

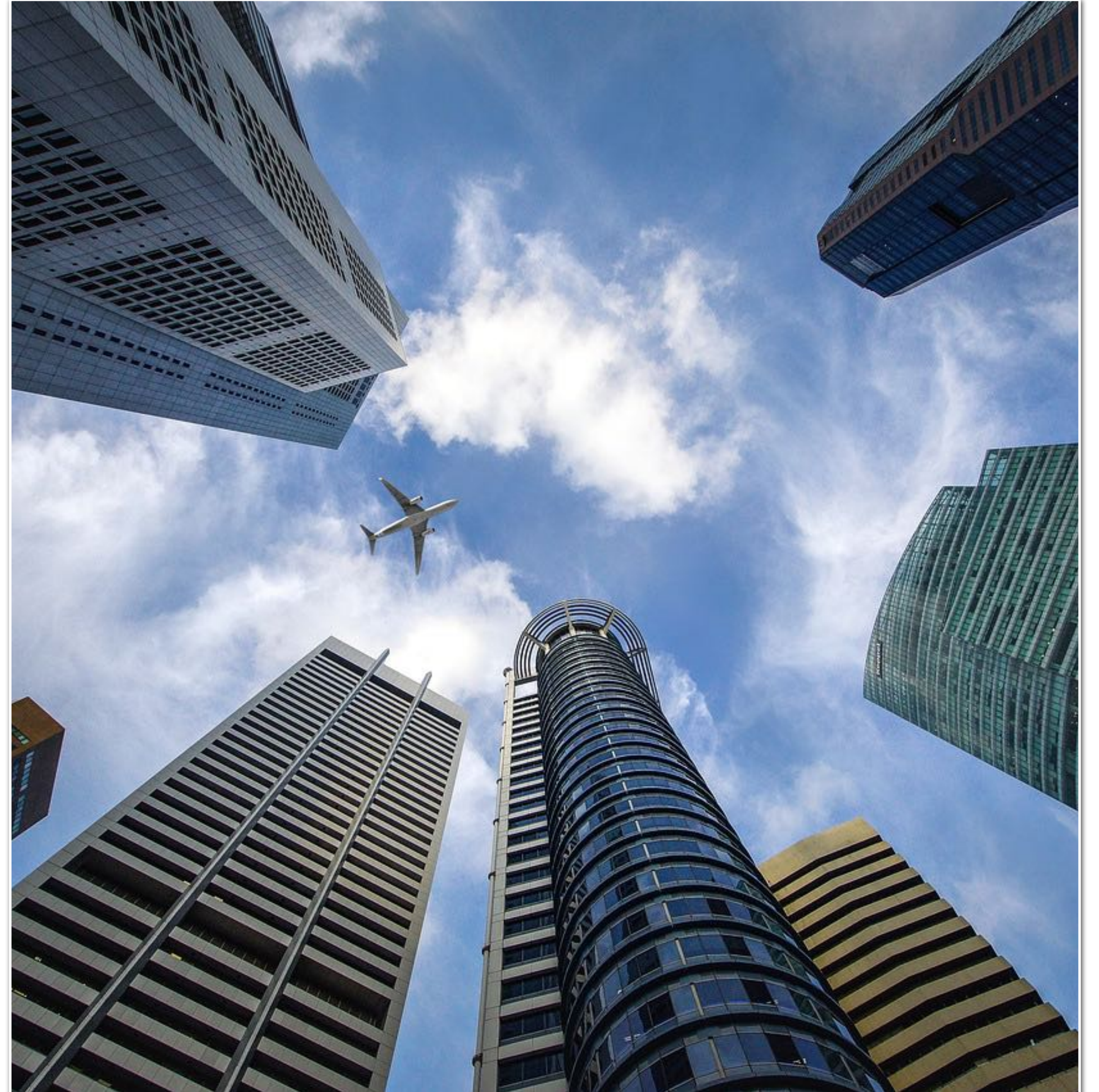
Welcome to The Christ Institute



Secularism: No God Here

Christ Institute, September 23, 2023

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What is Secularism?

- According to Charles Taylor, there are three uses:
 - Secular and sacred spaces
 - Decline of religious belief & practice
 - Belief in God is one option among many, often not the best

“So the shift to a secular age not only makes exclusive humanism a live option for us, it also changes religious communities. We are all secular now...We now inhabit this self-sufficient immanent order, even if we believe in transcendence [God].”

