

GOD'S TRUTH

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"Truth is a good of the mind that we are seeking constantly. We all know what it is, but many find it difficult to explain to others what is meant by 'truth'. It is one of those basic experiences of life that is so simple that it is hard to find words to explain."¹ The fact is that God is truth. Although this fact was



accepted as the foundation of thought for centuries, it is now being questioned by many. It was most famous questioned by Pontius Pilate in the Gospel of St. John when Pilate asks, "What is truth?" (*Jn 18:38*) This question still puzzles many people today. Unfortunately, in an attempt to answer this question, our modern society has tried to create its own truth, instead of going to God - the origin of truth. This paper, using St. Thomas Aquinas's Summa question 16, seeks to demonstrate that God is the origin of truth.

First let us consider what is necessary for truth to exist. In order to obtain truth it must be present in the thought of the person and the thing itself, because truth is the agreement of the mind's judgment with the reality. The thought or judgment of the mind must correlate with reality for truth to exist. Therefore truth resides primarily in the intellect, in the judgment aspect of the mind and secondarily in things. There are two types of truth, formal truth and ontological truth. Formal truth is when judgment, which occurs in the intellect and reality are in conformity with each other. Ontological truth is when the being thing is conformed to the divine intellect. In bestowing being and intellect upon humans, God gives them the ability to recognize truth and contemplate it. The truth that resides in the mind is called truth of thought but the truth of a thing is called ontological truth. God in his perfect knowledge knows all things. The ontological truth is the equality of things and how the divine mind perceives these things. A thing is true as far as its form is proper to its nature. God is the source of all being and therefore the source of all truth; in order for a thing to be true, it must first have being, which means it exists in God.² *"Since in God the knowing subject, the object of knowledge and the act of knowledge are identical, it follows that God is absolute truth. By knowing himself perfectly he thereby knows all things."*³ He not only knows all truth, but he is truth.

In our modern confusion between relativism and universal or absolute truth, many times the two criteria needed for the basis of truth are not present: truth is being declared on little or no foundation. As discussed above, there must first be agreement in thought and in reality to consider if a thing or idea is in fact true. In some cases, it is easier to say what truth is not rather than what it is; if there is a disagreement between reality and the mind's judgment, truth does not reside there. For example, the common claim that there is no absolute truth is false. First of all, the statement in itself is a contradiction: the statement cannot serve as an absolute truth if there is no such thing as absolute truth. Secondly, in the common claim that there is no truth, one has to question who the origin of that specific truth or creator of that statement is. If, in reality, God is the origin of Truth, then we cannot create truth; rather truth is a gift that only God bestows. Therefore, we can only come to discover a truth about something that already exists. My intellect comes to know it. Hence the origin of truth is God. Therefore the modern confusion of relativism and the denial of absolute truth have a faulty foundation and are false.

Of course there are many explanations as to why our culture is so heavily influenced by relativism. One explanation is that the capacity of human reason has been limited to fit within the bounds of the scientific method, since we are trained to trust science over God. Those who exercise reason to the full potential - to concepts beyond the mere material - are considered prescientific or unscientific. But in reality, each man naturally questions his origins and destinations in life. St. Augustine questions, *"What does the soul desire more than truth? Why then does the soul have hungry jaws, a spiritual palate as it were, sensitive enough to judge the truth, if not in order to eat and drink wisdom, justice, truth, eternal life?"*⁴ In recent times, man has been encouraged to divorce these natural questions from reason, thus resulting in a disintegration of man. Man instead needs to broaden the horizons of reason and break free from the chains of science that

have limited his God-given capacity. The gift of man's intellect allows him to know and understand his purpose in union with the truth of who he was created to be.⁵ Often man's natural inclination to know his origins, and seek answers to the fundamental questions of life eventually leads him to the truth, which is God. *"It is the nature of human beings, and especially youth, to seek the Absolute, the meaning and fullness of life."*⁶ Man must seek the truth that transcends him; when his searching ends in himself, is when he deems himself the origin of truth which is not possible.

