





## Theology??!!

- ❖ Theology
  - The contemplation and study of God! What better use of our time and efforts could there be?
- ❖ Everyone is a theologian
  - All people, in all places, at all times contemplate the most fundamental questions of our existence. Their answers shape their worldview!
  - The only questions is whether we will be a better theologian or a poorer theologian.
- ❖ Why do we – Christians -- “do” theology?
  - So we can come to know God! So we can be better disciples of Jesus Christ! We must always remind each other of this. Sometimes, it is easy to forget.
- ❖ The church needs more amateur theologians
  - Amateur – from the French word, *amator*, meaning “lover”!

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## How can we go wrong at this?

- ❖ By forgetting our purpose => knowing God
- ❖ By believing we can truly understand God!
  - Most of the great heresies and mistakes in the church have come from an unwillingness to find peace in the mysteries of God.
  - Don't allow yourself to be pushed into either-or choices!
    - Is God one or three?
    - Is Jesus God or a man?
    - Is the Bible the work of God or of humans?
  - In the end – these are unanswerable questions. We have to hold onto the tension, not try too hard to resolve it. If this makes you uncomfortable, learn a little about quantum physics!

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## How we'll go about this

- ❖ We could begin with a logical, well reasoned analysis of God's existence and attributes – but we won't.
  - Though popular, this approach is too cluttered with many Platonic (Greek) notions of god, the first mover.
  - An example – the nature and story of the soul
- ❖ We'll begin with the Bible and work outward.
  - As best as we can, we'll undertake a biblically-based theology. The UMC affirms that “scripture is the primary source and criterion of Christian doctrine.”
  - We'll see how the great creeds, confessions, and Methodism's own Articles of Religion & Statement of Faith are systematic expressions of biblical teachings.
- ❖ We will strive to find the ecumenical faith that all Christians – Roman Catholic, Protestant, & Orthodox – have affirmed for most of the last 2000 years.
  - Our guide will be a Methodist theologian, Thomas Oden

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## Knowing and Being Known

- ❖ Our purpose is to know God better!
- ❖ So . . . How do we come to know anyone?
  - > Watch what they do?
  - > Talk to other people about them?
- ❖ If we are truly going to know someone, they must enable us to know them. They must reveal themselves to us. Even then, coming to truly know someone is a life-long journey.

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## Can we know God without the Bible?

- ❖ First, notice that I use *God*, not *god*.
- ❖ Yes – we can know much about God without the Bible. Indeed, enough to be responsible when we turn from God. Paul knew this:
  - > "But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who push the truth away from themselves. For the truth about God is known to them instinctively. God has put this knowledge in their hearts. From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God." (Romans 1:18-20, NLT)
- ❖ But there is so much we would never know without the Bible.

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## Revelation

- ❖ General revelation
  - > What we can know about God without the Bible. I  
It is the basis for what is sometimes called  
"natural theology."
- ❖ Special revelation
  - > What God has revealed about himself and his creation through the words of scripture AND through his acts that the Bible tells us about!
  - > We come to the Bible to meet the living Jesus, the fullest revelation of God himself.

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## Methodists and theology

- ❖ For United Methodists, our theological task is:
  - > Both critical and constructive
  - > Both individual and communal
  - > Contextual and incarnational
    - "God's supreme mode of self-revelation is in Jesus"
    - Our theological reflection is energized by our involvement in the Church and the world.
  - > Essentially practical!
- ❖ We read the Bible and contemplate God as a believing community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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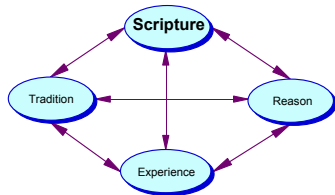
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## The Wesleyan Quadrilateral



"So I search and ponder parallel passages of scripture, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things. I meditate on them with all the attention and seriousness of which my mind is capable. If any doubt still remains, I consult others who are experienced in the things of God. Next, I look to the writings of those who although they are dead, yet they still speak. And what I learn in this way, I teach." by John Wesley, in his Preface to his collected sermons, 1746

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