

theological turnings

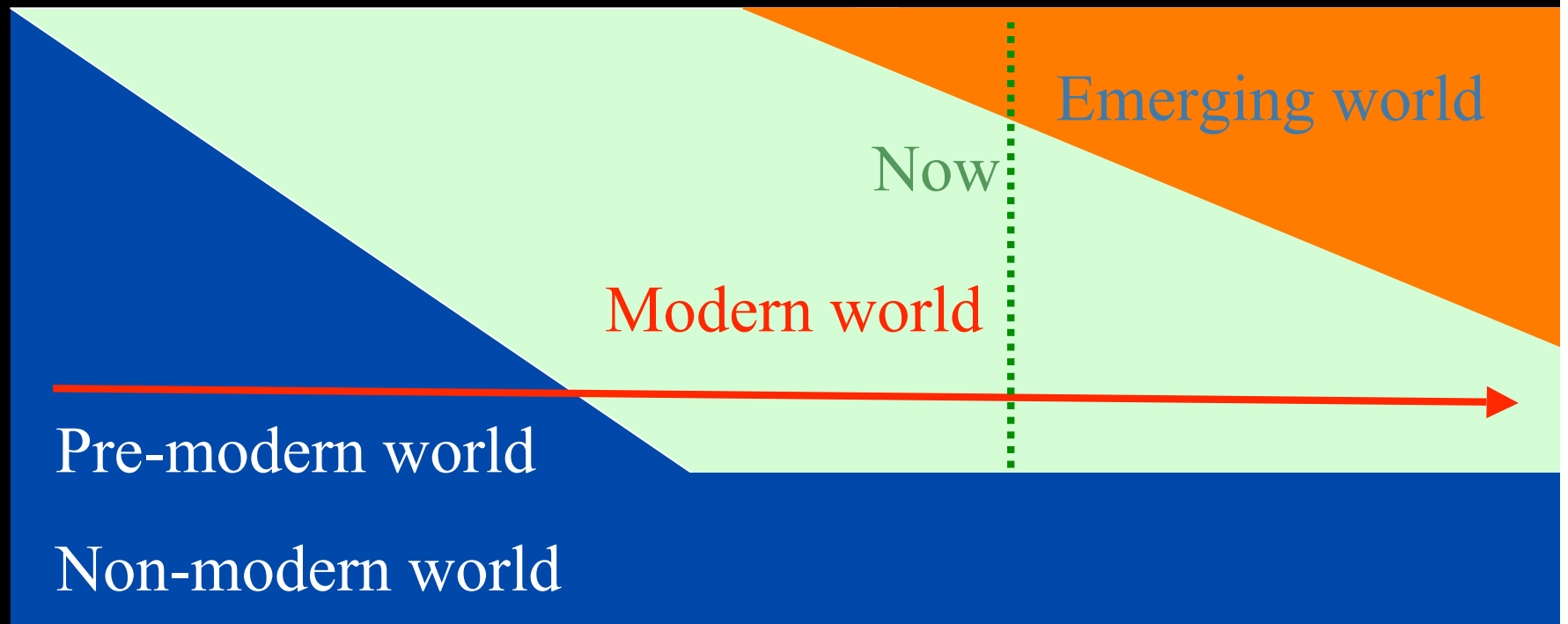
From John 21 ...

Do you truly love me?

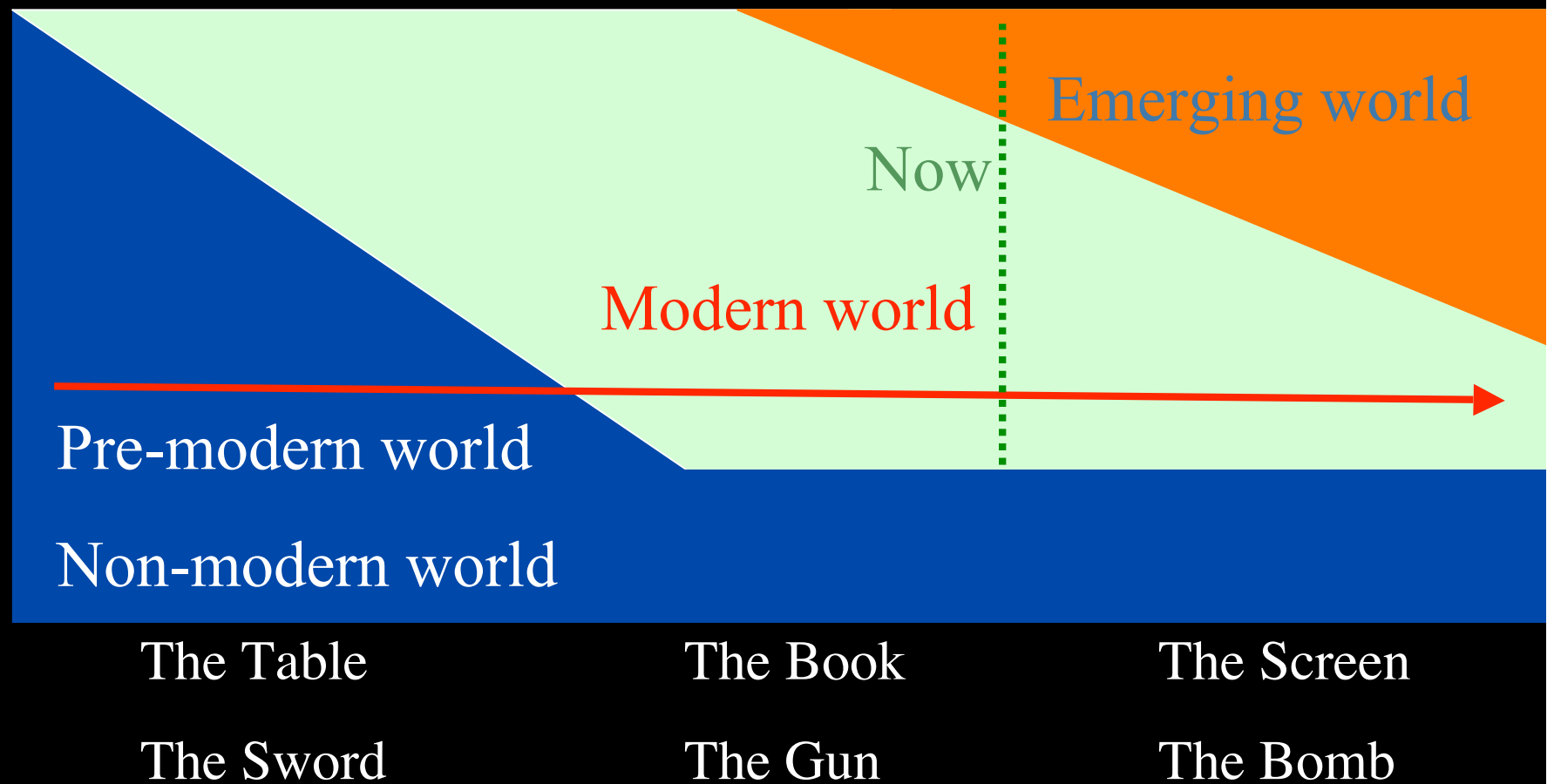
What is that to you?

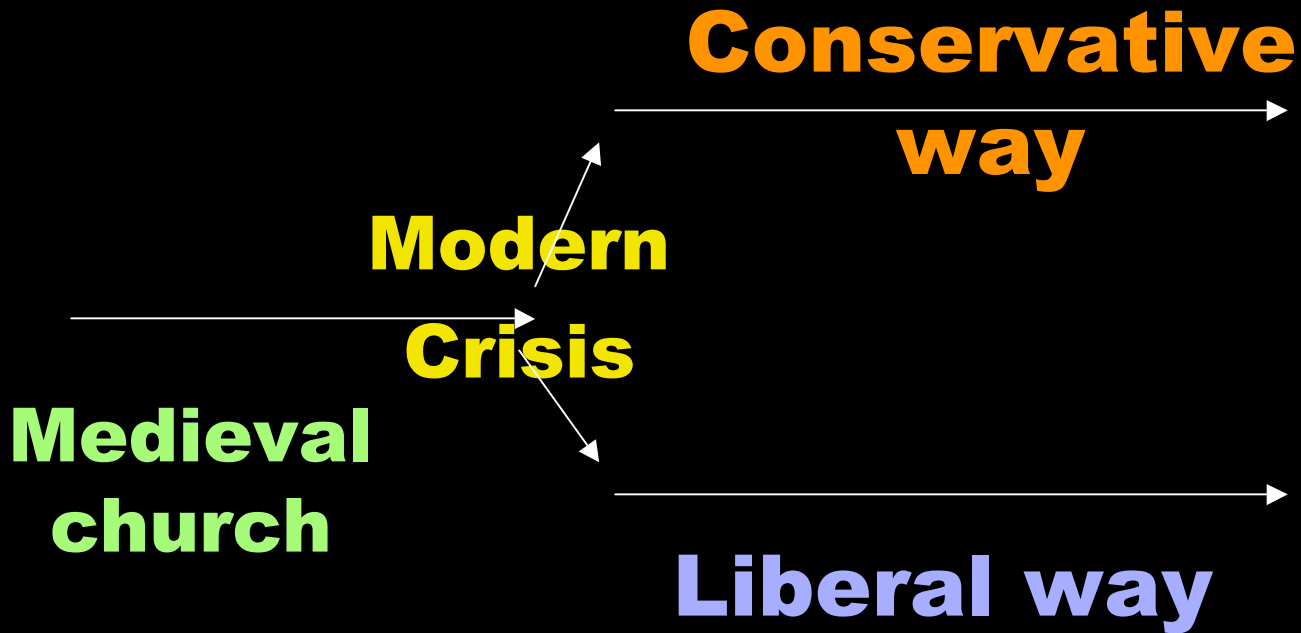
You follow me.

Consider that we live in at least three worlds.

