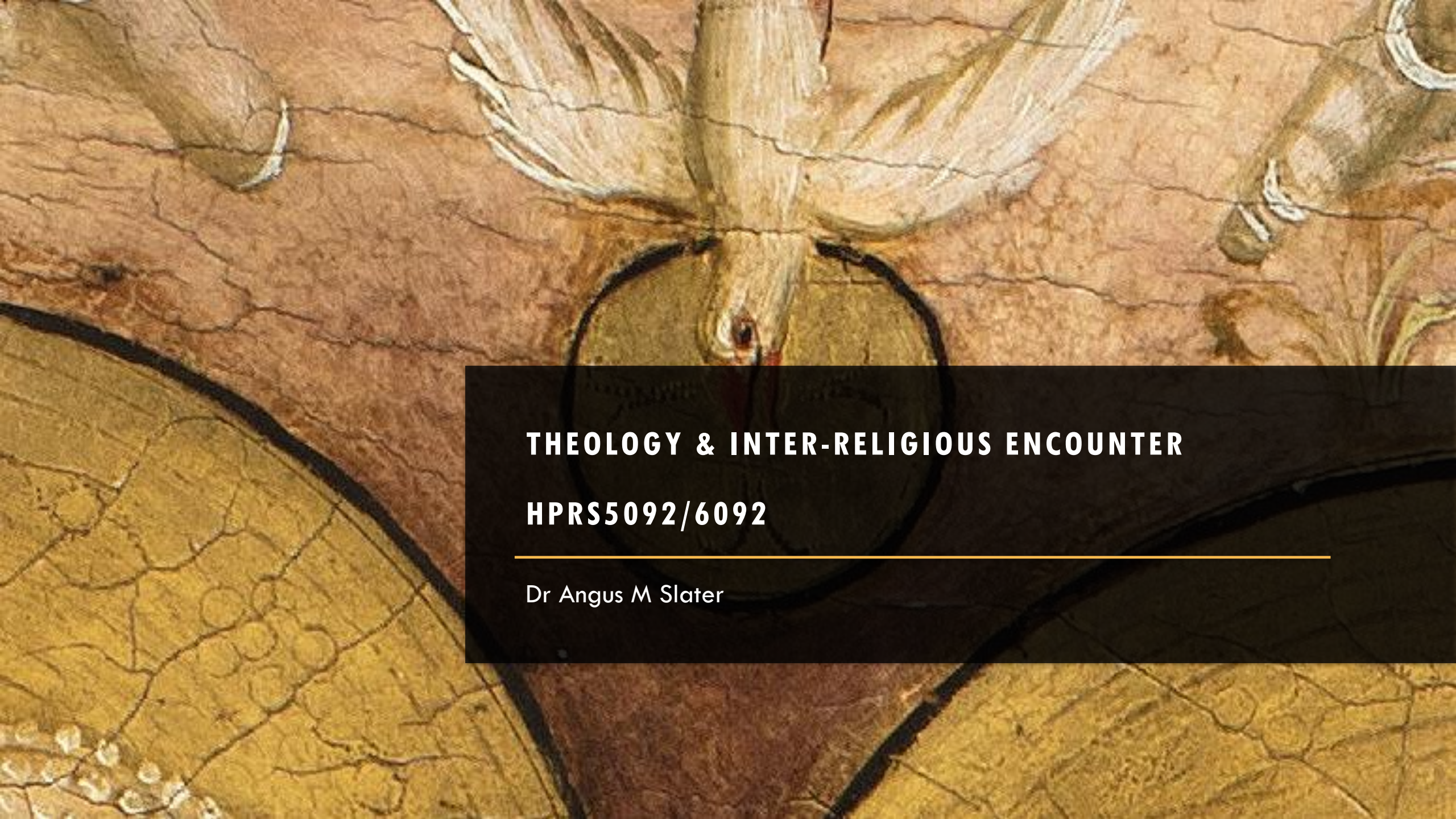




THEOLOGY & INTER-RELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER

HPRS5092/6092

Dr Angus M Slater

REVISION

In the previous section, we examined the way in which the Christian tradition, in its early and medieval periods, reacted to and engaged with alternative religious forms. These included the Jewish tradition and forms of Hellenic philosophy, followed by the arrival of Islam.

In each case, we looked at the differing ways that the Christian tradition reacted, and according to what conceptualisation it did so. These forms have continued to have a strong influence on the way that the Christian tradition conceives of the religious other even today.



REVISION

We also examined the differing social and historical contexts in which these encounters occurred and set the stage for the period we will look at today – the period of modernity.

You also had two readings to complete – a piece from John Chrysostom which highlighted the early antisemitism in the Christian tradition, and a piece that examined the fusion of Greek philosophy and the Christian tradition drawing from Clement of Alexandria.





THE THEOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE BIRTH OF THE MODERN



MODERNITY

One of the best ways to begin this discussion is by trying to answer quite a straightforward question:

When does history or a society become 'modern'?

MODERNITY

There are obviously several different potential answers to the question.

Common suggestions might be anytime after the Protestant Reformation (1516-), the Enlightenment (1789-), the 1900's, the First World War (1914-), the Second World War (1939-).

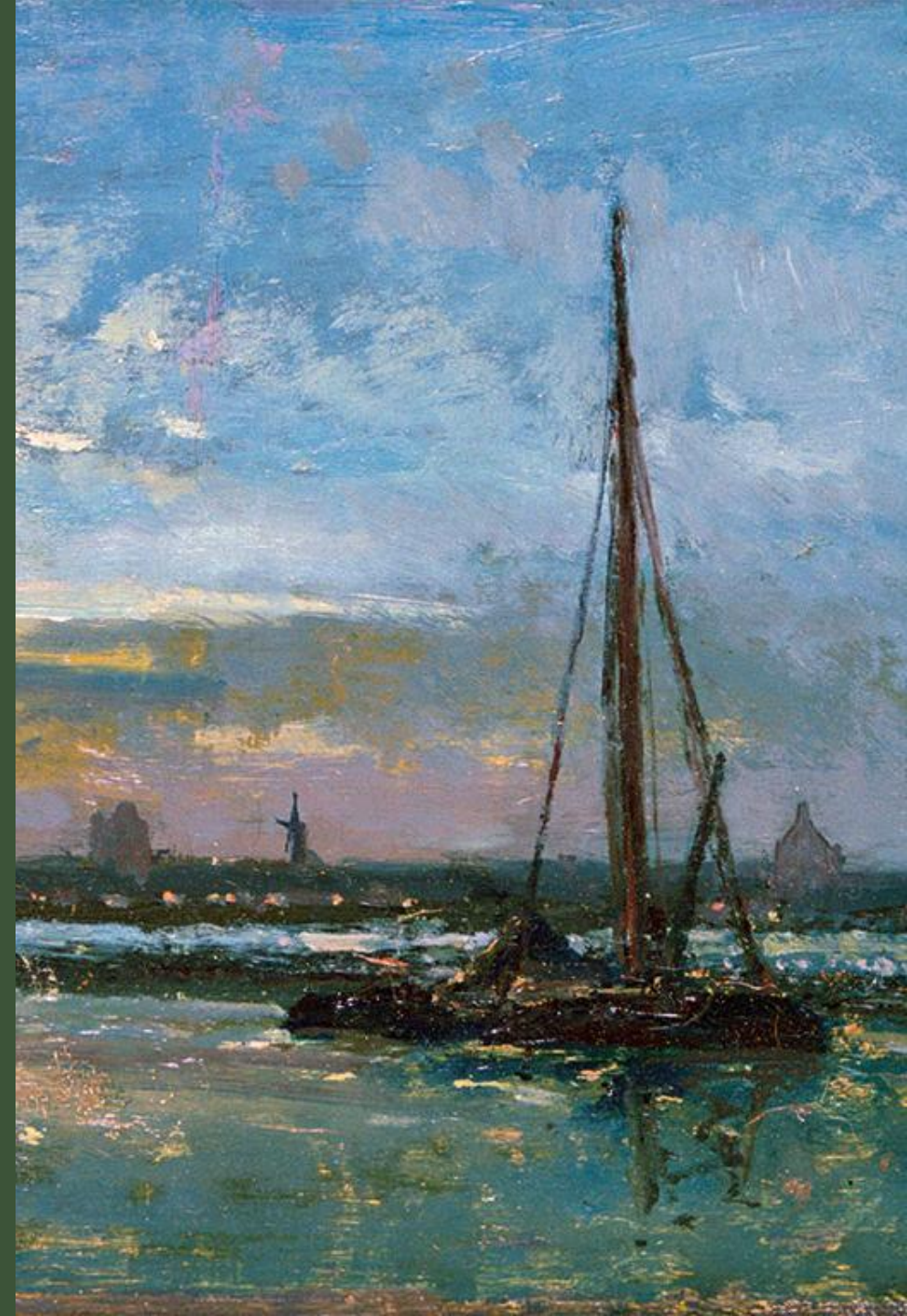
Others might invoke modernity as a relative concept, relative either geographically (different areas of the globe as modern in certain periods), or historically (society might be modern 'for its time').



