

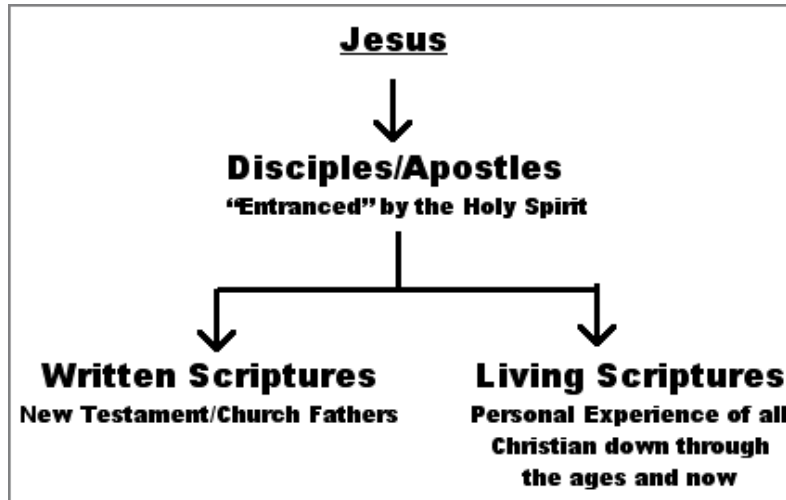
# The Wesleyan Quadrilateral

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We begin with the following diagram:



Here we can think of two branches stemming from Jesus (the root) through the disciples (the trunk): the "written" scriptures (and the commentaries), which make up a mighty limb, and the enlivened or "living" scriptures (or experiences) which is another (and in some respects more powerful\*) branch (which is essentially a continuation of the trunk) extending upward toward heaven (and down through the ages). These two are in a reciprocal relationship, i.e., the scriptures serve as additional inspiration leading to further experience; and the personal experience serves as validation of the scriptures and the tradition and leads to commentaries on them, i.e., additions to the tradition.\*

\* Actually the scriptures are no more than the experiences of the disciples, but are accorded more objectivity than any other personal experience because the early church attested to their authenticity (such that we might call them the "authoritative" experiences, but still always experiences, i.e., honest and excited people telling their own story of their sighting of Jesus in the flesh and the Holy Spirit in the soul). This concept is important, for we are able to dismiss inconsistencies in the tales while adhering thoroughly to the character of the figures of Jesus and the apostles. [This advantage is denied those who see a more dictation model on the order of Mohammed and Moses.]

In contrast, in the gnostic gospels we read of such as the baby Jesus' bath water giving sight to the blind into whose eyes it accidentally splashes. These stories

point to the power of Jesus, but not to his love, and it is to this love, in particular, that the canonical gospels point and describe. These gnostic gospels then the church rejects due to their moral deficiency, exemplifying power as opposed to purity of love, i.e., they lead to prudence as opposed to transformation. But this authority is only possible if we (again the church, including here most especially the early church) did not already belong to the Holy Spirit such that, through the power of the individual transformation and the corporate creativity that it engenders, we are able to discern a priori that which is the voice of God! (thanks here also to Kant for his representation of the universal moral law.)

In other words, while personally I am originally enticed into an investigation of the Christian story through the inspiration of my own, earthly father and his dealings in life (and which sort of inspiration will vary with different people), the scriptures give me a portrait of this same spirit in the reported person of Jesus which will have been authenticated by the same early church (people acquainted with the apostles) whose spirit is also now found in me, after having first been presented as a preview in my father.

And thus the scriptural portraits of Jesus and the apostles support the apparent fact of love in the life of my father (for another person it might be a friend, a roommate, i.e., someone who lives a principled life) at the same time that my father's life gives credence to the portrait of Jesus to me (and likely also to others), i.e., that it is a true portrait, i.e., that it does indeed resemble the heart of the man himself.\*

\* I invite a perusal of an essay on the [Golden Rule](#) to examine what sort of person the Holy Spirit intends to populate the earth with (as his children) and, therefore, how Jesus becomes an example (for imitation) rather than a mere (cultic) hero (for adoration and praise).

The next step then is in the validation of the portrait of my father and of Jesus (and all the saints in-between) in my own life as I see myself both wanting to be like Christ with increasing fervor and then also actually becoming more like him, at least as far as can be revealed in the circumstances of my own life and in the experiences of how I relate to those circumstances according to the model of Christ.

