



# FOUR LECTURES

**L1:** *Aristotle and the Qur'an in Andalusian Islamic Thought*

**L2:** *Reading Hebrew Scripture as a Philosophical Text*

**L3:** *Augustine's Vanquishing of Christian Anti-Intellectualism*

**L4:** *Augustine on Mind, Human and Divine*



Lisbon

Seville

Portimao

Tangier

Oran

Algiers

Bejaia

Annaba/  
Hippo

Tunis/  
Carthage

Palermo

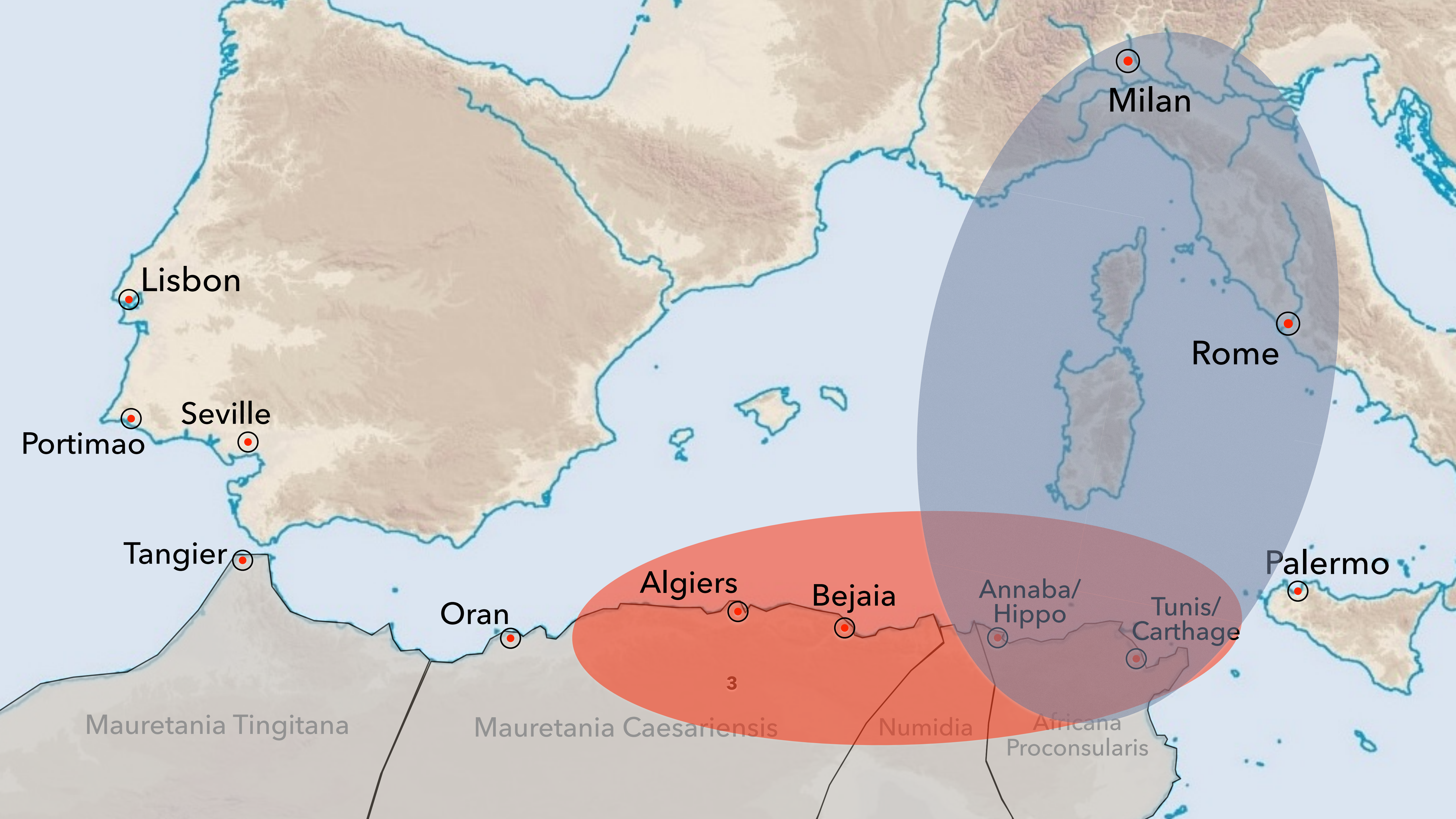
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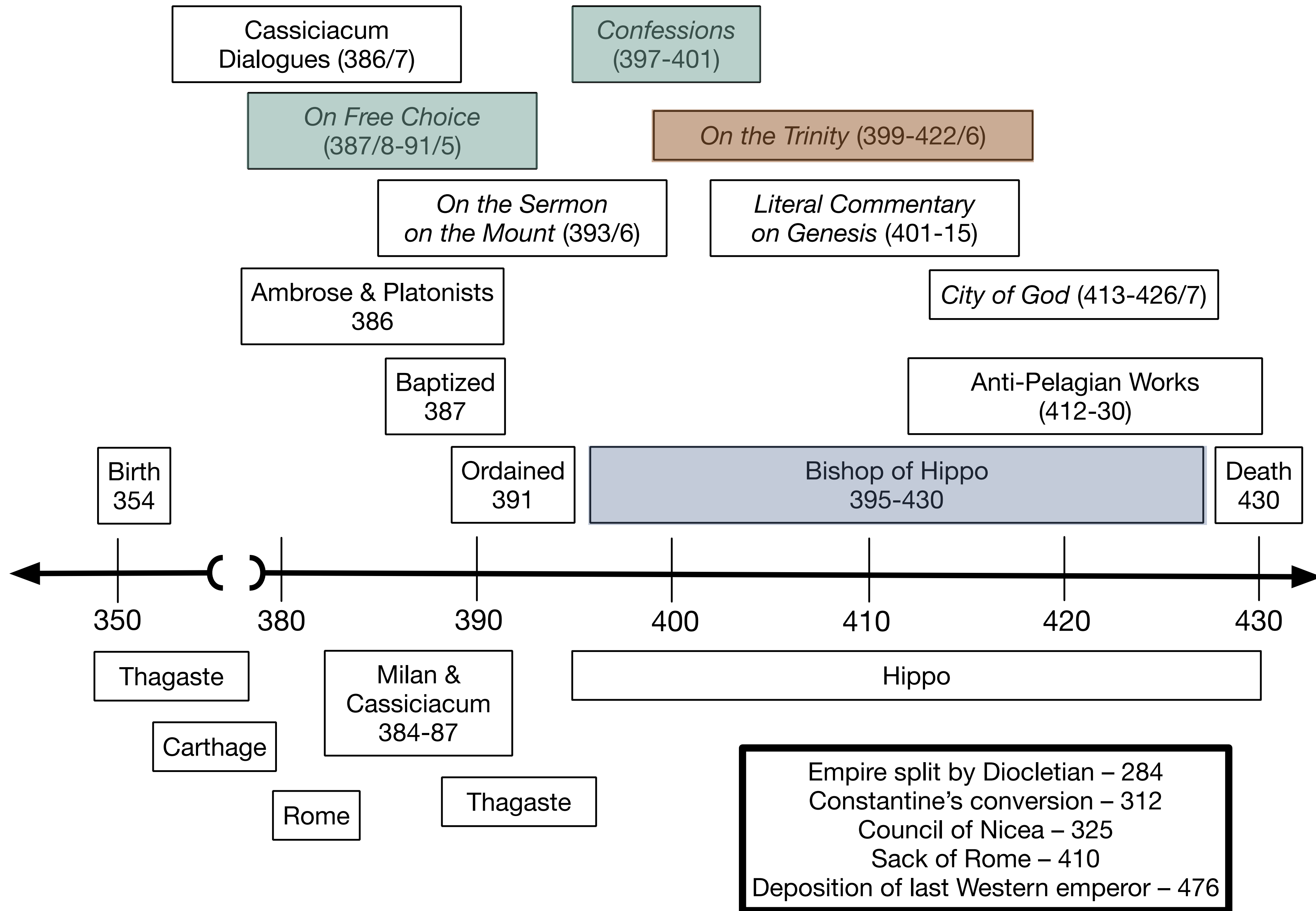
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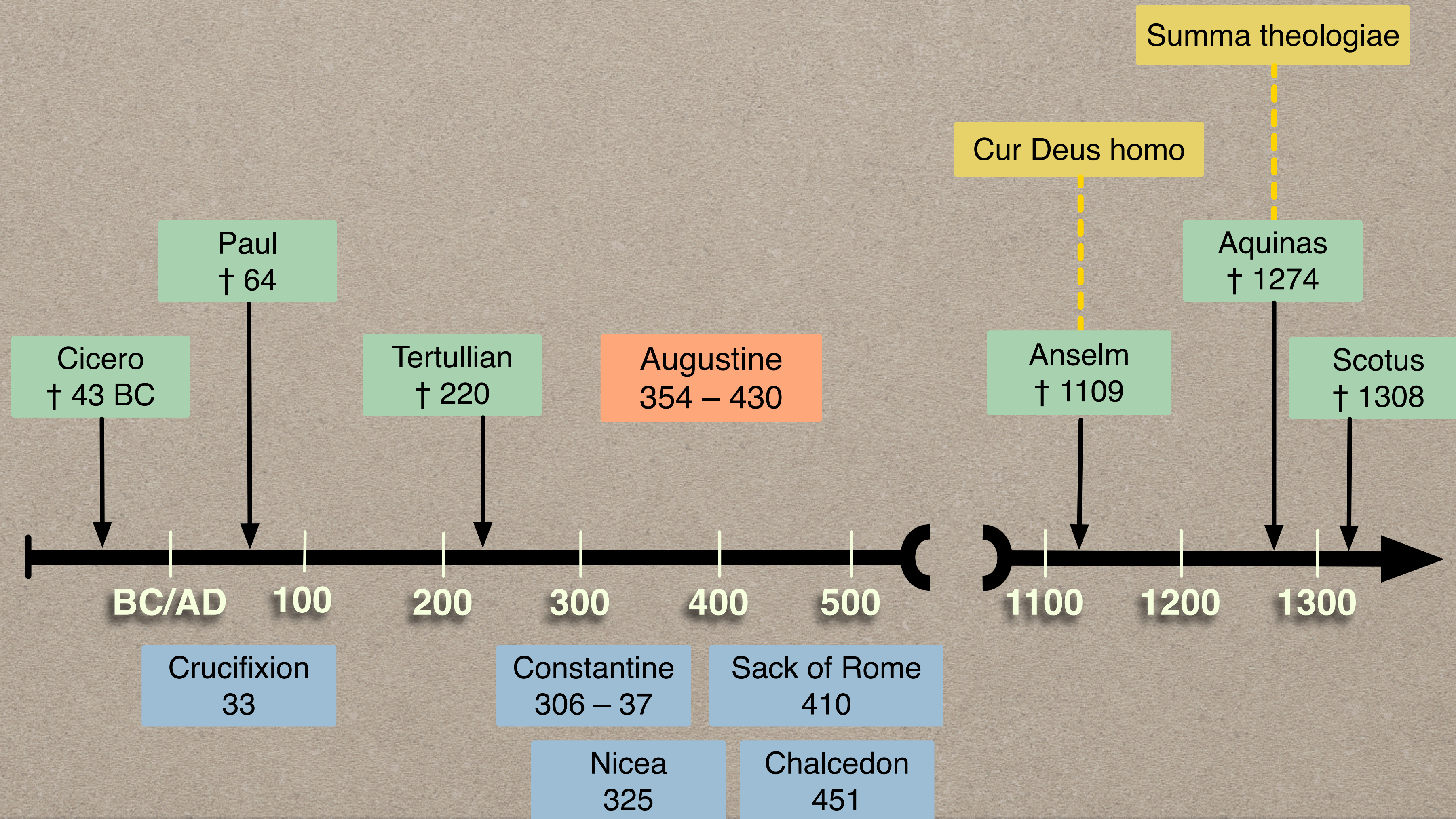
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# CAST OF CHARACTERS



