The Religious Smorgasbord: What Is Truh?

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Introduction

The title of this presentation has been given to me. It encompasses a sensitive and complex subject. The question was once asked by a certain Roman Procurator in approximately 33 A.D. of a prisoner who was to become famous the world over. According to the 17th century English Philosopher, Francis Bacon, Pilate asked the question in jest, and would not stay for an answer.[1] Whether asked in jest, curiosity or deep concern, the question resonates down the centuries.

The main focus of this discussion will be on the conceptual and practical meaning of truth. However, the particular context in which the question is being asked is religious plurality. Therefore, there has to be a strong emphasis on how one may know the truth amongst the many claims and counter-claims of different religions.

Two hypotheses

I would like to begin by stating two hypotheses, which I believe are critical for the conversation we are embarking upon. Firstly, all serious religious believers assert that the message they live by is true. Even those religions that are apparently the most tolerant of and welcoming to other beliefs, those that wish to profess that all religions are on a similar journey that will eventually

end up in the same place, are making statements that purport to be true. Secondly, it is impossible for human beings to reason or make choices about life without assuming that truth exists and can be known. However, the matter is not straightforward: for historical and philosophical reasons the notion of truth has come under heavy suspicion. Although the question appears, at first sight, to be simple to answer, it has become enveloped in controversy and disputation.

Truth under fire

Roughly until the time of the Enlightenment, in Europe truth was defined by the twin traditions of Greek philosophy and Christian doctrine.

Truth according to Greek philosophy

As a general description, we can say that Greek philosophy held a metaphysical or ontological concept of truth in the idea of universal archetypes or forms. These exist as perfect prototypes of which all existing things are imperfect copies. In his book Timaeus, Plato identifies the forms as ideas in the mind of God or concepts which God thinks are perfect:

> The world as we experience it is then the result of an intelligent agent creating it in the likeness of ideal patterns – existing independently of him – which he apprehends.[2]

In Plato's famous allegory of the cave, those trapped inside are condemned to viewing the real world as shadows on the walls. The shadows represent mere opinions. Truth comes only to those who gain knowledge of the perfect Forms through some kind of intuitive vision.

Truth according to Christian belief

For Christians during the period of Christendom truth coincided with what God has revealed about the nature of the universe, conveyed through the prophetic and apostolic word of Scripture, accurately interpreted by the church's magisterium. For the Reformers, who disputed the authority of the Church of Rome, on the basis that some of its teachings contradicted the plain

meaning of Scripture, truth is what God declares to be so, and can be known by diligent study of the Bible, using appropriate tools of understanding under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Hence Jesus' reply to Pilate's enigmatic question had already been given in the prayer for his disciples that ended the celebration of the Passover meal: "your word is truth" (John 17:17).

Truth in the view of early modern scientists

These views of truth pre-dated the modern scientific age, in which new methods of empirical investigation of the material world were developed. At the beginning of the scientific revolution, no dichotomy or separation was drawn between the truths of revelation and the truths discovered by scientific experimentation. Hence, Galileo could in all sincerity confirm two sources of knowledge: science that tells how the heavens go, and the Bible that tells how to go to heaven. Francis Bacon spoke eloquently, and without embarrassment, about God's two books: the book of nature and the book of his word. Word and world were considered in an uncomplicated way to be complementary avenues to a sure and certain knowledge about reality.

Truth in the view of the Enlightenment project

Gradually the two sources of truth became separated (John Locke was a pivotal figure in the shift to a different view).[3] An understanding of the world was now divided into two parts: firstly real *knowledge*, defined as justified true belief about facts that can be demonstrated by controlled experimentation; secondly, mere *opinion*, defined as beliefs that cannot be justified as true, about non-empirical matters, such as the nature of God, the existence of sin, salvation from sin through the death of Christ and eternal life. So began a tacit acceptance of the principle that only by means of empirically verifiable (and falsifiable) testing could truth be known.

With the birth of what appeared to be a self-authenticating and universally valid method of arriving at indisputable truth about the real world, modernity arrived. Doubt and scepticism were, at least temporally, kept at bay. Descartes' famous attempt to refute incredulity about knowing the reality of anything, by arguing that even doubt itself implies a thinking subject that

cannot be doubted, may have failed. Nevertheless, the scientific method offers certainty about the nature of the material world in which humans are immersed.