MODERNITY

Our definitions of when 'modernity' occurs naturally depend on the way in which we choose to define 'modern' – the characteristics that we view as paradigmatic of that specific period.

While we may associate a specific characteristic of society with modernity (or pre-modernity etc.) this does not mean that that characteristic is absent from other historical periods – rather only that it emerges as characteristic for that time period.



MODERNITY

Generally in social-scientific approaches to religion, the 'modern period' begins with the turn to rationality during the European Enlightenment and extends to around the 1970's.

This is a fuzzy description, as the processes and characteristics identified as modern naturally extend both before and after this period, and even these dates are contested on the basis of historical and geographical specificity.



MODERNITY

So, if we have come to the understanding that our categories of history like 'modernity' rely on characteristics we associate with societies from that time, we naturally turn to some subsidiary questions:

What characteristics does "the modern" have?

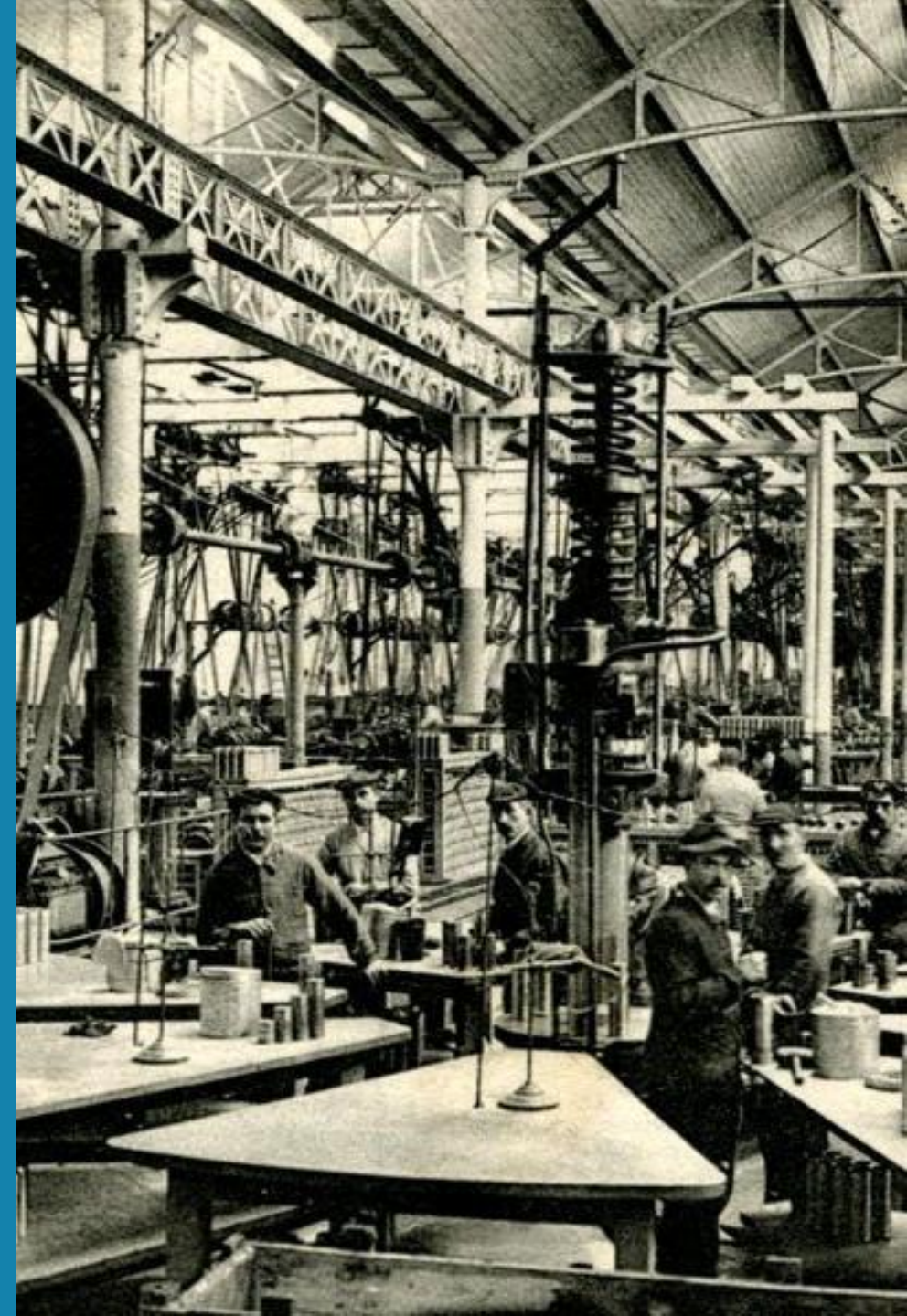
How does these differ from the period before and after it?



CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERNITY

Largely, scholars of modernity would highlight some of the following characteristics as paradigmatic of modernity, either because they shape the circumstances understood as modern, or because they occur within the historical period ascribed as modern:

- Rise of the nation state
- Growth of tolerance as a political and social belief
- Industrialization
- Rise of mercantilism and capitalism
- Emergence of socialist countries
- Discovery and colonization of the Non-Western world



CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERNITY

- Rise of representative democracy
- Increasing role of science and technology
- Urbanization
- Mass literacy
- Proliferation of mass media
- The Cartesian and Kantian distrust of tradition for autonomous reason

