

YOUR GOD IS STILL TOO SMALL

Chapter 4

Reality and the God of Truth

*If you think that you alone can determine truth,
then your God is still too small!*

In 1998, the multi-award winning film *The Truman Show* was released. Starring Jim Carrey, the movie used both humor and satire to deliver a thought-provoking attack on reality television shows. In the process, the film raised serious questions about life, truth, and reality. The movie has since been the subject of many essays on why we believe what we believe, existentialism, and simulated reality.

The plot revolves around a reality television show based on the life of the Jim Carrey character, Truman Burbank. The reality show was a worldwide phenomenon that began with Truman in his mother's womb. Truman lived his entire life unaware that he was living in a television created environment, where every person he encountered was really an actor, and where the producer was orchestrating each scene for the benefit of ratings and the viewing audience. By the time Truman turned 30, he began to have suspicions about "reality." Sometimes, the suspicions were instigated by a production glitch, like when a star fell and turned out to be a movie spotlight (The director tried to cover up this gaffe by having a character explain to Truman the light at his feet was in fact a landing light from an airplane that fell off in mid-flight).

Ultimately, to the director's frustration, Truman decided to journey beyond the limits of the bubble built by the production company. Up to that point, Truman had lived his entire life in an eco-bubble constructed and maintained by the production company, with cameras hidden everywhere. Through various mechanisms, the director kept Truman from ever wanting to venture outside the "world" as it existed in the bubble. As Truman tried to leave his city, the director managed to stop Truman from getting out on roads and flights, staging everything from traffic jams, forest fires, and even a reported nuclear melt down. Truman finally escaped by taking a small boat to the edge of the painted dome that enveloped the production bubble. The boat reached the edge of the enclosed area and punctured the wall that was painted to be the sky. Truman found stairs and

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stepped out from his “world” that he mistook for reality his entire life and into the “real world.”

In the movie, Truman faced ultimate questions: What is real? Were his relationships real or manufactured? Was his world real or manufactured? Was the news real or manufactured? Did his actions matter? Was love genuine? As original as the movie was, these are not questions that were invented by or unique to this movie. They are questions that go back far in history, and still thrive in certain circles today. Some might say that today, there are perhaps more ways and reasons to doubt reality than ever before, and the questions are certainly ones that merit discussion.

In this chapter, we consider reality and truth in light of God. Some people believe that they have a grasp of truth and reality through using their minds. Others think truth and reality is too elusive to grasp at all. Most of these people are not really focusing on God, but any that do regard God from this mindset, regard him as much too small! The thrust of this chapter centers both on “What is truth?” and “How do we know truth?”

WHAT IS TRUTH: HISTORICAL QUESTIONING

As we noted before, the Truman show was not the first effort at questioning what is real or true. One of the most famous early Western thinkers on this subject was Plato (c.427-c.347BC). Plato is famous for a theory that what appears physically is a shadow of what really exists as an essence. Plato asserted that the “real things” were things *seen intellectually*. He distinguished those things seen physically as shadows. His famous illustration used a cave. If a prisoner were in a cave chained and facing a blank wall (for his/her entire life), and if there was a fire behind the prisoner, then as people passed between the fire and the prisoner, the person chained facing the wall would not actually see the real people. The prisoner would see only a shadow cast on the wall. Never having seen anything else, the prisoner would likely believe the shadows to be real, but the true reality would be the unseen people. The shadow is simply a shadow.¹ We can use a

