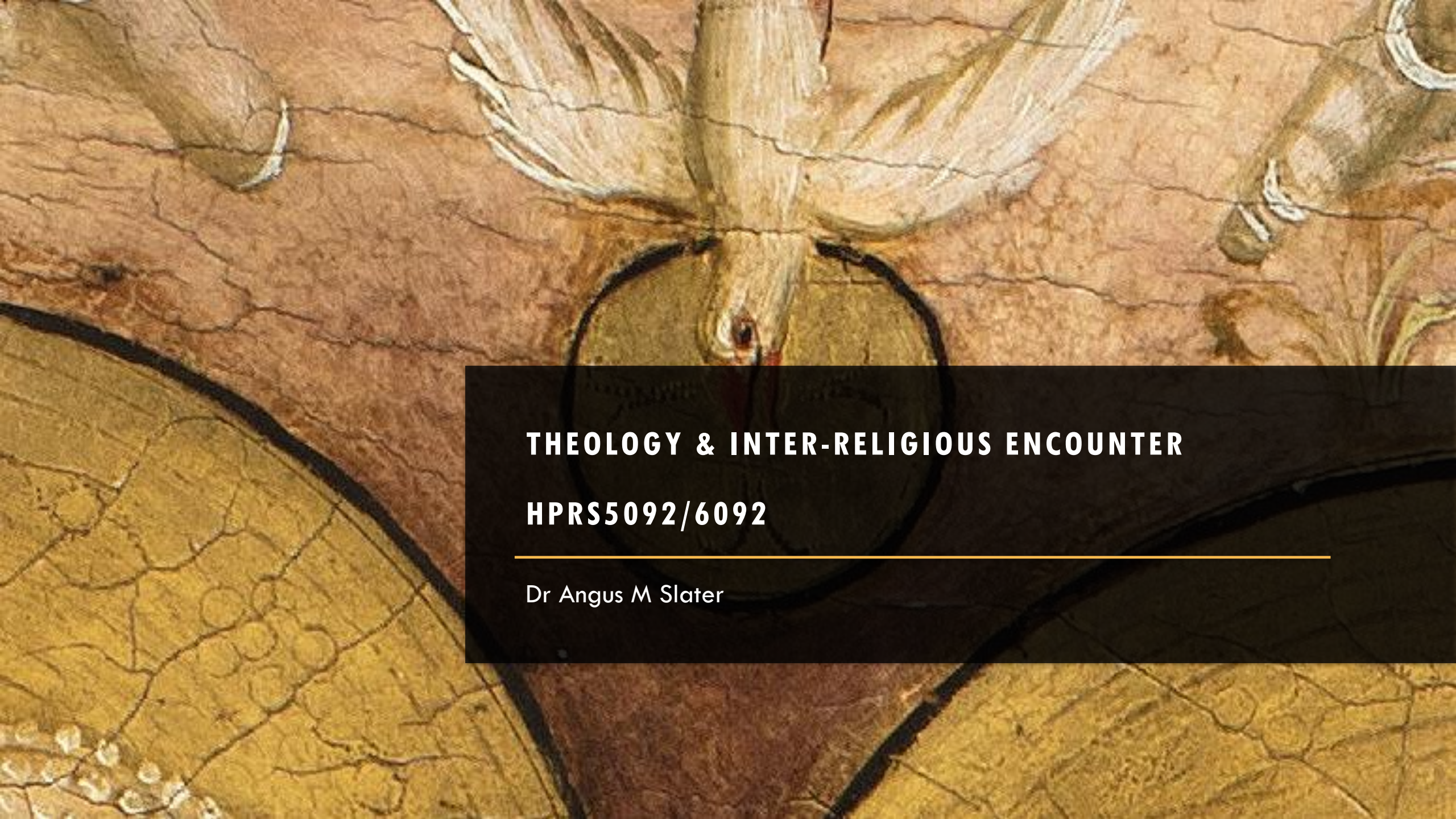




THEOLOGY & INTER-RELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER

HPRS5092/6092

Dr Angus M Slater

REVISION

In the previous section, we examined the definition of terms like “doctrine” and “truth” as well as how these terms have come to operate within the Christian tradition.

In doing so, we engaged with some etymology (the study of words) and with some differing conceptions of truth – the correspondence view, the relativist view of truth, and the pragmatic view of truth.

These two terms are vitally important for our following conversations.