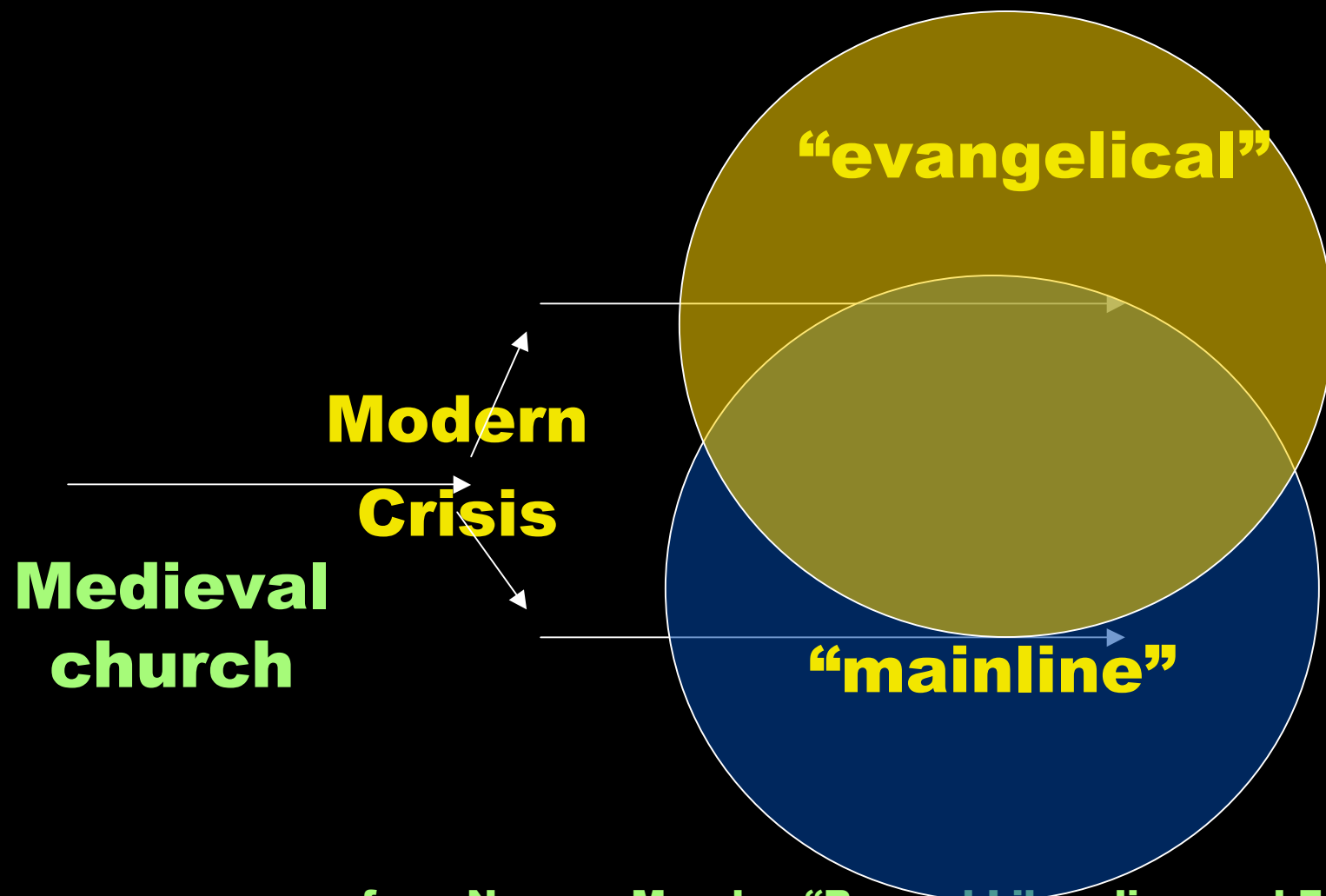


Consider that we live in at least three worlds.



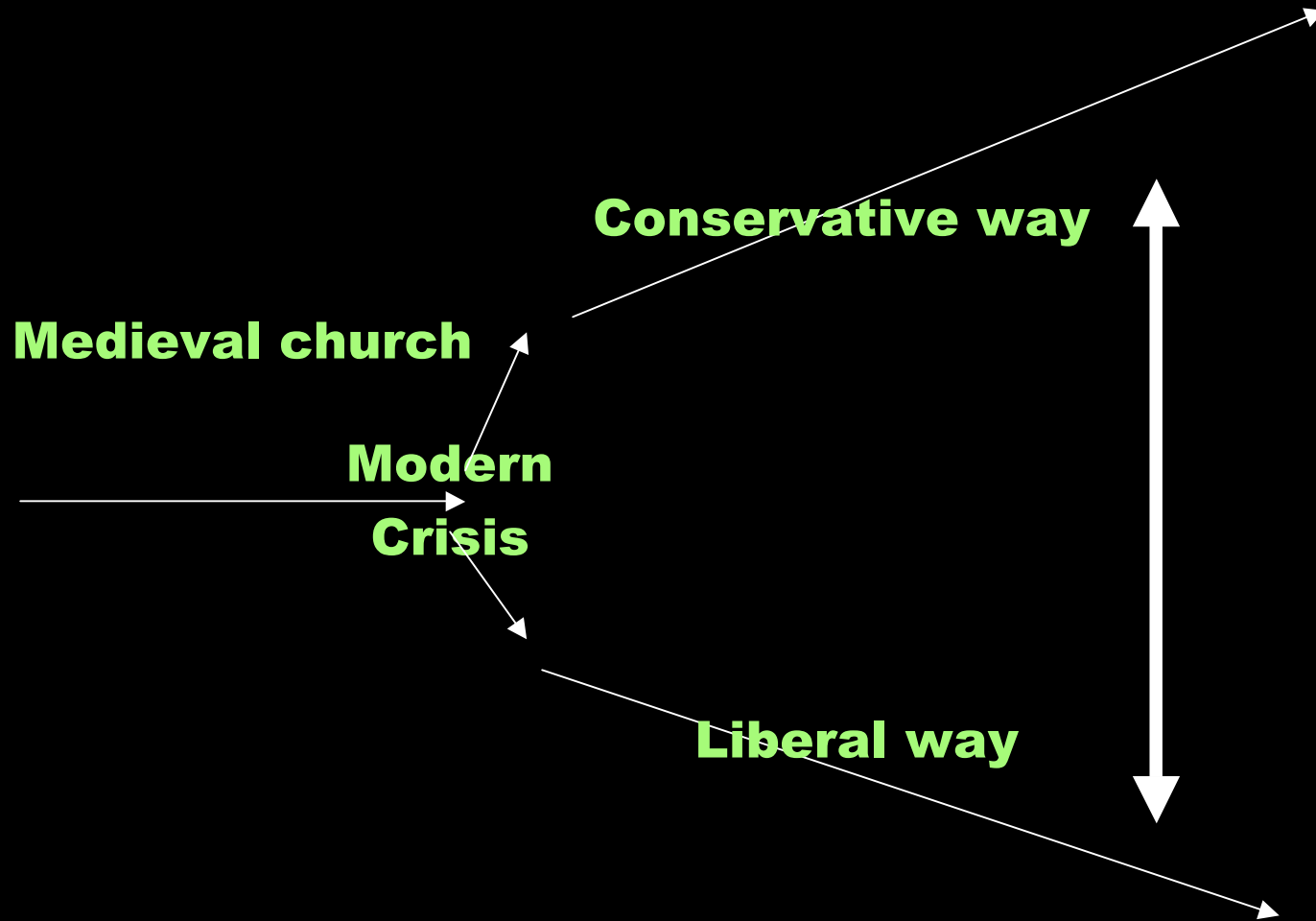


from Nancey Murphy, "Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism"

