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## A Core Curriculum for Discipleship

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"Enter through the narrow gate," said Jesus, " . . . for the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life" (Matthew 7:13-14, NRSV). All Christians need to be prepared for the rigors of discipleship. Let me make an attempt to show how the Wesley quadrilateral could become an outline for a core curriculum in discipleship.

**Scripture.** The first and most important step is the study of Scripture. Before studying the Scriptures, however, we need to know something of their source and gain an overview of their content.<sup>1</sup> I would propose two courses: "The Origin of Sacred Scripture" and "The Bible as Sacred History." We simply need to know how to use the Scriptures.

**Tradition.** The next step is tradition. One might define tradition as the interpretation of Scripture from the time of Jesus to the present. Obviously, we can find some serious distortions of Scripture, such as those that gave birth to the Crusades, the Inquisition, and slavery. On the positive side, there is the Reformation under Martin Luther and the Evangelical Revival led by John Wesley. All disciples need an understanding of Jesus, his teachings, and an overview of the history of the church. Core courses here would be "The Sermon on the Mount" and "The Story of the Church." It would be best to study Methodism (or any other denomination, for that matter) within this context and not as a subject of its own.

**Experience.** The third step is experience. Experience is to the individual what tradition is to the Christian community. John Wesley's own vivid religious experience took place in a religious society on Aldersgate Street. Although Wesley considered religious experience a personal matter, he never considered it private. There was plenty of sharing in those early Methodist Societies and Class Meetings. They

gave people the opportunity to exercise what Wesley called the *spiritual senses*. Our core curriculum would have to include courses that focus on religious experience, perhaps "The Spiritual Senses"<sup>2</sup> and "The Nature of Religious Experience."

**Reason.** The final step is the use of reason. It is not the first step, nor can it ever be. "Man left to himself," said Wesley, "will reason his way to hell."<sup>3</sup>

Reason helps us answer the questions our discipleship raises in modern society. Peter's advice is just as relevant today as it was in the first century: "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15-16, NRSV). Our faith and morals must be carefully reasoned out. Important courses in this area would be: "The Christian Faith" (or Theology) and "Christian Ethics."

There are many other courses that could be important for Christian discipleship, but those named above would make up the "core curriculum." These courses need to be offered in every church. Since they are all basic courses, they could be offered in any order. Without an awareness of the content of these courses, people do not have the basics, and people need the basics to guide them through the narrow gate to fullness of life in this world and eternal life in the next.

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<sup>1</sup>One example of what might be used is William Barclay's *Introducing the Bible*. This is a classic in helping us to understand the origin and development of Scripture.

<sup>2</sup>Not much has been written about the spiritual senses. Both John and Charles Wesley mention them in their sermons, but they do not go into any detail. I recently developed a Sunday school course on the spiritual senses, but much more needs to be done in this area.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Robert Tuttle in *On Giant Shoulders* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1984 [out of print]), page 120.

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