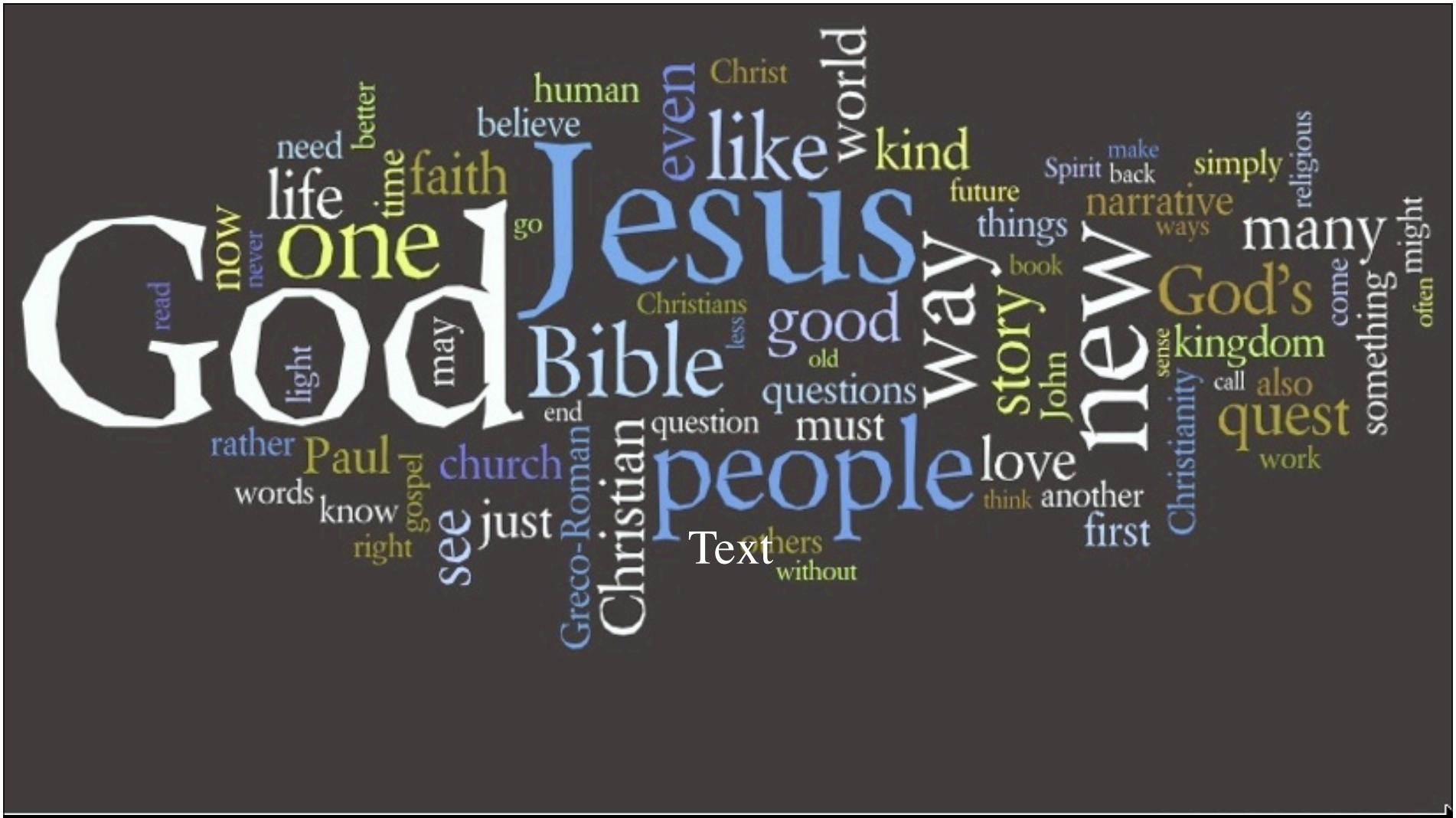


christianity transformed

and transforming

Caught between something real ...

and something wrong.

Formed

christianity/
christianities

Transformed

Reformed

Reframed

Formed

Framed

christianity/
christianities

Transformed

Malformed

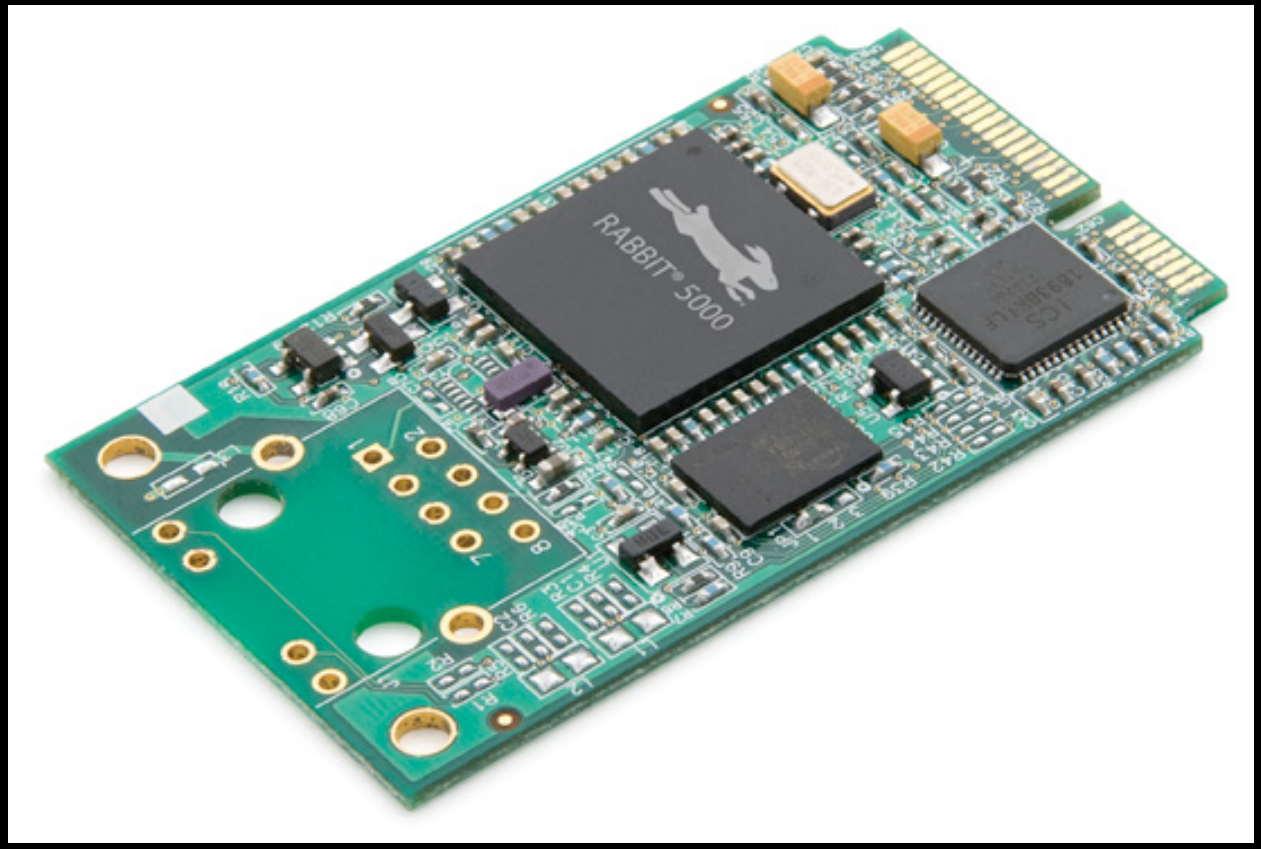
Deformed

Reformed

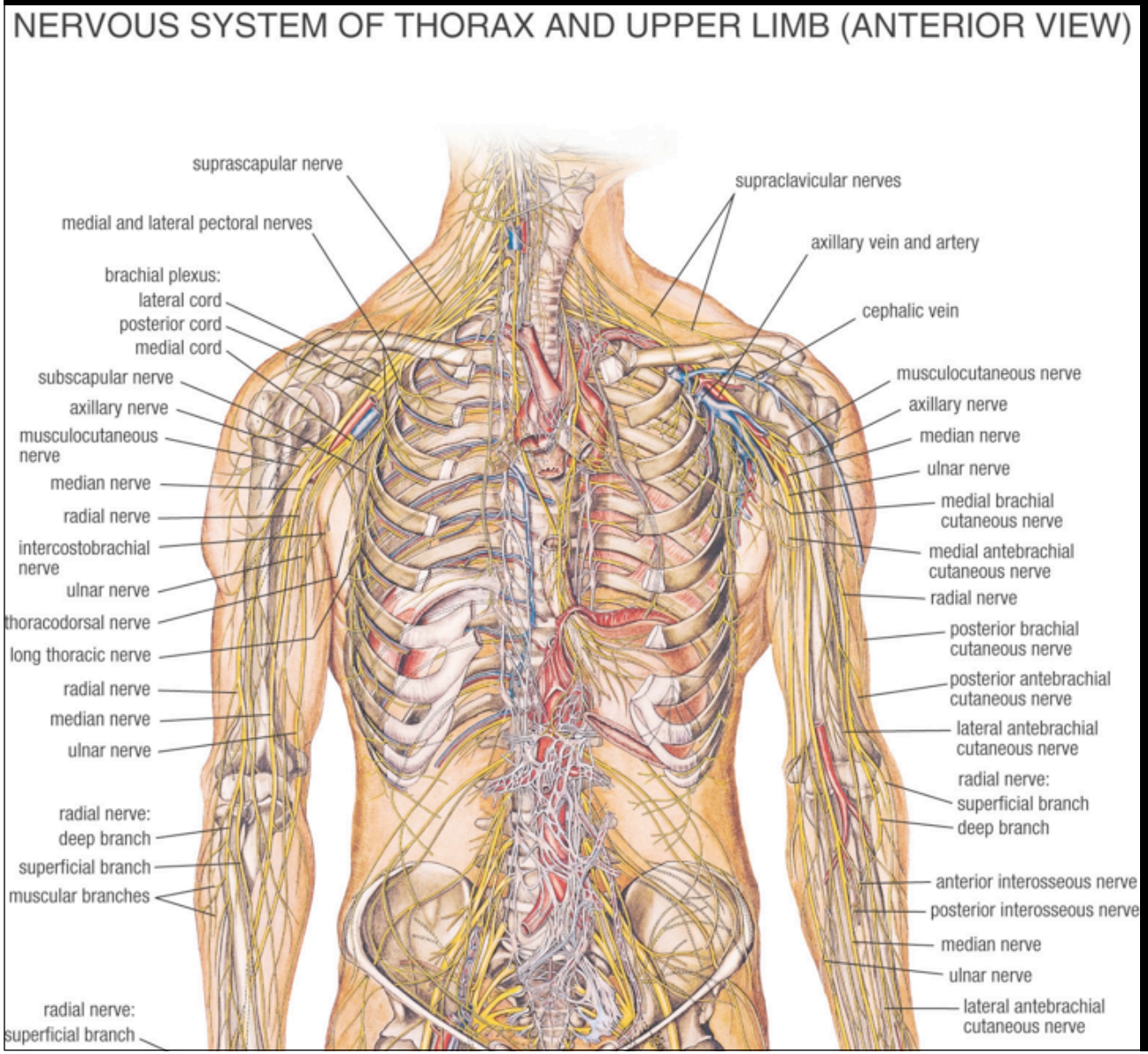
My quest ...