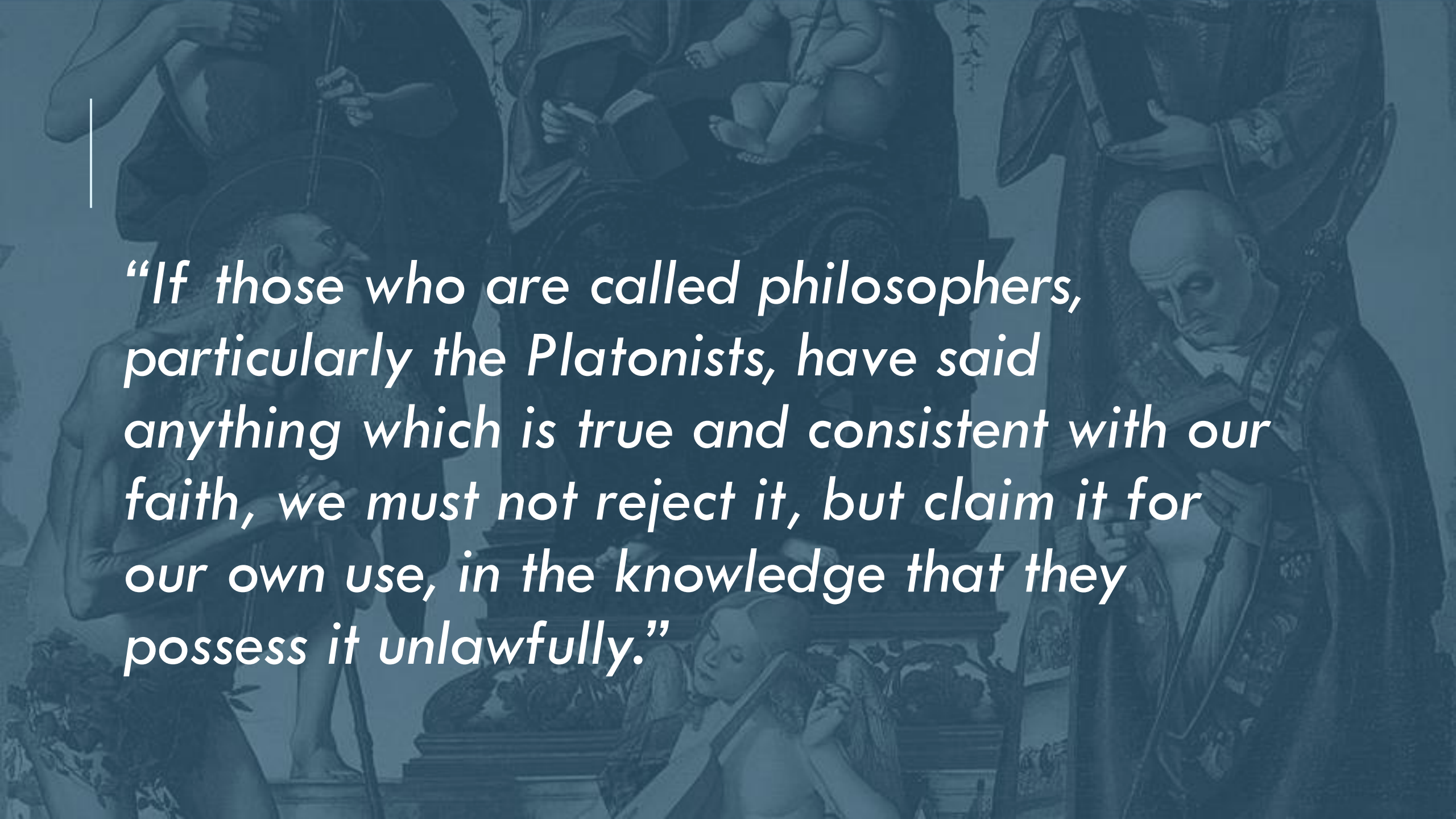


REVISION

We also examined the way in which the Christian tradition has understood the location and value of truth — as intricately bound up with matters of faith, reason, scripture, and revelation.

You also had two readings to complete — a piece from Augustine which explored the relationship between faith, truth, and reason in the Christian tradition, and a piece that combined a number of Christian approaches to theology and truth.





“If those who are called philosophers, particularly the Platonists, have said anything which is true and consistent with our faith, we must not reject it, but claim it for our own use, in the knowledge that they possess it unlawfully.”

READING

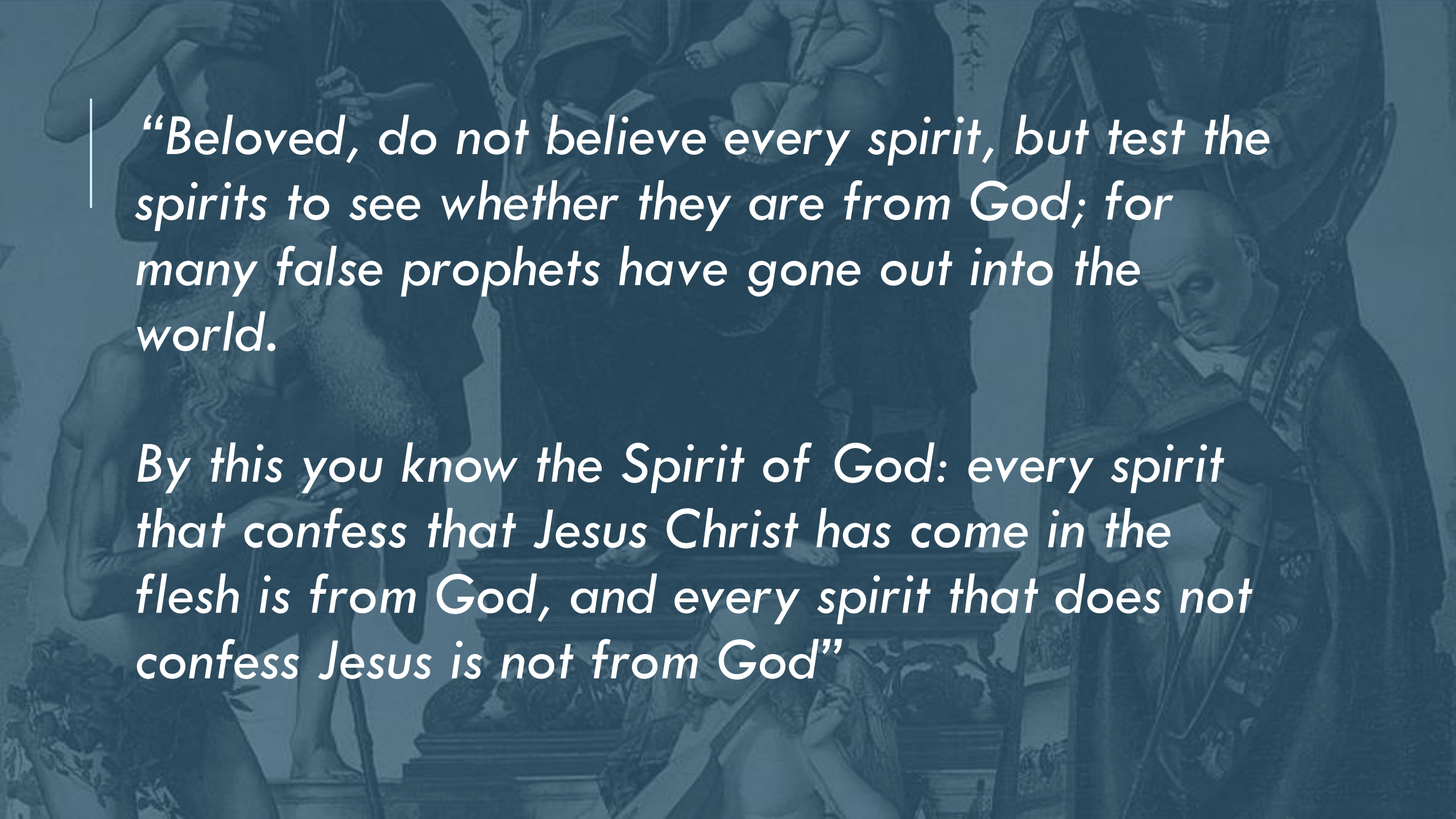
What is Augustine's description of the relationship between Christian truth and the truths of the Philosophers?

On what grounds does Augustine justify this relationship?

What is Augustine's understanding of where truth can be found – only in God?

What is the process outlined by Augustine for ascertaining the nature of truth?





“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God”