## The Wesleyan Quadrilateral

In the diagram above we see three of the four sides of Wesley's quadrilateral; we see the written scriptures (on the bottom left) and the personal experiences (on the right). Both the written and the living scriptures can also be conceived to encompass the tradition, i.e., the experiences and thinking of the church "fathers" as well as the experiences of all sorts

of people from peasant to pope who have been possessed of the Holy Spirit, e.g., the life and experience of Francis of Assisi as well as Thomas Aquinas, etc., etc.

The fourth side, and which might even be considered as the foundation, is reason or rationality itself, and not only as the source of experience and science in general, but also and more specifically as the formal repository of the voice of God as expressed in the conscience, and whereby we are kept from falling into sheer subjectivism. I am speaking most especially of the moral law of God which so amazed Immanuel Kant, i.e., "the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me"\* and which is expressed throughout humanity.\*\*

\* As given in the Conclusion to Kant's [Critique of Practical Reason](#), namely:

“Two things overwhelm the mind with constantly new and increasing admiration and awe the more frequently and intently they are reflected upon: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me. Neither of these do I need to seek beyond my horizon or merely to presume as though veiled in obscurity or extravagance. I see them before me and connect them immediately with the consciousness of my existence.”

\*\* Wesley spoke of this as “natural conscience”. (See [Compend, pages 148-150.](#))

The story accounting for the miracle of this moral law is given in the stories concerning the Garden and the fall of man from the pristine state of grace. For here, by virtue of the knowledge that we all receive (universally like original sin, one might almost say) through the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (the occasion for our first sin), and which is thoroughly validated through pure reason alone (albeit when applied to practical situations, but still abstracted from the subjectively valid needs of any individual) per Kant's [Critiques](#) in the form of the moral law and the categorical imperative, we are already positioned to recognize the voice of God when He speaks to us (as He did to me, personally, in the facts of my father's life). This recognition (of right and wrong), though dark and confused perhaps at first, is part and parcel of our rational and emotional psyche and, therefore, indispensable to our very being as rational creatures (by means of which alone even language and objective communication between beings is possible). Without it we would not have any way of distinguishing the moral from the immoral and the amoral in the stories of the bible, and would think the destruction of the infants of Jericho right and that of the infants of Bethlehem wrong for no other reason than that is the clear suggestion of the bible writers.\*

\* And many are there who think like this, who dismiss all personal evaluation in favor of the claims of the unknown bible writers (and in stark contrast to Jesus who did not hesitate to [correct the scriptures](#) with regard to what might be

attributed to Abba (Daddy, God) and what was merely a man's addition, e.g., Jesus' [comments about Moses on divorce](#) where, incidentally, Jesus asserts that the Garden story of is greater validity; and it is this story which tells us of the acquisition of "Kant's" moral law in the heart of every single person who was ever born. This "validation" of the moral law of Kant is a highly important tool for the Christian /Wesleyan evangelist, for it enables us to speak to every heart and to be received with understanding.

In this regard I am very much taken by Calvin's Axiom whereby John Calvin, with whom I really have very little in common otherwise (theologically speaking), is able to subjugate the passages of the bible to the clear pronouncements of reason (as spoken in the lingo of the science of his day). And there is no problem here. The moon is called larger than Saturn by Moses (= the writer of Genesis) because it *looks* larger (then and now) and was thought to be larger at that time by a simple inspection of the heavens. This is a common fact which is subject to science. [This reference to Calvin is the Commentary, Genesis 1:16, cited on page 110 of William F. Keesecker's "A Calvin Reader" The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1985.]

With the resurrection of Jesus, however and in contrast, we are talking about what science might call a "fluke," a sighting or reporting which cannot be confirmed (replicated) and, therefore, which is dismissed by science as probably subject to some other explanation if the event, so-called, could have been viewed from the beginning, e.g., the man Jesus was not really dead, or there was a plot, or the body was hidden, etc. This thinking (which is necessary for the most elementary human experience to arise) is much like a sighting of a roach on my kitchen table which, upon a second and closer look, is found to be a raisin. Thus the "roach" existed only in my imagination and association, due probably to problems I might have been having with these little creatures of God in my kitchen. But, the Christian proclaims, it is also in the flukes that God himself appears, but since God is sovereign, God appears only as God wishes and without regard for the curiosity of people (as scientists) to "catch" God in mid-flight, as it were. Therefore, without in any way suggesting that the roach actually became a raisin (which is an alternative hypothesis and which leads to an entirely different science and experience than we have now) the person of faith is able to say that sometimes what is considered merely a fluke is the entrance into time and space of the hand of God. These are called miracles by the Christians, and are ignored by science (unless science wants to explain how it is that people interpret flukes as the hand of God in a sociology of religion).

