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Six Propositions about Truth

A discussion of the evidence for and the nature of objective truth

By Jim Nelson Black, Ph.D.

Joel Green's chapter in the new book, *Grace and Holiness in a Changing World*, begins by reminding us of Charles Dickens' famous first line in the novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Could there be a more apt description of the situation we find ourselves in today? Seekers of truth have never been so challenged as we are today, particularly in the academy. But in the midst of controversy and dispute, as Dr. Green notes, we've never had such an opportunity to witness for the Truth. We're having a national debate about truth today, and especially a debate about the authority of biblical Truth.

The good news is that we're here because we care about this issue, and we have a reliable standard of truth, and we want to share it with our students and with the world. But today I'd like to offer you six propositions that I hope you may find worthy of further discussion:

SIX PROPOSITIONS:

1. Truth is real. It is not a myth.
2. Truth is satisfying. It resonates with something within us.
3. Truth is inconvenient for revisionists and dissemblers.
4. Truth is the opposite of Lying, and even revisionists believe that lying is real.
5. Telling the truth can be dangerous, but ignoring the truth can be even more dangerous.
6. Truth can be learned, but the greatest threat to truth is ... Well, I'll come to that later.

RECENT HEADLINES:

1. Despite wall-to-wall media coverage of Hurricane Katrina, a survey of students' knowledge of geography taken just months after the storm revealed that a third of those tested could not find Louisiana, which had been devastated by the hurricane, on a map of the United States. Half couldn't find Mississippi, and 60 percent of 18 to 24 year-olds couldn't find Iraq, where American troops were currently engaged, on a world map.

2. What about the importance of liberty? According to two studies conducted in New England, 25 percent of undergrads could not name any of the freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. Worse, only 21 percent of college administrators knew that freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. Only 6 percent of the administrators and 2 percent of the students surveyed knew that the first freedom guaranteed by the Bill of Rights is freedom of religion. "But all's well," we hear educators saying: "At least their self esteem is high."

3. A survey from the American Institutes for Research in D.C. found that 77 percent of college seniors believe they made “significant improvements” in their writing skills in college. However, according to standardized tests, only 11 percent of these students scored in the “proficient” range in writing, and just 6 percent were “proficient” in critical thinking. No wonder! Our students are being taught in an environment where responsible judgment, wise discrimination, and hurt feelings are forbidden. Consequently, students are given little or no understanding of truth. Today’s superstars are relativists like Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish, and revisionists like Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky. Ward Churchill, who had a fleeting moment of fame around 2007, is not the exception ... nor even the worst of the lot.
4. Or take for example, UT Austin Professor Eric Pianka—who argued that there are too many people on the planet, and with any luck the Ebola virus would soon take care of the problem, eliminating up to 90 percent of the population (5.8 billions lives). And for this he received the Distinguished Science Award of the Texas Academy of Science, and was given standing ovations whenever he was invited to speak.

1. TRUTH IS REAL. IT IS NOT A MYTH.

The majority of this discussion will focus on the first proposition, dealing with these issues:

1. What does Scripture say about truth?
2. How about Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the Ancients?
3. The early Church Father (Tertullian, Origen)
4. The Post-Apostolic Fathers (Athanasias, Augustine)
5. Later philosophers: Aquinas, Descartes, Kant and others
6. And what about revivalist and theologian John Wesley? What does he say about truth?

Scripture declares that:

> “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge” (Psa. 19:1-2).

Paul expands on this view when he writes:

> “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools ...” (Romans 1:20-22).

In the High Priestly Prayer in John 17, where Jesus commissions the Church and sends believers out into the world as His disciples, He prays to His father: “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.” (v. 17-19)

Christ is the “Word” and He declared that He is “the way, the truth, and the life.” And He says we are not only to know the Truth but to be sanctified by it. Of course, the most famous passage is the one in John 18:37-38, where Jesus is standing before Pilate, and the Roman Governor asks if it’s true that Jesus has been claiming to be a king. Jesus says, yes: He is a king. Then he says: “For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” Which prompts Pilate’s arrogant response that echoes down the corridors of time: “What is truth?”