# PUZZLE

## A. Christianity's beginnings:

- small Jewish sect in 1<sup>st</sup>-century Palestine
- no written texts of its own
- very simple message – that Jesus is the Messiah

## B. Christianity 1000 years later:

- extraordinarily complex, intellectually sophisticated

How to explain the development from A to B?

# INTELLECTUAL CHRISTIANITY

- Sophisticated doctrine and theology
- Subject of academic study
- Highest academic degree is degree in theology

[Think Anselm (†1109) and Aquinas (†1274)]



# PUZZLE

Christianity's intellectually humble origins

Christianity's intrinsic anti-intellectualism

# CHRISTIAN ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM

	Christianity	Philosophy
Appeal	<b>UNIVERSAL:</b> open to all, regardless of ability, means, or standing	<b>ELITIST:</b> requires intellectual ability, education, leisure
Content	<b>TRUTH:</b> claims to have the truth about the nature of reality	<b>TRUTH*:</b> offers an incompatible account
Method	<b>BELIEF:</b> accept what revelation (scripture), doctrinal authority say	<b>UNFETTERED REASON:</b> accept what reason dictates, what is certain

# SCRIPTURAL ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM

*Colossians 2:8*

See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to the elemental spirits of the universe and not according to Christ.

# SCRIPTURAL ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM

*1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 3:18-19*

- For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart." Where is the wise man? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.
- Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God.

# "INTELLECTUAL" ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM

*Tertullian* (ca. 150-220)

What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?

# PUZZLE

So how did intellectual Christianity come to flourish as an intellectual enterprise given its non-intellectual origins and inherent anti-intellectual tendencies?

Answer: **Augustine**

# HOW DID AUGUSTINE DO IT?

- Role model – life story in the *Confessions*
- Literary models – his books in philosophical theology
- *Theoretical foundation* for using philosophical reasoning to understand, explain, and defend Christian faith
- Historical luck

# PLAN

## Augustine's **big idea**

- Christianity is the true philosophy

## Augustine's **fancy theory**

- Belief seeking understanding

## Augustine's **Christian intellectualism**

- Christians not only **may** but **must** seek to understand what they believe
  - to do so they must use philosophical reason
  - in doing so they are true philosophers



# AUGUSTINE'S ANTI- ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM: PART 1

The big idea: Christianity is the true philosophy

- Christianity is **philosophy**
  - an account of the nature of reality
  - the account is robust, systematic, deeply explanatory
  - the account competes (successfully) against the best theories available in the market place of ideas – the best philosophical accounts
  - the tools for developing and defending the account are primarily those of reason
- Christianity is **true**

## CONFESSIONS 3.7-8

a. "with you is wisdom" (link wisdom with God)

b. etymology: *philosophia* = love of wisdom

[b.\* philosophy = love of God (easy inference from (a) and (b))]

c. distinguish true from false philosophy

d. baptize Cicero (link Cicero with scripture)

Conclusion: True philosophy is love of God (= Christianity)

# AUGUSTINE'S ANTI- ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM: PART 2

The fancy theory: Belief seeking understanding

Belief (in general):

- Thinking [a proposition] with assent – assent to a proposition (P)  
“I believe that . . .” (I believe that P)

Examples:

$P_1$ : MacDonald is wearing spectacles

$P_2$ : Trajan was born in Italica

$P_3$ : I am alive

$P_4$ :  $c^2 = a^2 + b^2$  (Pythagorean Theorem)

# BELIEF (IN GENERAL)

Two kinds of belief (in general):

Distinguish on the basis of the grounds for assent

Two kinds of grounds:

1. First-hand experience
2. Second-hand experience (somebody's say-so)

# BELIEF (IN GENERAL)

Examples (assent on what grounds?):

$P_1$ : MacDonald is wearing spectacles

$P_2$ : Trajan was born in Italica

$P_3$ : I am alive

$P_4$ :  $c^2 = a^2 + b^2$  (Pythagorean Theorem)