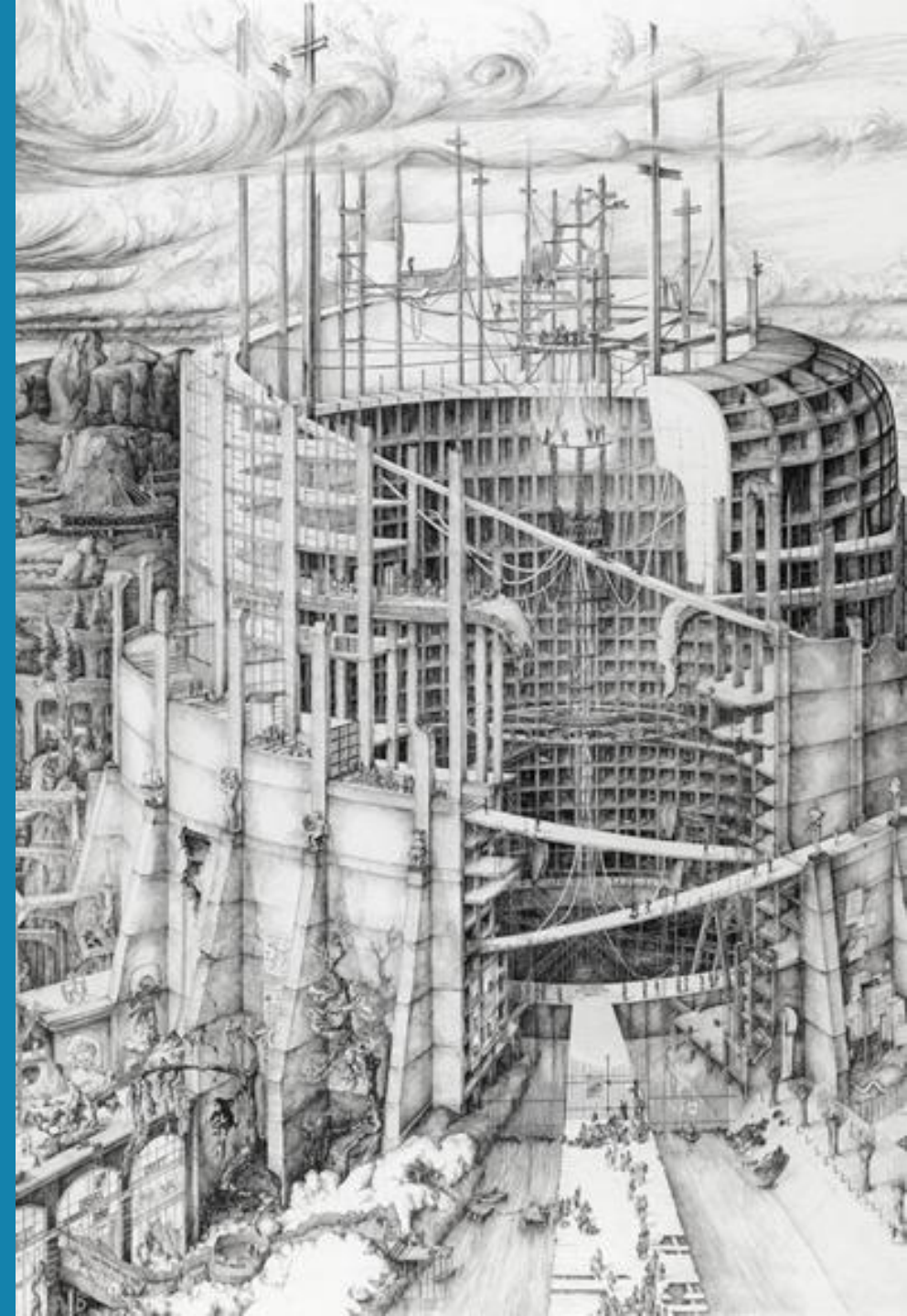


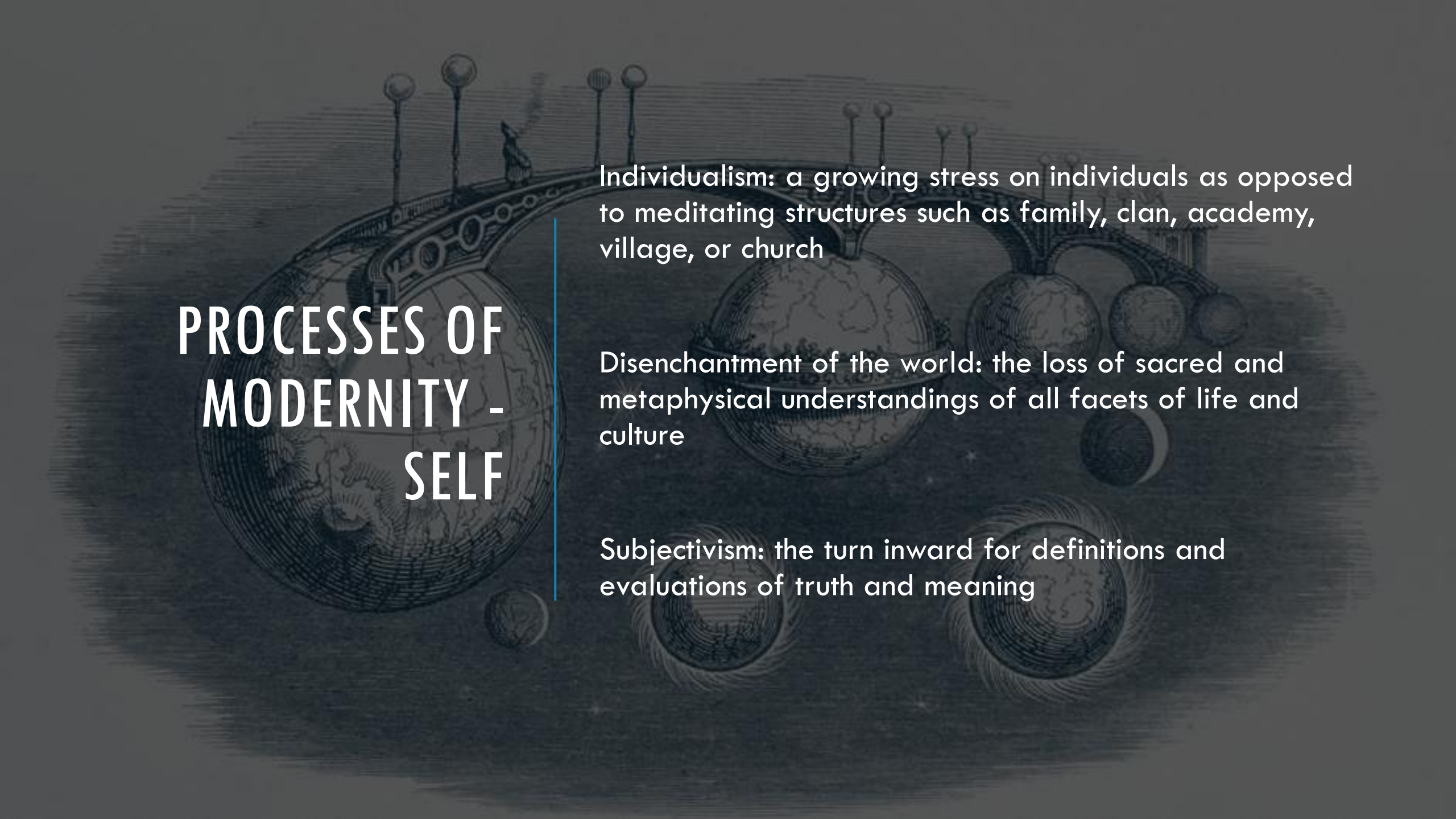
MODERNITY

These commonly identified characteristics of modernity are a useful way of considering the currents that underpin and inform our contemporary world.

Obviously, these characteristics do not just suddenly appear and disappear – rather they are the symptoms and results of broader social trends and processes that operate to change the way in which our society, our economy, our selves, and our ways of thinking operate over time.

When thinking of modernity (and, eventually, post-modernity) it is therefore sometimes helpful to think of the modern as a process – something that is happening to various extents in various places at various times – rather than a fixed ‘level’ or fixed ‘space’.