You may recall that Francis Schaeffer often spoke of God’s truth as “true Truth”—which is the idea that God is the Author of truth, he has chosen to reveal that truth to us in Himself, in His Son, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, and through the Scriptures, which are the “Word of Truth.” We believe that, even though the modern world has rejected this view. But what of the ancient philosophers and sages, who are spoken of today as such icons of wisdom? What did they believe about truth?

WHAT DID THE ANCIENTS BELIEVE?

The Greek philosophers certainly believed that truth is real. It's well known that Socrates was passionate about truth. But in the welter of competing ideas in the Greek world (5th century B.C.), Socrates believed it was necessary to test truth-claims by debate and discussion. This was the source of what we now refer to as the "Socratic Method."

Plato is of course the father of the "Platonic Ideal," which holds that there is an "ideal reality" to which all things visible aspire. This building, for example, is only one physical representation of the ideal concept of a building. But Plato did not say that about truth. He never idealized truth: in fact, Plato used the "Socratic Dialogues" in his writings to show us how Socrates probed for truth by challenging others to defend their ideas.

The Socratic method is a negative method of truth-testing. But it was used in the search for a truth that was very real. Truth was a tool for probing into the very nature of reality. With the Socratic method, truth is found by testing and eliminating everything that is not true, and by discrediting impostors, and the fact that we remember Socrates today is due to the fact that he used that tool very well. He was a relentless truth-seeker.

Aristotle's definition of truth is an expression of what we would recognize today as the "correspondence theory of truth." This is the idea that truth is really real. In the *Metaphysics* (written in the 4th century B.C.) Aristotle puts it this way: "To say of *what is* that *it is* not, or of *what is not* that *it is*, is false, while to say of *what is* that *it is*, and of *what is not* that *it is not*, is true." And statements very similar to that can be found in the writings of Plato and others.

THE PATRISTIC WRITERS

The early Christians understood that there's a spiritual aspect to the knowledge of truth that goes beyond opinion or personal judgment. Jesus said, "when ... the Spirit of Truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth..." (John 16:13). This is one of the vital missions of the Holy Spirit—to teach us, to train our ears to recognize the sound of truth. ("The language of truth.")

The early Church Fathers, who lived from the second through roughly the seventh centuries (A.D.), had remarkable insight into Christian teaching and doctrine, and they were dedicated to clarifying and setting forth the truth of Scripture. This is a tradition that began with Christ and the Apostles, and then was enriched immeasurably by the study, passion, and bold proclamations of the early Church Fathers.

Tertullian, who lived in the late second and early third centuries, was one of the most learned and outspoken of the early Church Fathers. He was a lawyer by training and converted to Christianity after he witnessed the bravery and dignity of the Christian martyrs who would rather die for their beliefs than deny the deity of Christ. Such courage, he said, could only exist if what the martyrs claimed to believe were really true.

He eventually became the Presbyter of the Church at Carthage (in North Africa) and wrote many important works in defense of Christianity and the Christian martyrs of that age. Tertullian was the foremost critic and debunker of Gnosticism, and he was bold in his criticism of the Roman judges as well.

He recognized that the attack on the Christian faith was, first and foremost, an attack on Truth. In one place he wrote, "Truth and the hatred of truth come into our world together." And he added that: "As soon as truth appears, it is regarded as an enemy. [truth] has as many foes as there are strangers to it ..." In his critique of the Gnostics, Tertullian makes this colorful remark, that "Truth does not blush." The implication is that truth has nothing to hide and no reason for shame; on the other hand, almost everything about the pagan heresies was shameful.