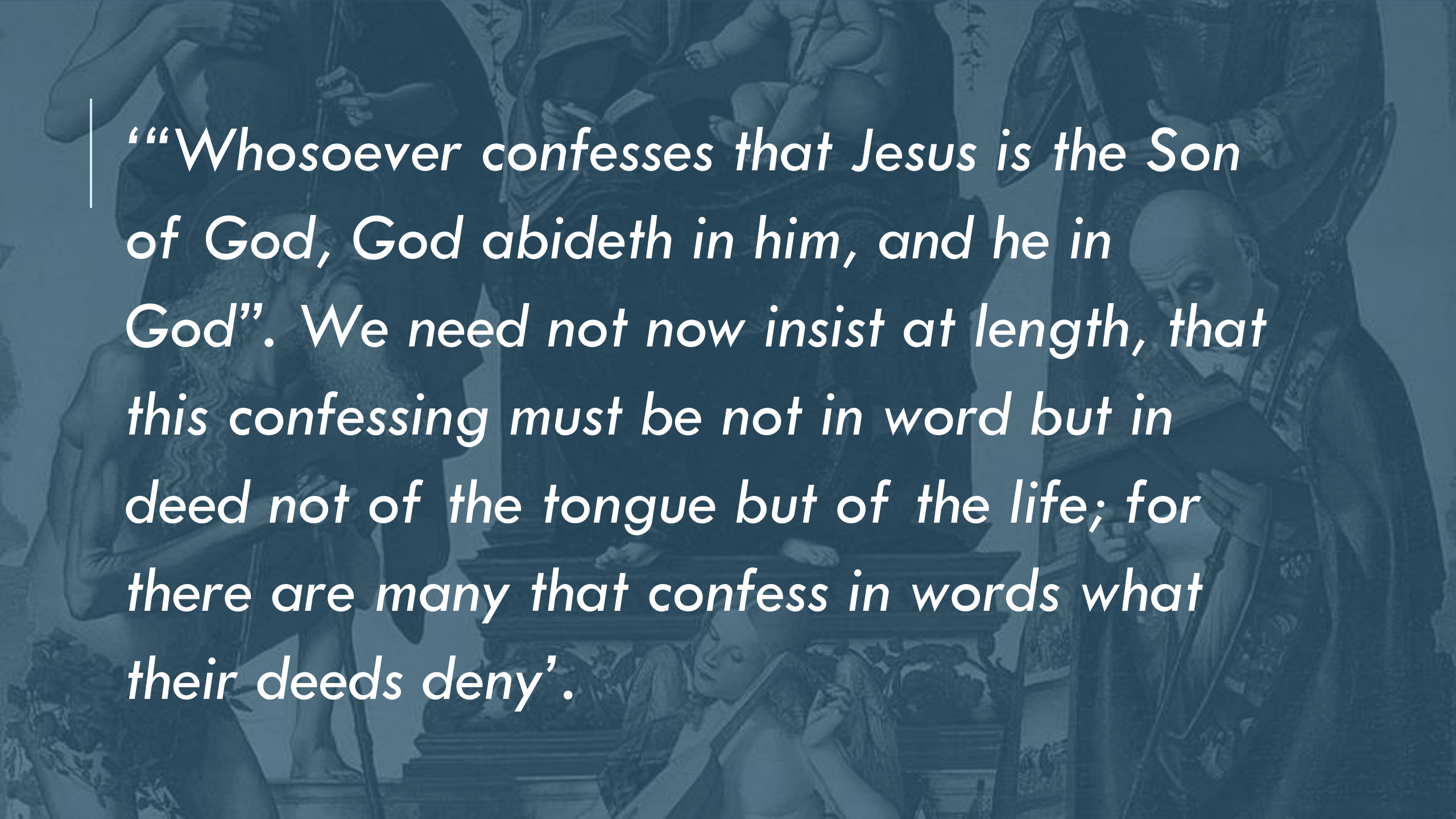
READING — JOHN 4

What is the Gospel of John aiming to do here?

What are the key criteria for ascertaining truth?

Why might the issue of “false spirits” be one of importance?





““Whosoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God”. We need not now insist at length, that this confessing must be not in word but in deed not of the tongue but of the life; for there are many that confess in words what their deeds deny’.

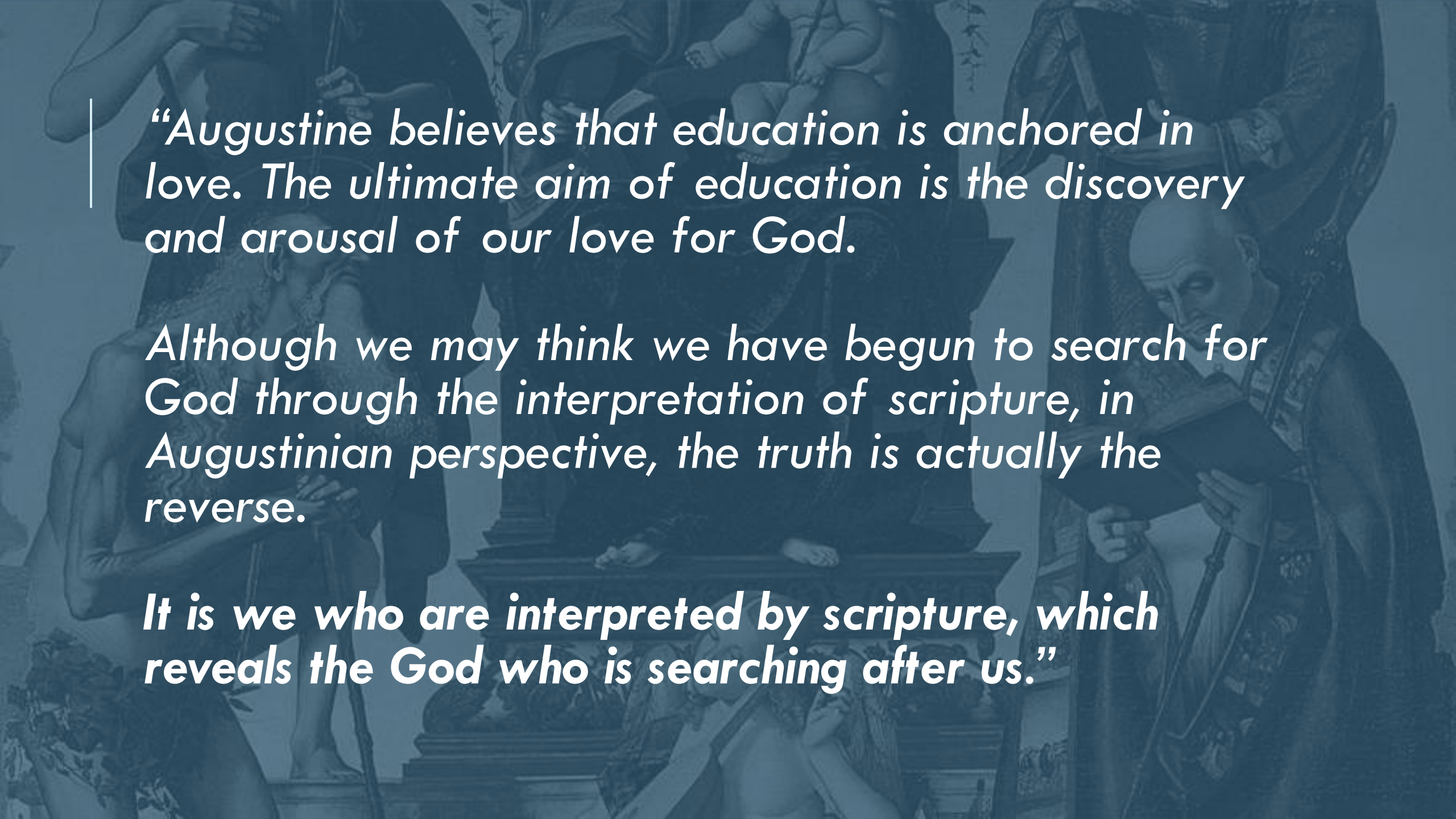
READING — AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

What is Augustine doing in this particular passage?

What is his aim?

How does Augustine use scripture here?





“Augustine believes that education is anchored in love. The ultimate aim of education is the discovery and arousal of our love for God.

Although we may think we have begun to search for God through the interpretation of scripture, in Augustinian perspective, the truth is actually the reverse.

It is we who are interpreted by scripture, which reveals the God who is searching after us.”

