

GOD'S TRUTH: "WHAT IS TRUTH?"

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When we speak about God's truth, there are so many aspects to consider. But, let us begin with John 8:38, the well-known bible verse where Pontius Pilate, asks Jesus a fundamental question "What is truth?" In Latin, Quid est veritas?



This is a question which (for centuries) has always been in people's minds. It is one of the most important questions in life, and just about every human person (at some point in their lives) not only has asked it but has searched for the answer as well.

Our human reason is capable of knowing the existence of God, and this ultimately leads (all of us) to know with conviction that He is the decisive Truth. And, it is also, our very own reason (our intellect) which allows us to come to know God's divine truth.

"If we accept human reason as trustworthy, we must recognize the fact of the existence of God".¹

God's character trait of trustworthiness and reliability are grounded in His metaphysical being as the ultimate Truth.

"The sum of your word is truth; and every one of your righteous ordinances endure forever. And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true, this is why God's promises always come true. God is Truth itself, whose words cannot deceive. This is why one can abandon oneself in full trust to the truth and faithfulness of his word in all things."²

Someone who denies the existence of God will also deny his divine truth. Therefore, in order to know God's truth, the human person has to (necessarily) believe in His existence.

"Following Anselm's definition of God as uniting essence and existence, Aquinas took the words of God to Moses in the burning bush, "I Am Who Am" (Ex 3:14), as revealing that, in Aristotelian terms, God is "pure being": that which exists fully and without limitation. Central to Aquinas' thought was the 'analogy of being". Since God is the ultimate cause of all things, some of His perfections can be found in His creation."³

Furthermore, the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that God's truth is his wisdom which commands the whole created order and governs the world. God is the only One who can give us true knowledge of every created thing in relation to Himself.

"Saint Bernard of Clairvaux taught us three degrees of truth, also known as the three degrees of perception on truth; the truth in oneself, the truth in one's neighbor and the Truth in itself".⁴

God is Truth. He is the First Cause and the Highest and most Perfect Truth.

"Truth in general is the conformity between mind and being. But this conformity can be rooted either in mind or in being. If located in the mind as being conformed in its own knowledge to the real being that it knows, this is epistemological truth, truth as found in the mind as related to the

being known. But, if this conformity can be located in the being itself as related to its knowers, actual or potential. This is known as ontological truth: the truth of things themselves as related to intelligence".⁵

As Saint Thomas Aquinas proposes it in his *Summa*, it is the divine mind that "measures" the being of creatures. Thus all beings are actually known by God's mind.

"Since the true is in the intellect in so far as it is conformed to the object understood, the aspect of the true must needs pass from the intellect to the object understood, so that also the thing understood is said to be true in so far as it has some relation to the intellect. Now a thing understood may be in relation to an intellect either essentially or accidentally. It is related essentially to an intellect on which it depends as regards its essence; but accidentally to an intellect by which it is knowable".⁶

To understand Saint Thomas' thought on God's truth, it is important to differentiate between an essence and an accident. Essence is what makes a thing be the particular kind of thing that it is, for example, a dog, a circle, a train, a human being. An accident is a reality which cannot exist independently, but only exists in a substance. For example, weight, shape, height, number, etc.

Saint Thomas teaches us that we cannot judge a thing by what is in it accidentally, but by what is in it essentially. A perfect example of this would be a human being. A human being whether he is tall or thin, short or overweight, dark hair or brown hair, it is still a human being.

In Saint Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*, we learned that the truth of each thing is a property of the essence which is immutably attached to it. And, this makes perfect sense, because in our intellect we know a thing by what it is and by what it is not. Our intellect is limited. However, God's intellect is not limited. He sees and knows all things perfectly, precisely because of who He is.

Truth is a reality in the intellect, not in words; words are true only because they express truth in the intellect. This is the reason why truth only resides in the intellect. As Saint Thomas lays before us in his *Summa Theologiae* "a thought or a word is true from the fact that a thing is, not because a thing is true".

"The intellect is not deceived in knowing what a thing is, just as the sense is not deceived in its proper sensible. All the knowledge of the divine intellect is in the manner of an intellect knowing what a thing is. It is impossible, therefore, that there be error or deception or falsity in the divine knowledge".⁷

Therefore, since God is His Essence, when we speak of the truth of the intellect or of the truth of a thing, God is His truth. Furthermore, in God, we can find pure Truth, because there is nothing false in His Being.

Truth resides primarily in the intellect, and secondarily in things means that truth is a reality in the intellect, not substantially in things. For example, a dog is not true in itself, but is a true dog insofar as it is ordered to being recognized as such by the intellect.

Furthermore, Saint Thomas states: "Truth makes being clear and evident". What he is saying is that when the being of things (both their act of being, which means that they exist rather than not at all, and their essence, "what kind of being they are") come to be perceived acutely by the intellect, that is truth.

