



“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do.”
—Paul of Tarsus (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NLT)

How do we think about God? How do we bring focus to a muddle of thinking about God and life and life beyond life? Some have given up and said with an agnostic sigh, “I just can’t be sure. How can a finite mind comprehend the infinite?” Others have been undisciplined, perhaps mentally lazy, and said, “It hurts my head to think about issues beyond the sports, business, or front page. I trust what my parents, pastors, teachers, and smart friends have told me about God. If it’s good enough for them; it’s good enough for me.”

Everyone (well, perhaps there are one or two who can’t) can ride a bike. Some integrate machine and human to the point they ride like the wind. Others wobble a little when they start and stop, but in general can follow the rules of the road and don’t pose a serious threat to pedestrians. Some are speed demons – it’s all about the finish. Others are tourists – it’s all about the journey and discovery. But they can ride. They can feel the exhilaration of being set free from stumbling and fumbling along the ground. Their horizons are broadened and their ability to see, and perhaps understand, the wider world is enhanced.

You are a theologian – a seeker of God’s truth – or you wouldn’t waste your time reading this (no one is THAT bored!). How can we take the wobble out of our walk—our Christian understanding of God? Albert Outler constructed a framework to bring theological understanding to all Christians – casual tourists and charging enthusiasts. His framework is known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral (quad = four, lateral = side). It brings Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Reason together in a balanced conversation seeking truth about God, life, and life after life.

Folks from various perspectives emphasize different aspects of the quadrilateral. Charismatics and Process thinkers (those who believe God is changing with creation) tend to emphasize experience. Ecclesiastical or Doctrinal folks tend to emphasize Tradition (what the church has said and done; how the historical church has understood issues) and often Scripture (to varying degrees). Social Activism (often attributed to “Liberalism,” but there are many “Conservatives” who are moved to make a difference for Christ in real world issues) tends to begin theological exploration through personal experience and reason.

Dr. John Oswalt described the quadrilateral as a milk stool. For those of us who haven’t milked a cow recently, that’s a three-legged chair. Picture Scripture as the solid foundation upon which you rest your full weight – that’s where you sit. Tradition, Experience, and Reason are the three legs that provide balance and strength to what Scripture has and is revealing about God. Imagine the discomfort if you turned the stool over and tried to rest your weight upon one of the stool’s legs! Yet, some do that when thinking about God.

Creation – including tradition, experience, and reason – reflects God: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Psalm 19:1). But Jesus reveals God: “Christ is the visible image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). And, Jesus Christ is discovered in Scripture. Sit there as you reason and reflect on God’s conversation with humanity through the ages.