Special case: Pythagorean Theorem

1. First-hand experience = *reason*
2. Somebody's say so = *authority*

# BELIEF / UNDERSTANDING – THE DISTINCTION

# BELIEF / UNDERSTANDING – THE DISTINCTION

**Assent**

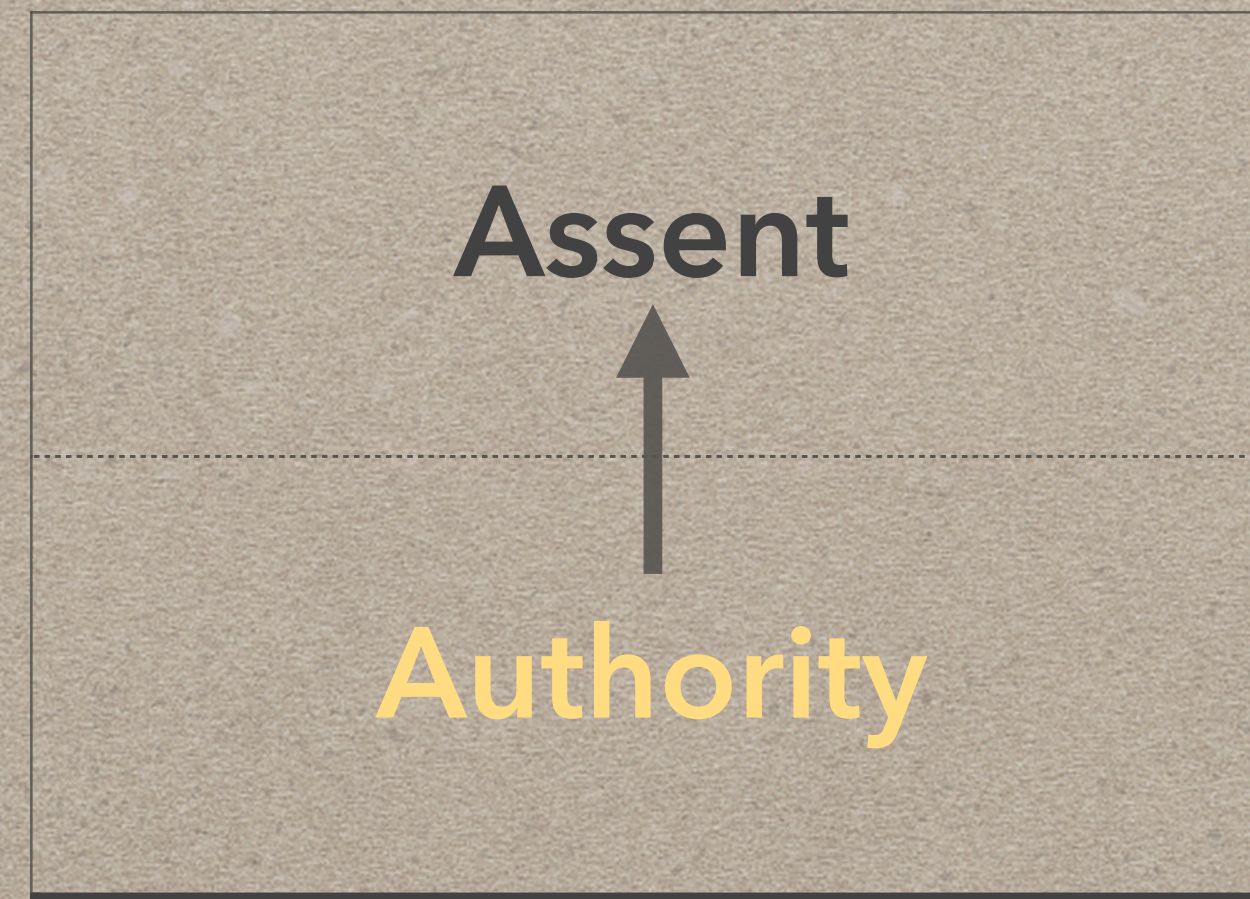
# BELIEF / UNDERSTANDING – THE DISTINCTION

