

## Note from the Editor

This journal, and our network, has continued to find a progressively broadening audience. Our website hosts visitors from across the globe (strange for a specifically local initiative) and the number of monthly visitors continues to trend upward. [City Light News](#) - Calgary's Christian newspaper – was gracious enough to offer [space in their March publication](#) (page 5) for our group to introduce itself to an even larger audience.

Our published response to the upcoming Atheist bus ad ([Extraordinary ad – ordinary response](#)) is one of the top downloads from our website. For a web search of "Calgary Apologetics," we are hit number 3 at Google and 4 at Bing at the time of this writing.

But it is not enough that people are aware of the conversation; participation is critical. This is where you come in. Whatever your opinion on the subject, if you've given it some thought then we would love to hear from you. This journal is intended to bring those of differing opinions together for a chat. Are you a Christian who has engaged in this debate with others and has some insights to share? Please forward them. Are you not a follower of Jesus, and you have some carefully considered reasons behind the beliefs you hold? Please share those too; we want to hear everybody's perspectives.

This journal is still finding its feet, so we have not been flooded with article submissions just yet, though several authors have indicated that submissions are on the way (stay tuned!). This particular edition is lacking a "letter from the front," as well as an article representing the "Nay" side; both due to lack of submissions. Our hope is that as we continue to gain a wider audience the submissions will come with time. But you can help. If you can read, you can probably write. Submit an article, or if you know somebody who you think is more articulate then encourage them to submit something. There cannot be a conversation unless individuals converse. The door is open; come on in.

All submissions can be forwarded to Paul Buller – [pdbuller@telus.net](mailto:pdbuller@telus.net). Submission guidelines are available at our website.

## Worldviews in the News

As mentioned in the last edition of "Jesus, the Truth?" Calgary will be one of several Canadian cities to see another round of Atheist ads on city transit buses and C-trains in 2011. The NCAC response (complete with numerous online resources) can be found [here](#).

### In this Issue

- Note from the Editor
- Worldviews in the News
- Further Reading
- Letters from the Front
- What is Truth? An answer to Pilate's question (*Evan Hertzprung - YEA*)
- A reply to Michael Martin (*Dr. Hugo Meynell - YEA*)

**Jesus, the Truth?** may be freely distributed. If you are reading a paper copy, an electronic version with hyperlinks is available at [www.whyjesus.ca](http://www.whyjesus.ca). The views presented in this journal do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the members of the NCAC. Submission guidelines are also available at our website.

A series of unprecedented uprisings and governmental changes have snowballed since late last year across the [Middle East and North Africa](#). Common threads in these uprisings include moral issues around government corruption, human rights violations and more. To what extent is the Christian faith inherently conducive to supporting social justice and human rights and, by extension, opposing government corruption and human rights violations? How inherently conducive are other religions and philosophies to supporting such concepts?

A computer named Watson recently [beat a human opponent in Jeopardy](#) (and was subsequently [beat by a different human](#)). Decades ago a different computer, Deep Blue, beat a human opponent at Chess. Will computers one day be superior to humans in all areas of life? Do the computers even realize that they are playing Chess or Jeopardy? Watson's winnings were donated to charity; did Watson get to choose which charities?

The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, an instrument of the (officially Atheistic) Chinese Communist Government has apparently concluded that the success of the West is [rooted in its Christian heritage](#). Historian Niall Ferguson documents this in his book, *Civilization: The West and the Rest*. What other factors, besides Christianity, may have contributed? Other Atheists, such as Christopher Hitchens, adamantly claim that Christianity has a net negative effect on society; what led these two groups of Atheists to such diametrically opposed conclusions?

Rob Bell, pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church located in Grand Rapids, Michigan published a book entitled "Love Wins." It has created a firestorm of controversy in the Christian world. Many Christian experts are claiming that his views are indistinguishable from "Universalism," the view that, in one way or another, every human will end up in Heaven, eventually. Is the concept of eternal punishment inconsistent with the concept of a God of Love? Is it inconsistent with the concept of a God of Justice? Is an eternal Hell of conscious torment just? Why or why not?