the church on the other side
a new kind of christian
a generous orthodoxy
adventures in missing the point
the story we find ourselves in
the secret message of Jesus
everything must change
finding our way again
a new kind of christianity
naked spirituality

Some theological problems are modular



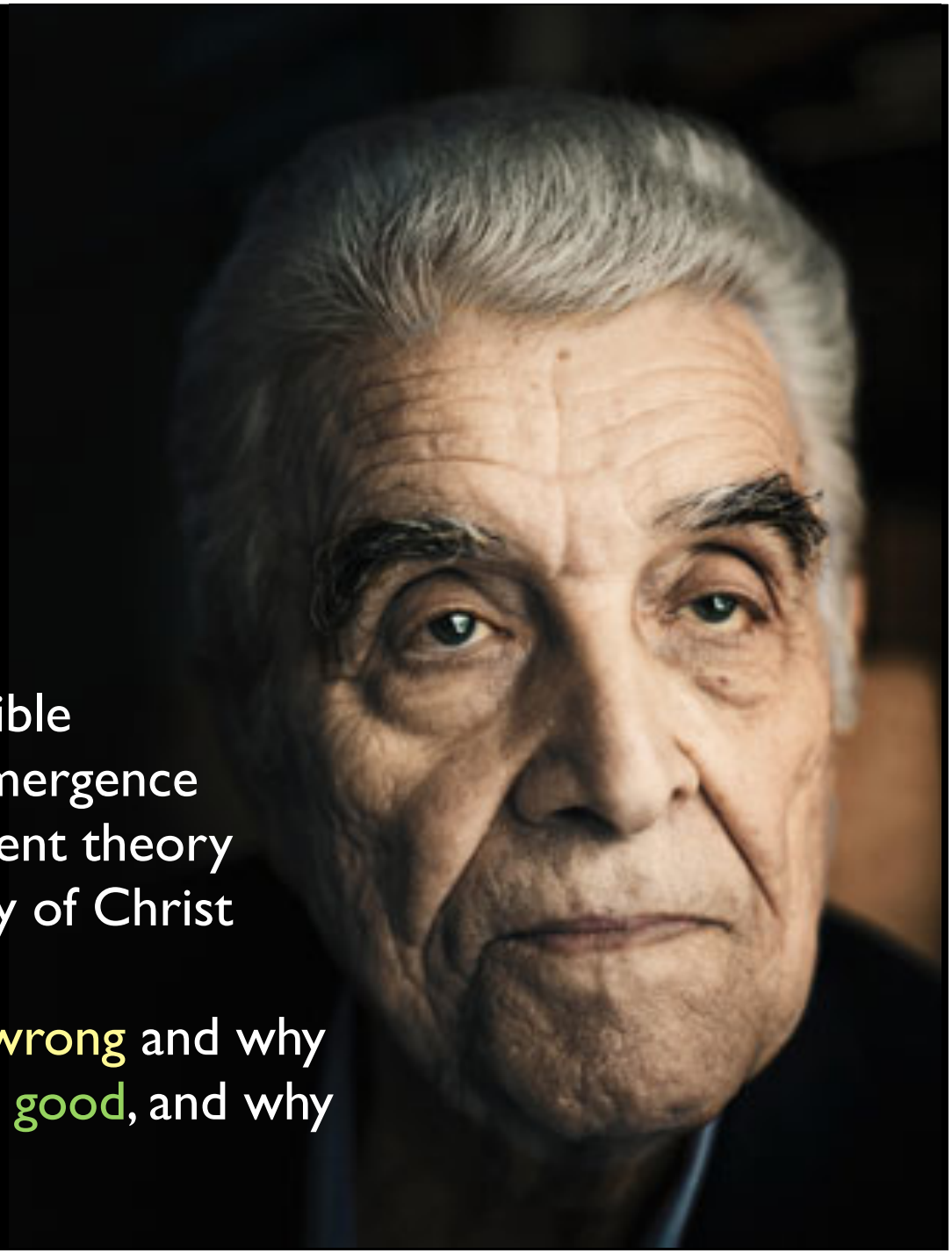
Some theological problems are systemic



rene girard

insights and contributions

rene girard



insights and contributions

- nonviolent theme in the Bible
- a narrative of evolution, emergence
- deconstruction of atonement theory
- uniqueness and universality of Christ
- proper apocalypticism
- a sense of what has gone wrong and why
- a sense of what is real and good, and why

A non-violent deity can only signal his existence to mankind by having himself driven out by violence - by demonstrating that he is not able to establish himself in the Kingdom of Violence.

But this very demonstration is bound to remain ambiguous for a very long time, and it is not capable of achieving a decisive result, since it looks like total impotence to those who live under the regime of violence. That is why at first it can only have some effect under a guise, deceptive through the admixture of some sacrificial elements, through the surreptitious re-insertion of some violence into the conception of the divine. (219-220)

Behaving in a truly divine manner, on an earth still in the clutches of violence, means not dominating humans, not overwhelming them with supernatural power; it means not terrifying and astonishing them in turn, through the sufferings and blessings on can confer; it means not creating difference between doubles and not taking part in their disputes. 'God is no respecter of persons.' He makes no distinction between 'Greeks and Jews, men and women, etc.' This can look like complete indifference and can lead to the conclusion that the all-powerful does not exist, so long as his transcendence keeps him infinitely far from us and our violent undertakings. But the same characteristics are revealed as a heroic and perfect love once this transcendence becomes incarnate in a human being and walks among men, to teach them about the true God and to draw them closer to Him. (234)

There is no privileged stance from which absolute truth can be discovered... That is why the Word that states itself to be absolutely true never speaks except from the position of a victim in the process of being expelled.... [F]or two thousand years this Word has been misunderstood, despite the enormous amount of publicity it has received. (435)

... this sacrificial concept of divinity must 'die,' and with it the whole apparatus of historical Christianity, for the Gospels to be able to rise again in our midst, not looking like a corpse that we have exhumed, but revealed as the newest, finest, liveliest and truest thing that we have ever set eyes upon. (235-236)

Historical Christianity covers the texts with a veil of sacrifice. Or, to change the metaphor, it immolates them in the (albeit splendid) tomb of Western culture. (249)

But the process requires an almost limitless patience: many centuries must elapse before the subversive and shattering truth contained in the Gospels can be understood world-wide. (252)

The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"
He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them...
This is why I speak to them in parables:

Though seeing, they do not see. Though hearing, they do not hear or understand. (Matthew 13:10 ff)

Something is on the way out and something else is painfully being born.
It is as if something were crumbling, decaying, and exhausting itself, while something else, still indistinct, were arising from the rubble....
We are in a phase when one age is succeeding another, when everything is possible.

Vaclav Havel, "The New Measure of Man"

a new kind of christianity:

ten questions that are transforming the faith

What are the questions?

1. The narrative question: What is the shape of the biblical narrative? Storyline, plotline?

2. The authority question: What is the Bible, and what is it for? How does it have authority?

3. The God question: Is God violent? Why does God seem so violent and genocidal in so many bible passages?

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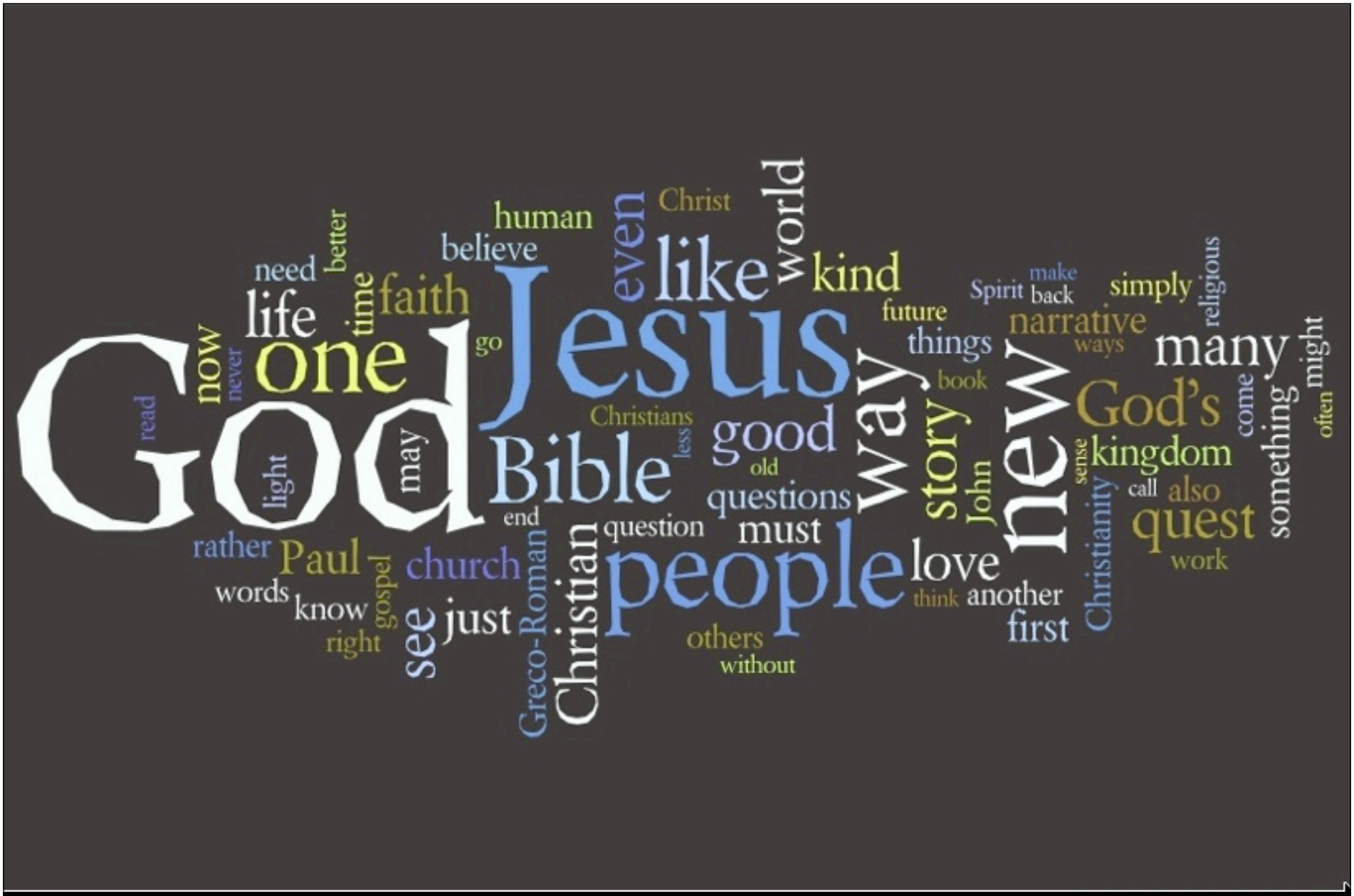
9. The pluralism question: How should we relate to people of other faiths?