Gnosticism was a syncretistic religion that took a little of this and a little of that in order to achieve some sort of spiritual enlightenment, and there were bits and pieces of Christianity mixed in. But one scholar of this period said that the Gnostics were only "stealing some Christian rags to cover their heathen nakedness."[1]

In the first chapter of his *Treatise on the Soul* [entitled "It is Not to the Philosophers that We Resort for Information about the Soul But to God"] he makes this rather provocative observation:

> "For by whom has truth ever been discovered without God? By whom has God ever been found without Christ? By whom has Christ ever been explored without the Holy Spirit? By whom has the Holy Spirit ever been attained without the mysterious gift of faith?"
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> "Socrates, as none can doubt, was actuated by a different spirit. For they say that a demon clave to him from his boyhood—the very worst teacher certainly, notwithstanding the high place assigned to it by poets and philosophers—even next to, (nay, along with) the gods themselves.
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> "The teachings of the power of Christ had not yet been given—(that power) which alone can confute this most pernicious influence of evil that has nothing good in it, but is rather the author of all error, and the seducer from all truth."

Tertullian then says in Chapter III of that work that:

> "The apostle [Paul], so far back as his own time, foresaw, indeed, that philosophy would do violent injury to the truth.[2] This admonition about false philosophy he was induced to offer after he had been at Athens, had become acquainted with that loquacious city,[3] and had there had a taste of its huckstering wiseacres and talkers."

Here again we have the affirmation that truth is real, and it has a spiritual dimension.

THE FIRST BIBLE SCHOLAR

Origen was a contemporary of Tertullian, and has been called the most important scholar and expositor of Scripture in that era. He was the first genuine biblical scholar of the early Church, and he was for many years the head of the Christian academy at Alexandria, in Egypt, which housed one of the most illustrious libraries and learning centers in the world. Later he founded a Bible school at Caesarea where he remained for twenty years, until he was imprisoned, tried, and tortured by the Romans, and died of his wounds. Like Tertullian, Origen was a gifted and productive writer, and a strong defender of truth. His best known work, *De Principiis*, begins with the words:

> "All who believe and are assured that grace and truth were obtained through Jesus Christ, and who know Christ to be the Truth, agreeably to His own declaration, 'I am the truth,' derive the knowledge which incites men to a good and happy life from no other source than from the very words and teaching of Christ."

In one very compelling passage, Origen compares the Christian's hunger for truth to the emotion we feel when we see a beautifully executed work of art. He writes:

> "And as, when our eye beholds the products of an artist's labor, the mind, immediately on

[1] The recent phenomenon created by the book *The Da Vinci Code*, as most Christians will know, was a shallow attempt to resuscitate the ancient heresies of Gnosticism and goddess worship. Only ignorant and de-educated people could fall for such blatant lies, but that's where we are today. And that's part of the reason why Christians need to be prepared to speak out on these issues.

[2] For this he cites Colossians 2:8, which reads: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."

[3] The statement about "that loquacious city" refers to Luke's words in Acts 17:21, where it says: "For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing."

perceiving anything of unusual artistic excellence, burns to know of what nature it is, or how it was formed, or to what purposes it was fashioned; so, in a much greater degree, and in one that is beyond all comparison, does the mind burn with an inexpressible desire to know the reason of those things which we see done by God.

> "This desire, this longing, we believe to be unquestionably implanted within us by God; and as the eye naturally seeks the light and vision, and our body naturally desires food and drink, so our mind is possessed with a becoming and natural desire to become acquainted with the Truth of God and the causes of things."

Origen knew that God would never have given us this passion for truth if our desire could not be satisfied. And he continues:

> "Now we have received this desire from God, not in order that it should never be gratified or be capable of gratification; otherwise the love of truth would appear to have been implanted by God into our minds to no purpose, if it were never to have an opportunity of satisfaction."

As an artist first sketches out the outlines of a painting in pencil before laying down the color, he says, so God plants in our hearts a desire for truth. He writes:

> "[T]is preliminary sketch in outline is found to prepare the way for the laying on of the true colors of the painting; so, in a measure, an outline and sketch may be traced on the tablets of our heart by the pencil of our Lord Jesus Christ. And therefore perhaps is it said, 'Unto every one that hath shall be given, and be added.' By which it is established, that to those who possess in this life a kind of outline of truth and knowledge, shall be added the beauty of a perfect image in the future."[4]

At the end of Book IV, where Origen offers a Summary of his arguments, he wants to make sure that his readers do not quibble over nuances of language but that they focus their attention on the meaning and substance of what is true. He says:

> "Let every one, then, who cares for truth, be little concerned about words and language, seeing that in every nation there prevails a different usage of speech; but let him rather direct his attention to the meaning conveyed by the words, than to the nature of the words that convey the meaning ..."