## Letters from the Front

No letters were received for this edition. Instead, the following links are provided to give you food for thought with respect to how to respectfully carry on conversations about the big questions in life.

## Further Reading

### Articles:

[Why are some physicists so bad at philosophy?](#) – A thought-provoking, albeit somewhat edgy, article.

### Podcasts/Videos:

[Hobbits, Heros and Jesus Christ: Is Christianity a Myth?](#) – Self-descriptive title.

[God, Math and the Multiverse](#) – By a supercool Mathematician.

[Daniel Dennett on William Lane Craig](#) – Thoughts from an Atheist philosopher on a leading Christian philosopher and Apologist.

### Websites:

<http://www.bigquestionsonline.com> – Theists, non-theists and others explore life's big questions from philosophical, scientific and other perspectives.

[Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) – An excellent resource for general philosophical research. Tough reading, but a great, scholarly, resource.

[Craig / Dacey debate](#) – One of the few Theist / Atheist debates that is generally cordial, scholarly, stays on topic and where there is no clear winner. Both sides do a good job of assertively presenting their case and deflating the case of the other. It's part 1 of 14; dig around at YouTube a little to find the rest.

[Argumentation: an intellectual game?](#) – Some wise thoughts from John Lennox on the nature of argument, and how to go about it with gentleness and respect.

[Conversational Apologetics](#) – Michael Ramsden shares some thoughts on the subject of Apologetics, how it fits in our Faith, and how one might engage in it respectfully and effectively within a cultural context.

[8 witnessing tips](#) – Greg Koukl shares some insights from a conversation he overheard on an airplane.

*Jesus, the Truth? – YEA*

## **What is truth? An answer to Pilate's question**

Evan Hertzprung [hertzprung@shaw.ca](mailto:hertzprung@shaw.ca)

*[Ed. This article provides a great reminder of the broader significance to the question, "Jesus, the Truth?" Truth is far more than mere propositions, and all worldviews yield consequences that must be considered alongside their factual claims about reality.]*

"What is truth? said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer." So wrote Francis Bacon in his essay "On Truth." Pilate asked his question in response to a statement made by Jesus: "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me" (John 18:36–37)<sup>1</sup>. Although Pilate showed no interest in any answer Jesus might have given, as readers we can pursue that question, "What is truth?" and given Jesus' heritage, we can look for an answer in light of the biblical worldview. How did the ancient Jewish people and the early Christians understand 'truth'?

The Hebrew people did not think of truth in terms that have occupied much of western philosophy. Today we have grown accustomed to reflect on truth in terms of a property that statements or propositions might have, resulting in an emphasis on objective inquiry, detached assent and logical analysis. Cognitive or propositional truth holds our interest and we try to determine a statement's truth value by the use of reason alone. The contemporary scientific enterprise and its value of proof and precision within a methodologically naturalistic worldview presents the current standard by which truth is pursued. There is little to no sense in which truth derives its status from a personal or moral reality. For the Hebrew people, however, the ultimate basis and referent for truth lay in God's moral nature, character and actions.

The Hebrew word that most corresponds to the English 'truth' is <sup>le</sup>*meṯ* and related words, one of which has been incorporated into English, 'amen.' If Hebrew has no word that directly corresponds to the English 'truth,' yet it does understand the concept and is capable of communicating it. Sometimes the word refers to that which is intellectual, related to knowledge, and whether something is true or false. For example, Moses instructs the people that if someone has been accused of idolatry, then they "must investigate it thoroughly," and "if it is true," then certain

---

<sup>1</sup> All quotes from Today's New International Version

actions must be taken (Deuteronomy 17:4). Or the Queen of Sheba says to King Solomon, “The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true” (1 Kings 10:6). In each example there is a fact of the matter—the truth—that can be determined through investigation, but this is not the most common use of *ᵑmeᵑ* in the Hebrew text.

