

The Problem of Evil

Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.

Provost

Professor of Philosophy and Apologetics
Norman L. Geisler Chair of Christian Apologetics
Southern Evangelical Seminary



Lev. 13:40

**"As for the man
whose hair has fallen
from his head, he *is*
bald, *but* he
is clean."**

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A banner for the Crossexamined Instructor Academy (CIA) 2025. The text is set against a teal background with a building and trees. Below the text is a row of ten headshots of the academy's members.

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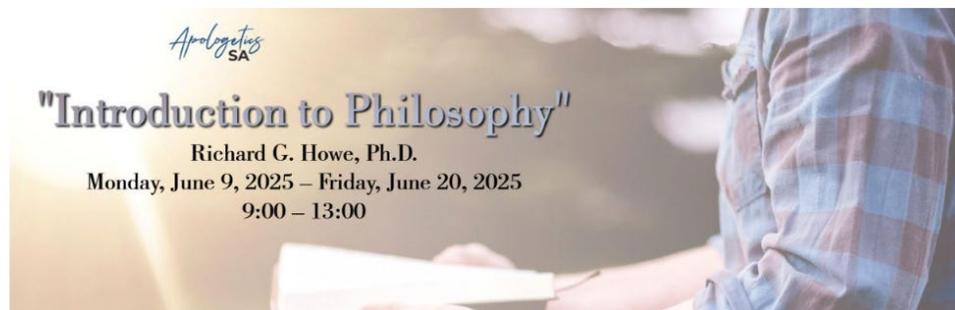
South Africa Trip

June - July 2025
Richard and Rebekah Howe





"Introduction to Philosophy"
Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.
Monday, June 9, 2025 – Friday, June 20, 2025
9:00 – 13:00



Apogetics South Africa

"Introduction to Philosophy" Slide Decks of the PowerPoint® Presentations

- Pt. 1. "Some Preliminary Matters" ([pdf](#))
- Pt. 2. "Defending the Handmaid: How Theology Needs Philosophy" ([pdf](#))
- Pt. 3. "Aristotle Camping with His Dog" ([pdf](#))
- Pt. 4. "Metaphysics: Plato" ([pdf](#))
- Pt. 5. "Metaphysics: Aristotle" ([pdf](#))
- Pt. 6. "Metaphysics: Aquinas" ([pdf](#))
- Pt. 7. "Epistemology: Introduction" ([pdf](#))
- Pt. 8. "Epistemology: Skepticism" ([pdf](#))
- Pt. 9. "Epistemology: Rationalism" ([pdf](#))
- Pt. 10. "Epistemology: Descartes" ([pdf](#))
- Pt. 11. "Epistemology: Empiricism" ([pdf](#))
- Pt. 12. "Epistemology: Kant" ([pdf](#))
- Pt. 13. "Epistemology: Aquinas" ([pdf](#))

Definitions of Evil

Different “Problems” of Evil

Formulating the Problem of Evil

Some Non-Evangelical Options

Some Evangelical Options

Summary of the Classical Approach



Definition of Evil in the
Contemporary Conversation

∞ Natural Evil ∞



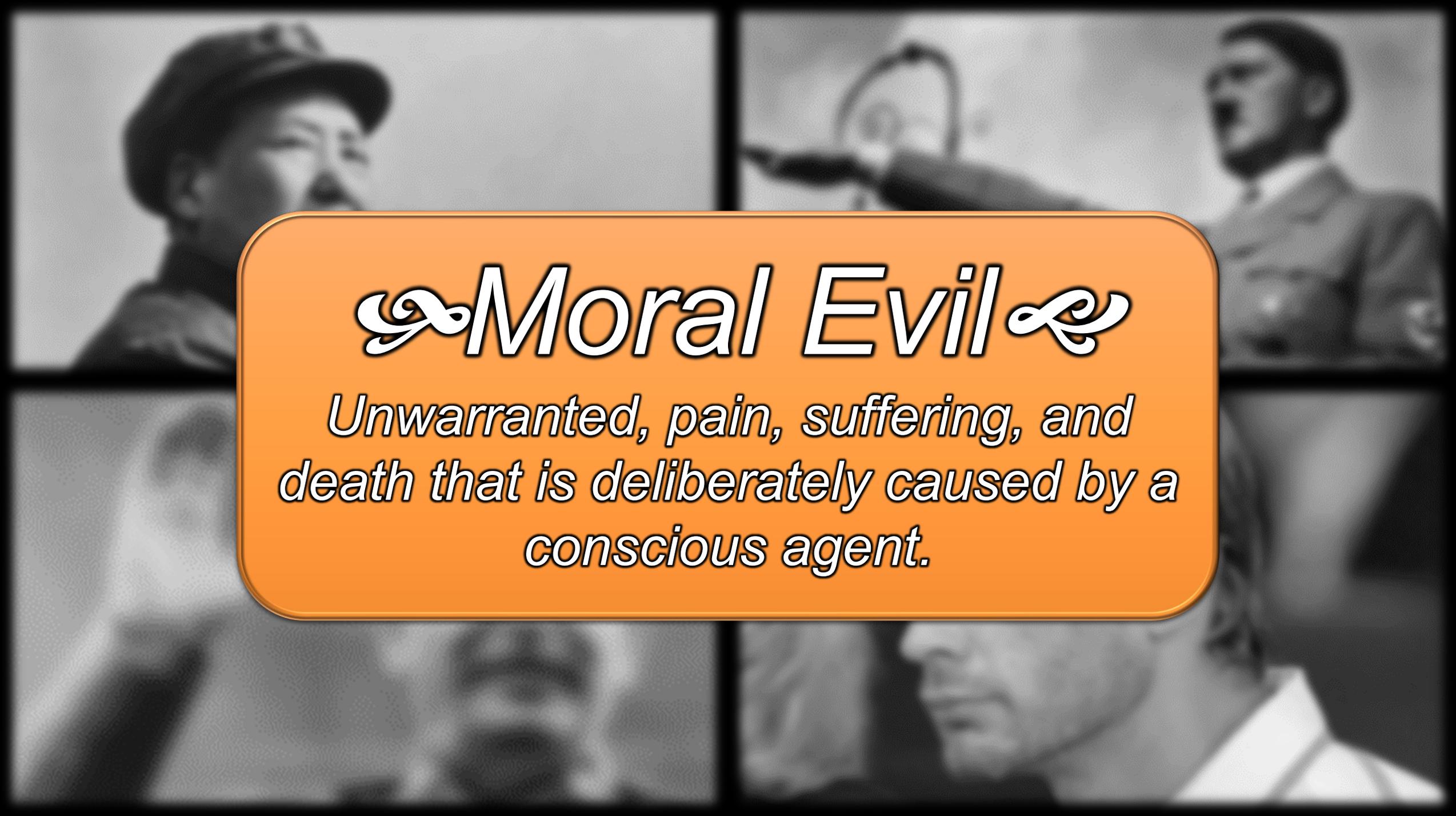


∞ Natural Evil ∞

Unwarranted, pain, suffering, and death that is not caused by any conscious agent.

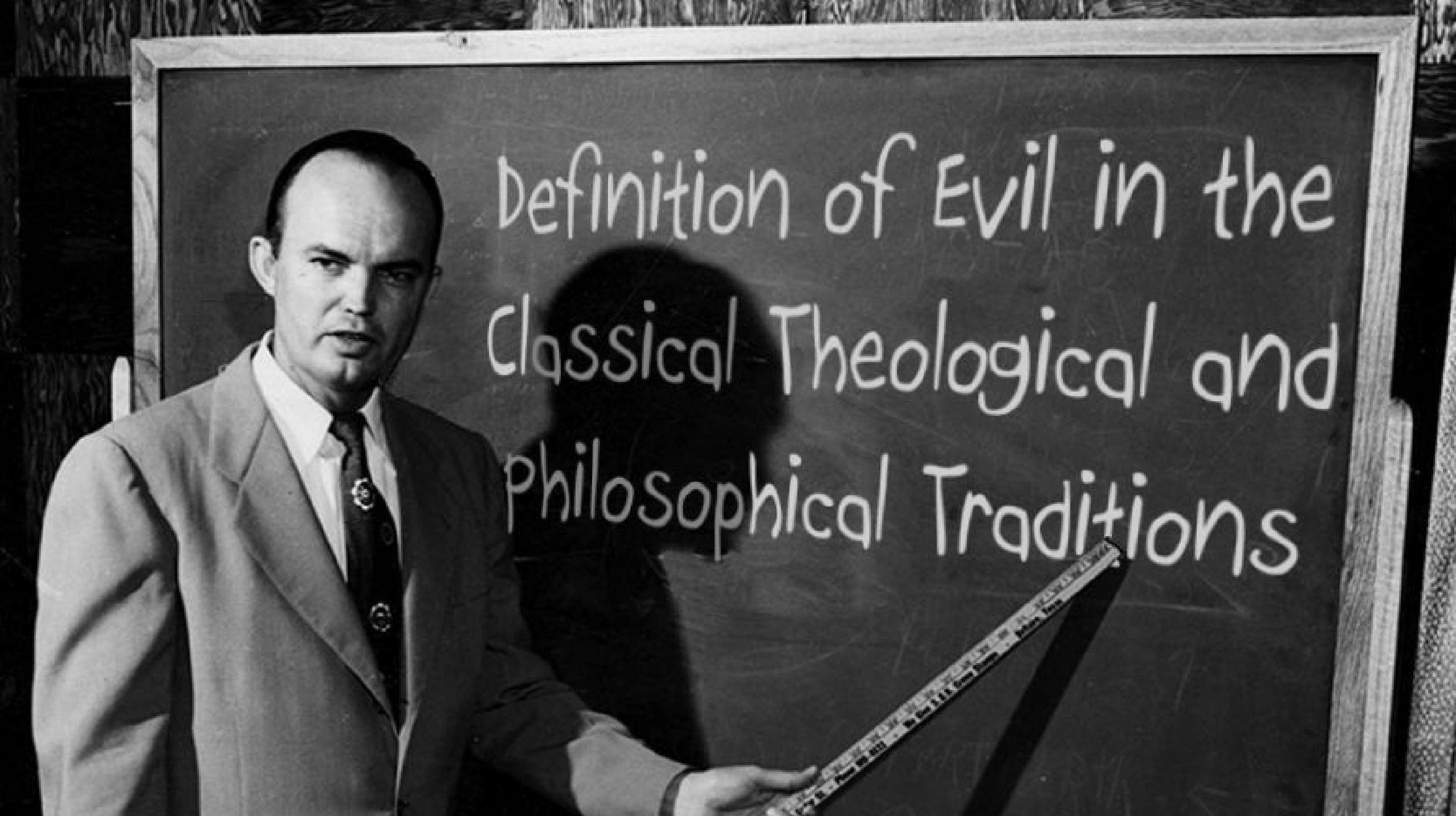
∞Moral Evil∞





∞ Moral Evil ∞

Unwarranted, pain, suffering, and death that is deliberately caused by a conscious agent.



Definition of Evil in the
Classical Theological and
Philosophical Traditions

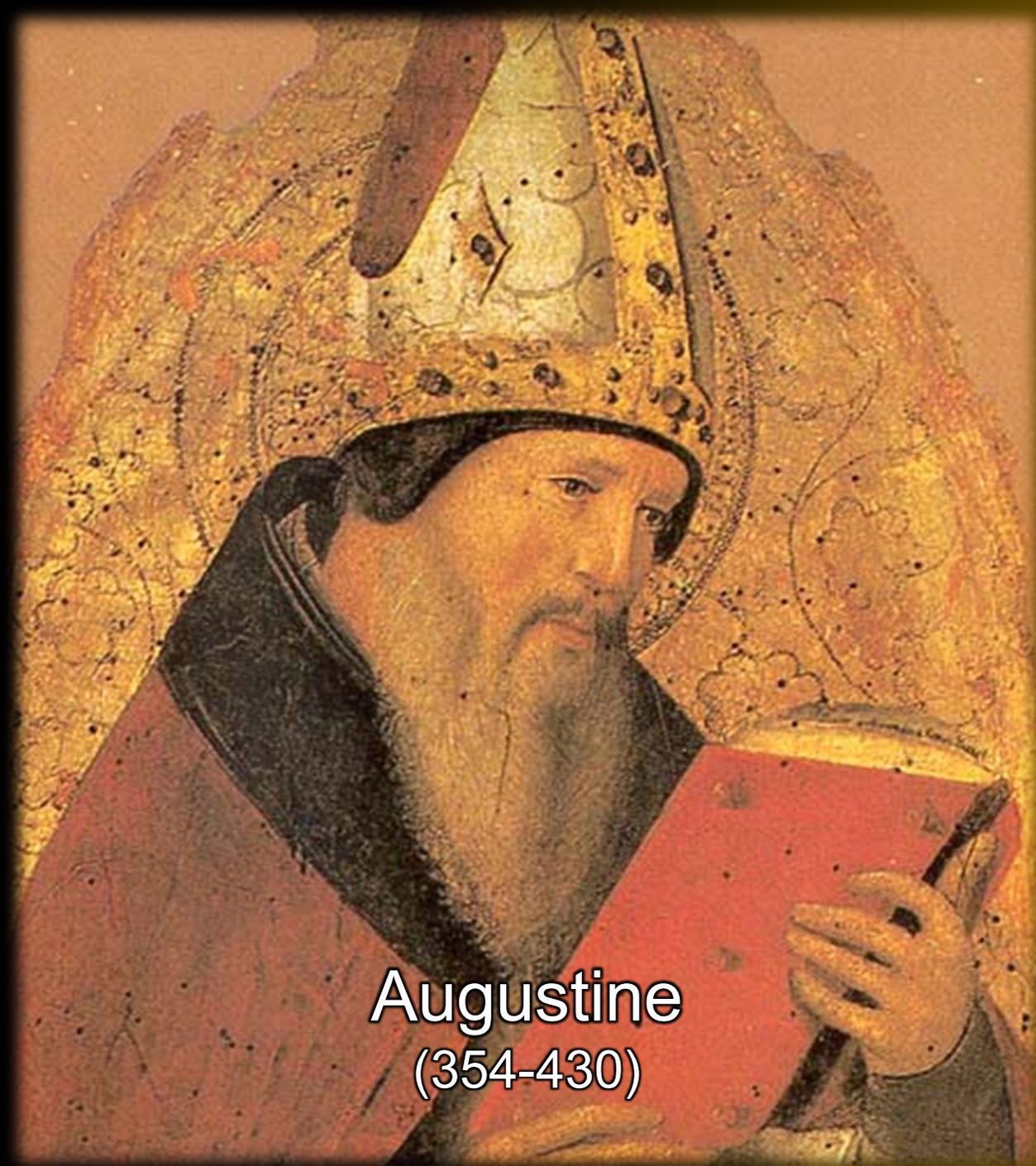
***If God created all things and
evil is something,
then God created evil.***

***If God did not create evil,
then it would seem either:***

evil is unreal

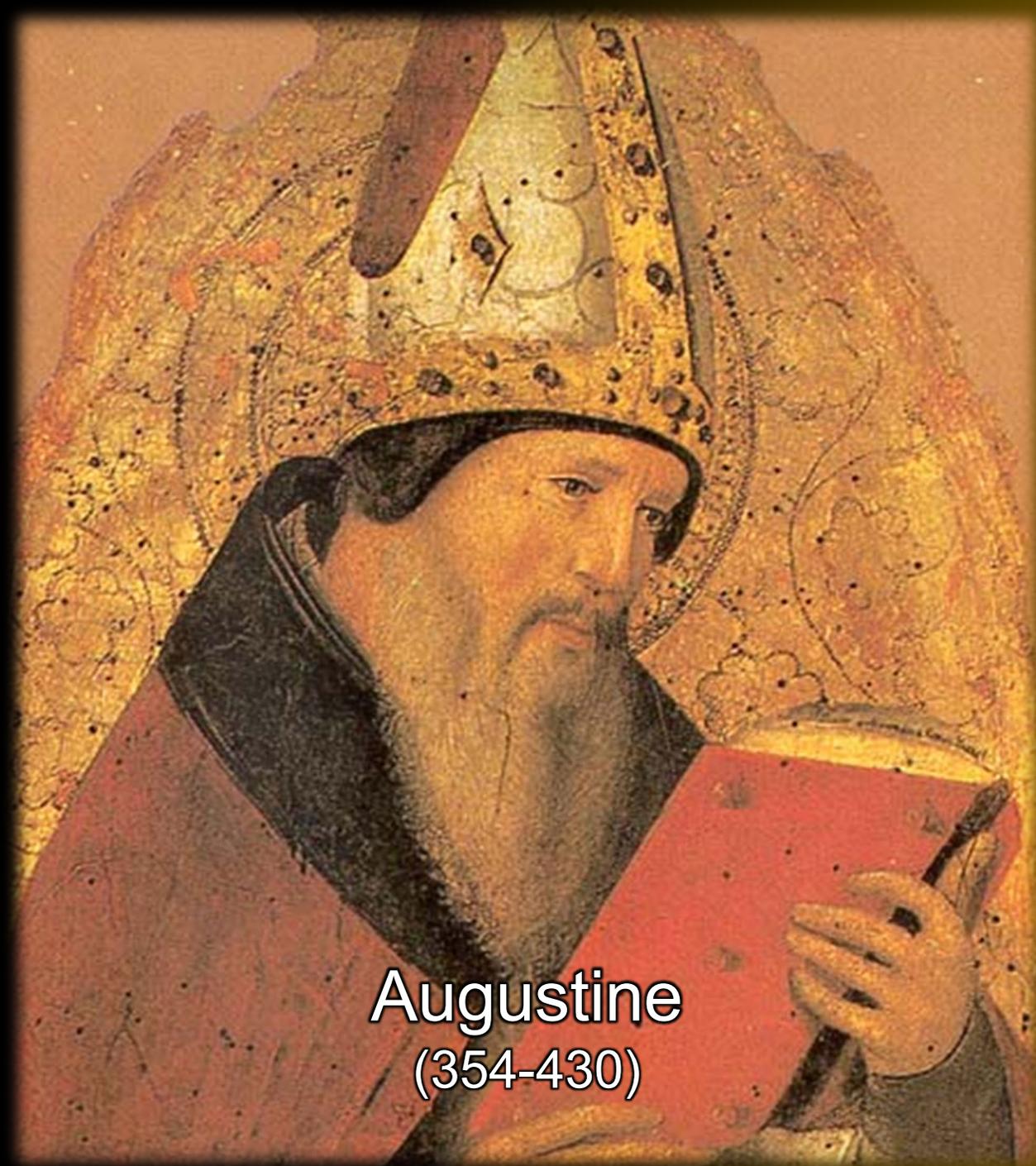
or

evil is not a thing.