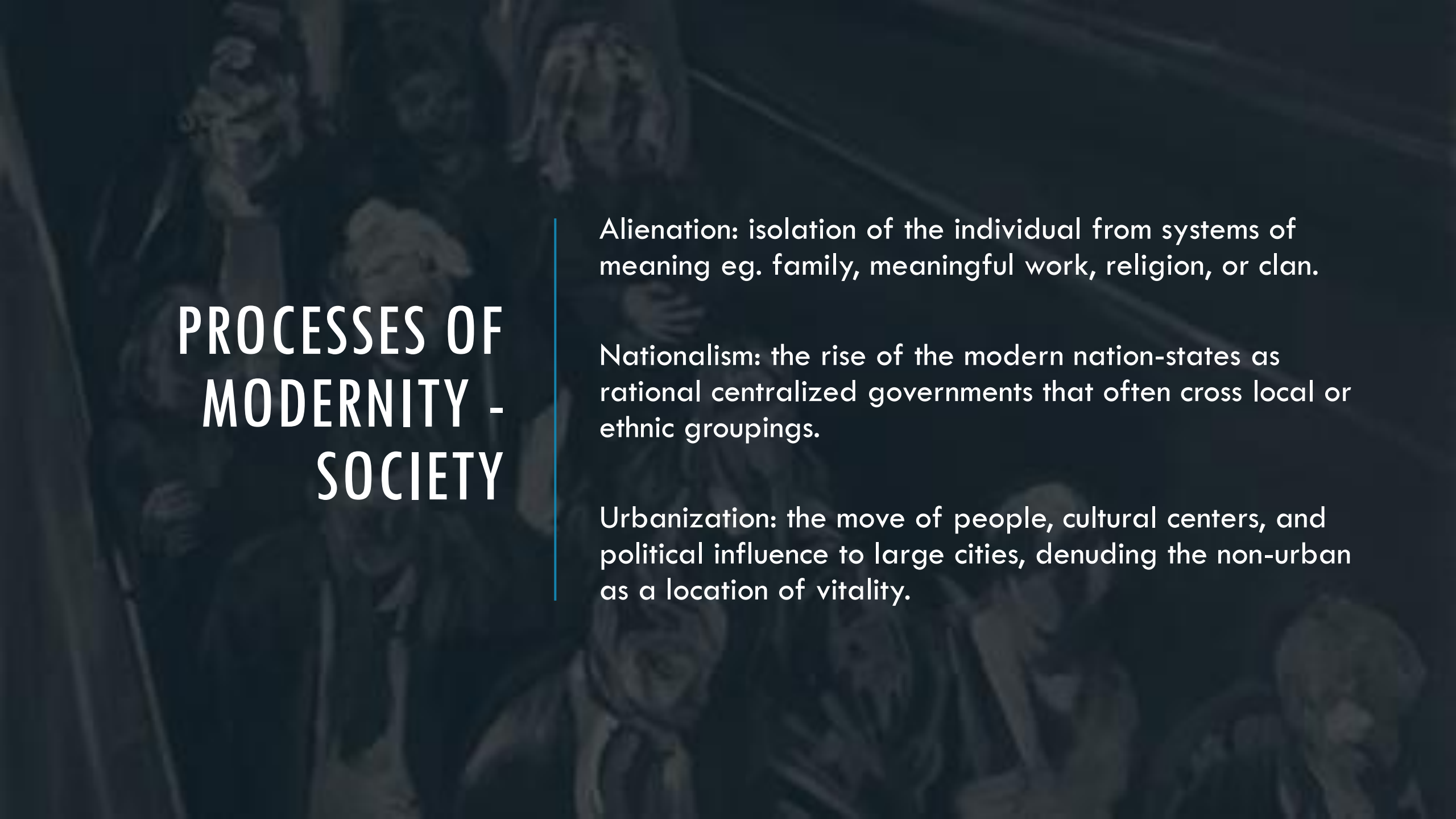


PROCESSES OF MODERNITY - SELF

Individualism: a growing stress on individuals as opposed to mediating structures such as family, clan, academy, village, or church

Disenchantment of the world: the loss of sacred and metaphysical understandings of all facets of life and culture

Subjectivism: the turn inward for definitions and evaluations of truth and meaning



PROCESSES OF MODERNITY - SOCIETY

Alienation: isolation of the individual from systems of meaning eg. family, meaningful work, religion, or clan.

Nationalism: the rise of the modern nation-states as rational centralized governments that often cross local or ethnic groupings.

Urbanization: the move of people, cultural centers, and political influence to large cities, denuding the non-urban as a location of vitality.



PROCESSES OF MODERNITY - ECONOMIC

Commodification: the reduction of all aspects of life to objects of monetary consumption and exchange

Rationalisation: the world can be understood and managed through a reasonable and logical system of objectively accessible theories and data

Secularisation: the loss of religious influence and/or religious belief at a societal level



PROCESSES OF MODERNITY - THOUGHT

Linear-progressivism: preference for forms of reasoning that stress presuppositions and resulting chains of propositions

Objectivism: the belief that truth-claims can be established by autonomous information accessible by all

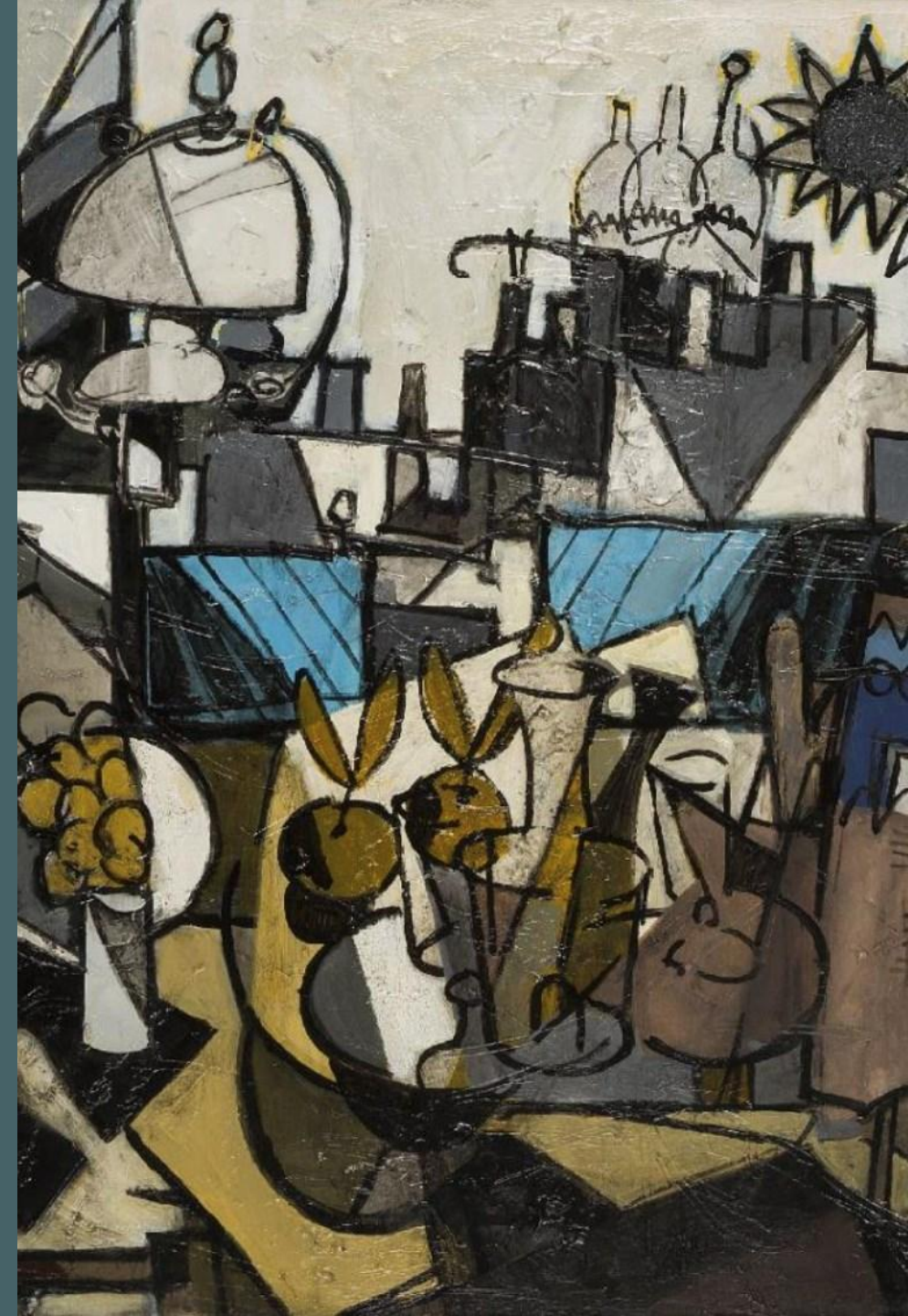
Universalism: application of ideas/claims to all cultures/circumstances regardless of local distinctions

