

# CALVIN VS WESLEY

BRINGING BELIEF IN LINE WITH PRACTICE

D O N T H O R S E N

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## Chapter 2



# BIBLE: MORE PRIMARY THAN SOLE AUTHORITY

*All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*

When I teach courses in Christian theology, students sometimes find it difficult to explain what they believe about particular doctrinal issues. Or, in some instances, they can recite what they have been taught about Christian doctrine, but they do not really know what it means. In such cases, I may ask students not what they believe, but how they live. For example, with regard to the Bible, students may self-confidently claim that the Bible is the word of God: it is inspired, authoritative, and truthful. They may not be able to explain what divine inspiration, religious authority, and biblical truth mean precisely, but they earnestly assert them nonetheless.

In response, I ask students not what they believe about the Bible, but how it actually functions in their lives. For example, how often do they read the Bible? Once a day? Once a week? Once a month? For all the confessional statements students may make about the excellences of the Bible, their actions may not substantiate their faith claims if they only read the Bible once per week. In such instances, their statements of belief do not really match their words. In fact, one could argue that they consider the Bible to be rather unimportant and perhaps expendable on a day-to-day basis. Despite students' exemplary theological affirmations about the Bible, such statements seem hollow if their actions (practice) do not support their beliefs (theory).

What about decision making? To what degree does the Bible factor into students' decision making? Perhaps with regard to especially mysterious doc-

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trines, like the Trinity and the Incarnation, the Bible represents the only pertinent authority for their doctrinal beliefs. But what about everyday life decisions such as how to spend their time, labor, and money? What about values used to decide what television programs and movies to watch, what cars and houses to buy, or what political policies and candidates to support? As important as students may claim the Bible is for their lives, does it really factor into their decision making or only when it is convenient—if ever?

Wesley and Calvin held similar views about the Bible, and both used it daily in how they lived, taught, and gave leadership. They shared many similarities in their views about the divine inspiration, authority, and truthfulness of the Bible; so, not much time will be spent in comparing how they viewed the Bible per se. But there were differences in how they understood and promoted the Bible in their respective theologies and ministries. In particular, consider the following question: Does the Bible stand alone as religiously authoritative, or does a more dynamic relationship exist between the Bible and other factors in Christian decision making?

At first glance, the differences between Wesley and Calvin may not seem significant. Complicating matters, however, are those who followed both Wesley and Calvin—sometimes overemphasizing things Wesley and Calvin said, while underemphasizing other things. To be sure, clear differences occurred between how Wesley and Calvin viewed the Bible, relative to other factors or religious authorities. These differences are not only important for understanding their respective views of the Bible; they are also important for understanding differences between how Wesley and Calvin viewed other aspects of Christianity, for example, how they viewed salvation, the church, and ministry.

### Calvin's View of the Bible

Calvin began the *Institutes* by talking about God in the first five chapters, and he continued by talking about the Bible in the next five chapters. Calvin used the term *Scripture*, rather than the *Bible*. Historically, Scripture (or Scriptures) means "writing, or writings," and Bible means "book, or books." Holy Scripture (or Sacred Scripture) and Holy Bible are Christian ways of referring to the canon (or standard) of writings considered to be holy, sacred, and divinely inspired by God, as described in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." Usually Christians refer to either Scripture or the Bible. In this book, I use the two terms synonymously.

In the *Institutes*, Calvin stated that the Bible is needed to teach and guide those who believe in God, who is the sovereign creator and redeemer. The Bible functions like "spectacles" (or reading glasses), which aids people in knowing God. Calvin said:

Just as old bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.<sup>1</sup>

The Bible is especially needed for salvation, since people cannot know about it without divine revelation.