-J.K. Smith-

Impact on Christianity

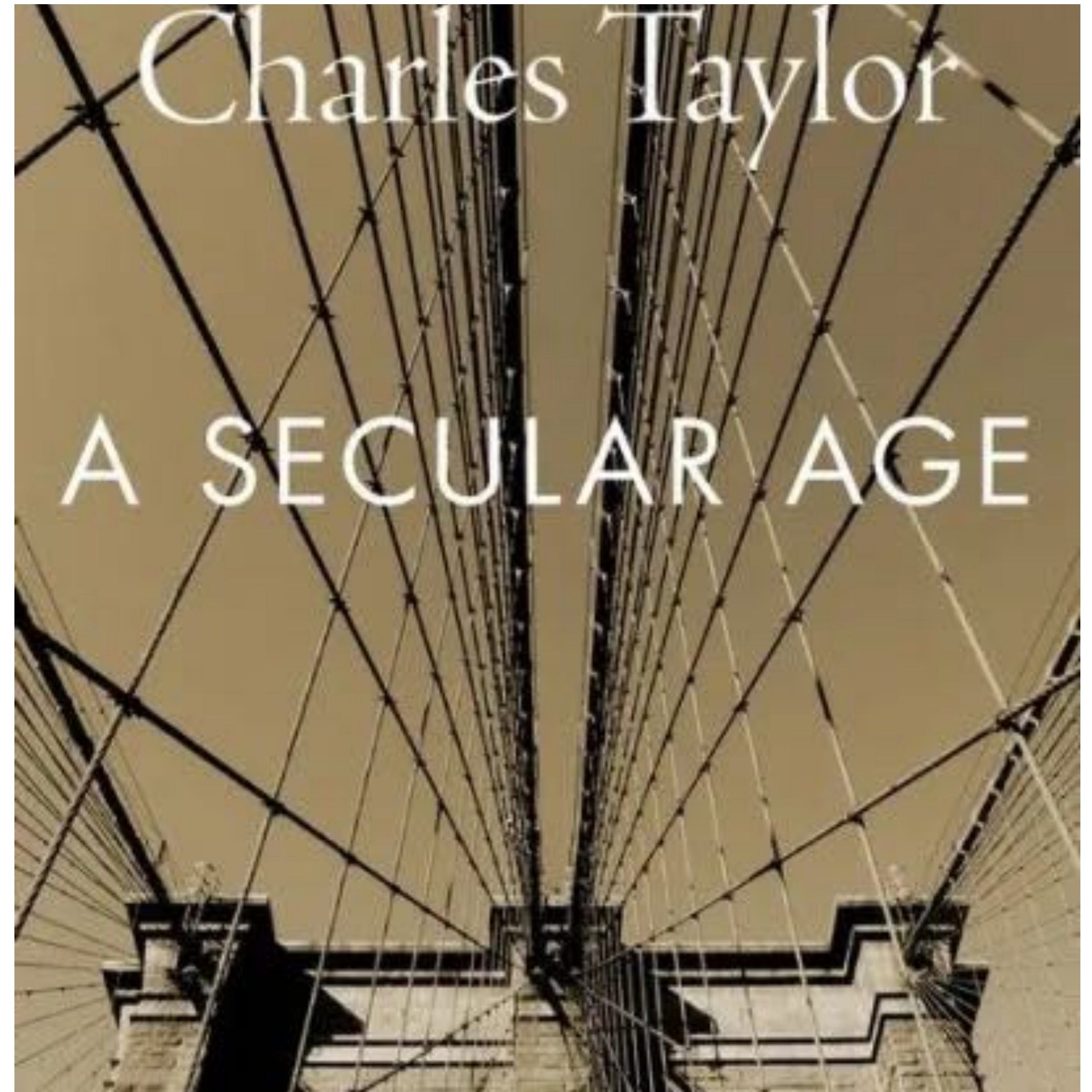
- Radical Two Kingdoms
- Pietism
- Leftism

Defining Secularism

- “The doctrine that rejects all religious principles in civic life.”
-Mary Poplin
- Nancy Pearcey- it introduces the dichotomies of “secular/
sacred, fact/value, public/private.”

How did we get here?

“Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”- Page 25

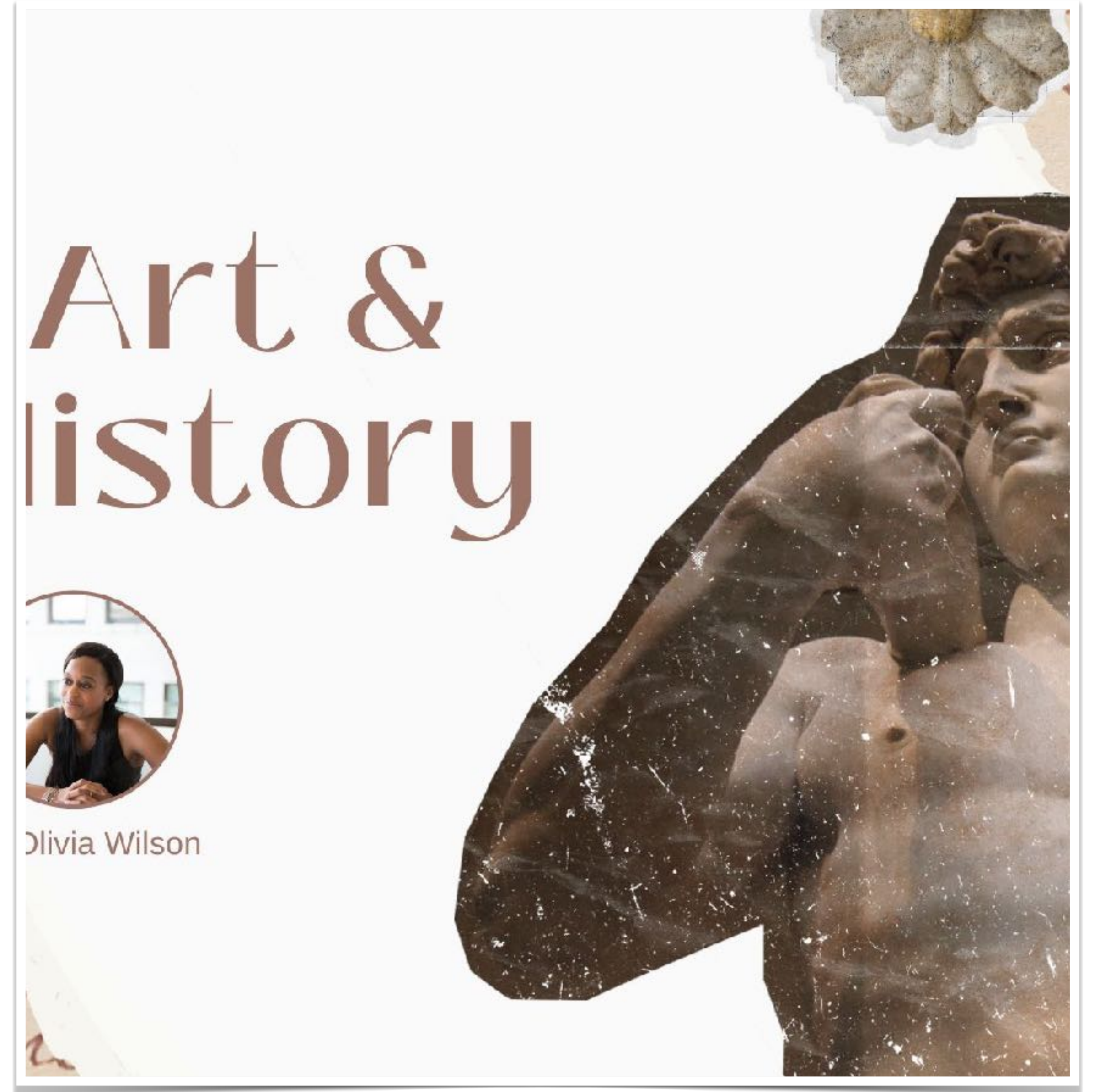


Objectives

- Learn secularism's origin *and* historical context
- Comprehend the modern version of secularism
- Understand the Biblical response

A Survey of History

**Where is the separation of
God from the State found?**



Ancient Egypt

- *“The king is by nature divine - he is Horus, and offspring of Ra. However, he is also inhabiting a human body, and is therefore mortal. This duality of divine character and mortal constraints is the essence of Egyptian kingship.”* -University College London



Ancient Babylon

- Nebuchadnezzar demanded worship



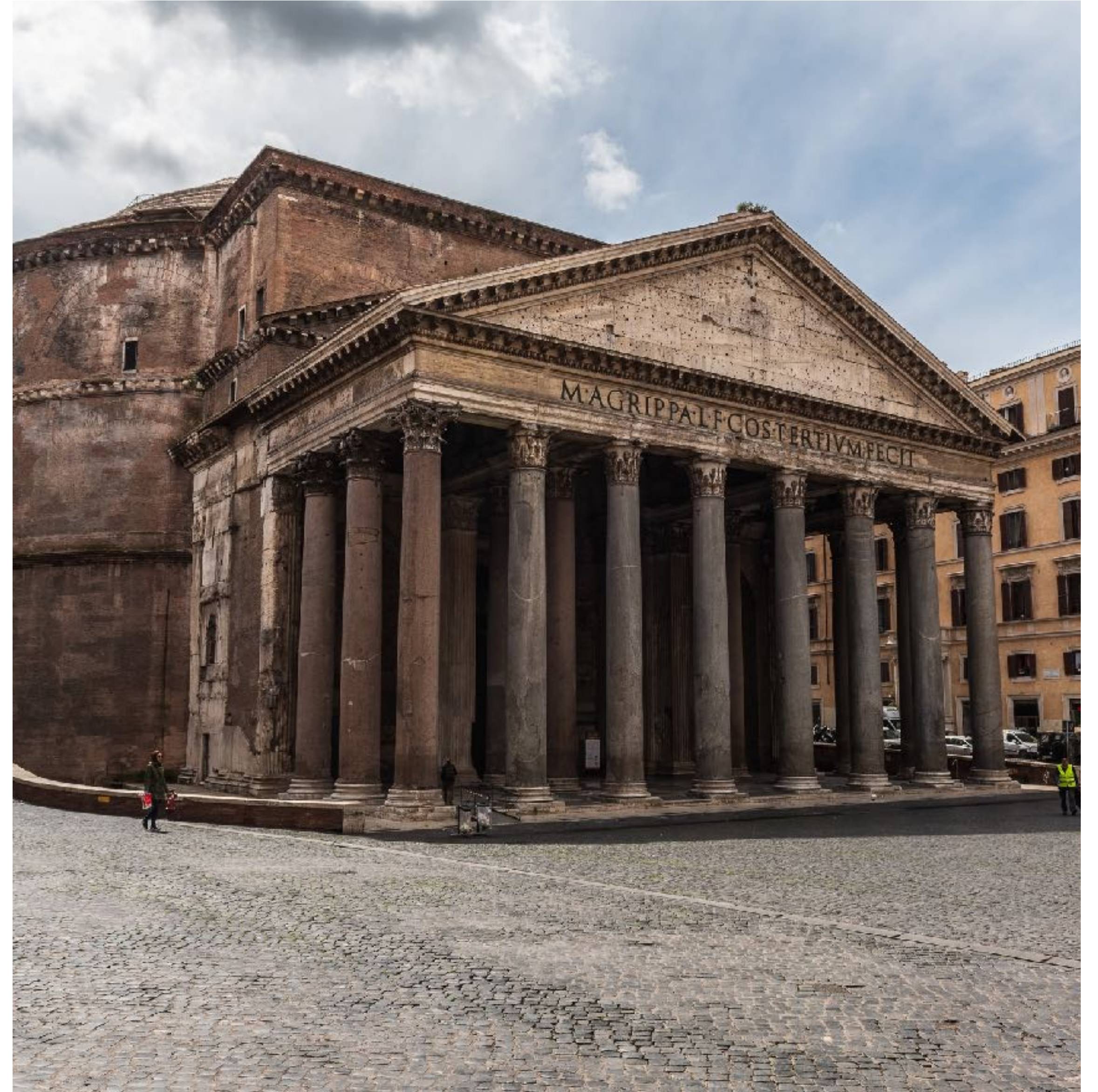
Ancient Persia

- Xerxes claimed a link to divinity, “his mission to establish Zoroastrianism at the expense of all other religions.” - Oxford Academic Journal