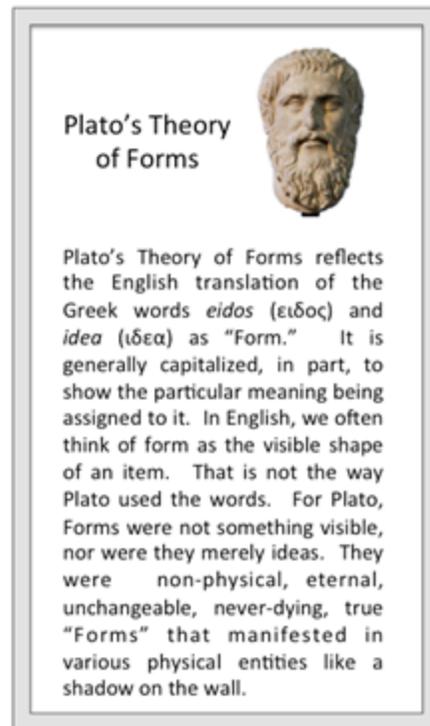


table to illustrate Plato's argument. The world has millions of tables, each distinct in some way. Even as there are many different tables, there is one thing that we can all call a table. For Plato, there existed a non-physical eternal table that was expressed in the various tables we see. For Plato, we see the physical table, but the true thing that is "real tableness" – that which finds its expression in a physical table – exists as a higher form or reality or truth.

Among Eastern thinkers, one of the most famous early questioners of reality was Chuang Tzu (who likely wrote near the same time as Plato in the 4th century BC). His "Butterfly Dream" is frequently cited as questioning reality. In the dream, Chuang Tzu dreamt he was a butterfly, flying about with a most happy life. Upon awakening, Chuang Tzu found himself a man. Chuang Tzu then asked the question: "Am I a man who dreamt I was a butterfly or am I a butterfly now dreaming I am a man?"²

We can fast forward 450 years to the 1st century and consider the New Testament writings of John. John's gospel used the word "truth" over 25 times (He used "truth" 17 times in his short letters we call 1, 2, and 3 John). One of the most famous passages was when Jesus was standing before the Roman regional authority Pontus Pilate. Pilate asked Jesus if he was claiming to be the king of the Jews. Jesus responded that his kingdom was not of this world, which must have challenged Pilate's views of the structure and form of reality! Pilate then reframed the question removing the part about the Jews: "So you are a king?" To that question, Jesus answered:

You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice (Jn. 18:37).

Jesus's claim, by inference, is that he is king to the truth! Here, Pilate responded with his famous question, "*What is truth?*"

If we continue to move through history, then we find one of the more famous philosophers who wrote on both what is truth or reality in the 17th century. The man was Rene Descartes (1596-1650), and his concerns reached beyond "What is real?" to include the question, "*How do we know truth to be truth?*" Among his now famous writings (the pope banned them after Descartes died) were *Meditations on First Philosophy: In Which the Existence of God and the Immortality of the Soul are Demonstrated*. This book is not famous for its attempted proof of God's existence or of the immortality of the soul. The book is famous for its *approach* to knowledge and reality. Descartes began the book noting how many things in his life that he had believed to be true turned out to be false (something most any adult experiences). He wanted to hold only to true

beliefs, so he resolved to rid himself of false ones. He knew the time involved in sorting through his beliefs one at a time was massive, so instead, he decided to go to the root of his disbeliefs. His approach was akin to chopping down a tree, knowing if the trunk was false, then all the limbs and leaves were as well. It would be quicker to fell the entire tree rather than go leaf-by-leaf identifying false beliefs.

Descartes's first meditation centered on how wrong he had been regarding foundational ideas of life, since his childhood. He decided that the senses could be deceptive, and reminiscent of Chuang Tzu's butterfly dream, used the example that life itself could be a dream. Descartes's solution was to doubt everything, considering everything false unless he could establish it as true. In his second meditation, he came to an accepted reality or truth: "I am, I exist." Descartes decided that since he had persuaded himself that everything was false, that he must exist as a thing that thinks (by which he means "doubts, understands, conceives, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, imagines, feels," *etc.*).

Descartes then built his belief system block by block with believed mathematical precision to establish what things are real and true and what things cannot be regarded as such. Descartes relied totally on his rational thinking to establish truth. This was quite a departure from those who wrote before him. For centuries, truth was determined by acceptance of historical ideas and conceptions, rather than by man's own thinking. Descartes's most famous example to illustrate his concerns used a piece of wax fresh from a beehive. He wrote that all five senses would inform one of the wax: it had a certain color and shape (eyes); smelled of flowers (nose); it tasted sweet (taste); it was hard and cold (touch); it made a sound when struck with the finger (hearing). Yet, when one brought the wax close to a fire, the shape changed; the smell evaporated; the taste was burned away; it melted and could not be handled without burning oneself; and it no longer made a noise when struck. In this example, all five senses were deceptive on determining what the wax really was. The only way one could adequately understand what the wax truly was, was by thinking about it, not by any of the five senses.