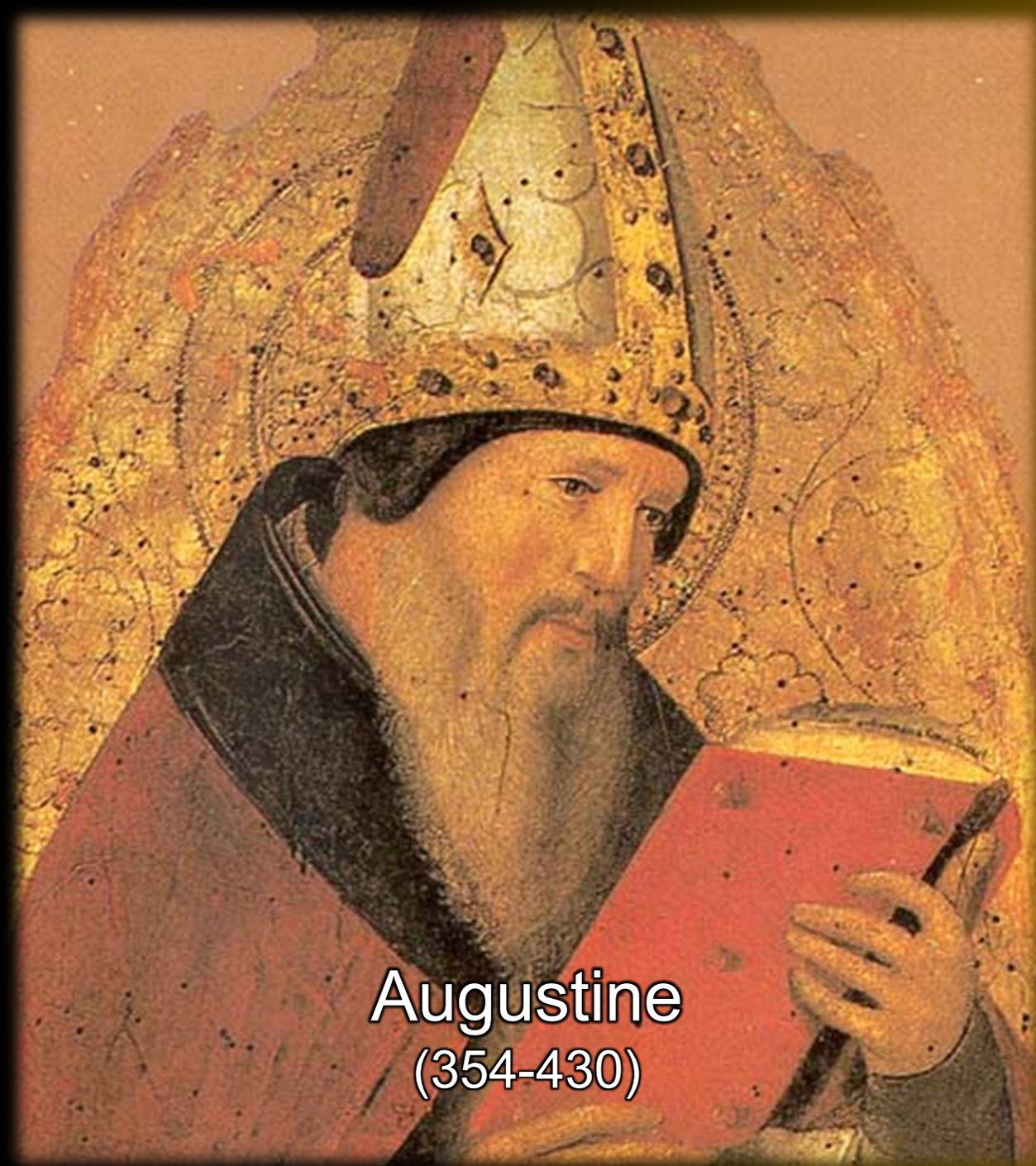
Augustine
(354-430)

Augustine on Evil as Privation



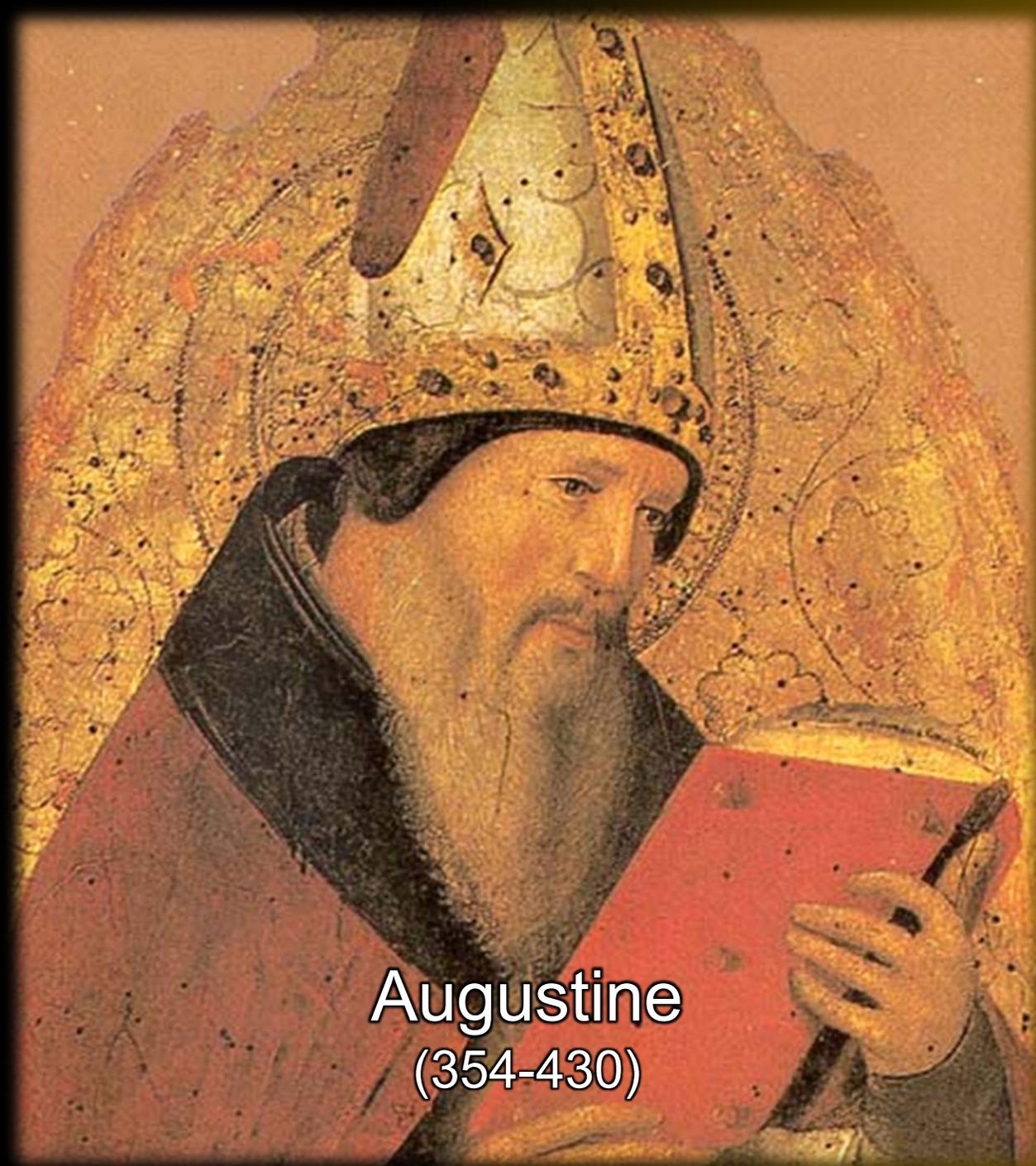
Augustine
(354-430)

There is a
difference
between:



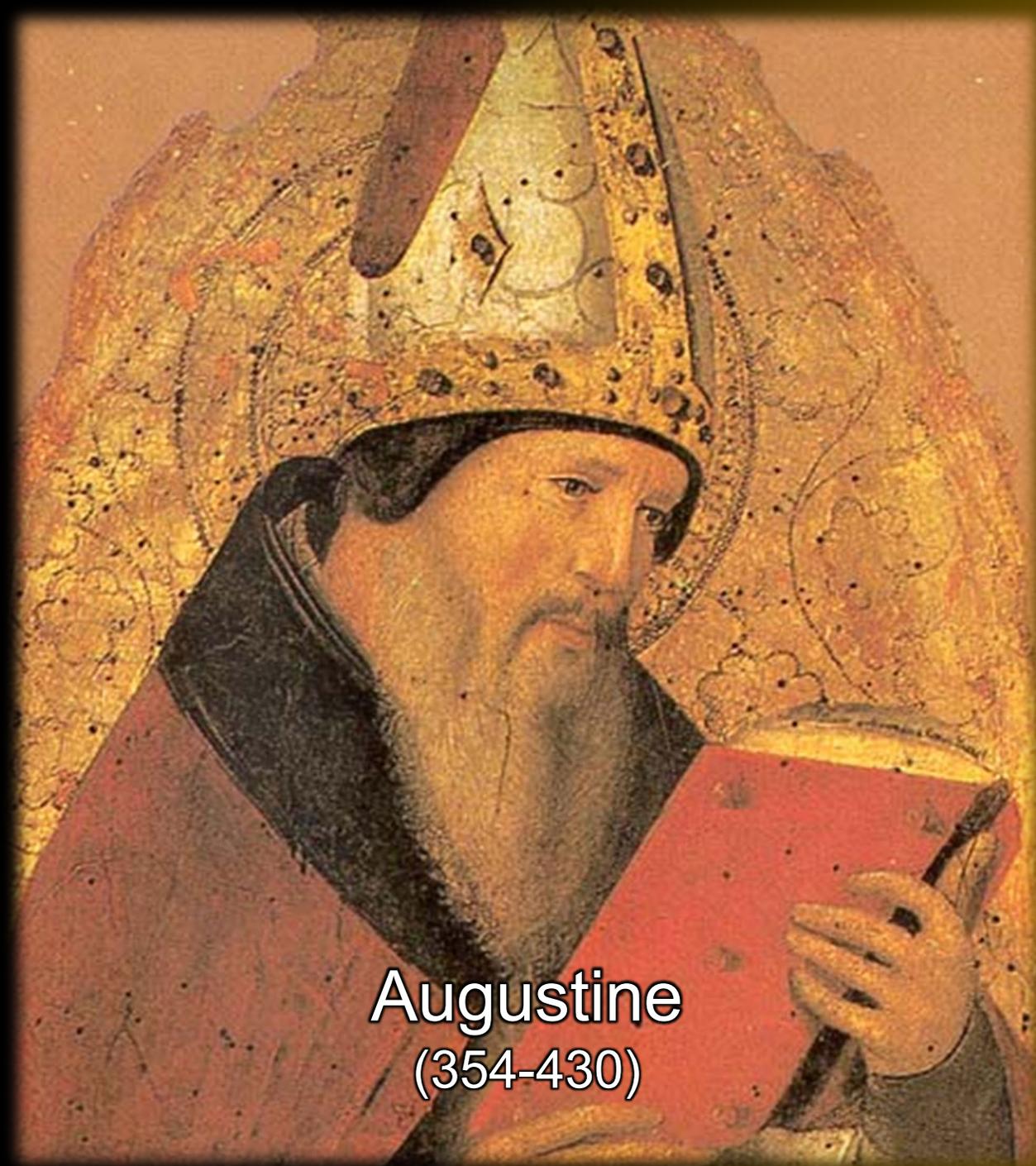
Augustine
(354-430)

There is a
difference
between:
being nothing
(unreal)



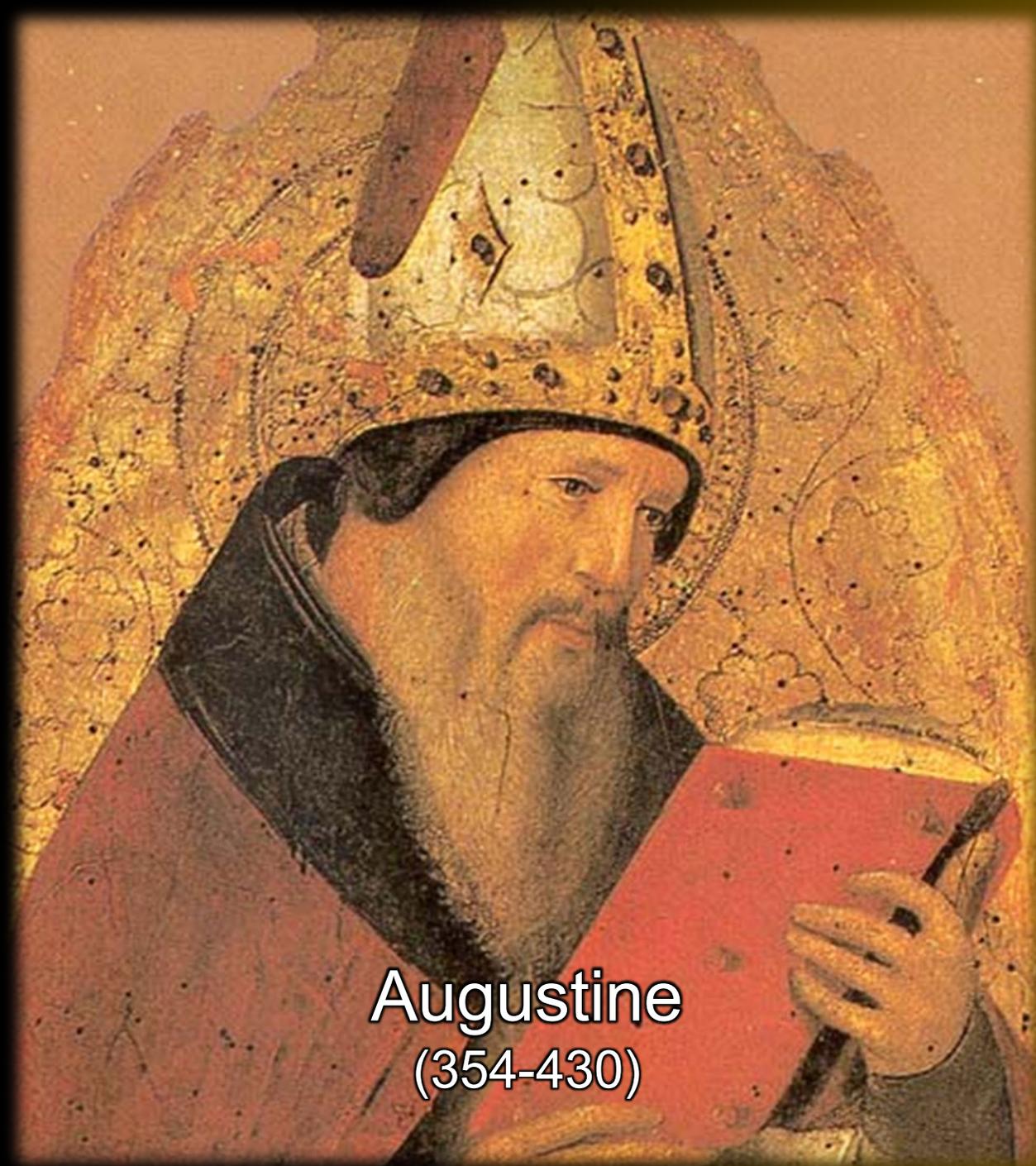
Augustine
(354-430)

There is a
difference
between:
being nothing
(unreal)
and



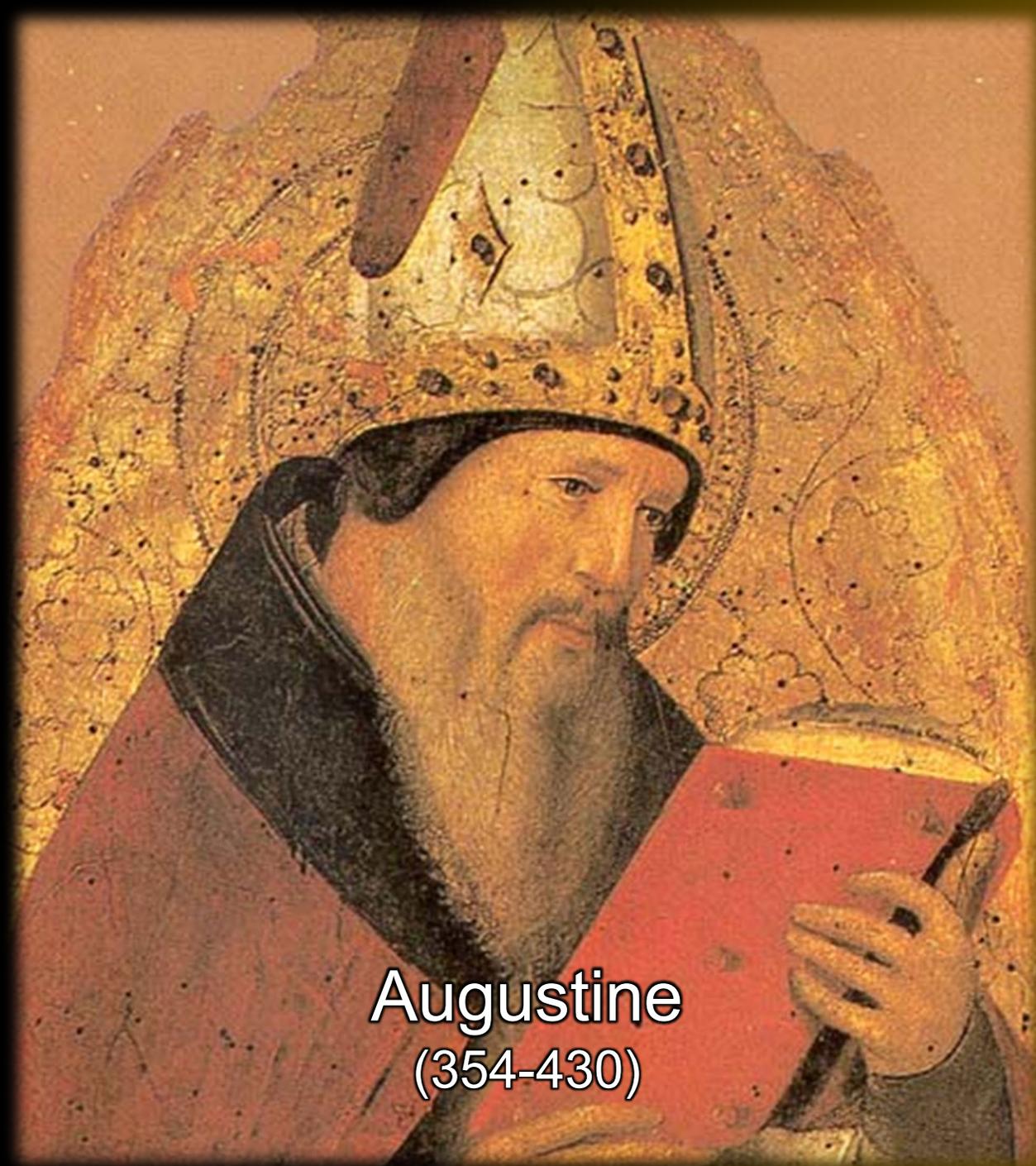
Augustine
(354-430)

There is a
difference
between:
being nothing
(unreal)
and
not being a thing.