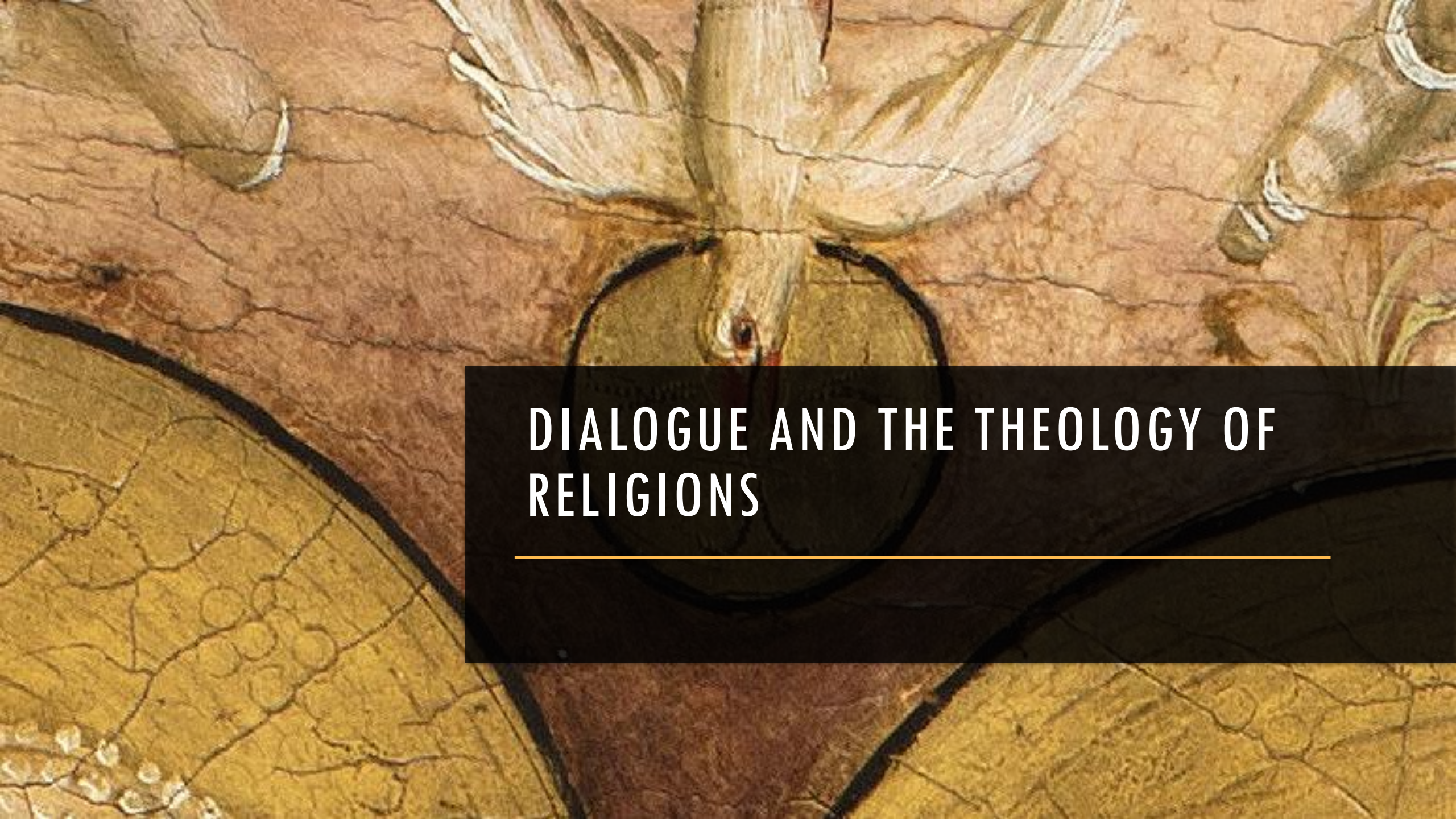
MODERNITY

These process have an obvious impact on the way in which the Christian tradition operates – the period of the modern is a period of great change and challenge to the established norms of Christianity, particularly in Europe.

The issue of the universality of truth become problematic, as does the simple dismissal of contrary opinions as unreasonable. This means that other opinions come to matter, in a way that they perhaps did not before.

Just as this is true for political opinion, so too does it have an influence on the pattern of Christian thinking.





DIALOGUE AND THE THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

DIALOGUE AS A CONCEPT

The concept of “dialogue” is quite new as previous discussion between religions tended to be proselytising – aimed solely at conversion.

What then caused the rise of “dialogue”?

- I. Modern conception of rationality / social progress
- II. (Post-)modern turn from certainty and objectivity to subjectivity
- III. Process of globalisation and pluralisation fractures homogeneity of societies
- IV. Historical events – end of colonialism, World Parliament of Religions, rise of “religious violence”

DIALOGUE AS A CONCEPT

The modern concept of rationality (that things can be adequately explained without recourse to non-quantifiable knowledge) has encouraged an understanding of religious difference as inevitably able to be explained away through conversation.

