria Aparecida Neves Ferreira de Oliveira⁵² (also known as sister Ada) from Parque Industrial, Campinas, São Paulo. She became a youth cooperator when she was twenty-two years old and served the Lord in this capacity for six years. In the 1950s, during the same time that female musicians were also barred from the orchestra, women cooperators were asked by the elders to stop preaching.

Until very recently there were seven women presiding and preaching at services at the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*, mostly in female prisons and Indian reservations: Iracema in Amazonas, Telma in Bahia, Diolinda in Goiás, Maria Antônio Silva in Tocantins at the Indian reservation of Guaparó, Maria Pereira Da Silva in Pernambuco at the Povoado Várzea in Petrolina, Benedita Ripolis in Rio Negro, and Maria Antônia de Almeida at the female prisons in Itupeva, Itapeva and Itapira, São Paulo. They serve God in secret. Their names are not included in the church’s directory. They do not hold ministry positions and the church’s community is oblivious to their existence.

When asked, “Would you favor sisters preaching in church?” 58 percent of respondents said no. Nevertheless, about 17 percent of respondents were in favor and 25 percent said maybe, as illustrated in Figure 3. Those in favor argued that “if the Holy Spirit leads them, why not?” and that “God does not make distinction between men and women.” Another respondent said, “I know that they used to preach at youth services, I don’t know why they were prohibited from continuing (maybe misogyny?). When Paul said that women should be silent in the church, I believe it was directed to that specific church, as was the veil. This issue must be researched and studied under the light of exegeses

50 Congregação Cristã no Brasil, *Yearly Assembly Teachings*, “Reuniões de Jovens e Menores,” Brás, São Paulo, 1936.

51 *Yearly Assembly Teachings*, “Topic 36—General Reunion of Youth Cooperators,” Brás, São Paulo, 1972.

52 Conversation with the author, July 2007.

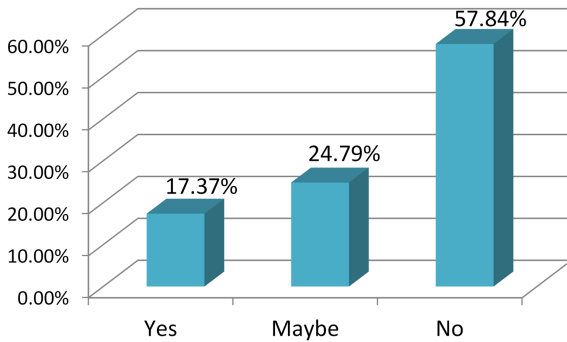


FIGURE 3 *Would you favor sisters preaching in church?*

and hermeneutics so that doctrine is not created based on isolated verses and misogynistic opinion.” Others said, “I have nothing against it, I actually have met sisters who used to preach in the services.”

Respondents who opposed women preaching showed support for a pentecostal interpretation of Paul’s writing in the New Testament that denies women any authority or religious voice.⁵³ A respondent said, “Paul was very clear in 1 Cor. 14:34–35 and 37,” and “Jesus never elected a woman to be an Apostle. God never chose a woman to be a prophet.” Others said that “the Bible condemns this; therefore I also condemn this practice.” Another said, “Women can preach with the veil on their head in all places but the church. It is not a question of misogyny or feminism, but the fact that Adam was created before Eve. It’s an apostolic tradition.” Others were uncomfortable with the idea, saying, “Maybe eventually I’ll change my opinion in this matter, but as of today, I wouldn’t feel comfortable if I had in front of me a woman preaching the Word,” and “I don’t have sufficient knowledge to justify my answer biblically, but I wouldn’t feel comfortable.” These comments derive from the fact that pentecostal churches are known to emphasize male control and authority over women based on their interpretation of Paul’s writing in the New Testament.⁵⁴

Respondents who said “maybe” were “unsure” about this issue or said that they “had not thought about this yet; need to read more of the Bible to have an opinion on this issue.” Another said that women could preach “only if there was a need” and “as long as they have the gift, but without holding a ministry such as cooperator.”

53 Elaine Lawless, “Rescripting their Lives and Narratives: Spiritual Life Stories of Pentecostal Women Preachers,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 53–71.