Much more frequently *ᵑmeᵑ* refers to the existential and moral nature of truth as being an attribute of a person, whether of human beings or of God. In Genesis, Joseph meets up with his long-lost brothers and, rather than believing their story, accuses them of being spies. In order to determine the truth of their story, he tells them to “send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!” (Genesis 42:16) That is, Joseph wanted to find out if his brothers were dependable and consistent, and whether their character was reliable. Reliability was more important than the mere facts of the case. From previous experience, Joseph had reason to wonder about the reliability of his brothers. Moses’ father-in-law told him to “select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, *trustworthy* men who hate dishonest gain” (Exodus 18:21)<sup>2</sup>. Or Joshua tells the people to “fear Yahweh and serve him with all *faithfulness*.”<sup>3</sup>

The Hebrew word *ᵑmeᵑ* frequently translates as ‘true,’ ‘faithful’ and ‘trustworthy.’ Although these words can apply to human beings, most often they are used in reference to God and his moral nature.<sup>4</sup> Here are some examples. “Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, Yahweh, my *faithful* God” (Psalms 31:5). Or, “But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and *faithfulness*” (Psalms 86:15). Or, “Then they said to Jeremiah, ‘May Yahweh be a *true* and *faithful* witness against us if we do not act in accordance with everything Yahweh your God sends you to tell us’” (Jeremiah 42:5). Finally, “He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A *faithful* God who does no wrong, upright and just is he” (Deuteronomy 32:4).

The Hebrew writers emphatically describe God as consistent, firm, dependable and trustworthy, but they speak of God's faithfulness, not concerned so much to catalogue the attribute of ‘faithfulness’ per se, as to celebrate the one who ‘proves himself faithful.’ What is important is the covenant relationship of God with his people that manifests itself in history through action. King Solomon, at the dedication of the temple, prays “And now, God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David my father come *true*” (1 Kings 8:26). There is no question that God *is* true for Solomon, but he prays that God will *prove* his word to be dependable. Frequently the biblical writers place truth alongside the love and justice of God.

Since the ultimate basis and referent for truth lies in God’s moral nature, character and actions, and as a result it includes the whole of the cosmic order, then necessarily each individual human being, and communities as a whole, must embody truth as well. The prophet Hosea brought a charge against the people: “There is no *ᵑmeᵑ*, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land” (Hosea 4:1). Truth includes speaking the truth as well as acting faithfully, for Hosea continues to describe what actually does characterize the people: “There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery.” It is not enough to know the God of truth, and to act consistently in that regard with God, but one must also demonstrate *ᵑmeᵑ* to one’s neighbors. Word and deed must be one. This is true of God and it must be

---

<sup>2</sup> All words italicized are from the *ᵑmeᵑ* word group

<sup>3</sup> All occurrences of ‘the LORD’ in the TNIV replaced with ‘Yahweh,’ the personal name of the God of the Hebrew people.

<sup>4</sup> Although God is not male, for ease of use and to keep from awkward constructions, the male pronoun will be used of God

true of his people. In fact, unless one lives <sup>le</sup>met out towards one's neighbors, one cannot live in faithfulness with God. <sup>le</sup>met is the bedrock of all human relationships. For the Hebrew people, truth was never just an abstract or theoretical concept.

If <sup>le</sup>met is the Hebrew word that most closely corresponds to 'truth,' then in the New Testament *alētheia* (and related words) is the Greek word for 'truth.' For the Greeks, truth was intellectual, pertaining to the full or real state of affairs. The Greeks did not understand truth to have the same personal or moral implications as the Hebrew people did, so the question is, how did Jesus and the New Testament writers understand *alētheia*, in Hebrew or in Greek terms? Not surprisingly, the answer is a combination of both, though sometimes it can be difficult to determine the extent of the balance. Two primary senses of the word predominate.