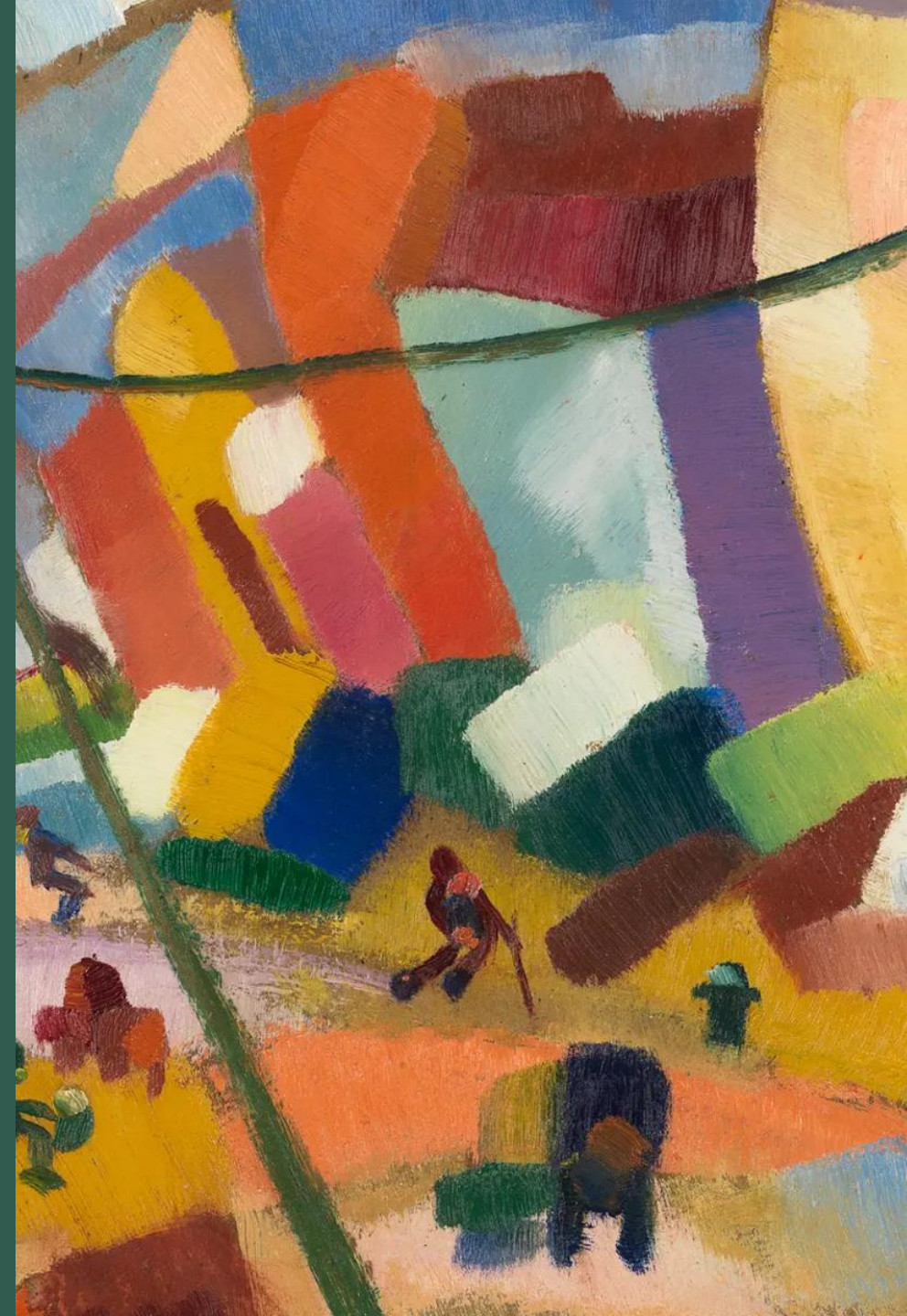
The turn from certainty and objectivity embedded within the development of post-modernity has encouraged the exploration of forms of difference, including religious difference, and a hesitancy about the universality of any one tradition



DIALOGUE AS A CONCEPT

The process of globalisation and pluralisation in our societies – the interconnectedness of different parts of the globe and the internal social difference of our societies – has made talking between differences more prominent and politically desirable.

The end of colonialism disrupted the hierarchical nature of western interaction with non-western faiths, the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions brought “dialogue” into public consciousness, and the rise of “religious” violence has driven religious harmony up the political awareness scale.

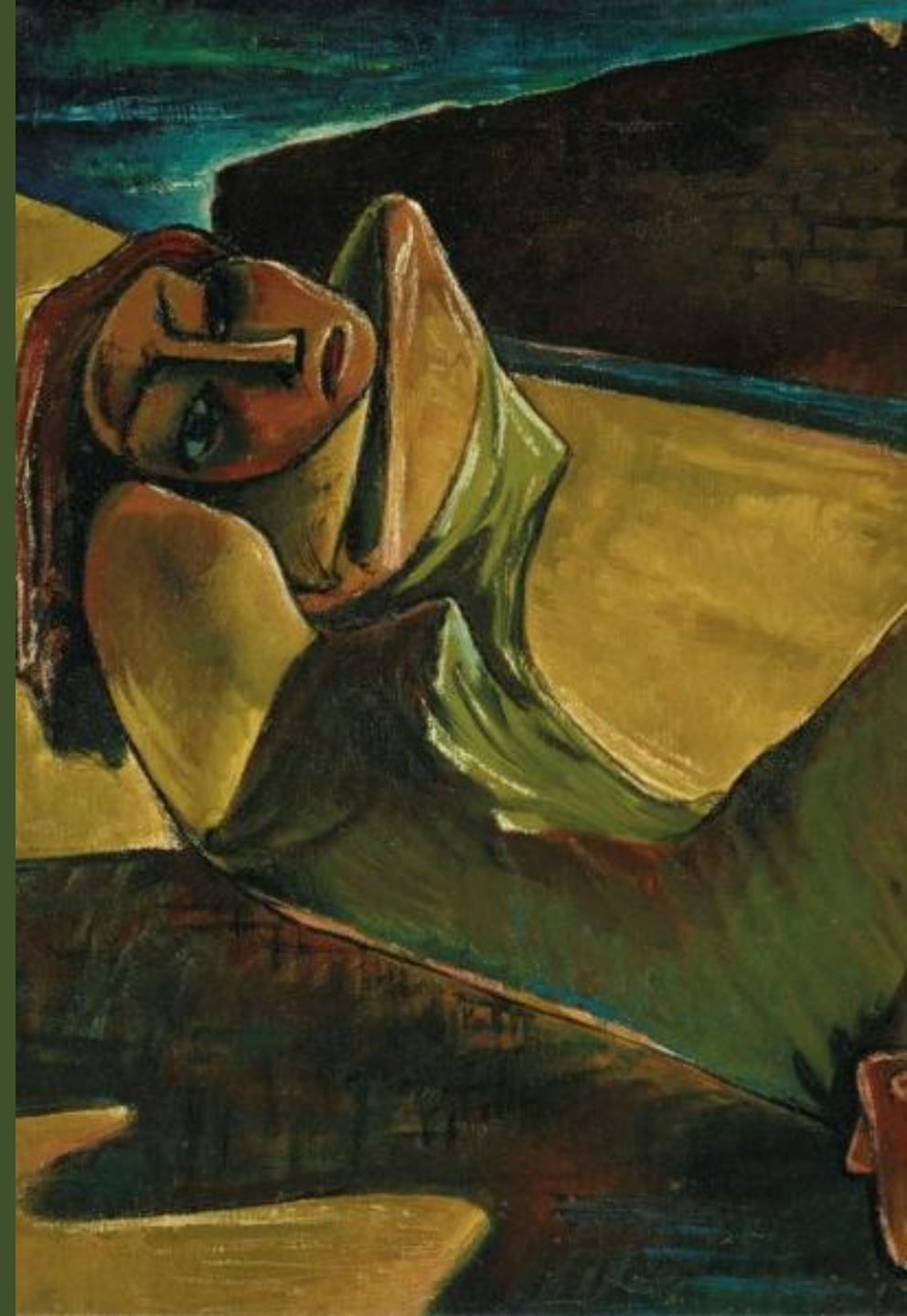


CONTEXT

Historically we have seen the prominence of thinking about other religions rise, as the prominence of places where other religions are prominent also rises.

This can occur either as a threat (e.g. Crusader polemics) or where this rise is political / cultural in nature (e.g. post-colonialism).