[An interesting possibility and speculation of what we call flukes is this: it might be that occasionally God makes a face in a cloud which the infants see and enjoy much more than we do, for we have already dismissed these faces as products of our imagination, and to be believed in only by children and madmen. And which may be unavoidable for, again, we would have an entirely different world view if we took cloud faces to be real faces which happen to appear in clouds and shrubbery instead of on the front of people's heads.]

The Wesleyan asserts a tie-in with the reported resurrection, however, in that the transformation that has taken place and which is still in process within one's own heart and flesh, is also a miracle and enables the Wesleyan to look to the reported resurrection as a fact. In this regard see especially the [Compend, page 30](#) and learn how experience for Wesley was an even stronger testimony to the truth of Christianity than the traditions.

And so now we can grasp the elements of Wesley's quadrilateral altogether now as a unity: scripture, tradition, reason and experience, all working together reciprocally to fashion the "Christ in me" such that I too can speak authoritatively with regard to right and wrong and good and evil, and of the power of God, for the same spirit that moves me, moved the bible writers and the line of Christians from Christ to myself, and all under a rubric of rationality and sense.

The critical consideration for us presently, however, is the recognition that the personal experience is the work of the Holy Spirit in the world and that the scriptures merely report of the experiences of the earliest adherents, but which is continued to this very day.\*

\* The scriptures do have this much authority, i.e., nothing can be added for salvation than what the earliest Christians recognized, i.e., a transformation of one's life through the Holy Spirit which is symbolized at the personal commitment ceremony in the church.

But the reason for this is not so much that the scriptures are ancient (for at one time they were not!) but rather because they accord with the moral law of pure reason with regard to the nature of a moral religion (as opposed to a prudent religion), namely that it is only a willing and loving heart that can be pleasing to God.\*\* But then the New Testament goes no further in this regard except to state that such a heart (per the Wesleyans) will be provided by God if it is sincerely sought in faith, and finally that the sincere seeking of that heart is counted by God, morally and spiritually speaking, for the actual attainment and fact of that heart.

\*\* See especially [Luther's Preface to Paul's' Letter to the Romans](#), which so affected the spirit and mind of Wesley at Aldersgate--Kant was probably also influenced by this thinking, given his pietistic background.

In brief: Christ comes! He shows the cost of God-likeness! Many (the apostles) are enthralled and ask for the Holy Spirit (which "accompanied" Jesus). This spirit is conveyed in response to this (informed) petition. These enlivened or quickened souls now become very much like Jesus and speak authoritatively and in accordance with their understanding (many, like Peter, thought [erroneously until corrected] one had to become a Jew in order to reflect the Holy Spirit). They go out and tell the story. One of the ways they tell the story is through the gospels and the epistles which are collected by the developing church as a repository of truth, i.e., the stories of those with first hand contact with Jesus physically (I count Paul's brief encounter as physical, for it was at least empirical). But the scriptures are merely incidental, with this exception: they provide an unchanging benchmark of the experience of those touched by God, i.e., the experience of the transformation of the heart must also find a counterpart in the scriptures in order to be authentic. But the presentation is not to be of an "untouchable" Jesus, but one who can be emulated in every way, albeit always from the state of sin, for it is only from sin that we (who are born in sin) can first come to Jesus. Thus we can never claim our own righteousness, but only that of God. But that righteousness is real and not merely legalistic (like per chance, and for example, thinking of an American as being one who was born within the geographical confines of the United States, even though his loyalties might be elsewhere).

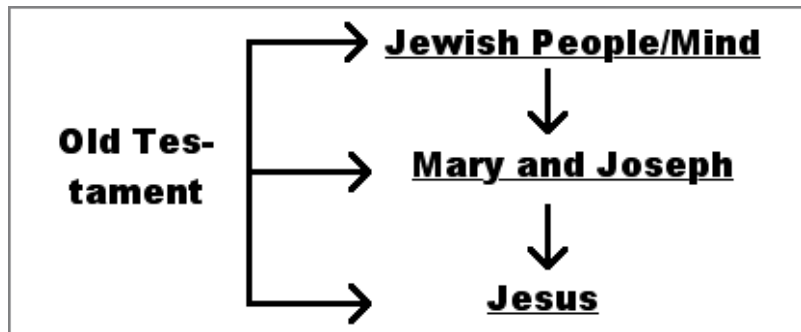
With regard to the Old Testament we can now consider a similar evolution, as it were. God works to shape a particular document and a particular psyche such that the boy Jesus will be so fashioned that he will be awakened to his role as the Son of God. Thus Mary and Joseph are really the products of the Jewish history as recorded in the scriptures and the Talmud and the thinking and attitudes of the Jewish people. The contrast is Mary and Sarah. While Sara laughed at God, Mary bowed low in adoration and was perfectly obedient, so much so that (the infant) Jesus was able to spy in her that which resonated with the God within himself and which brought that internal God forth, in what must surely be the greatest miracle that could ever be (with the possible exception of the time when the dead body of Jesus in the tomb "hears" the voice of God saying "Come forth" on that Easter morning!)\*