READING - BLACK

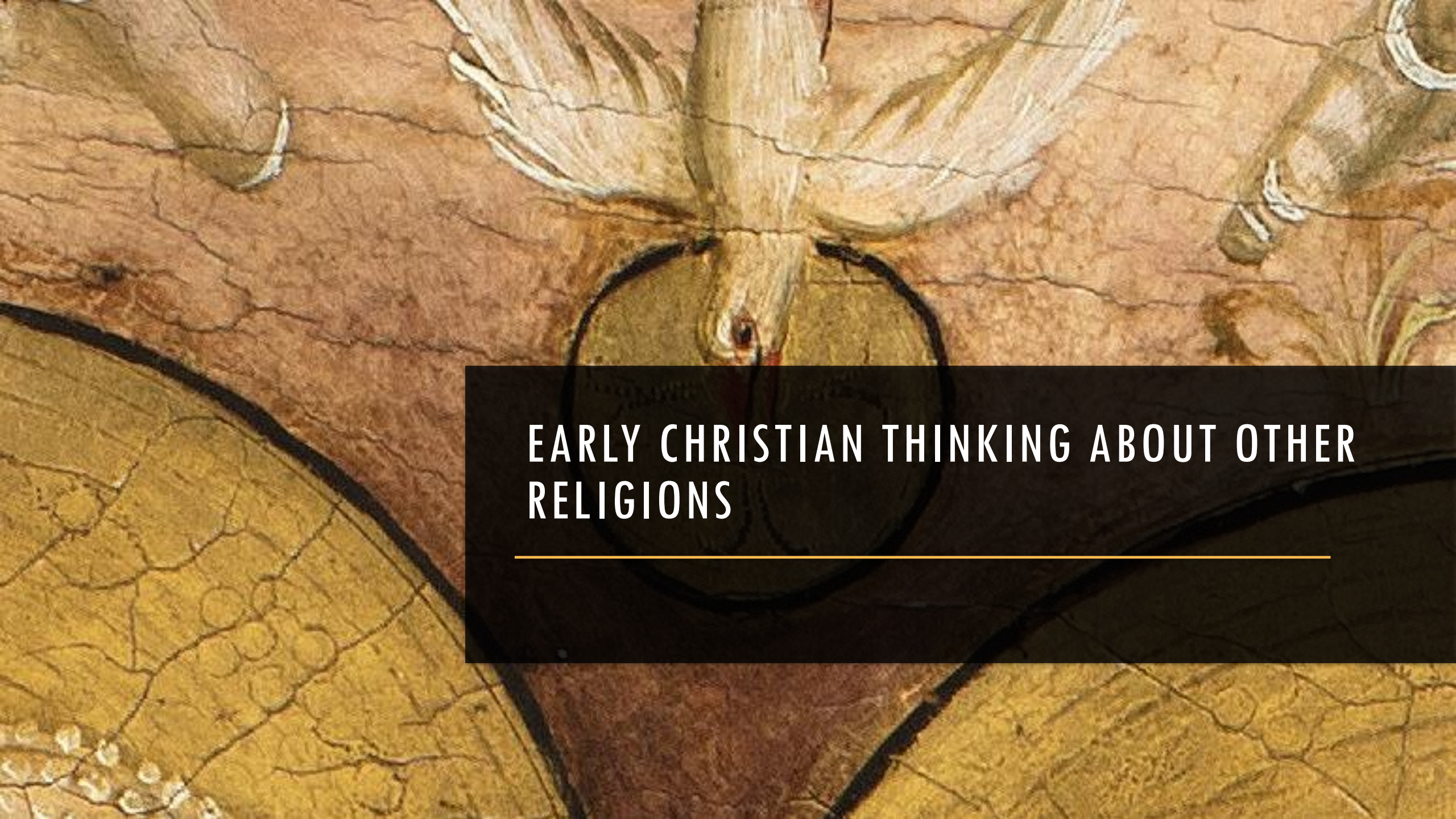
In Black's reading of Augustine, what is the aim of the process of discerning the truth?

I believe in order that I may understand.

St Augustine (354-430)

How does Black's description of the process connect to Augustine's quotation?





EARLY CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

EARLY CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

At this stage, with a solid grounding in some key terms and with some reading under our belts, I want us to move towards the consideration that the Christian tradition had for other faiths when it first encountered them. This passage is largely historical and will chart the early division between Christianity and Judaism, and the later meeting of Islam and Christianity.

If you are interested in this issue, I would recommend the level 7 module – Christian-Muslim Relations.



EARLY CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

The Christian tradition, as it emerges from within the Jewish tradition and into a period of great religious plurality and diversity, has sought to grapple with the meaning and importance of other religious traditions since its inception, as well as developing a sense of how the newly formed Christian tradition should continuously engage with them.

This thinking laid the foundation for the way in which the Christian tradition conceived of the beginning of the Islamic tradition, and still has a distinct influence on the relationship of the Christian tradition to others until today.



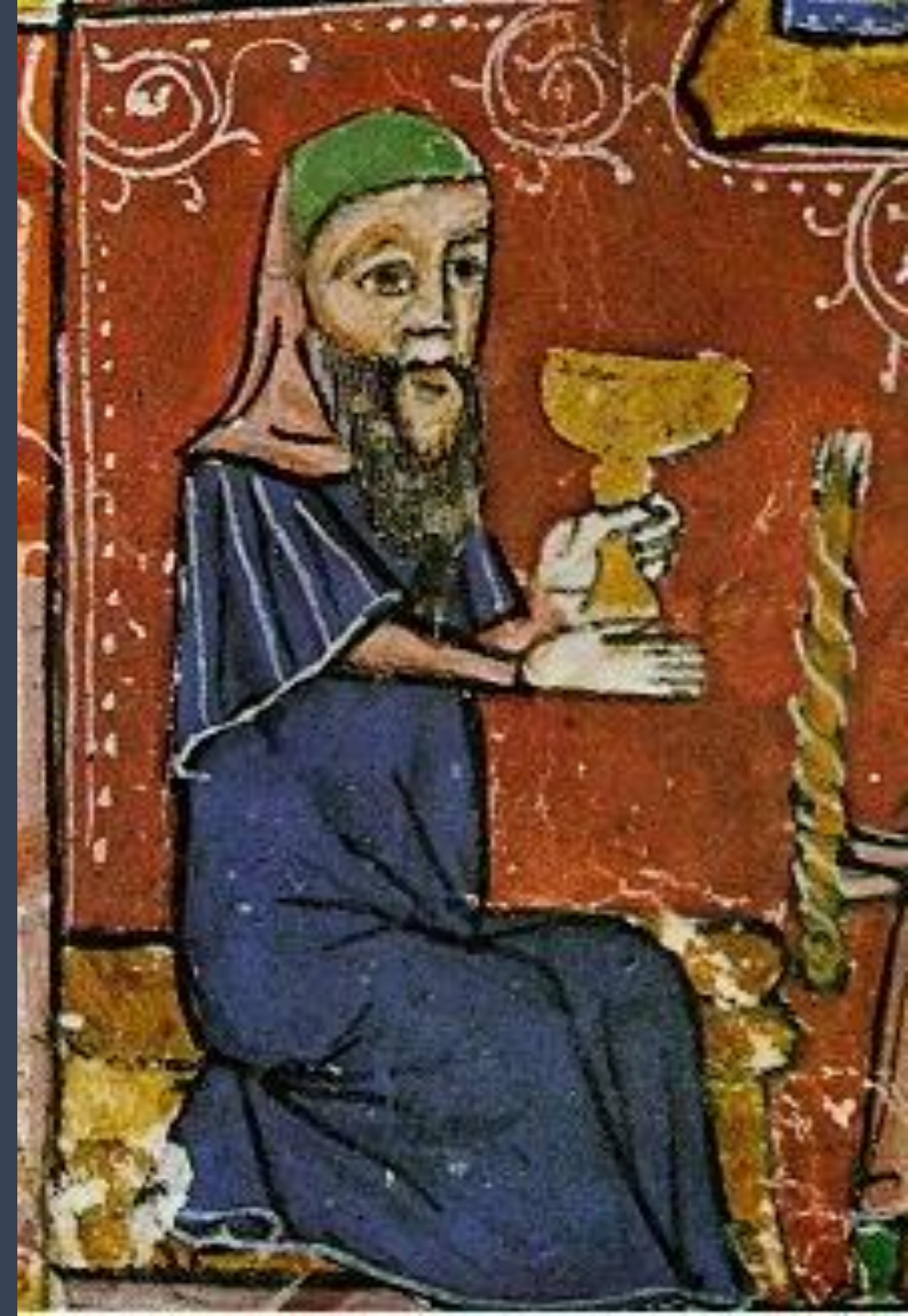
EARLY CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