Aspects of post-colonialism, economic growth in non-western locations, organisation and representation of non-western religions, increasing migration and cultural contact etc., have gradually pushed inter-religious matters into a more central location of the Christian tradition.



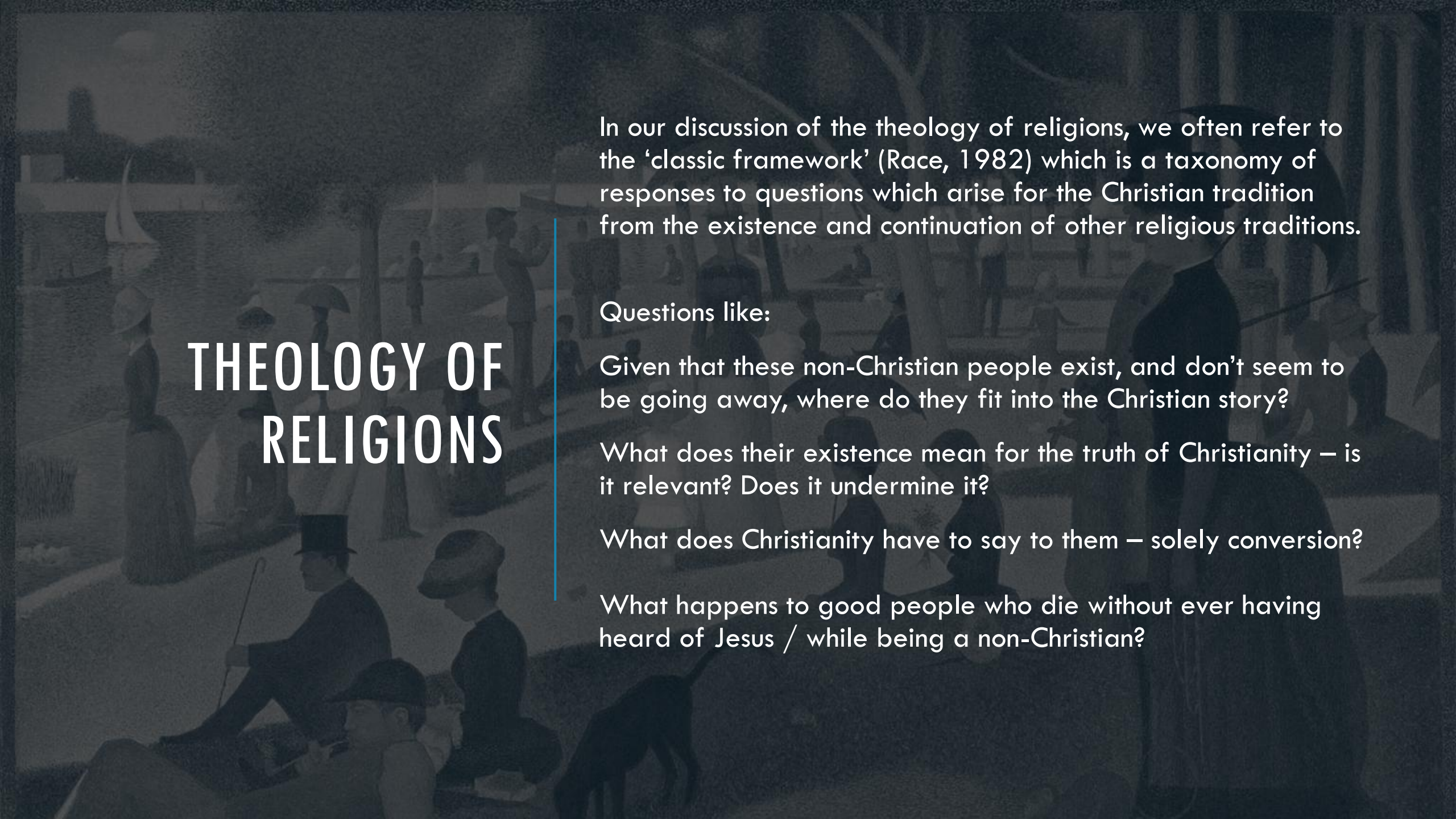
THE ISSUE

The issue for Christian theology is quite simple:

1. Other religions exist and, despite attempts at conversion, continue to do so.
2. Other religions appear to encourage good behaviour and good behaviour is not limited to Christians.

The part of theology which attempts to address these questions is called the “Theology of Religions” and emerges as a distinct field in reaction to the processes and increasing importance we have seen in the previous slides.





THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

In our discussion of the theology of religions, we often refer to the 'classic framework' (Race, 1982) which is a taxonomy of responses to questions which arise for the Christian tradition from the existence and continuation of other religious traditions.

Questions like:

Given that these non-Christian people exist, and don't seem to be going away, where do they fit into the Christian story?

What does their existence mean for the truth of Christianity – is it relevant? Does it undermine it?

What does Christianity have to say to them – solely conversion?

What happens to good people who die without ever having heard of Jesus / while being a non-Christian?

THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

In the Christian tradition, these questions largely boil down to one question that is concerned with the central purpose of Christianity, salvation.

Simply – can non-Christians be saved?

The framework identifies three potential replies – yes, no, and maybe.

We call these three responses – pluralist, exclusivist, and inclusivist.

Over the next couple of sections in the module, we will examine each position in turn and look at some scholars who argue for each.

THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

Roughly, the positions are as follows:

Exclusivist – only one tradition can lead to salvation, those outside cannot be saved.

Inclusivist – only one tradition mediates salvation, but it is available to other outside the Christian tradition in some way.

Pluralist – all or many traditions lead to salvation and all point to same ultimate reality



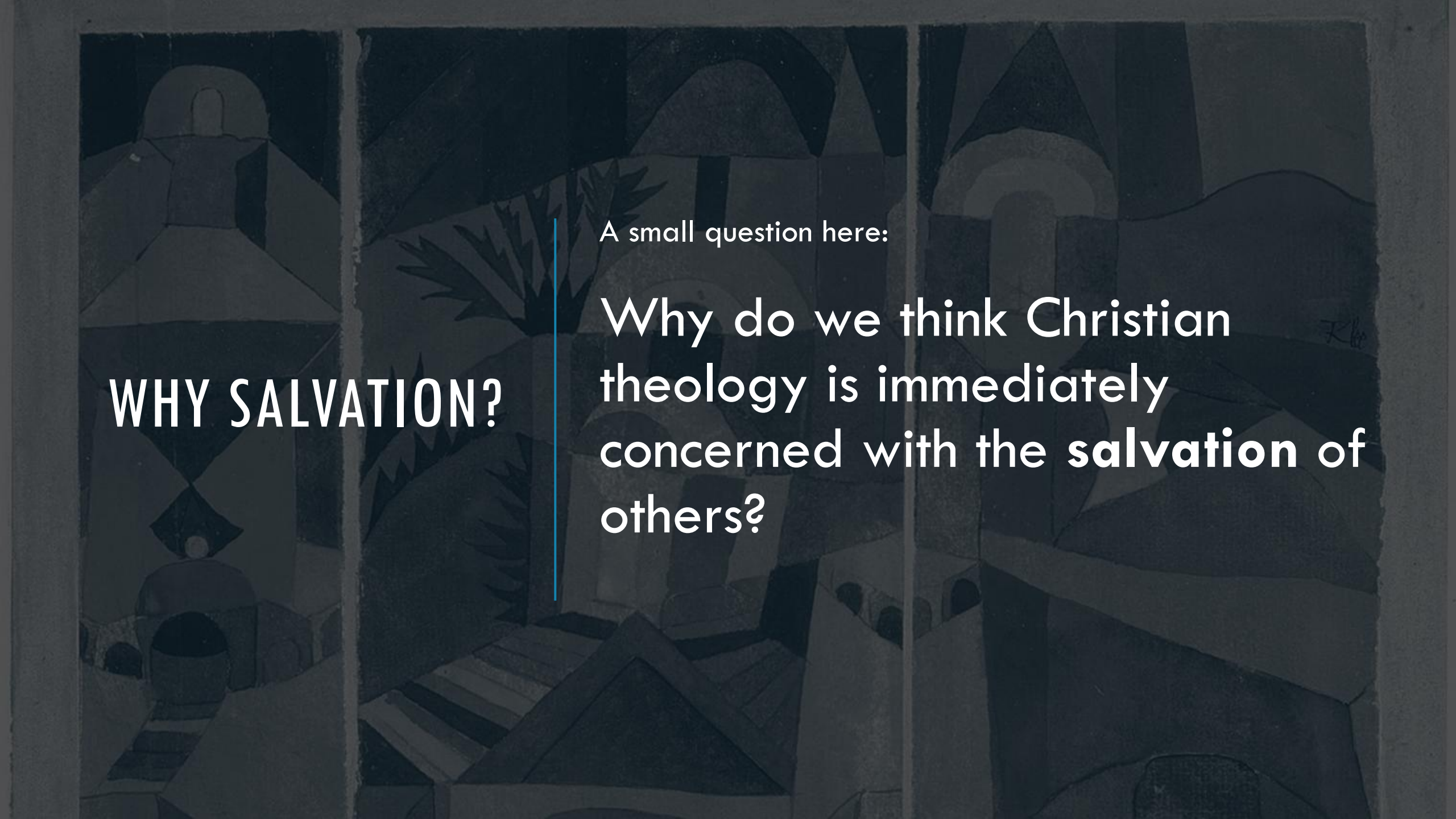
THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