The limits of science as a path to truth

The self-confidence of modernity has not gone unchallenged. It did not need much thought to realise that scientific methods led to knowledge of only limited scope. Whole areas of human experience lie outside the possibility of strictly-controlled empirical research to illumine. The three most important are aesthetics, morality and the intuition of a reality beyond the mundane. Empirical knowledge of the natural world and methods of investigation that are based on evidence open to testable processes are enormously valuable and indispensable. However, they do not exhaust the richness and variety of the human experience of being human. It is, for example, a philosophical truism that how we *ought* to live cannot be deduced from the way the natural world *is*. If moral values could be inferred from empirical investigation, then surely it would be right, for example, to assume that the practice of eugenics – selective breeding of the human species to meet certain standards of physical robustness and mental agility and the disposal of specimens that fail to match the standards – follows from the notion of 'the survival of the fittest.' This would be a case of transforming an empirical fact – those that survive have proved themselves to be the fittest – into an ethical priority; survival is a good thing. However, on a naturalist account of evolution, survival as a goal is not evident; the universe has to be totally indifferent to the supposed value of surviving, as an overarching purpose for existing is ruled out a priori.

Truth after modernity

Post-modernity has been born as a reaction to the arrogance of modernity, with its tendency to reduce truth and knowledge to a rationality entirely encompassed by scientific methods of demonstration. There is much more to life than knowledge of the way the physical world, or even the mind, functions. There are questions about the existence and origin of the universe, the beginning of life, the birth of consciousness and rationality,

the reason for existence, the nature of goodness, the end of life. None of these can be answered simply by investigating material existence alone.

After modernity a huge dilemma exists: by what means can we have access to a truth that informs us about the whole of reality? Is it right to conclude that all truth-claims that are not open to empirical verification (or falsification) are mere opinions, or points of view, and that there are no certain ways of judging their validity? If this were the case, we would be condemned to exist in a world of competing, incommensurable beliefs about ultimate values and destinies. We are constantly being reminded that we live in a world of contested creeds, doctrines and ideologies, where no reliable criteria exist for sorting out fact from fantasy, truth from error, right from wrong. Referring to the title of this presentation, contemporary society (and not just in the West) offers a smorgasbord of beliefs, lifestyle choices, values, and religious beliefs and practices. Take your pick!

What has happened to truth?

The correspondence theory of truth

In ordinary life, truth refers to a belief or statement about an event or fact that corresponds to or matches the reality to which it refers. We sometimes phrase it by saying, *"it is the case that...* this morning, it started raining at exactly 0934 hrs." This is a true statement, if, and only if, in fact the first drops of rain fell when the atomic clock registered 0934.

The ability to check out the truth of a claim by seeing how it agrees with a certain set of circumstances is a necessary assumption for any conversation, as in the statement, "sadly my aunt has just been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer." The assertion, to be true, has to correspond to a scan or x-ray that shows a malignant growth in the pancreas.

This understanding of truth is applied rigorously in a court of law, where statements purporting to be true (for example, "I was 50 kms away from the scene of the murder, when it happened") have to be supported by incontrovertible evidence before they can be accepted as what actually was the case. If the truth of the matter cannot be ascertained (by reliable witnesses or some material proof), there is no way of judging whether the

claim may be a mistake, due to poor memory, or a deliberate fabrication, intended to deceive the judge and jury into thinking there was a convincing alibi. Discovering the truth of a matter is paramount in the cases of the miscarriage of justice, when fresh evidence or a reassessment of existing evidence points to errors of fact (or the interpretation of fact) in the case of the first trial.

So far so good, one might say. It would be a brave (or foolhardy) person who did not hold to a correspondence theory of truth, when she was the one being falsely accused of a crime and was trying to clear her name. However, when we move from statements about events in the world that can be verified or falsified to statements about aesthetic judgements, moral values or religious beliefs, the situation becomes more complicated.

Non-empirical statements and truth

In order to demonstrate the problem, let us take one or two examples:

- "The hallelujah chorus from Handel's Messiah is the most stirring piece of music ever written;"
- "To have sexual relations outside of marriage is wrong;"
- "To pay men and women different salaries for the same job is unjust;"
- "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures;"
- "The cause of suffering is craving for sense pleasure" (the Second Noble Truth of Buddhism).