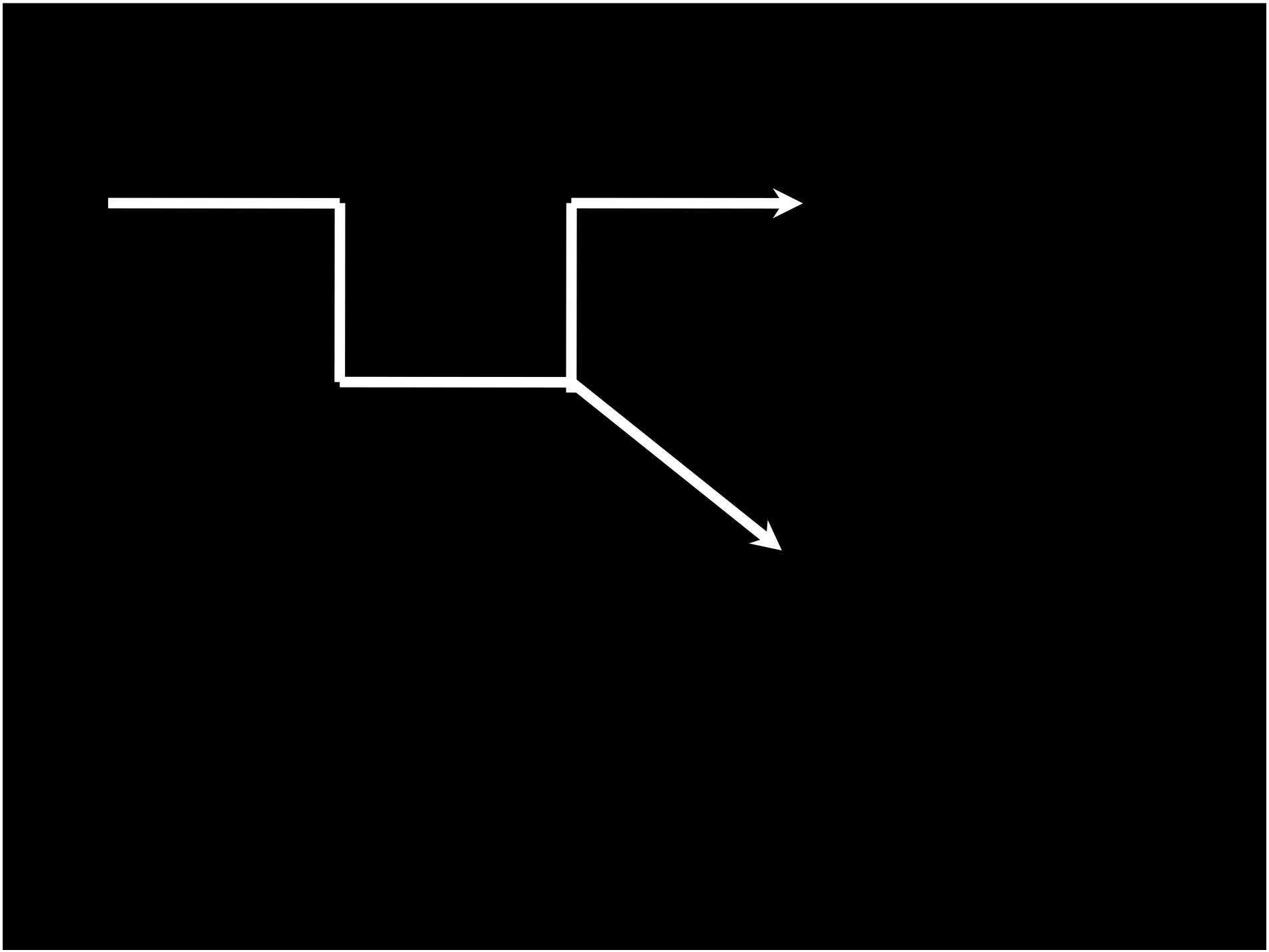
10. The next step question: How can we pursue this quest in humility, love, and peace?