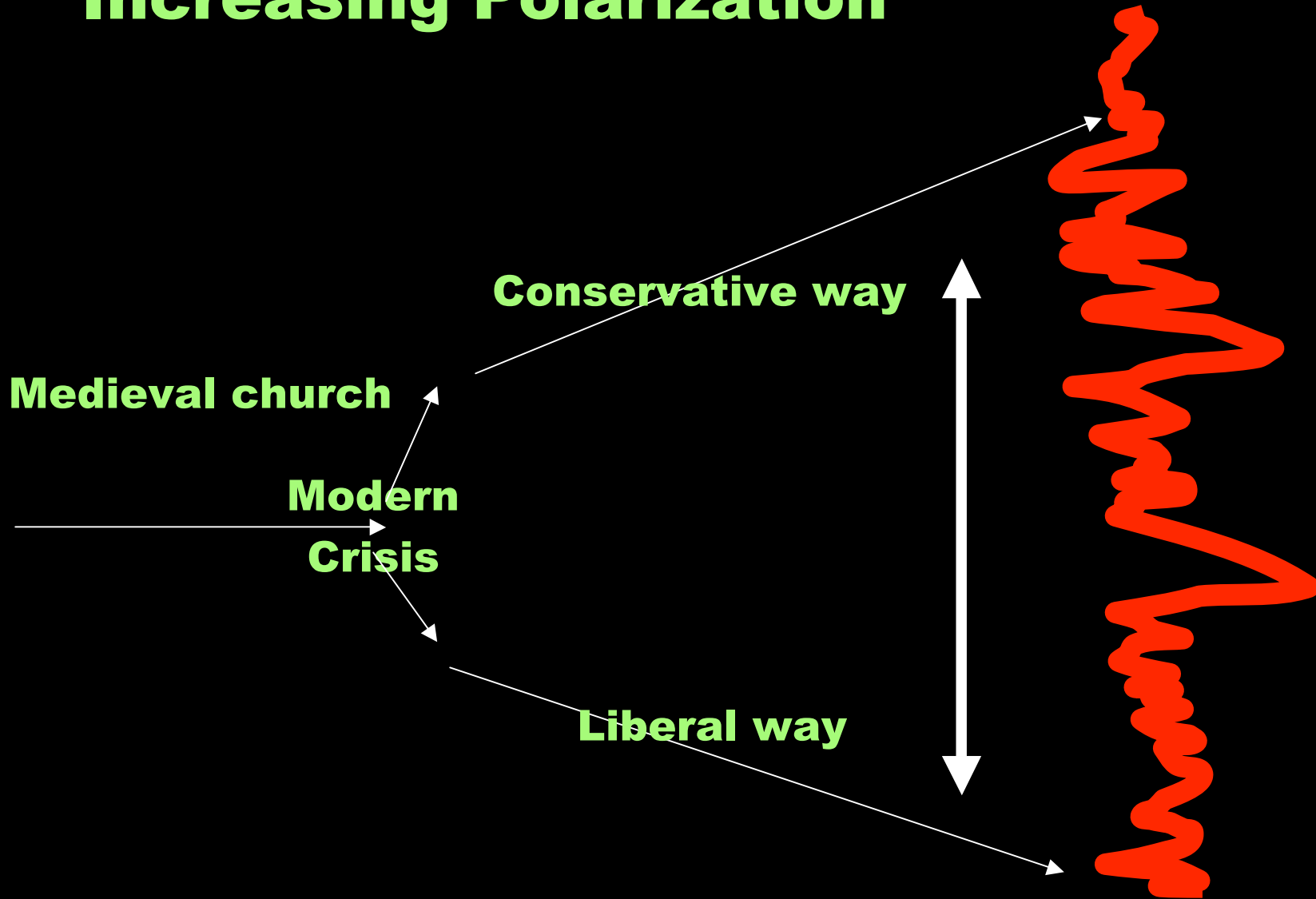


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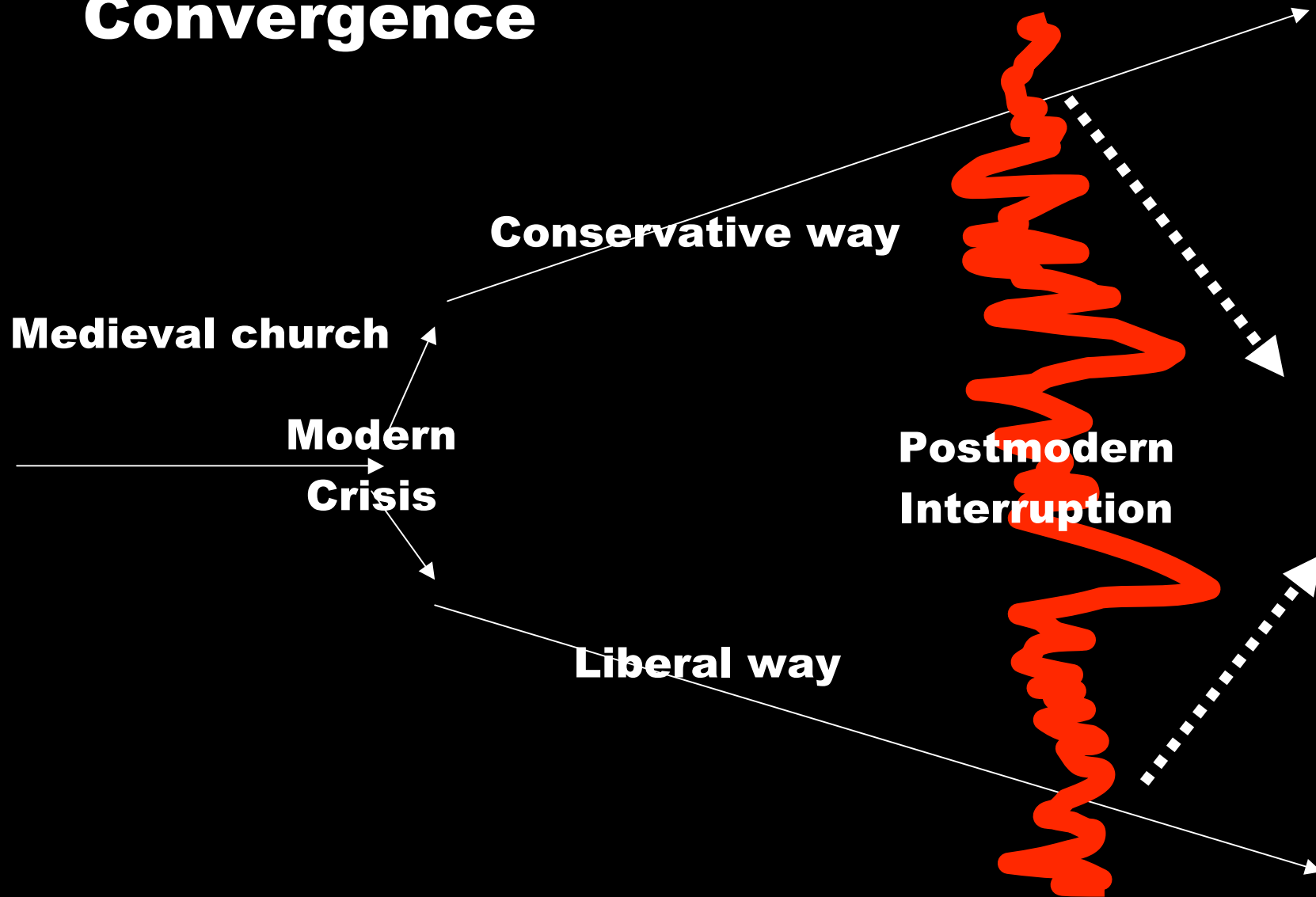
Increasing Polarization

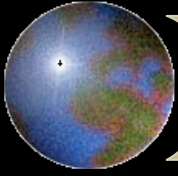


Increasing Polarization



The Post-Liberal, Post-Evangelical Convergence





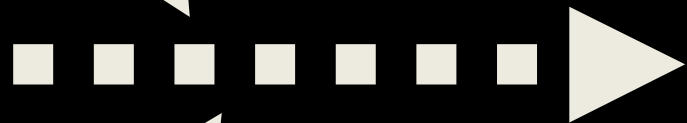
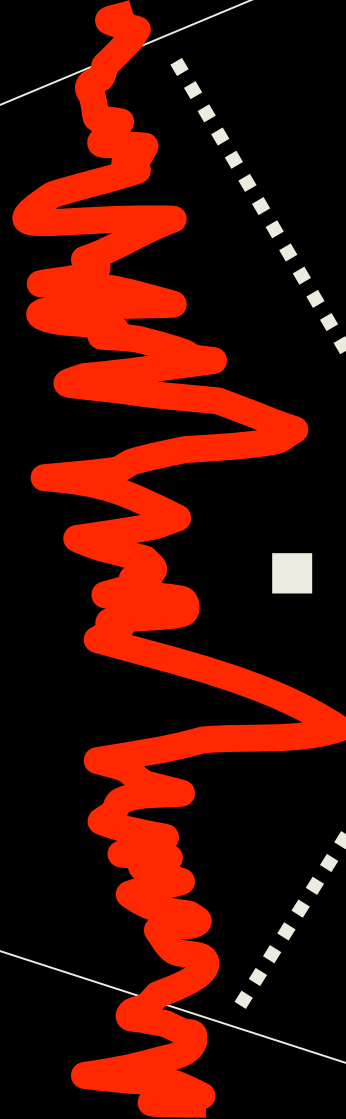
**Modern
Crisis**

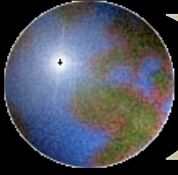
Conservative way

Liberal way

**A Generous
Orthodoxy?**

**A Missional
Church?**

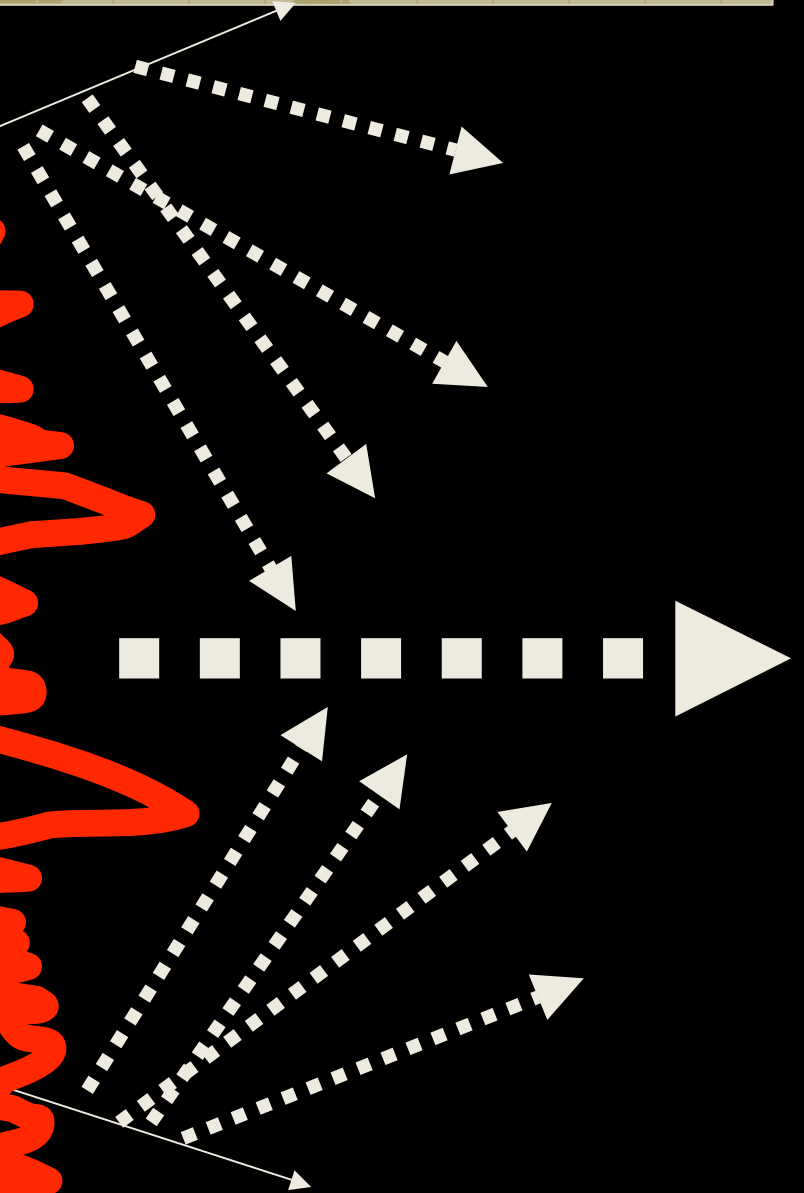
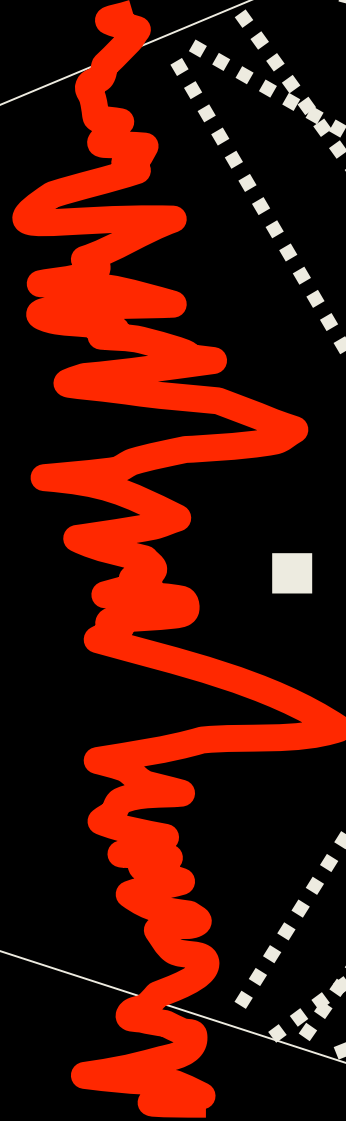




