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The Enlightenment and the Authority of Scripture

Kevin Twain Lowery

Olivet Nazarene University, klowery@olivet.edu

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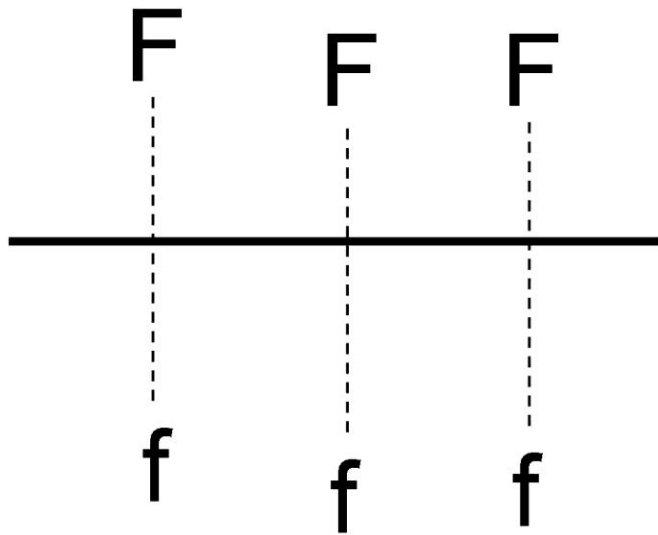
The Enlightenment and the Authority of Scripture

Kevin Twain Lowery, Ph.D.
Olivet Nazarene University

Two Basic Worldviews

Plato

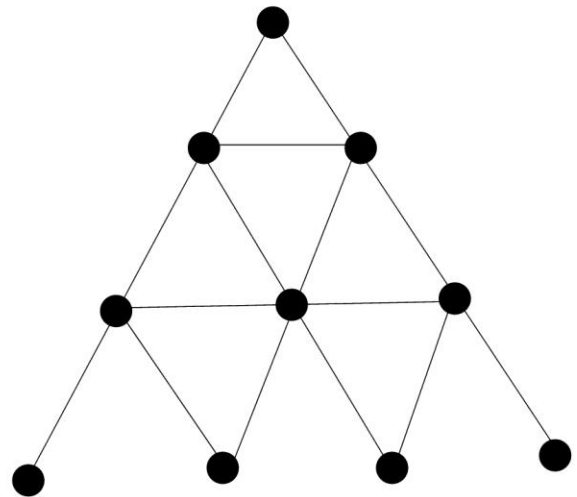
Intelligible
Realm



Material
Realm

Aristotle

Ideals



Empirical

The Medieval Mindset

(5th-15th c.)

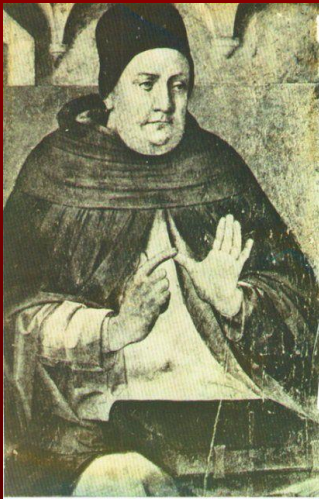
- Predestinationism
 - *Nature*
 - *Society*
- Foundationalism (Authority)
 - *Scripture*
 - *The Church*
- Emphasis on human depravity
- Mysticism
 - *Supernatural knowledge*
 - *Supernatural change*



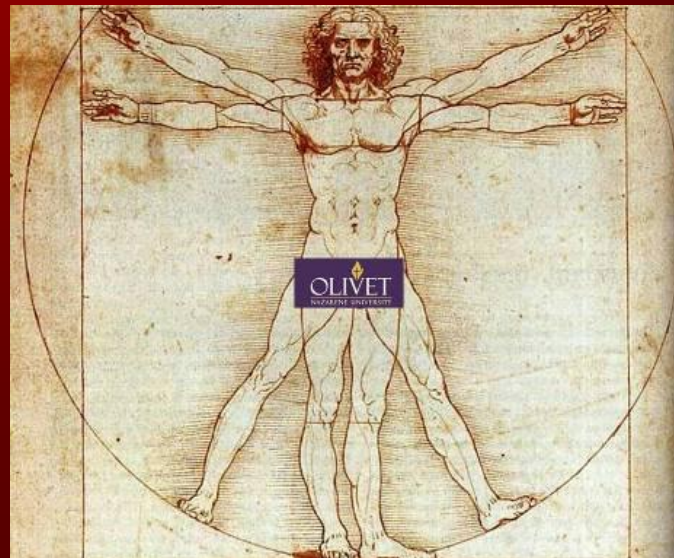
St. Augustine
(354-430)