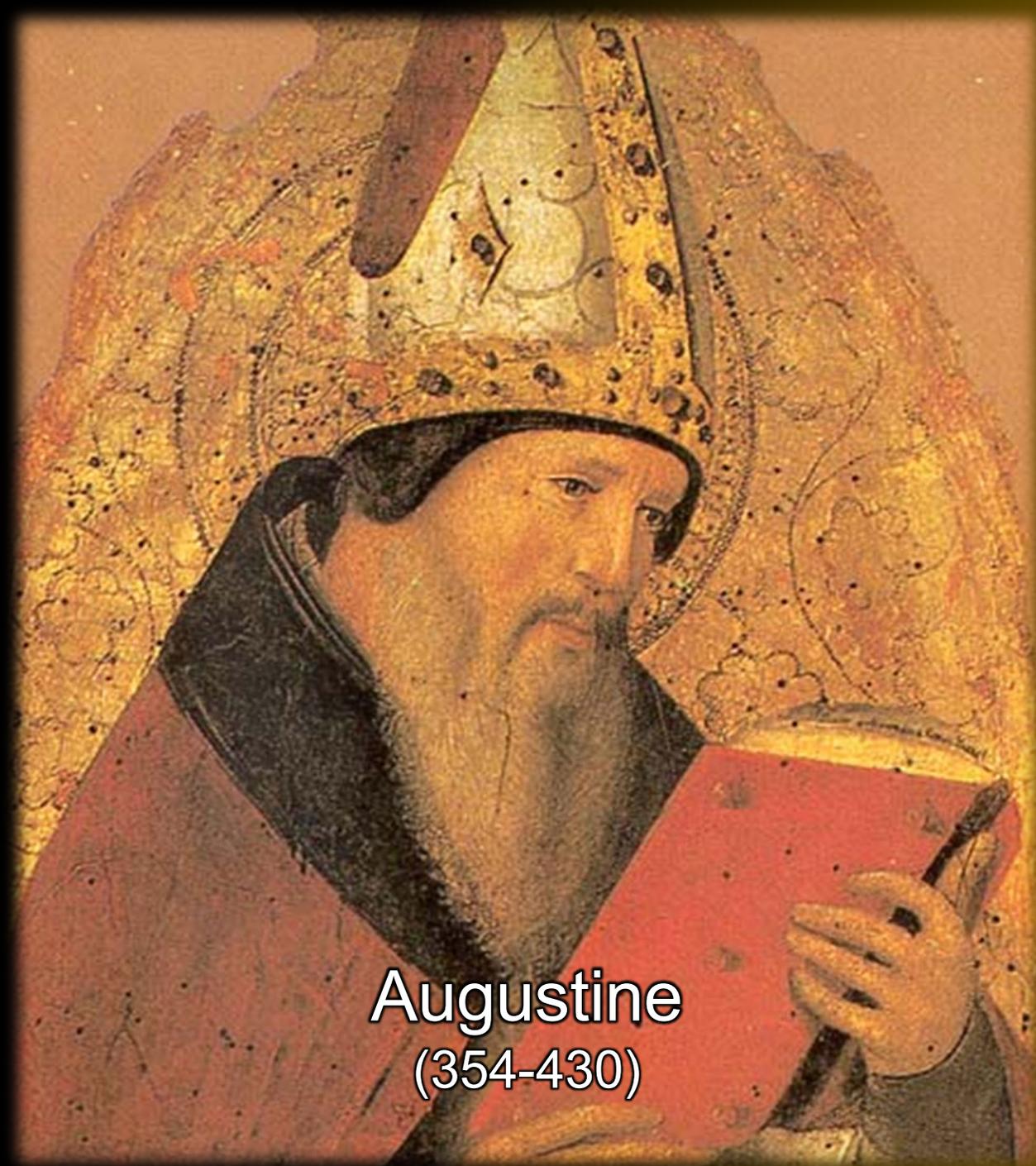
Augustine
(354-430)

There is a
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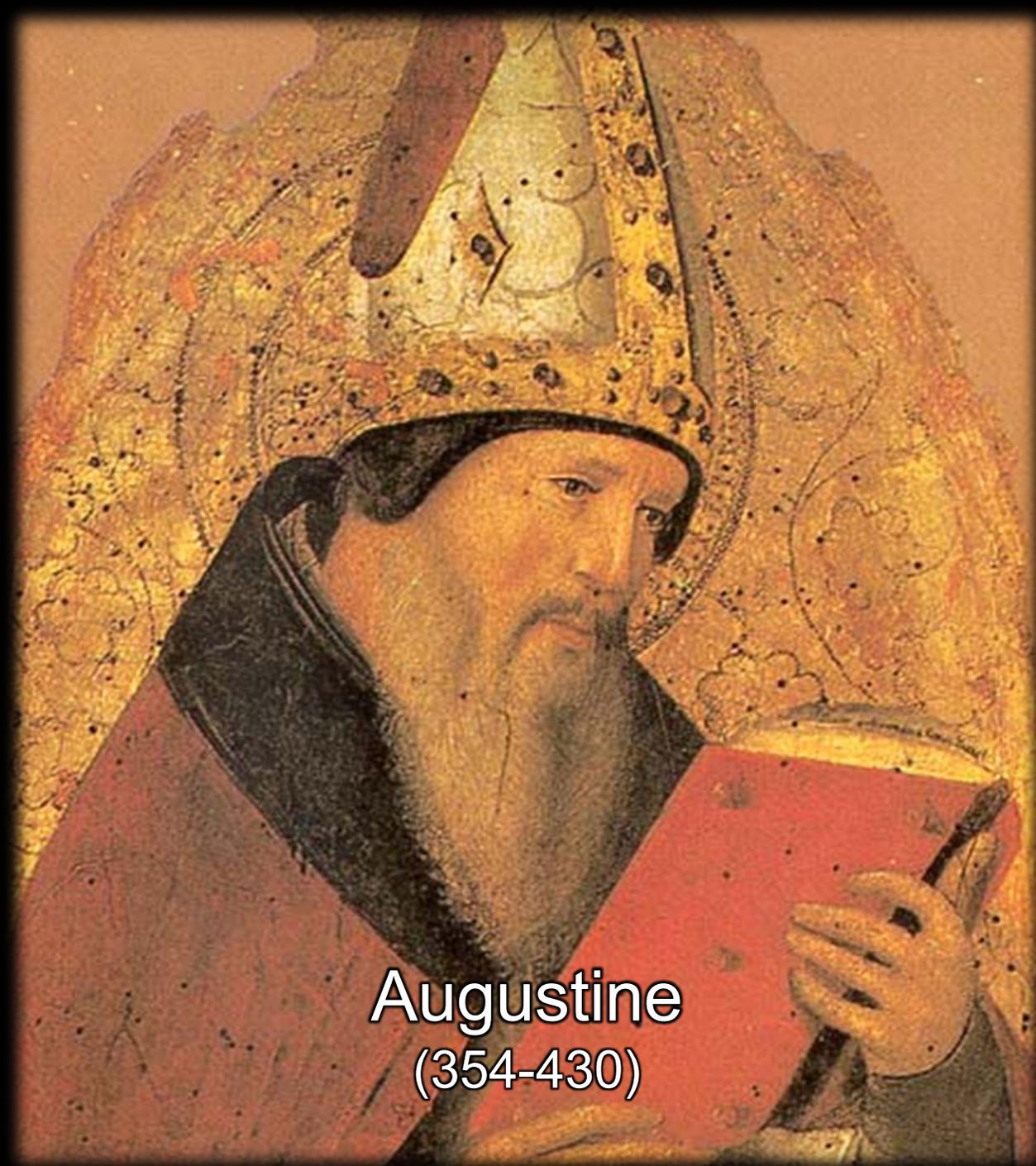
Augustine
(354-430)

Augustine argued
that evil is real but
is not a thing.



Augustine
(354-430)

Augustine argued that evil is real but is not a thing. Rather, it is a **privation** or a **lack** in things.



Augustine
(354-430)

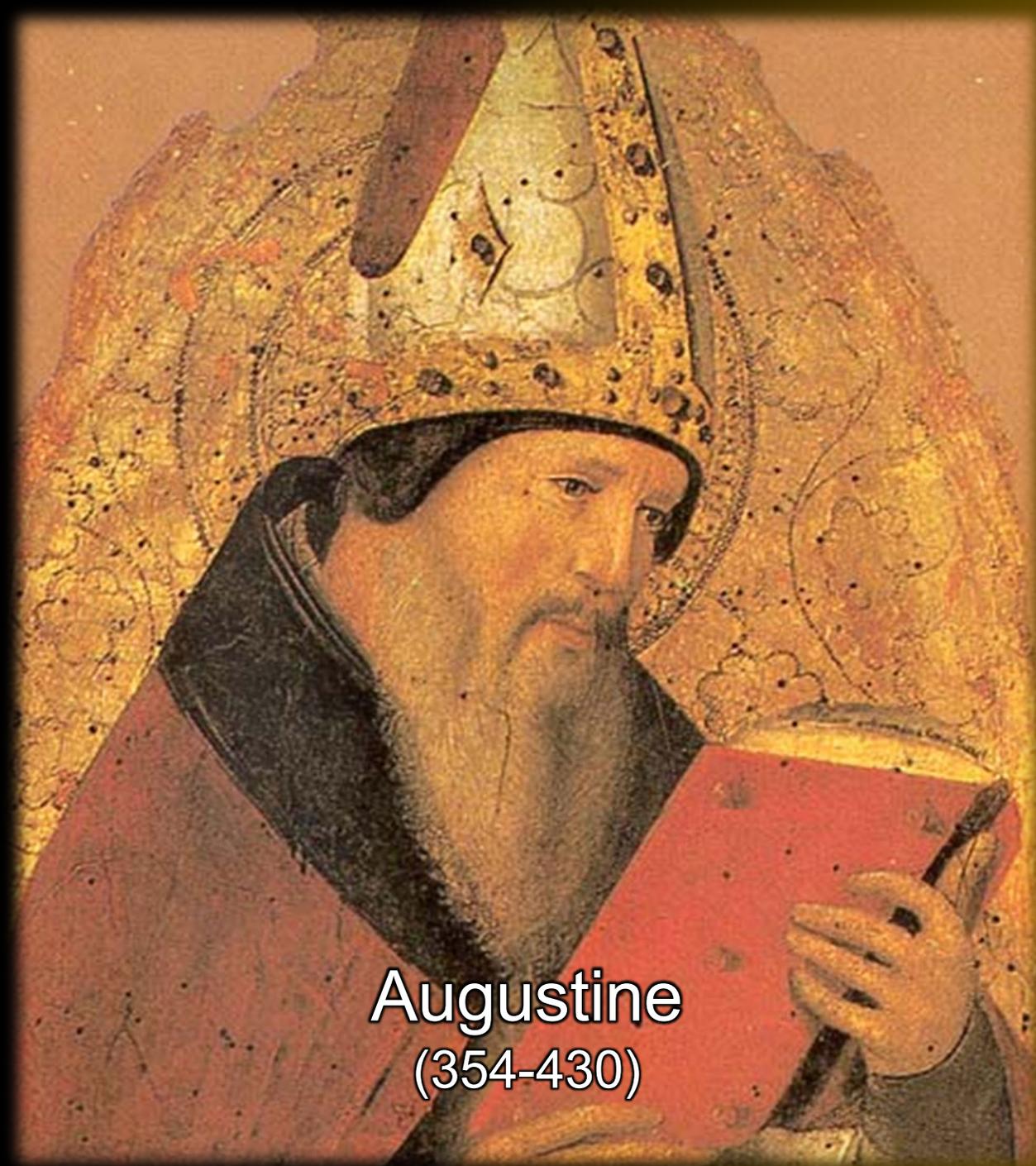
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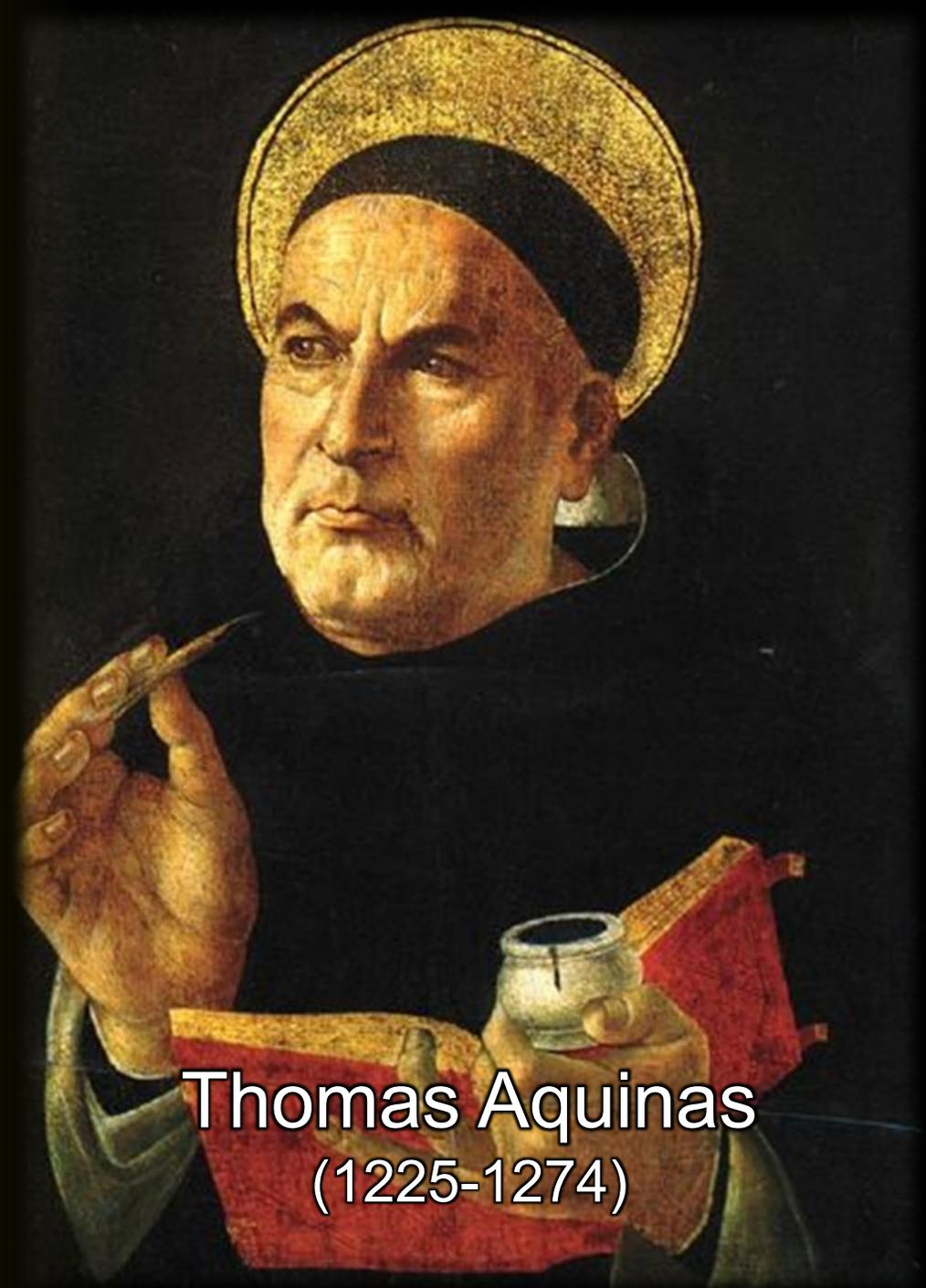
Augustine
(354-430)

**“... evil is
only the
privation
of a good
”
...**

[Augustine, *Confessions* III, 7, §12, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 85.
malum non esse nisi privationem boni]

“Evil is simply a privation of something which a subject is entitled by its origin to possess and which it ought to have.”

[*Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 7, §2, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), Pt. 1, 48]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)



***Blindness is the
privation of sight.
But blindness is not a
thing in itself.***



***Blindness is the
privation of sight.
But blindness is not a
thing in itself.***

***A rock cannot see, but
it is not blind because
it "ought" not be able
to see.***





***Blindness is the
privation of sight.
But blindness is not a
thing in itself.***

***A rock cannot see, but
it is not blind because
it "ought" not be able
to see.***



negation



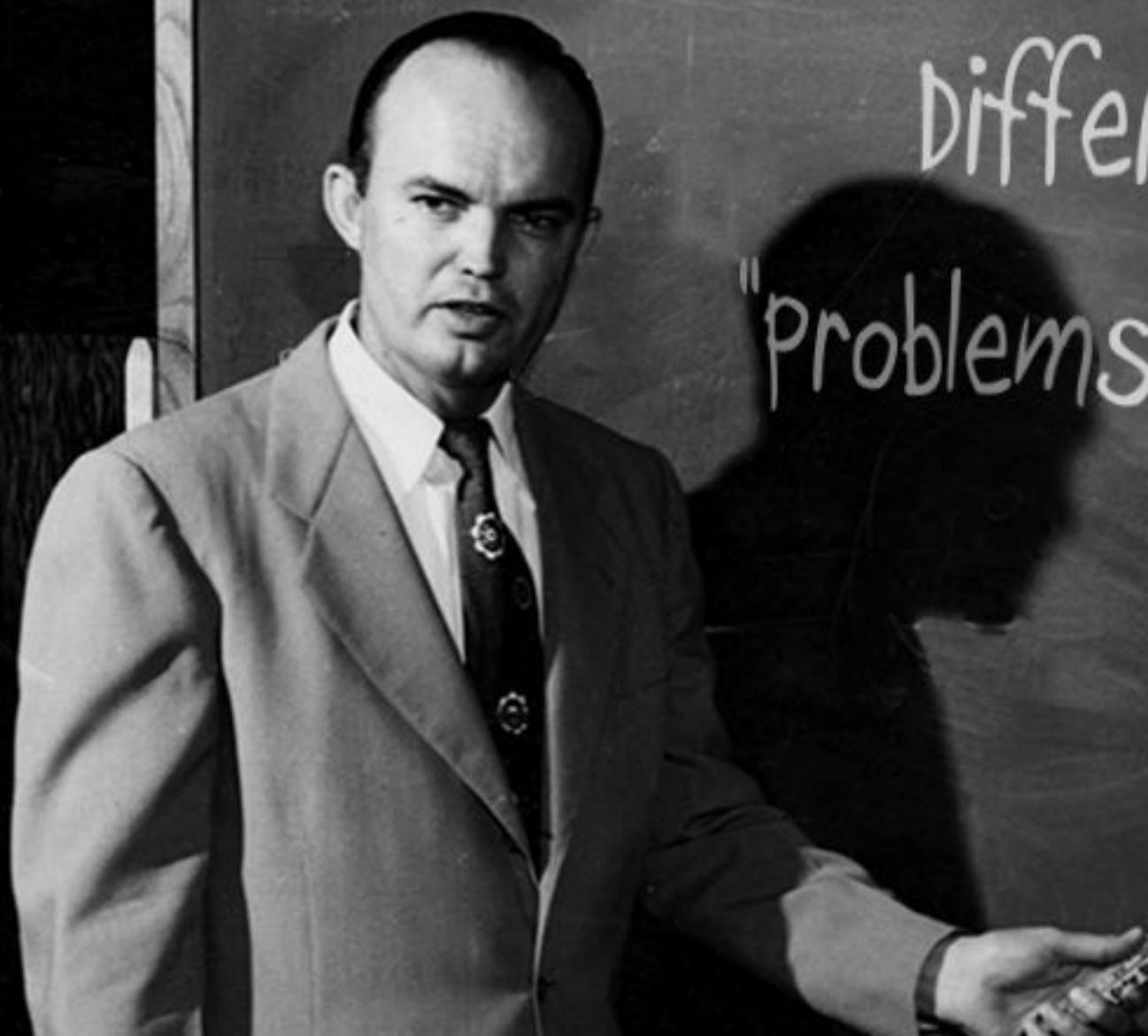
privation

***Blindness is the
privation of sight.
But blindness is not a
thing in itself.***

***A rock cannot see, but
it is not blind because
it "ought" not be able
to see.***



negation



Different
"problems" of Evil

*The Logical
Problem of Evil*

*the logical problem of evil is
notion that the propositions*

“God exists”

and

“Evil exists”

are logically incompatible

***With very few exceptions,
the consensus among
contemporary philosophers
is that there is no logical
problem of evil.***

*The Pastoral
Problem of Evil*

***The pastoral problem of evil
address the emotional and
practical ways of managing
the personal experience of
suffering in one's life.***

*The Philosophical
Problem of Evil*

*The Philosophical /
Inductive /
Probabilistic /
Evidential / Moral
Problem of Evil*



Formulating the
problem of Evil

☞ Premise 1 ☞

*If God is all good (omnibenevolent),
He would prevent evil.*

☞ Premise 2 ☞

*If God is all powerful (omnipotent),
He could prevent evil.*

☞ Premise 3 ☞

If God knew in advance that creation would fall into sin He would have either:

**left well enough
alone and not
created in the
first place**

**left well enough
alone and not
created in the
first place**

**taken steps to
prevent the
occurrence
of evil**

∞ Premise 4 ∞

*There is evil, i.e. evil
is not prevented.*

∞ Conclusions ∞

*Either evil does not exist
or God is not all-good
or God is not all-powerful (or both)
or God is not all-knowing
or God does not exist.*

∞ Conclusions ∞

*Either evil does not exist
or God is not all-good
or God is not all-powerful (or both)
or God is not all-knowing
or **God does not exist.***



Some Non-
Evangelical Options

Evil does not exist.

God is not all-good.

God is not all-powerful.

God is not all-knowing.

God does not exist.

*Evil does
not exist.*

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(1909-1981)**

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Marianne Williamson





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David Hoffmeister and the Messengers held a series of deeply inspiring and healing discussion evenings, gatherings and retreats around South Africa in December last year, a tour that gave rise to the desire for more such events to spread the teachings of A Course in Miracles throughout South Africa. We have invited them to return, so watch this space for details or sign up to our mailing list. To help you to keep living miracles in the mean time, you can find out about Course discussion sessions and retreats being held throughout South Africa and access helpful resources through this site.