**Modern
Crisis**

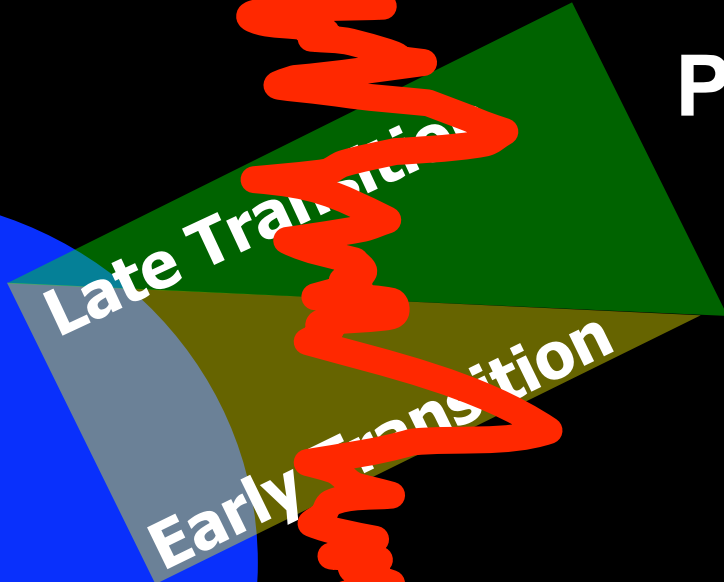
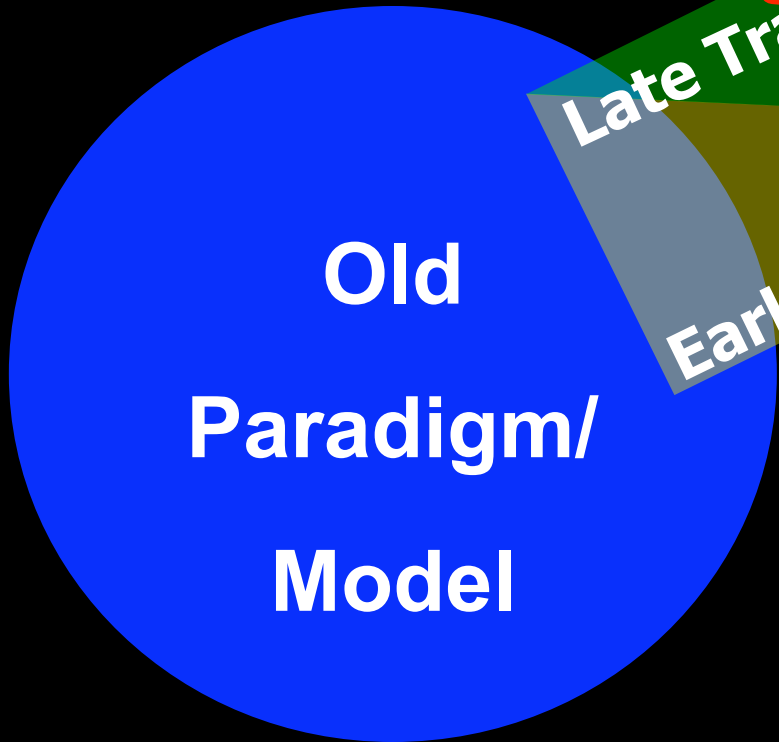
Conservative way

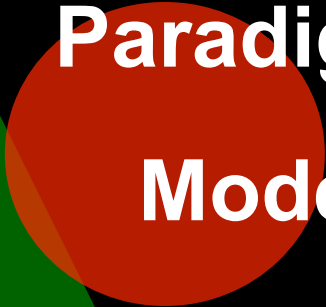
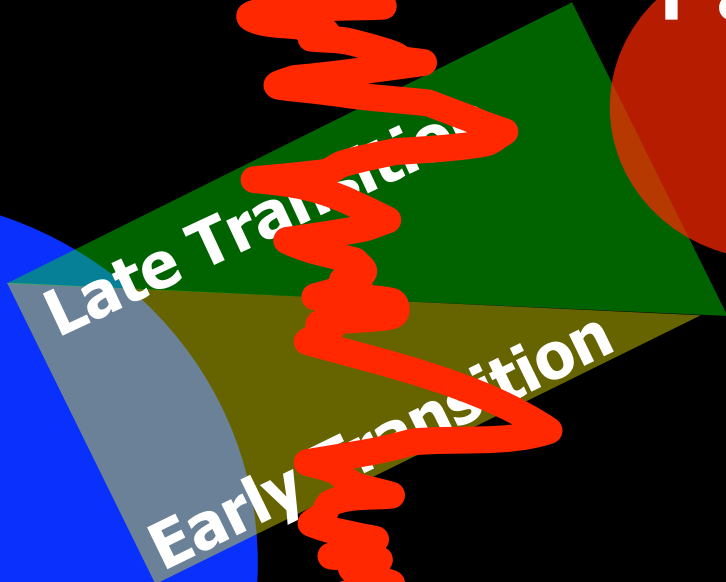
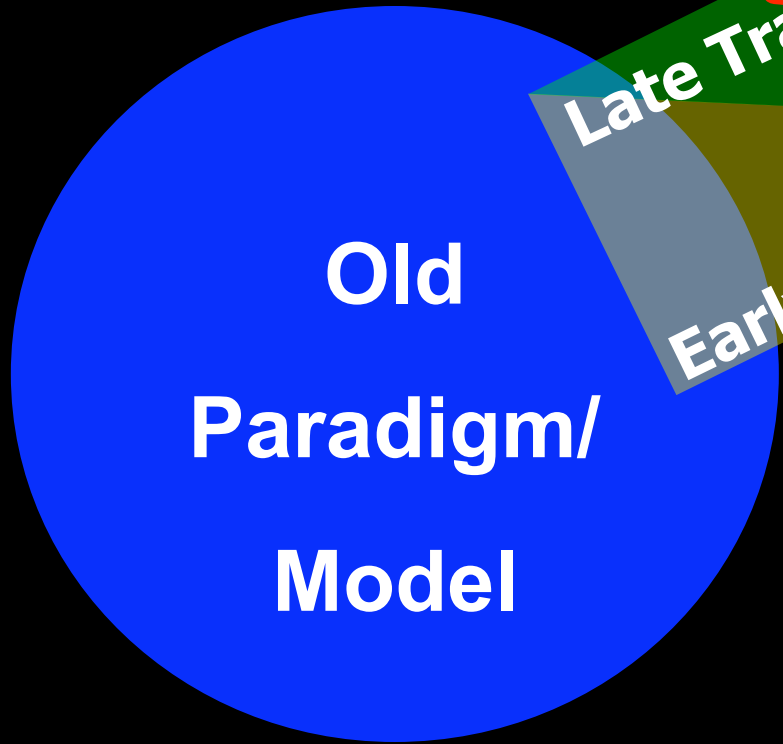
Liberal way

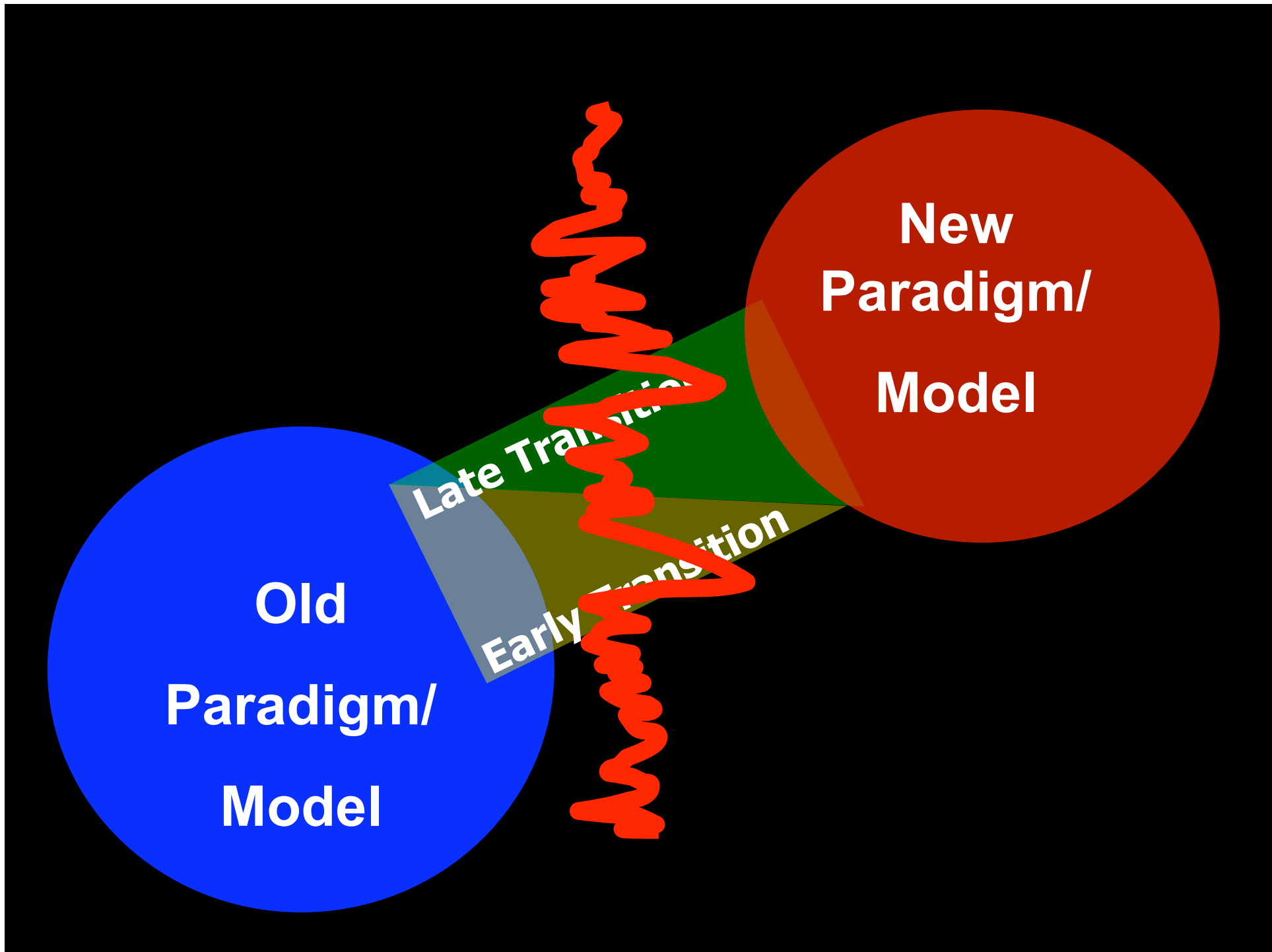


PACKAGING VERSUS SUBSTANCE ...