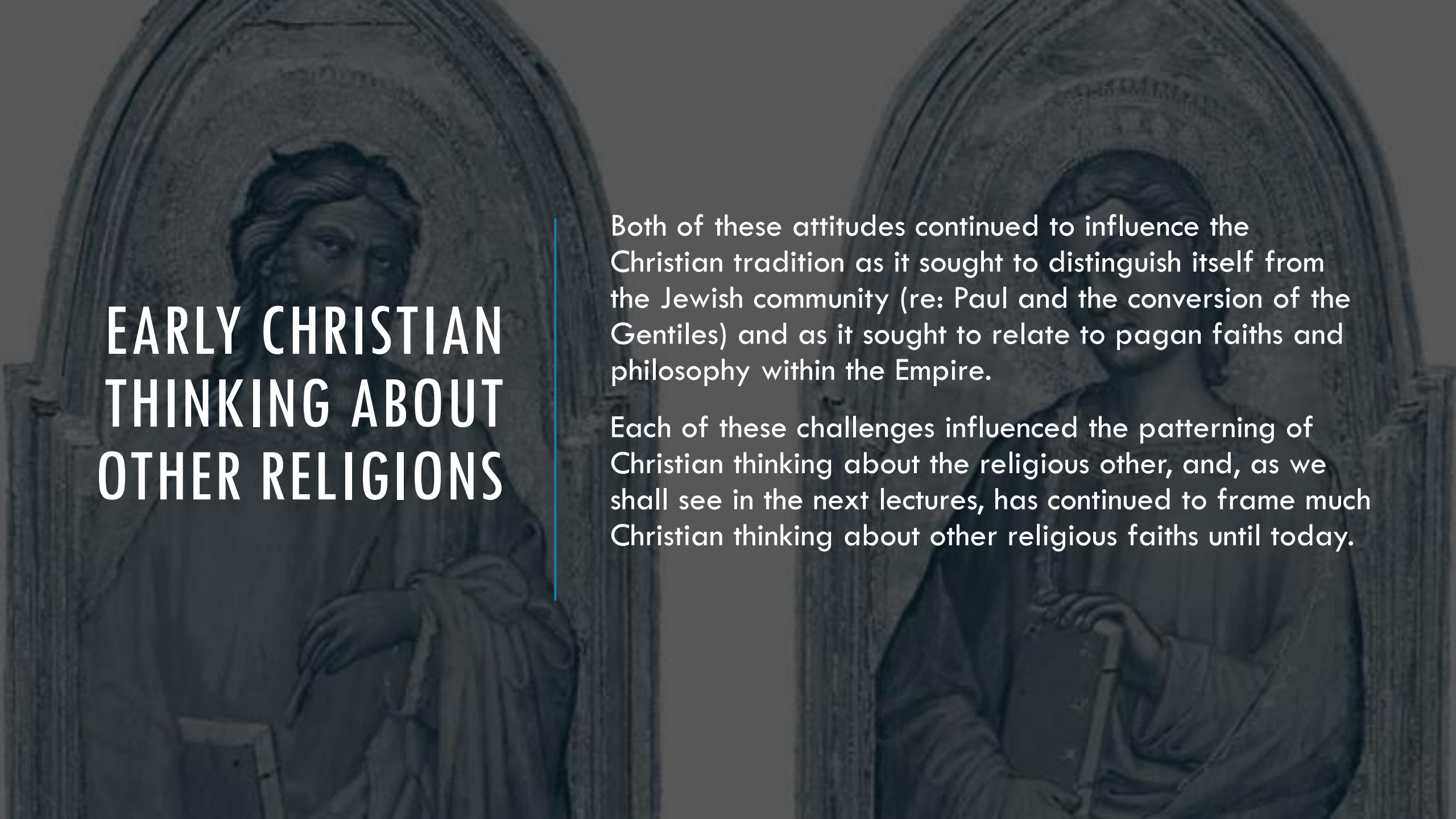
As the Christian tradition emerged from the Jewish tradition, it absorbed the distinctive difficulties that the Jewish tradition had had in conceiving of neighbouring religious traditions.

This was a dilemma between:

The universalist understanding of God as present everywhere and open to all, with relationships with Old Testament non-Jewish figures like Cyrus.

The exclusivist understanding of the Jewish people as specifically chosen by God, bound by their covenant with him, being set apart from their pagan neighbours – for example, Elijah's challenge to the priests of Baal and Asherah.





EARLY CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

Both of these attitudes continued to influence the Christian tradition as it sought to distinguish itself from the Jewish community (re: Paul and the conversion of the Gentiles) and as it sought to relate to pagan faiths and philosophy within the Empire.