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LIVING MIRACLES SOUTH AFRICA

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Seeding the Revelation in South Africa

in [Distribution](#)**Date:**

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Author:

Simone Cox

*By Simone Cox, South Africa**Note from Tamara Wood – Urantia Foundation Coordinator for the South African Initiative:*

A project to place over 1000 Urantia Books across Southern Africa has been sponsored by many individuals within the reader community and carried out by Mark Bloomfield. The project began in June when the first shipment of 500 books was received by Mark in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Since then 700 books have been gratefully accepted by public libraries, universities and religious institutions as indicated by the many thank you letters Urantia Foundation has received.

Mark has covered a lot of territory within South Africa and has also placed books in Namibia and Botswana. Currently, he is en route to Mombassa, Kenya where 300 books will be arriving for additional library placement. After this round, Mark will return to South Africa to receive one more shipment of 300 books in order to complete this phase of his mission.

The Trustees and Staff extend their thanks to the reader community for participating in this service of making our treasured text available to so many individuals across Southern Africa.

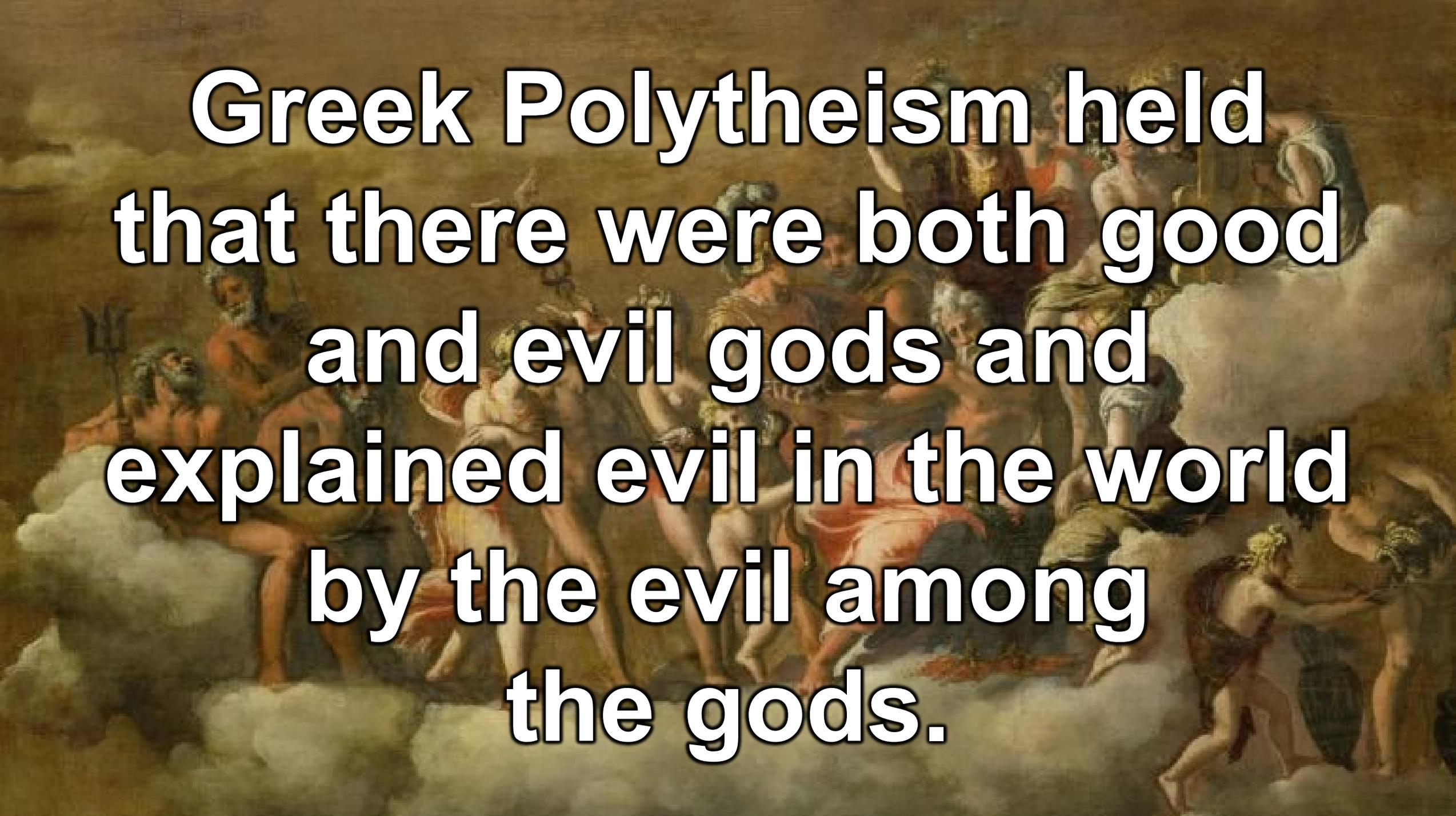
On behalf of the budding Urantia community in South Africa, kindly allow me to express our gratitude and appreciation for the wonderful work you are doing in service of the fifth epochal revelation, our Christ Michael and our beloved planet, and for your generous contributions to our own efforts.

As a spiritually progressive country, South Africa is thirsty for the rich blessing of the Urantia teachings. Not only will we benefit greatly from the books seeded into our local libraries, but we also enjoy upliftment and encouragement from your loving prayers and kind support.

Our Urantia community is still embryonic (we now have almost 80 people on record) but is growing at the rate of four to six new (recorded)

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*God is not
all-good.*



Greek Polytheism held that there were both good and evil gods and explained evil in the world by the evil among the gods.

*God is not
all-powerful.*



Rabbi Harold Kushner

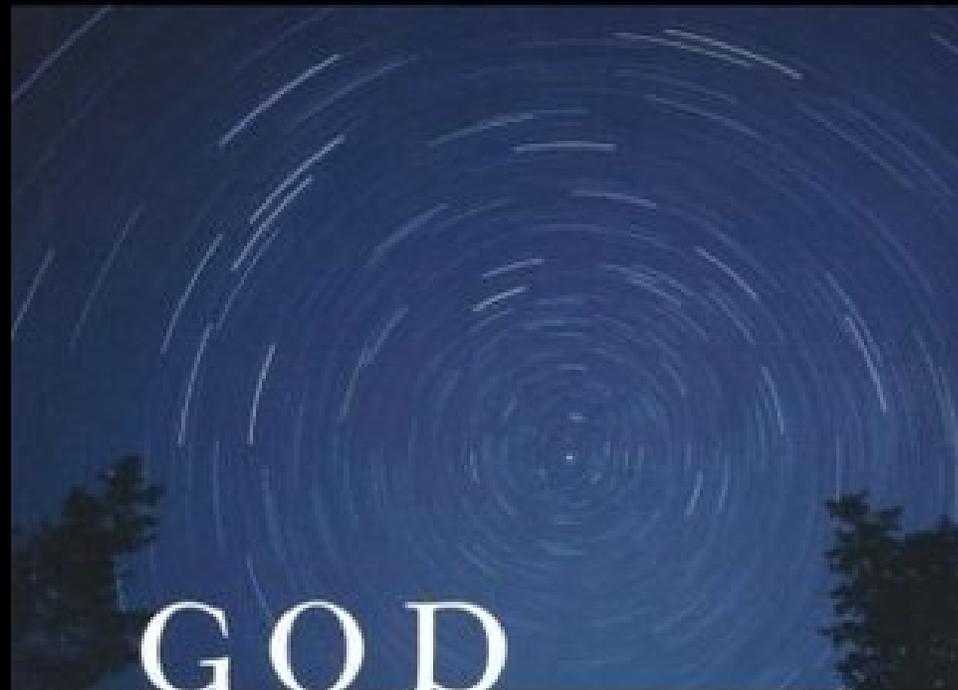
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*God is not
all-knowing.*

Does God ever change his mind?



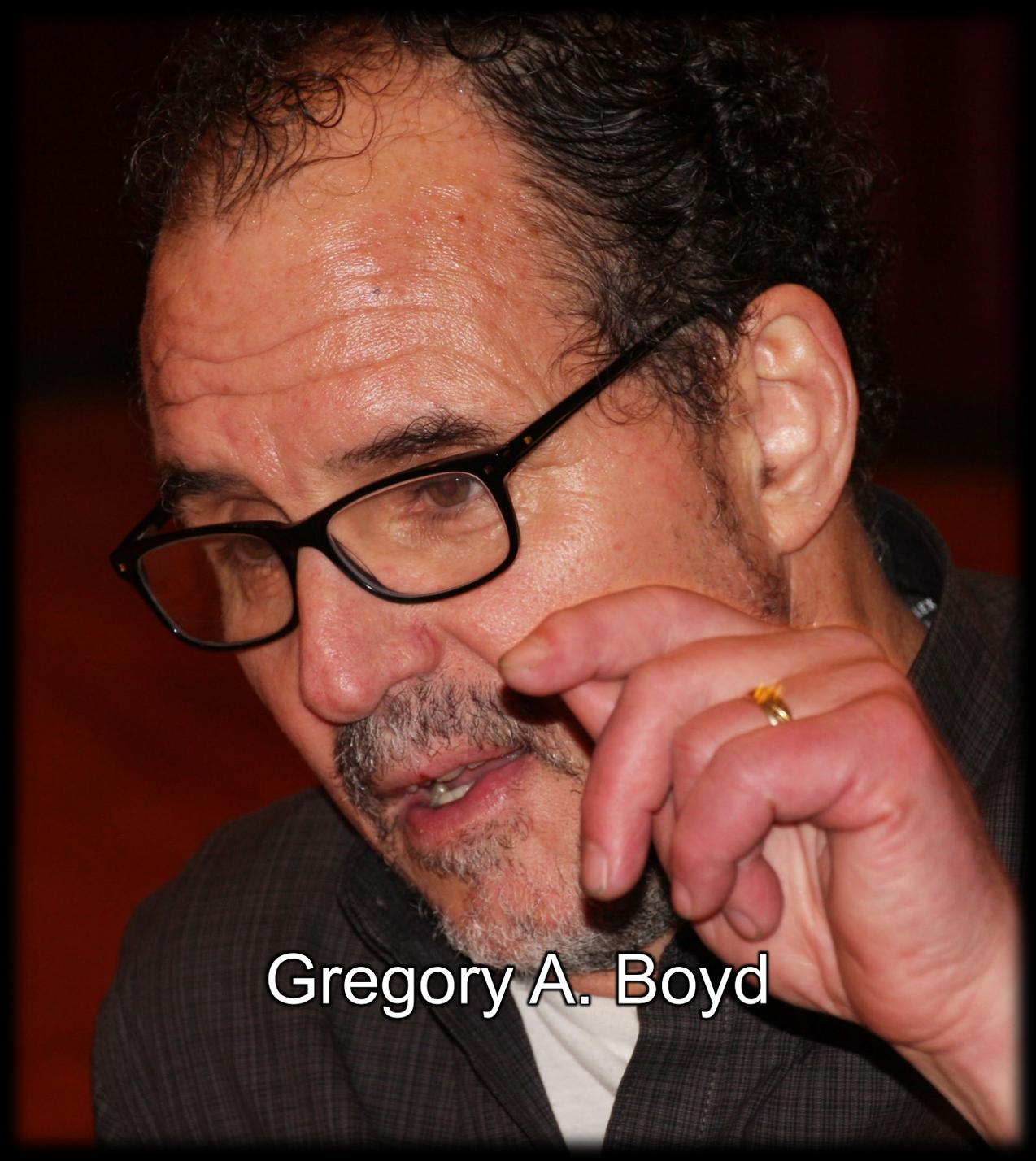
GOD

OF THE POSSIBLE

A
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TO THE
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Does God ever change his mind?



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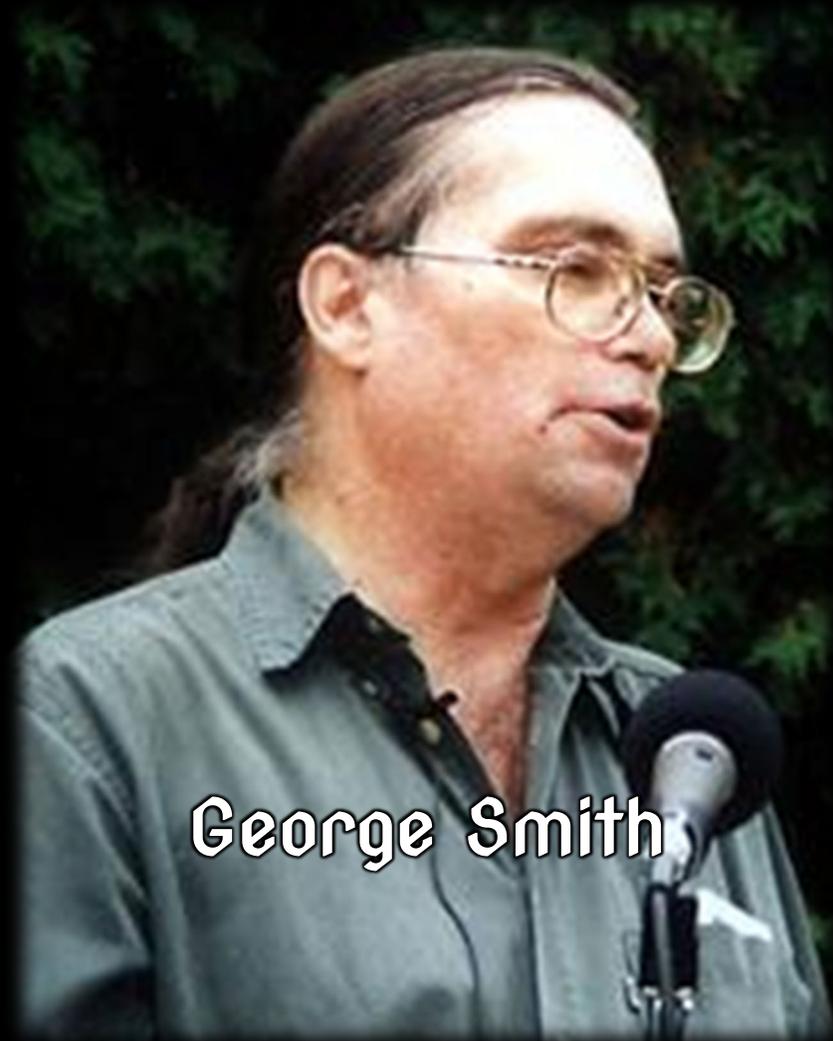
Gregory A. Boyd