Each of these statements purports to be true, i.e. in accordance with the ultimate reality of life in the universe, concerning beauty, moral absolutes and human existence. How can these claims be demonstrated as corresponding to some external reality? It is easy to see how, in an age that is used to basing beliefs on concrete evidence, whose factual accuracy is properly open to testing, these other claims are placed in the category of ideas, theories, points of view and feelings. They may be true, but there is no way of judging their truth-value; so, equally, they may be false. At the least, they are all contested. There is no way of arriving at a universal agreement about any of these statements,

as there would have to be about rain beginning to fall at precisely 0934 hrs, or being 50 kms from the scene of a crime at the time it was committed.

Other theories of truth

It is not surprising, then, that other theories about the meaning of truth have been proposed. The coherence theory states that "the truth of a believed proposition simply consists in its fitting together *coherently* with other propositions that are believed."[4] If none of my beliefs contradict one another, they count as true. Such a view clearly allows for a religious smorgasbord, for religious believers would argue that, once certain assumptions are accepted, the beliefs which follow cohere with the initial premise. Thus, for example, if God (Allah) is a singular, unitary being, it follows that there can be no plurality within the being of God. Consequently, it also is true that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity must be false. We are talking here basically of the propositional content of beliefs or concepts. The main problem with this account of truth is fairly obvious: a set of beliefs can cohere, one with another, and yet be false

The *pragmatic* theory holds that a believed proposition is true if it leads to a successful outcome, or brings beneficial results in the long run.[5] The main problem with this definition is that it begs the question about the meaning of success and beneficial. If these are defined as true by using the pragmatic criterion, we end up with a tautology. There are other theories, but there is not the space to discuss them.

What is significant about these two main alternatives to the correspondence theory is that they relocate the notion of truth from objective reality into the subjective sphere. Truth is what seems to me, my friends, my clan, my community or political party to be the truth. There is ultimately no independent point of reference to judge the legitimacy of truth-claims. In the case of aesthetic views, the lack of objective criteria is not so important. We are familiar with sayings like "beauty is in the eye of the beholder", "choice (of a favourite flower, scent, meal or TV show) is a matter of personal preference"; "it is all a matter of taste or inclination". Here no great issues are at stake in conceding diversity, variety and plurality. It is near impossible to

ascribe value-judgements – either good or bad - to these kinds of choices.

Truth in the context of moral judgements

In the case of morality and religion, however, the case is quite different. How human beings act as individuals and as societies is of the utmost importance. It would be hard to defend, for example, the proposition that it is a matter of personal choice how President Assad of Syria responds to the 'Arab Spring' in his country. However, the question as to whether there are objectively right and wrong ways of conducting life is hard to resolve. Nevertheless, there is a growing consensus (indicated by grass-roots campaigning groups)[6] that certain norms of conduct define what it means to be a civilised society. The whole business of law-making as a democratic process suggests that human beings believe that right and wrong action cannot be determined either by individual preference or by arbitrary power. The increasing attention given to the notion of universal human rights implies some kind of implicit common norm that should be shared across all societies and cultures. The language of justice, peace and the integrity of creation (a programme of the World Council of Churches) also points to a set of standards of behaviour to which all ought to aspire. Notions of 'the common good' and 'human flourishing' also indicate a vision of a society in which all have an equal opportunity to grow and blossom into mature human beings.

This kind of language presupposes that human beings, by virtue of their humanity, possess an inherent dignity and worth that demands to be respected. In terms of Christian thinking, the emphasis on the given nature of human reality (our being in the universe, in many of its facets, is predetermined) is supported by a natural theology derived from the doctrine of creation (the *imago Dei*).