It is important throughout your studies to remember the origin of this framework as it has had a huge impact on the genesis, current scope, and continuing obsessions of the field.

It is also important to remember that there is a difference to be drawn between an external description of a position and an internal position that argues for a position – this can most easily be discerned as the distinction between an –ist and an –ism.

e.g. pluralist and pluralism

The typology attempts to
categorise *Christian responses*
to the *existence of religious*
plurality according to their *view*
of salvation

The background is a dark, abstract collage. It features various geometric shapes like triangles, rectangles, and circles in shades of grey and black. A prominent palm tree silhouette is visible in the center-left. The overall texture is layered and artistic, resembling a collage of different materials.

WHY SALVATION?

A small question here:

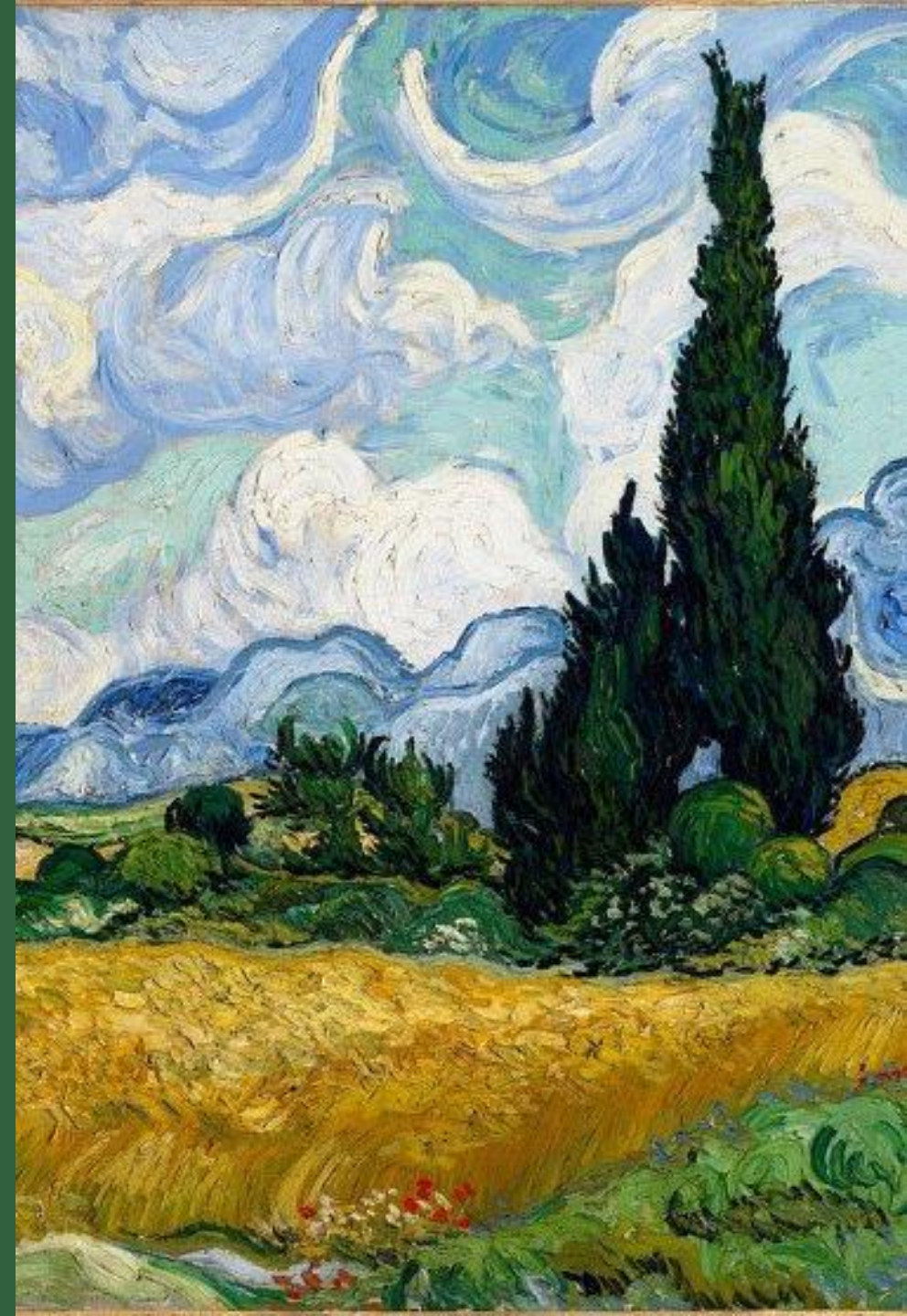
Why do we think Christian theology is immediately concerned with the **salvation** of others?

WHY SALVATION?

Salvation is the entire purpose of Christianity — faith, gained through reason, devotion, scripture, revelation etc, allows Christians to be saved.

Salvation also delimits the boundaries of faith — only those who believe will be saved, and those who do not, will not be saved.

So salvation matters to this question of other religions for two reasons — first, because of the potential of the salvation of good non-Christians, but also second, because if that is the case, then what does that mean for the uniqueness of Christianity?



READING

You have two readings to complete. The Cantwell Smith reading will introduce you to the issues which drove Christian theological engagement with questions about other faiths and their meaning for Christian theology.

Race provides a good outline of the nature of the main three responses to the question of whether those of other faiths can be saved.

Cantwell Smith W “The Christian in a Religiously Plural World” in Hick J & Hebblethwaite B (eds) *Christianity and Other Religions*, (London: Oneworld, 2001)

Race A “Track One: Christian Theology of Religions” in Race A, *Interfaith Encounter: The Twin Tracks of Theology and dialogue*, (London: SCM Press, 2001)

