

WOMEN IN MINISTRY

For the Churches of God, General Conference

Note: This document was prepared by the CGGC Commission on Church Vocations in the early 1990s. Though it was not officially adopted by the CGGC Administrative Council as official policy, it has served as a valuable resource on the topic of women in ministry. August 2012

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Introduction

The Churches of God, General Conference faces an immediate shortage of pastoral candidates to serve in existing churches and projected new churches. The Commission on Church Vocations oversees the recruitment, preparation, and continuing care of those persons who respond to God's call to vocational ministry. The Commission has recently completed an intensive study of the standards for ministerial credentials. In addition to clarified standards the Commission also published a "Readiness for Ministry" profile that offers guidelines for personal and professional maturity for pastoral candidates.¹

The issue of women in ministry has not been addressed directly in the Commission's review of standards and guidelines for maturity. Both of the 1990 documents assume that women ARE considered legitimate candidates for ministry. The forward to the "Standards" document opens by saying: "God calls men and women to the Gospel Ministry..." (p.2). The first sentence of the "Readiness" profile states: "The Churches of God believe that God calls men and women to serve the church as pastors" (p.3).

Yet there has been no public discussion regarding women as the source of candidates for the shortage of ministers. There is no evidence of the intentional recruitment and encouragement of women in the denomination to enroll in approved educational tracks leading to licensing and ordination.

The Commission on Vocations senses the need to address the issue of women in ministry to stimulate denomination-wide dialog and education. It must state a theological position on the issue that is consistent with biblical authority, as well as the historical and present character of the General Conference. It

¹ Cf. the documents: "Standards for Ministerial Credentials" and "Readiness for Ministry" published by the General Conference in April, 1990. The standards were adopted by the 46th Session of the General Conference in June 1989.

must identify the reasons why women are not being encouraged to consider pastoral roles. It must also determine why those women who do consider vocational ministry are unsure about the propriety of their calling, and often feel unaccepted by clergy and laypersons.

This paper represents an initial statement of the issue, the problems in the General Conference, and the theological considerations which will provide the foundation for future discussion on attitudes toward women in ministry. It is the Commission's desire to address this concern as candidly as possible, and to state a position representing the consensus of the denomination.

The paper briefly summarizes the issue of women in ministry and the factors inhibiting women from ministry in the General Conference. The main section applies a theological method called the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" to the present situation in the Churches of God.² This section suggests a biblical hermeneutic that provides a common foundation for future discussions of the immediate issue and other concerns which depend upon resolutions consistent with Scripture's authority. It also reviews some historical research concerning female ministry in the denomination. The paper concludes with some positive recommendations for denomination-wide education concerning the appropriateness and need for women to consider and pursue pastoral ministry.

The Issues at Hand

The primary issue quite simply is whether it is or is not permissible for a woman to serve as the pastor of a church. If it is, then ordination is the appropriate recognition of that ministry. If it is not, then ordination and appointment to meaningful pastorates are not relevant concerns.³

² This theological method is explained in the appendix.

³ It needs to be noted here that the issue of women in ministry is NOT necessarily an issue of modern feminism. It is a popular misconception that any woman pursuing ministry embraces the kind of strident philosophy that would simply reverse roles with men, placing them in subservience to women. Nor do all women necessarily wish to blur the created male/female distinctions into a kind of "unisex" identity. Women who seek the pastoral office (and the men

The General Conference is not contemplating this issue in isolation from other churches. Women in pastoral ministry continues to be one of the prominent issues throughout the entire Christian church. The Roman church denies women the opportunity to serve as priests. This policy fosters increasing anger among Catholic women and men, especially in the Western Hemisphere. Numerous mainline Protestant denominations have deliberated the issue and opened ordination to women. The United Methodist, Presbyterian, U.S.A., and United Church of Christ represent these open churches.

Evangelical churches, like the General Conference, represent a spectrum of responses. Some are still in the process of deliberation. The Southern Baptists have ordained women, but then do not allow them to minister. Others have remained firm in the stance that women should not be allowed into the pastoral office. Most independent groups, such as the Independent Fundamentalist Churches of America (IFCA), refuse to allow women to become pastors. At the other end of this issue are various Pentecostal, Holiness (such as the Church of God, Anderson), and Charismatic groups who have ordained and permitted women to fill the pastoral office for most of their history.

As stated in the introduction, both the "Standards" and "Readiness" documents of the General Conference ASSUME that women are viable candidates for the pastorate and for ordination. Therefore, it would seem that the denomination has resolved the basic issue. But this resolution does not seem evident in the present, or past, experience of the Churches of God. Some current statistics will substantiate the discrepancy between the denomination's stated policy and actual practice.

The discrepancy is documented in a review of women's concerns written for a 1990 self-study conducted by Winebrenner Seminary, the seminary supported by the General Conference. The self-study team observed that:

who support their effort) are responding to God's call. They seek to allow that call to work through the sexual, racial, and cultural diversity that characterizes human experience.

The Churches of God has licensed women since 1859 and ordained them since the late 1800's. However, the number of women ministers has always been small, with few of them filling full-time appointments. The 1990 directory shows that only seventeen of the 510 persons holding credentials are women. Of these, four are serving parishes, one is a General Conference staff person and eight have retired status.⁴

Of the eight ordained women who have retired, only one of them was involved in her own parish ministry. One was a single foreign missionary. The others are wives of pastors who shared their husbands' ministries. Furthermore, in the past five years only two women from General Conference churches have enrolled at Winebrenner Seminary as full-time students in courses leading to ordination.

The self-study summary concerning Churches of God women concluded with a most important and problematic statement. It is a statement of the most immediate problem facing the denomination as it seeks to encourage women toward pastoral roles. The team observed that "while the denominational policy does permit women to enter the ministry, some local pastors and laypersons are outspoken in their opposition to the ordination of women."⁵ This vocal opposition is strong enough to inhibit women from pursuing the pastorate, and leaves many persons questioning the appropriateness of ordaining women.