And yet, for all the progress made in advancing a universal understanding of human rights, there are still a number of cultures and societies that do not accept such convictions. The most obvious case, probably, is the reluctance to grant in law and in practice full equality to women. The rights of children remain problematic in most societies, and in Western nations the un-

born child is deprived of the most basic right of all – the right to life. There is also the problem of limits to rights – sometimes the most ridiculous claims are made – and the complex issue of a conflict of rights (of which the clash between religious freedom and non-discrimination is a currently confused example).[7]

Truth in the context of religious beliefs

The question of truth with regard to the claims of religions is even more difficult to adjudicate. A study of the core beliefs of the major world religions, according to their own best advocates, shows that there are many fundamental contradictions between them. Let me take one example, which I have tried to present in a recent book.[8] Within Christianity and Islam there are, I argue, two rival views of the meaning and practice of prophethood. For Islam, the prophet, as the accredited messenger of God, has to succeed in conveying his message, meaning that, as the result of prophecy, ultimately people will turn away from all forms of idolatry and believe solely in the God of Muhammad. If this were not to happen, so it is thought, God himself would be seen to be ineffective, and therefore not worthy of being worshipped and followed. Now, Muhammad, as the seal of the prophets, failed in his prophetic message in Mecca, but he succeeded in Medina. Later, his message finally triumphed in Mecca also, but more through superior military strength than through preaching.

The prophets of the Old and New Testaments, however, had a totally different relationship to political power. Their calling was not to rule, but to hold the rulers to account. The classic case was that of David and Nathan: David was the ruler, Nathan the prophet. For Islam, Muhammad was both ruler and prophet! There was no-one else to hold him to account. There is a fundamental difference here, which, I argue, explains the very basic disagreements about the relation of religion to civil power. Who is right? Which version of prophecy is true?

This is but one example of countless that could be given. Now, if one accepts the logic of the law of non-contradiction (and in denying it one actually affirms it) that all statements are either true or false (they cannot be true and false at the same time), then either the view of Islam or that of Christian faith is

true regarding the prophetic office, or they are both wrong. It is not sufficient to refer to paradox, dialectic, symbiosis or mystery as a means of avoiding contradiction. To claim, for example, that there is a realm of reality beyond good and evil contradicts the monotheistic affirmation that there is nothing behind God – God is the absolutely ultimate and his nature, as pure goodness, is the norm of all virtue: 'God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all' (1 John 1: 6).

Can truth be rescued?

Is there any way out of the dilemma? Are we bound to treat all religions as equally valid, since there are no universally acceptable criteria for deciding between their varying truth claims? This is how secular society has chosen to deal with the religious question. The tenets of the different religions are considered to be simply a matter of individual belief. As long as they do not issue in actions detrimental to the common good of society as a whole, they should be tolerated and freedom given to believe and practice what they require. In other words, as far as public civic society is concerned, religion is a matter of indifference. Secular societies think they have solved the truth question by privatising religion and remaining strictly neutral.

However, as a number of high profile legal judgements[9] (some made by the European Court of Human Rights) confirm, the matter is not so simple. None of the major world religions are content to be confined to a realm of individual belief and esoteric community practices, conducted at special times of the week. They all claim that their doctrines have public, political, social and economic consequences for the whole life of society. And, as a matter of fact, some of these teachings conflict with standard human rights' legislation on matters of equality, discrimination and others' rights and freedoms. As a result, judges have now been called upon to decide what the core beliefs of different faiths are, even though they themselves may not adhere to any religion or have the requisite theological or historical knowledge of the religion concerned.[10]

The issue of what is truth will not go away. Moreover, it has a very public face. If something is true, it is true for the whole of life, private and public. The secular consensus is in disarray. If

the truth, or otherwise, of religious teachings cannot be settled by appeal to an independent authority, can we advance at all beyond an agreement that everyone should be free to follow the religion of their choice? It may be convenient for secular societies to hold the common, and pragmatically useful, misconception that all religions are equally true; or, if you are a follower of Richard Dawkins and the 'new atheists,' equally false. However, such a confusing and evasive conviction will, sooner or later, be tested by assertions of the right to religious freedom,[11] and be found wanting.

Clearly, undue external pressure to identify with any particular religion is inimical to the practise of faith. Yet there is something intrinsically unsatisfactory in conceding that nothing more can be said about mutually excluding beliefs; or, in the words of the title, every dish in the smorgasbord is equally nourishing, so just take your pick! It is a universal human impulse to attempt to discover the truth about the whole of reality. Is there a way of doing this that might have a chance of success?