Calvin considered the Bible to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, and its certain authority is confirmed by the witness of the Holy Spirit and not by any other authorization. Here Calvin distinguished his view of the Bible from Roman Catholicism, since the latter considered the Bible to be part of a broader understanding of church authority that included the canonization process of the Bible. Although Catholics believe that the Bible is divinely inspired, God's Holy Spirit worked through the leadership, councils, and decisions of the church to canonize its contents. Thus the Catholic Church has priority over biblical authority both historically and theologically, since it was the ancient church that codified the Bible. However, Calvin disagreed, saying that God alone, through the Holy Spirit, testifies to the inspiration, authority, and truthfulness of the Bible, and not by any human or church authorization. He said:

Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit. . . . Therefore, illumined by his power, we believe neither by our own nor by anyone else's judgment that Scripture is from God; but above human judgment we affirm with utter certainty.<sup>2</sup>

Calvin argued that it is the church that is based on the Bible, and not vice versa. To the degree that the church attests to the Bible, it speaks truthfully and authoritatively. As such, the church does not represent authority to authorize the Bible, since the church's authority is derived from it.

Although Calvin appealed primarily to the "secret testimony of the Holy Spirit" to establish the divine inspiration, authority, and truthfulness of the Bible, he argued that human reason—though limited—provides sufficiently firm proofs to establish the Bible's credibility.<sup>3</sup> The simplicity of biblical

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truths, including its order and inner harmony, corroborates its inspiration, authority, and truthfulness.<sup>4</sup>

With regard to biblical interpretation, Calvin was proficient in his approach to hermeneutics—the study of the theory and practice of biblical interpretation. After all, he wrote commentaries on most of the books of the Bible. Of course, Calvin lived long before the nineteenth-century rise of historical criticism, so it is anachronistic to speculate about Calvin's hermeneutics in comparison to later developments. He was certainly aware of biblical interpretive practices from the ancient and medieval churches as well as the contemporary hermeneutics of Luther, Erasmus, Philipp Melancthon, and Martin Bucer. Calvin knew about the fourfold methodology—the *Quadrige*—that sought after the literal (historical), allegorical (symbolic), topological (moral), and anagogical (metaphysical, or eschatological) senses of the Bible. According to Raymond Blacketer, Calvin focused on “what he calls the *sens naturel*, the literal, historical, straightforward meaning of the text. In comparison with other exegetes of his day, Calvin is less apt to engage in speculative exegesis, and he frequently criticizes the method of finding multiple spiritual senses in the text, such as characterized medieval interpretation, embodied in what is known as the *Quadrige*.”<sup>5</sup>

Although wide-ranging in his study of the Bible, Calvin avoided protracted, convoluted, and speculative debate over biblical interpretation. He wrote straightforward commentaries because he thought that people were capable of studying the Bible for themselves. Calvin agreed with Luther's ideas about the perspicacity of the Bible, namely, that it is not too difficult or mysterious for people to read and understand by themselves. The church and biblical scholars may aid people in reading and understanding the Bible, but individuals have sufficient wherewithal to read, understand, and interpret it.

Calvin was concerned about critiquing what he considered to be superstitious and sometimes fanatical approaches to Christianity, for example, when people claimed present-day prophecies from God. His concern was, in part, because of ongoing claims by Roman Catholics that God continues to speak through the pope and the Catholic magisterium, which represents the teaching authority of the pope and the college of bishops, rather than through the Bible. He rejected the authority of the pope and the Catholic magisterium. Calvin also rejected those who claimed new revelation from the Holy Spirit today that exceeds biblical teachings, which he thought occurred among many Anabaptists. According to Calvin, God's Spirit does not lead us beyond the Bible. It is the safeguard against revelatory claims to extrabiblical revelation, whether prophetic claims come through the church or individuals. Calvin said: “Therefore the Spirit, promised to us, has not the task of inventing new and unheard-of revelations, or of forging a new kind of doctrine, to lead

us away from the received doctrine of the gospel, but of sealing our minds with that very doctrine which is commended by the gospel."<sup>6</sup>

