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# The Enlightenment and the Authority of Scripture

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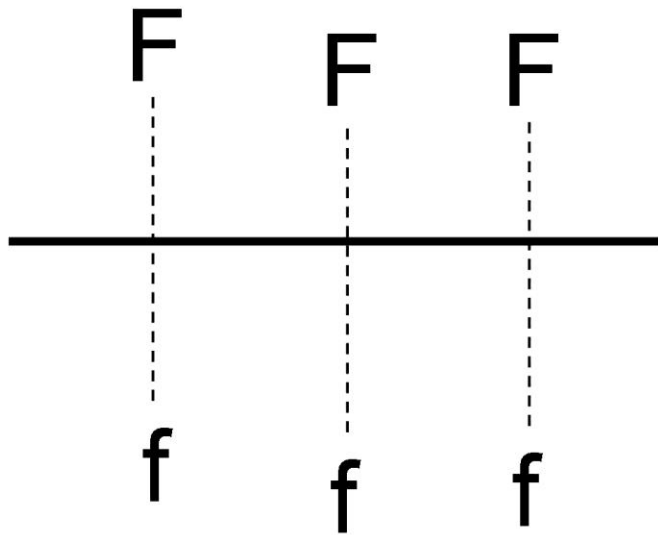
# The Enlightenment and the Authority of Scripture

Kevin Twain Lowery, Ph.D.  
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# Two Basic Worldviews

## Plato

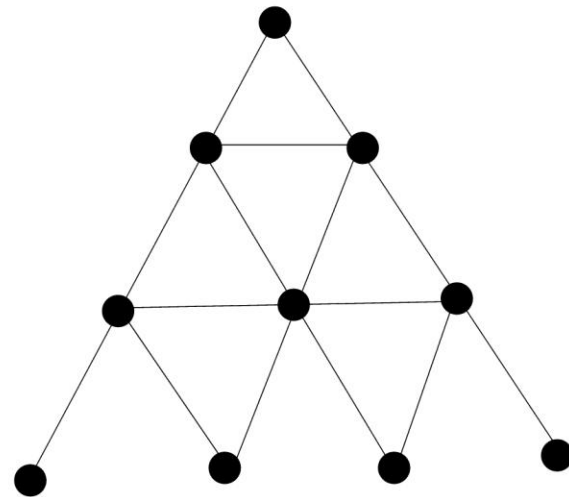
Intelligible  
Realm



Material  
Realm

## Aristotle

Ideals



Empirical

# The Medieval Mindset

(5<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> c.)

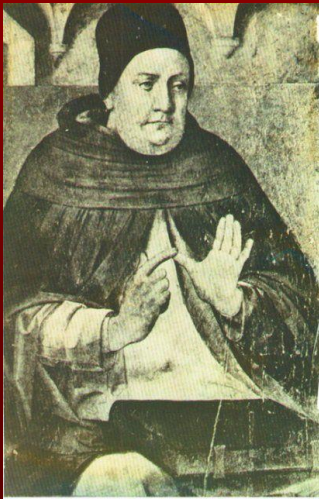
- Predestinationism
  - *Nature*
  - *Society*
- Foundationalism (Authority)
  - *Scripture*
  - *The Church*
- Emphasis on human depravity
- Mysticism
  - *Supernatural knowledge*
  - *Supernatural change*



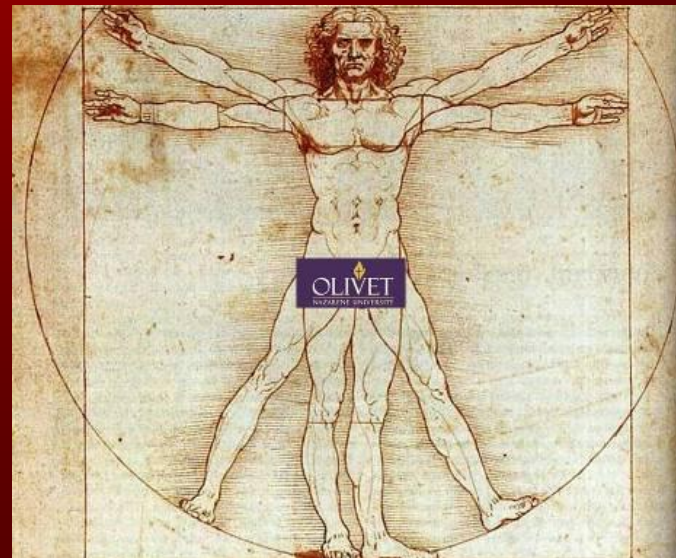
St. Augustine  
(354-430)