In other words, especially in that part of the world and at that time in history, the truth of an idea was not limited to Greek or Latin or Hebrew, but to the intrinsic meaning of the idea and its implications. What we see, then, is that the ancients and the Church Fathers believed that truth is true because it is real. It can be tested against reality. And the Church Fathers taught that, in time, God's truth will be revealed to all men. Truth is natural, and the search for truth is natural and innate. The search for truth is a natural function of the mind upon its objects.

MOVING FORWARD IN TIME

One of the best known expressions of this view during the Middle Ages comes from Thomas Aquinas, who said: *Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus* ("Truth is the equation of thing and intellect."} which he restates in his *Summa Theologiae* as: "A judgment is said to be true when it conforms to the external reality."

From the Middle Ages until early Modern times, this view has been echoed by many great minds. Descartes said: "I have never had any doubts about truth, because it seems a notion so transcendentally clear that nobody can be ignorant of it ... the word 'truth', in the strict sense, denotes the conformity of thought with its object."

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant said: "The nominal definition of truth, that it is the

[4] The reference is of course to Matthew 25:29 (The Parable of the Talents): "For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away."

agreement of [thought] with its object, is assumed as granted." And the American philosopher William James (who wrote a great deal about religion) said: "Truth, as any dictionary will tell you, is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their 'agreement', as falsity means their disagreement, with 'reality'."And the authoritative Oxford English Dictionary begins its entry on truth with this definition: "**Truth**, *noun*. Conformity with fact; agreement with reality."[5]

So how are these "facts" perceived? How are they discovered? John Wesley often referred to himself as *homo unius libri*, that is, "a man of one book." He writes in one place that, "In the year 1729, I began not only to read, but to study, the Bible, as the one, the only standard of truth, and the only model of pure religion." The Bible was his sourcebook for understanding revealed truth. This doesn't mean, of course, that Wesley read nothing but the Bible in his search for truth, but rather that it was the one essential source.

Albert Outler, in his book *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*, traces the references in Wesley's many tracts and sermons from 1725 onward and finds that Wesley quotes, cites, or refers indirectly to the works of more than fourteen hundred different authors, including classical and contemporary writers of all stripes—philosophers, scientists, poets and playwrights, as well as the leading theologians of the day. Obviously John Wesley didn't exclude insights from many other sources, but the Scripture was his focal point, which he referred to as the "the only standard of truth."

2. TRUTH IS SATISFYING: IT RESONATES WITH SOMETHING WITHIN US.

Literary critics, among whom I spent much too much time during my graduate studies, sometimes use the German word *Einfühlung* [which means sympathetic understanding] to describe the sensation of emotional agreement and concurrence that comes when a text is just right—when it is true to the intuition and the spirit of its subject matter. Truth is like that ... When we see or hear something that is absolutely true, there's a nod of the head or an intuitive response within us that says, "Yes, that's it! That's true!"

Blaise Pascal, the French mathematician and aphorist, said that "We know the truth, not only by the reason, but by the heart." Of course, Pascal also cast a rather somber judgment on man's ability to construe and use the truth wisely when he wrote this bit of doggerel:

> "What a chimera then is man! What a novelty! What a monster, what a chaos, what a contradiction, what a prodigy! Judge of all things, feeble earthworm, depository of truth, a sink of uncertainty and error, the glory and the shame of the universe."

His judgment here was very much like that of the English poet Alexander Pope in his long poem, "An Essay on Man," where he refers to our species as the ...

> *Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled;*
> *The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!*

In other words, having access to truth doesn't automatically confer wisdom! These sages of the Age of Reason may well have foreseen what we would be discovering today.

But stepping back for a moment: There are also many declarations in the writings of the Post-Apostolic Fathers suggesting that truth stirs a deep resonance in the human soul. They believed that truth, whenever we come upon it, is affirmed by the witness of the Spirit and it can be known by its fruits. A good example is Athanasias, who was Bishop of Alexandria in the fourth century.