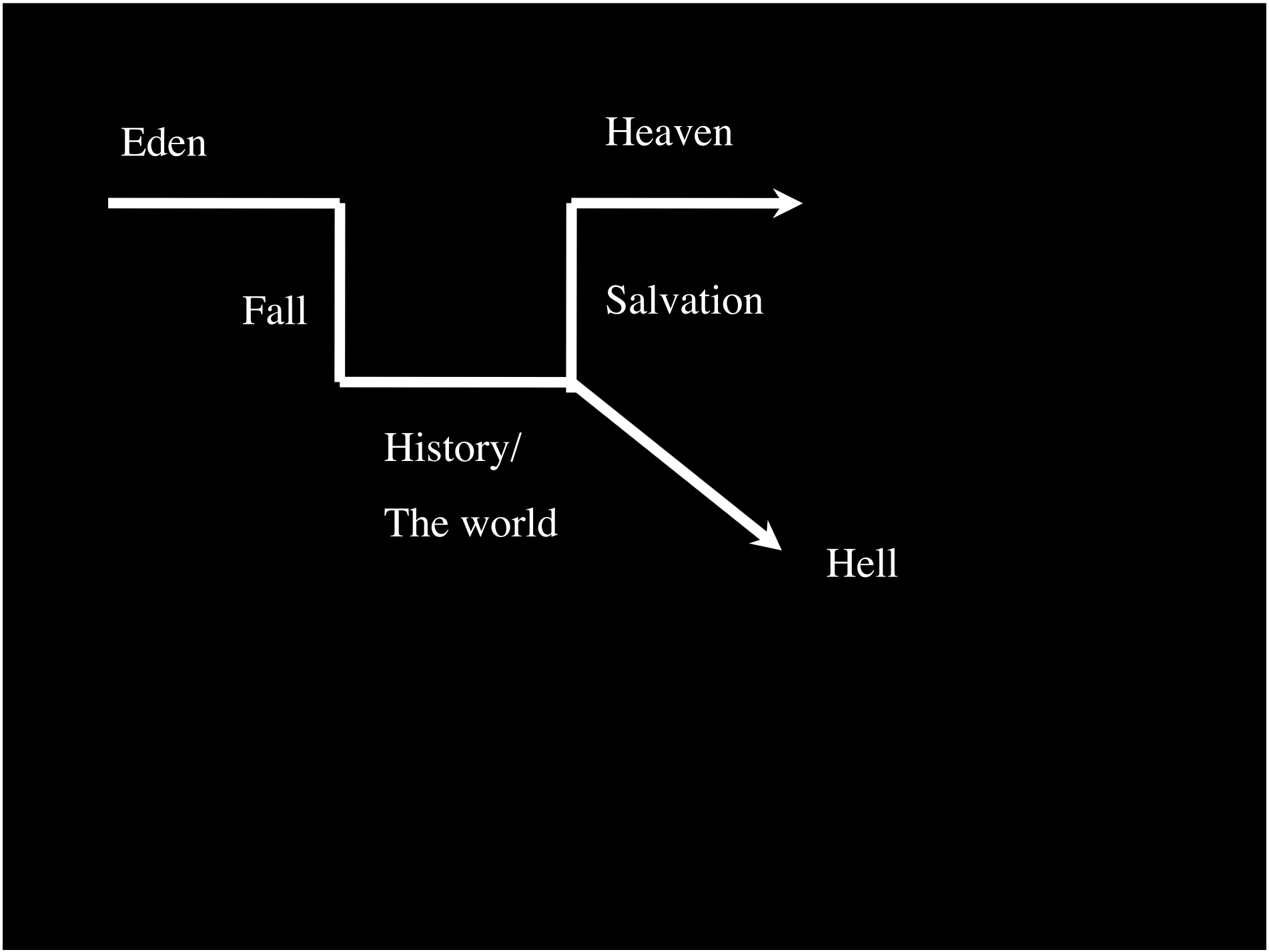


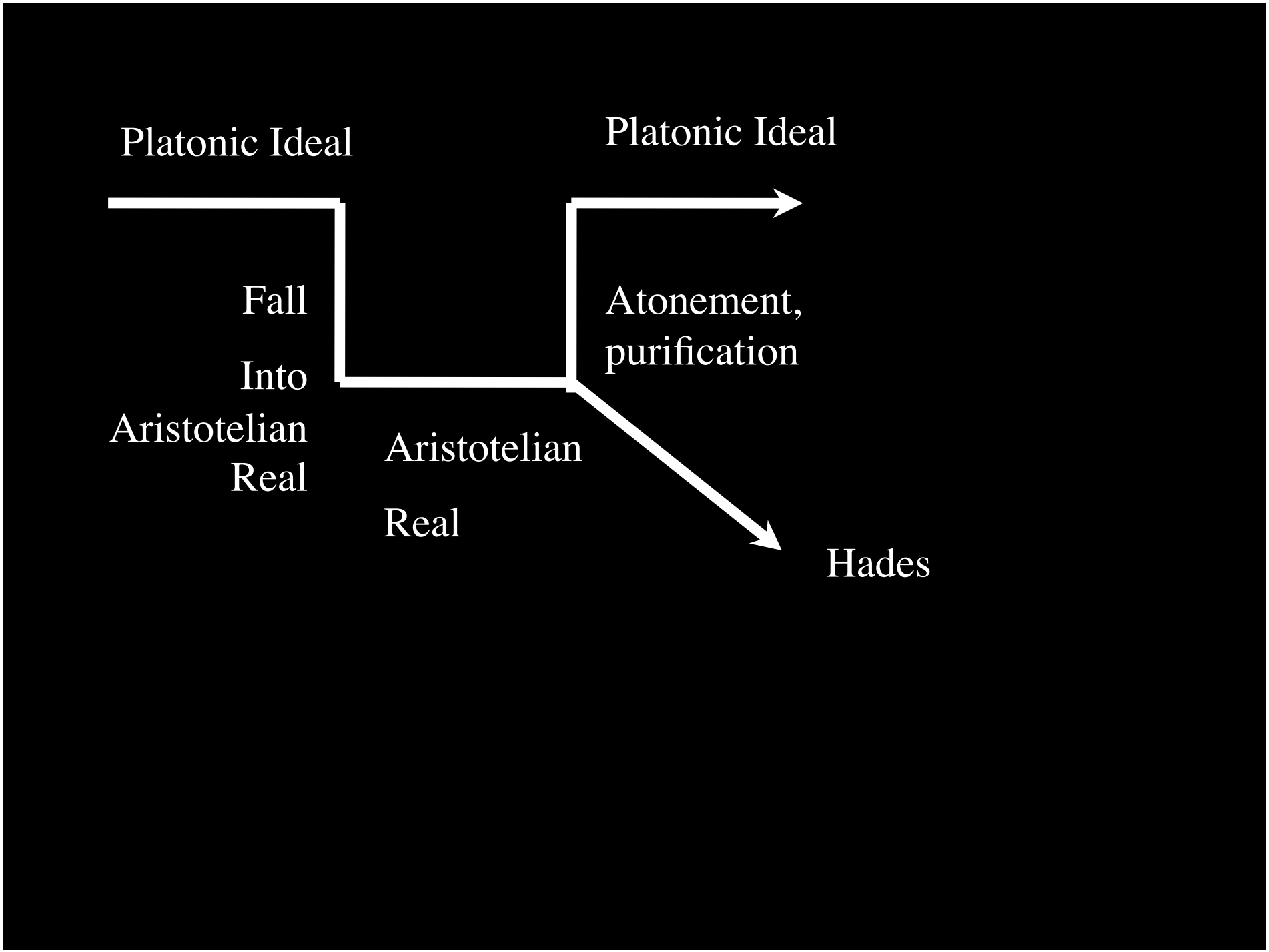
a new kind of christianity

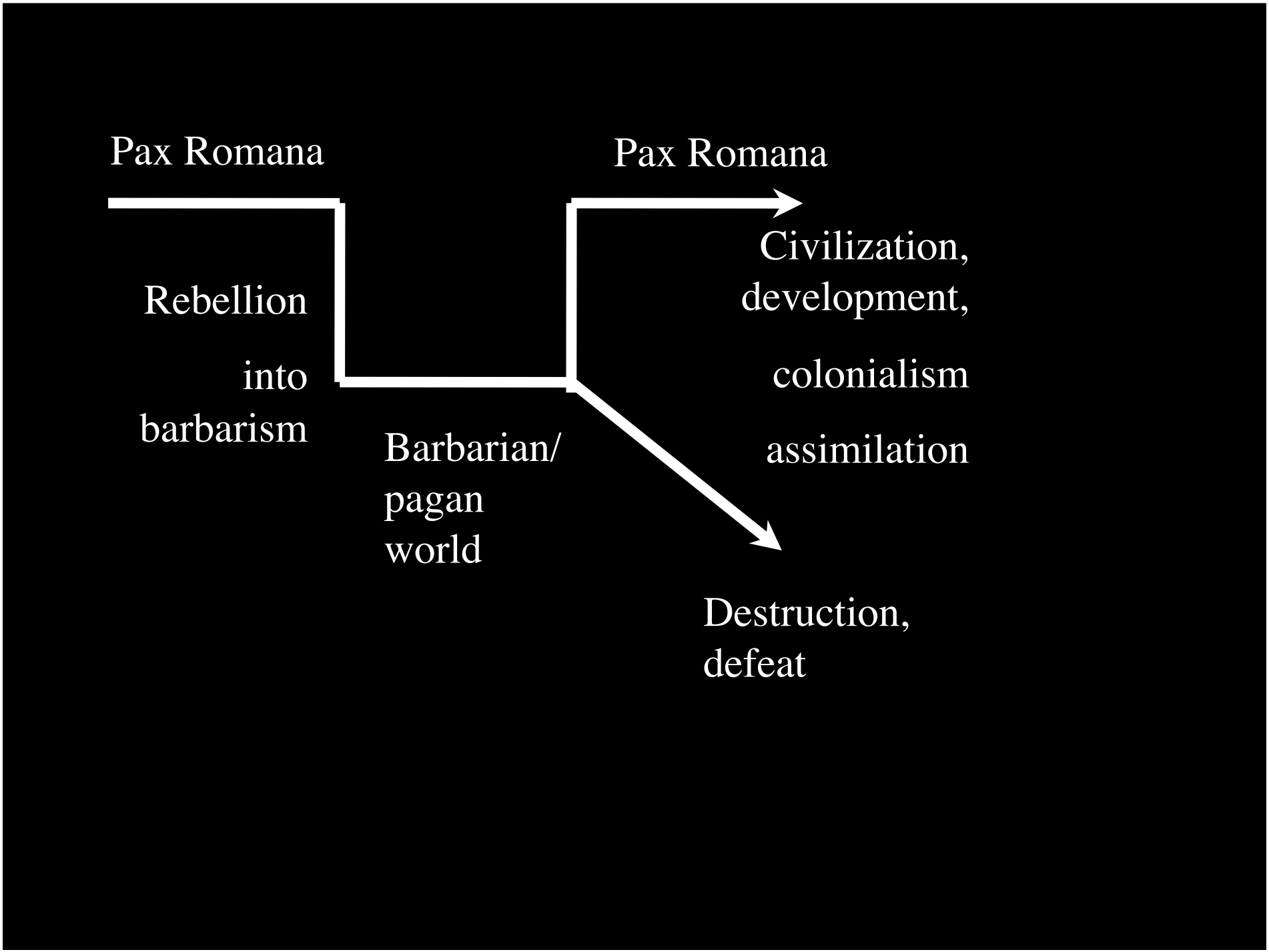
Question 1:
What is the shape of the biblical narrative?

(A pre-critical question)




Eden
Heaven
Fall
Salvation
History/
The world
Hell


Platonic Ideal
Platonic Ideal
Fall
Into
Aristotelian
Real
Aristotelian
Real
Atonement,
purification
Hades


Pax Romana
Pax Romana
Civilization,
development,
colonialism
assimilation
Rebellion
into
barbarism
Barbarian/
pagan
world
Destruction,
defeat

If love and violence are incompatible, the definition of the Logos must take this into account. The difference between the Greek Logos and the Johannine Logos must be an obvious one, which gets concealed only in the tortuous complications of a type of thought that never succeeds in ridding itself of its own violence. (270)

Heidegger is absolutely right to state that there has never been any thought in the West but Greek thought, even when the labels were Christian. Christianity has no special existence in the domain of thought. Continuity with the Greek Logos has never been interrupted... everything is Greek and nothing is Christian. (273)

By cultural Platonism we mean the unexamined conviction that human institutions have been and are what they are for all eternity, that they have little need to evolve and none whatsoever to be engendered.

... It is quite evident how a universal Platonism manages to obscure any phenomena that contradict it. (TH 59)

To what degree is orthodoxy
the version of the faith
that has proved most useful
in supporting the apparatus of western
civilization:
empire/colonialism
tyranny/domination
rule by elites
mystification and co-option
environmental exploitation?

How have
our cherished doctrines
been (ab)used
in the cause of
violence?

Is there an alternative/ subversive understanding of the biblical narrative?

sdrawkcab gnidaer

Rick Warren, Billy Graham, Charles Finney, John Wesley (or Calvin), Luther, Aquinas, Augustine, Paul, Jesus

reading forwards

Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, John the Baptist, Jesus

Exodus: Liberation & Formation

Exodus: Liberation & Formation

Genesis: Creation and Reconciliation

Isaiah: Peaceable Kingdom - Justice and Mercy

Exodus: Liberation & Formation

Genesis: Creation and Reconciliation

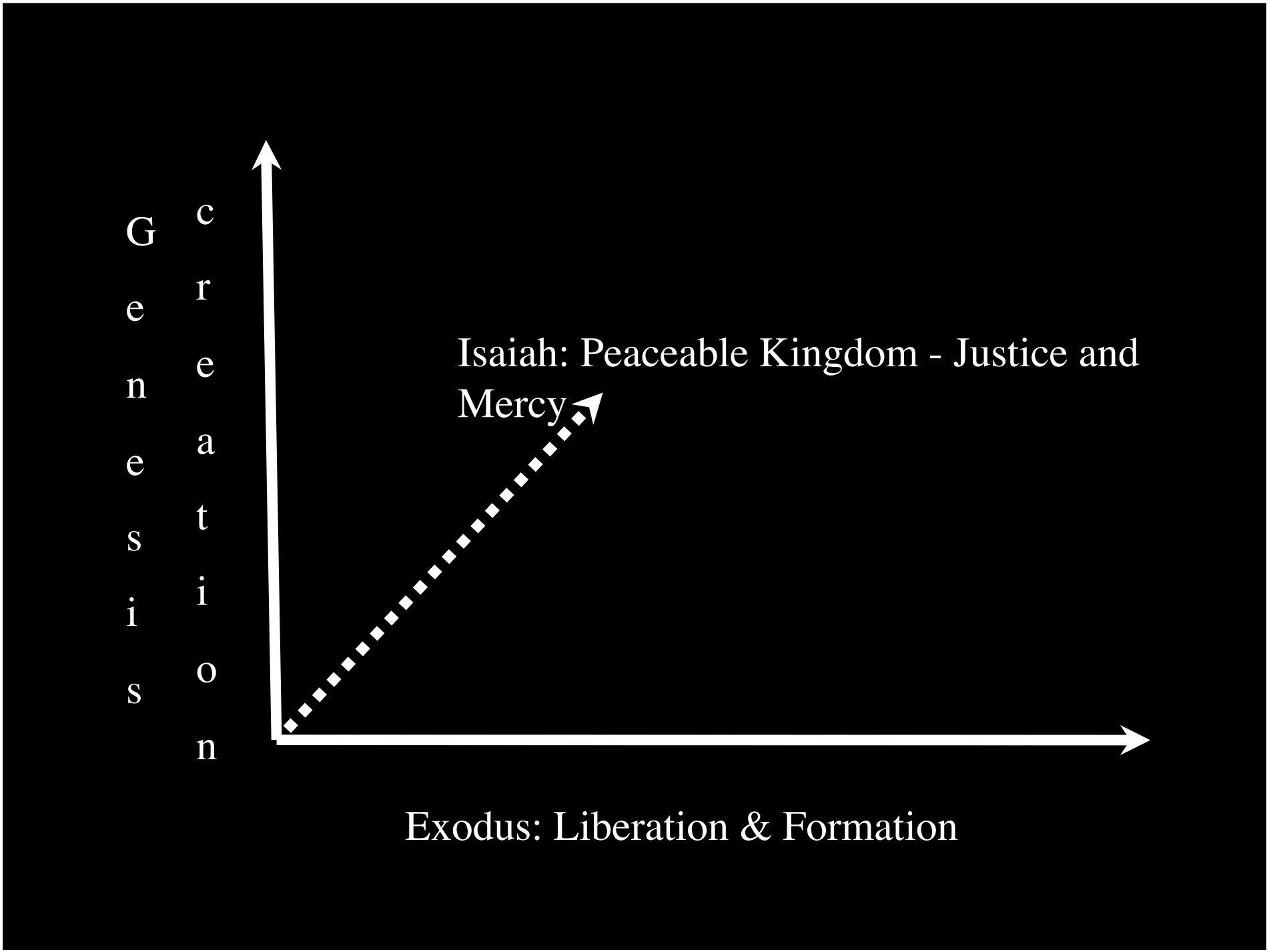
Isaiah: Peaceable Kingdom - Justice and Mercy