Descartes is often recognized as the father of modern rationalism, or the idea that man can think himself through any truth. As Descartes taught, only the mind of man can truly determine what is true and reality. Many since Descartes have challenged the conclusions he drew based on his reasoning; however, his approach to what could be known, and his method of determining truth, have taken a firm hold of many Western thinkers.

As we entered the 21st century, more modern people have continued to question reality and truth, sorting through seemingly innumerable approaches and permutations of ideas. On a philosophical level, Oxford's Nick Bostrom has made

a name for himself not only for his writings and lectures on human potential, but also for his quizzing about reality. In a paper published in *Philosophical Quarterly* in 2003, Bostrom argues that one possible reality is that we are all living in a computer simulation. He bases this on the idea that at some point in the future, should mankind live long enough, computers will be powerful enough to run simulations of what life was like in earlier human history. He also thinks that these programs will have human characters with a capacity for conscious thought. From that idea, he draws a reasonable option for reality that we are actually living inside the computer program as computer generated consciousness, rather than biological minds.³

To many, Bostrom's ideas will recall the Matrix movie trilogy, although the Matrix idea was quite different. In the Matrix, people truly existed in electricity-tapping wombs where a computer program was pumping a "reality" into the minds of those captured. For Bostrom, our entire existence might be a computer simulation.

WHAT IS TRUTH: THE DANGERS IN PLAY

For many reading this paper, the reaction is likely, "Those are goofy people asking those questions and making those suggestions. Normal people know what is real. It is what we live, what we eat, whom we know, and how we live." But is it? Even on a more basic, "non-goofy," and daily level, it is fair to ask "What is truth?" and "What is real?" Consider the following: over the last three years, I have received multiple emails from different friends linking me to a PowerPoint presentation of the remains of Goliath-type giants' bones found in Greece (or Saudi Arabia, depending upon the email). This email has gone around the world in various permutations claiming to be true. In actuality, it is bogus. The pictures came from a contest for computer photo manipulation. They have no basis in truth. How many other Internet legends masquerade as truth?

Even beyond the Internet and the obvious movies like the Matrix or the Truman show, consider reality and a run-of-the-mill television show. While we know the shows themselves are not real, do we accidentally buy into the ethics portrayed on the shows? Do we think it normal for two people to live together before marriage, as is frequently seen on television and the movies? Do we think that the ethics we find in the make-believe world accurately reflect the ethics that are both best for us and truly good? Do we believe that problems can arise and find a solution within the 48 minutes of a one-hour show?

Beyond the fictitious worlds of movies and television, read the book *Nudge* and understand how often people manipulate others' behaviors by manipulating

appearance. Many times, things are falsely presented as simple reality with no agenda or drive. For example, in a buffet, people just assume the food is laid out in a manner that comports with how you might normally eat food (salad first?) In truth, multiple studies have indicated that people tend to put more of the early buffet items on their plates and less of the later items. That is why buffets typically put the higher profit margin items early in line, so you fill up your plate on those rather than the later, less profitable items. (Have you ever seen a buffet line with the prime rib station at the front of the line?)

Beyond the challenges of reality and truth in an everyday setting, I would return to the thought leaders mentioned earlier in this chapter, and suggest that their ideas also effect us, even those of us who find them senseless! Many of these are the leaders who are teaching and addressing the next generation. Their ideas may take a decade (or decades) to reach the common man, but they will come. The inability to locate and define truth has already given rise to many who have disregarded the ability of science and other objective explanations of reality. This approach, often labeled “postmodernism,” takes many forms and incarnations, but it is often rooted in those trying to define one’s reality and truth based upon what the world means to that individual.