First, *alētheia* describes consistency, dependability, truthfulness and moral integrity of character in the Hebrew sense. In Paul's letter to the Romans, he seems to use the 'faithfulness' and 'truthfulness' of God as synonyms, and argues that God is 'true' (Romans 3:1–7). He later affirms the truthfulness and faithfulness of God that was evident in the life and work of Jesus (Rom 15:8). He praises one church for how they "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God," (1 Thessalonians 1:9), the dependable, consistent, faithful and trustworthy God in distinction to false idols.

Just as God is true, so Paul desired that Christians live in the light of that truth. He admonished them to behave and act "as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)" (Ephesians 5:8–9). People are to live and behave in a manner consistent with the moral nature of God. When Jesus told Pilate that "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me," he meant that they would 'do' the truth, live it out. It was not just a cognitive assent to some proposition, but it necessarily involved behavior and action. In a similar manner, Jesus taught that "those who live by the truth come into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God" (John 3:21). And, "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'" (John 8:31–32). Assent to truth required a full commitment to living out the teaching of Jesus.

Second, *alētheia* describes what is real and complete in distinction to that which is false and lacking. Paul wrote that Christians "must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor" (Ephesians 4:25). He equated the Christian gospel with truth when he wrote of the "truth of the gospel" (Galatians 2:5) and "the word of truth, the gospel" (Ephesians 1:13). He explicitly linked truth and the gospel when he asked one group of people what kept them from "obeying the truth?" (Galatians 5:7).

John, more than any other New Testament writer, writes of *alētheia*. In the prologue to his Gospel, he wrote that Jesus "came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). To affirm Jesus' teaching is to affirm that "God is truthful" (3:33). Jesus taught that his Father is true (7:28), in fact "is trustworthy [*alēthēs*]" (8:26). To understand truth it is necessary to know Jesus, who claimed in some sense to personify the truth (14:6) both in what he was and in what he did. Jesus was one who revealed God's truth in the world. Unlike the nation of Israel, who failed to live in the light of their identity, Jesus was the "true light" (1:9), the "true bread" (6:32) and the "true vine" (15:1). Repeatedly Jesus referred to "the Spirit of truth" who "speak[s] the truth" (14:17; 15:26; 16:13), who, like himself, was sent from the Father.

Employing both the Greek intellectual and cognitive understanding of truth, as that which corresponds to reality, of which there is a fact of the matter, and the Hebrew personal and moral foundation to truth, the New Testament writers never permitted a merely theoretical apprehension of truth. The biblical writers could not have conceived of an

educational system in which one pursued truth apart from an emphasis of that truth working itself out morally in the life of the student. In the biblical worldview, always truth (moral and theoretical) was to have an effect on the individual's life, and to be worked out through attitudes, behavior and living. Always truth was to effect transformation such that a person's life mirrored reality as founded in God's nature and in the person of Jesus. First and foremost, truth spoke of God's moral character, but since humanity was created in the image of God and to be in relationship with God, humanity was to reflect that moral character, both to God and between human beings

Pilate did not wait for an answer. What will be your response to the truth of the biblical writers?

References used: entries for "Truth" in

- New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology
- New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis
- New Dictionary of Biblical Theology
- IVP New Bible Dictionary

*[Evan Hertzprung - Married for twenty-five years, three children, and soon to be grandpa in May. Loves both theology and philosophy, science fiction and mysteries, and photography.]*

## A Reply to Michael Martin

Dr. Hugo Meynell [hugomeynell@shaw.ca](mailto:hugomeynell@shaw.ca)

[Ed. The following is the second in a two-part article. The first half appeared in the [Winter issue](#)]