# Important Developments

- Scholasticism (12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> c.)
  - *Rediscovery of Aristotle*
  - *Partial human depravity*
  - *Integration of faith and reason*
- Renaissance (14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> c.)
  - *Emphasis on human goodness and potential*



St. Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-74)

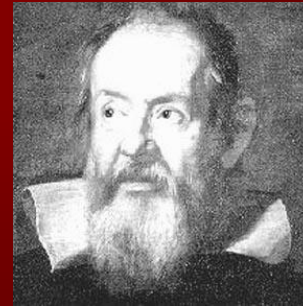


# Important Developments

- Reformation (16<sup>th</sup> c.)
  - *Shift in authority*
  - *Revert to Augustine*
  - *Canonization*
- Scientific Discovery (16<sup>th</sup> c. to present)
  - *Mechanistic view of the universe*
  - *Intellectual optimism*

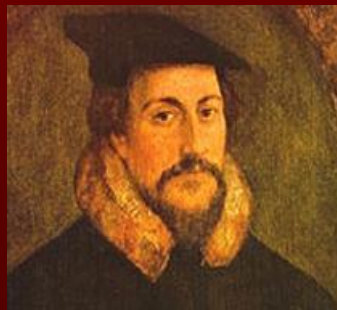


Martin  
Luther  
(1483-1546)

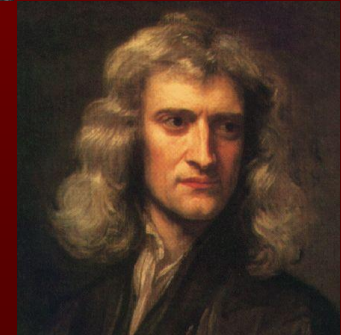


Galileo  
(1564-1642)

John  
Calvin  
(1509-1564)



Sir Isaac  
Newton  
(1642-1727)



# How did all of this affect the interpretation of Scripture (especially for Protestants)?

- Multiple translations (16<sup>th</sup> c.)
- Increased emphasis on personal experience and perspective
- Numerous sects and denominations
- King James Version (*Textus Receptus*) (1611)
- Certainty based on the integrity of the text
- Lower criticism (18<sup>th</sup> c.)
- Archeological discoveries (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> c.)

# Growing Skepticism

- Rationalism (17<sup>th</sup> c.)
  - *Knowledge is based on rationality*
- Empiricism (17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> c.)
  - *Knowledge is based on sensory experience*
- Phenomenalism (18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> c.)
  - *We can only know our perceptions*



Descartes  
(1596-1650)



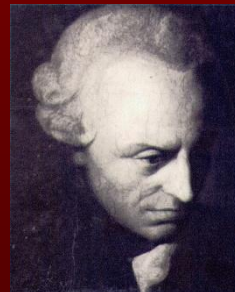
Leibniz  
(1646-1716)



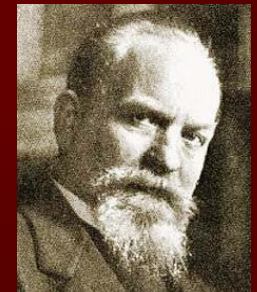
Locke  
(1632-1704)



Hume  
(1711-76)



Kant  
(1724-1804)



Husserl  
(1859-1938)



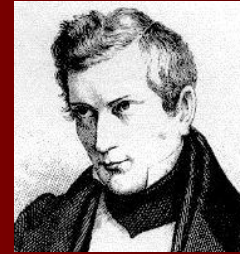
# Result: Can the Bible be trusted?

- Accuracy of the text
  - *Reliability of testimony*
  - *Discrepancies*
  - *Conflicts with science (only minor ones, at this point in time)*
- “Enlightened” religious belief
  - *Possibility of miracles*
  - *Superstition and myth*
- Scripture must be interpreted allegorically.
  - Kant: Morality is the basis of religion.

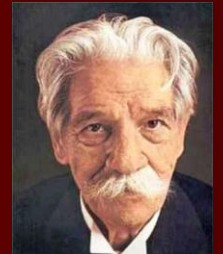
# The Big Challenges

(19<sup>th</sup> c.)