### Calvin and *Sola Scriptura*

Like Luther, Calvin argued for the authority of the Bible in determining Christian beliefs, values, and practices. In this regard, he embodied the Reformation slogan of *sola Scriptura* (Latin, "Scripture alone"). Interestingly, Calvin did not use this precise phraseology in the *Institutes*. However, the substance of *sola Scriptura* can be found throughout his writings. Luther, however, overtly defended himself in a heresy trial at the 1521 Diet of Worms with the following words:

If I do not become convinced by the testimony of Scripture or clear rational grounds—for I believe neither the pope nor councils alone, since it is obvious that they have erred on several occasions—I remain subjugated by the scriptural passages I have cited and my conscience held captive by the word of God. Therefore, I neither can nor will recant anything. For to act against conscience is difficult, noxious, and dangerous. May God help me. Amen.<sup>7</sup>

After making this confession, Luther is thought to have said, "Here I stand! I cannot do otherwise," though historians consider these words an early legendary addition.<sup>8</sup> Be that as it may, the quotation above reflects the staunch stand that Luther took in confronting the papal and magisterial authority of the Roman Catholic Church, displacing it with the authority of the Bible. Although Luther utilized "clear rational grounds" and "conscience" in his defense, the authority to which he appealed was Scripture alone. Thus *sola Scriptura* has often been described as the formal principle or cause (that is, authoritative source) of the Reformation, since Luther and other reformers established the Bible as their normative religious authority.

The principle of *sola Scriptura* is present throughout the writings of Calvin. In talking about true religion, Calvin said, "Now, in order that true religion may shine upon us, we ought to hold that it must take its beginning from heavenly doctrine and that no one can get even the slightest taste of right and sound doctrine unless he be a pupil of Scripture."<sup>9</sup> Because of the effects of sin, human authority and even church authority must not be equated with the authority of the Bible. Instead Calvin clearly emphasized the Bible as the prescriptive standard of Christianity. He said: "Let this be a firm principle: No other word is to be held as the Word of God, and given place as such in the church, than what is contained first in the Law and the Prophets, then in the writings of the apostles; and the only authorized way of teaching in the church is by the prescription and standard of his Word."<sup>10</sup>

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Calvin was not woodenly or uncritically literalistic in his understanding of biblical authority. He was remarkably sophisticated in understanding that, secondary to the Bible, Christians need to employ historical Christian teachings, especially from the most ancient patristic writers, as well as critical thinking in theological decision making. This sophistication was sometimes lost upon Protestants during the Reformation, for example, Anabaptists who unrelentingly appealed to no authority other than the Bible. It was also sometimes lost upon later Protestants who thought that *sola Scriptura* meant that absolutely no other resources or factors had any legitimate input. Even today, Christians may naively argue that the Bible only—and nothing else—should inform their beliefs, values, and practices. However, even a cursory look at the decision making of such people reveals that they commonly rely upon doctrinal developments from church history, logical argumentation, and obvious experiential confirmation for their most cherished beliefs, values, and practices, though without acknowledgment.

Calvin was concerned that the Reformation not be considered something new, and especially not heretical; he makes this clear in the preface to the *Institutes*. Instead, Calvin argued that Protestantism was in continuity with both the Bible and Christian antiquity—a continuity that he thought Roman Catholicism distorted. Throughout Calvin's writings, references can be found to such patristic writers as Jerome, Augustine, and Chrysostom as Christian authorities to whom Calvin appealed in developing his theology and ministry. He drew upon the writings of Augustine the most, especially when talking about the relationship between divine predestination and human freedom. Finally, Calvin helped oversee the creation of Protestant ordinances and confessions that, along with the Bible and his own writings, became foundational for his followers.