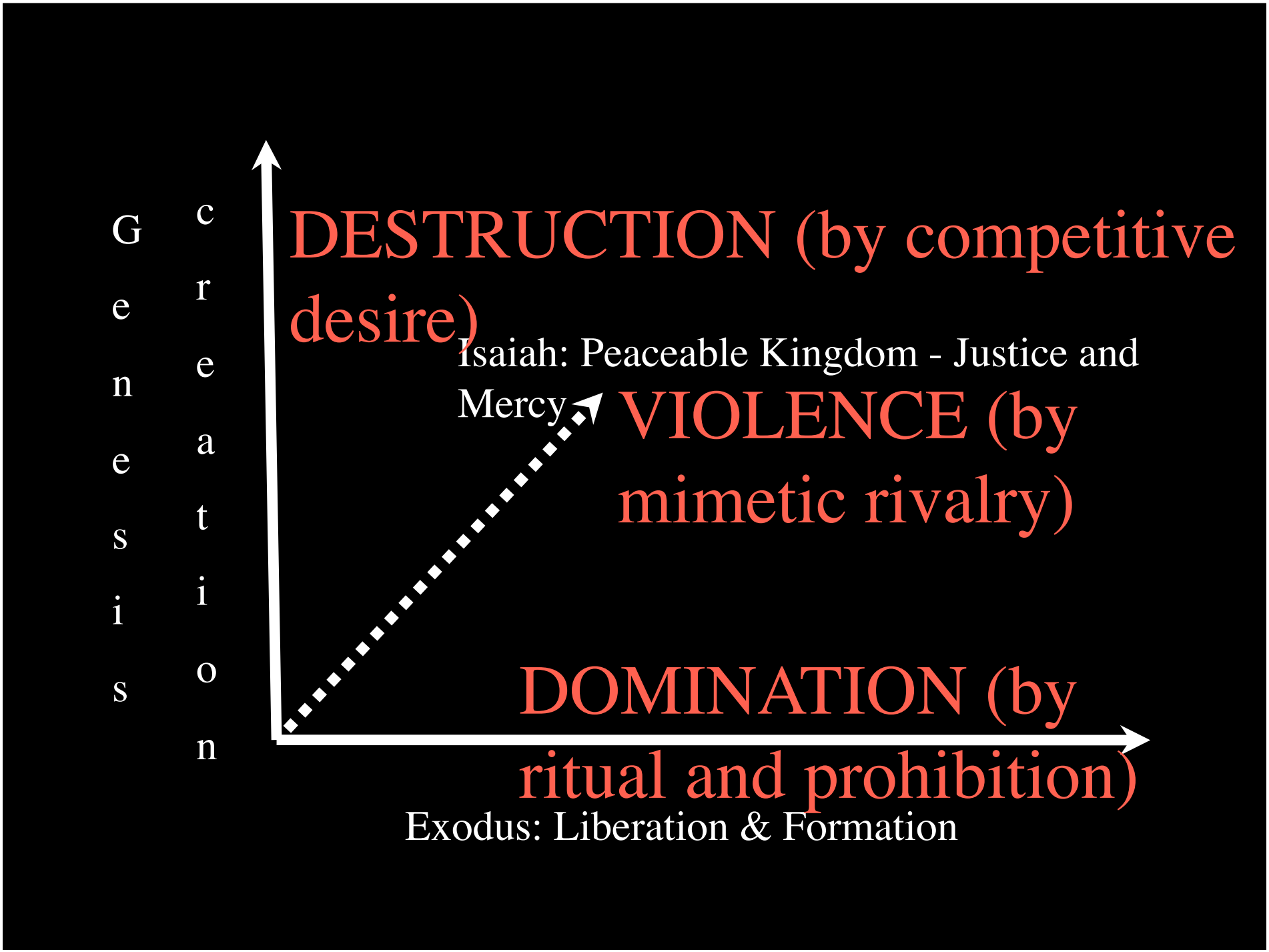
Exodus: Liberation & Formation

Genesis: Creation and Reconciliation

Not a “totalizing metanarrative” - an us-them story that legitimates domination and purification (scapegoating).

But a “multi-narrative” that creates a story-space (not a story-line) in which a million good stories can emerge.


Genesis creation
Isaiah: Peaceable Kingdom - Justice and Mercy
Exodus: Liberation & Formation


Genesis
creation
DESTRUCTION (by competitive desire)
Isaiah: Peaceable Kingdom - Justice and Mercy
VIOLENCE (by mimetic rivalry)
DOMINATION (by ritual and prohibition)
Exodus: Liberation & Formation

Genesis creation
Salvation (by creative desire - your will be done)
Isaiah: Peaceable Kingdom - Justice and Mercy
Reconciliation (by positive mimesis - the way)
Liberation (by service and self-giving)
Exodus: Liberation & Formation

Salvation ...

Salvation ... from God?

Salvation ... from God?

Salvation ... from our sins?
(our cycles of violence - as victims or perpetrators)

Jesus died “for our sins.”

Jesus died “for our sins.”

As a payment?

As a substitute?

Jesus died “for our sins.”

As a payment?

As a substitute?

I took an aspirin “for my headache.”

I exercise “for my heart.”

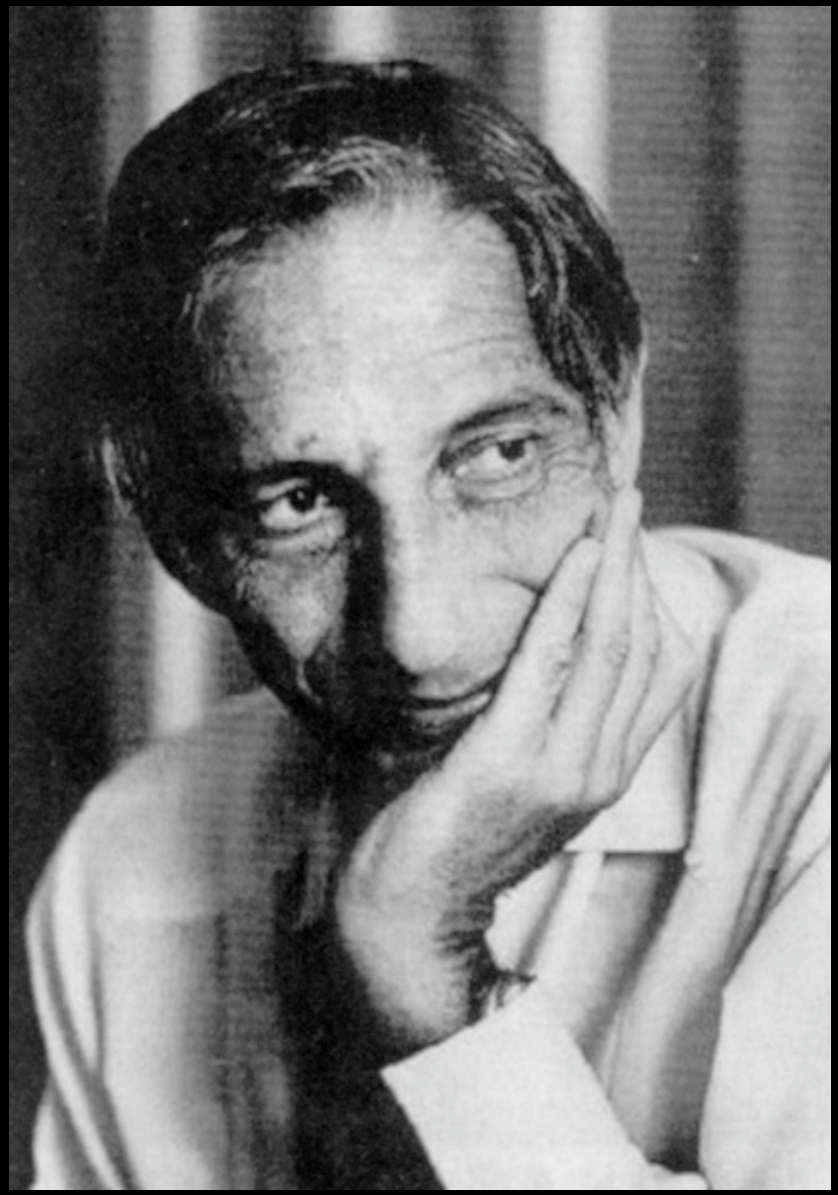
The Gospels only speak of sacrifices in order to reject them and deny them any validity. Jesus counters the ritualism of the Pharisees with an anti-sacrificial quotation from Hosea: "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice'" (Matthew 9:13).

There is nothing in the Gospels to suggest that the death of Jesus is a sacrifice, whatever definition (expiation, substitution, etc.) we may give for sacrifice. At no point in the Gospels is the death of Jesus dfined as a sacrifice.... Certainly the Passion is presented to us in the Gospels as an act that brings salvation to humanity. But it is in no way presented as a sacrifice. (181)

Our great need:
A better version of the
biblical story ...

Good news of the
commonwealth, new society,
new economy, new family,
sacred ecosystem of God

Ivan Illich (Austrian former priest, philosopher, social critic, 1926-2002)



Neither revolution nor reformation can ultimately change a society, rather you must tell a new powerful tale, one so persuasive that it sweeps away the old myths and becomes the preferred story …

… one so inclusive that it gathers all the bits of our past and our present into a coherent whole, one that even shines some light into the future so that we can take the next step…. If you want to change a society, then you have to tell an alternative story.