- 1. There's a problem.***
- 2. It must be a **marketing** problem.**
- 3. It must be a **style** or branding problem.**
- 4. It must be a **packaging** or form problem (cassettes, CD's, MP3's)**
- 5. It couldn't be a **substance** problem ... could it?**







**Old
Paradigm/
Model**

**New
Paradigm/
Model**

Late Transition

Early Transition

Assumptions:

- 1. Not all change is good. Neither is all resistance to change.**
- 2. Resisting change changes the resister. Being resisted changes the change agent. Change is therefore a dance that challenges everyone. The dance can become a fight ...**
- 3. Christian faith has been extremely successful at negotiating transitions in the past. The church has always had “an emerging edge.”**

- 4. Change means stress, and under stress people often behave badly. So - change provides an opportunity to practice virtue. *Being “right” in the wrong way may be more dangerous than being wrong in the right way.***
- 5. It is better to adequately understand something before attacking or opposing it.**
- 6. The Holy Spirit is with us giving us discernment, AND our own psychology is with us, providing static.**
- 7. Dangers seldom come in one's, so we must not lean on our own understanding, but rather we must trust the Lord....**

8. How can we avoid the kind of excessive seriousness that can lead to viciousness and violence? Humility, humor, humus (down-to-earth-ness) ...

A humorous interlude:

Why beer is better than religion ...

Why Beer is Better than Religion

1. No one will kill you for not drinking Beer.
2. Beer doesn't tell you how to have sex.
3. Beer has never caused a major war.
4. They don't force Beer on minors who can't think for themselves.
5. When you have a Beer, you don't knock on people's doors trying to give it away.
6. Nobody's ever been burned at the stake, hanged, or tortured over his brand of Beer.
7. You don't have to wait 2000+ years for a second Beer.
8. There are laws saying Beer labels can't lie to you.
9. You can prove you have a Beer.
10. If you've devoted your life to Beer, there are groups to help you stop.

Note: Theological (and philosophical) turnings are important.

But so are sociological turnings ...
political turnings ... economic turnings
... technological turnings.

In your context, the latter turnings may
be more important than the former, or
inseparable from it.

theological turnings

Turning 1: What is theology?

A systematic outline of truth, in the form of propositions extracted from the Biblical text through technique, to create a timeless “Biblical world view.”

Turning 1: What is theology?

A systematic outline of truth, in the form of propositions extracted from the Biblical text through technique, to create a timeless “Biblical world view.”

Or: An ongoing creative enterprise of making models of the universe based on beliefs about God.

Turning 1: Theology as model-making

A system of metaphors

Respecting differences

Holding alternatives in simultaneity

**Valuing history - a succession of
metaphorical centers, a vast
repertoire of metaphors**

Emerging theologies aim to be ...

coherent (hanging together, making sense when its many parts are integrated)

contextual (sensitive to its cultural and historic situation)

conversational (never attempting to be the last word, and thus silence other voices, but rather inviting ongoing dialogue in the search for truth)

comprehensive (relating to all of life)

From *Church Dogmatics* Vol 1, book 1, page 76-7 (1932...at the dawning of a decade of terror for which the church's theology and theologians, including pastors, were woefully unprepared):

“How disastrously the Church must misunderstand itself if it can imagine that theology is the business of a few theoreticians who are specially appointed for the task

Again, how disastrously the Church must misunderstand itself if it can imagine that theological reflection is a matter for quiet situations and periods that suit and invite contemplation, a kind of peace-time luxury

As though the venture of proclamation did not mean that the Church permanently finds itself in an emergency! As though theology could be done properly without reference to this constant emergency! Let there be no mistake. Because of these distorted ideas about theology, and dogmatics in particular, there arises and persists in the life of the Church a lasting and growing deficit for which we cannot expect those particularly active in this function to supply the needed balance. The whole Church must seriously want a serious theology if it is to have a serious theology.”

(from *Dogmatics in Outline*, 1946, lectures given in the ruins after the war in Bonn, at 7am, “always after we had sung a psalm or a a hymn to cheer us up.”)

“Dogmatics is the science in which the Church, in accordance with the state of its knowledge at different times, takes account of the content of its proclamation critically, that is, by the standard of Holy Scripture and under the guidance of its Confessions.”

Discipleship is not limited to what you can understand - it must transcend all comprehension. Plunge into the deep waters beyond your own understanding.... Bewilderment is the true comprehension. Not to know where you are going is the true knowledge. In this way Abraham went forth from his father, not knowing where he was going. You cannot find it in yourself, so you must let [God] lead you as though you were a blind man. Not the work which you choose, not the suffering you devise, but the road which is contrary to all that you choose or contrive or desire - that is the road you must take. - Martin Luther, *quoted in The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

FOOTNOTE TO ALL PRAYERS"

He whom I bow to only knows to whom I bow
When I attempt the ineffable Name, murmuring Thou,
And dream of Pheidian fancies and embrace in heart
Symbols (I know) which cannot be the thing Thou art.
Thus always, taken at their word, all prayers
blaspheme,
Worshipping with frail images a folk-lore dream,
And all men in their praying, self-deceived, address
The coinage of their own unquiet thoughts, unless
Thou in magnetic mercy to Thyself divert
Our arrows, aimed unskilfully, beyond desert;

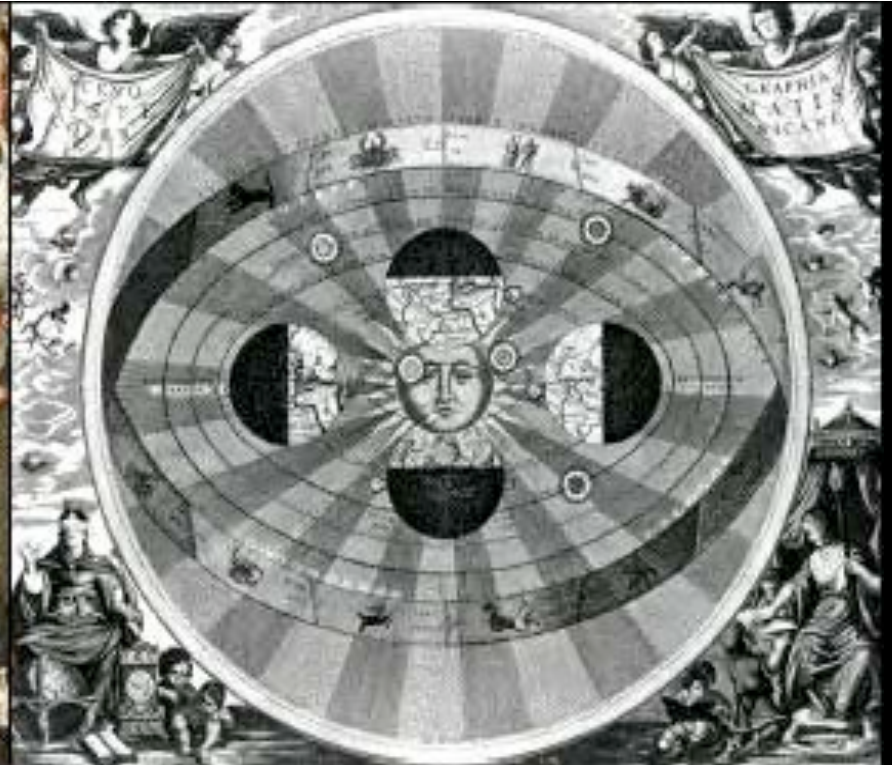
And all men are idolators, crying unheard
To a deaf idol, if Thou take them at their
word.

Take not, oh Lord, our literal sense. Lord,
in Thy great,
Unbroken speech our limping metaphor
translate.

--C.S.Lewis

theological turnings

Turning 2: What is the gospel?



Mary Evans Picture Library

What's at the center of the gospel - 4 spiritual laws? A solution to the problem of original sin? A message of the kingdom of God? The need to say something called "the sinner's prayer?" Evasion of justice or seeking of justice? Being nice?

One dominant American version of the gospel is centered in a theory of atonement developed in the 11th and 12th centuries. It is heavily Calvinist (even for Wesleyans) ...

Another dominant American version is institutional, and often boils down to ... go to church and be good.

Six Atonement Theories (Metaphor, Enemy)

- A. Ransom/Fishhook - vs. the Devil
- B. Christus Victor - vs. Death, the devil
- C. Penal substitution - vs. Wrath of God
- D. Moral Influence - vs. Human Pride, Sin
- E. Subversion of Empire - vs. Power, Tyranny, “redemptive” violence

Context: A. Slave market, B. underworld, C. court of heaven, D. human heart, E. human history

If a theory of atonement isn't central, what is?

Perhaps we don't need a single center?

Recentering or decentering or multicentering?

Could
the gospel of the kingdom
be the center of the gospel -
or better yet, the storyline of
the gospel?

Could the gospel be a narrative about the coming of the kingdom of God?

A SOCIAL/HISTORICAL REALITY

(You can't have a king without a kingdom)

A PERSONAL REALITY (You can't have a kingdom without a king.)

**Wesley's Synthesis: Social
Holiness**

SOCIAL WITHOUT PERSONAL =
IDEOLOGY

PERSONAL WITHOUT SOCIAL =
ESCAPISM

WE NEED A REAL KINGDOM
(social/public/historical) AND THE
“INTERIOR CASTLE” (personal)

ATONEMENT

KINGDOM

KINGDOM

ATONEMENT

Or ... ?

KINGDOM

Christ

ATONEMENT

Or ...