Ancient Rome

- The Pantheon of gods were believed to establish and bless the Roman Empire



Ancient Rome

- Roman Emperors took the titles of Lord, Savior, and Son of God
- Emperor worship and claims to divinity were common



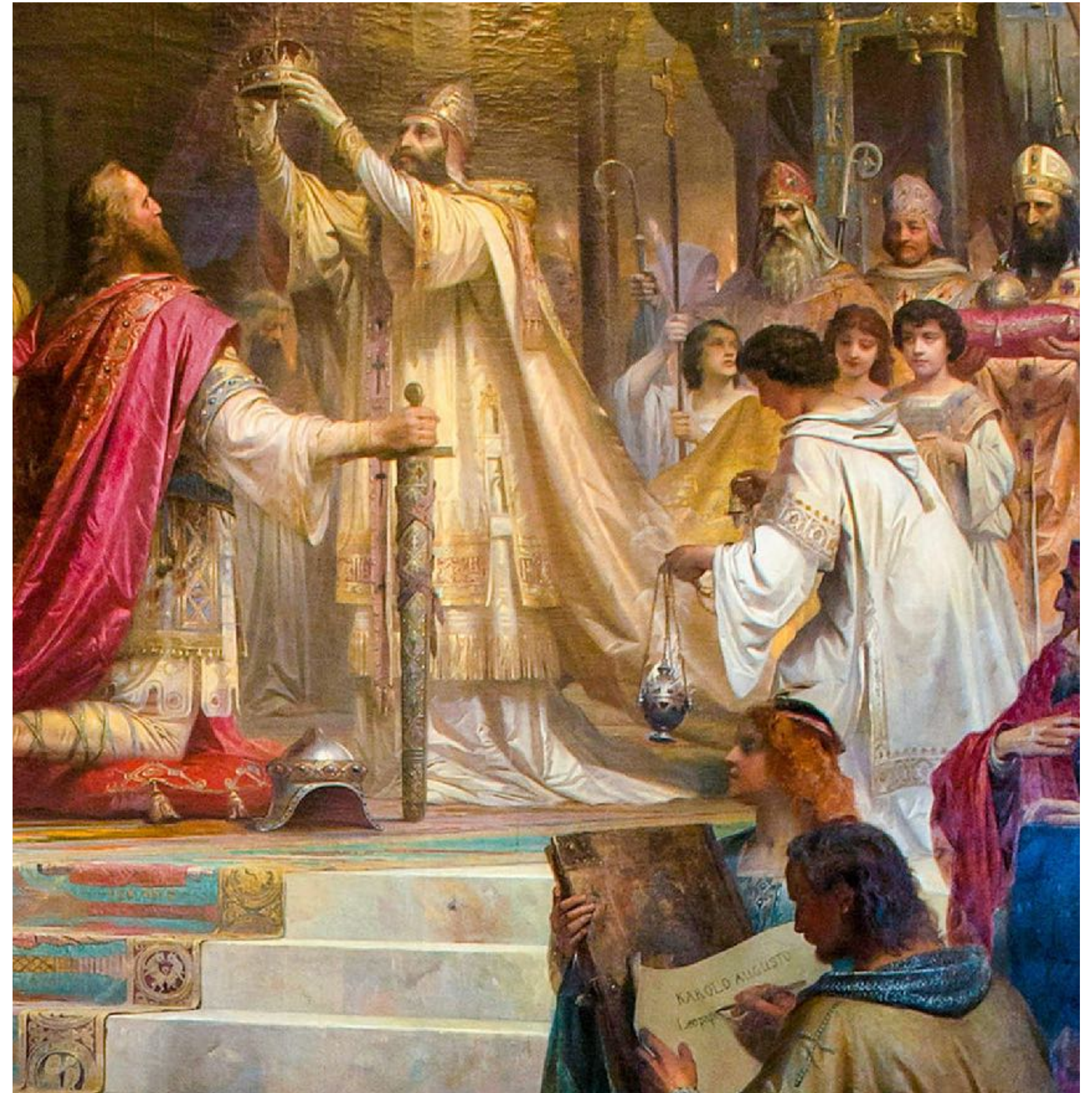
Chinese Dynasties

- Chinese Emperors were considered divine
- And ruled under a mandate from heaven



Medieval Europe

- Church over the state
- Popes crowned kings and emperors
- The divine right of Kings



Reformation Europe

- Some marriage of church and state
- But also some distinction



Where is the Origin of Secularism?

- Most of world history did not think in secular/sacred categories
- Even the idea of “religion” is new
- The first prominent example of an attempt of a secular state was in the French Revolution (Reign of Terror)
- Followed by Fascism and Marxism building off of Darwinism
- Western States have been secularizing for the last 200 years

A Christian Heresy

The Origins of Secularism



The Seeds of Secularism

- Medieval Catholic Spirituality
 - Semi-Gnostic Neo-Platonic thought (physical is bad, spiritual is good)
 - Dualistic patterns of life—holy orders vs. laity, monasticism, asceticism
 - Only “spiritual” things truly matter
 - Often, spiritual and physical truths were contradictory

Upper vs. Lower Story of Life (Gnosticism)

Form (Ideal/non-physical)

Matter (physical)

“There are two truths, the truth of the supernatural world, and the truth of the natural world, which contradicts the supernatural world. While we are being naturalists, we can suppose that Christianity is all nonsense; but then, when we remember that we are Christians, we must admit that Christianity is true even if it is nonsense.”