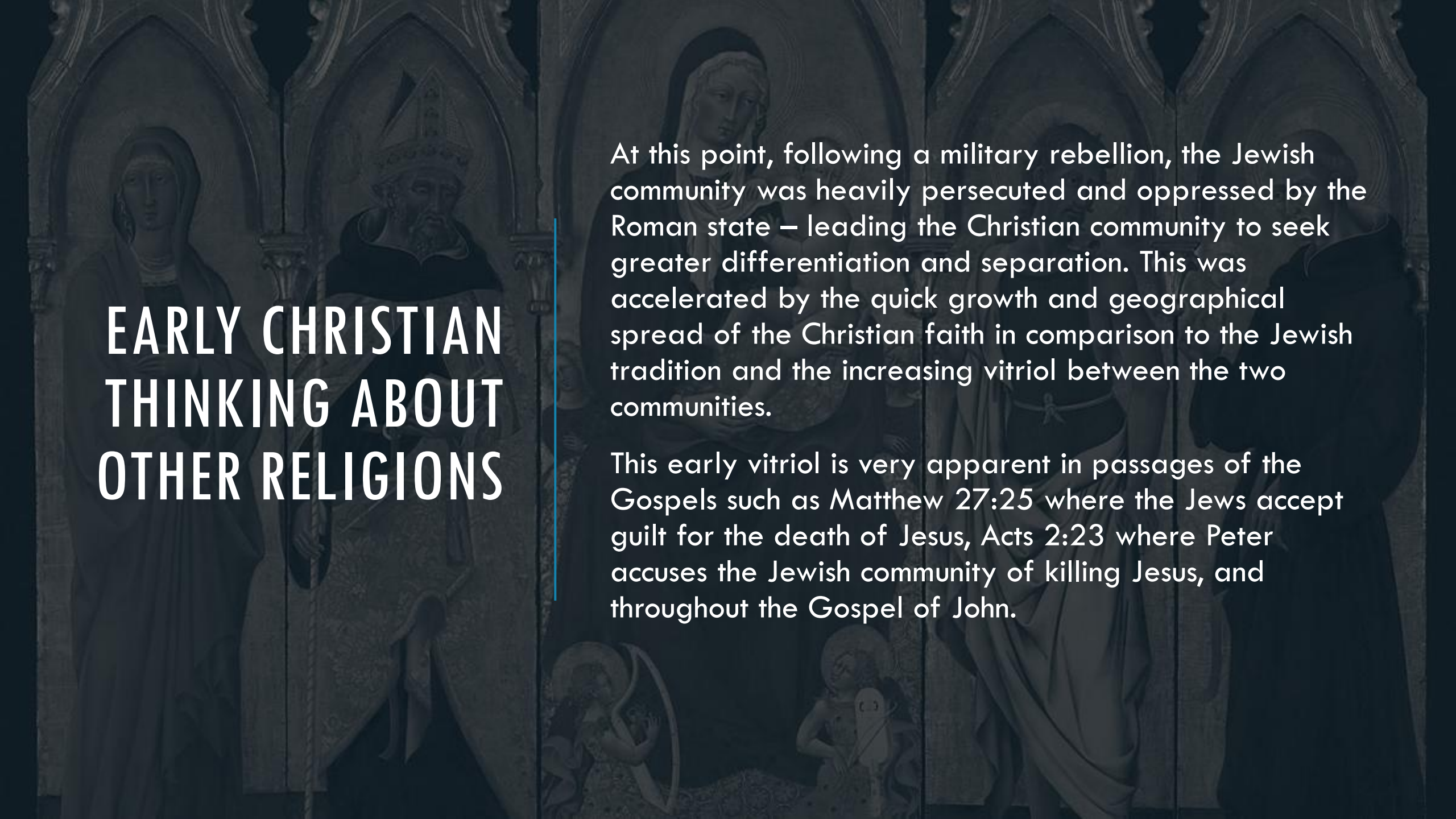
Each of these challenges influenced the patterning of Christian thinking about the religious other, and, as we shall see in the next lectures, has continued to frame much Christian thinking about other religious faiths until today.

EARLY CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

The early Christian community underwent a significant 'Parting of the Ways' with the Jewish community over the period of history we have so far examined.

While the early Christian community, and Jesus himself, were firmly positioned within the Jewish community, this grounding gradually lessened as political and social tensions emerged around joint worship and the conversion of non-Jews to Christianity, and were accentuated by the destruction of the Second Temple by the Roman Empire in 70AD.





EARLY CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

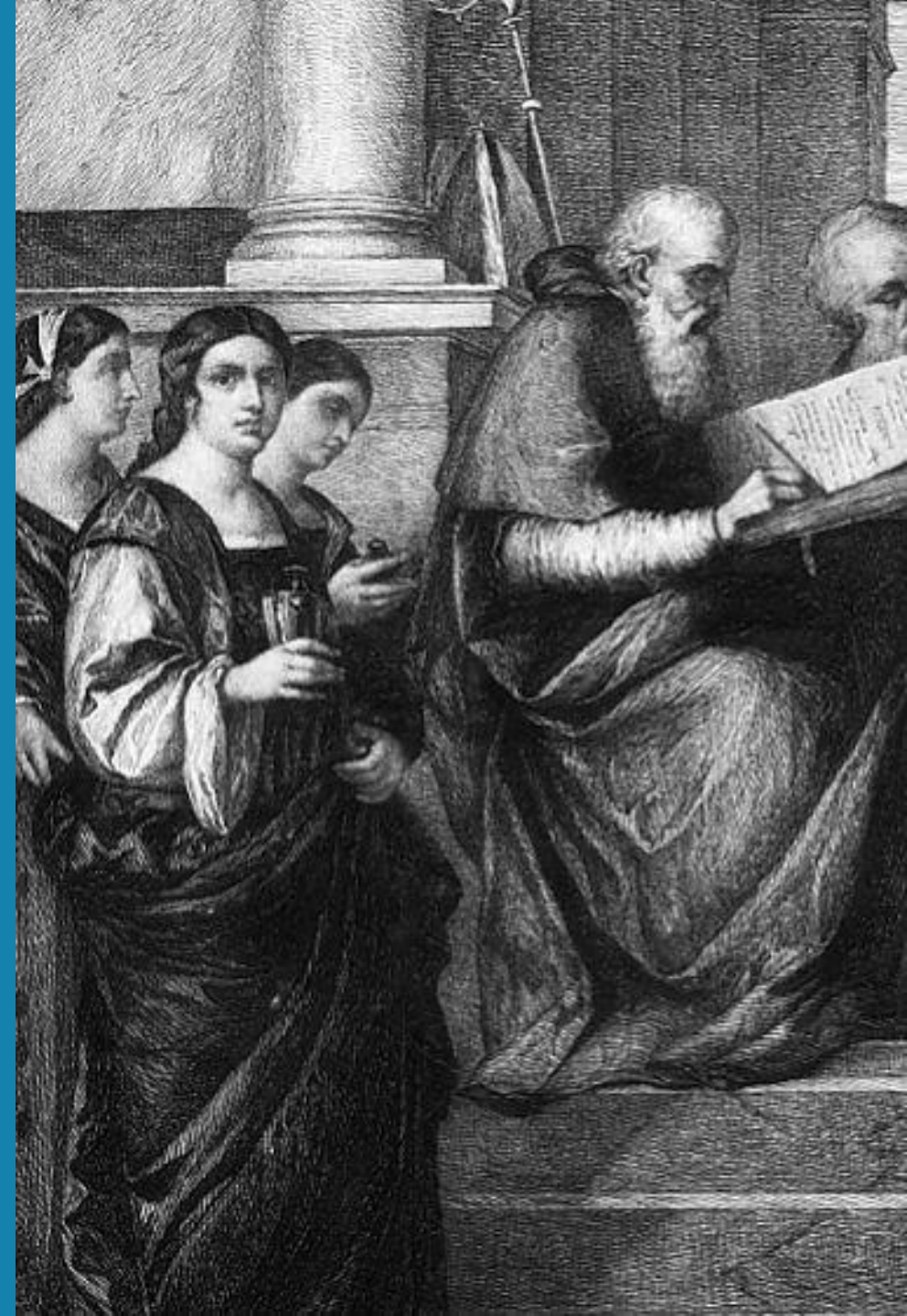
At this point, following a military rebellion, the Jewish community was heavily persecuted and oppressed by the Roman state – leading the Christian community to seek greater differentiation and separation. This was accelerated by the quick growth and geographical spread of the Christian faith in comparison to the Jewish tradition and the increasing vitriol between the two communities.