### Wesley's View of the Bible

Wesley was a lover of the Bible. He believed in its divine inspiration, religious authority, and truthfulness, just as did Calvin. In the preface to his *Sermons*, Wesley talked about the importance of the Bible, especially for the sake of salvation, and he famously described himself as *homo unius libri* (Latin, "a man of one book"): "I want to know one thing, the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price give me the Book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri*."<sup>11</sup> Wesley agreed with Protestants in their focus upon the primacy of scriptural authority

in matters of faith and practice. Although he lived two centuries after the Reformation, conflict between Protestants and Roman Catholics continued, and Wesley affirmed "the written word of God to be the only and sufficient rule both of Christian faith and practice; and herein we are fundamentally distinguished from those of the Romish Church."<sup>12</sup>

Wesley believed that the Holy Spirit inspired the writing, canonization, and transmission of the Bible and that today the Holy Spirit chooses principally to guide people through it. He said: "For though the Spirit is our principal leader, yet He is not our rule at all; the Scriptures are the rule whereby He leads us into all truth. Therefore, only talk good English, call the Spirit our 'guide,' which signifies an intelligent being, and the Scriptures our 'rule,' which signifies something used by an intelligent being, and all is plain and clear."<sup>13</sup> So the Bible is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit and also by rational and empirical evidences, since it comes through an intelligent creator. Thus, in talking about the inspiration of the Bible, Wesley appealed to "four grand and powerful arguments which strongly induce us to believe that the Bible must be from God; viz., miracles, prophecies, the goodness of the doctrine, and the moral character of the penmen."<sup>14</sup>

Although Wesley had a high view of the Bible, he was not simplistically a man of one book. On the contrary, Wesley was an Oxford University tutor who was well aware of church history, including its ecclesiastical and theological developments. He read, edited, and wrote vast numbers of books, and required that the pastors and lay leaders he supervised read widely from classics of Western civilization, logic, and rhetoric as well as the Bible in preparing them to provide leadership in churches and ministry. In his "Minutes of Several Conversations," Wesley responded to Methodist leaders who argued that they only needed to study the Bible: "This is rank enthusiasm. If you need no book but the Bible, you are got above St. Paul. He wanted others too. 'Bring the books,' says he, 'but especially the parchments,' those wrote on parchment. 'But I have no taste for reading.' Contract a taste for it by use, or return to your trade."<sup>15</sup> Wesley understood that theology, spirituality, and ministry are not narrow disciplines, isolated from a rich context of learning from multiple sources beyond the person and work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives as well as the Bible.

For example, Wesley viewed himself firmly within the context of the Anglo-Catholic tradition of Protestantism. He was a lifelong ordained minister in the Church of England, and his theological roots were formed in its tutelage. Wesley admired and drew from the continental reformers, but it was the British reformers with whom he most identified. Going back to

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Thomas Cranmer, Wesley was part of the British Reformation in England, whose leaders considered themselves to be a *via media* (Latin, "middle way") between Roman Catholic and the continental reformers. As such, Anglicans drank more deeply from the fountains of church tradition, including Roman Catholicism and Orthodox churches, than did Luther and Calvin. The Bible was considered the primary religious authority, but church tradition was also considered a genuine—albeit secondary—religious authority. How ought Christians to decide between the teachings of the Bible and church tradition, when they seem at odds with one another?

Anglicans believe that reason represents the God-given religious authority to discern between the Bible and church tradition, and through the dynamic interdependence of these two things, Christians can more ably discern the will of God and the Holy Spirit in matters of religion. Henry McAdoo described this methodological approach to Christianity as a way for British reformers to avoid the authoritarianism of Roman Catholicism, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to avoid uncontrolled liberty that resulted from the continental reformers' belief in the ability of individuals to interpret the Bible for themselves. McAdoo says:

An over-all characteristic of Anglican theological method is then this polarity or quality of living in tension, which goes far towards explaining how the element of reason did not for the most part become over-weighted during the seventeenth century since it never existed in a vacuum, theologically speaking, but operated in conjunction with other elements such as the appeal to Scripture and antiquity.<sup>16</sup>

The Anglican emphasis upon the primacy of religious authority, coupled with the legitimate secondary authorities of tradition and reason, did not appeal to the continental reformers, with their preeminent focus on *sola Scriptura*.