*God does
not exist.*

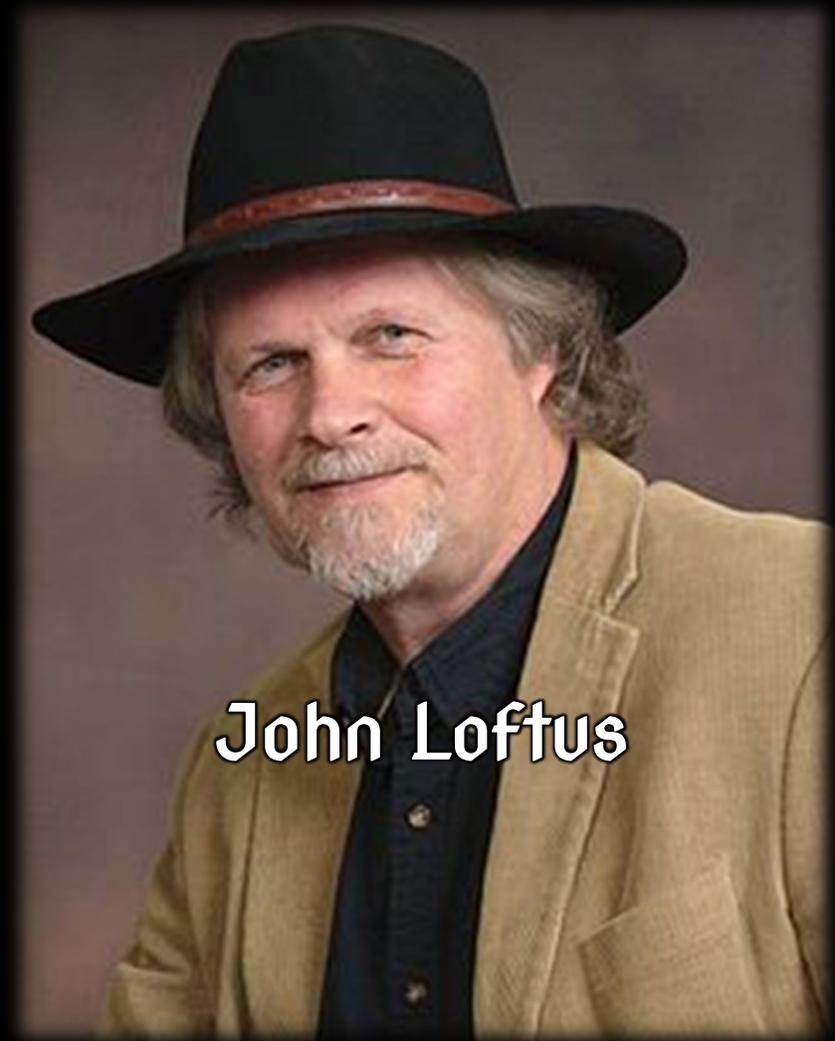
Popular Atheism



Dan Barker

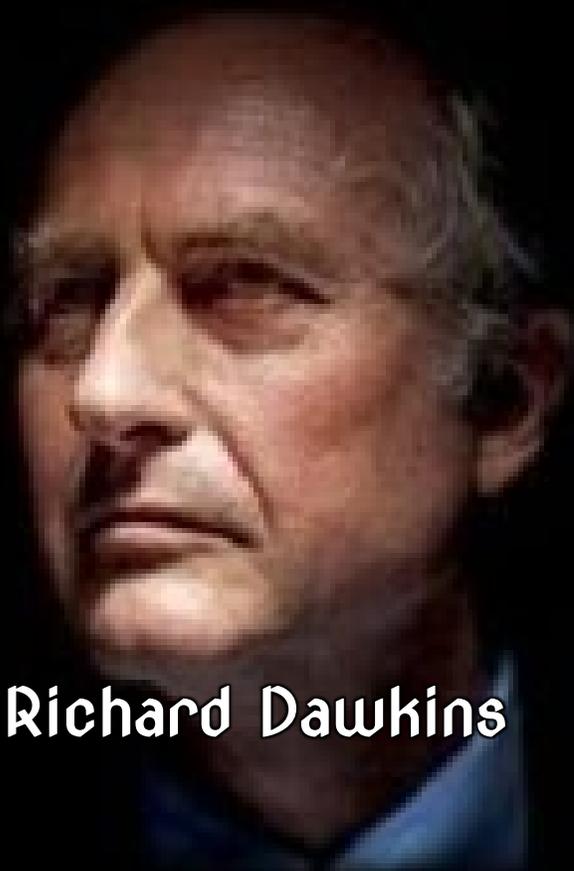


George Smith



John Loftus

The New Atheism



Richard Dawkins



Sam Harris



**Christopher Hitchens
(1949-2011)**

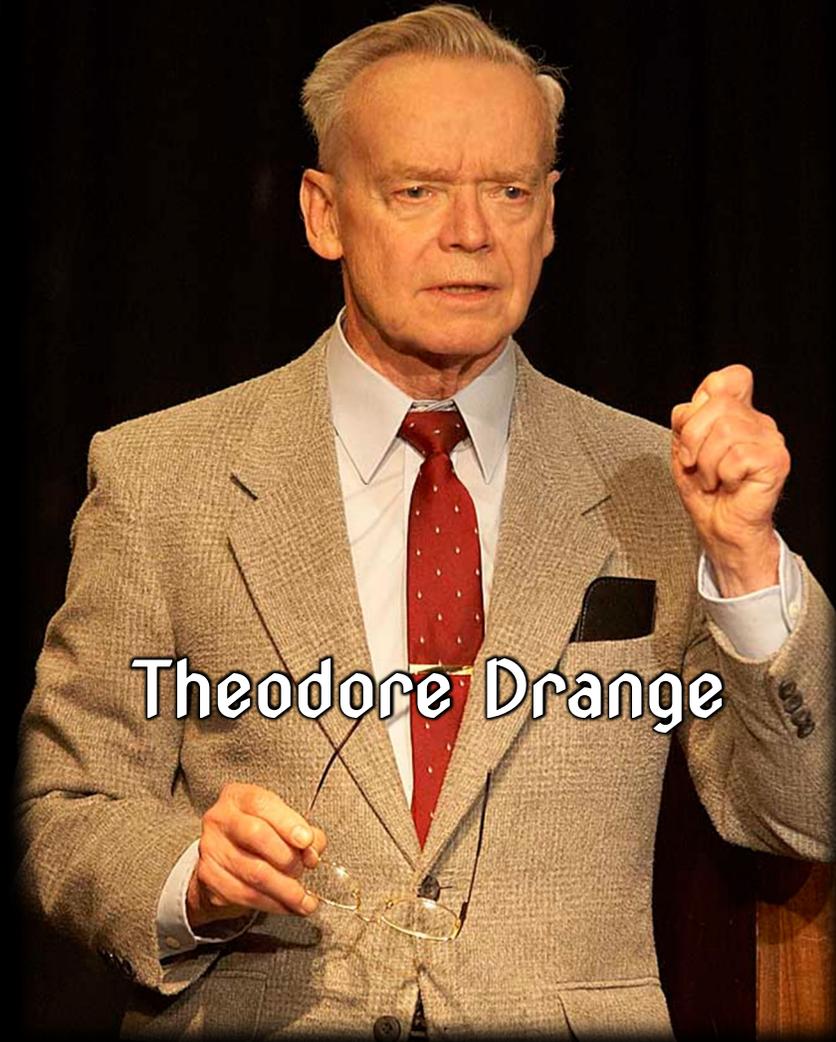


Daniel Dennett

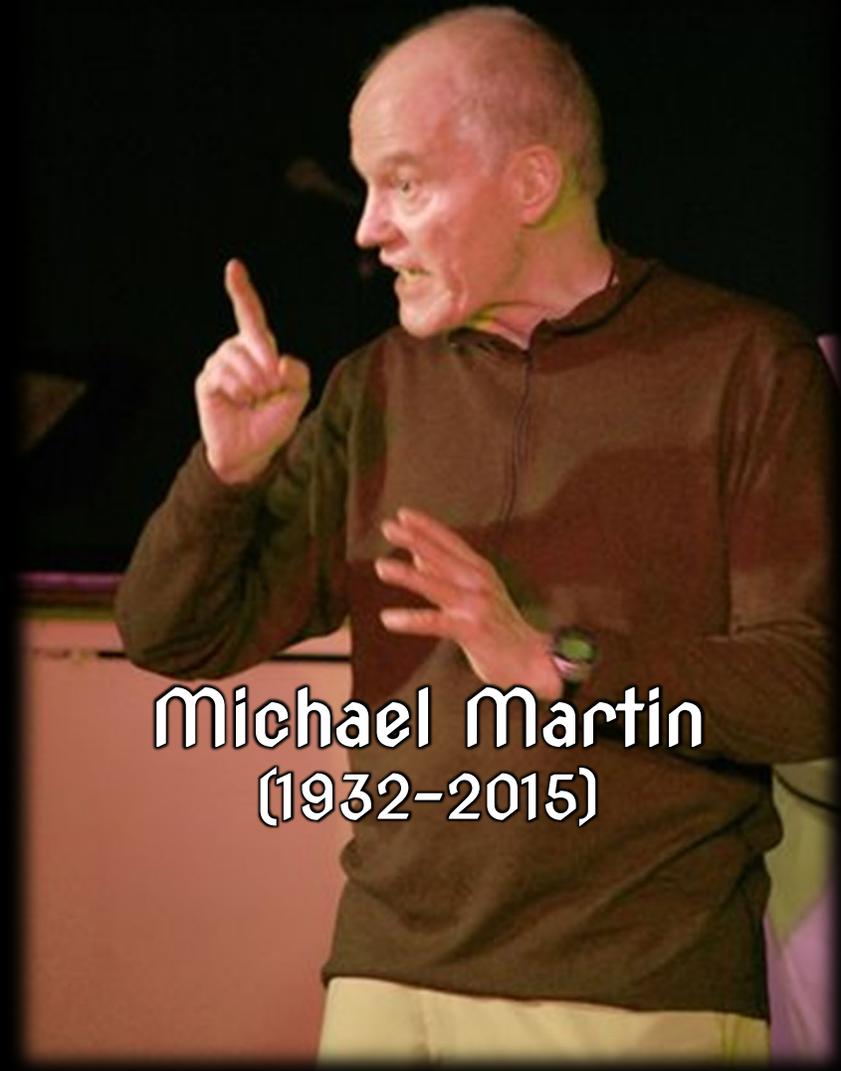
Academic Atheism



J. L. Mackie
(1917-1981)



Theodore Drange



Michael Martin
(1932-2015)

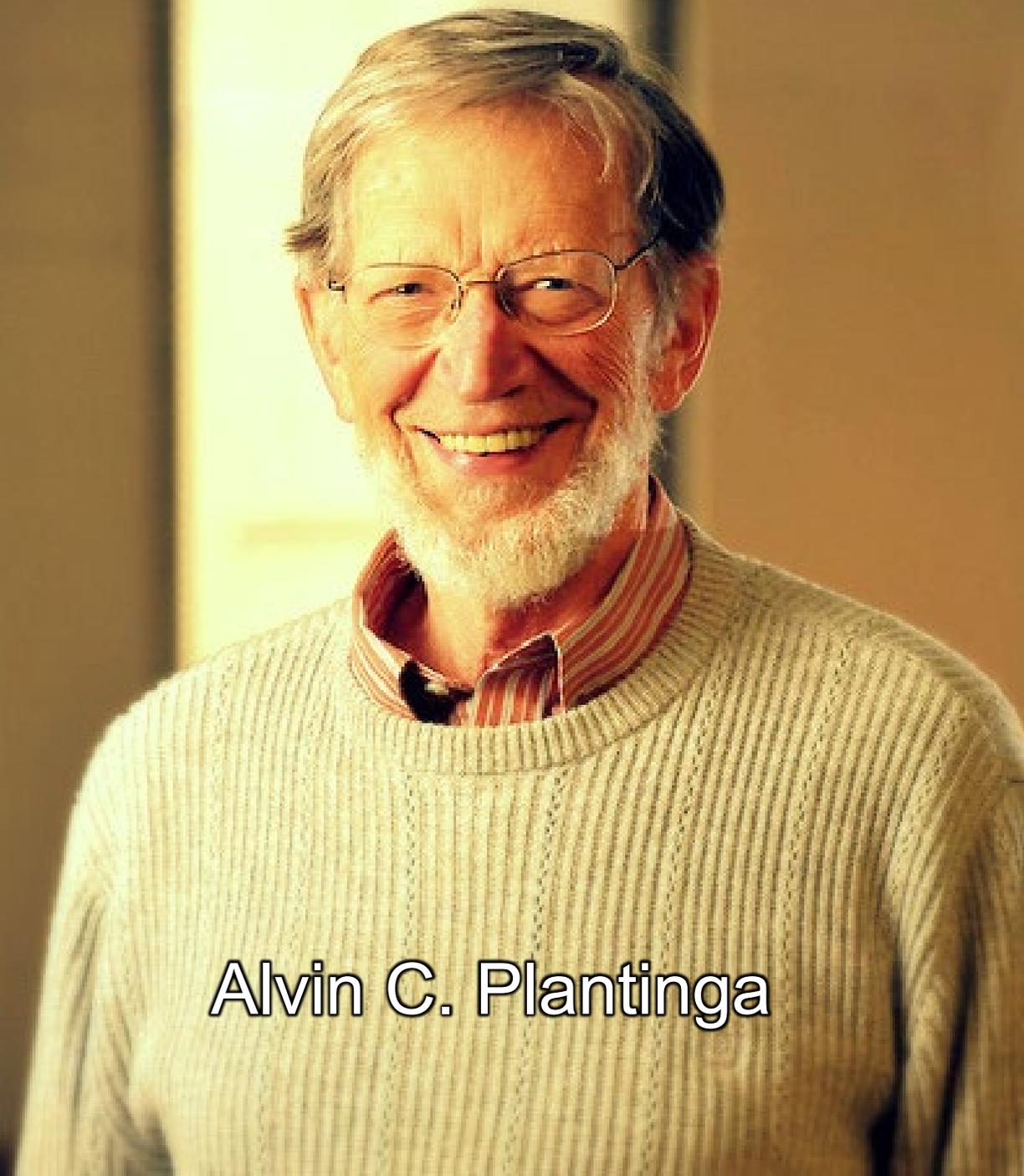


Some
Evangelical Options

The Free
Will Defense

God, Freedom, and Evil

ALVIN C. PLANTINGA

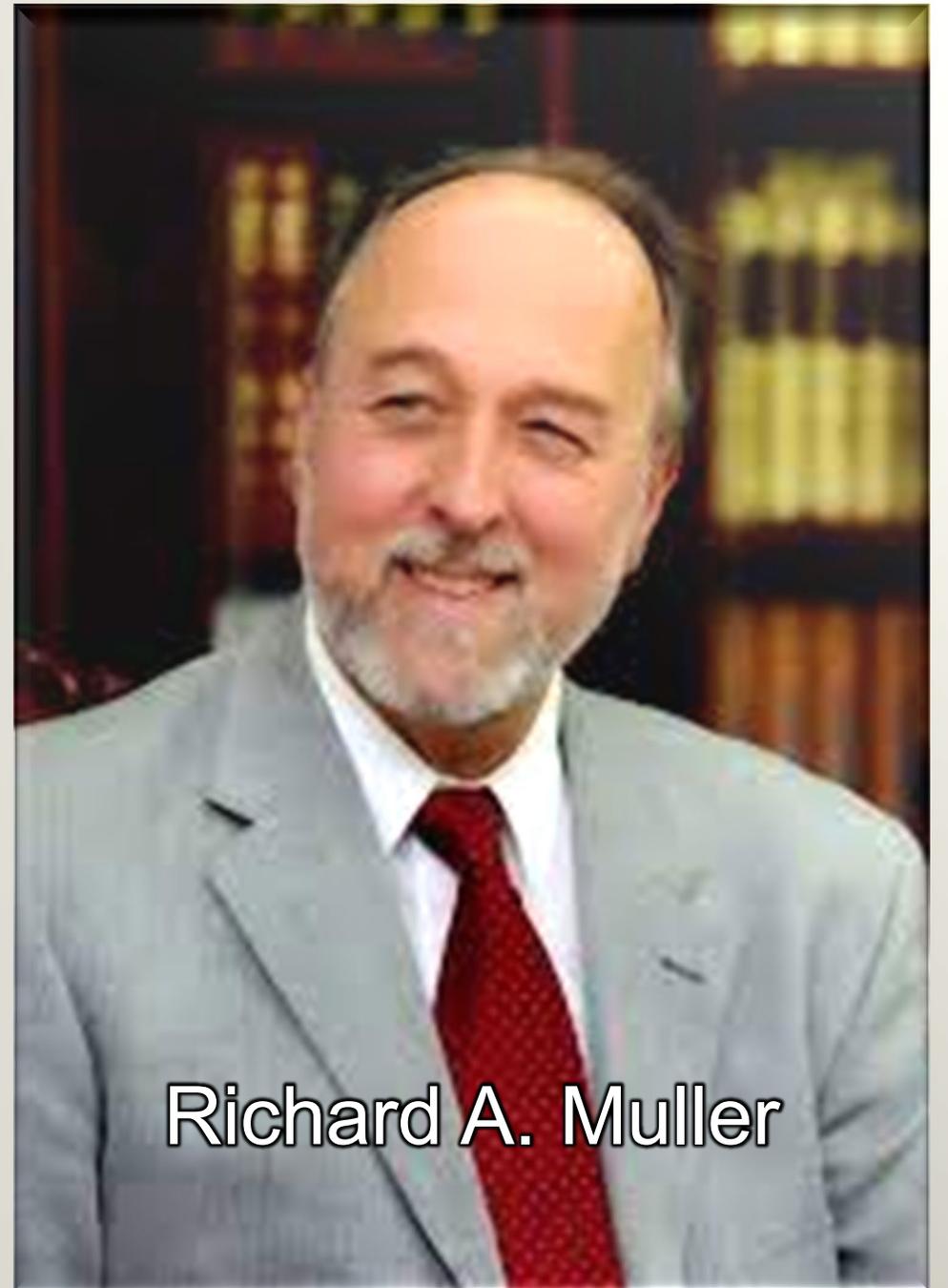


Alvin C. Plantinga

DIVINE WILL
AND HUMAN
CHOICE

*Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity
in Early Modern Reformed Thought*

RICHARD A. MULLER

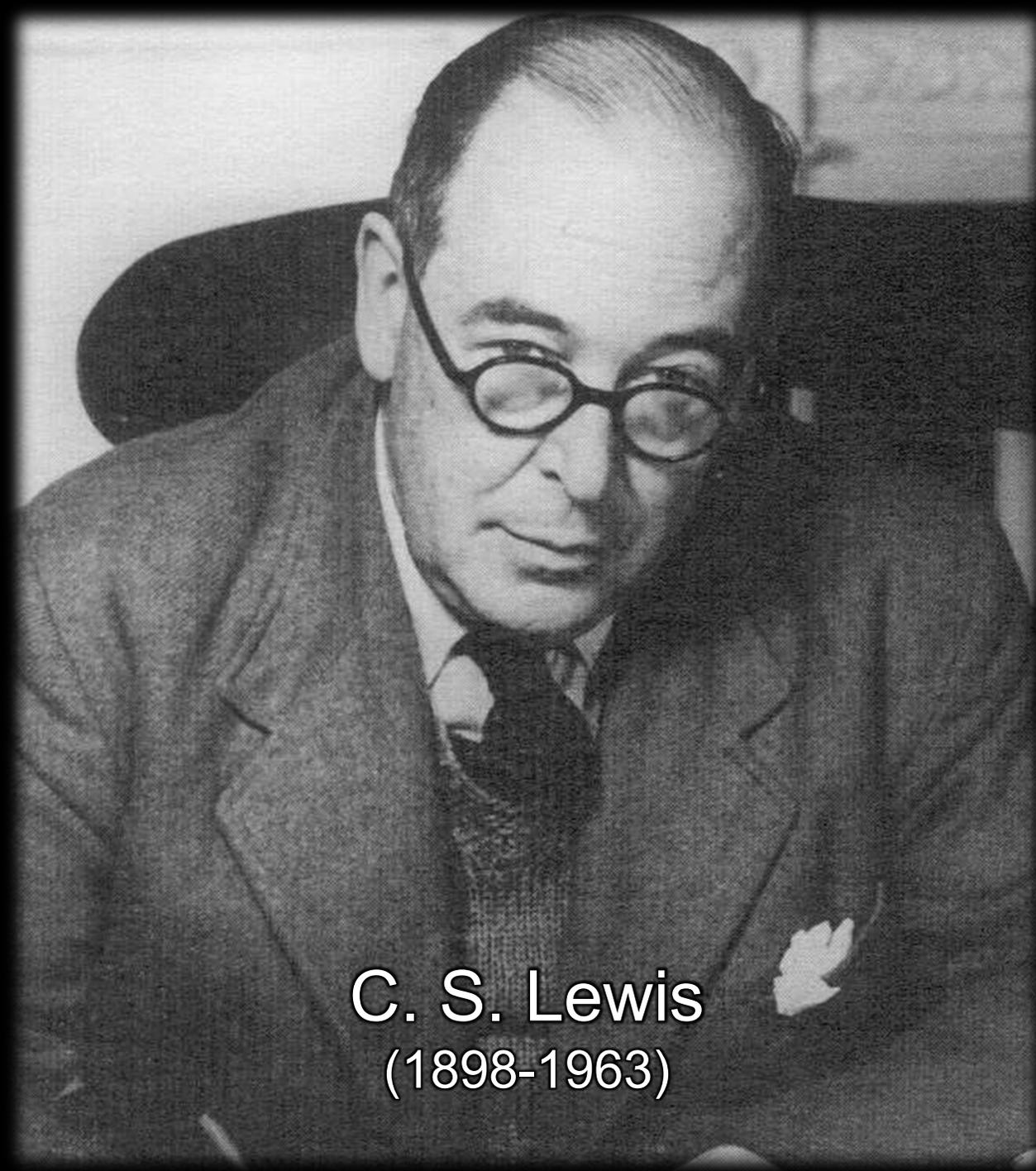


Richard A. Muller

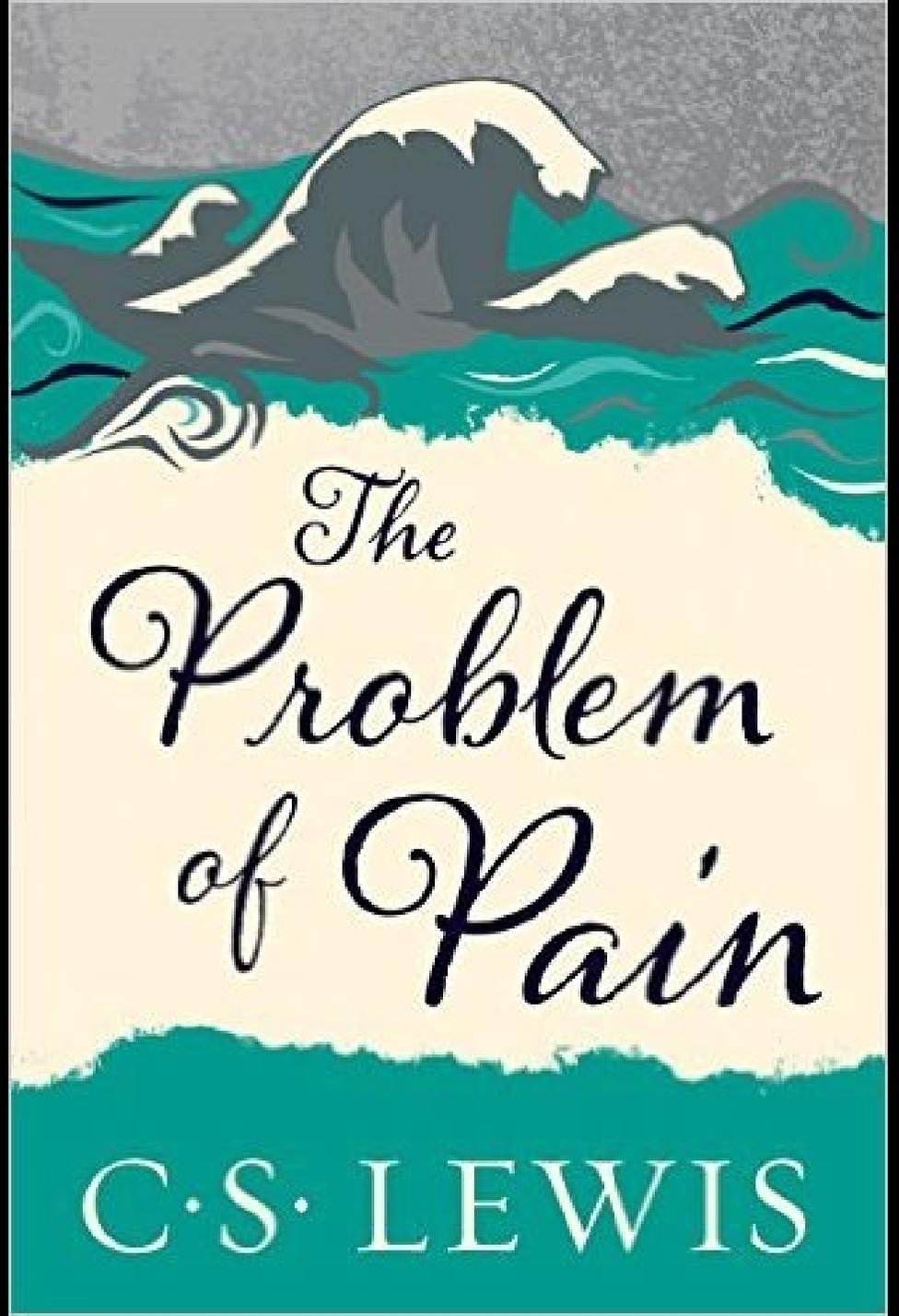
It's
Good!
good?