Dialogue through 'inference to the best explanation'

One of the main methodological tools used by the experimental sciences for assessing outcomes of research-work is given the technical name of *abduction*.[12] It is a mode of reasoning employed whenever we infer the truth of a situation on the grounds that a particular hypothesis offers the best explanation of the greatest amount of evidence germane to the case. So, in medical science, for example, a particular diagnosis of an illness is adopted, because it offers the best explanation of the symptoms manifested. Usually the diagnosis will follow a certain procedure. A doctor will come to a preliminary conclusion on the basis of an initial consultation with the patient. Sometimes the diagnosis is immediate as the symptoms are clear; on other occasions, however, a second, or even third opinion, may be necessary. This is required just because there could be more than one cause. Further tests will, hopefully, eliminate some possible explanations in favour of the one that best accounts for all the evidence.

Inference to the Best Explanation as a method of reasoning
Abduction is also known by the term *Inference to the Best Explanation* (henceforth IBE). It is a tool used by reason for settling disputes about the truth of a matter; it is essentially evidence-based. In brief, IBE makes the assumption, based on logical reasoning and evidence, that

> Beginning with the evidence available to us, we infer what would, if true, provide the best explanation of that evidence.[13]

There are two particular mechanisms by which the method proceeds. The first works by way of contrast: 'best' implies the most persuasive among a number of alternative hypotheses; it seeks to answer the question 'why *this* account of reality rather than *that*? The second is to keep a distinction between what Lipton calls 'the likeliest' and 'the loveliest' explanation, i.e. a "distinction between the explanation most warranted by the evidence…and the explanation which would, if true, provide the most understanding."[14]

IBE as a tool for dialogue
Now I believe that this method of reasoning is an excellent, indeed the most adequate, way of engaging in a dialogue between the Christian faith (understood in terms of Trinitarian theistic realism) and the claims of other religious traditions. It has the advantage of being recognised as a fruitful way of arriving at a knowledge of the truth in scientific experimentation. It also proceeds in ways substantially similar to the processes of the law-courts, which aim to discover, 'beyond all reasonable doubt,' what is the truth of the matter in the case of someone accused of a crime. By means of the sifting of forensic evidence, the testimony of witnesses and deductive reasoning, the court proceeds to make a judgement about the best explanation regarding the circumstances surrounding a particular offence. The prosecution marshals evidence that points to the accused, whilst the defence produces evidence for an alternative explanation. The jury is then given the task of deciding which evidence is most likely to be true to the facts of the case.

IBE as a missiological method

This method may become a missiological project in which the Christian faith can be shown to be the best of all possible explanations of our unique experience of the universe as human beings: one which offers the most coherent, consistent, and complete account. The theory's explanatory power is measured by its observational success in accounting for data already accepted as veridical, and for new data. It also scores well in its predictive ability with regard to human behaviour (i.e. what is likely to happen, if certain courses of action are followed).[15] The model can be particularly productive for the purposes of inter-religious dialogue, because it takes account of universally-available evidence and proven categories of rational argument. The truth-claims that are made are related to self-awareness, human experience of the world, the universal concourse of alternative traditions, ideas and explanations and are open to a critical exchange of views. Therefore, when it comes to assessing rival interpretations of the origins, meaning and future of human existence in the universe, it has great missiological potential.

IBE and truth-claims

I would claim, therefore, that IBE, as both a method of dialogue and a research method, offers a potentially effective way of resolving the impasse created by contradictory claims to know the truth.[16] It is already used as a method both of discovery and confirmation in the experimental sciences and, therefore, by inference can be applied (with caution) to issues in areas of philosophy (such as epistemology and moral reasoning) and inter-religious encounter (such as giving explanations of suffering and evil) with a view to testing hypotheses and tentative claims about the nature of reality. So, in answer to the question, what is truth, in the context of the religious smorgasbord of contemporary societies, I am arguing that IBE is an excellent way of overcoming the contradictory view that all religious claims must be at least partially true.

Dialogue in the context of IBE

Dialogue has a number of component parts that need to be

honoured, if the conversation is going to be fruitful. It assumes that the partners in dialogue have basic beliefs that are distinguishable in principle from contingent, cultural forms of them, that there are sufficient points of contact (despite the contradictions) between different belief systems that enable a genuine intellectual engagement to take place, that the parties to the dialogue respect one another and believe that they may have something to learn as well as to give in the exchange, that the opinions we do not share are fairly represented, and finally that the issues under discussion are significant matters not only for theoretical considerations, but also in daily living.[17]