This early vitriol is very apparent in passages of the Gospels such as Matthew 27:25 where the Jews accept guilt for the death of Jesus, Acts 2:23 where Peter accuses the Jewish community of killing Jesus, and throughout the Gospel of John.

EARLY CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

In contrast, the other key tradition prevalent in the Mediterranean world, the tradition of Hellenic philosophy, had a more varied and complicated character.

Prior to the emergence of the Christian tradition, Hellenic philosophy, stemming from the classical writers of Ancient Greece and Rome, occupied the preeminent social and cultural position, particularly for elite social groups.



EARLY CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

As the Christian community grew and began to occupy situations of social power, the relationship between this form of philosophy became more important – early attempts at reconciliation can be seen in the travels of Paul to Corinth and Athens, and in the Hellenistic language of the Gospel of John.

The position of Hellenic philosophy within the broader social context of the Roman Empire and Mediterranean Sea was one of high-status – requiring, then, some kind of accommodation or address from the Christian tradition.

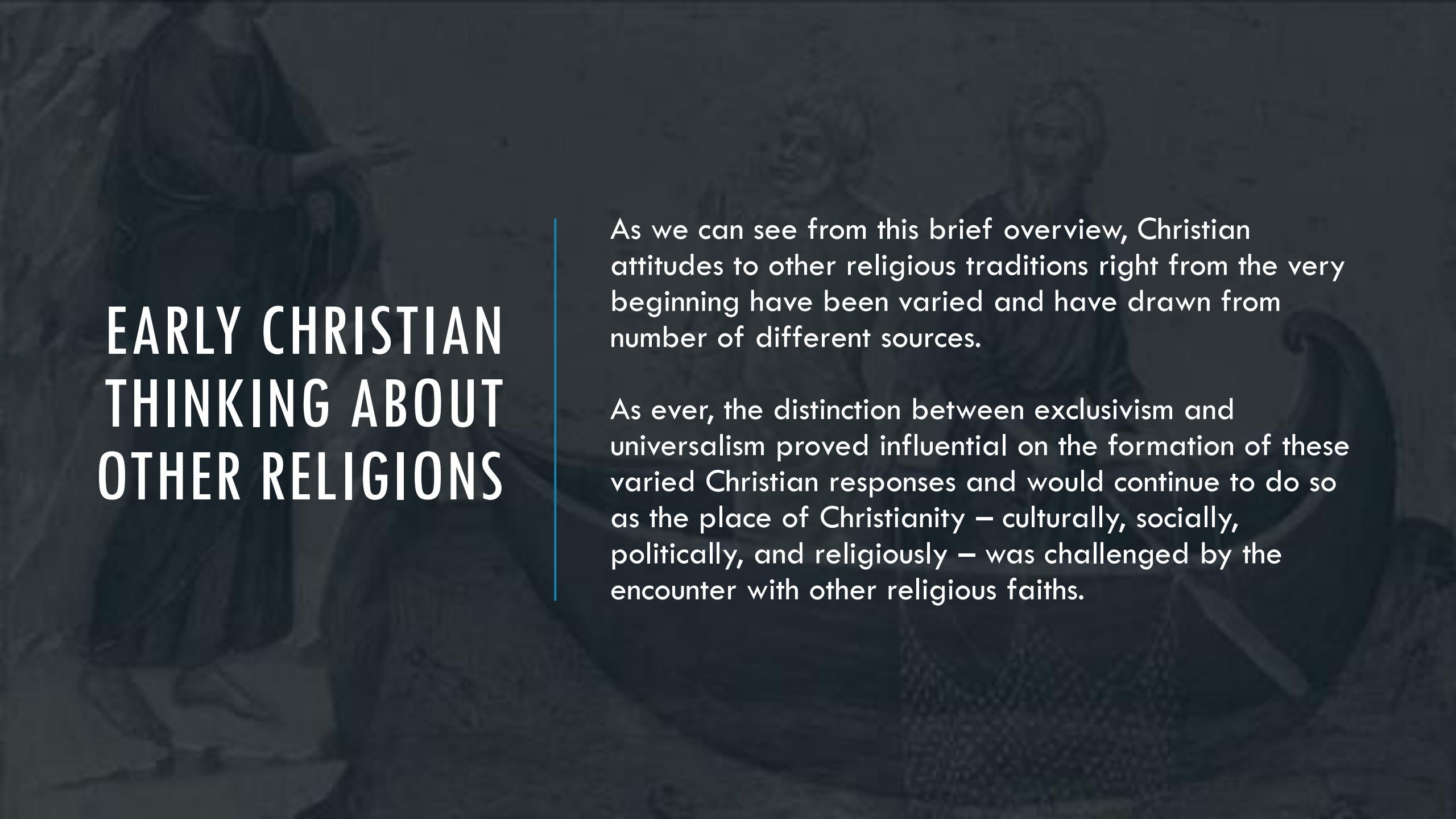


EARLY CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

Beyond this, thinkers such as Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria, both based in the East, sought to meld the Christian faith with aspects of Greek philosophy in order to encourage the spread and influence of the Christian tradition in areas where Hellenic philosophy held a strong sway.

This aspect was less prominent in the West, with thinkers such as Tertullian, where a discontinuity between Christianity and Hellenic philosophy was more strongly maintained.





EARLY CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

As we can see from this brief overview, Christian attitudes to other religious traditions right from the very beginning have been varied and have drawn from number of different sources.

As ever, the distinction between exclusivism and universalism proved influential on the formation of these varied Christian responses and would continue to do so as the place of Christianity – culturally, socially, politically, and religiously – was challenged by the encounter with other religious faiths.