**Assent**

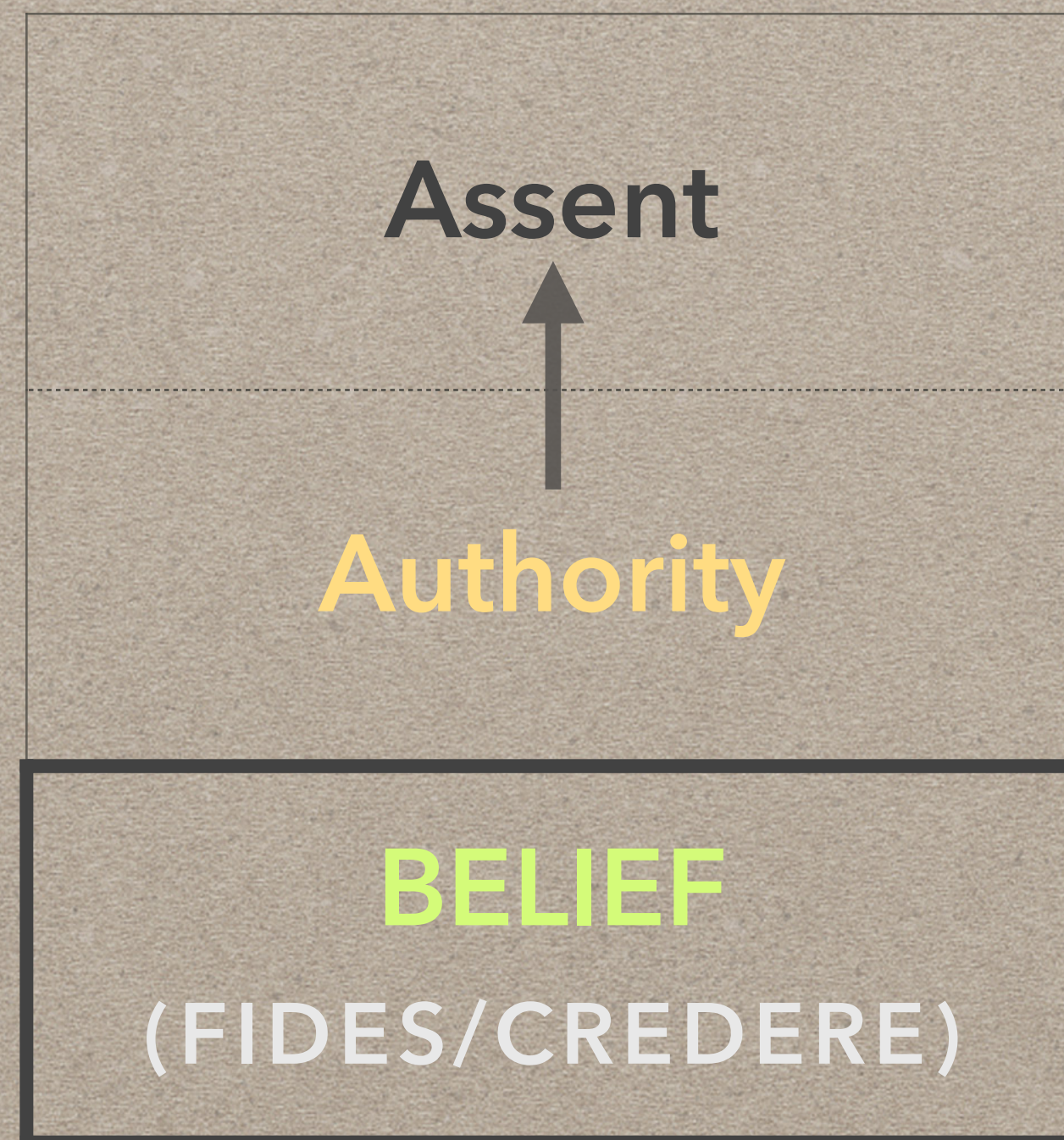
**Authority**



# BELIEF / UNDERSTANDING – THE DISTINCTION



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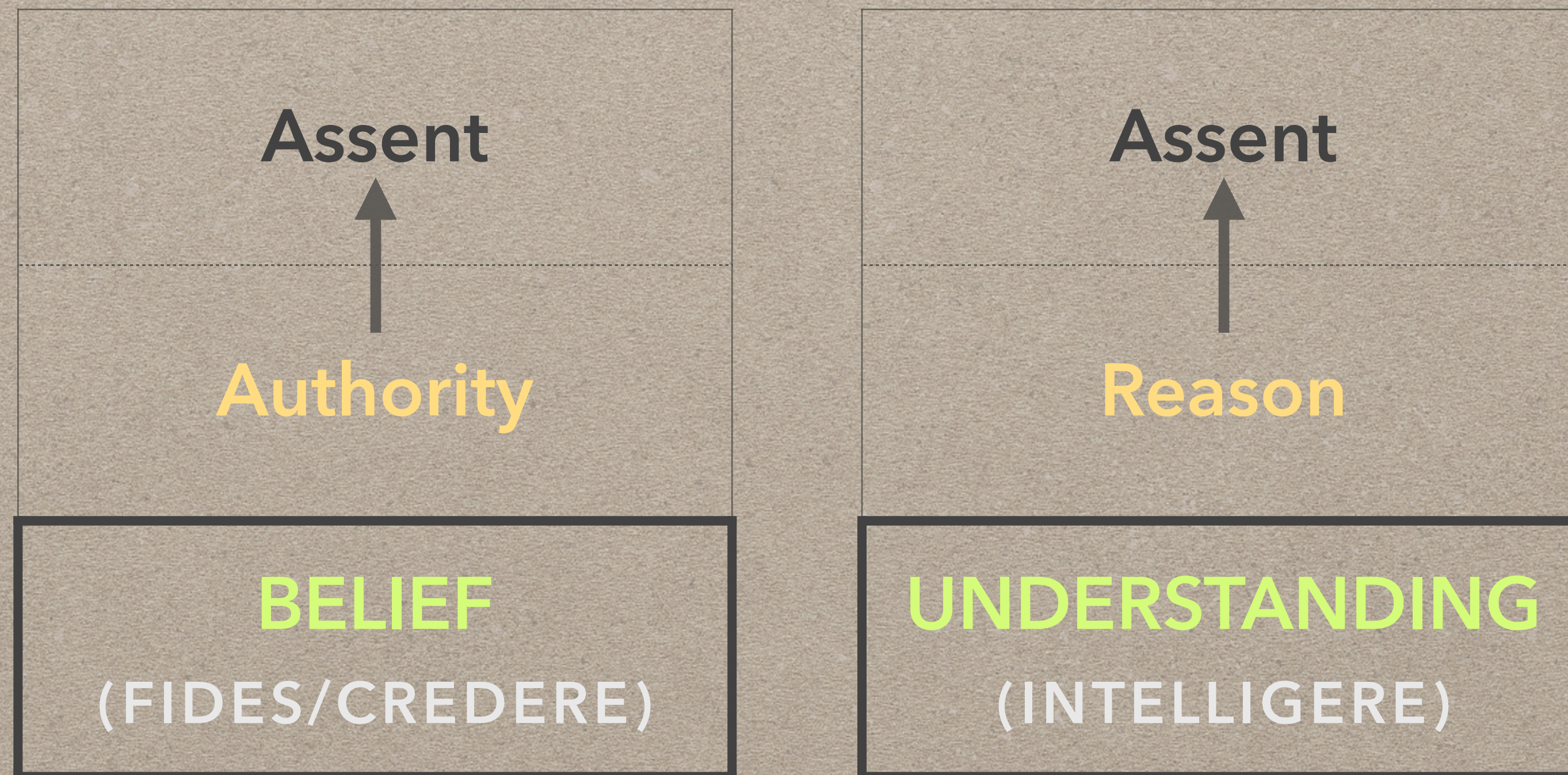