I am claiming that the best form of dialogue is to work through together the principle of IBE as a method of arriving at the probable truth about the whole reality that we human beings experience. Its advantages are manifest in a culture inclined to put its trust in scientific experimentation and outcomes. First, it is based on evidence that can be rationally assessed and empirically tested. Secondly, it is open to a universal discourse, from which nobody in principle is excluded. Thirdly, it commands the widest possible acceptance as it is applicable throughout many disciplines – each of which are in engaged in the task of explanation. Fourthly, when rightly applied, it avoids begging questions about prior beliefs. Thus, basic beliefs are not the subject of an initial discussion; rather, they are brought in as potential explanations of those aspects of human life that all participants in the dialogue can agree are fundamentally important to understand and resolve. Fifthly, it is essentially a discussion about the nature of reality in its variety of forms, a reality that to one degree or another everyone is part of. Sixthly, it avoids an immediate appeal to subjective experience, which in the nature of the case is almost immune to rational consideration, and therefore forecloses inter-human engagement through the discussion of differences. Recourse to experience may be a lazy way of avoiding the rigour of intellectual encounter.

If the apprehension of truth is the most fundamental issue concerning religious faith, then IBE is concerned to facilitate the most comprehensive, and intellectually and existentially compelling, evaluation of the realities of existence. Its pragmatic value lies in its ability to distinguish between truth and error

and fact and fantasy. There is no question that lies outside its purview. It is, therefore, equally applicable to scientific research, moral debate and religious claims, each of which, in its own way, appeals to a transcendental realism. In spite of the scepticism of post-modern thinking, human beings need to situate their lives within a discourse that offers a meta-interpretation of their experience. This has been called a grand narrative, an account of life that links together all the fragmentary parts into a plausible whole. Human beings can be seen to flourish best when they can make sense of the past, present and future.

IBE offers a method for rationally considering all claims to know the ultimate reality that lies behind the experience of being human. No claim to know the ultimate meaning of life is excluded a priori. All beliefs can be part of the dialogue, which proceeds by way of testing the various claims against one another and against the stubborn facts of human life in the world. Naturally, there is no final human arbiter. Each person or group has to decide for itself how far its intuition, common-sense, philosophy of life (home-spun or borrowed), ideology or religion is best able to make sense of the widest spread of the reality of life. The process is one of advocacy in which alternative explanations are promoted, discussed and judged. It is assumed that where there are conflicting claims, they cannot all be valid.

Dialogue in New Testament usage

From a missiological point of view the method is non-imperialistic, non-intrusive and non-violent. It works through persuasion, on the basis of the cogency of the case, not through coercion in the form of inducements, constraint or intimidation. Perhaps, without stretching the matter too far it is a way of returning to the original New Testament understanding of dialogue (*dialegomai*), meaning to conduct a discussion,[18] to argue a case, debate or convince. In the second half of the Acts of the Apostles, it had become a semi-technical term for Paul's method of teaching in the synagogues, being translated by the NRSV as "argue," "have a discussion," "hold a discussion," "talk," "dispute," and "discuss" (e.g. Acts 17.2, 17; 18.4, 19; 19.8f.; 20.7,9; 24.12, 25).[19] It seems legitimate to conclude, therefore, that, in the context of the religious smorgasbord and the desire to encounter truth,

mission as dialogue can best be fulfilled through adopting and adapting the methodological tool of IBE.

Conclusion[20]

The approach that I have outlined above does not pretend to exhaust the rich subject of truth. I have chosen to look at the debate from a contemporary philosophical perspective. The object has been to lay a foundation for a fruitful dialogue between people who may assume a variety of intellectual and existential starting-points, whether these embrace what has come to be termed 'religious' or 'secular.' The advantage of the method, as I see it, is that it enables dialogue to take place, even when different systems of thought and practice appear to be incommensurable, for it begins not from theoretical sets of belief (important as these may be) but from people's actual experience of the world and their attempts to make sense of it.

Other approaches no doubt would be equally valid. Some will wish to emphasise, from the beginning of an encounter between people of different faiths (including non-religious ones), an understanding of truth as presented in the teaching of the Bible. They will point out that truth (*'emet, 'emuna, aletheia*) encompasses more than correspondence to a reality that can be tested by human rationality – though certainly not less. God's truth, for example, is understood as his faithfulness to the covenants he has made with his specially chosen people: that he is utterly reliable and will accomplish His promises (for example, Psa. 31:5; Isa. 45:19; Jer. 10:10; Rom. 3:7, 15:8).