54 Lawless, “Rescripting their Lives”; Lehman, *Women Clergy in England*.

These attitudes toward women clergy are similar to what other researchers have observed. Members who were in favor of women preaching stated that they knew or heard of sisters in the past that preached. Studies have shown that interaction with a woman in the role of minister seems to challenge preexisting attitudes usually in the positive direction.⁵⁵ Regarding negative attitudes, some comments simply reflect misogynist views due to sexism; nevertheless, the majority of opposition is not conscious or even sexist. Rather it is based on the assumption of traditions, which include the assumption of a male ministry based on the literal biblical interpretation of Paul's writing.⁵⁶

Deaconess

In the Christian Congregation Church in Chicago, under the ministry of Francescon, women were appointed to the ministry of deaconess. The "Fede e Regole della Congregazione Cristiana di Chicago, Illinois" signed by Luigi Francescon on August 1955 states:

The ministry of this church is composed of the elders, cooperators, deacons, deaconesses, administration, treasury and a secretary.⁵⁷

During the Italian pentecostal movement many women were deaconesses, including Rosina Francescon, Lucia Menna, Emma Ottolini, Teresa Nigido, Angela Paretto, Elvira Arcangeli, Maria Pagano, and Paola Tedesco.⁵⁸ To this day the Christian Congregation Church in Chicago ordains women deaconesses.

In the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*, instead of using the title *deaconess* for women who work alongside the deacons in the Ministry of Piety, their title changed to "sister of piety." The men's title remained "deacon." Foremost, as sisters of piety, they are not regarded as being on equal footing with the deacons. They are not ordained in a special service as the deacons are. Although in the early years they used to be presented to the church, the ministry recently stopped this practice and has instructed them not to tell others of their position or to mention it during testimonies. Deacons, on the other hand, are invited to preach in the services and to go up to the pulpit to make announcements

55 Marjorie Royle, "Women Pastors: What Happens After Placement?" *Review of Religious Research* 24, no. 2 (December 1982): 116–126; Lehman, "Changing Receptivity"; Carroll et al., *Women of the Cloth*.

56 Lehman, *Women Clergy in England*; Carroll et al., *Women of the Cloth*; Adams, "Parishioners' Image."

57 Luigi Francescon, *Fede e regole della Congregazione Cristiana di Chicago*, Chicago, 1955.

58 Toppi, *Madri in Israele*.

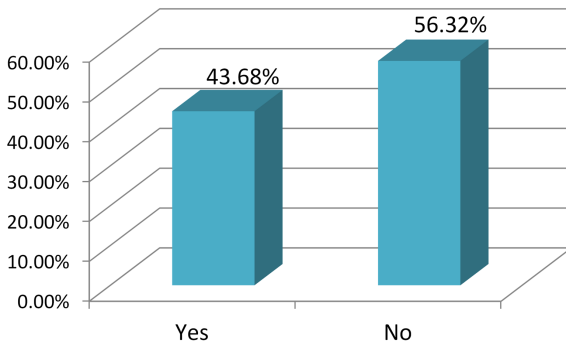


FIGURE 4 *Should sisters of piety be called Deaconess as Phoebe was called in Romans 16:1?*

and to testify, and are asked to assist the elders during the baptism and the Holy Supper. Unlike the deacons, sisters of piety are not allowed to preach, are never invited to the pulpit, are not allowed to help the ministers during baptisms and Holy Suppers, and cannot make decisions regarding the Ministry of Piety on their own. They must communicate everything to the deacons and wait for their approval in order to proceed or not. In gatherings, sisters of piety are not even asked to lead the prayer; if there is a man present, he will lead the prayer even if he does not hold a ministerial position.⁵⁹ Male ministers are always asked to lead prayers during gatherings or visits.

Calling the “sisters of piety” by the rightful title of “deaconess” would imply that they are equal to the deacons, not only in title but also in rights and practices before God. This is the title they held since the beginning of the Italian pentecostal movement that gave rise to the Christian Congregation and the beginning of the Christian church as described in the Gospels. Although the Bible does not name any man “deacon,” not even Stephen,⁶⁰ a woman named Phoebe is described as the deaconess of the church of Cenchreae (Rom 16:1).⁶¹

Regarding the change of the title of “sisters of piety” to the biblical title of “deaconess,” there was almost an equal split in members’ opinions, as seen in

59 I witnessed a male teenager who was not even baptized lead a prayer meeting in front of two elder sisters of piety.

60 Stephen is considered to be one of the first deacons (Acts 7).

61 *διάκονος* (*diakonos*): (1) one who executes the commands of another, esp. of a master, a servant, attendant, minister 1a) the servant of a king 1b) a deacon, one who, by virtue of the office assigned to him by the church, cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use 1c) a waiter. *Bible Study Tools* <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/diakonos.html>.

Figure 4. Respondents in favor argued that if this is the biblical term, it should be used and that “sisters of piety exercise the same function as the deacons and in some cases are even more active; it would only be fair to call them by the appropriate title.”

Those against said that this was just a title and that if “a sister of piety is indeed a deaconess, she is a deaconess before God, and that is what matters.” Others asked, “What difference does a title make in the church? Sister of piety, deaconess, sister of charity, what matters is that their work is done with love,” and that “they exercise the same function as deacons, to take care of the needy ones, no need for change.” Others were quick to assert, “For now, no, because if they were called deaconesses and were ordained like the deacons, they would have the right to preach and this would bring confusion.”