Anglicanism arose within the context of the burgeoning Enlightenment, and such intellectual influences need to be considered when critically evaluating Wesley and his view of particular theological issues. Wesley highly valued rationality, for example, when considering the Bible, theology, and ministry. For that matter, the continental Reformation arose within the context of humanist and nominalist ideas prevalent in the education of both Luther and Calvin, which influenced their theology. It is naive to think that Luther and Calvin developed their beliefs, values, and practices based upon the Bible alone. Both were sophisticated Christian thinkers who drew upon contemporary as well as historic rationality. Although such considerations are crucial in contextually understanding the different theological traditions of Protestantism,

they cannot be reduced to them. Even so, such considerations aid us in understanding both Wesley and Calvin.

## Wesley and the *Via Media*

Wesley embraced the *via media* of the Church of England, emphasizing the priority of the Bible while utilizing church tradition and critical thinking in his theology and ministry. He did not consider this to be in opposition to the continental Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*. On the contrary, Wesley did not interpret either Luther or Calvin as slavishly attending to the Bible only, without responsible theological and ecclesiastical dialogue with other religious authorities. He considered *sola Scriptura* to be more confirmation of the Bible as the final authority in religious matters—as the primary rather than sole authority in matters of Christian faith and practice.

Wesley referred to more than the Bible as authoritative in his theology and ministry while always maintaining the Bible as the final authority. For example, in the 1771 edition of his collected *Works*, Wesley said, “[I]n this edition I present to serious and candid men my last and Matures thoughts, agreeable, I hope, to Scripture, reason, and Christian antiquity.”<sup>17</sup> He thought that “Christian antiquity” represented “the religion of the primitive church, of the whole church in the purest ages.”<sup>18</sup> To be sure, Wesley did not value all church tradition equally. He valued Protestantism over Roman Catholicism, the British Reformation in England over the continental Reformation, and the ancient church over its medieval developments. But much was to be learned from such historic authorities as well as what could be understood through logical, critical thinking.

Reason, after all, did not so much represent an intuitive source of knowledge as it served as a tool of logic and critical thinking for rightly understanding and applying Christian beliefs, values, and practices. In talking about the importance of logic, Wesley said: “For what is this, if rightly understood, but the art of good sense? of apprehending things clearly, judging truly, and reasoning conclusively?”<sup>19</sup> Of course, reason and rationality represent a gift from God, given by God in creation, since people are created in God’s image. Certainly the finitude of humanity as well as its sinfulness requires that people faithfully discern the nature and extent of reason. Still, Wesley was sufficiently confident in the God-given gift of reason to say: “It is a fundamental principle with us [i.e., Methodists] that to renounce reason is to renounce religion, that religion and reason go hand in hand, and that all irrational religion is false religion.”<sup>20</sup>

Although Wesley did not try to be theologically innovative, he made

a noteworthy contribution when he talked about tradition and reason something new in history, from the very beginning, Wesley thought, valued, and practiced that the gospel message in the world. In the presence of scriptural, experiential

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a noteworthy contribution to the intellectual development of Christianity when he talked about experience as a genuine religious authority alongside tradition and reason. Again, like Calvin, Wesley did not intend to create something new but to restore what had been believed throughout church history, from the time of Jesus Christ. By appealing to experiential authority, Wesley thought he was making explicit what had always been believed, valued, and practiced, though not necessarily in a conscious way, namely, that the gospel makes a verifiable difference day to day in our lives and in our world. In the preface to his *Sermons*, Wesley claimed to present "the true, the scriptural, experimental religion," reflective of "religion of the heart":

I have endeavored to describe the true, the scriptural, experimental religion, so as to omit nothing which is a real part thereof, and to add nothing thereto which is not. And herein it is more especially my desire, first, to guard those who are just setting their faces toward heaven (and who, having little acquaintance with the things of God, are the more liable to be turned out of the way) from formality, from mere outside religion, which has almost driven heart-religion out of the world; and secondly, to warn those who know the religion of the heart, the faith which worketh by love, lest at any time they make void the law through faith, and so fall back into the snare of the devil.<sup>21</sup>