- attributed to Ivan Illich (Austrian former priest, philosopher, social critic, 1926-2002)

How can that story be ...

articulated in sermons and books

celebrated in creeds and confessions

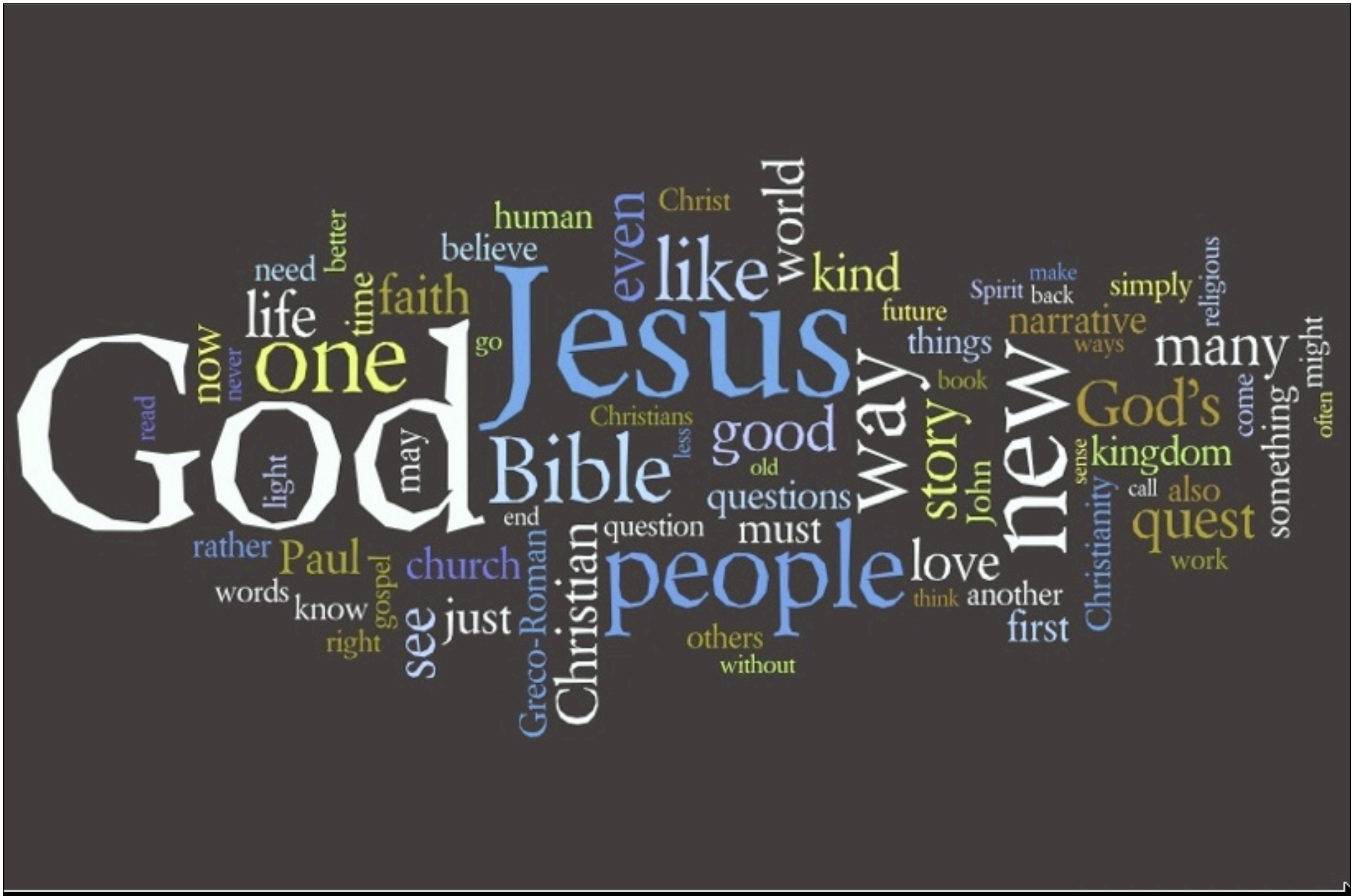
rooted in songs and prayers

embodied in mission and prophetic action

explored in art and research

shared with everyone everywhere?

This is our task.