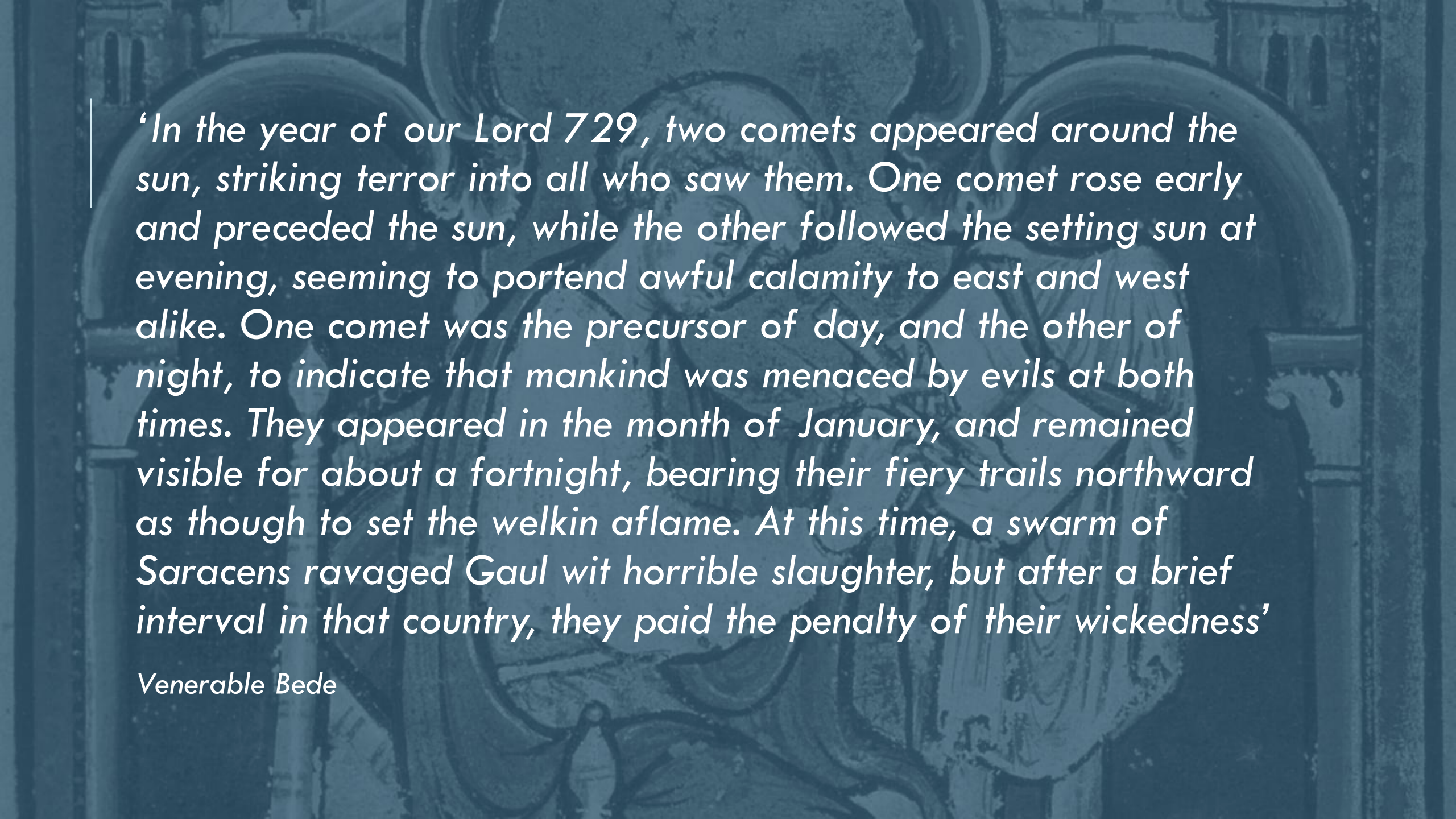
MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

In the medieval period, we see the heightening of this sense of challenge as the raiding tendrils of the Islamic caliphate and the Frankish kingdom in France cause a great deal of worry and speculation on the part of Western Christians at the time – the forming centralisation of the Church and secular power at this time allowed the news to travel quickly across Christian Europe, even reaching the Venerable Bede in Jarrow, England.

Bede's view of the coming of Islam took the same form as early Eastern Christian approaches, who had interpreted them largely as the descendants of Ishmael from the Old Testament, heretical Christians rather than an entirely different faith.



The background is a blue-toned image of a manuscript page. It features a large circular diagram, possibly a celestial or mechanical model, with various lines and text. The overall tone is historical and scholarly.

‘In the year of our Lord 729, two comets appeared around the sun, striking terror into all who saw them. One comet rose early and preceded the sun, while the other followed the setting sun at evening, seeming to portend awful calamity to east and west alike. One comet was the precursor of day, and the other of night, to indicate that mankind was menaced by evils at both times. They appeared in the month of January, and remained visible for about a fortnight, bearing their fiery trails northward as though to set the welkin aflame. At this time, a swarm of Saracens ravaged Gaul wit horrible slaughter, but after a brief interval in that country, they paid the penalty of their wickedness’

Venerable Bede



MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

One of the best examples of the fruits of this increased interaction between the Muslim and Western Christian worlds, is through the work of Peter the Venerable (1092-1156AD), the abbot of the great monastery at Cluny.

While Bernard of Clairvaux was preaching the crusade, Peter understood the challenge of Islam in a different way, investing in understanding its core beliefs and practices – this involved a sustained attempt at translating the key texts of Islam and seeking to understand the formation of Islam through its own sources.

Largely completed in Spain, Peter's efforts at encouraging the translation of Islamic texts resulted in the first translation of the Qur'an by Robert of Ketton in 1143AD, the translation of accounts of the life of Muhammad, a translation of al-Kindi's *Apology* from ~900-100AD, and various other documents.

MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

In Peter's own works, the *Summa totius heresis Saracenorum* (The Summary of the Entire Heresy of the Saracens) and the *Liber contra sectam sive heresim Saracenorum* (The Refutation of the Sect or Heresy of the Saracens), he extends and expands the knowledge gained through this process of translation, attempting in the *Summa* to encapsulate the beliefs of the Muslim tradition and in the *Liber* to refute the key aspects of Muslim beliefs from the Christian perspective.

As you can tell from the titles, Peter was originally most concerned with providing a clear outline of the principles of Muslim beliefs, but, as with John of Damascus earlier, saw these beliefs as stemming from a heretical form of Christianity.



MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN THINKING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

We can see from these brief summaries that the Early and Medieval period of the Christian tradition saw a number of different reactions to the encounter with differing religious faiths — ranging from the adoptive and appreciative tone towards much Hellenic philosophy (in a context where it had prestige), to the heretical dismissal of Islamic beliefs (in a context where Christian power was challenged by it).

These conceptual locations (paganism or heresy) largely defined Christian responses to alternative faiths until the next period we will engage with — the modern.



The image features a central white bird, possibly a phoenix or a similar mythical creature, with its wings spread. It has a long, pointed red beak and a circular gold emblem on its chest. The background is a textured brown surface with a network of fine cracks. Large, stylized circular patterns in shades of yellow and green are visible in the lower corners, resembling ancient pottery or stone carvings. The word "READINGS" is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the image, partially overlapping the bird's chest and the background.

READINGS

READINGS

You have two readings for this section:

John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos Oratio 2*

http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/chrysostom_adversus_judaeos_02_lost_portion.htm

This reading is an example of the anti-Jewish polemics current in the Early Christian community in Antioch – it is deeply anti-Semitic in tone.

Muckle, J. T. “Clement of Alexandria on Philosophy as a Divine Testament for the Greeks.” *Phoenix*, vol. 5, no. 3/4, 1951, pp. 79–86.

This reading aims to introduce the work of Clement of Alexandria on aspects of Greek philosophy as an example of the way these two traditions interacted.