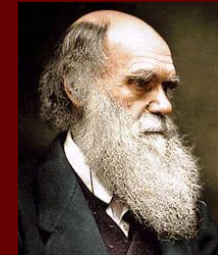
- Modern Higher (Historical) Criticism
  - *Life of Jesus*
  - *Quest for the Historical Jesus*
- Evolution
  - *Historicity of the text*
  - “*Survival of the fittest*”
  - *Incarnation and atonement*
- Protestant liberalism
  - “*God-consciousness*”
  - “*Demythologizing*” the Bible



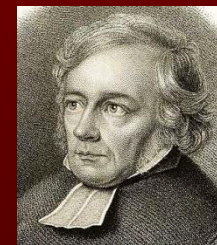
Strauss  
(1808-74)



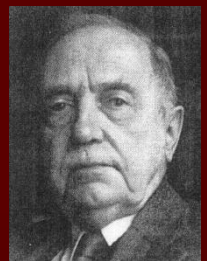
Schweitzer  
(1875-1965)



Darwin  
(1809-82)



Schleiermacher  
(1768-1834)

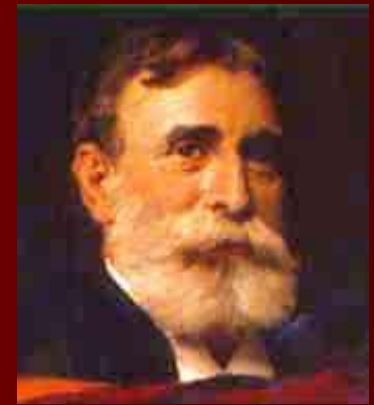


Bultmann  
(1884-1976)

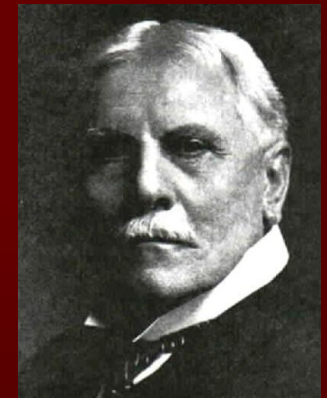
# REACTION : Fundamentalism

(late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> c.)

- **Goal:** Protect traditional orthodoxy
- Dogmatism based on:
  - *Foundationalism*
  - *Apologetics; avoid critical thinking*
- Two basic forms
  - *Reformed (Calvinist)*
    - Focused intellectual engagement
  - *Anti-intellectualist*
    - Biblical literalism
    - Use “common sense”, not scholarship
    - Appeal to the Holy Spirit (mysticism)
    - Suspicion of science, etc.
- Use of the term “Evangelical”



Warfield  
(1851-1921)



Scofield  
(1843-1921)

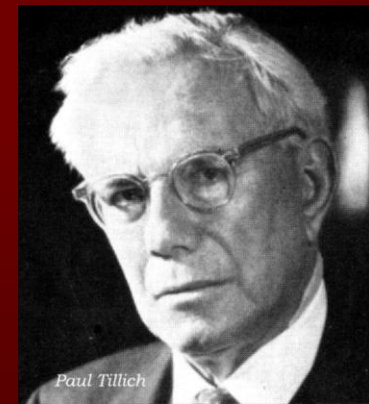
# REACTION : Neo-Orthodoxy

(early to middle 20<sup>th</sup> c.)

- Aimed at recovering a sense of Christian orthodoxy
- Some strands dogmatic; other strands more philosophical
- Existentialist – gave subjective Christian experience a stronger theological and philosophical basis



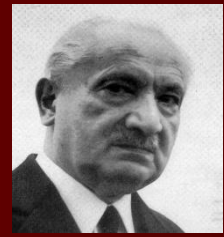
Barth  
(1886-1968)



Tillich  
(1886-1965)

# The Move toward Subjectivism

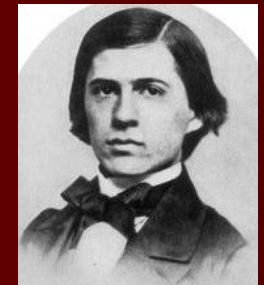
- Existentialism (late 19th – middle 20th c.)
  - Truth is a matter of inner consciousness, not empirical observation.
- Pragmatism (late 19th – early 20th c.)
  - Peirce
    - All beliefs are reducible to feelings and empirical observations.
    - Abduction: We reason to the best possible explanation in the absence of conclusive evidence.
  - James
    - Truth is determined by usefulness.
    - Inconclusive matters must be decided by passion and will.
    - Religious experiences can be studied psychologically.



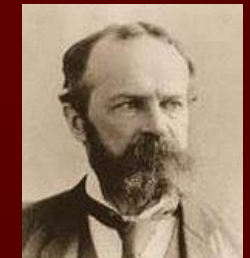
Heidegger  
(1889-1976)



Sartre  
(1905-80)



Peirce  
(1839-1914)



James  
(1842-1910)

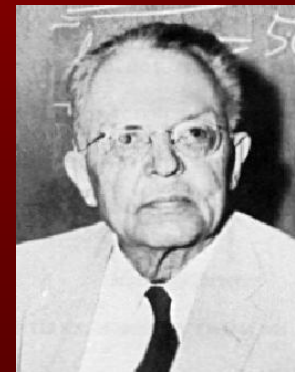
# Logical Positivism

(mid-20<sup>th</sup> c.)