The underlying (and more volatile) issue which the denomination faces regarding women is the continuing influence of persons who deny or discourage women from pursuing professional ministry. Ruth Tucker and Walter Liefeld observe that "in some denominations and religious organizations the 'women's issue' has become a battleground and even (though few would say it out loud) a test of orthodoxy."⁶ Such may be the case in some areas of the General Conference. Where that can be admitted, it must be done in a context of careful

⁴ J. Harvey Gossard, coordinator, "Self-Study Report: Prepared for Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada" by Winebrenner Theological Seminary, Dec. 1, 1990, p. 58.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ruth A. Tucker and Walter Liefeld, Daughters of the Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) p. 401.

and open dialogue. Some critical questions need to be raised about the issue and the objections from this group. Such questions are:

- What is the basis of this denial?
- Is it founded on a clearly-stated biblical/theological argument?
- Does such theology represent the consensus of the General Conference?
- Does the denial, in whole or in part, rest upon traditions of Western culture that enforce a male-dominated hierarchy, which in turn perpetuates female subjugation?
- Might that cultural influence also perpetuate many other forms of prejudicial belief and action?
- Is there a need to educate persons concerning the stated biblical interpretation and theology of the denomination and discuss attitudes and opinions that contradict that authority?
- Is there a need to call some persons to correction regarding their theological position on this issue, and to repentance regarding their attitudes and actions?

The following section explains the theological basis for the denomination's openness to women in ordained pastoral ministry. It represents the rationale behind the opening statements of the "Standards" and "Readiness" documents mentioned at the outset of this paper.

Women in Ministry: Consistent with General Conference Theology and History

The Churches of God openly state their commitment to the primacy of Scripture as the authority for their theology. We Believe leaves no question concerning the importance of the biblical justification for any belief or action in the Churches of God.

We believe the Bible is the inspired, infallible authority, the Word of God, our only rule of faith and practice... Inspired of God or "God-breathed" means the Holy Spirit lifted the understanding of the speakers and writers above human limitations to give the Scriptures divine authority... God was guiding in such a way that the written

truth was his word. It is thus the infallible authority in everything Christians believe and do.⁷

Therefore we must begin with the biblical texts that address the role of women in ministry. The intent of this paper does not permit discussion of every possible text. We will address those passages which are most frequently used by persons discussing this issue. Prior to the interaction with specific texts we will summarize the interpretive principles employed in our deliberation.

SCRIPTURE AND WOMEN IN MINISTRY

Interpretive Principles

There are some basic scriptural references which are used in every discussion of women and the pastorate: Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 & 14:34-37; and 1 Timothy 2:8-15. Certainly other portions relate to this concern. Most writers cite passages from the Old Testament which illustrate the roles or integrity of women. They do not fail to refer to the Gospel records concerning Jesus' attitude toward women. But the epistles contain the central teaching concerning the church, its ministry, and the people who are to be its ministers.

Yet there is a serious problem, especially among people who agree that the Bible is God's infallible Word, and that it should be the final rule for faith and practice. Various individuals can read the words of the same text and derive totally different meanings and applications from that passage. This is often evident in the discussions of women in ministry.

The variations arise because people have different methods of interpreting the words they read. Scripture speaks to us through our interpretations, and those interpretations are influenced by presuppositions and priorities that cause us to come to particular understandings and applications. This paper does not allow an extended discussion of the discipline of biblical interpretation. Readers

⁷ We Believe, p. 17.

should consult the excellent texts available for that study.⁸ We must focus on a particular presupposition regarding one's approach to Scripture that has a crucial effect on decisions concerning women in ministry.

That presupposition concerns the "flat view of Scripture" versus the "prioritized view."⁹ One must note at the outset that a commitment to either of these views has nothing to do with one's belief in the inerrancy, infallibility, or final authority of the Bible.¹⁰ Willard Swartley explains that the "flat view" causes readers to assume that "all texts are of equal significance to us and must be harmonized into one, rational, propositional truth." Such a view leads to the disregard for the cultural and historical contexts which shaped the meanings of different texts. Other writers refer to this as making Scripture speak univocally, i.e. with one voice at all times in all places.

The "prioritized view" represents interpreters who acknowledge a diversity within Scripture. These readers believe that there are fundamental moral and theological principles which are to be given "priority over specific statements which stand in tension either with these principles or with other specific texts on the subject."¹¹ Alvera Mickelsen explains that the interpreter should "identify the highest norms or standards taught in the Bible. These highest principles must take first place in our considerations and have top priority in all we do."¹²

Swartley, Mickelson and other "prioritists" generally focus on Christ as the key to the most important norms. Mickelsen argues that the key principles "were emphasized by Jesus Christ... and were often plainly stated as the highest

⁸ Winebrenner Seminary employs the following texts in different courses: Douglas Stuart, Old Testament Exegesis (1980) & Gordon D. Fee, New Testament Exegesis (1983), both published by Westminster Press; J. Robertson McQuilkin, Understanding and Applying the Bible (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983).

⁹ The former term is found in Willard Swartley, Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), 23. The latter term has been derived from the statements of Swartley and other writers who concur that some portions of the Bible maintain more direct authority and relevance for application than other passages.

¹⁰ In fact it is safe to say in light of the conservative commitment of all the writers in Bonnidell & Robert G. Clouse, eds., Women in Ministry (Downers Grove: IVP, 1989) that a belief in inerrancy and infallibility will not resolve the issue; cf. Swartley, p. 26.

¹¹ Swartley, 23.

¹² Alvera Mickelsen, "An Egalitarian View" in Women in Ministry, 177.

standard.”¹³ Swartley draws a similar conclusion from his Anabaptist heritage. He contends that “the Gospels in their direct witness to Jesus Christ are to be taken as final authority.”¹⁴

Other Old Testament and New Testament teachings should be tested against the basic norms affirmed by Christ. When the reader faces a passage shaped by the demands of a specific cultural/historical situation the principles found there should be tested against more broadly stated concepts. This procedure allows interpreters to address the ambiguity which besets the original setting of a text AND the ambiguity surrounding their present context of application. As Swartley observes:

First, as human beings we are subject to particular influences from our culture and history. We tend to use the Bible to reinforce what we believe. While none of us can fully overcome this problem, it is possible to correct wrong notions by serious and sustained study of the biblical text and by following a method which helps us hear the text on its own terms.