Even though the biblical passage citing that Phoebe was a deaconess (Rom 16:1) is stated in the question, some said that this was not in the Bible.⁶² A respondent said, “I don’t agree. The title ‘deacon’ was given to men only: In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain (1Tim 3:8). A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus (1Tim 3:12, 13). This title was given to men, not women.”

Conclusion

The historical analysis of the role of women at the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil* provides empirical support to Weber’s theory.⁶³ Women were positively received in leadership roles only at the beginning of the church’s development. As the church grew, the role of women in leadership positions quickly diminished. The church’s patriarchal system along with the assumption of a male ministry based on the biblical interpretation of Paul’s writing have thwarted the effort to broaden women’s roles in the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*. Weber’s theory is also applicable in the United States, where, although women still play in the orchestra, there are no women cooperators, youth cooperators, or deaconesses. This is largely due to the strong influence exerted by the Brazilian ministry in churches abroad.

62 Phoebe in Romans 16:1 is identified as διάκονος. This is the same Greek word used for deacons in 1Timothy 3:12.

63 See Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*.

The survey's responses indicate that although a high percentage of members were in favor of women playing in the church's orchestra, the majority of respondents opposed women preaching in church and sisters of piety being called deaconesses. Respondents opposed to the preaching of women seemed unaware of biblical accounts in which God chose women to be prophetesses: Miriam (Mic 6:4; Exod 15:20–21), Deborah (Judg 4:4), who besides being a prophetess was a judge,⁶⁴ Huldah (Kings 22:14; 2 Chron 34:22–28), Noadiah (Neh 6:14), Isaiah's wife (Isa 8:3), Anna (Luke 2:36–38), and the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8–9). Other women in Scripture also prophesied but were not expressly called prophetesses. These include Rachel (Gen 30:24), Hannah (1 Sam 2:1–10), Abigail (1 Sam 25:29–31), Elisabeth (Luke 1:41–45), Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:46–55), and Mary Magdalene (John 20:18; Mark 16:9–10). In addition, Junia is called an apostle in Romans 16:7. This claim, however, goes beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that early church commentators agreed that Junia was a female apostle.⁶⁵ In fact, John Chrysostom said:

Greet Andronicus and Junia ... who are outstanding among the apostles: To be an apostle is something great! But to be outstanding among the apostles—just think what a wonderful song of praise that is! They were outstanding on the basis of their works and virtuous actions. Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle.⁶⁶

Additionally, the option of calling sisters of piety by the biblical title of deaconess received a substantial but not majority support of members. It is interesting to note that a respondent justified his opposition by quoting 1 Timothy 3:8, 12, and 13, but skipped verse 11, which says, "In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in

64 The Hebrew *shaphat* means "to deliver" or "to rule."

65 Origen of Alexandria (185–253) understood the name to be feminine; Bernadette Brooten, "Junia ... outstanding among the Apostles (Romans 16: 7)," in *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*, ed. Leonard Swidler and Arlene Swidler (New York: Paulist Press, 1977, 141–144). Brooten also cites Jerome (340–419) (*Liber Interpretationis Hebraicorum Nominum* 72:15; see <http://www.fourthcentury.com/jerome-hebrew-names>), Hatto of Vercelli (924–961), Theophylact (1050–1108), and Peter Abelard (1079–1142) among those who took Junia to be a woman.

66 Brooten, "Junia ... outstanding among the Apostles" (Romans 16: 7).

everything.” Many scholars, including several ancient commentators,⁶⁷ believe that verse 11 refers to women deaconesses.⁶⁸ Likewise, recent commentaries written by complementarian scholars affirm that the reference to Phoebe in Romans 16:1 as a *διάκονος* should be interpreted as her serving as a deaconess.⁶⁹

The support for female musicians is perhaps due to the fact that women already play in other countries and that they would not hold a position of leadership over a man by playing; whereas preaching or being called a deaconess would put the established male tradition of ministry of the church into question. Based on members’ responses, there is little indication that women will have access to the pulpit again anytime soon, since their opinions largely reflect what is preached by the ministry. Nevertheless, the positive response toward women deaconesses and women’s reintegration in the church’s orchestra indicates a hopeful openness to women’s role in the future of the *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*.

67 John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407), Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350–428) and Theodoret of Cyrus (ca. 393–457). See also the reference in Pliny the Younger, in which two women are called deaconesses (*ministrae*) in Bithynia under Trajan (Epist. 10.96.8; c. A.D. 115).

68 Jennifer Stiefel, “Women Deacons in 1 Timothy: A Linguistic and Literary look at Women Likewise ...,” *New Testament Studies* 41, no. 442 (1995): 442–457; Walter Liefeld, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999); Andreas Kostenberger, “The New Testament Pattern of Church Government,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 43–56.

69 Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996); Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998).