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Pedlar, James E. "Original Church of God," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity in the United States*, ed. George Thomas Kurian and Mark A. Lamport, 1693-1694. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.

Its founding leader was Charles W. Gray, and its head office is in Nashville, Tennessee.

The Original Church of God or Sanctified Church shares common roots with the Church of God (Sanctified Church), the Church of Christ (Holiness), United States, and the much larger Church of God in Christ. All of the bodies originated in the “Church of God” stream of the later Holiness Movement in the 1890s, and were associated with the ministry of Charles Price Jones and Charles Harrison Mason. Prior to 1907, this was an informal body of churches, known simply as the Church of God or Church of God in Christ. Among their number was a church in Nashville under the leadership of Elder Charles W. Gray. Gray and John C. Brown had left the Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church in Columbia Tennessee in 1903 over that church’s failure to embrace Holiness teaching concerning sanctification as a “second blessing” crisis experience.

In 1907, Mason visited the Asuza Street revival, experiencing baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. He then adopted Pentecostal teaching, causing Jones to part ways with Mason. At that time, the Church of Christ (Holiness), United States was established with an episcopal polity under Jones’s leadership. Gray was the leader of a faction that shared Holiness doctrine with Jones but favored congregational polity. Thus, Gray organized the Church of God (Sanctified Church). After failed merger talks with the Church of Christ (Holiness) in 1924, tensions developed over the prospect of incorporating the Church of God (Sanctified Church) and appointing a board of directors to oversee operations. These initiatives were approved in 1927, causing Gray and about one-third of the membership to part ways and form the Original Church of God or Sanctified Church. By the 1970s, the Original Church of God reported 85 churches and 4700 members. Negotiations to merge with the Church of God (Sanctified Church) at that time failed, and the two denominations are still active in the United States today, though present membership statistics are not available.

Distinctive Beliefs and Practices

The Original Church of God maintains the doctrines of the Holiness Movement, which are generally evangelical with a special focus on the experience of sanctification as a distinctive second work of grace. In distinction from Pentecostal theology, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is identified with this decisive sanctification experience. Strong congregationalist convictions remain a key feature of this denomination, and distinguish the Original Church of God from its two closest denominational relations. The church is also opposed to the ordination of women, an issue that was at play in the 1927 schism, though the authority to ordain remains in the hands of each local congregation.

References and Resources

- DuPree, Sherry Sherrod. 1996. *African-American Holiness Pentecostal Movement: An Annotated Bibliography*. New York, NY: Garland.
- Jones, Charles Edwin. 1987. *Black Holiness: A Guide to the Study of Black Participation in Wesleyan Perfectionist and Glossolalic Pentecostal Movements*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.

ORIGINAL CHURCH OF GOD

The Original Church of God or Sanctified Church is an association of African American churches that share Holiness Movement doctrine and congregationalist polity.

Murphy, Larry G., J. Gordon Melton, and Gary L Ward. 1993. *Encyclopedia of African American Religions*. New York, NY: Garland.

—JAMES E. PEDLAR