Second, it must, however, be candidly noted... that the reason Christians disagree on these issues is because the Bible itself gives mixed signals, especially on the surface of the text. This is due not to the nature of God but to the fact that divine revelation comes into and through history and culture. The various writers of the Bible reflect the cultural practices of their times and write to and for specific situations. For this reason, any proper interpretation of a given biblical text must take into account the historical and cultural setting of both the writer and the community for which the text was written.¹⁵

This paper will employ the “prioritized view” in its interpretation and application. It also assumes two other fundamental principles of interpretation. First, Scripture must be read under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Second, proper interpretation is ultimately the work of a community of believers rather than one person or small group.

¹³ Ibid, 178.

¹⁴ Swartley, 23.

¹⁵ Swartley, 203.

The guidance of the Holy Spirit is a basic presupposition, but one that should not be overlooked. We Believe states clearly that “proper interpretation of the Scriptures comes from the Holy Spirit” (18). The Spirit inspired the composition and canonization of the Bible, and he continues to give life to the written text. God’s Spirit illumines believers’ understanding and causes them to identify personally with the truth being communicated. The Spirit enables believers to discern the message of a text and its appropriate application in contemporary settings. Scripture and the Spirit work in constant harmony. There is never a time when the Spirit would prompt someone to act contrary to the Bible. But there is no right understanding of Scripture without the influence of the Spirit in the hearts and minds of people.

That influence must be proved at the corporate or congregational level. The illumination and application of the Bible does not belong to single, privileged individuals. Swartley accurately describes the communal process of interpretation which churches ought to depend on.

The unique authority and rule of God in Christ which is set forth in the Bible can become apparent only in the voluntary faith and obedience of the responding community... God gives special insight to individuals as they read and study the Bible. These insights are to be tested in the community (1 Cor. 14:29; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21). This testing of interpretations ultimately needs to involve the whole people of God- individuals, study groups, congregations, conferences, denominations, and wider church.¹⁶

The Churches of God recognize the importance of this principle too. The writers of We Believe observe that the Holy Spirit must actively guide the church in the unity of the entire body. “Therefore, we understand that the interpretation of Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is subject to the **collective understanding of the body** (Ephesians 4:1-19)” (18, emphasis added). The unity of the body begins with the consensus concerning how

¹⁶ Swartley, 236. The communal hermeneutic is developed ably by John Howard Yoder in an essay title “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood.” See John Howard Yoder, The Priestly Kingdom (Notre Dame: UNDP, 1984), 15-45.

theology will be done and how the Scriptures will be understood. Hence, readers are reminded that these preliminary discussions are vital to the decision concerning women in ministry.

Key Texts in Women's Issue

As stated above, Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 & 14:34-37; and 1 Timothy 2:8-15 are the primary texts used in the discussion of women in ministry. Of these four, Galatians 3:28 and 1 Cor. 11:2-16 are more general teachings. The other two are more specific in their directives. They are the subjects of intensive exegetical and historical analysis. Our treatment here begins with an interpretation of the general passages and allows their principles to inform the discussion of the more ambiguous texts of 1 Cor. 14 and 1 Tim. 2.

Paul told the Galatians "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (3:28). The verse proclaims the new order of life which believers enter when they identify with Christ.¹⁷ Entrance into this new order is not restricted to any particular social, racial or gender group. This is the interpretation held by virtually all who read it.

There are some who apply that principle to all of the areas of life within the new order. They contend that the equality which Paul asserts relates to every kind of human relationship. This was a critical principle in Christian arguments against slavery in the United States. More recently it has formed the foundation of many applications that contend that female subordination in the home and in the church should give way to mutual service and authority.

This line of application is supported by the text of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. At the heart of Paul's teaching is the principle that both sexes should be allowed to pray and prophesy in the public meetings of the church. This is apparent from the references in verses 5 and 13 that indicate that women were praying and

¹⁷ Similar statements are found in Romans 6:4ff and 2 Corinthians 5:16-21.

prophesying. Paul discusses some outward signs of distinction between men and women, but the head coverings and shaved heads were specific to the context of Corinth. They do not communicate the same things in contemporary Western culture; therefore, they should not be expected.

The “prioritist” interpretation of these two passages holds that the apostle was teaching about the ultimate goal for the church while recognizing that the implementation of that order would be a gradual process. This is the observation of Krister Stendahl in his assessment of the New Testament teaching on women in ministry.

It should not be such a strange idea for us that the full consequences of the new life in Christ are not immediately drawn and applied... If we are right in describing the statements of 1 Corinthians 11:11-12 and Galatians 3:28 as pointing beyond what is actually implemented in the New Testament church, then they must be allowed their freedom; and the tension which they constitute must not be absorbed or neutralized in a comprehensive and hence harmonized “biblical view.”¹⁸

Stendahl’s conclusion has been embraced by others since he penned it in 1958. Writers like Willard Swartley and Alvera Mickelsen agree that the mutual service and ministry that results from full equality is the objective of the new community formed by faith in Christ. The biblical passages which qualified the exercise of that ministry by women are the product of cultural and historical situations that would not have understood or tolerated such a dramatic transition in social and gender roles.

When Paul enjoins the women of Corinth to “be silent in the churches” he was probably addressing a form of action that was causing the church to create more cultural problems than necessary. Perhaps Paul wanted the women to refrain from excessive exuberance in their participation, since ANY female involvement in public worship was a dramatic difference from other religious customs.

¹⁸ Krister Stendahl, The Bible and the Role of Women, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 35.

Similarly the women at Ephesus in Timothy's church were told to "learn in silence and full submission" (2:11, NRSV). This did not deny them the general principle of equality and participation. Aida Besancon Spencer offers a detailed analysis of the situation at Ephesus in her book, Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry. She argues that women were not barred from learning, but their education was to take place in a manner that did not violate educational customs of the day. She concludes that Paul was giving authoritative instructions that were not limited to the first century, but they were also not to be enforced if social and spiritual conditions changed.

In summary, in 1 Timothy 2:13-14 Paul has employed an analogy between Eve and the women at Ephesus, both of whom were misled. When women anywhere, including Ephesus, grow beyond a resemblance to Eve in this respect, then the analogy is no longer valid. Ultimately Paul was teaching equality through Christ who humbles all. The difficulty has been that women everywhere have been compared with the woman at Ephesus.¹⁹

Spencer carefully studied the particular situation of the church at Ephesus. Her historical details cannot be absolutely confirmed from the pages of the Bible, but they are corroborated by extra-biblical materials. She has provided a very plausible interpretation of Paul's instructions. Her interpretation explains the meaning of the injunction to learn in silence and maintains that women were intended to be active in ministry in the church. Spencer also explains that this particular injunction has ongoing validity, but is not intended to be a universal prohibition. It is only applicable when women (or men) are misled concerning biblical faith and practice. When persons demonstrate competent learning of correct teaching they should not be restrained from any ministry in the body of Christ.