-G.K. Chesterton-

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

- Recover & Christianize Aristotle
- Nature/grace duality
- Nature as good, but independent
- Reinforced a division in life



“Man, such as mediaeval Christendom conceived him has been split in two. On the one hand, one has a man of pure nature, who has need only of reason to be perfect, wise, and good, and to gain the earth...”

-Catholic Philosopher-

“This two-tiered schema of nature and grace proved unstable, and after Aquinas the two orders of existence had a tendency to separate and grow increasingly independent. Why? Because there was no real interaction or interdependence between them... nature remained complete and sufficient in itself, with grace merely an external add-on.”

-Nancy Pearcey-

The Seeds of Secularism

- Two parts of life, two distinct goals and methods
- Life becomes divided
- Form/matter, nature/grace, and *now* secular/sacred
- We see many of attitudes prevalent in evangelicalism

Aquinas (Aristotle) & Dualism

Grace

(God, heaven, the unseen, spiritual, soul, church)

Nature

(The created, earth, visible, physical, science, gov't)

Two Responses to the Divide

**The Reformation and the
Enlightenment**



The Reformation

Unifying Life



“One of the driving motives of the Reformers was to overcome this medieval dualism and to recover the unity of life and knowledge under the authority of God’s word.”

-Nancy Pearcey-

The Reformation

- No Two-tiered spirituality of Christians
- The Priesthood of all Believers
- The expansion of vocations
- Monastic Retreat replaced with the Cultural mandate (Gen 1:26-28)
- The Universe is a “theatre of God’s glory”
- The birth of the *Protestant Work Ethic*

“[Calvin] taught that the individual believer has a vocation to serve God in the world—in every sphere of human existence—lending a new dignity and meaning to ordinary work.”

-Nancy Pearcey-

The Reformation

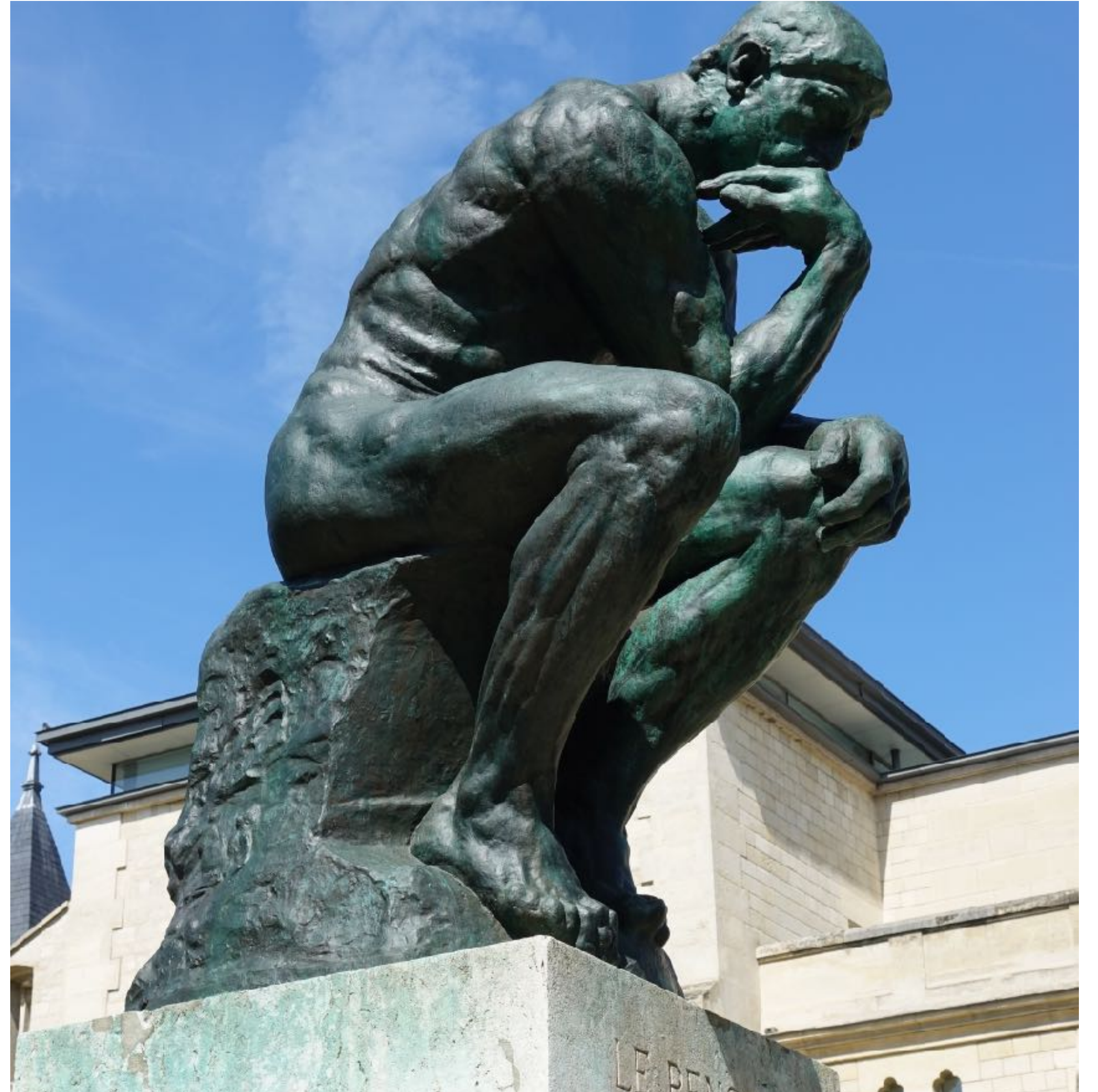
- When evangelicals fall into the secular/sacred division, pietism, or spiritual/physical divide they are rejecting the Reformation and returning to a blending of Greek and Catholic thought