Important Developments

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



St. Thomas Aquinas
(1225-74)

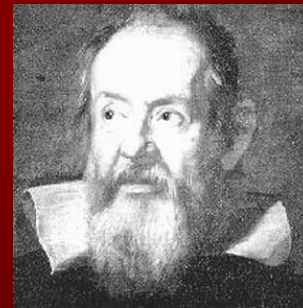


Important Developments

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

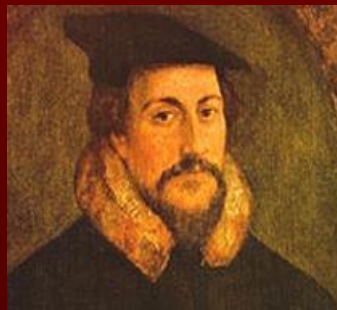


Martin
Luther
(1483-1546)

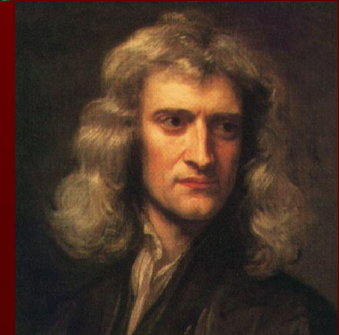


Galileo
(1564-1642)

John
Calvin
(1509-1564)



Sir Isaac
Newton
(1642-1727)



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

- Multiple translations (16th 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 (18th c.)
- Archeological discoveries (19th-20th c.)

Growing Skepticism

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



Descartes
(1596-1650)



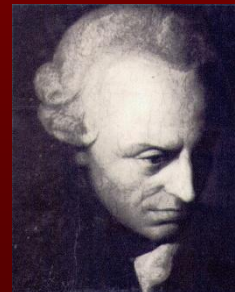
Leibniz
(1646-1716)



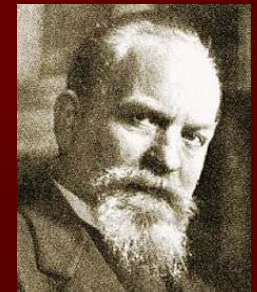
Locke
(1632-1704)



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.

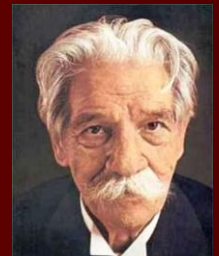
The Big Challenges

(19th c.)

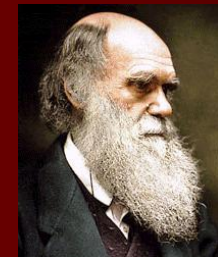
- Modern Higher (Historical) Criticism
 - *Life of Jesus*
 - *Quest for the Historical Jesus*
- Evolution
 - *Historicity of the text*
 - *“Survival of the fittest”*
 - *Incarnation and atonement*
- Protestant liberalism
 - *“God-consciousness”*
 - *“Demythologizing” the Bible*



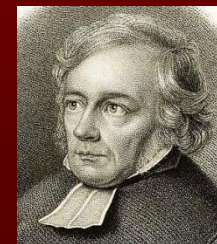
Strauss
(1808-74)



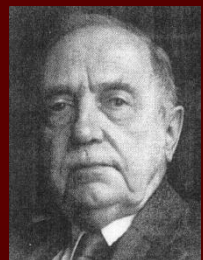
Schweitzer
(1875-1965)



Darwin
(1809-82)



Schleiermacher
(1768-1834)

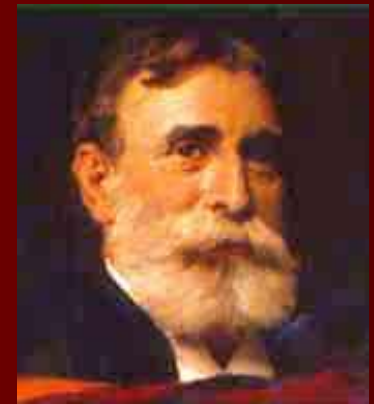


Bultmann
(1884-1976)

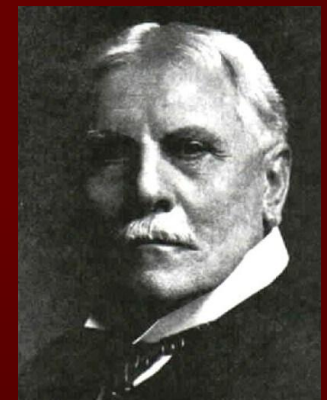
REACTION : Fundamentalism

(late 19th – early 20th 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)