Spencer's argument makes good sense of the passage. It demonstrates a careful analysis of history and culture in the original setting, and in the

¹⁹ Aida Besancon Spencer, Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 94.

contemporary setting of application. It is a positive example of the “prioritized” view of hermeneutics. This paper asks that the “prioritized” view be accepted as the consensus within the denomination. In light of that interpretive decision the paper also asks that the Scripture be understood to direct the church toward complete equality in all ministry. Those passages which seem to indicate otherwise speak to particular problems which may or may not be relevant to contemporary experience.

TRADITION AND WOMEN IN MINISTRY

It is impossible to survey 2000 years of history in the scope of this paper. But it is important that readers be aware that the issue of women in ministry is the subject of much careful historical research. One will find references mentioned below that will permit further study and evaluation of this important theological influence.

General Church History

Ruth A. Tucker and Walter Liefeld have collaborated to publish the most recent and most readable historical survey of women and ministry. Daughters of the Church establishes the active involvement (often leadership) of women in all forms of ministry. The text covers the issue “from New Testament times to the present.” Its main focus is on women in the Western church tradition, especially the Protestant tradition in its conservative expression. However, Tucker and Liefeld include a chapter on the non-Western church which helps one develop a sense of the global concern for women in ministry.²⁰

Daughters concludes with the observation that “women have had far more involvement in the church’s mission and other ministries than has generally been realized.” Furthermore the authors point out that “the equality and freedom of

²⁰ Daughters, 329-358.

women discerned by many in the New Testament record seems to have diminished as church organization and hierarchical structure increased."²¹

Such observations force one to confront the possibility that restrictions on women's involvement have been, and may continue to be, the result of improper interpretations of the Bible. The study of church history allows one to see that the church has been remarkably elastic. It has adapted to a variety of cultural situations in ways that are radically different from New Testament practices. These changes are defended as being consistent with Scripture and directed by the Holy Spirit. But they also bear evidence to ways of doing theology that permit God to be a dynamic agent in the life of the church. History will also reveal those traditions where restrictions on female pastors resulted from theological methods that refused to allow God to speak in contemporary settings.

The authors caution readers that definitive conclusions concerning women in any period in history must be reserved until further work is done. This is an important encouragement to those discussing the issue in the General Conference. Careful analysis of the Churches of God will need to begin with the general survey made by Tucker and Liefeld. Anyone who chooses to follow their survey will want to continue with a more detailed study of the 19th and 20th century context of American Protestantism where the denomination finds its primary heritage.

American Church History

The bibliography of Daughters offers a wealth of books, dissertations, and articles addressing the propriety and activity of women in ministry.²² There is another less-extensive but equally helpful bibliography at the end of Women in Ministry.²³

²¹ Ibid, 435.

²² Ibid, pp. 511-540.

²³ Clouse & Clouse, pp. 241-247.

Two works which help clarify the context of the Churches of God are a study by Janette Hassey and a work edited by Donald Dayton.²⁴ Hassey's book establishes a general context of women in conservative churches in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Dayton's editorial work brings to light tracts which offered a biblical case for women in pastoral and preaching roles. These were early attempts at dealing with past and present historical and cultural details in understanding and applying the authority of Scripture. The General Conference does not have a true "Holiness" background, but its character was certainly influenced by churches that represent that heritage (like the Methodists and the Church of God, Anderson).

The History of the General Conference

Historical resources are scarce within the entire denomination. The most comprehensive study available is C. H. Forney's History published in 1914.²⁵ Forney's history includes material concerning the involvement of women during the early decades of the Churches of God, but it is scattered throughout the large work. Happily his record was condensed in a series of articles for The Church Advocate by Marilyn R. Kern, who also documented women's involvement from the annals of the Advocate itself.²⁶

Kern's history testifies to the existence of influential women in the ministry of the General Conference during the first fifty years. But it also reflects the tragedy of historical documentation that ignored the role of women in every area of human endeavor. Kern observes that "many of the contributions of women to the Churches of God in the early days are lost to history because of the obscure

²⁴ Donald W. Dayton, ed., Holiness Tracts Defending the Ministry of Women, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985) & Janette Hassey, No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry Around the Turn of the Century, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

²⁵ The General Conference has commissioned a new history which is yet to be completed.

²⁶ Marilyn R. Kern, "Women in the Churches of God: the first fifty years," The Church Advocate, January – May, 1977.

status of women generally.”²⁷ Her words are echoed by Tucker and Liefeld in Daughters of the Church:

In many instances the role of women in the church has not been as noteworthy as that of men... But frequently women have been overlooked even when they made outstanding contributions. “As so frequently happens in the writing of history,” writes Patricia Hill, “the women have simply disappeared.” Their role in religion down through the ages has been flagrantly neglected. And it continues to be neglected, despite the longstanding appeals to historians to do otherwise.²⁸

Kern’s study illuminates the significant women who helped start churches, and who opened their homes for meetings and for itinerant preachers. It also notes the dates when various elderships granted the first preaching licenses to women. The first of these was granted by the West Pennsylvania Eldership in 1859 to Martha Jane Beecher. Beecher received two licenses from West Pennsylvania. The first was an “exhorter’s license” (1859) and the second was a “preacher’s license (1864). She later moved to Iowa, where she preached for the Eldership in 1866, though she was not granted a license until 1878.

There is evidence that the Michigan Eldership licensed a woman in 1859 and another in 1868. Indiana licensed Elizabeth McColley in 1863. Illinois recognized Annie C. Newcomer in 1873. Kern summarizes the credential issue observing that “by the turn of the century, at least thirty-four more women were licensed to preach in twelve Elderships.” But she includes the significant detail that “it would not be until 1923 that the East Pennsylvania Eldership would ordain its first woman.”²⁹

Kern’s effort uncovered two important voices favoring women in ministry in the early history of the denomination. The first was Ellen Stewart. Stewart lived in Ohio. Her formal affiliation with the Churches of God is uncertain. She

²⁷ Kern, Advocate, Feb. 1977, p. 4.