KINGDOM

Christ

AT-ONE-MENT = reconciliation

*(primarily a relational reality rather
than a forensic one)*

Seeking kingdom AND justice of God

This emerging understanding of the gospel leads to a radical ecclesiological turning ...

... where the church becomes at heart a disciple-making community, promoting personal and communal spiritual formation for global transformation.

theological turnings

Turning 3: Eschatology

What should we expect?

In light of our expectation, what
is our duty?

Turning 3: What should we expect?

Do we only have hope
beyond history?

Or only within history?

Or both within and beyond?

Turning 3:

What should we expect?

The old Eschatological Question: how do we get individual souls into heaven after they die?

1. Salvation of individuals or the church or the world?
2. Salvation of the church for or in spite of the world?
(Election)
3. Salvation from hell, from sin, from this present evil age?
4. Salvation of history or from history?
5. What is salvation anyway?
6. Will things get better, worse, or both?

Turning 3: Eschatology?

**“Eschatological Realism” and the theology
of hope**

Reversing the polarity of the universe?

Turning 3: What are we given?

The old Eschatological Assumption: the Bible gives us a blueprint for the end of the world. (Video is already shot.)

1. Or maybe it gives us an open future.
2. And maybe it gives us guidance by warnings and promises (cf Jonah)
3. Or maybe it tells about “the end of the age” then present so that we live in a post-eschatological age.

Turning 3: Eschatology?

A MINORITY REPORT:

**Apocalyptic Literature and the
Literature of the Oppressed
Transmillennial Eschatology**

**The destruction of Jerusalem as the
primary eschatological horizon for
Jesus and the apostles.**

Turning 3: Eschatology?

Somewhere between 0% and 100% of New Testament “apocalyptic” passages refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the end of an age centered in temple, sacrifice, priesthood, and holy city.

Turning 3: Eschatology?

**Are we a community of despair,
escape and abandonment ... or a
community of engagement,
transformation, and hope?**

**Do justice and reconciliation
ultimately lose in God's creation?**

theological turnings

Return of the Bible

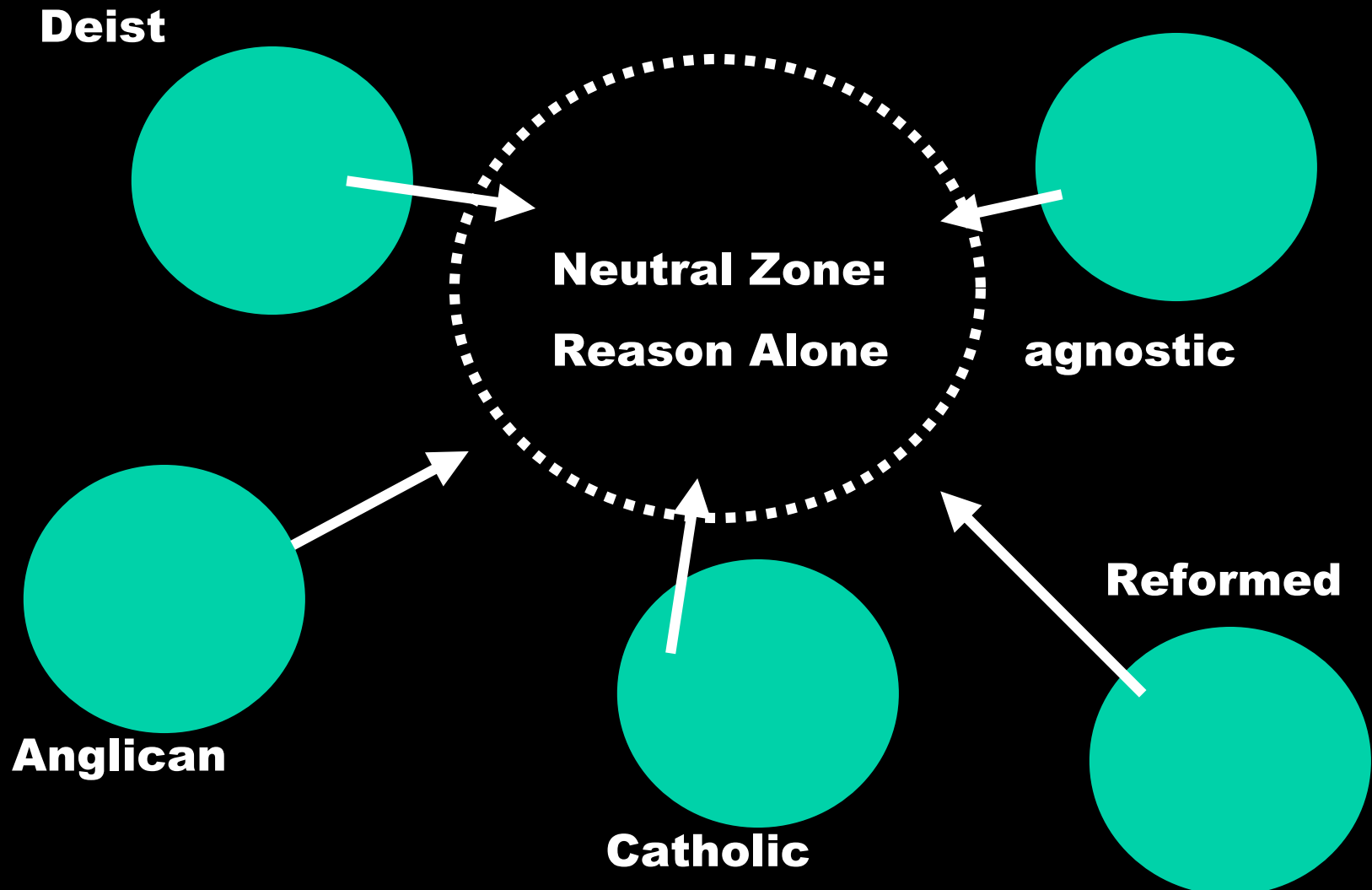
**Key words in a dominant
model (for or against):**

inerrant

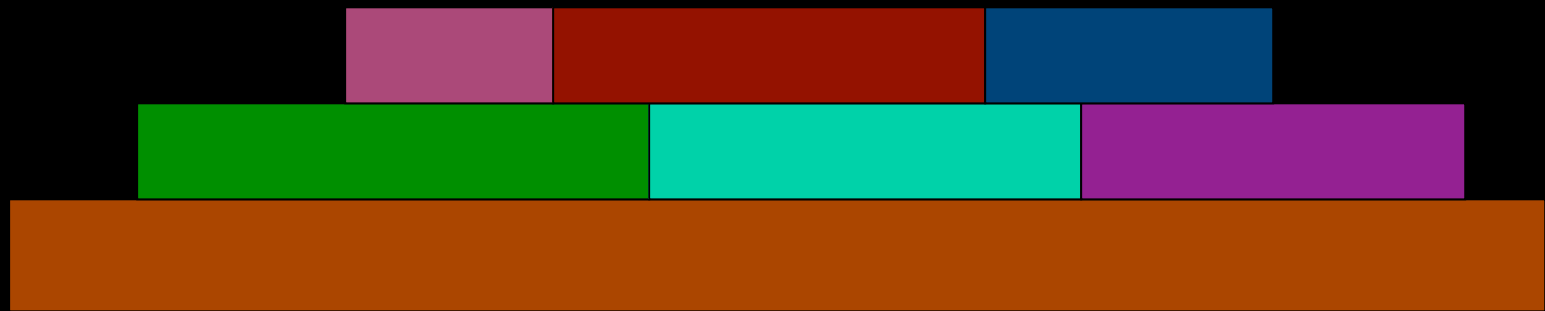
authoritative

foundational

The idea of a rational neutral zone

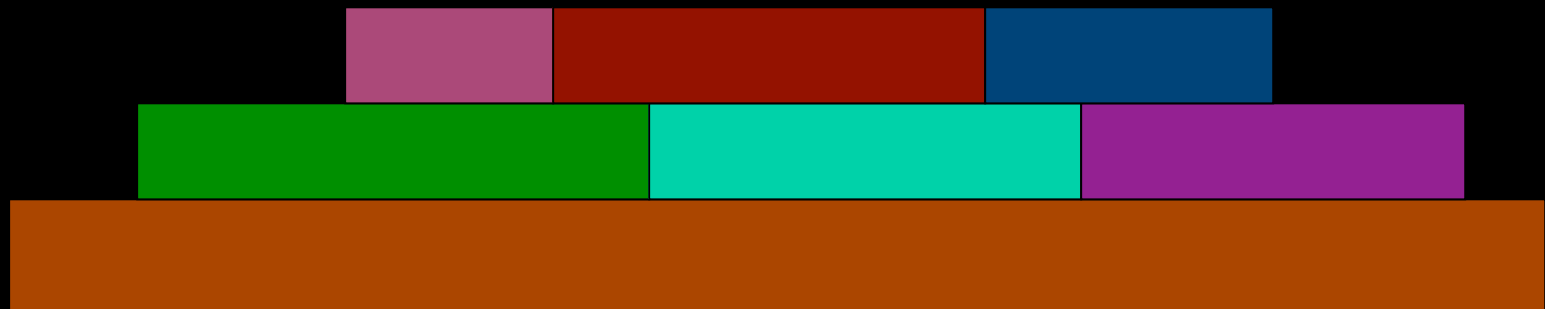


**Descartes' Dream:
Fight the enemy with the weapons
of the enemy.**



I doubt therefore I exist.