\* Such a picture of God coming awake in the boy Jesus should be nothing less than uplifting and awe inspiring. We should assert authoritatively (with the early church) that the gnostic accounts of Jesus fashioning little clay birds and making them come to life are totally without basis. For Jesus to speak exemplatively

about the need for faith, he must have been willing to withhold the use of the power that the scriptures (and his musing about these scriptures with Mary) would have promised him, and never to use this power except when Abba called (the best picture of which is given in the picture of the [wedding at Cana](#) [where John makes a point of this being Jesus' first miracle]). It is only in this way that Jesus can understand our reluctance to believe and to be able to speak to that reluctance and how to overcome it. [While technically speaking, thinking of Jesus as God, he might be able to understand our reluctance to believe by a direct, divine insight, this approach would be problematical from the standpoint of the human, and so therefore we could not really believe that he understood us. Thus we can say that it was in condescension to us that this Jesus took the way of a complete man, undifferentiated from any other man with this one exception: his mother was the perfectly obedient agent of the Holy Spirit. And thus God awakens himself as a person through the agencies of another person who, however, is a miracle. There seems to me to be increasing (rational) evidence for the theory of the Immaculate Conception, albeit for a different reason than advanced by our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters.]

Our diagram above then is prefaced by this:

### Influences upon Jesus

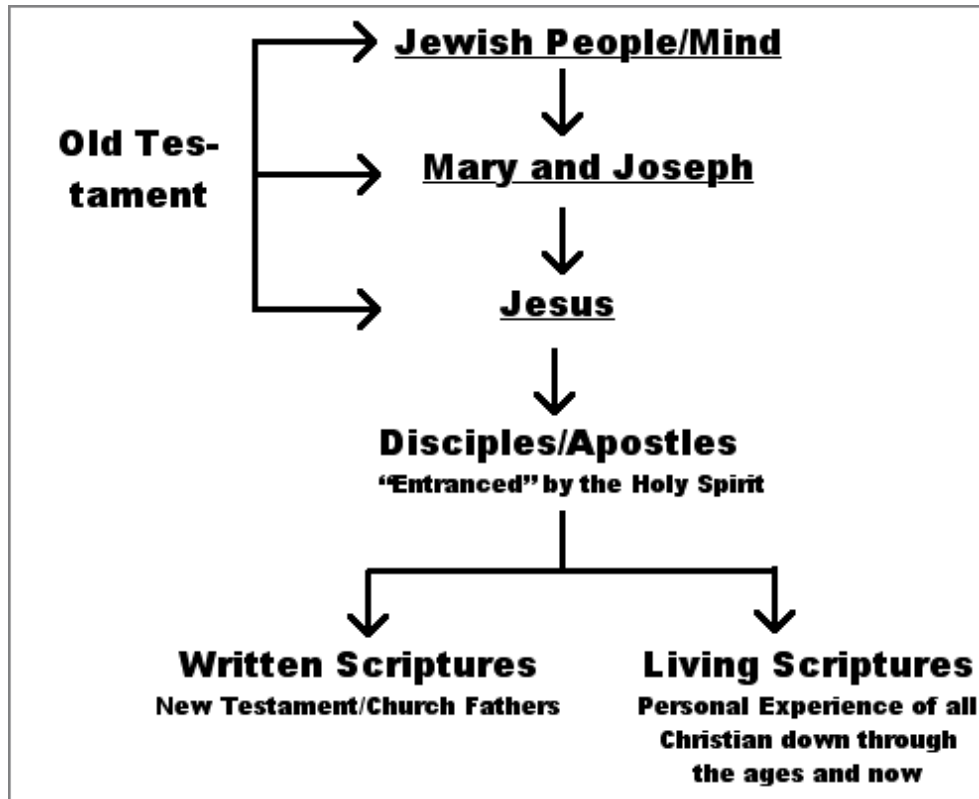


so that we obtain this:

### Progression of Influence and Inspiration

So then it is the personal experience that is authoritative, when fashioned in truth, and it is to this that scripture alludes, however darkly. We can almost hear Francis of Assisi saying once again: "Oh let yourselves become living stones in the temple of God!"





The reader may be interested in a more detailed consideration of the liberty and promise of the [Gentile Christian](#).

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