In conclusion, there is much at play here. There are one’s own beliefs about reality and truth, there are the ethics we believe appropriate for life, there are the reasons for accepting or not accepting matters of religious faith, there are recognition issues of other’s manipulative attempts, and there are questions about the principles we use to establish truth. With these critical issues at play, where does this “real world life” fit with God?

DETERMINING REALITY AND GOD

How do we determine what is reality or what is truth? Living in a post-Descartes era, do we find his idea of rationale processing appealing? Can we apply mathematical logic and deduce right and wrong? Is the only option to “go with our gut” and decide right and wrong by what seems most sensible? Or, should we return to a pre-Descartes era and simply rely on the decisions of truth made by those who have come before us? Maybe we should we avoid the question altogether and just live to get the most out of life.

One criticism of Descartes centers on his utter confidence in the mind’s ability. For Descartes, the mind becomes the arbiter of right and wrong and the ultimate source of truth, yet most everyone agrees that the human mind does not operate flawlessly, even in the realm of logic. For example, many who followed Descartes’ approach of rationalism did not agree with his rational proofs of the

existence of God or the immortality of the soul. Furthermore, the human intellect will always be limited by its preconceptions, even though Descartes and others have tried to deconstruct them. For example, Descartes had no concept of a computer, and hence his argument that he existed, simply because he was able to think was logical to him, yet it would not hold before Bostrom's idea that we might be computer-generated consciousness. Another shortcoming of Descartes's rational approach concerns truths that are not knowable by today's technology and rational logic. For example, there were a certain number of stars in the sky. No one alive today has the ability to know that number, using his or her brain and current technology. The limits of the modern mind, as smart as we are, must be acknowledged.

These limitations of the mind are consistent with the teachings of Scripture. The mind is not reliable as a source of all knowledge; neither is the mind reliable as the arbiter of right and wrong. A major doctrine of Scripture is that the mind of man, a wonderful creation with purpose and incredible possibilities, is still fallen and in ways deceptive. Scripture teaches that God enlightens the mind of man to better understand reality, especially the spiritual aspect of reality. Further, God works on renewing the mind of the believer, in an effort to better enable that believer to live God's will while on earth. The mind does not find truth simply by some Cartesian rational building from the ground up. True truth or real reality must have an element of revelation to grasp levels of truth otherwise unknowable.

Let us approach this by looking at various passages of Scripture, considering what Scripture teaches about the mind, truth, and understanding.

The Limitations of Man's Mind

In the creation stories, Scripture teaches that God made man "in his own image," and in that way, man was a thinking and creative being. Man was able to create names for the animals (Gen. 2:19), exercise dominion (Gen. 1:28, 2:15), communicate, and appreciate relationships (Gen. 2:18-24). Man was not all knowing, but man was able to grow in knowledge (Gen. 3:7-11). The thinking man (and woman) was also subject to deception, and able to make independent decisions, including ones of rebellion (Gen. 3:1-13)). Man did rebel, and fell from the relationship of direct enlightenment from God, having to rely instead on his own limited, now fallen mind (Gen. 3:16-24).

The fallen mind of man was darkened by sin. Paul wrote that God is apparent in the world, but that man's failure to acknowledge or honor God led to futile and worthless speculations and thoughts, both about God and reality. J.B. Phillips makes the point in his excellent translation of Romans 1:18-28:

Now the holy anger of God is disclosed from Heaven against the godlessness and evil of those men who render truth dumb and inoperative by their wickedness. It is not that they do not know the truth about God; indeed he has made it quite plain to them. For since the beginning of the world the invisible attributes of God, *e.g.*, his eternal power and divinity, have been plainly discernible through things, which he has made and which are commonly seen and known, thus leaving these men without a rag of excuse. They knew all the time that there is a God, yet they refused to acknowledge him as such, or to thank him for what he is or does. Thus they became fatuous in their argumentations, and plunged their silly minds still further into the dark. Behind a facade of “wisdom” they became just fools They gave up God: and therefore God gave them up.... These men deliberately forfeited the truth of God and accepted a lie, paying homage and giving service to the creature instead of to the Creator, who alone is worthy to be worshipped for ever and ever, amen. God therefore handed them over.... Moreover, since they considered themselves too high and mighty to acknowledge God, he allowed them to become the slaves of their degenerate minds, and to perform unmentionable deeds.