The Reformation

- No dualism
- No separation of faith and reason
- We believe in order to understand

The Enlightenment

The Age of “Reason”

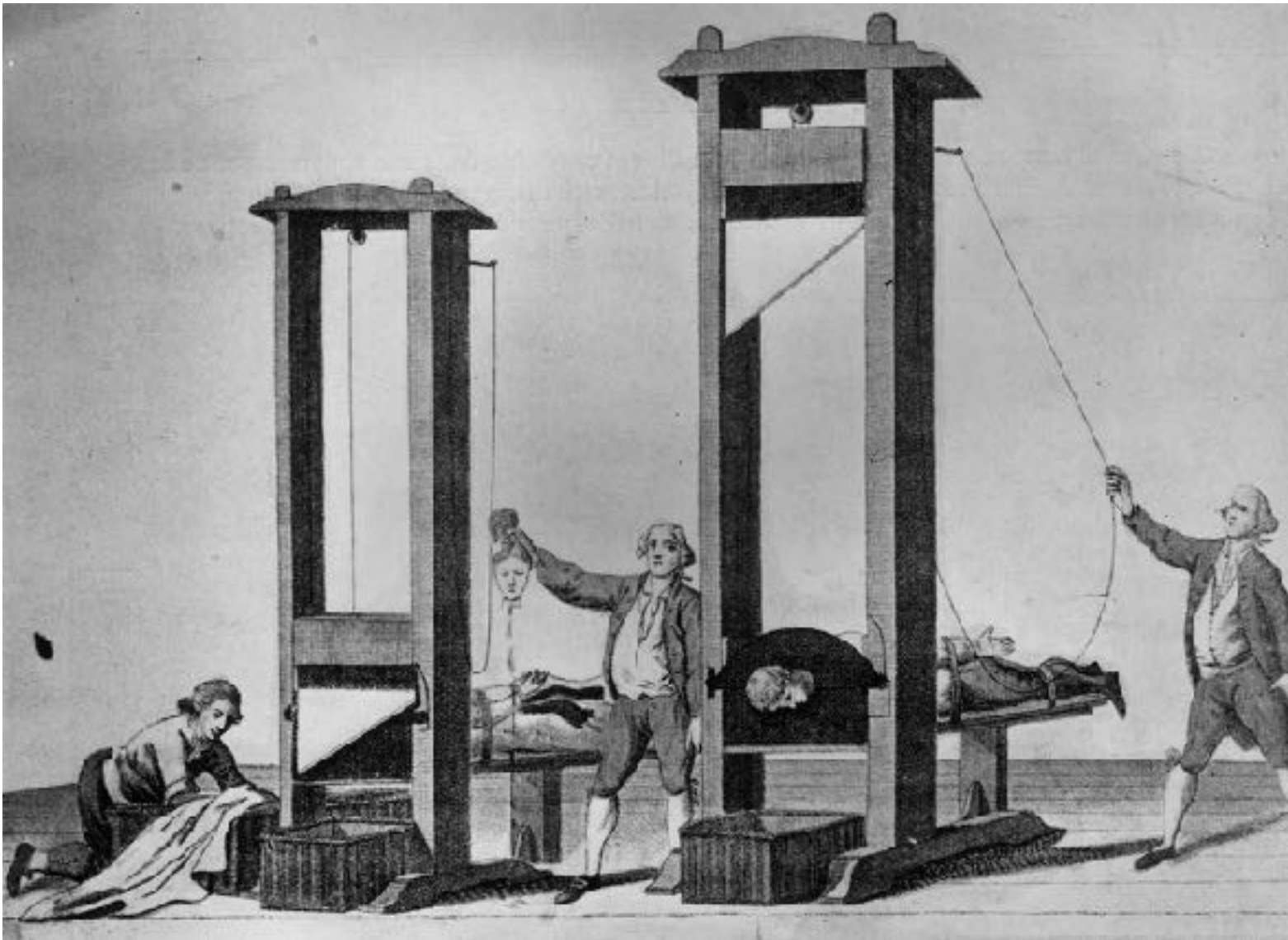


The Enlightenment

- Nature/grace set nature free
- The first *turn to the self* and human reason
- Reason and science became the “neutral” arbiters of truth
- Problem: no one could agree what was reasonable

The Enlightenment

- Religion viewed as oppressive
- Government's should be free from religion
- Two contrasting Revolutions



The Enlightenment

- The rise of “isms”
- Secular political ideologies like fascism and Marxism
- The Enlightenment crumbled in a second turn to the self —there is no truth but what we create (postmodernism)

The Enlightenment

- The Enlightenment, following the nature path of Aquinas's thought, leads us to modern secularism