a new kind of christianity

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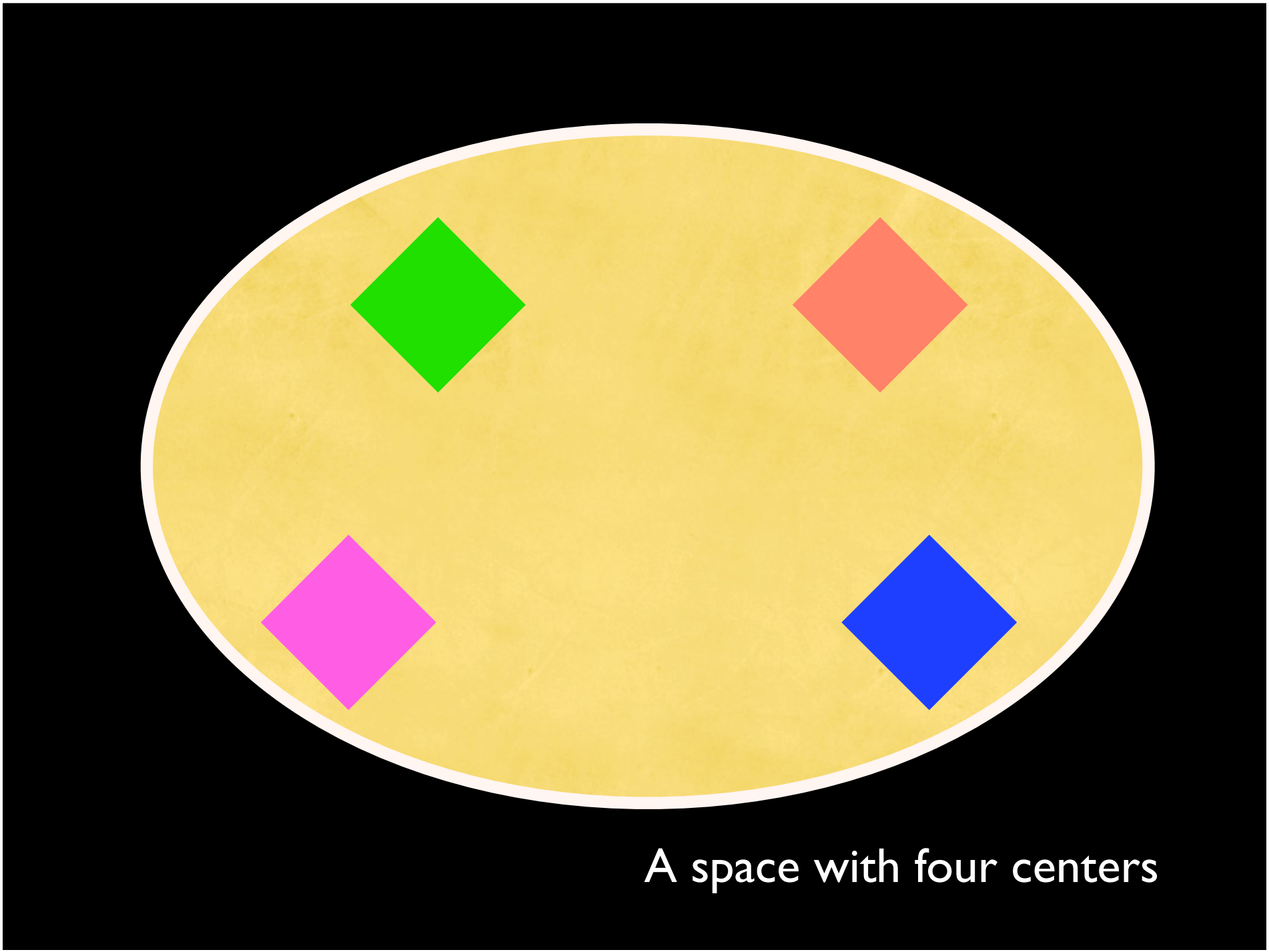
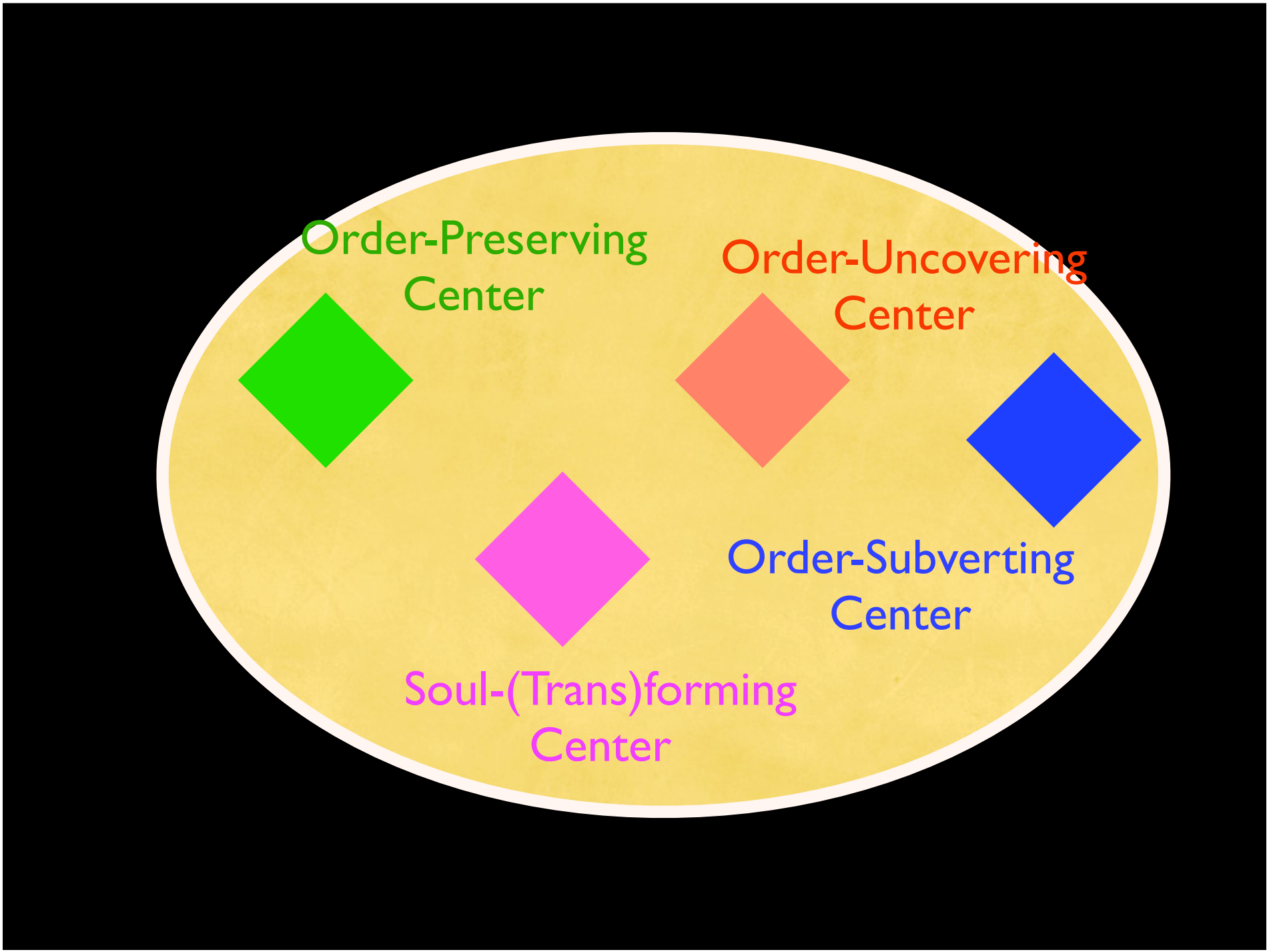
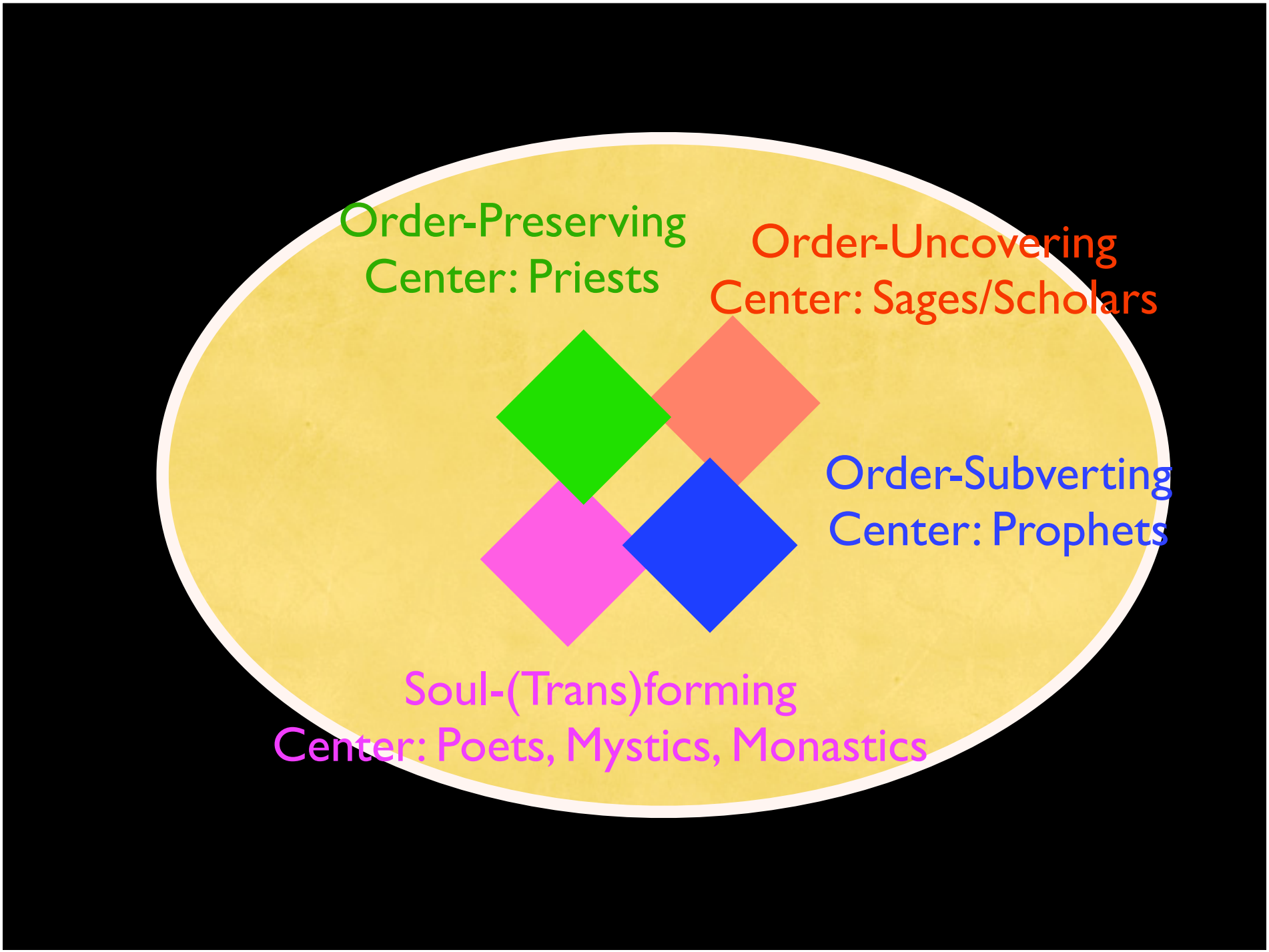
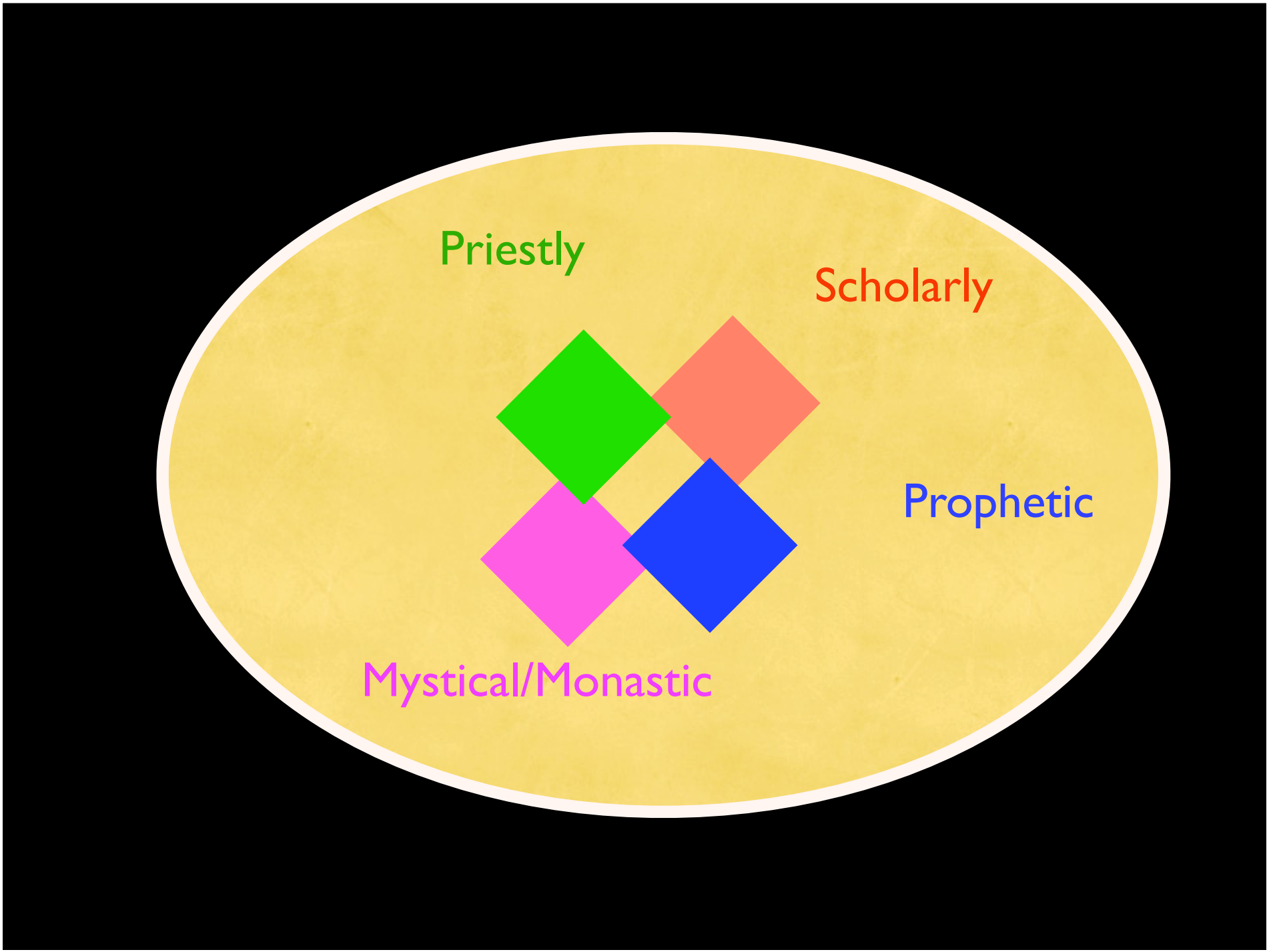
Caught between something real ...

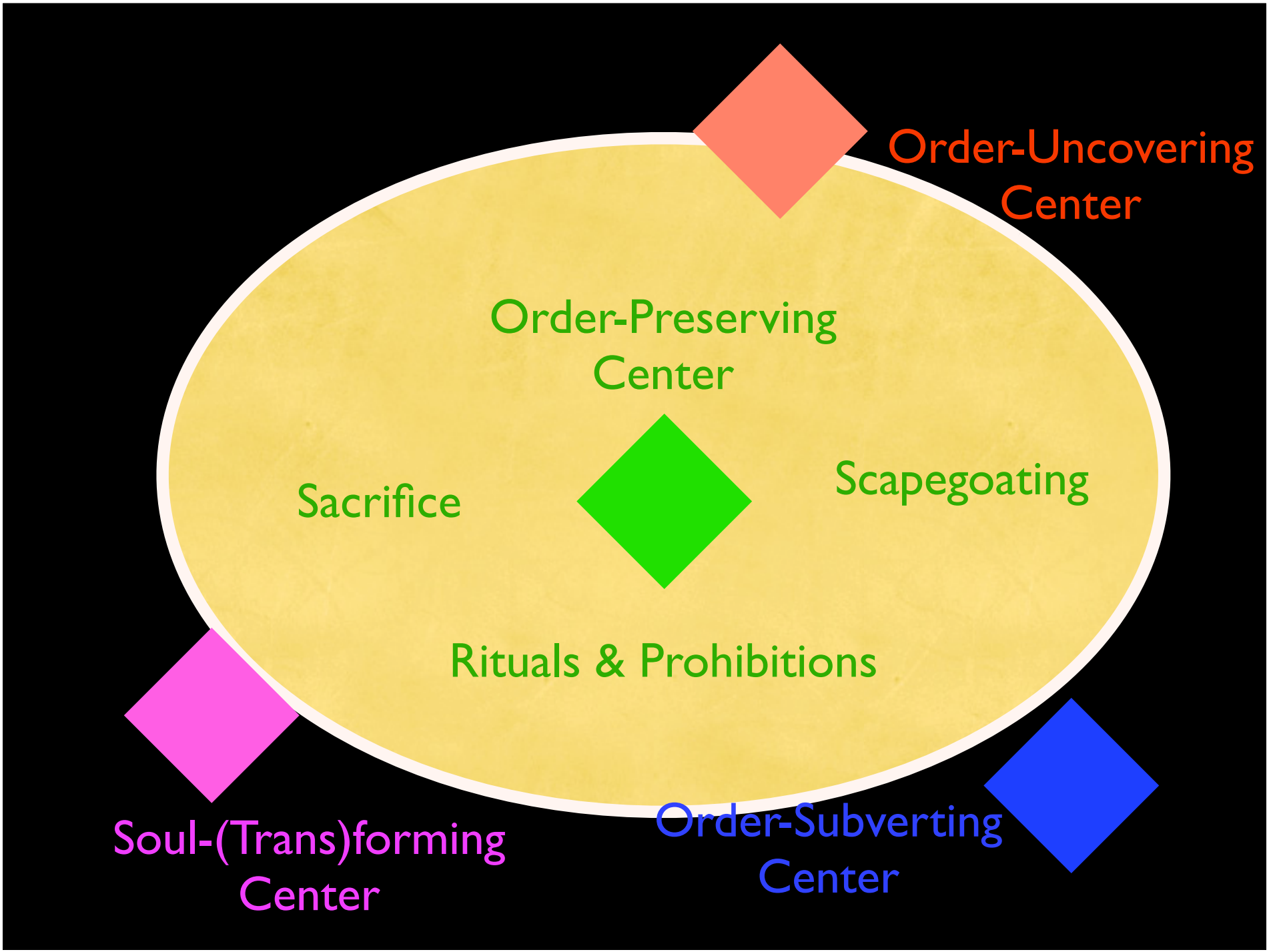
and something wrong.