By experimental religion, Wesley meant the experience of God and of God's salvation, which had to do with faith and hope, but also with love experienced by believers. They sensed God's love, and they tangibly expressed love in return as well, to others. For Wesley, the reality of God and our salvation were tangible, sensed realities and not merely propositional Affirmation of the Bible. Wesley was so convinced of the experiential dimension of religious authority that he talked about how feelings matter, no matter how mercurial and difficult to discern they may be. He said:

From these [i.e., biblical] passages it may sufficiently appear for what purpose every Christian, according to the doctrine of the Church of England, does not "receive the Holy Ghost." But this will be still more clear from those that follow; wherein the reader may likewise observe a plain, rational sense of God's revealing himself to us, of the *inspiration* of the Holy Ghost, and of a believer's *feeling* in himself the mighty working of the Spirit of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

Wesley was especially concerned about the felt presence of the Holy Spirit—that is, of the testimony or witness of the Holy Spirit. Calvin talked about the testimony of the Holy Spirit primarily in terms of the validity of the Bible, but Wesley thought that the experiential validation of the presence

and work of the Holy Spirit in other dimensions of Christian life were also important and valid confirmations of divine truth. Christianity is more than a biblical, doctrinal, and propositional existence; it is Spirit-filled, relational, and dynamic. Wesley believed that experience represents a genuine—albeit secondary—religious authority alongside tradition and reason, relative to the primary authority of the Bible.

## The Wesleyan Quadrilateral

Wesley's use of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience has sometimes been referred to as the "Wesleyan quadrilateral." Wesley, of course, did not use the phrase, just as Calvin did not write about *sola Scriptura*. Nevertheless, both terms have become affiliated with the aforementioned men. Albert Outler coined the quadrilateral. He drew the imagery from the Lambeth Quadrilateral used by the Anglicans, which refers to four walls of a fortress that defend those inside. About the quadrilateral, Outler said:

It was intended as a metaphor for a four-element syndrome, including the four-fold guidelines of authority in Wesley's theological method. In such a quaternity Holy Scripture is clearly unique. But this in turn is illuminated by the collective Christian wisdom of other ages and cultures between the Apostolic Age and our own. It also allows for the rescue of the Gospel from obscurantism by means of the disciplines of critical reason. But always, Biblical revelation must be received in the heart by faith: this is the requirement of "experience."<sup>23</sup>

Some have criticized the quadrilateral as a myth; if so, then it is a useful myth—concept, paradigm, or heuristic tool—for capturing the interdisciplinary and interdependent way that Christians reflect upon, decide, and act with regard to their heartfelt beliefs and values. One could equally say that *sola Scriptura*, for Calvin, was a myth, since he did not use the phrase; yet it is a useful one for capturing his preeminent focus upon the authority of the Bible. To be sure, the views that Wesley and Calvin had about the Bible, canon, and hermeneutics as well as religious authority are more intricate and interactive than what can simply be said. But the quadrilateral and *sola Scriptura* help us distinguish between the theological and methodological views of the two men.<sup>24</sup>

Although Wesley would not disagree with the *sola Scriptura* emphasis of Calvin, he would consider it inadequate to deal with the complexities of Christian beliefs and values, and especially for ministering to the real-life issues that plague people day to day. Wesley would want Christians to reflect theologically in broader ways; to consider more explicitly historic contributions that individuals, churches, and other confessional statements make; and

to integrate them critically because of Wesley's emphasis on the Holy Spirit, a more holistic order to comprehend the world with people, and graciousness.

Wesley thought that tradition as it is primary. Ultimately speaking, it is a witness for how the written words of God—albeit secondary—relate to the world talked about in terms of creation. Wesley provided his own hermeneutic, reason, and experience, alongside tradition. The fourfold helps in responding and to its application to all and socially; physically.