- Derived from Auguste Comte's "positivism"
  - 3 phases of human history: theological, metaphysical, scientific (positive)
- The only meaningful statements are tautologies and empirical observations.
- Metaphysical statements are meaningless.
- Religious statements merely express personal feelings.



Comte  
(1798-1857)



Carnap  
(1891-1970)

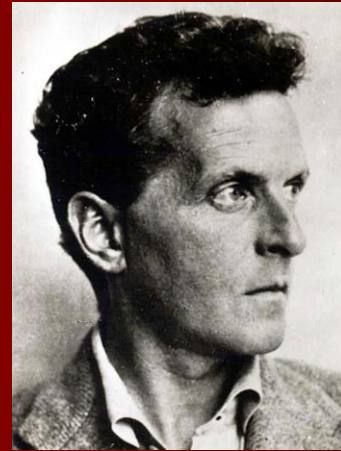


Ayer  
(1910-1989)

# Postmodernism

(mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> c.)

- End of foundationalism
- Truth is wholly subjective.
- We cannot appeal to abstract principles.
- We construct our own reality and narrative.
- Dialog breaks down.



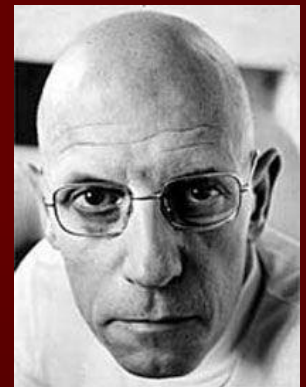
Wittgenstein  
(1889-1951)



Kuhn  
(1922-96)



Derrida  
(1930-2004)

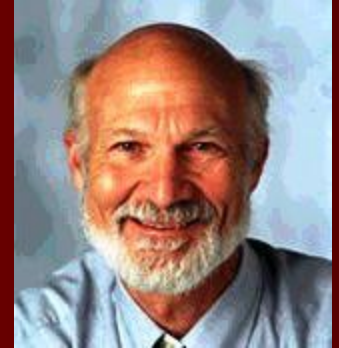


Foucault  
(1926-84)

# What are the epistemological options open to us today?

- Postmodernism

- *Hauerwas: Truth is communicated as we live out our narratives in the covenant community.*



- Pragmatism (“It works for me.”)

- Foundationalism

- *Inerrancy/infallibility of text (Fundamentalist)*

- *Inerrancy/infallibility of church (Catholic)*

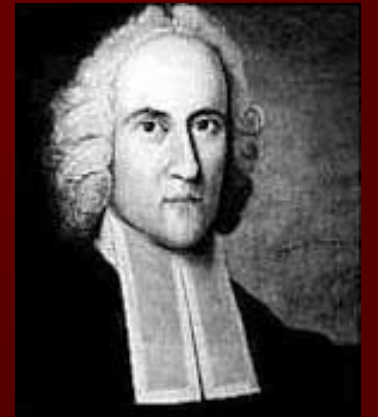
- Post-foundationalism



*How high should our  
view of inspiration  
be?*



QUESTION:  
Can people be  
inspired by  
the Holy  
Spirit without  
being  
inerrant?



# The inerrancy of Scripture cannot be supported rationally.

- Internal inconsistencies
- Historical & scientific discrepancies
- Essentially requires the inerrancy of canonization

# Inspiration cannot be verified, only accepted by faith.

- Ancient bases for affirming divine inspiration:
  - foretelling the future
  - miracles
  - etc.
- It cannot be established by circular arguments.
  - Scripture itself claims to be divinely inspired
  - Scripture is divinely inspired (and inerrant) because the church is divinely inspired (and inerrant), and vice versa.

# Principles for a mediated position

- Accommodation
- Progressive revelation
- Complementarity of special and general revelation

*What is a  
critically  
informed basis  
for the authority  
of Scripture?*

The  
authority of  
the canon  
rests on the  
authority of  
tradition.



# Possible bases for scriptural authority

- Reliability of Christian tradition
- Historical veracity (e.g. Pannenberg: The resurrection of Christ is essential.)
- Relevance of the message (personal or universal)
  - Kant: The teachings of Christ are morally superior.



*These can establish  
authority, but they  
still cannot  
authenticate divine  
inspiration.*

# How should all of this inform the way we approach Scripture?

- Allow scholarship to inform us about the:
  - Complexities of authorship
  - Context
- Recognize that everything (including Scripture) is judged by reason.
  - Judgment depends upon the criteria used.
- Base belief on truth, not vice versa.
- Integrate Scripture with other sources of knowledge.