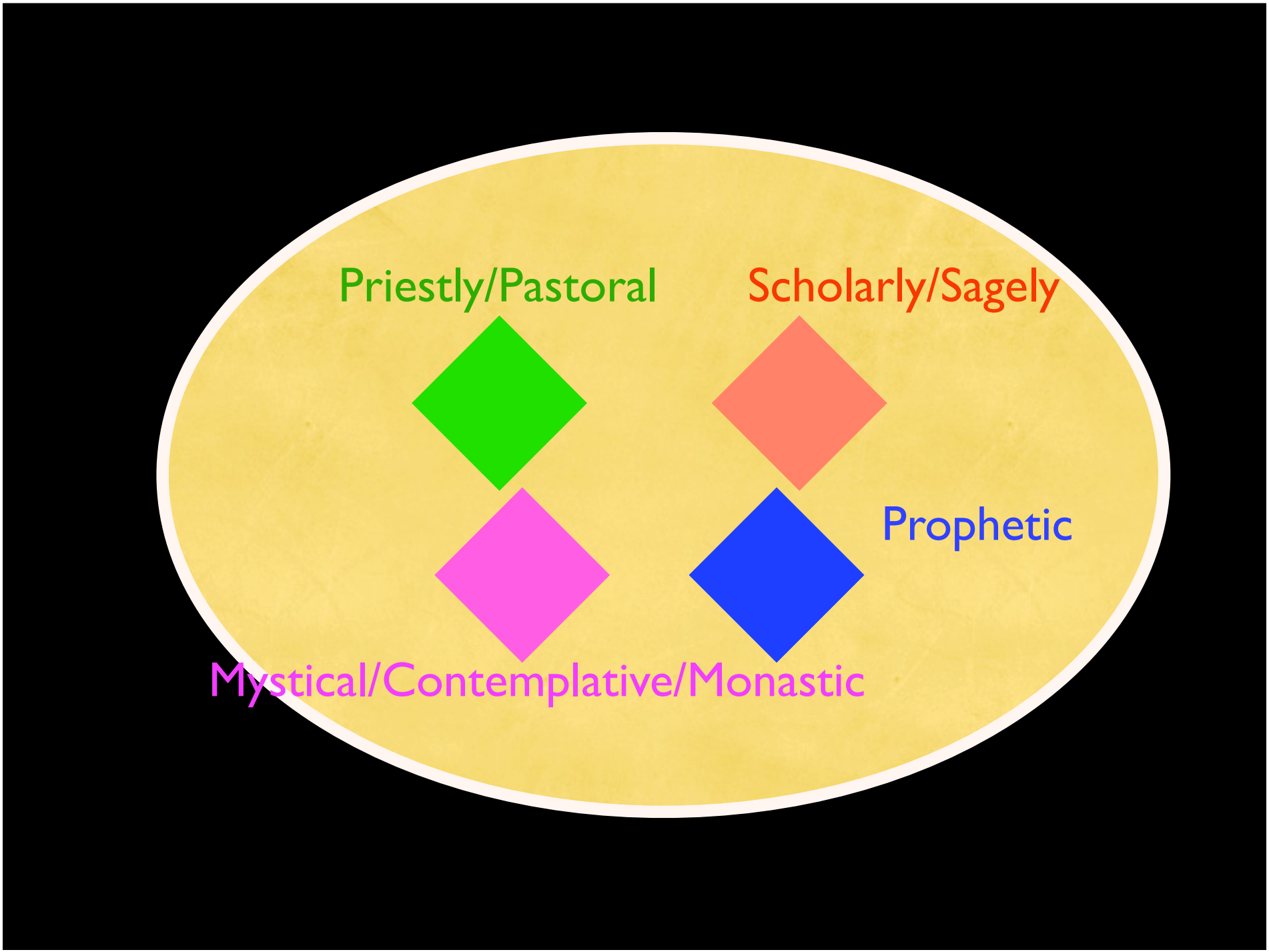

A space with four centers


Order-Preserving Center
Order-Uncovering Center
Order-Subverting Center
Soul-(Trans)forming Center


Order-Preserving
Center: Priests
Order-Uncovering
Center: Sages/Scholars
Order-Subverting
Center: Prophets
Soul-(Trans)forming
Center: Poets, Mystics, Monastics


Priestly
Scholarly
Prophetic
Mystical/Monastic


Order-Uncovering Center
Order-Preserving Center
Sacrifice
Scapegoating
Rituals & Prohibitions
Soul-(Trans)forming Center
Order-Subverting Center


Priestly/Pastoral
Scholarly/Sagely
Prophetic
Mystical/Contemplative/Monastic

Priestly/Pastoral

Scholarly/Sagely

Prophetic

Mystical/Contemplative/Monastic

Priestly/Pastoral

Scholarly/Sagely

Prophetic

Mystical/Contemplative/Monastic

Not a ritual of sacrifice - but a meal of reconciliation

Priestly/Pastoral

Scholarly/Sagely

Prophetic

Mystical/Contemplative/Monastic

Not rivals - but companions

Priestly/Pastoral

Scholarly/Sagely

Prophetic

Mystical/Contemplative/Monastic

Not hostility/exclusion - but hospitality/welcome

Priestly/Pastoral

Scholarly/Sagely

Prophetic

Mystical/Contemplative/Monastic

Not substitutionary atonement - but self-giving for at-one-ment

Priestly/Pastoral

Scholarly/Sagely

Prophetic

Mystical/Contemplative/Monastic

... the Gospels [must] rise again in our midst, not looking like a corpse that we have exhumed, but revealed as the newest, finest, liveliest and truest thing that we have ever set eyes upon. (235-236)

St. Paul

When I was a child, I spoke and thought
and reasoned like a child,
But when I became an adult,
I gave up childish ways.

For now we see in a mirror dimly,
But then face to face.
Now I know in part; then I shall
understand fully,
Even as I have been fully
understood.

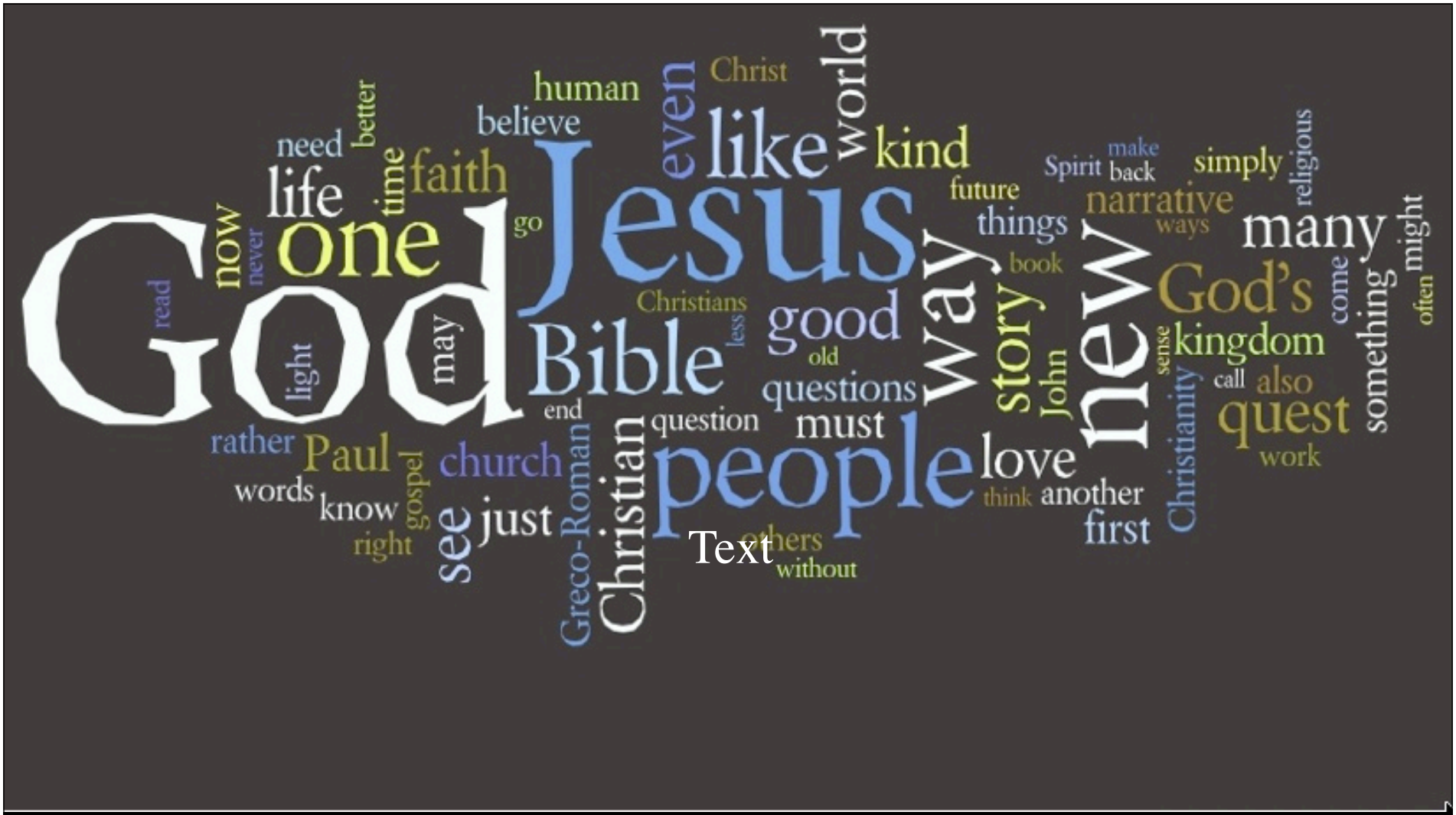
So faith, hope, and love abide, these three;

But the greatest of these is love.

I will show you the most excellent way.

Follow the way of love.

Amen.



christianity transformed

and transforming

APARTHEIDMUSEUM

DEMOCRACY
RECONCILIATION
DIVERSITY
RESPONSIBILITY
RESPECT
FREEDOM