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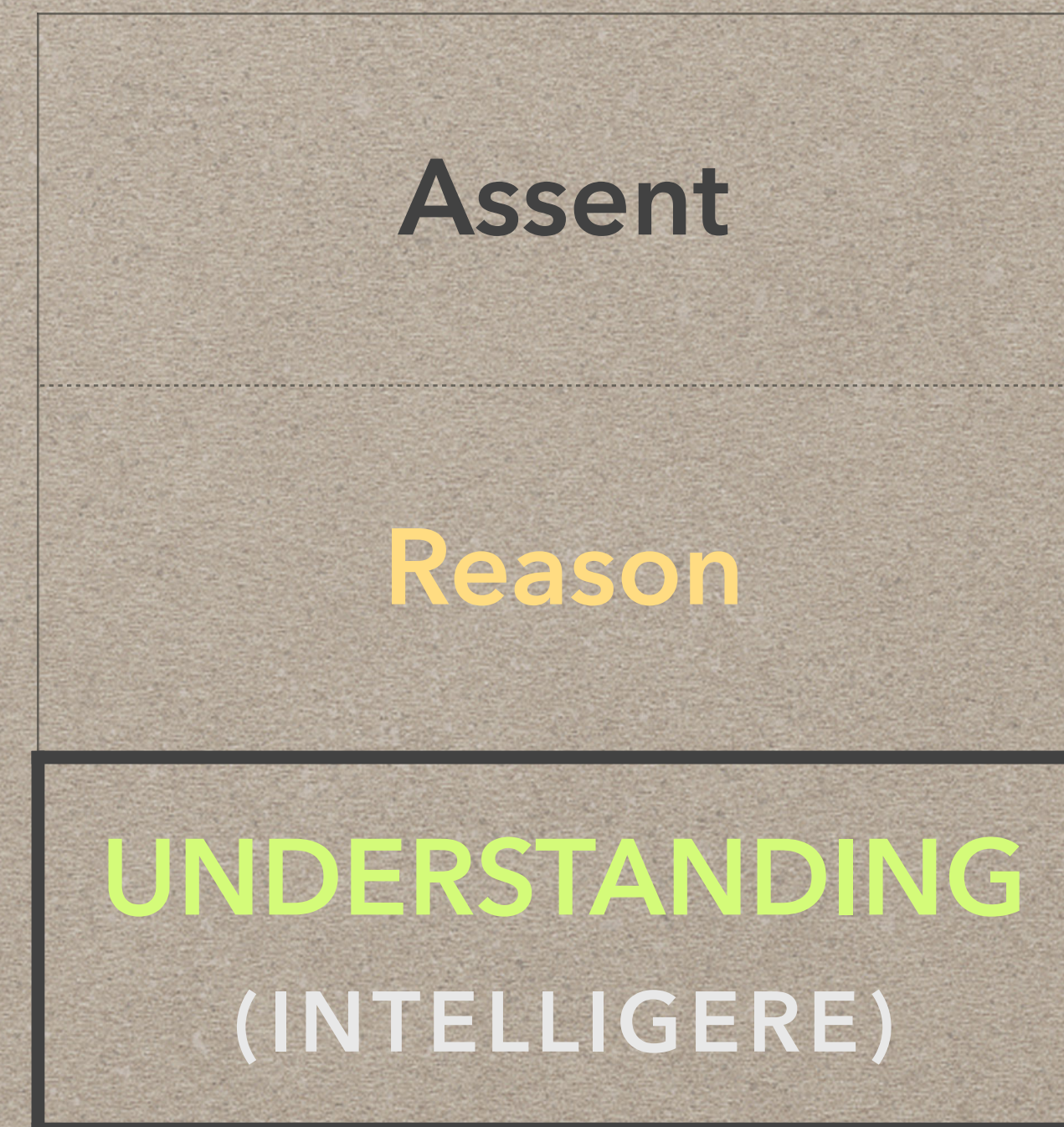
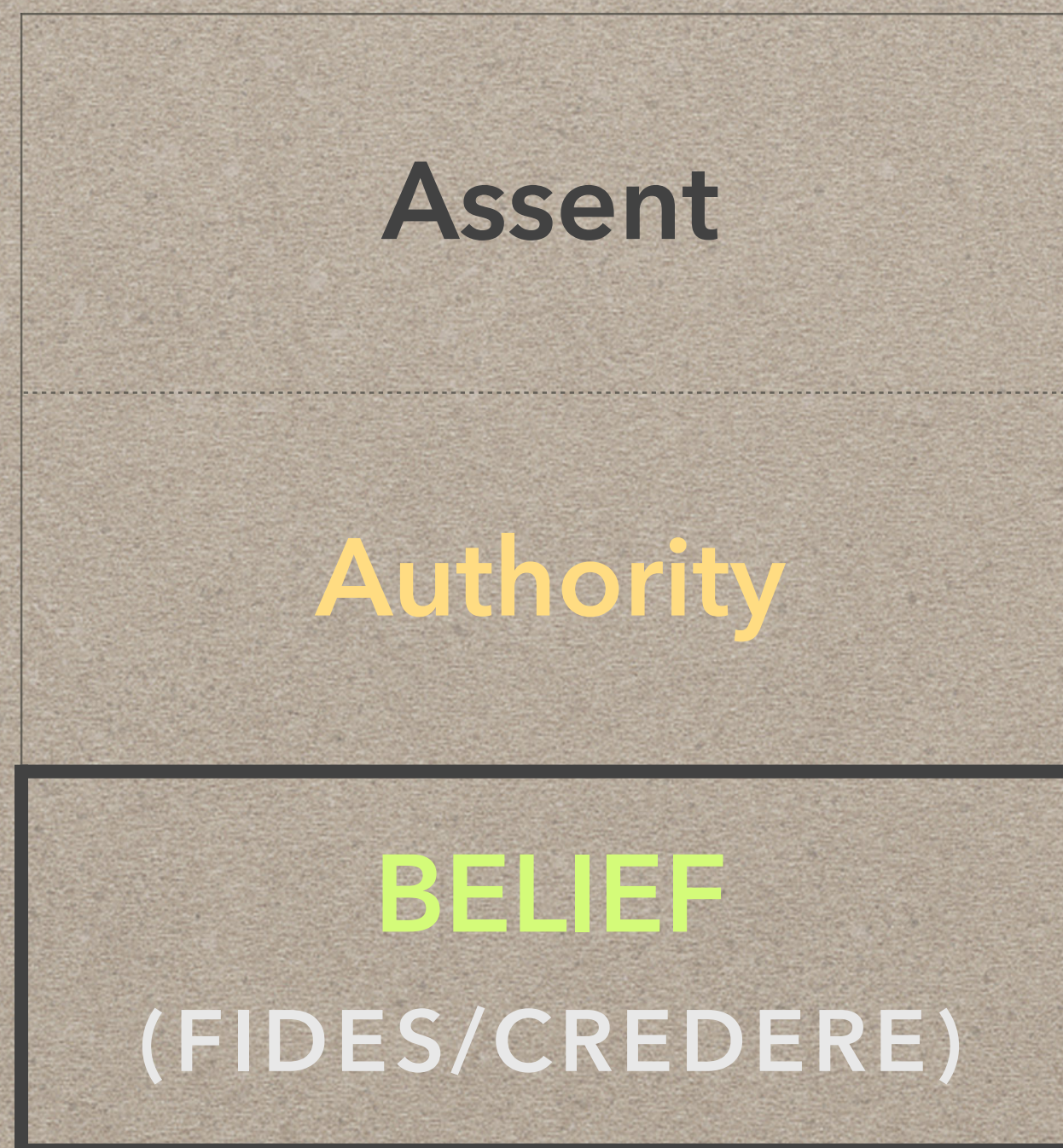
# BELIEF / UNDERSTANDING – THE DISTINCTION