He begins the preamble to his work entitled *Against the Heathen* with these words: "The

[5] Several citations given here are from David Marian, "The Correspondence Theory of Truth", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2005 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), available online at http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2005/entries/truth-correspondence/.

knowledge of our religion and of the truth of things is independently manifest rather than in need of human teachers, for almost day by day it asserts itself by facts, and manifests itself brighter than the sun by the doctrine of Christ."

Another good example is Augustine, who was Bishop of Hippo (also in North Africa) in the fifth century, when the Roman Empire was in its death throes. For Augustine, Christ is not merely the Way and the Life: He is the eternal Truth, and as we know, Augustine argued passionately for the truth of Scripture in works like *The City of God*. But one of his most eloquent statements in defense of truth comes from *The Confessions* where Augustine praises Christ for saving him out of his life of sin and immorality. Here he writes passionately and poetically:

> *O eternal Truth, true love and beloved eternity.*
> *You are my God. To you do I sigh day and night.*
> *When I first came to know you, you drew me to yourself*
> *so that I might see that there were things for me to see,*
> *but that I myself was not yet ready to see them.*
> *Meanwhile you overcame the weakness of my vision,*
> *sending forth most strongly the beams of your light,*
> *and I trembled at once with love and dread.*
> *I sought a way to gain the strength I needed to enjoy you.*
> *But I did not find it until I embraced "the mediator between God and men,*
> *the man Christ Jesus, who is above all, God blessed for ever."*
> *He was calling me and saying: "I am the way of Truth, I am the life."*

Augustine argues in another place that truth is not always apparent at first blush, but that a genuine seeker of truth will find it nevertheless. Remember also the famous story he tells about walking in the garden of his mother's home at Carthage when he hears the mystical voice of a child saying over and over, *Tolo Lege, Tolo Lege*—meaning, "Take it, Read it!" This sends him to the Scriptures where he is immediately converted. His antenna was tuned to truth, and his works have had a profound influence on our understanding of the faith.

3. TRUTH IS INCONVENIENT FOR REVISIONISTS AND DISSEMBLERS.

In his important book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, the late University of Chicago professor Alan Bloom describes the attitude of today's relativist culture. He writes:

> "The danger [today] ... is not error but intolerance. Relativism is necessary to openness; and this is the virtue, the only virtue, which all primary education for more than fifty years has dedicated itself to [teaching]. Openness—and the relativism that makes it the only plausible stance in the face of various claims to truth and the various ways of life and kinds of human beings—is the great insight of our times. The true believer is the real danger. The study of history and of culture teaches that all the world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think that you are right at all."

This is the lie that millions of Americans have chosen to believe. Sigmund Freud played a role in this deception, of course, and turned the idea of truth on its head. In one place he writes:

> "Fundamentally, we only find what we need and only see what we want to see. We have no other possibility. Since the criterion for truth—correspondence with the external world–is absent, it is entirely a matter of indifference what opinions we adopt. All of them are equally true and equally false. And no one has the right to accuse anyone else of error."

Could there be a better description of Post-Modern Relativism? When modern culture decided they could be comfortable with this, society moved in short order from the belief that everyone has a right to his or her own opinion to the belief that every opinion is equally true. Relativists like Rorty, Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, and others say that “Subjective reality is the only truth.” All that matters is what’s true to me: but even Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” proves that this is false—a fact that the student whose paper I mentioned earlier totally misunderstood. Subjectivity is the lie. Reality and truth are *outside* the cave. That’s the real lesson of Plato’s metaphor.

Secular academics are totally hung-up on this, and can’t escape from the cave. Columnist Suzanne Fields tells the story of a Left-wing professor at Cornell who had his own interpretation of history—thoroughly post-modern and laden with a message of “race, class, and gender”—and for most of the semester he had been telling his class how “dead white European males” had systematically robbed the Black Man and cheated him out of his rightful place in history.