Man’s lack of recognition of God, led to mindsets that distorted truth, and distorted right and wrong, all the while claiming to be wise and educated! Paul took the same argument, and approached it from a different angle in a letter to the church at Corinth. In his Corinthian letter, Paul focused on the inability of the unregenerate mind to understand and accept the death and resurrection of Christ. The unregenerate does not see the need for such a sacrifice, nor the promised eternal hope that does not fit into the world’s logical system:

The preaching of the cross is, I know, nonsense to those who are involved in this dying world, but to us who are being saved from that death it is nothing less than the power of God. It is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.’

For consider, what have the philosopher, the writer and the critic of this world to show for all their wisdom? Has not God made the wisdom of this world look foolish? For it was after the world in its wisdom failed to know God, that he in his wisdom chose to save all who would believe by the “simple-mindedness” of the Gospel message. For the Jews ask for miraculous proofs and the Greeks an intellectual panacea, but all we preach is Christ crucified—a stumbling block to the Jews and sheer nonsense to the Gentiles, but for those who are called, whether Jews or Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. And this is really only natural, for God’s foolishness” is wiser than men, and his “weakness” is stronger than men (1 Cor 1:18-25, JBP translation).

A simple glance at history, both of humanity and one's own life, bears out the Scriptural teaching that man's mind is not a good final arbiter of truth, especially where right and wrong are concerned. Jeremiah, pointing out the sin and errors in his day, noted that the heart and mind are "deceitful above all things, and desperately sick" (Jer. 17:9-10). Only a desperately sick mind could convince much of Germany that it was doing mankind a blessing by purifying a master race, getting rid of all elements that were deemed insufficient or inadequate! The same sick mind can convince many people of the right or wrong *de jure*. We are a people who *want* to believe the emails and Internet stories that feed our preconceptions and desires.

The Role of Revelation

The teaching of Scripture is that man is inadequate at constructing reality in his own mind, without the aid of revelation. Paul explained that God takes an active role in revelation and the enlightening of man's mind, through the work of his Spirit. As Paul explained, God's work with man was never based on man's intellect. God does not reach out to those smart enough to embrace him. Rather, God reaches to those humble enough to accept the truth of his historical intervention into the affairs of man:

Plainly God's purpose was that your faith should not rest upon man's cleverness but upon the power of God. We do, of course, speak "wisdom" among those who are spiritually mature, but it is not what is called wisdom by this world, nor by the powers-that-be, who soon will be only the powers that have been. The wisdom we speak of is that mysterious secret wisdom of God which he planned before the creation for our glory today. None of the powers of this world have known this wisdom—if they had they would never have crucified the Lord of glory! But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him'. But God has, through the Spirit, let us share his secret.

...

It is these things that we talk about, not using the expressions of the human intellect but those which the Holy Spirit teaches us, explaining things to those who are spiritual. But the unspiritual man simply cannot accept the matters which the Spirit deals with—they just don't make sense to him, for, after all, you must be spiritual to see spiritual things. The spiritual man, on the other hand, has an insight into the meaning of everything, though his insight may baffle the man of the world. This is because the former is sharing in God's wisdom, and 'Who has known the mind of the Lord that

he may instruct him?’ Incredible as it may sound, we who are spiritual have the very thoughts of Christ! (1 Cor. 2:1-16 JBP translation).

God not only takes an active role in enlightening people to the truths of his historical interaction in this otherwise apparently closed universe, but he also continues his work at turning a darkened mind of man into one that better perceives the hand of God at work and the will of God among men. In Romans 12, Paul speaks of renewing our minds as important in discerning what is the will of God. A renewed mind helps us understand who we are, gives us appropriate humility, leads us to a more genuine love, helps us treat others properly, and helps us overcome evil with good.