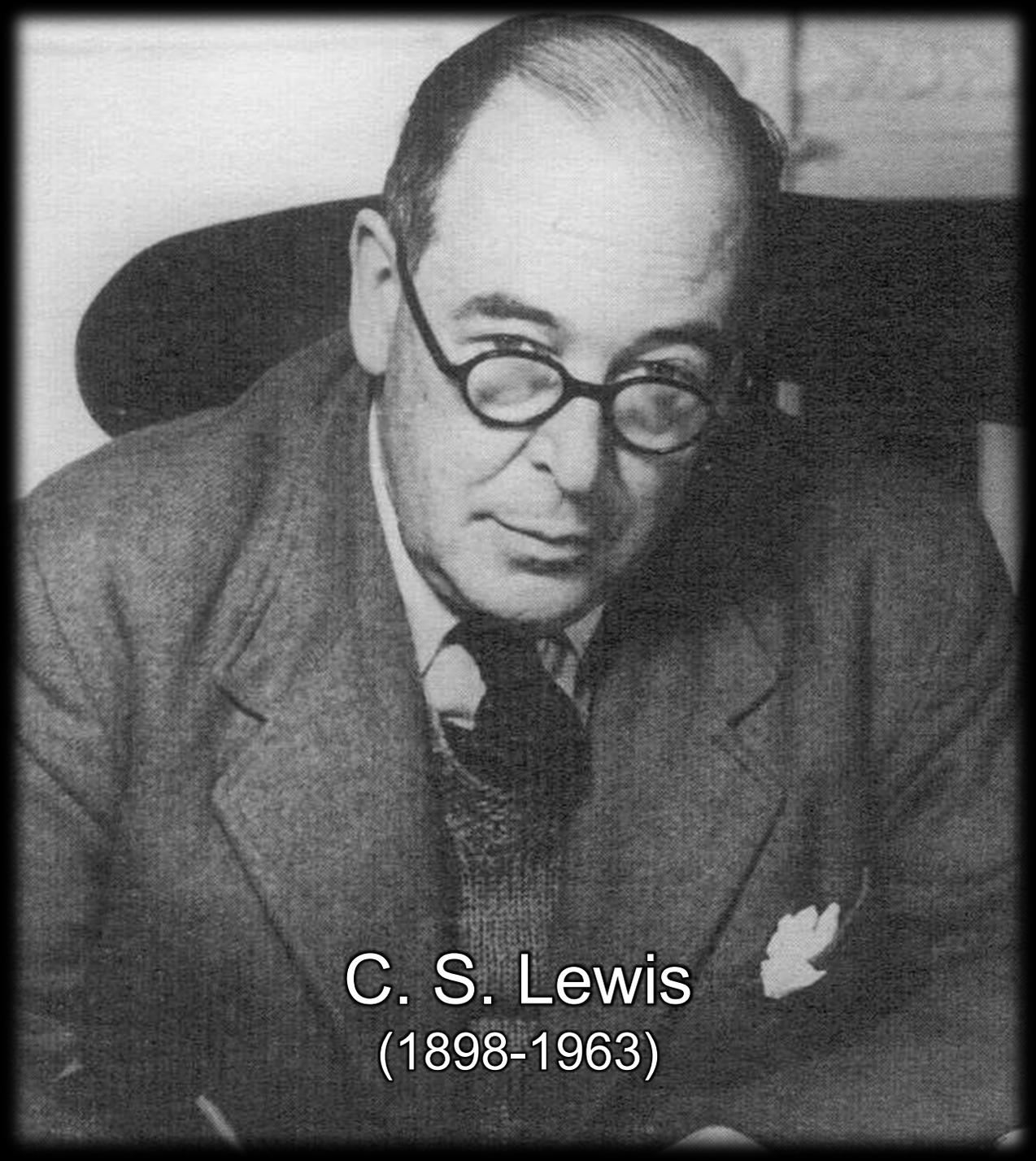


**The Natural
Order Defense
of C. S. Lewis**



C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)





C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)

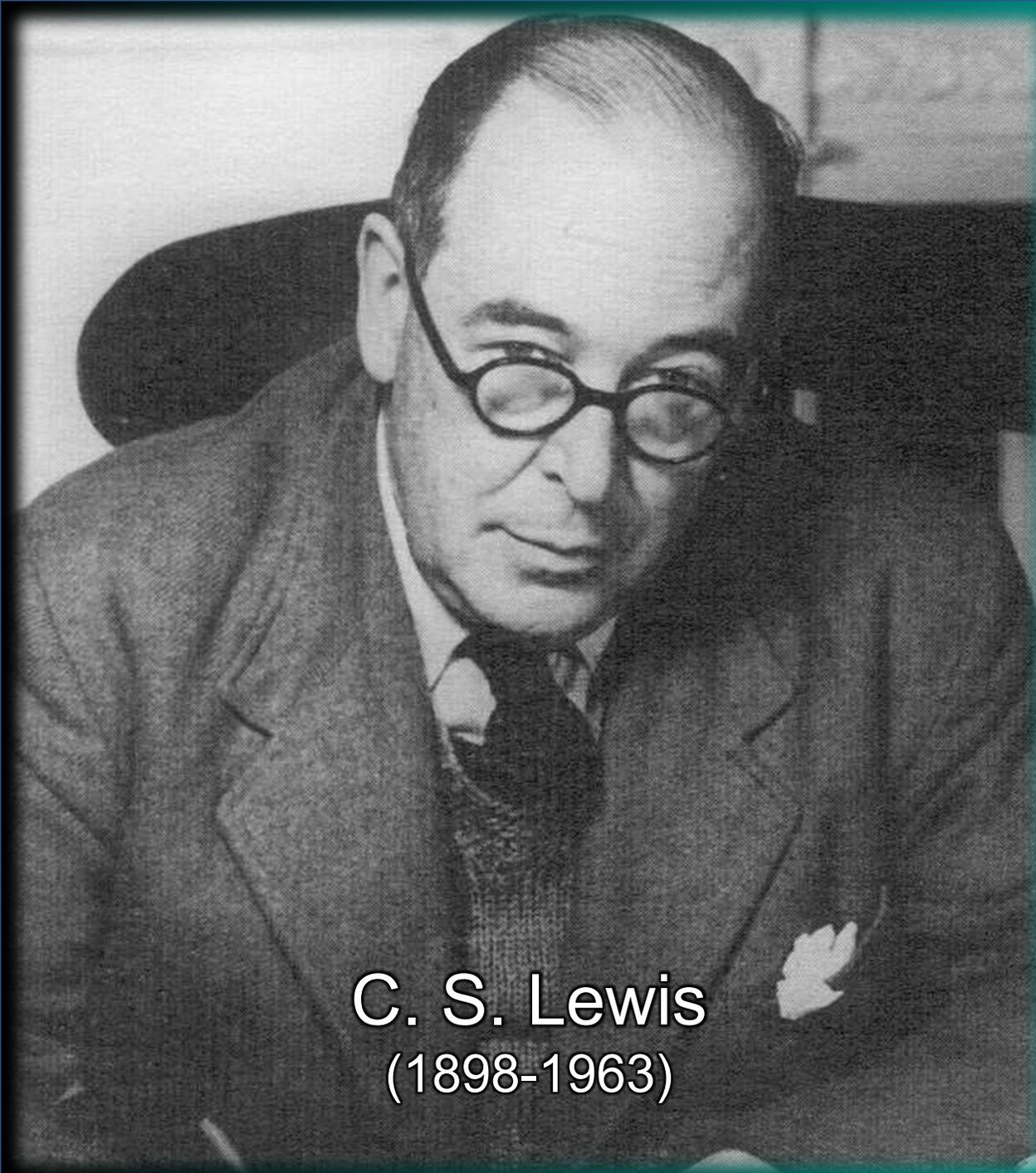
***"Fixed laws,
consequences
unfolding by causal
necessity, the whole
natural order, are at
once the limits within
which their common
life is confined and
also the sole
condition under
which any such life is
possible."***



C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)

"Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free-wills involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself."

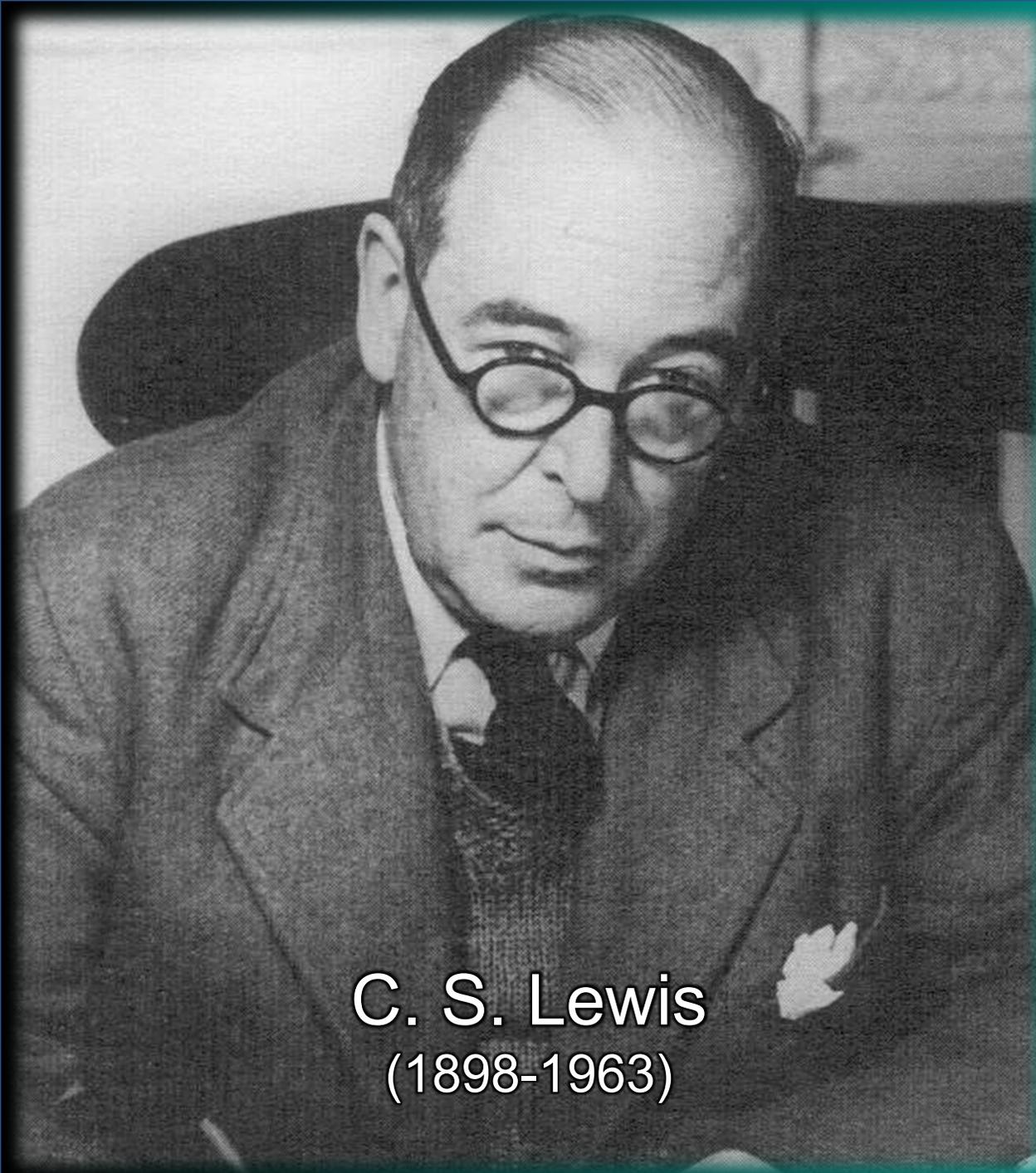
[*The Problem of Pain* (London: The Centenary Press, 1940), 22]



C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)

C. S. Lewis's Natural Order Defense

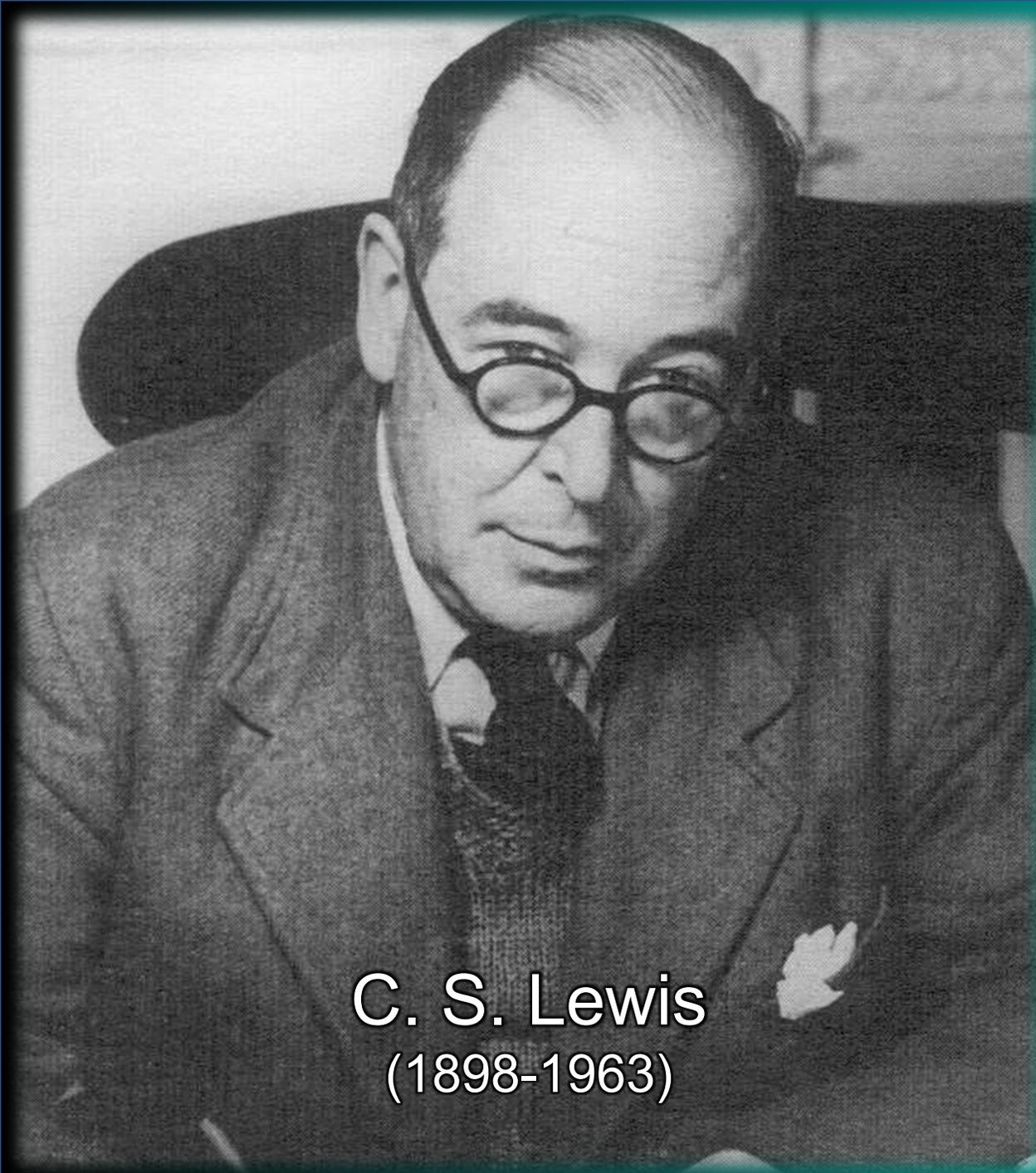
- *God created humans with free will.*



C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)

C. S. Lewis's Natural Order Defense

- *God created humans with free will.*
- *The responsible exercise of free will requires a world of non-capricious physical regularities (laws).*



C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)

C. S. Lewis's Natural Order Defense

- *God created humans with free will.*
- *The responsible exercise of free will requires a world of non-capricious physical regularities (laws).*
- *These regularities create the possibility of natural evil.*

Consideration of the Afterlife



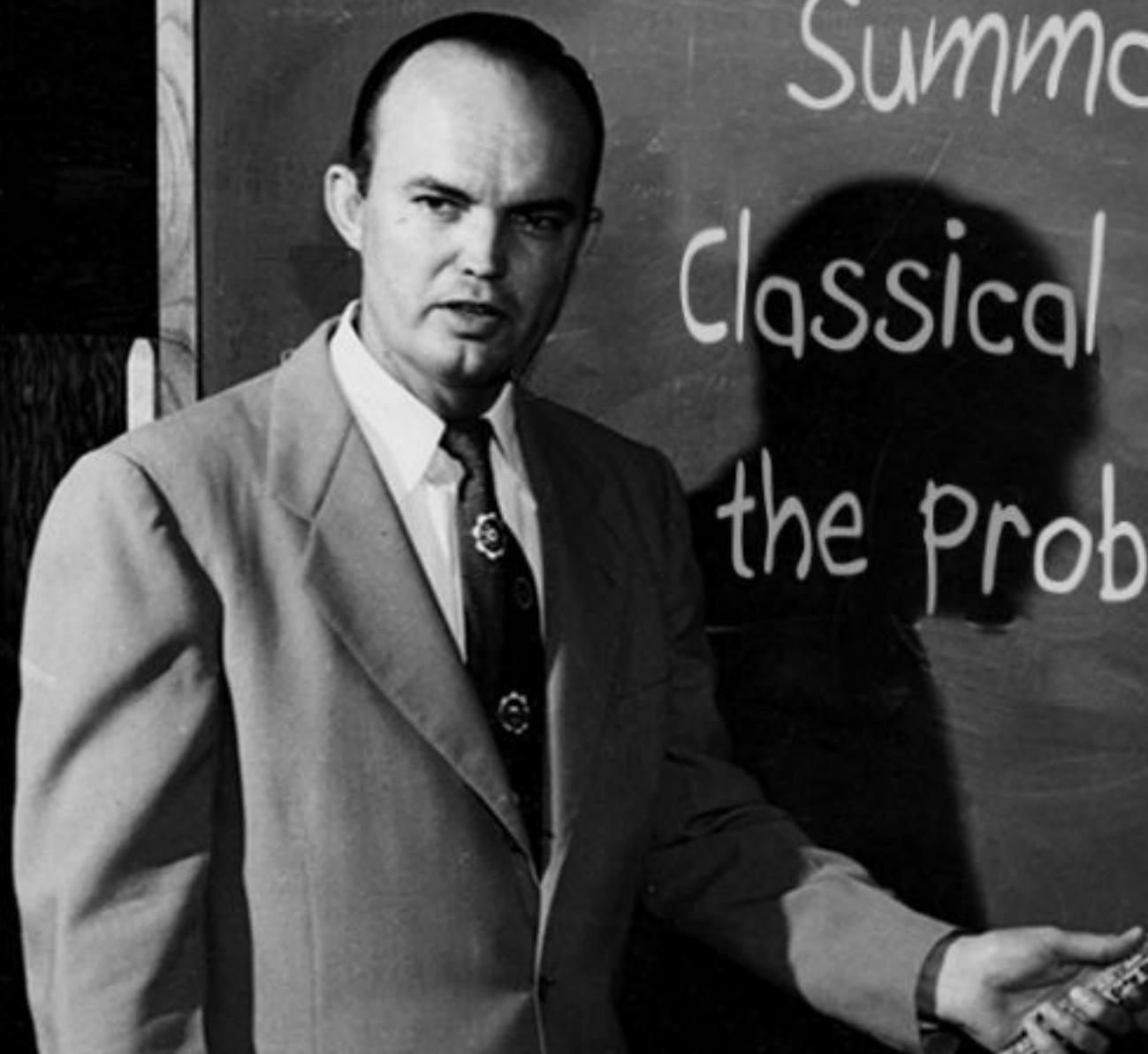
Since it is most often the Christian who is challenged with the problem of evil, it behooves the Christian to cull from the entire Christian world view in responding.