²⁸ Tucker and Liefeld, p. 13.

²⁹ Advocate, May, 1977, 7-11. More research of every conference’s Eldership sessions might locate other women licensed during this period. A complementary project would be to research the credentialing of women in the various conferences in the period 1925-1990.

was of the opinion that denominationalism and church membership were hindrances to genuine "Church Union." Nevertheless she was a frequent correspondent in The Church Advocate.

Some of Mrs. Stewart's concern focused on the involvement of women in preaching ministry. She was articulate in her expression and also very capable in her interpretation and application of Scripture. Stewart raised issues that are still open subjects in contemporary discussions. Concerning the texts of 1 Cor. 14:34 and 1 Tim. 2:12 she argued that Paul "plainly shows that he allowed women to prophesy; which according to his own definition, was to speak to edification, exhortation and comfort."³⁰ Her concern was to refute the wrong interpretations of those texts which were used to stifle the teaching gifts of women. She did not have access to the documentation of Aida Spencer, but her analysis of the texts is not much different.

Stewart was also concerned with the meaning of the personal experiences of women, including her own. She raised the question concerning the experience of the call: "what shall a woman do if she believes the Holy Spirit moves and commands her to go and preach the Gospel?" And she was quick to acknowledge that the permission for women to preach must "be right and according to the spirit of the Gospel." Stewart understood that Scripture gave place for women to preach, but the text needed to be affirmed in the contemporary experience. She understood that the Spirit would be the agent to evoke that affirmation.

Ellen Stewart did not simply argue that males should permit women to preach. She contended that if the leaders of the church were convinced that Scripture and the Spirit confirmed the valid right of women to preach, such conviction "involves still another duty, - that of defending that right."³¹ Stewart raised the sensitive issue of advocacy. If men (and women) believe an issue to

³⁰ Advocate, March, 1977, 7.

³¹ Ibid, 7 (emphasis added).

be true, simple assent is not sufficient. They must act on that conviction in ways that will put it into effect.

In later correspondence Stewart continued her clear defense of women in the preaching ministry. She was not without opposition. Kern documents some correspondence between Stewart and William Johnston in Maryland. Johnston wrote a detailed letter citing a number of biblical references and drawing inferences that women are to be excluded from formal ministry. Stewart responded by pointing out Johnston's arguments from silence and his misuse of the term 'man.' Johnston believed that it always indicated male persons, but Stewart corrected him, noting that the term was the standard reference to all of humanity. Many of the biblical texts to which Johnston referred should be understood as inclusive of males and females.

The other important voice raised for women in the early years came from C. H. Forney. His efforts to articulate the history and theology of the Churches of God are well-known. Kern's research indicates that he had no serious problem with admitting women to the pastoral ministry. One indication of that approval is the fact that he did not make a formal statement against it. Granted, this is an "argument from silence," but in this case it seems to be a significant omission, especially since Forney documented the credentialing of women throughout his History.

Earlier, John F. Weishampel had used the pages of the Advocate to deny the validity of women in ministry.³² His argument was in response to letters from Ellen Stewart. Forney, in contrast, concluded that Stewart "argued her side of the question (women's preaching) with skill." He later included her autobiography in his "Bibliography of the Churches of God" which according to Kern "would indicate that Forney considered her a Churches of God minister even without a license."³³

³² Advocate, April, 1977, 9 & 10 (see "footnotes").

³³ Ibid, 11.

Forney also commended a positive statement concerning women in ministry in 1875. He quoted a paragraph from the Baptist Union that was based on the quotation of Joel found in Acts 2, "Thy sons and thy daughters shall prophesy." The article contended that:

Modern churches have erred sadly in neglecting this decree of the Lord. Women have been treated as ciphers; silence rather than active service has been imposed, and the largest and best part of our Christian forces thus wasted... They constitute two thirds of the church of Christ, and ought to enjoy every possible facility for the development and use of their powers in saving souls. To devise ways and means to this end should enlist the best talent of the church.³⁴

The statement itself shows a remarkable openness to women in ministry. Forney's introduction indicates his agreement with its theme.

We note with pleasure the fact that a healthier sentiment is beginning to prevail with reference to the work of Christian women. We have a paragraph before us... which would have been less popular fifty years ago than it is now. It is one of the most sensible items on the subject that we have read for a long time.³⁵

Unfortunately there is not a companion, or a series of companions, to Kern's history. The denomination is left without easily accessible accounts of other women who have been credentialed. One would have to study the pages of numerous Eldership and Conference minutes to document such action. It also lacks a good historical analysis of why the Churches of God did not "devise ways and means" to encourage women into ministry; and why male leadership has been at least reticent, and at most openly opposed, to "defending the right" of women to pastoral positions.

EXPERIENCE AND WOMEN IN MINISTRY

³⁴ Advocate, May 1977, 10.

³⁵ Ibid.

Our present experiences should not be excluded from theological reflection. The contemporary emergence of women in roles traditionally held by men is such an experience that cannot be overlooked. If women can function equally with men in the realms of art, hard science, economics, law, medicine and politics why can't they also function in the pastorate? It would seem that when most modern societies allow women to compete for and fill virtually all vocational roles, the church should be leading the way to such equality rather than hindering it.

In the United States the conservative wing of Christianity has an audible voice in the realm of social practices and moral values. On one hand conservatives argue for the biblical mandates of justice and love to permeate society, yet they have been some of the most vocal about denying women the right to exercise their spiritual gifts freely and fully in the church. As Tucker and Liefeld point out, "Today the absence of women from positions of responsibility in a contemporary Christian church or organization constitutes in itself a message to our generation."³⁶

Some will argue that the Bible stipulates that only males should fill church leadership. Yet careful exegetical and historical research reveals that the New Testament Scriptures are ambiguous about the issue. Simple Bible interpretation does not resolve the issue. History fails to support the male-only view by documenting instances of competent female ministry. In fact history indicates that a traditional interpretation of 1 Timothy 2 is wholly inaccurate. Tucker and Liefeld draw their study to a clear summation, writing

Contrary to a popular contemporary supposition, no examples were found of heresy or other evil effect of women's ministry that were the clear, sole result of the sex of the instigator. Cults have had their share of women members, but the leaders have usually been men. The proportion of cults originated by women is fewer than has been claimed. The major heresies of the early church were, of course, launched by men. It is impossible, therefore, to prove from

³⁶ Tucker & Liefeld, 448 (emphasis theirs).

history that women are more easily deceived than men, as some think 1 Timothy 2:11-15 teaches.³⁷

More recent experience corroborates this statement. Jim Jones led hundreds of followers to their deaths in 1978. In the mid-1980s male leadership was involved in the sexual immorality that marred the reputation of conservative Christianity. There have been no females who have brought equal moral disrepute to the Christian ministry in the same time span.