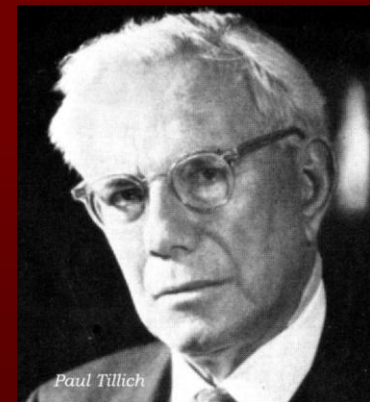
REACTION : Neo-Orthodoxy

(early to middle 20th 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



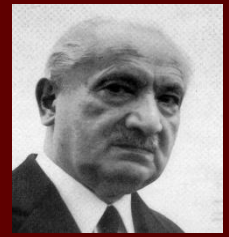
Barth
(1886-1968)



Tillich
(1886-1965)

The Move toward Subjectivism

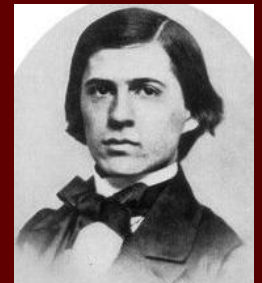
- Existentialism (late 19th – middle 20th c.)
 - Truth is a matter of inner consciousness, not empirical observation.
- Pragmatism (late 19th – early 20th c.)
 - Peirce
 - All beliefs are reducible to feelings and empirical observations.
 - Abduction: We reason to the best possible explanation in the 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)

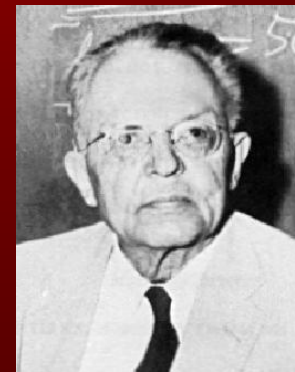
Logical Positivism

(mid-20th 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)

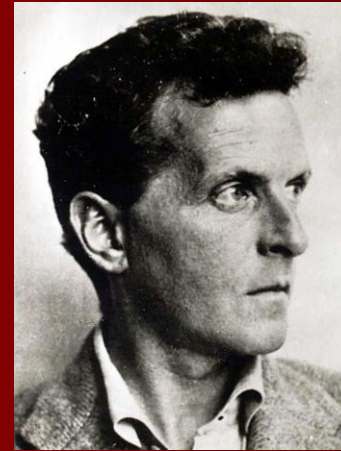


Ayer
(1910-1989)

Postmodernism

(mid to late 20th c.)

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



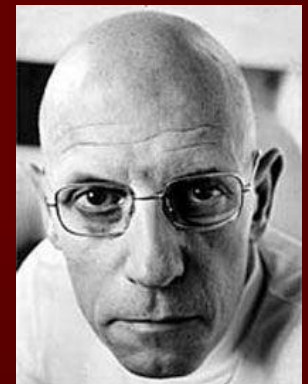
Wittgenstein
(1889-1951)



Kuhn
(1922-96)



Derrida
(1930-2004)

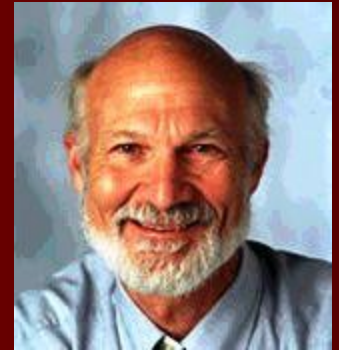


Foucault
(1926-84)

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)*

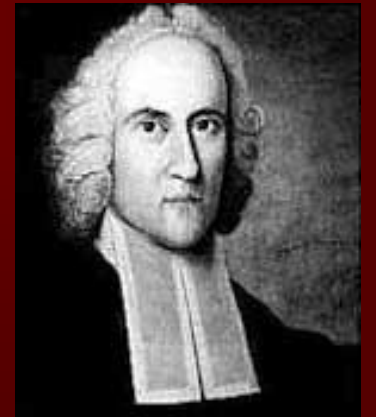
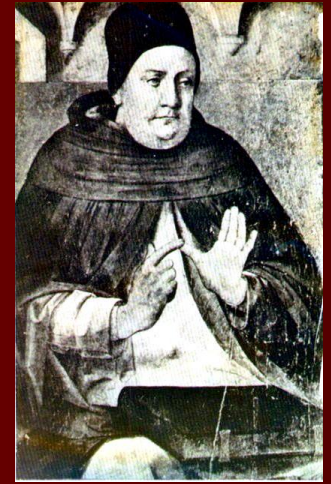
- Post-foundationalism

***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.