Some might argue that looking beyond one’s own mental faculties to Scripture for answers and knowledge about truth is a denial of logic, or at least a manifestation of circular reasoning. That is not, however, a fair criticism. Man can choose to look to Scripture as a *reasonable* and *rational* solution to trying to understand truth. If man’s mind is not a reliable barometer in itself, and if Scripture offers a reasonable and rational explanation that is consistent with experience, then it makes sense for one to look at those teachings. Further, as we discussed in the last chapter, with God as a communicating God, we should expect the One who *does know* the number of stars in the sky, to have useful insight for the small, yet incredible mind of man. Furthermore, as Paul wrote, God’s actions attest to the truth of his message. His message was not one of logical persuasion, opening truth up to those smart enough to handle divine logic and the intricacies of eternity. Instead, his message was one of power, something anyone can understand. The biggest obstacle to anyone living is death. By conquering death, God demonstrated the authority of his message. Now, we might quibble over the accuracy of the reports on Jesus’s resurrection, but that is for a later chapter! Here, we note the confirmation of God’s message in a powerful demonstration of events that are simply not possible in a closed universe.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

If we accept revelation as an aid in helping our minds understand truth, then we ask what does the Bible say truth is? What is real?

The core of Biblical teaching in the Old and New Testament is that truth is unified and grounded in God. Much of the Hebrew thought in the Old Testament about truth is a nuts-and-bolts thinking about what really happened in history. Truth (*emet* - אמת) means “firmness” or “stability.” It is “that which can be relied upon.” It is closely tied to the Hebrew word for “faith” (*emunah* - אמונה), which reflects

someone or something you can rely upon without being disappointed. In Old Testament usage, truth is grounded in God.

The New Testament keeps the same ideas, but John takes the idea a bit further. As church history relates, and as discussed in an earlier chapter, John wrote his gospel in Ephesus to those intimately aware of Greek ideas, as well as Hebrew. Like so many other areas of his gospel, he used terms that had strong meaning in both Hebrew and Greek circles. His usage of “truth” accurately conveyed the Hebrew usage as something firm and stable that one can rely upon. Truth and reality were also major ideas and concerns in the Greek world, and John was able to write in a way that brought out the Greek ideas as well. John uses the Greek word for truth (*aletheia*) over half of the number of times it is used in the entire New Testament. The only author coming close is Paul, who was the apostle to the Greeks.

John related the story earlier where Jesus interacted with Pilate on truth. Prior to that story, John gave several other accounts that put the Pilate story into perspective. In John 14, Jesus told his disciples that he was leaving to prepare a place for them. While Jesus was talking about Calvary, and his cross making the way, or road, for his followers to be in the Father’s house, the disciples were totally blind to what Jesus meant. Thomas asked how they could possibly know the road to where Jesus was going because they did not know Jesus’s destination. Jesus responded with the bold statement:

I am the way [road], and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also.

Jesus’s claim to be truth was not only in that conversation. Earlier in Jesus’s interactions with a number of Jews, Jesus pointed out that those who *truly* followed him would know *the truth* and *that truth* would liberate them! (Jn. 8:31-32).

As Jesus says, “I AM the truth,” he declares himself to be that which is reliable, the one upon whom people can rely. He is the measure or the true reality. This calls into question, not Jesus as a point of inspection or questioning, but rather everyone else. If he is the truth, if he is reality, if he is the

John, Jesus and *the* Truth

ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ
ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ

John’s Greek is very deliberate and insightful into the claims of Jesus in this interaction with his disciples. As discussed in an earlier chapter, when the Greek inserted the definite article (“the” in English), it was not simply to notify the reader that a noun was coming like it often does in Modern English. The Greek definite article draws attention to the *specific* nature of the noun that follows. So when John wrote up the conversation, he wrote Jesus as saying he was not merely one road to God, or one truth, or one kind of life. Jesus was *the* road, *the* truth, *the* life. There is something unique to the truth of Jesus as set apart from all others.

measure, then where do the rest of us fit in? Now suddenly, Jesus turns the idea of man seeking truth on its head. Truth is not found first in man, in man's mind, his experiences, or in his logic. Truth is found outside of man and man has a chance *to make that truth part of his mind, experience, and life!*

In John's writings, we also have Jesus as truth, prophesying that the Holy Spirit would descend upon his followers in a special way, giving them the insight both to remember these teachings as well as to understand them:

When the Spirit of *truth* comes, he will guide you into all *truth*, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears, he will speak... He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you (Jn. 16:13).