- ***In the consummation of history,
all will be good.***
- ***All moral goods will be rewarded.
(which is good)***
- ***All moral evils will be punished.
(which is good)***

"While it might be easy to imagine what we would do if we had God's power, it is impossible to know what we would do if we had God's knowledge."

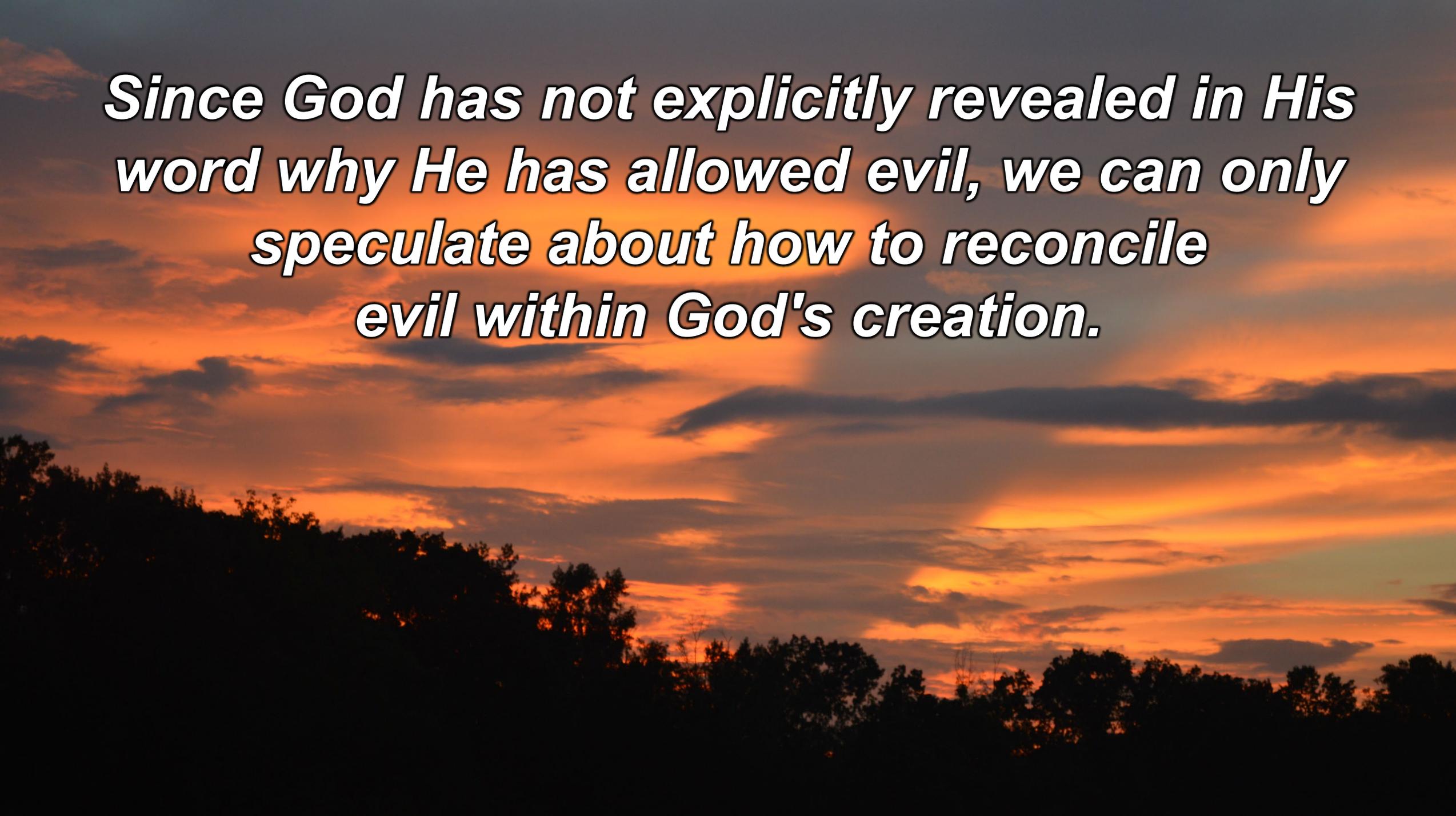


Doug Geivett

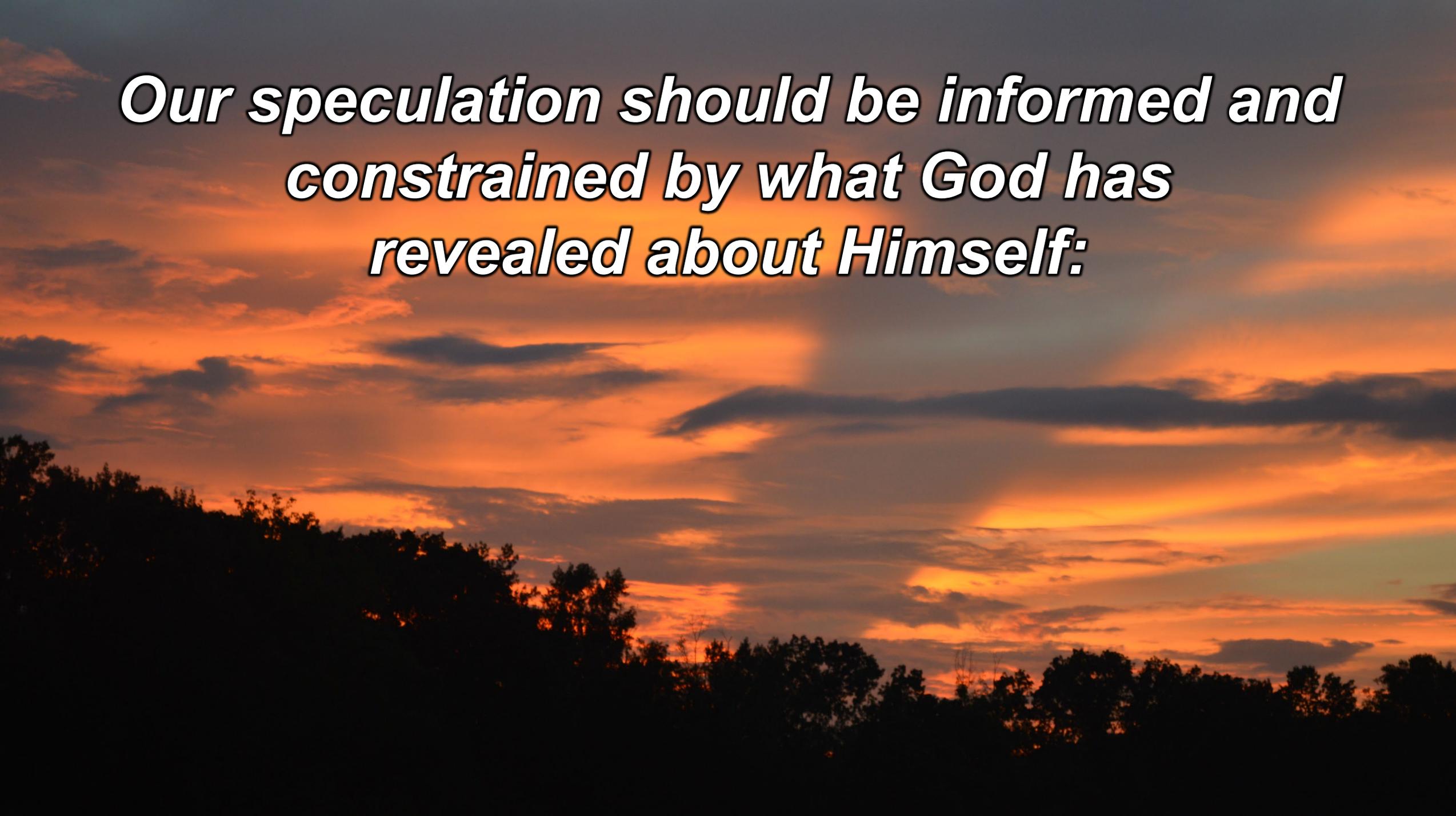


Summary of the
Classical Approach to
the problem of Evil

Since God has not explicitly revealed in His word why He has allowed evil, we can only speculate about how to reconcile evil within God's creation.

The background of the image is a dramatic sky at sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with soft, glowing clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and light blue. The bottom portion of the image shows the dark, silhouetted tops of trees and foliage, creating a stark contrast with the bright, colorful sky above.

***Our speculation should be informed and
constrained by what God has
revealed about Himself:***

The background of the image is a dramatic sky at sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with soft, glowing clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and light blue. The sun is not directly visible, but its light creates a warm, golden glow across the horizon. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of trees and foliage are visible against the bright sky, creating a strong contrast.

***Our speculation should be informed and
constrained by what God has
revealed about Himself:***

***❖ through creation (General Revelation and
Natural Theology) and***

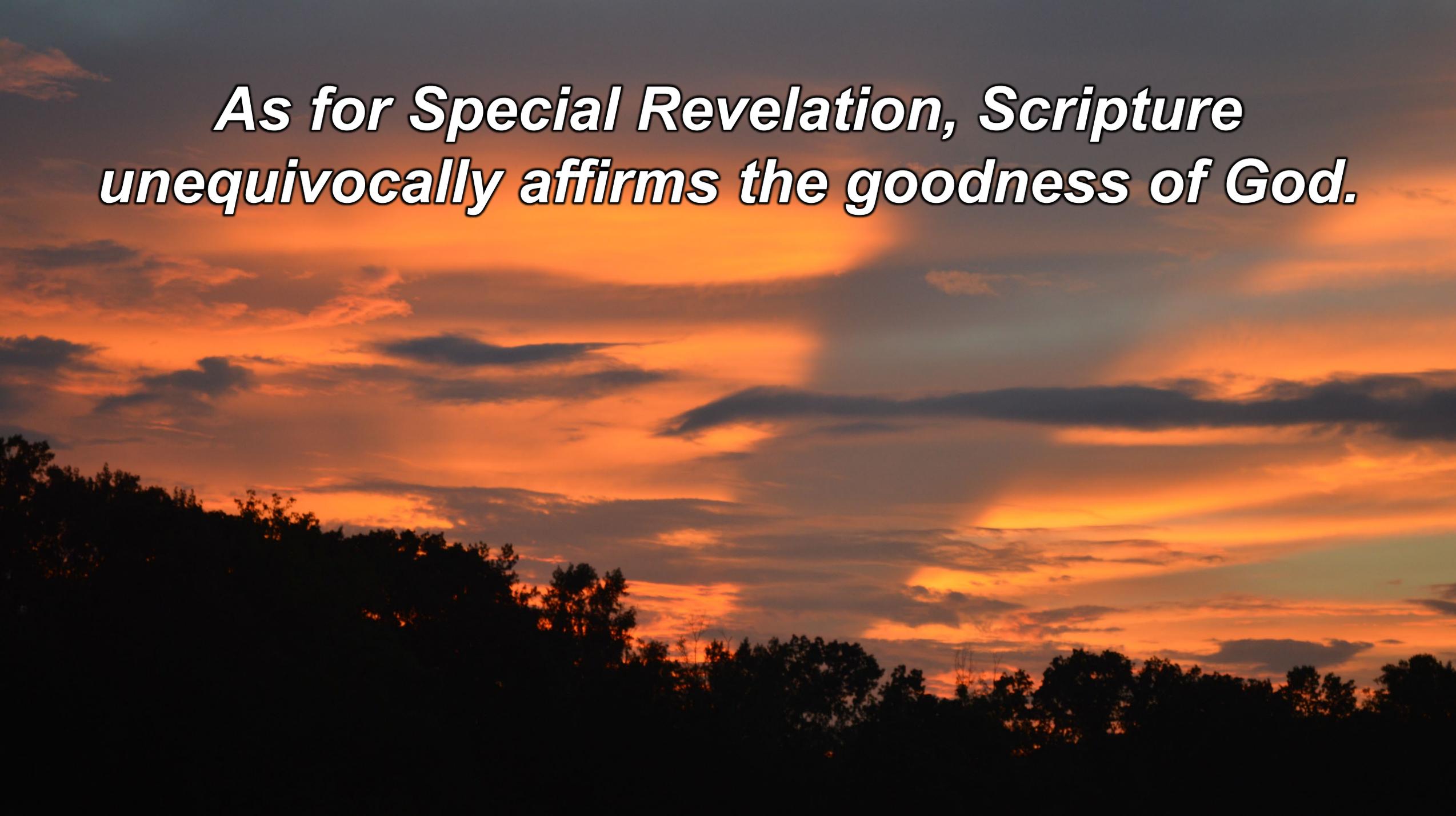
***Our speculation should be informed and
constrained by what God has
revealed about Himself:***

***❖ through creation (General Revelation and
Natural Theology) and***

Our speculation should be informed and constrained by what God has revealed about Himself:

- ❖ through creation (General Revelation and Natural Theology) and***
- ❖ through Scripture (Special Revelation and Systematic Theology).***

As for Special Revelation, Scripture unequivocally affirms the goodness of God.

The background of the image is a dramatic sky at sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with layers of clouds, some of which are illuminated from below, creating a vibrant orange and yellow glow. The top of the image shows a darker, blue-grey sky. In the foreground, the dark, silhouetted tops of trees are visible against the bright sky.

☞ Nahum 1:7 ☞

*The LORD is good, A stronghold in
the day of trouble; And He knows
those who trust in Him.*



∞ 1 Chronicles 16:34 ∞

*Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for
He is good! For His mercy
endures forever.*



☞ Psalm 25:8 ☞

*Good and upright is the LORD;
Therefore, He teaches sinners
in the way.*



∞ Psalm 34:8 ∞

*Oh, taste and see that the LORD is
good; Blessed is the man
who trusts in Him!*

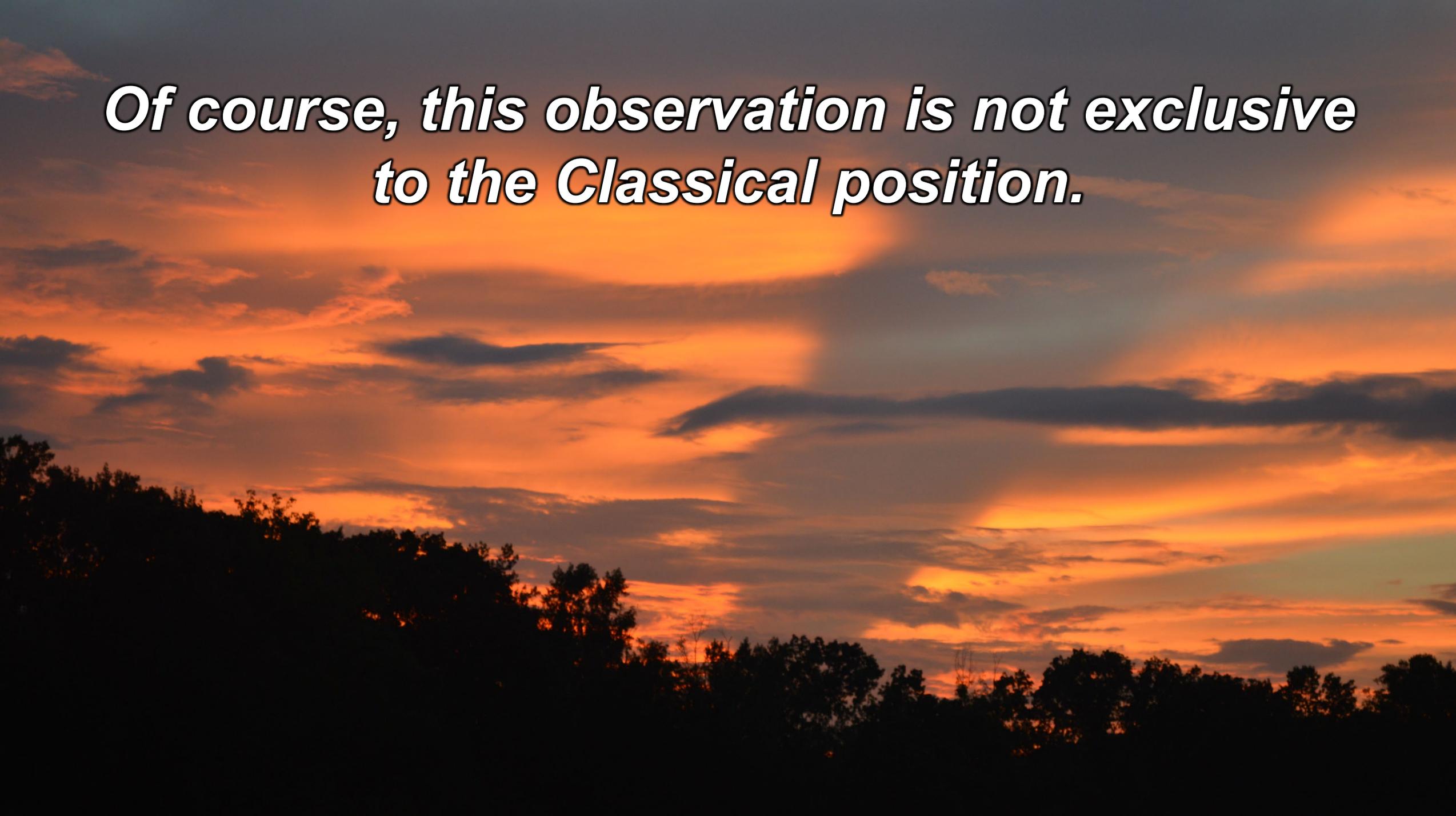


∞ Psalm 100:5 ∞

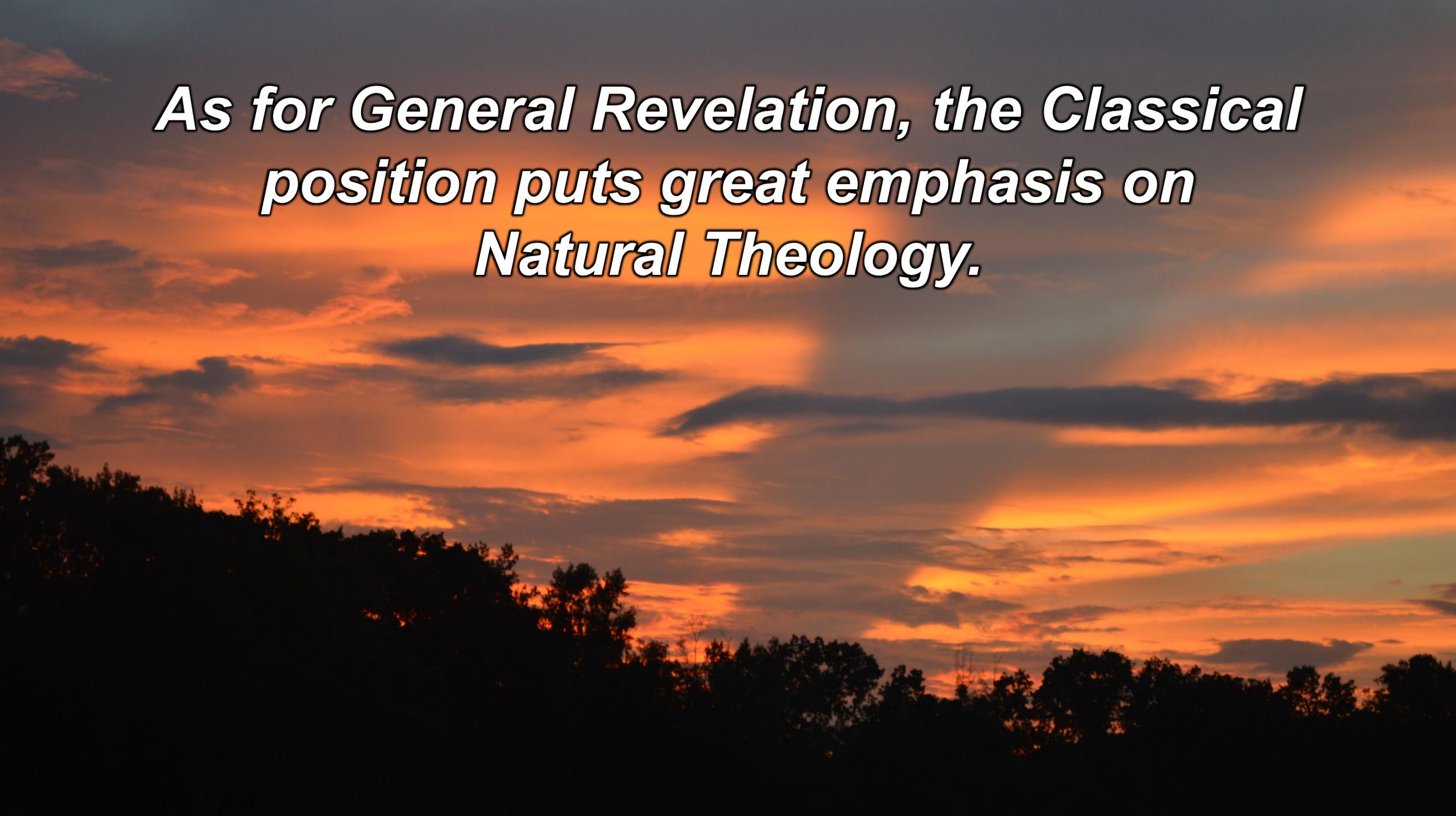
*For the LORD is good; His mercy
is everlasting, And His truth
endures to all generations.*