During the past fifteen years seminaries have struggled to attract students. The traditional supply of young men moving from college to seminary has dwindled to a trickle. Student populations are made up of large numbers of second career people. Moreover seminaries have seen an increasing number of women enter their degree programs. These women consistently prove themselves capable in all of the academic and professional demands of ministry. Women have also become accomplished members of faculties in every theological discipline.

All of which leads back to the immediate experience of a pastoral shortage in the Churches of God. The question is obvious: Why aren't women being recruited, trained, credentialed, and placed in open pulpits? It is possible that God is not calling them. It is also possible that women who sense the divine call are intimidated by individuals who denounce the basic policies upheld by the denomination. It is possible that women who sense God's call never have it confirmed by local congregations who understand that women are legitimate candidates for ministry according to Scripture, tradition and experience.

A REASONABLE PROPOSAL FOR WOMEN IN MINISTRY AND A CALL TO FURTHER DIALOG

This paper has attempted to explain the theological foundation for the stated policy concerning women in pastoral ministry for the Churches of God. It

³⁷ Tucker & Liefeld, 435-6.

has examined some primary biblical texts concerning women in ministry. It has reviewed the history which has shaped the traditions of the denomination. It has also acknowledged some of the issues raised by contemporary personal and social experiences. There is more that could be said in each area of theological influence.

Other persons will need to study the nature of interpretation. They will need to affirm or reject the “prioritist” method suggested above. They will also need to evaluate the exegetical studies of the passages from Galatians, 1 Corinthians, and 1 Timothy. Perhaps other studies exist which clarify the historical and cultural concerns raised by Swartley, Mickelsen, and Spencer.

The General Conference needs to appoint persons who will document its history. We have a distinctive story to tell, but it must be researched. It needs to be told with a sensitivity to the larger stories told by American Christianity and by the church that has grown since the 1st century of the Common Era.

Diverse members of the Churches of God need to observe and discuss the social shifts that have taken place in the United States during the past thirty years. They need to articulate their own experiences with the changes in male and female roles. They need to discern where those changes reflect rebellion against God, and where resistance to change might indicate a similar rebellion.

No claim is made to have exhausted this complex issue. Rather this paper has raised points from Scripture, tradition and experience which lead toward a reasonable conclusion and a positive recommendation. The conclusion is that there is no clear reason to prohibit or discourage women from responding to God’s call to pastoral ministry.

Scripture establishes a general principle of full human equality in the worship and ministry of the church (Gal. 3:28). Those passages which have been understood as prescriptions against female pastors (1 Cor. 14:34-5; 1 Tim. 2:11-15) can be interpreted as cautions against improper action and insufficient preparation. Our final authority in matters of faith and practice can be

interpreted accurately to allow women all the privileges and responsibilities of church ministry.

The history and present policy statements of the Churches of God indicate that the tradition of the denomination favors this egalitarian interpretation. Women have been credentialed since the middle of the 19th century. The current standards for credentials acknowledge that the divine call does not discriminate regarding gender.

Contemporary experience proves that women are capable of handling virtually every profession open to men. Athletic competition is the most prominent area where the genders have not reached equality, but even that is not true for every sport. Certainly females have demonstrated competence in the kinds of professional activities needed in the pastorate. They have demonstrated their competence as pastors in and out of the Churches of God.

The theological position for the General Conference that makes sense of the Bible, history, and the present cultural ethos is one that permits and encourages women to prepare for and fulfill the pastoral calling. This position is recommended as the consensus for the denomination. Initially church leadership must determine if that consensus will be accepted in the individual conferences. That determination can only be made through dialog. Ellen Stewart articulated that fact in 1852 when she wrote:

If there are no female preachers in the Church of God in Pennsylvania, there are two in Ohio, and some in other parts of the country, and there have been some in every age, why not discuss the subject then, so that, if right, it may be tolerated and encouraged, or, if wrong, put down at once.³⁸

Hence the recommendation from this study is that the General Conference Commission on Vocations and the corresponding commissions in local conferences take the following steps:

³⁸ Kern, *Advocate*, March, 1977, 9.

1. Circulate this statement of theological method and proposal for its application concerning women in ministry.
2. Schedule opportunities for discussion within local conferences, followed by similar discussions by representatives from all conferences of the Churches of God.

Assuming that the consensus can be accepted, the denomination will need to:

1. Educate congregations concerning the validity of women in vocational ministry.
2. Encourage women to be sensitive to God's call in their individual lives, and to seek the confirmation of that call from their local churches.
3. Identify and recruit female candidates who can pursue the educational requirements for ministerial credentialing.
4. Give proper care to those women who are in preparation and maintain a program of support to those who have already entered vocational ministry.

The Churches of God do not face the question of women in ministry alone. Many other denominations and independent groups are presently struggling with it. For many of them the restrictions are flatly stated in the codes and constitutions of the institution, which makes their dilemma easy to identify.

It is more difficult in the General Conference. Our policies affirm women, yet our practices discourage them. Our situation is like the problem of racial prejudice in the United States. The laws grant full freedom to every person, but it is frequently understood that those laws are superseded by actual practices which maintain clear lines of segregation.

We find ourselves with the opportunity to be a witness to other groups. We can admit longstanding biases and we can take concrete steps toward denominational unity. And we can permit the Spirit-endowed women of our congregations to share the ministries to which God calls us.

APPENDIX:

A PROPOSAL FOR CONSENSUS ON THEOLOGICAL METHOD: THE WESLEYAN QUADRILATERAL

The need to address the issue of women in ministry illuminates another concern within the denomination. The Churches of God needs a consensus regarding its theological method. That is, they need a common form for interpreting Scripture and allowing its authority to speak intelligibly to concerns from history and contemporary experience.