Many today think of truth as something objective, measurable, and scientific; *"truth is what we succeed in building and measuring by our scientific know-how."* In opposition to that, the contemporary culture also sees truth as highly subjective in that each person can only be held to their own personal truth and moral code. Without an understanding of the objectivity of truth, *"the question of universal truth – and ultimately this means the question of God – is no longer relevant."* What the culture fails to realize is that truth existed before human beings and, *"transcends our petty and limited individual consciousness. It is a question about the origin of all that is, in whose light we can glimpse the goal and thus the meaning of our common path."*⁷

Another common misconception of our time is that faith and reason are at odds. Actually, faith and reason encourage each other. Just as reason can bring about a greater understanding of faith, science and reason encourage and bring about a fuller understanding of truth. Related to this issue of the misunderstanding of the relationship between faith and reason, is a misunderstanding about the relationship between the feelings and the acquisition of truth. One's feelings alone cannot determine truth; the intellect is needed to further the comparison of thought and thing, and the comparison of intellect and thing, which determines truth. This clear distinction of emotions and feelings not determining truth is widely misunderstood and even abused in our culture. For example, people often base their actions on what they feel rather than the objective good involved. If we understood that truth could not be determined by our feelings alone we would base our actions on truth instead of feelings. God is immutable and God is truth; therefore, truth is immutable. Therefore, a 'truth' based on wavering human emotions is not in accordance with actual truth that cannot change. Truth does not change; no matter how strongly you feel about something it cannot change the facts. We can change our mind, but truth itself does not change. Since truth, by its nature, is immutable, a personal truth that changes from person to person would not be truth at all. *"But the truth of our intellect is mutable; not because it is itself the subject of change, but in so far as our intellect changes from truth to falsity, for thus forms may be called mutable. Whereas the truth of the divine intellect is that according to which natural things are said to be true, and this is altogether immutable."*⁸ Basically, Truth is changeless only in God.

Furthermore, if truth originates in man, there would be no real truth; each person would be inventing their own truth. *"Indeed, there are many who, creating their own gods, believe they need no roots or foundations other than themselves. They take it upon themselves to decide what is true or not, what is good and evil, what is just and unjust; who should live and who can be sacrificed in the interests of other preferences"*⁹ This is a scary reality that we have adopted in our society. If relativism is lived out and carried out in honesty and purity, it can only lead to a society in which laws do not exist. If truth originates in man, then each man determines his own. If this is legitimate, no one should be able to force anyone else to conform to a 'truth' that is not their own.

Among the many dangers of relativism or man creating his own truth is that man also determines his own good. In this way man can make idols of things or people placing them above the ultimate good, which is God. *"Certainly, in order to have a "good conscience" (1 Tim 1:5), man must seek the truth and must make judgments in accordance with that same truth."*¹⁰ The truth of a thing consists in the fact that it has being or is created by God and is therefore known by God. Just as good and being are equivalent, so too are truth and being. Although being and truth are the same, being comes before truth. In order for something to be true, it must first be. In the order of true and good, truth comes before good because it is more closely related to being. For example, we must know something exists before we can know it or whether it has goodness. Our knowledge precedes our appetite, so we know before we can determine or desire the good.

God is truth, for Jesus tells us in the Gospel of John, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6). As we have learned, truth resides in the intellect. Since God is pure act, his being and his intellect are one, and they are more united in him than in any other thing. Where intellect and being are one, there truth resides. In God it is such a great union that God not only obtains truth, he is truth. Therefore, God is truth, he contains all truth in his being, and truth is eternal in God alone. Created minds and intellect can know things that are eternally true, but these truths are eternally known by God alone. In God alone also is truth

immutable the truth in our intellect is mutable, not by the nature of the truth but by the nature of our intellect. God is truth and to be his disciple we must know truth and remain in it for in the truth we will be set free. (Jn 8:32). Free from all the false misconceptions of our time such as relativism and the belief that we are the origins of truth.

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¹Baker, Kenneth, S.J., Fundamentals of Catholicism, Vol. 2, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1983, 44

²Cf; Aquinas, St. Thomas, Summa 1 Q. 16 Article 5, www.newadvent.org, 2008

³Baker, p. 45-46

⁴St. Augustine, Liturgy of the Hours, Thursday of the 28th Week in Ordinary Time.

⁵Cf: Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal, Truth and Tolerance, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2004, p. 156-161

⁶Blessed John Paul II, World Youth Day Address, Toronto, Canada, August, 2002, www.vatican.va

⁷Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, Lumen Fidei, On Faith, June 29, 2013, 25

⁸St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa 1, Question 16, Article 8, newadvent.org

⁹Pope Benedict XVI, Welcoming Ceremony, World Youth Day, Madrid, Spain, August 2011.

¹⁰Blessed Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, Veritatis Splendor, August 6, 1993, 62

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