One day during a lecture on rural sociology, he made the statement that Cleopatra was, in fact, an “African-American.” After a moment of reflection, a shy sophomore raised his hand and said. “Professor, I don’t know as much as you do about rural sociology, But I can say with certainty that Cleopatra was not an African-American.” The startled professor, obviously miffed at being interrupted and challenged, said, “Oh, is that right? Please explain.” To which the student replied, “Cleopatra couldn’t have been an African-American because at the time she lived America hadn’t been discovered.” Oops! Sounds like history got in the way of the professor’s theory!

I don’t want to linger on this, but we’ve had many examples in the academy recently where those who disrespect truth have paid a price. Ward Churchill is just one example who had his 15 minutes of fame. As you may know, a faculty committee at the University of Colorado found his guilty of many failings. According to an article from *Inside Higher Ed*: “Among the violations the committee found Churchill had committed were falsification, fabrication, plagiarism, failure to comply with established standards regarding author names on publications, and a ‘serious deviation from accepted practices in reporting results from research.’ The committee also found that Churchill ‘was disrespectful of Indian oral traditions’ in his writings about an 1837 smallpox epidemic.”[6]

It only proves that sooner or later the truth will come out! In a head-to-head battle, truth is an awesome competitor. Truth incorporates history, knowledge, and experience. Like a diamond, it’s hard and lustrous; but for all its purity and beauty, truth is a cutting tool and a ruthless revealer of falsehood. It’s the revisionists’ worst nightmare, and that’s why it has been resoundingly attacked in the academy for the last hundred years.

4. TRUTH IS THE OPPOSITE OF LYING, AND EVEN REVISIONISTS BELIEVE THAT LYING IS REAL.

A favorite charge of Internet pundits and others who are angry about the War in Iraq is that “Bush lied and people died!” Whether it’s WMDs or Hurricane Katrina or the 9/11 attacks, there’s one obvious fact: These people have absolute faith in the existence of lies, even though many of them would say, on any other issue, that “Truth is relative.” Or, “I have my truth, and you have yours.” Sorry, but you can’t have it both ways. The opposite of lying is truth, which means there has to be some truth worth defending.

Mark Twain, who was no great fan of truth, once said that, “The history of our race, and each individual’s experience, are sown thick with evidence that a truth is not hard to kill, but a lie told well is immortal.” He also boasted on one occasion, “I have a higher and grander standard of principle than George Washington. He could not tell a lie. I can, but I won’t.” But to prove that Twain really knew his Scripture, he also said, that “a Lie is an abomination before the Lord ... and an ever present help in time of trouble.”

It’s been said that if you’re going to tell lies, you’d better have a good memory. Some of our

[6] “The Churchill Verdict,” *Inside Higher Ed,* May 16, 2006: <www.insidehighered.com/news/2006/05/16/churchill>

public servants in Washington must have heard that advice ... which is why they have so many aides on their staffs—to help them keep their stories straight. But on a more somber note, remember that it was Vladimir Lenin who said that, “A lie told often enough becomes the truth.” And Adolf Hitler and his generals maintained what they called “The Big Lie,” and used it to enslave and murder millions of their own people—and the world is still paying a price for that.

Lies are real, and they do exist. But, once again, what this points out is that we must also have a high regard for “the truth” as well as a serious grasp of the great danger of “the lie.” And we must insure that our students understand this as well.

5. Telling the truth can be dangerous, but ignoring the truth can be even more dangerous.

History resounds with the stories of countless men and women who have suffered for the truth. Christ and the apostles, first of all; followed by tens of thousands of Christian martyrs in the first five centuries of the Christian era. John Foxe says in *The Book of Martyrs* that “the blood of the martyrs has become the seedbed of the Church ...” According to a report on Christian persecution published in 2004, as many as 60,000 Christians are killed every year, to this day, for their faith. So clinging to the Truth of Christ can still be very costly. And there are, of course, many more who have suffered for merely speaking the truth.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn spent eight years in a Soviet Gulag for making some unflattering comments about Josef Stalin in a private letter to a friend. Prison awakened his mind. His book, *Gulag Archipelago*, chronicled the harsh life in Soviet prison camps under communist rule. For that, he was exiled from the Soviet Union in 1974 and accused of treason. But ever since that time he has been an outspoken advocate of truth, even though the intellectual elite in this country have shunned and mocked him for his strong defense of faith and democracy.

