

SERMON SERIES: IT'S HIP TO BE SQUARE

"Tradition And The United Methodist Future"

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral



- ★ For Wesley, tradition—or “Christian antiquity”—included such things as **Church history**, **spiritual practices** (worship, prayer, fasting, meditation, etc.), and **Christian writings**—especially of the early Church fathers. Today we would also include denominations in that list.
- ★ Wesley deemed learning church history helpful in the process of understanding, appreciating, and—finally—realizing scriptural truth in life.
- ★ Some, thought certainly not all, church tradition contains both the biblical knowledge and the practical wisdom of Christians who experienced the kind of genuine “heart-religion” Wesley hoped to revive throughout Britain.

- ★ Wesley did not consider tradition either inspired or infallible. He rejected Roman Catholicism’s tendency to elevate tradition’s authority to the level of scriptural authority.
- ★ No one can read Wesley without observing a great reverence for the church fathers. He said: *“I...reverence them as well as their writings, and esteem them very highly in love. I reverence them, because they were Christians... And I reverence their writings, because they describe true, genuine Christianity, and direct us to the strongest evidence of the Christian doctrine.”*
- ★ Wesley made early Christian writings, doctrines, and creeds a lifelong subject of theological study and methodological import for himself and the Methodist preachers. He considered early Christian writings *“the most authentic commentators on Scripture, as being both nearest the foundation, and eminently endued with that Spirit by whom ass Scripture was given.”*
- ★ Wesley allowed a great deal of theological flexibility and chose not to quibble over diverse opinions on nonessential aspects of the Christian faith. Near the end of his life, he declared that love required Methodists to accept into their fellowship others who also loved God, regardless of their Christian affiliation, as long as they sought to *“fear God and work righteousness.”*
- ★ Tradition proved useful to the extent it gave evidence to the authority of the Old and New Testaments and to the way it faithfully interpreted, communicated, and applied the content of the gospel message.
- ★ Wesley considered tradition second only to Scripture as a source of religious authority...especially as found in the creeds and patristic writings.