The text of this paper employs a method that may be of help in future discussions. It is a method that acknowledges Scripture as its primary source of authority, but it also recognizes the influence of tradition, experience, and reason. These four sources have been used in the conversation of theology since the emergence of classical teachers such as Irenaeus, John Chrysostom and Augustine.³⁹ But present studies refer to it as the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral,” named after the 18th century evangelist, denominational founder, and theologian, John Wesley who used these four sources in his own preaching and teaching.⁴⁰

Recent works in systematic and historical theology have established the validity of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral as a useful and competent method for theology.⁴¹ This appendix summarizes the method in hopes that it will be considered as a consensus in the Churches of God.

³⁹ Thomas C. Oden, Systematic Theology (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), vol. 1, The Living God, p. 330.

⁴⁰ The last title is one that is lifted more frequently as new critical scholarship emerges analyzing Wesley's writings. He did not publish formal works in Systematic theology, so his methods are more difficult to discern. Albert Outler is frequently recognized for his efforts to uncover the theological competence of the Methodist founder.

⁴¹ Oden's work, mentioned above, gives a thorough summary of the quadrilateral method, cf. Living pp. 330-354. It is also the basis of reflection in H. Ray Dunning, Grace, Faith, & Holiness (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1988), pp. 55-94. The latter is the primary text for systematics classes at Winebrenner Seminary. The quadrilateral is also the subject of discussion in Clark Pinnock, Tracking the Maze (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), pp. 170-181. It is the subject of historical analysis and contemporary application in Donald A.D. Thorsen, The Wesleyan

Initial Dependence on Divine Revelation

Before one can prioritize the sources there is one crucial presupposition that must be acknowledged. Christian theology, wherever it is derived from, depends on the personal revelation of God's self to humanity. We would have no perception or understanding of God apart from the knowledge granted us through the general revelation of creation (cf. Ps. 19:1-6, Rom. 1:19-20) and the special revelation of the spoken message and the person of Jesus Christ (Jer. 1:4-10; Heb. 1:1-2).

Thomas Oden explains that "each phase of the fourfold approach to the study of God hinges on the central premise that God has made himself known."⁴² Clark Pinnock affirms that premise and goes on to elaborate the manifold ways in which God has affected that personal disclosure.

Revelation according to the Christian story encompasses historical actions, verbal disclosures, and personal encounters. All of these are included in the process whereby God unveils truth about God's character and purposes to the believing community, a process in which God always respects their freedom.⁴³

The Churches of God affirm the presupposition of divine revelation. The doctrinal statement, We Believe, explains that "We believe God wants us to know him and has revealed himself in various ways."⁴⁴ For Christians the Bible is always the normative source of the record and evaluation of that revelation. Scripture is the touchstone for recognizing and responding to God's continued direction for his people.

The task of theology is to discern how God is directing believers now. That task means painstaking interpretation of Scripture. It also means trusting

Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

⁴² Oden, I, 330.

⁴³ Pinnock, p. 171.

⁴⁴ Churches of God, General Conference, We Believe (Findlay: Churches of God Publications) adopted by the General Conference in session, June 1983 and 1986, p. 9)

the living guidance of the Holy Spirit as he moves in present experience. The transition from Scripture to experience can be monitored in history by studying those traditions which have perpetuated the truth of Scripture. The task of theology also means trusting the Holy Spirit to work through human reason to bring full articulation and application of what God is revealing about his person and plan.

The Primacy of Scripture

The Quadrilateral method can be misconstrued in such a way that Scripture is perceived as an equal or lesser authority in comparison to the other three influences. But when the method begins with the presupposition that Scripture is the norm of revealed communication it maintains the Bible as the final authority for any teaching or application. Tradition, experience and reason can only contribute insights and suggestions which need corroboration from the biblical texts.

The recent works cited above all approach the Quadrilateral method with the initial affirmation that Scripture will never be superseded by the influence of the other sources. Each of the authors refers to the fact that the Bible is the unique source of the story of God's program of salvation.⁴⁵ Clark Pinnock offers the clearest definition of the Bible as the primary source of theological communication:

The authority of the Bible is lodged primarily in the fundamental witness it bears to God's disclosure of himself in history that is carried down to us in these words. The Bible points us to the story of salvation and facilitates it coming alive in our experience as it is mixed with faith. Thus, Scripture is the written fixation of the apostolic witness and, therefore, the foundation of the Church. The divine revelation first encountered in the mighty acts of God in history is now actualized by means of certain writings that serve to perpetuate its authority and function as foundation and standard in

⁴⁵ cf. Oden, p. 337; Thorsen, pp. 127-130; Dunning, p. 57.

the Church today and in the future. God continues to reveal himself by speaking to us in Scripture.⁴⁶

As the Churches of God discuss the validity of the Quadrilateral method there needs to be complete understanding of this initial element. In no way does the method impugn or impinge upon the conviction regarding the inspired, infallible, and hence, final authority of the Bible. Persons listen for the guidance and direction of God in the words of Scripture. The Quadrilateral does not impair their hearing. It acknowledges that the influences of tradition, reason and experience shape what we hear and how we respond to God's voice in concrete actions.

The Conversation between Tradition and Experience

Hearing and responding to God's voice is the nature of our contemporary experience of faith. As believers living in the final decade of the 20th century we face global social, economic, and political situations that differ radically from the context of the early New Testament era. We believe that the character of God in holiness, justice and love remains the same, but the shape of his activity through the life of the church will look different.

We monitor the change of that shape by reflecting on the history of its development. We study the history of the church as it spread out in its missionary activity from Jerusalem and Judea into the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). That history helps us understand the development of important doctrines, such as the Trinity and the nature of justification by faith. It reminds us of the various practices that have taken place in different churches, like the manner of observing the Lord's Supper, the mode of baptism, and the multitude of practices that have been used in personal devotions.

The doctrines and practices of the past and the present are all founded on some interpretation of Scripture. They were, or are, relevant expressions of the

⁴⁶ Pinnock, 172.

experience of believers' faith at specific points in history. They are the TRADITIONS which shape the present and future identity of groups of Christians as they worship God and witness their experience of faith. Tradition is an inevitable source of theology. No person or group is able to come to the text of the Bible and to the task of theology without some previous understanding that has been shaped by the teachings and practices of other people.⁴⁷ Tradition⁴⁸ in the words of H. Ray Dunning "is understood not as something separate from Scripture but the continuing task of reinterpreting the biblical message and may even be recognized as the continuing activity of the Holy Spirit."