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to integrate them critically, contextually, and experimentally in life. Especially because of Wesley's emphasis upon the ongoing presence and work of the Holy Spirit, a more holistic approach to religious authority is necessary in order to comprehend the Spirit's immanent presence, interactive relationship with people, and gracious empowerment of them.

Wesley thought that the Bible is not so much solitary in its religious authority as it is primary. Of course, both Wesley and Calvin would say that, ultimately speaking, it is God who is our authority. But God has chosen to reveal a witness for how people ought to live. That witness primarily exists in the written words of God—of the Bible. To it, Christians may add other genuine—albeit secondary—religious authorities. They do not necessarily need to be talked about in terms of tradition, reason, and experience; they may also be talked about as creation, culture, or some other contextual categories. Yet Wesley provided his own helpful and insightful categories of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, which today carry the weight of longstanding Methodist tradition. The fourfold principle of the quadrilateral has been extremely useful. It helps in responding both to the complexities of Christian understanding and to its application to the ever-changing needs and demands of life: individually and socially; physically and spiritually; ecclesiastically and ministerially.

Let me quote from a book that I wrote on the Wesleyan quadrilateral. I talk about the value of how Wesley advocated a "living faith" more than a "systematic whole," characteristic of Calvin:

The Wesleyan quadrilateral does not emphasize the quality of the end product so much as the quality of the approach or the means to achieve the end product. From Wesley's perspective, theology involved more of a means of addressing religious issues than a part of the end—an intricate, systematic whole. Wholeness came through process rather than completion. The quadrilateral may have dogmatic (positive) and apologetic (negative) functions, but the emphasis tends to land less on the doctrinal aspects than on living faith.<sup>25</sup>

## Final Thoughts

Both Wesley and Calvin believed in the ultimate authority of God. Both further believed that the Bible is inspired, authoritative, and truthful. In particular, they considered the Bible to be the primary authority to which we should turn in determining matters of Christian life and faith. Calvin as well as Wesley studied and appealed preeminently to the Bible in their theological reflection so much so that Calvin is identified with the Reformation slogan of *sola Scriptura*—"Scripture alone."

Although Wesley agreed with the primacy of biblical authority, he was more explicit in appealing to other authorities as being genuine—albeit secondary—in theological reflection. He saw himself as part of the *via media*, which steered between the continental Reformation and the theological excesses of Roman Catholicism. Wesley valued the traditions of church history, which canonized the Bible as well as passed on orthodox Christian beliefs. He valued critical thinking and the need for persuasive argumentation and preaching. Finally, Wesley valued relevant experience that confirmed biblical Christianity as well as the ongoing presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people.

### Discussion Questions

1. In what ways would you say that Wesley and Calvin most agree and disagree about the Bible?
2. What do you think about the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*—"Scripture alone"?
3. What do you think about the prospect of more than the Bible having authoritative input into your beliefs, values, and practices?
4. Is there a difference between what you say you believe about the nature and authority of the Bible and how the Bible practically functions in your day-to-day life?
5. What do you think about Wesley's emphasis on the primacy of biblical authority, coupled with the genuine—albeit secondary—religious authority of church tradition, critical thinking, and relevant experience?
6. How is the Wesleyan quadrilateral a useful concept for thinking about the dynamic ways in which Christians make theological decisions about what they think, say, and do?