Enlightened Dualism

Faith

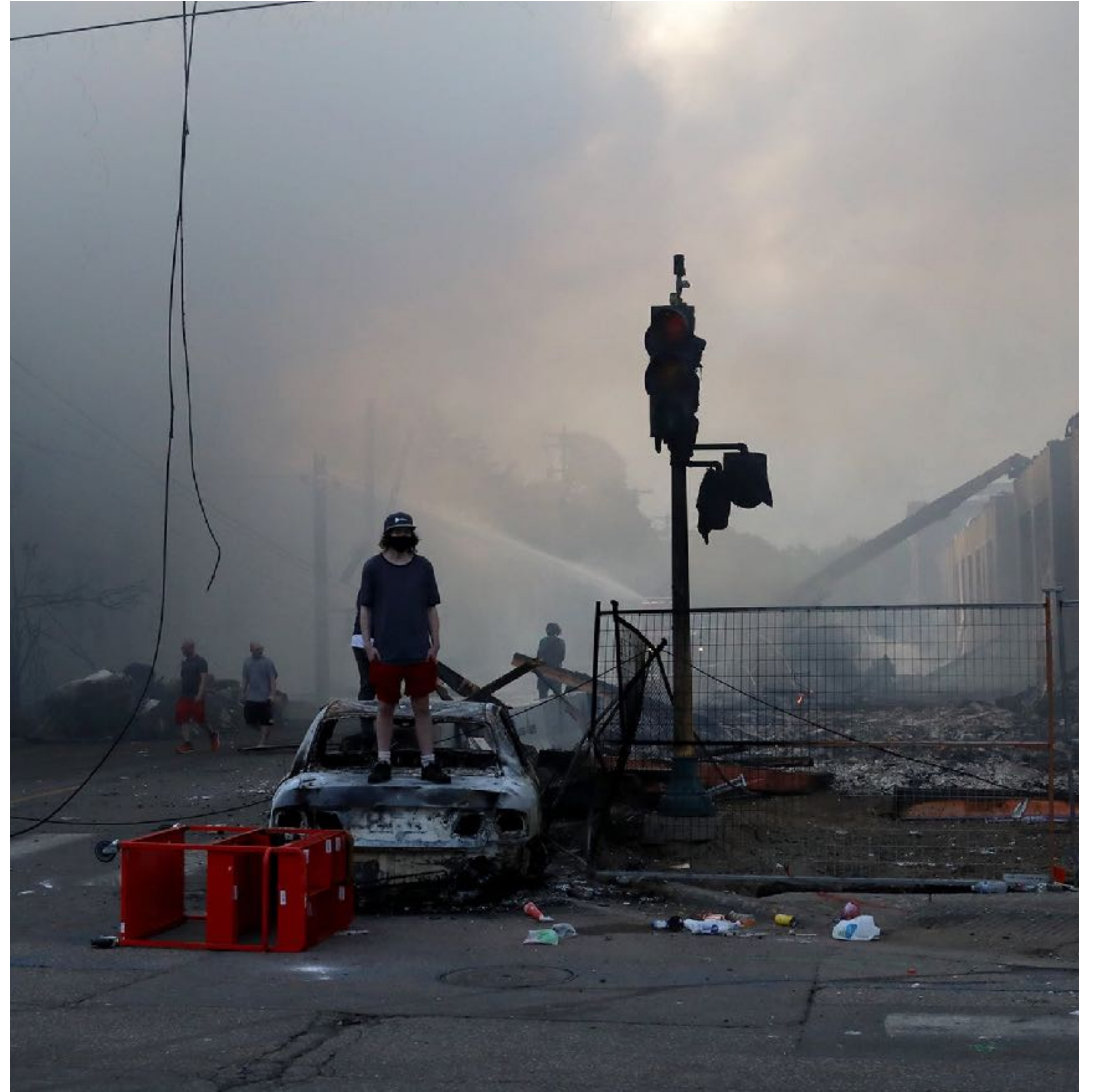
(religion, personal beliefs, values, church)

Reason

(Science, rationality, math, gov't)

Modern Secularism

Life in the Wasteland



Modern Secularism

- **Key Tenets**

- God is not allowed in *public parts* of life (secular)
- Faith is private, therapeutic, and relative (sacred)
- Secularism is viewed as the *neutral* standard
- Secularism is good/progress
- All of life's goals are immediate

Modern Secularism

- **Life in a Secular Age**
 - Fragmented living
 - Haunted by its Christian past
 - No basis for truth, good, progress, freedom, etc
 - Secularism was never neutral

Modern Secularism

- **Life in a Secular Age**
 - We turn further *within* ourselves for meaning
 - Life becomes about *human flourishing*
 - We live “disenchanted lives”

“In the enchanted world, the meaning exists outside us, prior to contact; it can take us over...” [Pre-secularism]

“The power for fullness is within [Secularism].”

“It wasn’t enough for us to stop believing in the gods,; we also had to be able to imagine significance within the immanent frame, to imagine...meaning that did not depend on transcendence.”

Secularism's Disintegration

- No longer feigns neutrality
- No foundation for human rights, only power
- No foundation for truth, meaning, morality, science, reason, etc.
- Haunted by the ghost of Christianity

“When God—the external God—dies, then the self immediately moves in to fill the vacuum. But then something strange happens. The self also dies. And with it goes meaning and reality.”

-David Wells

The Dilemma

- The main difference between many evangelicals and secularists is which side of the dualism they view as more important
- They both embrace the foundational beliefs of secularism —the ***secular/sacred divide***

**The Biblical
Alternative
Life Unified Under God**



The Biblical Alternative

- Christianity must break out of its secular cage
- Return to Reformational thinking

The Biblical Alternative

- Return to the Biblical foundation of creation, fall, redemption, restoration

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Genesis 1

A Comprehensive Creation

- God created the heavens and the earth
- God declares creation *good*
- God owns everything
- God gave man charge, as an image-bearer, over everything
- No room for a secular/sacred divide, there is good or evil

The Biblical Alternative

- Return to the Biblical foundation of creation, fall, redemption, restoration
 - Creation (Gen 1:26-28)
 - The Fall (Gen 3:1-21, Rom 8:19-22)

“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.”