The Christian Fathers of the Council of Chalcedon, which defined that Christ was one ‘person’ in two ‘natures’, a human and a divine, could well have availed themselves of the modern predicate calculus (E x [phi x/ psi x]); there is (at least) one individual who has two [sets of] properties [human and divine]). The doctrine of the Trinity is admittedly a somewhat harder nut to crack. Martin amuses himself by deducing absurdities from it, like that of God being his own father --- something which any anti-Christian philosopher ought to be able to do in his sleep. Can one all the same attain to the kind of indirect but very fruitful understanding of the divine mysteries alluded to by the First Vatican Council? Assuming that the inquirer is not completely discouraged by the strictures of Martin and many others,<sup>1</sup> she may attend to the following points. If our notion of divine creation may be clarified by attention to human practical consciousness (as I have just tried to show), that of deciding to do one thing as opposed to another, perhaps our notion of the Trinity may be rendered less obscure by consideration of human consciousness of self. The members of the Trinity may be thought of as ‘three subjects of a single, dynamic, existential consciousness’.<sup>2</sup> Martin may form a conception of Martin, and may more or less approve of himself as so conceived. Human beings are apt to form more or less distorted conceptions of themselves and of others. I may conceive myself as better than I am, my enemies as worse than they are; so hatred and misconception tend to reinforce one another in our fallen world. God’s conception of and love for the divine self are not subject to such limitation or distortion.

As St. Anselm suggested to the Council of Florence, in God all is one where the mutual opposition of relations is not involved. We human beings, as persons, are and are what we are largely in and through our relations with other persons. This applies more radically to the Persons in God; this is what prevents their threeness as Persons from impugning their unity as God. As understanding forming conception from which love flows, God is Father; as conception formed by understanding from which love flows, God is Son; as love flowing from understanding and conception as one, God is Holy Spirit. Such is God in eternity; temporal succession is not supposed to be involved, in spite of the claims of Arius and the assumptions of Martin<sup>3</sup>, according to Aquinas’ and Lonergan’s exposition of the Trinity. What is there in this which is relevant to us, in our flawed and bewildered human situation? When we fall in love with God’s conception of self in human form (Christ Jesus), the divine love, which is the Holy Spirit, is poured out upon us; inspired by this love, we have the heart to counteract the enormous mass of evil in ourselves and in human society at large. That there is such evil, and that we are all complicit in it (it can’t be blamed on just the whites, the blacks, men, women, the upper classes, the commies, our parents, or everyone but ourselves), is one of the most evident of all facts.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the Koran on the Trinity and the Incarnation: ‘Believe in Allah and His Messengers, and say not, “They are three.” Desist, it will be better for you. Verily, Allah is the only one God. Far is it from His Holiness that He should have a son’ (*The Holy Qur’an* [Lahore, Pakistan: 1955], p. 97, verse 172 of the Sura Al-Nisa).

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *A Second Collection* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 25.

<sup>3</sup> One Arian slogan was ‘*En ote ouk en*’ (‘there was when he (the Son) wasn’t’).

True, God as Father 'begets' God as Son, and God as Father and Son together 'spirates' God as Holy Spirit. The quotation marks, so often a sign of confusion, equivocation or dishonesty, are intended here as an indication that these are technical terms. (One may compare the use of the term 'particle' in modern nuclear physics as contrasted with that in ordinary language.) Muslims need not be shocked by the apparent implication, if 'beget' is taken in the literal sense, that Allah is so demeaned as to descend to earth, in the manner of so many pagan gods, and screw around.

Martin says he cannot understand my account of the atonement; I will do my best to remedy the matter in what immediately follows. I believe that the atonement has become less inscrutable to us as a result of developments in human knowledge and speculation over the last century or so. On some understandings of this doctrine, it is certainly immoral, as has been noticed at least since the time of Peter Abelard in the twelfth century. Suppose there are three human beings, Smith, Jones and Robinson. Jones commits a serious offence against Smith, who is incensed at it; but then takes it out on Robinson, after which Smith is appeased enough to let Jones off. We would not think much of a human being who thought that an offense committed against him by one person was really made up for by his punishment of a third party; and the case is made worse rather than better if one casts God in the role of the person who was originally offended, humanity at large as offender, and Christ as innocent victim.