“A Discourse on Method”



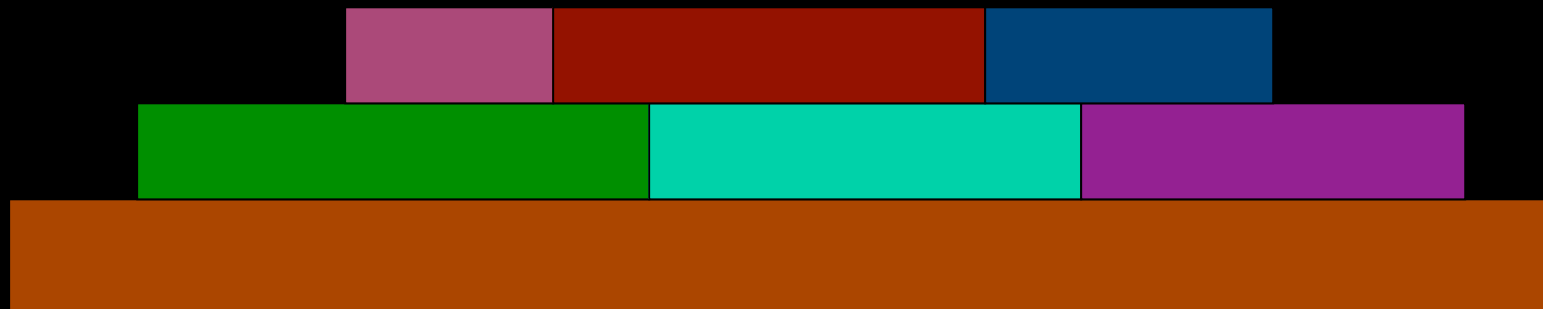
Foundationalist Neutral Zone:

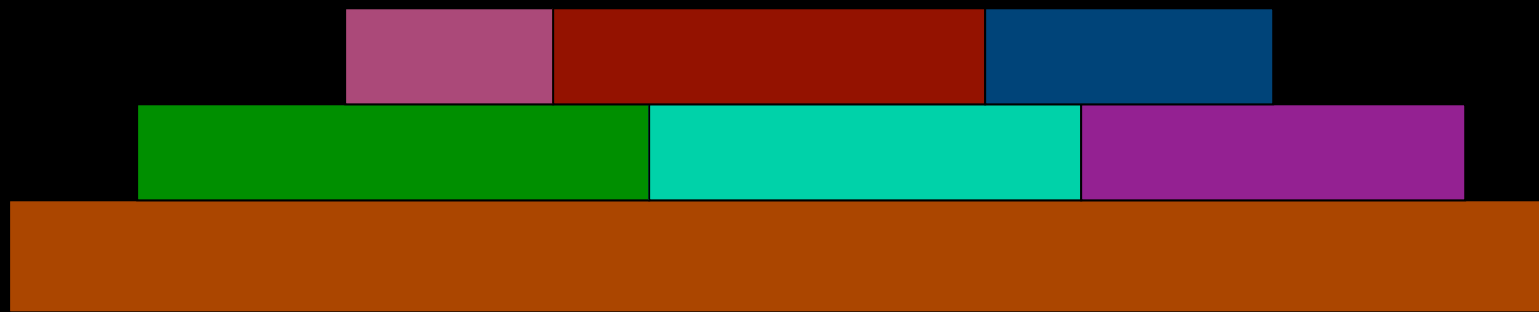
Knowledge is like a building or wall.

“Fundamental” Beliefs are established by research (doubt).

They must be “incorrigible.”

Certainty is built from the bottom up.

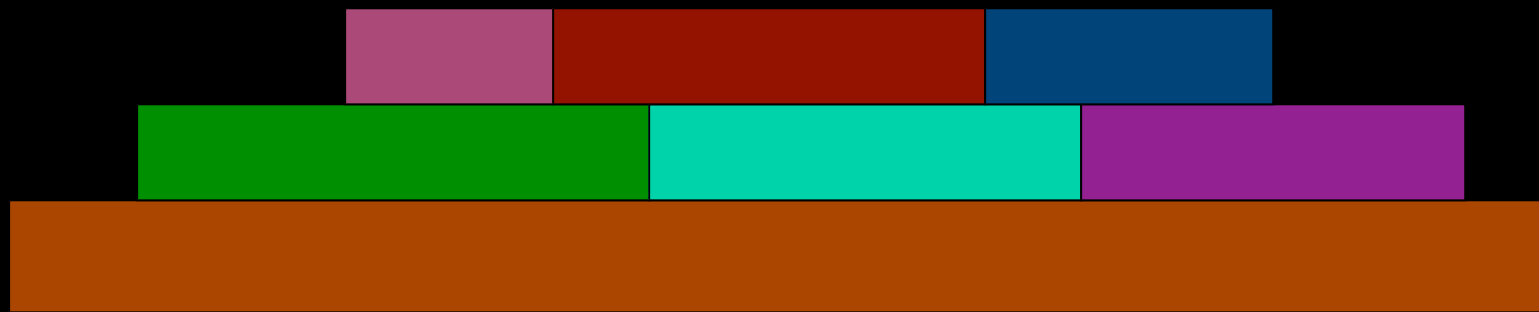




The “liberal” foundation: Assumptions of the modern (Enlightenment) mindset, with methodology of the modern mindset too.

The Scriptures must be screened and fit into the existing mindset. What doesn't fit (e.g. the miraculous) is discarded or minimized.

Ethics and aesthetics remain - religion becomes either reduced (limited to the realm of analysis or politics) or romanticized (segmented into the realm of feeling).

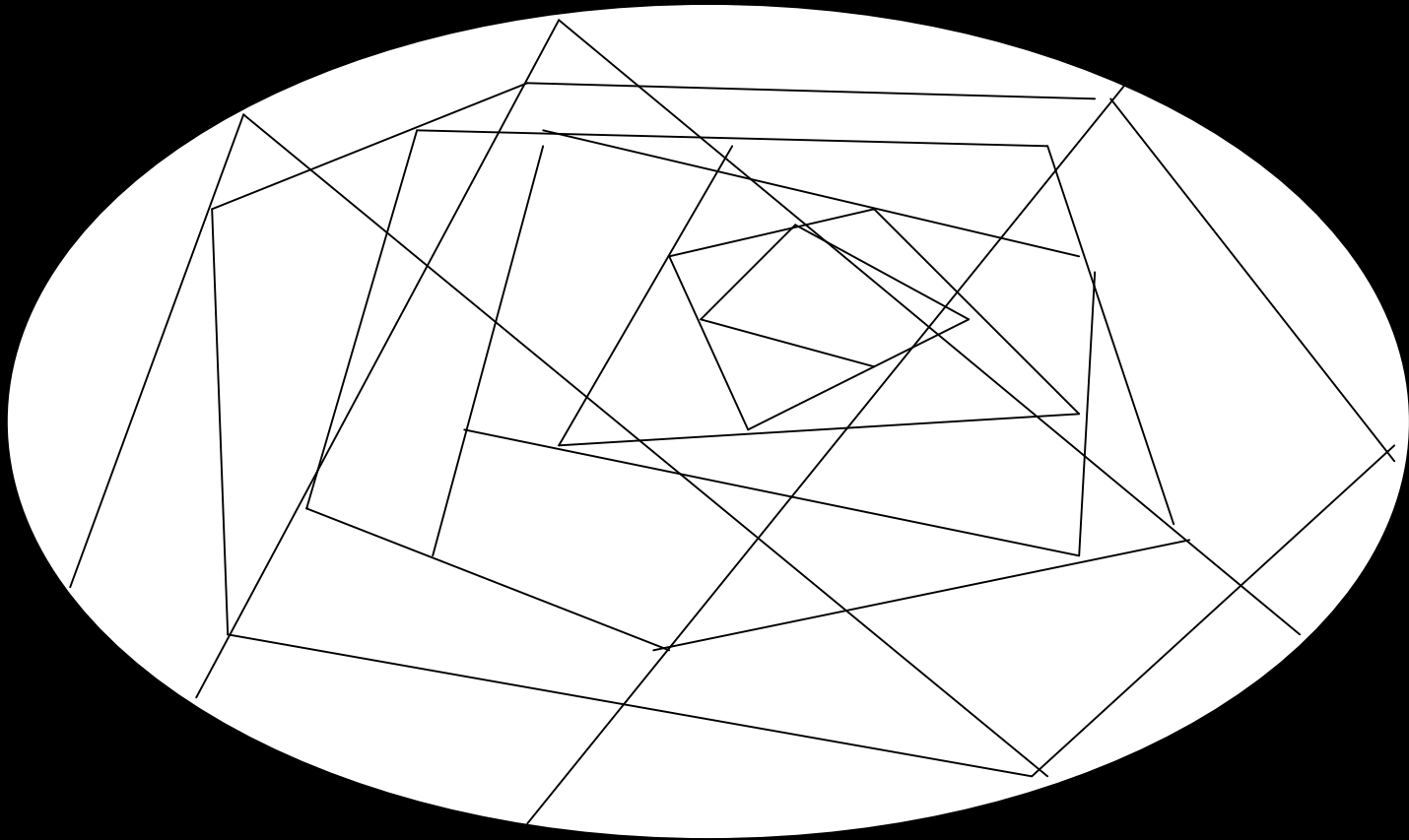


The “conservative” foundation: Methodology of the modern (Enlightenment) mindset. Assumptions of the ancient (premodern) mindset.

Abstract universal statements must be extracted from the Scriptures and organized into an absolutized ancient worldview. What doesn't fit (scientific discoveries, multi-vocality or tension in the text) is discarded or minimized.

Evangelism remains. Religion either abandons public square or seeks to dominate it.

Post-Newtonian World
Knowledge is like a web.
Beliefs are flexible, in dynamic tension,
and corrigible.



If the place where we look for ultimate truth is in a story and if (as is the case) we are still in the middle of the story, then it follows that we walk by faith and not by sight. If ultimate truth is sought in an idea, a formula, or a set of timeless laws or principles, then we do not have to recognize the possibility that something totally unexpected may happen... Future and past are governed by the same laws, the same principles, and the same realities. But if we find ultimate truth in a story that has not yet been finished, we do not have that kind of certainty. The certainty we have rests on the faithfulness of the one whose story it is. We walk by faith. (Newbigin, Proper Confidence, 14)

Scripture: Post-Foundationalist Categories.