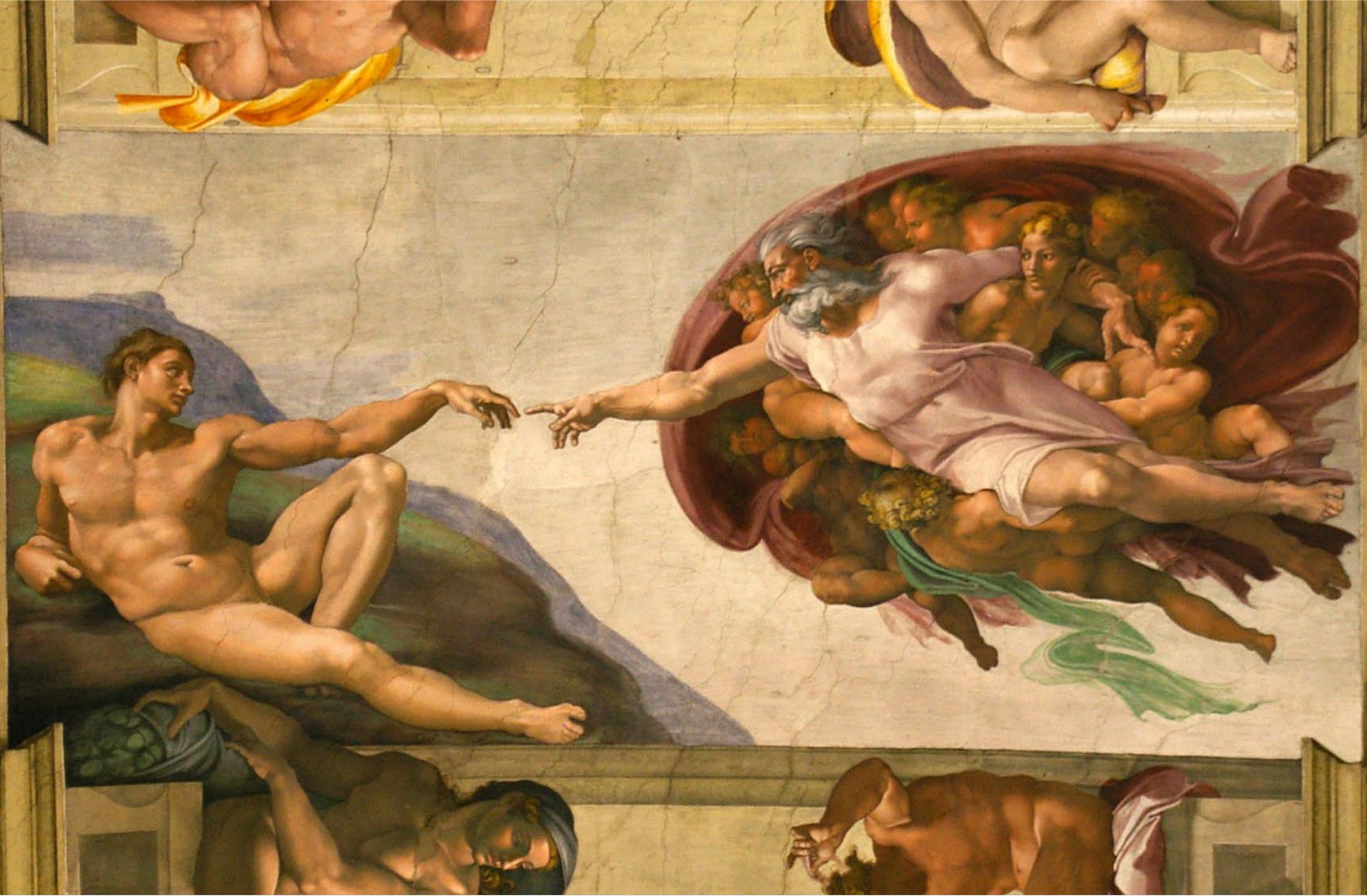
***Of course, this observation is not exclusive
to the Classical position.***

A landscape photograph of a sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with horizontal bands of orange, yellow, and blue clouds. The bottom of the image shows a dark silhouette of a forest line against the bright sky.

As for General Revelation, the Classical position puts great emphasis on Natural Theology.

The background of the image is a dramatic sky at sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and light blue. The bottom of the image shows a dark silhouette of a dense line of trees against the bright sky.

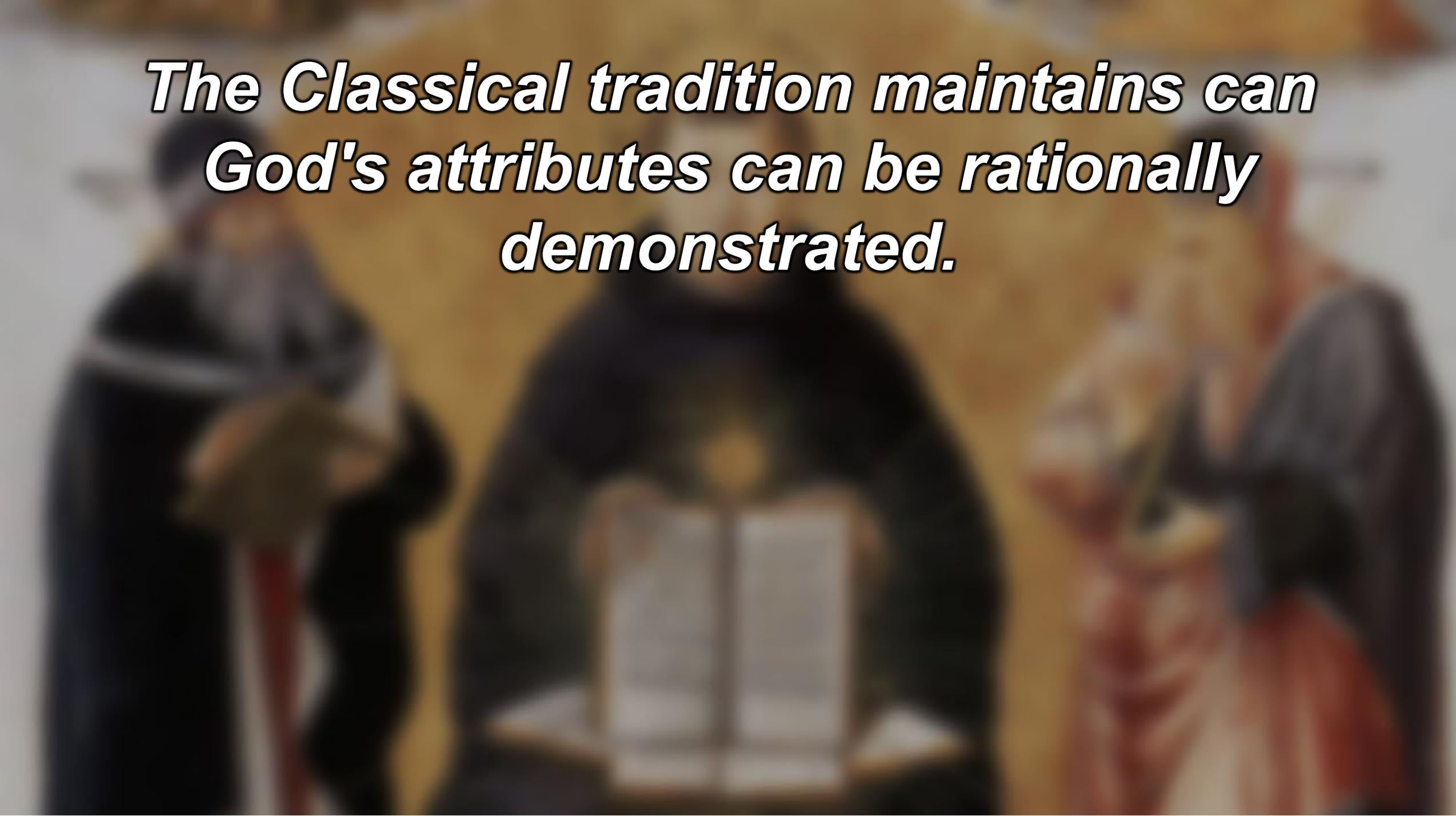
Natural Theology is that body of knowledge about God's existence and attributes that can be acquired by human reason as it carefully attends itself to God's revelation of Himself in Creation.



For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead ...

Rom. 1:20a

***The Classical tradition maintains can
God's attributes can be rationally
demonstrated.***



***The Classical tradition maintains can
God's attributes can be rationally
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***Unfortunately for me (but perhaps
fortunately for you) we do not have the
time for this demonstration here.***

***The Classical tradition maintains that
God's attributes can be rationally
demonstrated.***

***Unfortunately for me (but perhaps
fortunately for you) we do not have the
time for this demonstration here.***

***One can find such a demonstration in
Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae.***

The rationally demonstrable body of knowledge about God's existence and attributes is known as Natural Theology.

The rationally demonstrable body of knowledge about God's existence and attributes is known as Natural Theology.

Included among those attributes are God's infinite goodness and omnipotence.

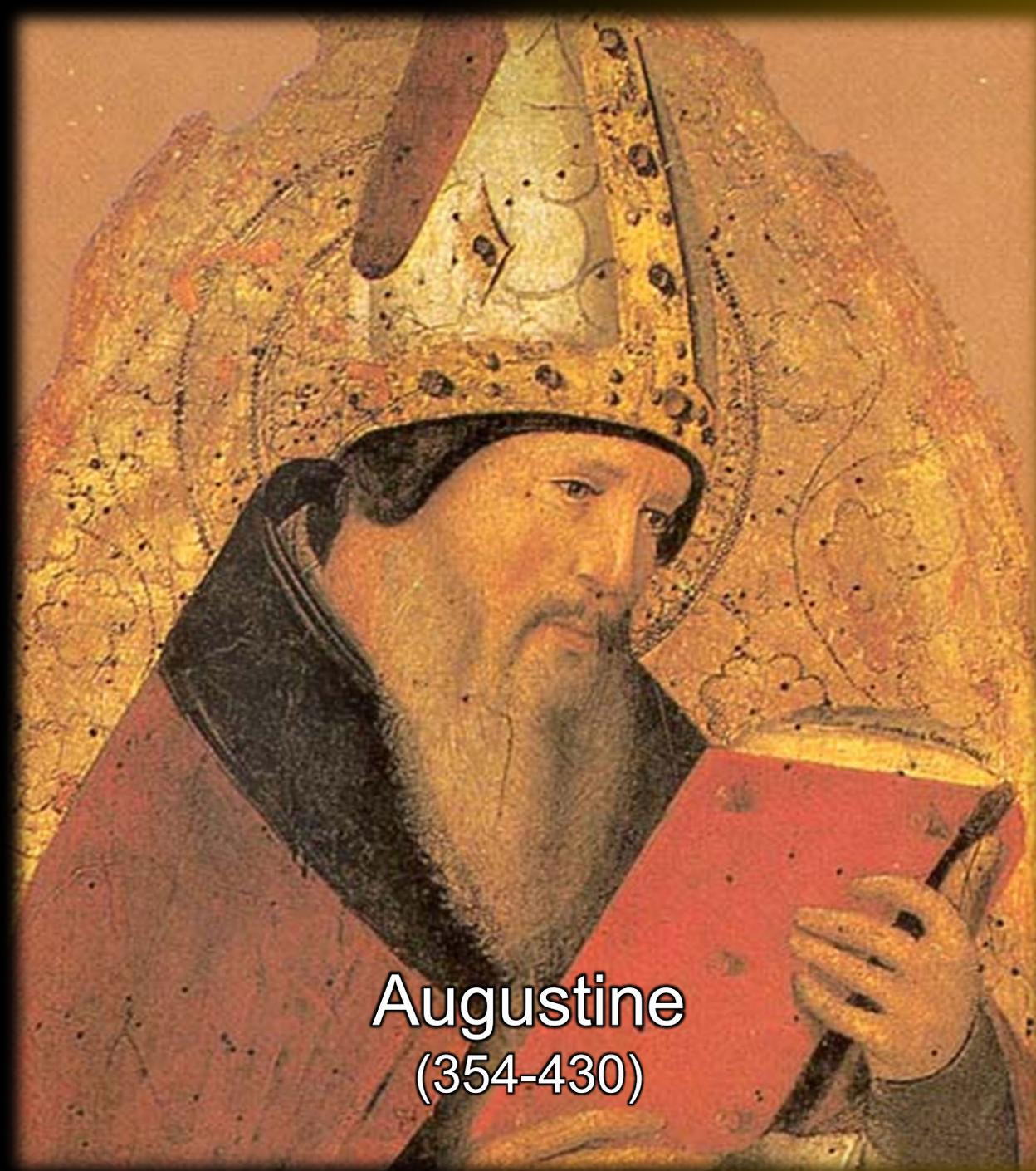
We know God is all good and all powerful even when we cannot demonstrate the connection between specific evils in the world and the specific goods that God might produce from them.

***"Good belongs
pre-eminently
to God."***

(ST I, Q5, art. 1)



**Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)**



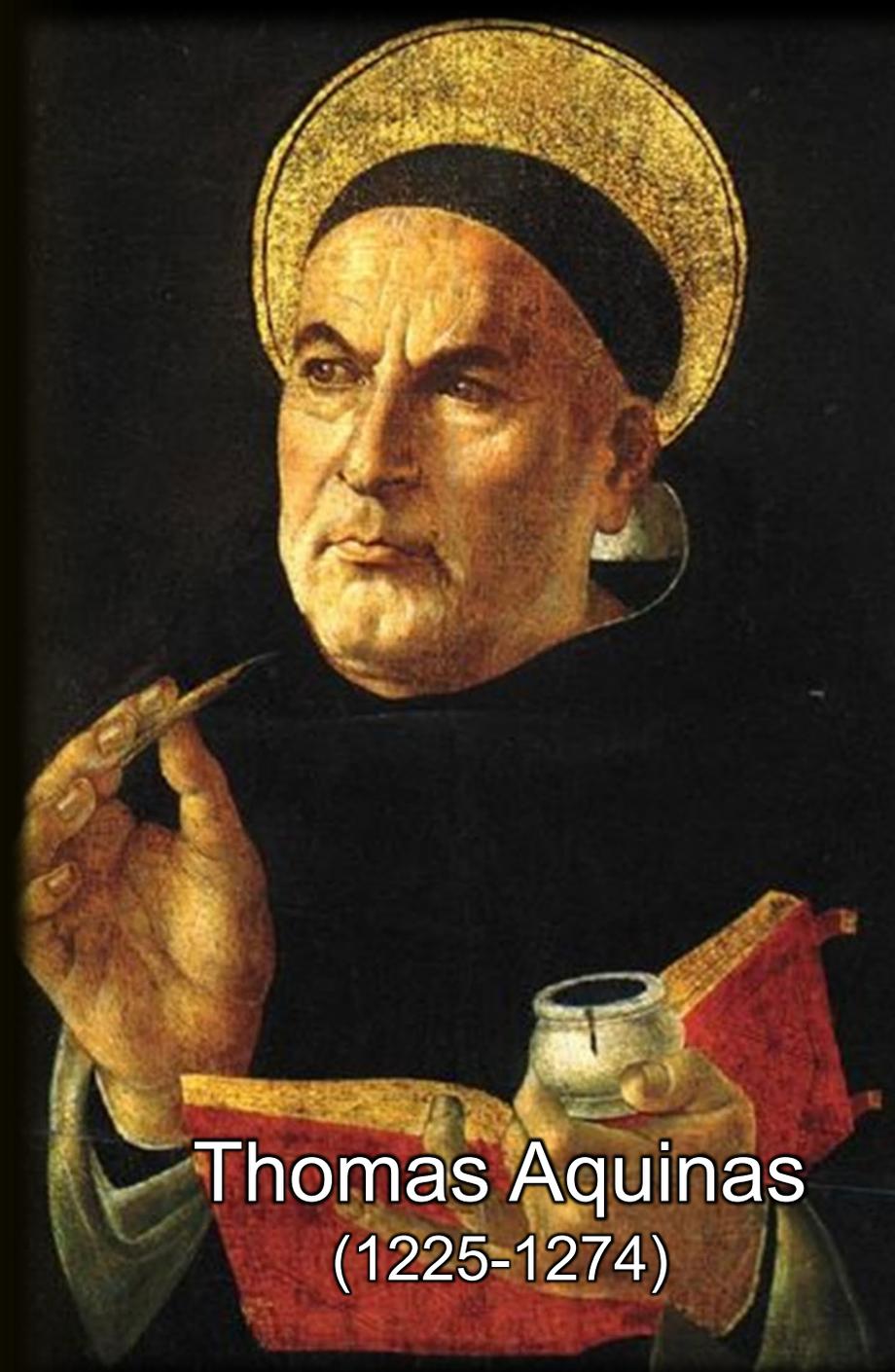
Augustine
(354-430)

"For the Omnipotent God, whom even the heathen acknowledge as the Supreme Power over all, would not allow any evil in his works, unless in his omnipotence and goodness, as the Supreme Good, he is able to bring forth good out of evil."

[Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, III, § 11, trans. Albert C. Outler, p. 5, available at <http://www.saintsbooks.net/books/St.%20Augustine%20-%20Enchiridion%20on%20Faith,%20Hope,%20and%20Love.pdf>, accessed 06/19/25]

"As Augustine says 'Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil in his works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil.' This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good."

[ST, I, Q2, art. 3, ad. 1]



**Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)**

Conclusion

In the contemporary discussion, evil is commonly distinguished as natural evil and moral evil.

In the Classical tradition, while not rejecting this distinction, goes on to define evil, not as a thing in itself, but as a privation of goodness in things.

Solutions to the problem of evil seek to address both the contemporary discussion and the Classical tradition.

***Some approaches to the
problem of evil are
incompatible with
Evangelical Christianity.***

***There are approach to the
problem of evil that are
compatible with biblical
Christianity broadly considered
and with Classical Christing
theism more narrowly.***

A grand, ornate library with dark wood paneling and bookshelves. The shelves are filled with books. A spiral staircase with a dark metal frame is visible on the right side. The ceiling and walls are decorated with intricate gold-colored carvings and a bust of a man in a circular frame on the left. The word "Resource" is written in a large, white, stylized font across the center of the image.

Resource



A New Way to Think About the Question

If God, Why Evil?



NORMAN L.
GEISLER

A blue-tinted illustration of a cave interior. The scene is dimly lit, with light filtering through openings, creating a somber atmosphere. Stalactites hang from the ceiling on the left. A large, textured rock formation dominates the center background. In the foreground, there is a pile of debris, including what appears to be a broken wooden structure and some tools or weapons. The overall mood is one of desolation and quiet reflection.

Thank you!