Former Russian President Boris Yeltsin sent Solzhenitsyn a birthday greeting on the occasion of the famous writer’s 75th birthday. He said that although Solzhenitsyn had suffered the hardship of war, Soviet labor camps, and exile, “nothing could deter you from your great mission of telling the truth to the whole world.” And that’s true.

In his Nobel Prize speech, Solzhenitsyn said, “One word of truth outweighs the whole world.” Less than 20 years later, the Soviet Empire was dead—a victim of its own lies and distortions. And the headlines are full of the stories of others who’ve paid a heavy price for misrepresenting truth. I don’t need to go into the scandals of the past few years, but you know what I mean. Being caught in a lie can be very costly—but to be guilty of lying, there must be a standard of truth. So all those who say “There Is No Truth,” or that “All Truths are Equal” are wrong about that.

But sometimes we have to wade into the middle of controversy to focus our energies and proclaim the truth to a world that often seems hard of hearing. Scripture tells us that “Men prefer darkness ... because their deeds are evil.” And for those who abide in darkness, who turn away from the truth, there will always be a high price to pay—whether it’s now or sometime in the future. We don’t discover truth in the easy answers—the kind the academic revisionists prefer—or in the convenient fables and social fabrications that tell us, “If it feels good, do it!” We need truth for the hard ones—the life and death ones. We need truth for those times when nothing but the truth will do.

6. Truth can be learned, but the greatest threat to Truth is graduate school.

I discovered just how serious the debate over truth had become when I began my doctoral program back in 1977. The first course I signed up for was “Philosophy of Literature,” which sounded compelling. But I soon discovered that education had changed dramatically since my undergraduate days just a few years earlier. I heard things I’d never heard or even thought about before. Suddenly I was thrown like a lamb to the slaughter into the presence of Deridda, Foucault, Sartre, Wittgenstein, and others who argued that truth was relative and unreliable. That course turned out to be an assault on truth disguised as intellectual engagement with the subtleties of language. I suspected then, as I do now, that the situation had something to do with graduate school; and recently radio host Dennis Prager helped me affirm my suspicion. He says:

> "When my son was two years old, a five-year-old bully walked over and threw him down to the ground. The bully's mother frantically ran over to her son, held him, and said, 'What's troubling you, darling?' I know nothing about this woman, but of one thing I was certain—that she had attended graduate school. I am certain of this because hers was a learned response. Most human beings would have yelled at their child, 'What are you doing?' and probably would have punished the child. You need many years of an American liberal arts education to learn that the proper response to a bully is to ask the bully what's troubling him."

Could this be the real source of danger after all? Is higher education (or education in general perhaps) the problem? Is it something about the conceit and arrogance of "the higher learning" that makes intellectuals fall for these fantastic and fraudulent beliefs? Or is the times we're living in? I can't helping thinking of the warnings of 2 Timothy 3?

> "... in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!"

Paul goes on to say:

> "For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible [men and] women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, *always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*" (vv. 1–7) [emphasis added].

Well, whatever the cause, the warning is appropriate. A personal story that's close to home involves my daughter, Alison, and a final exam she took in her last semester in college. The assignment was to parrot back to the science professor all the man-made, God-free ideas he had shared with them that semester. Alison did that, and then over the next hour after everyone else had left the room, she wrote a second paper. At the top she wrote, "Here's what I believe," and she then told the professor what God says about all those things. Fortunately, he was a fair-minded liberal; Alison made an A-plus on that exam, in part because she had the courage to stand by her convictions. But it could easily have gone another way. I'm proud of my daughter, but how many young people today care that much, or would take the risk of speaking so plainly—especially on the last final exam of their senior year? I pray that our Christian young people will always be that courageous.

In any event, I offer these six propositions simply to stir our thinking about this important issue, and I do so with this reminder: We do have the truth, and if we truly know the Truth, He will set us free

AN ACTUAL STUDENT PAPER:

> **Note:** This following student paper is full of sloppy thinking and intellectual laziness. But it nevertheless reflects the postmodern beliefs of the academy that there is no truth except the one you make up for yourself. It may take generations to correct the errors our society has ingested, but this paper (now available on the Internet to millions of undergrads to crib) is an example of just how far things have gone.