# BELIEF / UNDERSTANDING – COGNITIVE VALUE

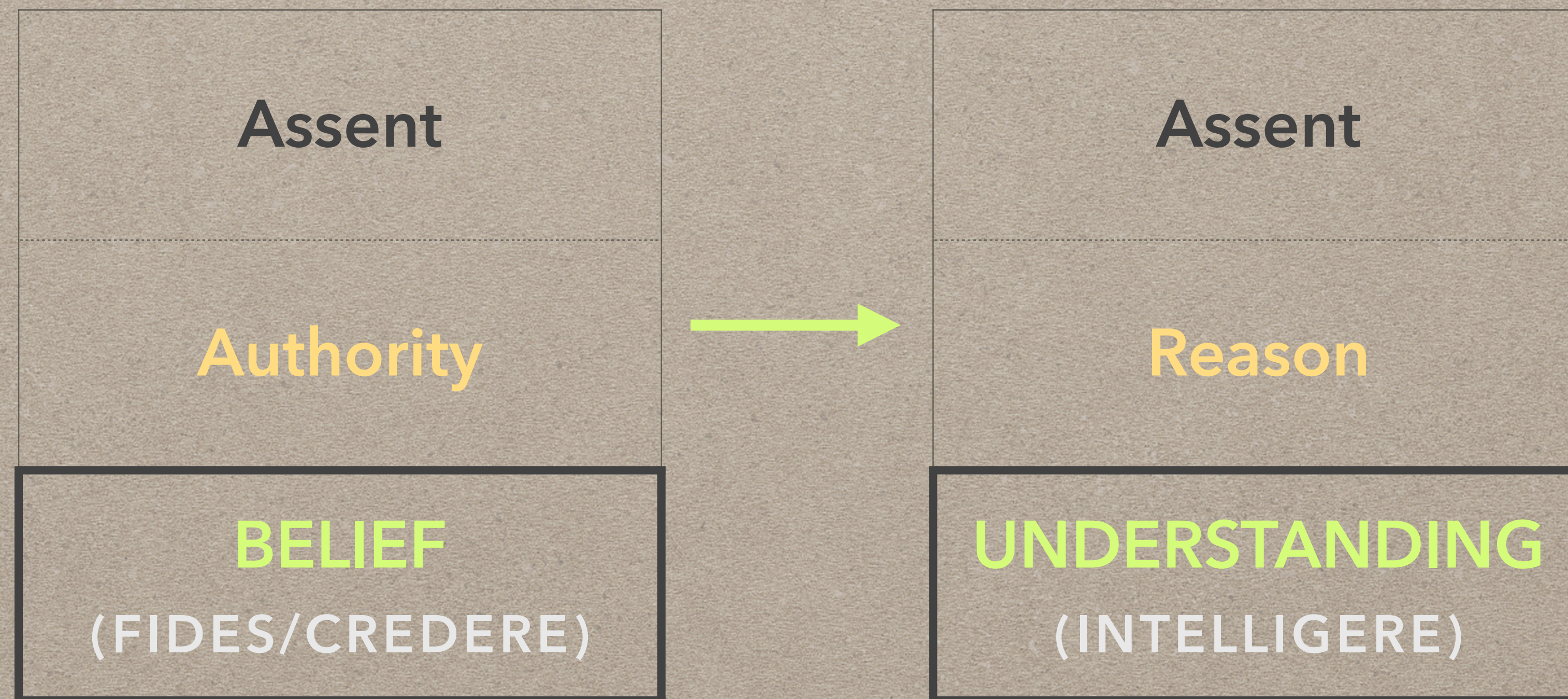
- (Mere) **belief** is cognitively deficient (to some extent)
- **Understanding** (to the extent possible) is preferable
- One should **seek understanding** of what one (merely) **believes** (where and to the extent possible)