-Romans 8

A Comprehensive Fall

- Creation is universally cursed
- Creation is *not* the problem
- Creation longs to be freed, not from physicality, but from sin

The Biblical Alternative

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 - The Fall (Gen 3:1-21, Rom 8:19-22)
 - Redemption (Matt. 28:18, Col. 1:20; Eph. 1:22-23)

“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

Matthew 28:18

“and Through [Christ] to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

-Col. 1

"That he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

-Eph. 1

A Comprehensive Redemption

- Christ died to address the chief problem—humanity's sin
- Christ is the Creator, sustainer, and savior of *all* things
- Christ presently has *all* authority, not some
- Christ's work is remaking and uniting *all* things by the blood of his Cross

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 - Redemption (Matt 28:18, Col 1:20; Eph 1:22-23)
 - Restoration (Rev 21:1, 5)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more...And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

-Rev. 21

A Comprehensive Restoration

- God restores everything physical and spiritual
- God makes ***ALL THINGS NEW***
- God will dwell with mankind again
- A comprehensive return to the comprehensive beginning

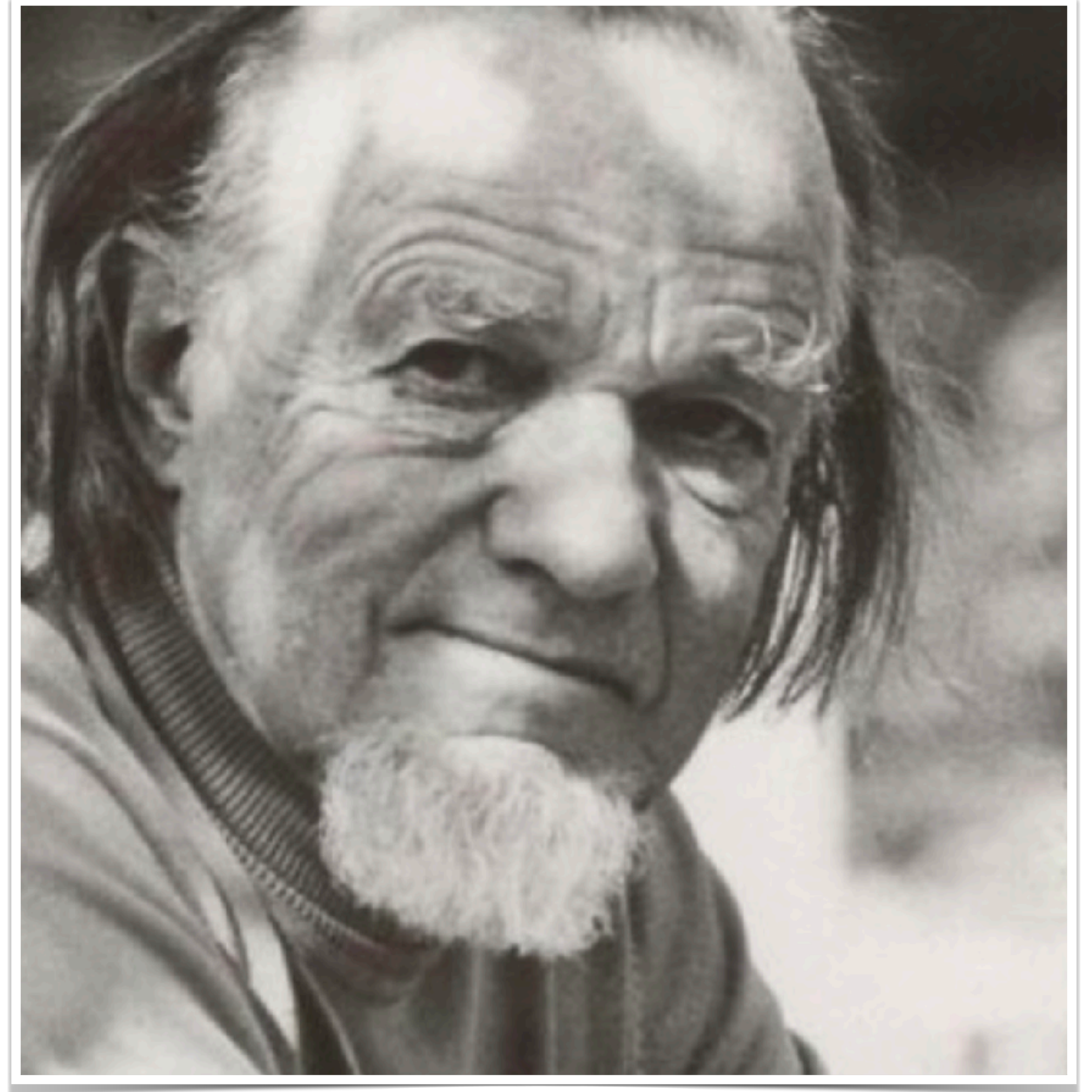
Conclusion

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- There is no room for *dualism* in Christianity, especially the secular/sacred divide
- What is needed is a comprehensive *world-and-life-view* that transformed the West
- This means seeing a universe *united* by its creator and savior
- While there are distinctions within creation, Christ is the head of all things

“True spirituality covers all of reality...the Lordship of Christ covers all of life and all of life equally...In this sense there is nothing concerning reality that is not spiritual.”

-Francis Schaeffer-



Questions & Discussion