What Is Truth?

For Philosophy 101

What is truth? What is the truth, of what truth is? There are many answers to this question. Each answer may lie different, inside of each person. Only you know what truth is to you. In this essay I will describe what truth is to me, how I verify truth, and whether I believe truth to be good or bad. I will then compare and contrast my idea of truth, to that of Plato's truth, from his ideas in "Allegory Of The Cave."

First of all we have, what is truth to me? Well for my definition of truth we can turn right to Mr. Webster and see that he says, that truth is: "sincerity or honesty"

To me truth is exactly what you think or how you feel. Truth to me is not veiled by anything, making the real truth either more positive or negative. Truth is simply what's on your mind, exactly how you feel, its just plain and simple and right down to the point. How do you arrive at my kind of truth? We'll it's simple: as stated before, you simply tell how you feel, being both honest and sincere.

Now the tougher part, how is truth verified? Truth is verified by whether it's honest and sincere by who, or where it came from. This means for example, is a person telling you really that they like your new haircut, or they just saying "yes" they do, to avoid a possibly touchy moment. Truth can only be verified by whether or not it was genuine and from the heart.

This test of verification is the only test to see whether or not the "truth" was genuine. How else could something be true, if where it came from was not genuine itself? To wrap it all up, truth is simply whether or not a person is saying what is at the bottom of their heart or not.

Now we move onto, is truth all good, like Plato believes, or can some truth be bad, evil and ugly? I personally feel that, unlike Plato, truth can be all good, bad, evil and ugly. For instance again with the haircut, you could honestly tell someone their hair cut is hideous. But is that good truth? To me that's not a "good truth". So what is a "good truth" then? A "good truth" to me is one that helps a person, supports a person, or does anything else to a person in a positive way. So then you may ask what are the "bad, evil, and ugly truths"? Well those are the exact opposite of the "good truths", they are ones that will negatively effect a person. In the end though, a "bad truth" may be the best for the person. For example, you may have to tell someone the truth even if it may hurt their feelings at first, but as long as that truth is honest, sincere and from the bottom of your heart, then it's the honest (or genuine) truth for that situation.

Now lets look at some of Plato's ideas of truth from "Allegory of The Cave". Let's start by looking at Plato's definition of what it takes to reach the genuine truth:

"And suppose once more he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and held fast until he is forced into the presence of the sun himself………"

I agree with Plato on this issue. That to reach the genuine truth, the ascent, or journey it will take, may not be an easy one. And likely as in “Allegory of the Cave” you have to be dragged up that ascent, and forced to see the genuine truth (or the sun). Now I don’t mean you’ll have to be physically made to see or tell the genuine truth, but it may take other people coaching you or pushing you along the way, to see that genuine truth.

Next Plato goes on to describe what it is like when you first see the genuine truth (or the sun): “…….is he not likely to be pained and irritated? When he approached the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities……”

Once again I agree with Plato on this fact too. When you first see the genuine truth, it may hurt you and dazzle you, just as the morning sun beaming trough your windows may dazzle you, when you first wake up in the morning. The genuine truth will take some getting used to, you’ll have to accommodate to not being in the dark anymore. You now have to adjust yourself to being in the light, of a whole new world, once you have entered the genuine truth.

The biggest point of Plato’s I don’t agree with is that of that:

“Plato’s concept of truth is an absolute one, regardless of the observer.”

I don’t agree that there is only one truth, and that, that truth is the genuine truth. I believe that each of us have our own genuine truth inside of ourselves. It just depends on whether or not we use that genuine truth, which lies within each and every one of us.

In conclusion I have defined what my definition of truth is:

“One that sincere and honest, one that comes from the heart, whether good, bad or evil, as long as its honest, sincere, and genuine, then its your own truth.”

I have also shared what aspects of Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” I agree with, and the one I don’t agree with. But remember: Truth is only what it means to one person, and only you know what truth means to you.

From “Other People’s Papers”: http://www.oppapers.com/read.php?id=38573

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