# BELIEF SEEKING UNDERSTANDING





# BELIEF SEEKING UNDERSTANDING



# AUGUSTINE'S ANTI- ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM: PART 3

Christian intellectualism: the distinction applied

1. Christianity requires **belief** (but that can be reasonable)
2. Christianity can also involve **understanding** (in important respects and to an important extent)
3. It's **permissible** for Christians to seek understanding of what they believe
4. Christians are **better off** if they understand (to the extent possible) rather than merely believe
5. Christians are **obligated** to seek understanding (insofar as they're able, and guided by their belief)

# AUGUSTINE'S ANTI- ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM: PART 3.1

**Christian intellectualism:** the distinction applied

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# BELIEF SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

Example: **Evil**

1. Everything that exists (other than God) comes from God
2. Evil exists
3. Evil does not come from God

## *On Free Choice 1.2*

God will be with us and will help us **understand** what we have **believed**. For we can be assured that the prophet's precept applies to us:

**"Unless you have believed, you will not understand"** (Isaiah 7:9).

Now, we believe that everything that exists is from the one God, but that God is nevertheless not the author of sins.

# BELIEF SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

Example: **Trinity**

God is three persons in one substance

(the Son and the Spirit are *homo-ousion* with the Father)

*The Trinity 9.1*

# AUGUSTINE'S ANTI- ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM: PART 3.1

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# AUGUSTINE'S ANTI- ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM: PART 3.2

**Christian intellectualism:** the distinction applied

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# TWO BASIC IDEAS

1. God created us rational beings (in God's own image)
2. The end (purpose) of Christianity is understanding rather mere belief –  
"see God face to face"

## Letter 120

- It's *wrong* to *reject* reason

Heaven forbid, after all, that God should hate in us that by which he made us more excellent than the other animals [namely, our reason]. Heaven forbid, I say, that we should believe in such a way that we do not accept or seek a rational account, since we could not even believe if we did not have rational souls.

## Letter 120

- It's *better* to understand (ii.8)

One who now understands by true reason what he before only believed should certainly be preferred to one who still desires to understand what he believes. But if he does not even desire to understand and thinks that those things which should be understood ought only to be believed, he does not know the benefit faith brings.

## On Free Choice 2

- It's *obligatory* to seek understanding (Christians are *commanded* to understand)

For unless it is *one thing to believe* and *another to understand*, and unless we ought first to believe the great and divine matter that we desire to understand, there would have been no point in the prophet's saying, "*Unless you have believed, you will not understand*" (Isaiah 7:9). Moreover, *our Lord himself, by both word and deed, exhorted* those whom he called to salvation to believe first. Later, when he was speaking about the gift that was to be given to those who believe, he did not say, "This is eternal life, that they may believe," but rather, "*This is eternal life, that they may know you, the true God*, and the one whom you have sent, Jesus Christ" [John 17:3]. Moreover, to those who already believe he says, "*Seek and you will find*" (Matthew 7:7). For something that is unknown and [merely] believed cannot be said to have been found, nor can anyone be prepared for finding God unless he has first believed what is later to be known.

# CHRISTIAN ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM VANQUISHED

## Christian intellectualism

1. Christianity requires **belief** (but that can be reasonable)
2. Christianity can also involve **understanding** (in important respects and to an important extent)
3. It's **permissible** for Christians to seek understanding of what they believe
4. Christians are **better off** if they understand (to the extent possible) rather than merely believe
5. Christians are **obligated** to seek understanding (insofar as they're able, and guided by their belief)

# AUGUSTINE'S CHARTER FOR CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUALISM

Christians not only may but **must** seek to understand what they believe:

- to do so they must use **(philosophical) reason**
- in doing so they are **true philosophers**

# AUGUSTINE'S LEGACY

An openness in Christianity to intellectuals and intellectual endeavor

The enterprise of philosophical theology

The great edifice of medieval philosophy & theology in the Latin West