When C. S. Lewis first came to believe in God, he could not at first become a Christian, because he could make no sense of the doctrine of the atonement. He could understand how human beings at large might be lost to sin, rather as individuals are lost to alcohol or sex or drugs, in such a way that one might say that only a miracle could save them. But he could not see how the life and death of one human being, however virtuous, could make up for it. While he was in this state of perplexity, he was visited by two friends, one of them named J. R. R. Tolkien. Lewis, they pointed out, was a great authority on myths, and set great store by them. Suppose that God as a human being had actually lived out a myth in history, making historical fact what had been surmised by the poets; might not this do the trick? About three weeks later, while he was on an expedition to Whipsnade Zoo, Lewis realized that he was a Christian.

The elements constitutive of the archetypal myth of the hero have been summarized by C. G. Jung: mysterious birth, rescue in the nick of time from deadly dangers, precocious development, miraculous deeds, tragic and early end, symbolical manner of death, post-mortem effects. It does not require great powers of detection to see these elements in the narrative of the gospels. Some have said, this is because the material of the gospels just is mythical, in the sense of symbolically significant fiction. But the time between the alleged events, and the writing of the gospels, does not seem sufficient for a full-fledged myth to have developed out of historical material which did not have at least a closely similar form. Christians relate to their cult-hero much as humankind have from time immemorial; they celebrate the life of Jesus in recitation and ritual. There are other aspects to the matter. In his classic study of intra-specific aggression in animals and human beings, Konrad Lorenz noted that four things were conducive to the expression and sublimation of human aggression --- a group, a cause, an enemy, and a leader. How would it be if God had provided us with the one leader who could not let us down, the human God; of a group (the Church) which could cut other group loyalties down to size; for the cause which was truth and goodness as such; and against the enemy which was falsity and evil as such, rather than the human beings who are their slaves or dupes? Furthermore, R. C. Zaehner noted a 'hunger for an incarnate God' which has expressed itself in all manner of religious traditions (Muhammad and the Buddha were divinized in spite of what they claimed and wished; whereas the many incarnate gods of Hinduism have no historical basis); and which more recently has appeared in the worship of such worthy objects as Stalin, Mao and Che Guevara. Does it not look rather as though the Christian dispensation might be a key providentially given to fit the lock constituted by human poetic, religious, and socio-political consciousness?

Martin charges me with not having read some material which was importantly relevant to my case. (In fact, I had read both books to which he referred; but did not regard them as particularly significant for my purpose. One of them was rather a tragic work by an earnest Christian who seemed to me not to understand what the Fathers were on about.) I make the same charge against Martin. On the matter of the doctrine of the Trinity, Bernard Lonergan's *Verbum. Word and Idea in Aquinas*<sup>4</sup> was available, if he has no Latin. (*The Triune God*<sup>5</sup> had not been translated out of its original Latin<sup>6</sup> at the time when he made his attack on me.)

And what difference would be made to the world, it might be asked, if Christianity disappeared? Is it entirely superstitious to note a decline in public morality in recent years? And is it merely irrational to guess that the decline of religion has something to do with it? It is fifty years or so since R. C. Zaehner suggested that opium had become the religion of the people; and addiction to drugs is far more of a problem now than when he wrote. Human beings are morally frail; and it may help them, in their fitful efforts to pursue the good, to believe that power behind the universe is basically friendly to this. This is not to deny, it must be insisted, that many atheists put many believers to shame by the rectitude of their lives.

*[Hugo Meynell received his Ph. D. at Cambridge, taught in the Department of Religious Studies in the University of Calgary, and was elected to the Royal Society of Canada in 1993. He has published a book defending a cosmological argument for the existence of God (The Intelligible Universe), and another of Christian apologetics (Is Christianity True?).]*

---

<sup>4</sup> London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1968.

<sup>5</sup> Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964.