A. Scripture as an art gallery (artifacts) helping us reconstruct the story we find ourselves in.

B. Scripture as a community-creating text to continue the story

C. Scripture as a “math book” - introducing the story’s problems.

D. Scripture as dialogue, not monologue or echo chamber.

Turning 4: Scripture's new value

New Metaphors:

Webs,

Rafts,

Flotillas,

Fabrics,

Case Studies,

Trajectory

Concern:

Certainty (absolutism) as **cancer of
colonialism ...**

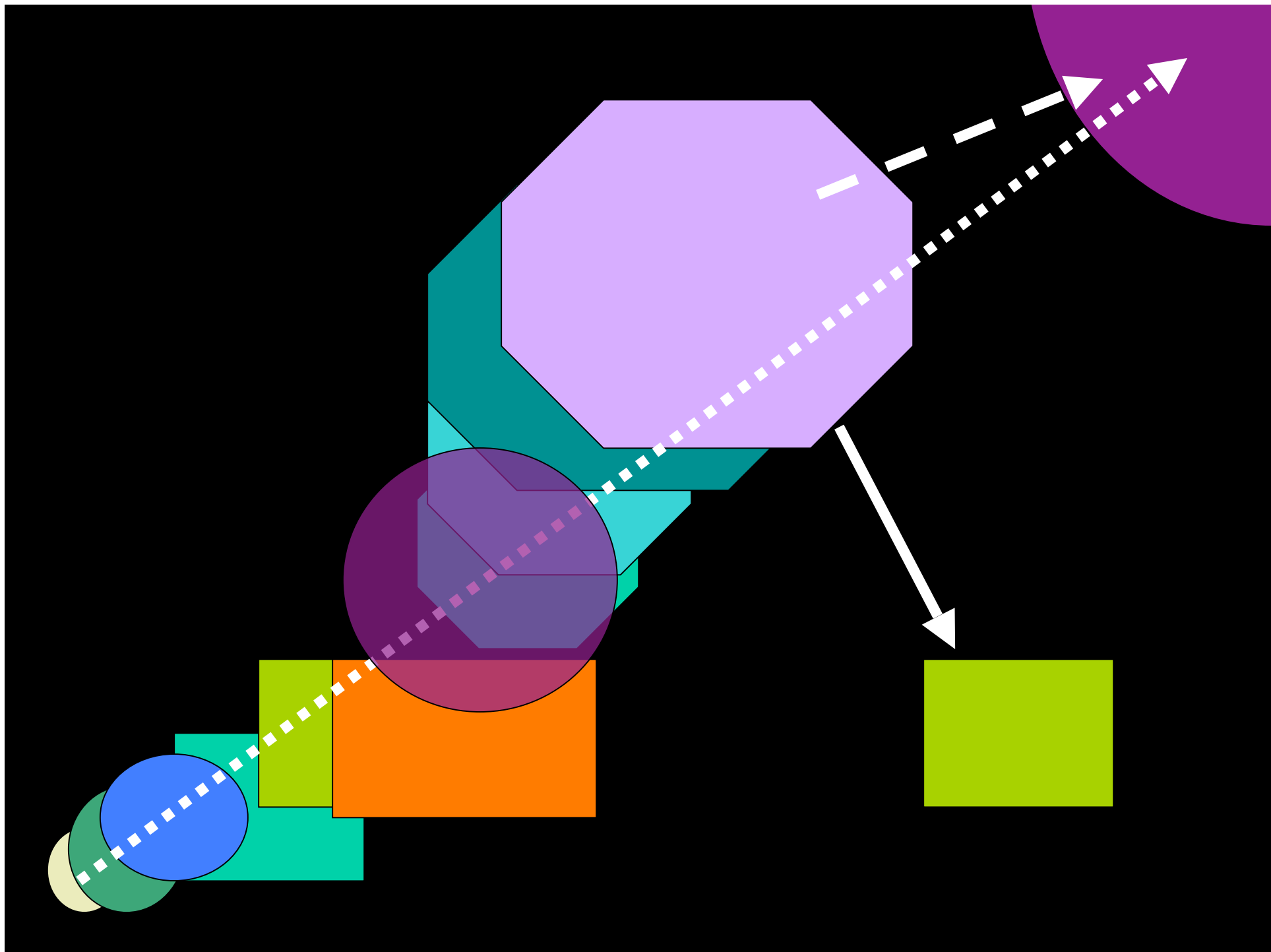
**Uncertainty (relativism) as
chemotherapy**

**Opportunistic infection of global
nuclear theocapitalist militarism**

In search of **a proper confidence ...**

Read the Bible ...

Narratively



Read the Bible ...

Narratively - Big picture, ongoing conversation

Missionally - call of Abraham

Literarily - genre, contexts

Communally - past, present, marginalized

Politically - God in human affairs

Ethically - Interpretation as moral act

Recursively - Each reading enriched by previous

Expectantly/Humbly - to encounter the Living God

What brings our congregation together?

“Rightness” of our interpretation of Bible

Personality of pastor

Heritage, graveyard

Relationships - including families

Mission

Denominational identity (including radio-orthodoxy)

Practices, ways of relating

Habit

Financial commitments

Worship/music style

The elephant in the room ...

**Religious Broadcasting as the
most powerful (stealth)
denomination and seminary.**

Turning 5: What kind of God?

Omnipotent

Omnipresent

Omniscient

Immutable

Impassible

Turning 5: What kind of God?

**Omnipotent - and/or Vulnerable and
Self-Giving**

Omniscient - and/or an open future?

Immutable - and/or relational/dynamic?

**Impassible - and/or incarnated,
compassionate, passionate?**

Turning 5: What kind of God?

The “New Trinitarianism”

- and the new science, where ultimate reality is relationship.**
- and narrative theology, where God not only is alive, but has a life, a story.**
- and perichoresis, the eternal circle dance of God....**

Turning 5: What kind of God?

Practical implications:

Does God inflict torture?

Does God endorse genocide?

Does God hate some people and love others? Who? Why?

How does God act toward enemies?

Does God care more about x than y?

Five Theological Turnings:

What is theology?

What is the gospel?

What do we expect, and what is our duty in light of our expectation?

How does Scripture serve the church and its mission?

What is God like? (Jewish, or Greek?)

Also ...

- **Inhabiting theological systems versus inhabiting communities of practice** (disciple formation).
- **Anthropology - dualism or nonreductive physicalism**
- **Ontology - dualism versus “hierarchy suspended from transcendence”**
 - **Role of violence - “redemptive violence,” “quiet in the land,” or active peacemaking?**

***-Resistance to Empire,
counter-imagination - or **divine
legitimization of Empire?*****

-Theology - imperial model?

**-Soteriology & Eschatology - leaving
history to empire**

**-Scripture/Authority - legitimizing
empire**

-God - Dominating Emperor?

APARTHEID MUSEUM

















Websites:

Brianmclaren.net

Emergent-uk.org

Amahoro.info

REMEMBER
JOHN WESLEY

*founder of Methodism
who served as curate
in the Parish of Wroot
during the years 1727-
1729 when his father,
Samuel Wesley was
the rector of Epworth.*

LORD LET ME NOT
LIVE TO BE USELESS

John Wesley's Covenant Prayer

to be used
early in January
each new year



I am no longer my own,
but yours.

Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you
will.

Put me to doing, put
me to suffering.

Let me be employed by you
or laid aside for you, exalted
for you or brought low for
you.

Let me be full, let me
be empty.

Let me have all things,
let me have nothing.

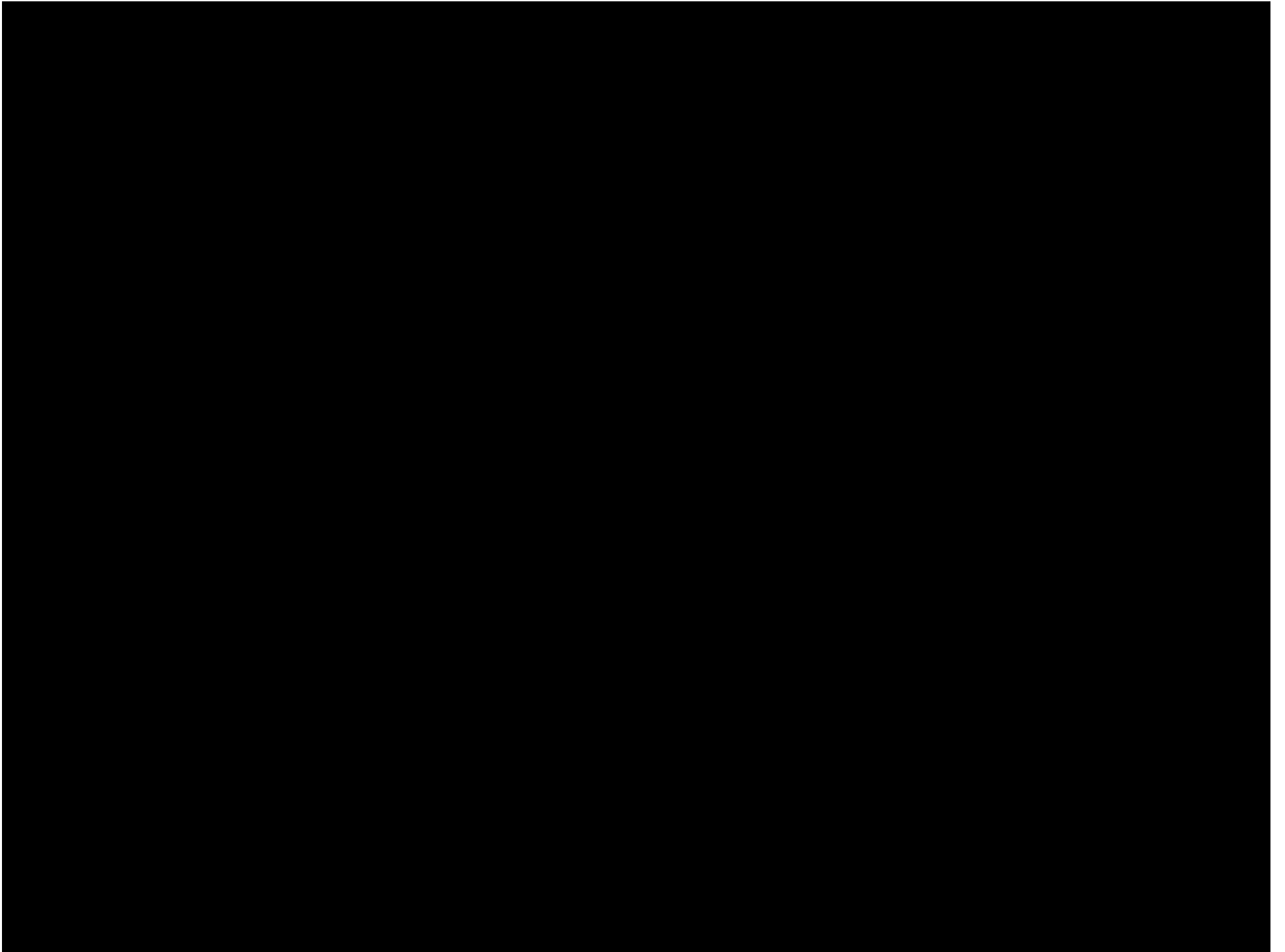
I freely and heartily
yield all things to your
pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and
blessed God, Father, Son,
and Holy Spirit,

you are mine, and I am
yours.

So be it.

And the covenant which I
have made on earth,
let it be ratified in
heaven. Amen.



theological turnings