The influence of tradition is plainly evident in the Churches of God. The denomination's tradition regarding women in ministry will be explored in the following section. For now it can be illustrated from the text of We Believe. The introduction mentions statement of faith written by John Winebrenner, C. H. Forney and the General Elderships of 1925 and 1959. The 1959 work was a "Bible-based declaration" intended to "set forth in order things most surely believed."⁴⁹ Clearly all of the statements comprise a tradition of biblical interpretation and application which have given the General Conference its own identity.

It is the historic interpretive tradition that gives the Churches of God their most obvious distinctive, the ordinance of footwashing. Actually there are two elements of tradition involved in this particular teaching. First, John Winebrenner, and later C. H. Forney, rejected the Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed conception of Sacraments. They used the term "ordinance," taken from biblical language found in Exodus 12:14 and 1 Corinthians 11:2. Yet it is also grounded in the Zwinglian-Anabaptist interpretation of ordinances which developed early in the Reformation.

⁴⁷ See the summary of this by Dunning, G, F, & H, pp. 81-83.

⁴⁸ Dunning, 82.

⁴⁹ We Believe, 4.

Second, Forney's discussion of the five characteristics of an ordinance (cf. We Believe, p. 32) reveals a different interpretive method than other groups who also observe ordinances, but deny the validity of footwashing. Millard Erickson represents the baptistic tradition which views ordinances in the same manner as the Churches of God. But most Baptist groups only observe Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Erickson explains that those two rites were enjoined by Christ in a 'universal setting.' In contrast, he explains, "the footwashing incident in John 13 is not put into a general or universal setting... (Jesus) does not indicate that the practice is to be perpetually performed." Erickson concludes that humility was the lesson Jesus taught in John 13, and humility is taught elsewhere in the New Testament without reference to footwashing. Therefore, footwashing is not a permanent ordinance in Erickson's perspective.⁵⁰

The point here is that both Forney and Erickson hold the same high view of biblical authority. Both agree that the practices of the church should be viewed as outward signs rather than actual means of grace. But there is a variation in their interpretive tradition that leads to the observance of different rites. It is an issue of tradition.

A person from the General Conference might invite Erickson to participate in a footwashing observance. And he might come and share in a manner that persuades him of the validity of the practice as an ordinance. He might study Forney's argument in The Philosophical Basis of the Ordinances and conclude that the Churches of God had a better method of interpretation than his own Baptist heritage. Erickson might change his mind, and his own EXPERIENCE might be a determining influence in that transition.

Contemporary experience constantly dialogues with historical tradition. It serves to convince persons of truth or convict them of error.

⁵⁰ Millard Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 122. While the General Conference refers to the ordinance as "footwashing" most groups who do not practice it refer to it as "footwashing;" cf. EDT, s.v. "Foot Washing" by H. A. Kent, Jr.

Truth needs to become personally convincing by being confirmed in individual experience, when the faith of the whole church becomes real for me in my own life today. Daily life provides experiential confirmation of the reliability of the truth of the Christian story.⁵¹

Sometimes experience confirms the timeless validity of a teaching and its applications. There are certainly situations when a tradition must be upheld in the face of experiences that contradict the character and plan of God. On other occasions personal experience nudges believers toward the conclusion that God's truth might be more appropriately applied in a new way.

The Statement of a Reasonable Faith

Believers listen for the word of God in the Scriptures. That listening process involves them in a conversation between their own experience and the experiences that represent the traditions of other faith communities. But sometimes it seems that there are three voices speaking simultaneously saying entirely different things. How is a person or a congregation to make sense of all the input? God has gifted us with a fourth source of theology, the human faculty of understanding, analysis and organization we call REASON.

Since the late 18th century a number of philosophers have argued that humans could solve all their problems simply by careful use of their reason. They denied the reality and the necessity of any supernatural revelation that communicated information regarding the living of life. The classic Christian tradition continues to dispute this, but that does not mean a dismissal of the importance of rational activity. It does mean that reason must be granted its rightful, albeit limited, place in the task of theology.

Reason provides theologians with the ability to make "critical analysis of all that has been asserted in order to avoid self-contradiction, to take appropriate account of scientific and historical knowledge, to credit appropriately new information and empirical data, and to try to see the truth as a whole and not as

⁵¹ Pinnock, 178.

disparate parts or incongruently separable insights.”⁵² In short, reason is the faculty that lets us make sense about what God is saying to us and what our experience requires from us.

This section is titled “The Statement of a Reasonable Faith.” That means that when we decide what a biblical text means and we allow it to direct our thinking and actions the correspondence must be something we can understand. When the cultural context of our lives changes through political transitions or technological development, reason allows us to compare the new experiences with the past traditions and decide which is right or wrong, which enhances life lovingly and justly and which offers developments at the expense of greater moral and spiritual values.

Reason cannot create the elements of information in our theological conversation. It can only help us keep track of who is speaking, what he or she is saying, and how it relates to the messages coming from the other voices. The function of reason is clearly evident in the introduction of We Believe. The editors explain that Forney intended his early statement to be used as “an outline for instruction in the blessings of the Christian faith.” The term “outline” reflects the human need for careful organization and logical development. The intent of “instruction” implies the coherent, convincing presentation of important influence of rationality on all forms of human communication.

Elsewhere in the introduction the writers refer to the efforts of the Consultations of Doctrine which caused the statement to be “written, edited, evaluated, and rewritten.” Two of the guidelines for that composition were that the document be “concise” and be “a document for laypersons, non-technical, free of theological jargon and preaching.”⁵³ Such instructions set some parameters on the kind of reason that should be evident in this communication.

Summary

⁵² Oden, 339.

⁵³ We Believe, 4-5.

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral offers a basis for future theological discussion in the General Conference. It reminds us to begin with the careful selection and interpretation of relevant biblical texts. They are the final authority for our understanding and application. The method also allows us to give proper consideration to the traditions that have shaped us and to the present experiences to which we must respond. The Quadrilateral acknowledges that the careful application of reason holds our analysis and application together.

This method does not solve our theological problems. It provides a “grammar” that allows us to speak so that everyone can understand as we try to solve our problems. It is explained here and employed in the main text of the paper in order to stimulate consideration for its continued use in the denomination.