When applied to human beings, truth often carries the sense of uprightness of character, dependability, integrity (2 Cor. 7:14; Eph. 5:9). Thus, in John's Gospel in particular, truth is something to be practised – "to do the truth", "to walk in the truth." Truth is the opposite of unreality, falsehood and deceitfulness. Nathaniel was commended by Jesus because of his complete lack of deceit, duplicity and pretence (John 1:47). When applied to the good news of Jesus Christ, the truth refers to both its rational plausibility and its historical credibility (Acts 26:25-27). The point of announcing the truth is not simply to state the fact of a matter but to persuade people to accept the truth for themselves as a life-changing act (Acts 26:28-29).

This brief survey of the meaning of truth in the Bible leads on naturally to emphasising the necessity of personal integrity in human relationships if dialogue is to prove fruitful. Another person is probably more likely to be persuaded by the honesty and warmth of human encounter than by the logic of evidence-based argument. IBE, used as a means of showing the truth of Christian belief, through its ability to give the most plausible answers to the enigmas of existence, is a tool that can clear the way for the truth of Jesus Christ to penetrate deep into the heart of those who no longer have adequate reasons not to believe. It is a way of communication that both precedes and follows the proclamation of the Gospel itself.

In missiological terms, then, IBE is a way of preparing the ground for talking openly and persuasively about Jesus as the way, the truth and the life, by showing that the fundamental reason for believing is that the message communicated is true and ought, therefore, to be accepted. At what point one moves from a general advocacy of the evidence on which the Christian faith is built to a direct telling of the story of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus will vary from person to person. In the first and last analysis, how one conveys the truth will depend on sensitivity to the guidance of the Spirit of truth and to the particular situation in which inter-human communication is taking place.

Noter

1 "On Truth" in Sidney Warfaft (ed.), *Bacon: A Selection of his Works* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 47.

2 David E. Cooper, *World Philosophies: an Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 109.

3 See, J. Andrew Kirk, *The Future of Reason, Science and Faith: Following Modernity and Post-modernity* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), pp. 46-47.

4 Laurence Bonjour, Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses (Lanham, MY: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), p. 36.

5 See, Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), p. 133.

6 One example of which is Avaaz. It has a global membership of about 14 million people from across the globe. 'Avaaz...was launched in 2007 with a simple democratic mission: organize citizens of all nations to close the gap between the world we have and the world most people everywhere want;' see www.avaaz.org.

[7] For a full discussion of this dispute, see Roger Trigg, *Equality, Freedom and Religion* (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

[8] J. Andrew Kirk, *Civilisations in Conflict? Islam, the West and Christian Faith* (Oxford: Regnum Books International , 2011).

[9] A sample of these from Europe, the USA and Canada are explored in detail in *Equality, Freedom and Religion*.

[10] See, *Equality, Freedom and Religion*, pp. 94-96, 116-117.

[11] A number of examples are given in *Equality, Freedom and Religion*.

[12] See, James Ladyman, *Understanding Philosophy of Science* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 47.

[13] Peter Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation* (London: Routledge, 2004/2), p. 1.

[14] *Inference to the Best Explanation,* p. 207.

[15] An example of explanatory prediction might be a prognosis of the consequences that will inevitably follow a deficit of proper care, security and affection for the emotional stability of children. The ability to anticipate certain behavioural outcomes in these circumstances is derived from an understanding of how human beings are created to function best within a stable and cherishing family environment.

[16] I set out in much more detail the reasons for this claim (in the context of Christian witness in a secular society) in J. Andrew Kirk, *Christian Mission as Dialogue: Engaging the Current epistemological predicament of the West* (Nijmegen: Nijmegen Institute for Mission Studies, 2011).

[17] Further on the subject of dialogue, see J. Andrew Kirk, *'Mission as dialogue: the case of secular faith' in Mission under Scrutiny* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006), pp. 26-45.

[18] See, Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 1957), p. 184.

[19] See, Colin Brown (ed.), *Dictionary of New Testament Theology (Vol. 3)* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 821.

[20] This section was written as the result of the response of those who read the original text prior to its presentation and comments made after the presentation. I am extremely grateful for the sharp observations and critical judgements that emerged. This was constructive dialogue of the highest order!

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