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NOTES TO PAGES 3-18

6. Ibid., III.xxviii.1 (2.947).
7. Ibid., III.xxviii.7 (2.955). The Latin phrase *decretum horribile*, which Calvin used, is sometimes translated as "horrible decree" or "awe-inspiring." Calvin used it to describe the doctrine of reprobation, but others have used the phrase to describe his entire theology of divine predestination, election, and reprobation.
8. Ibid., I.xiv.16 (1.175).
9. Ibid., I.v.1 (1.52).
10. Ibid., III.xxi.1 (2.922-23).
11. Wesley, "Thoughts upon God's Sovereignty," *Works* (Jackson), 10.361.
12. Wesley, "The Unity of the Divine Being," §5, *Works* (Jackson), VII.265.
13. Ibid., §7, 7.266.
14. Wesley, "Predestination Calmly Considered," §45, *Works* (Jackson), (10.229-30).
15. Wesley, "Thoughts upon God's Sovereignty," *Works* (Jackson), 10.362.
16. Wesley, *NT Notes*, 1 John 4:8.
17. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.v.3 (1.55).
18. Ibid., II.xvi.4 (1.506).
19. Wesley, "New Creation," §18, *Works*, 2:510.
20. Wesley, "Some Remarks on 'A Defence of the Preface to the Edinburgh Edition of Aspasio Vindicated'," §6, *Works* (Jackson), 10:351. Words in brackets are mine.
21. Wesley, "God's Love to Fallen Man," §5 sermon 59, *Works* (Jackson), (6.235).
22. Wesley, "Predestination Calmly Considered," §42 *Works* (Jackson), 10.227.
23. Ibid.
24. Wesley, "Free Grace," §§23, 25 *Works* (Jackson), 7.381, 383.
25. Charles Wesley, "Free Grace" (hymn XVI), in *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love* (Bristol: Felix Farley and Sons, 1741); reprinted in *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, vol. 3, ed. G. Osborn (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1869), 96.
26. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (1910 reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 8.261.2

**Chapter 2. Bible: More Primary Than Sole Authority**

1. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.vi.1 (1.70).
2. Ibid., I.vii.5 (1.80).

# NOTES TO PAGES 18-31

3. Ibid., I.viii.4 (1.78).
  4. Ibid., I.viii.5 (1.85-86) and I.ix.1 (1.93).
  5. Raymond A. Blacketer, "Commentaries and Prefaces," in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 184.
  6. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.ix.1 (1.94).
  7. Martin Luther, quoted by Erwin Iserloh, Joseph Glazik, and Hubert Jedin, *Reformation and Counter Reformation*, trans. Anselm Biggs and Peter W. Becker, in *History of the Church*, vol. V, ed. Hubert Jedin and John Dolan (English translation 1980; reprint, New York: Crossroad, 1986), 79.
  8. Ibid., n. 17.
  9. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.vi.2 (1.72).
  10. Ibid., IV.viii.8 (2.1155).
  11. Wesley, "Preface," §5, *Sermons, Works*, 1.105.
  12. Wesley, "The Character of a Methodist," §1, in *Works* (Jackson), 8:340.
  13. Wesley, "To Thomas Whitehead," 10 February 1748, *Letters* (Telford), 2.117.
  14. Wesley, "A Clear and Concise Demonstration of the Divine Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures," *Works* (Jackson), 11.484.
  15. Wesley, "Minutes of Several Conversations," Q.32, *Works* (Jackson), 8.315.
  16. Henry R. McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism: A Survey of Anglican Theological Method in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Scribner's, 1965), 313.
  17. Wesley, "Preface," §6, *Works* (Jackson), 1.iv.
  18. Wesley, "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel" (1777, sermon 112), II.3, *Works*, 3:586.
  19. Wesley, "Address to the Clergy," I.2, *Works* (Jackson), 10.483.
  20. Wesley, "To Dr. Rutherford," 28 March 1768, *Letters* (Telford), 5.364.
- Words in brackets are mine.
21. Wesley, "Preface," §6, *Sermons, Works*, 1.106.
  22. Wesley, "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part I," V.24, *Works*, 11.167. Words in brackets are mine.
  23. Albert C. Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 11.
  24. For more information about the Wesleyan quadrilateral, see Don Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), and W. Stephen Gunter et al., *Wesley and the Quadrilateral* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997).
  25. Thorsen, *Wesleyan Quadrilateral*, 248.

## Chapter 3. Humanity: More Freedom Than Predestination

1. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xv.3 (1.186).
2. Wesley, "The New Birth," I.1, *Works*, 2.188.