In speaking of the resurrected Christ, John repeats this thought in his letter we call 1 John, writing that the Spirit indeed testifies to Christ as the Spirit of truth:

Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? ... And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the *truth* (1 Jn. 5:5-6).

John makes an interesting addition to his gospel in this sentence. In the gospel, Jesus is "*the truth*," while here, the Spirit is "*the truth*." This leads to a related assessment about truth as it extends from God and revelation. As the church, illuminated by the Spirit, grew to understand and enunciate, there is a plurality in God, even as God is a unity. We have historically termed this the "Trinity," a word that is not found in Scripture but is based on the church's best terminology for the Scriptural idea of God's plurality and unity. Such a truth about God, trying to capture an eternal essence way beyond man's ability to comprehend, will certainly not be found by a Cartesian rational approach of doubting all that cannot be built brick by logical brick. This is a matter of truth that must be revealed, and even then is difficult to fathom.

CONCLUSION

Jesus, "full of grace and *truth*" (Jn. 1:14), is the foundation for understanding reality and truth. This is true in ethics, life, and death. It provides the basis for understanding how we should live and what we can rely on. If we think that we can understand truth or reality simply by building upon our minds, history, or even our gut feelings, then we are wrong. Man does not so easily compute God, who is the final point of truth and reality! The human mind can never be the decider or

source of truth without outside intervention. Before Descartes, the Benedictine monk Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) offered a more Biblical approach to faith and understanding of truth. Anselm wrote:

Nor do I seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe that I may understand. For this, too, I believe, that, unless I first believe, I shall not understand.

Anselm was not against one's ability to use one's mind, even to come to belief in God, but he saw the understanding that came from revelation as a catalyst for insight and thinking. This was similar to Augustine's (354-430) comment in a sermon on John 7:14-18, where he said:

Therefore do not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe that you might understand.⁴

We know truth through using our minds in conjunction with revelation. We rely on the revelation, even as we understand and interpret it with our minds, knowing that God is at work renewing our minds. This becomes not only our way of knowing, but also the truth we seek to know.

Anyone who thinks they can understand God's truth on their own, conceives of a God much too small!

¹ Plato, *The Republic*, Book VII.

² Watson, Burton, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, (Columbia University Press 1968), Ch. 2.

³ Bostrom, Nick, "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?", *Philosophical Quarterly* (2003) Vol. 53, No. 211, pp. 243-255.

⁴ Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 29.6.

ADDENDUM
POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”* (Jn. 8:32).

Truth has consequences. It effects what we do, how we think, and how we relate. With it, we have a confidence and a liberty that is otherwise missing. It provides a confidence in life, in right and wrong, and it gives purpose. We should seek to know truth!

2. *“I am the way [road], and the truth, and the life”* (Jn. 14:6).

The truth that is the integration point for understanding life is God, revealed in Jesus and confirmed by the Spirit. This is our source for understanding truth. This sets up a whole different approach to truth. Truth is no longer simply a matter of our human testing as to whose perception of reality is closer to reality. It is not even a question as to how well I measure up to some standard of how good I am at some activity or profession. It is a challenge as to whether I measure up to reality. I am on trial. The question is what I do with the truth?

This flips everything on its head. I am not the judge of truth. Truth exists and I am on trial. Am I aligned with truth or not? Do I accept or reject the amazing and shocking claims Jesus made about himself? This is where I need to spend my time, studying, praying, and thinking about Jesus!

3. *“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil... Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth”* (Eph. 6:12, 14).

Truth is important, not only for providing positive direction in your life, but it also protects you from the adversary. It should be a part of every believer's armor!