Some of the attributes we know about God are that He is Simple, One, Infinite, Immutable, Spiritual, Good, Merciful, Just, Eternal, Truth, and Intelligent. We know He is the Creator of the universe, and that He is not limited by time or space. We also apprehend that He is not a material being. He is Omniscient and Omnipotent. Once we appreciate who God is (in our imperfect humanity and our limited human comprehension), we can also experience what He is not. However, when we speak about God's Truth,

it is essential to speak about His intelligence.

“God is the creator and sustainer of all things. He is, for example, the creator and sustainer of all physical and chemical elements and all living organisms. Now, every one of these things has an intelligible structure and fits within a system of intelligible structure - a system in which things act and react with each other in certain specific ways determined by the system. This intelligible correlation of part with part (of which our intelligence grasps the tiniest measure) is something established by God. An intelligible correlation of part with part is the kind of thing we normally refer to as a “plan”, as an “act of intelligence”. So it is reasonable to affirm that all the vast intelligibility, which the world is given by its Creator, is the work of intelligence and therefore that the Creator is intelligent”.⁸



God’s intelligence will always surpass ours; His will always be infinitely greater. It is futile to even compare it. He is the source of all being, therefore His Truth will always be paramount to ours, not only because His intellect transcends ours, but because He is Truth, Himself.

Truth in the intellect is the result of being in things. Truth in things is their relationship to the truth in the intellect. For example, truth in the intellect is provoked by the being / reality of things I judge to be true; the things I judge to be true are then said to be true in relation to my intellect.

The act of knowing truth is what the intellect is for. Saint Thomas, further on continues to teach us in His Summa Theologiae that truth resides in the intellect by composing and dividing. Once our intellect knows the truth, it then divides it, for example, by making distinctions, such as roses, tulips; and then it composes it, in this particular example, it would be under the category of flowers.

Furthermore, whether true and being are convertible terms. And, this is in the affirmative, because what really is is also true. Wherever there is being, there is truth. Another way of saying this is: anything that has being is knowable. And, just as good adds to what is desirable, true adds in relation to the intellect. Being cannot be understood, unless being is intelligible.

Saint Thomas explains that although, the good and the true are convertible with being, they do differ logically.

The judgment of what is good depends upon the prior judgment of what is true. Goodness depends upon truth. Therefore, true is prior to good.

God is Truth, there is no denying this. Our Lord said so Himself in John 14:6 “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”. This well-known bible verse is enough for us (Christians) to know with conviction that God is the Truth.

“While Aquinas thought enjoyed preeminence in the Church, it was by no means universally followed. Pope Leo XIII initiated the “Thomistic Revival”, affirming that Catholics should embrace truth wherever it is found but extolling Aquinas as the primary philosopher, the source of a unified view of reality that all Catholics should achieve.”⁹

It is not that God contains some of the truth, or that He knows the truth, but that He is Truth. According to Saint Thomas, the truth of our intellect is according to its conformity with its principle, to the things from

which it receives knowledge.

This refers back to the simplicity and oneness of God. God knows all truths; man knows many truths. Only in God is truth eternal although we can know things that are eternally true. But they are not true we know them, but because God knows them. Man knows changeless truth, but it is changeless only in God. Our minds do not remain changeless (e.g., culture, forgetfulness).¹⁰

God alone is eternal. He is everywhere. And, He knows all things. Our intellect is not eternal.

“Before any truth existed, we could not say that truth existed, only the divine intellect (whose truth is eternal). Furthermore, the truth of the divine intellect is immutable”.¹¹

However, the truth of our intellect is immutable, because (as human beings) we can change our minds constantly, and forget things easily. Not so in God, He doesn't forget things. He is all-knowing. He knows our thoughts (even) before we think them.

Finally, eventhough we are speaking about God's Truth in reference to Saint Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae, we must mention (at least) briefly, God's revealed truth (which is found) in His only Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”. What He was ultimately saying was very simple and straightforward, and that is that you don't need to look any further, “ I Am It”.

You want to know the truth, “I Am the Truth”. You want to know the way. “I am the Way”. You want to have life, “I am the Life”.

Jesus came to bear witness to the truth, proclaiming by His words and deeds, that God is indeed Truth and Love. Jesus Christ is the only One who knows the Father and the only One who can reveal Him to us. “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32). Jesus is the culmination of all truth. If we want to know the depth of God's Truth, let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, who is ultimately Truth Himself.

To recognize Jesus is to perceive the Fullness of Truth.

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4 *The Steps of Humility & Pride* - Page 9 - Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1989

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6 *Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, q 2, a.3, Second and Revised Edition, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920), at New Advent, www. New Advent.org*
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10 *Toolin, Cynthia Dr. - Class Notes - Week 7 - One and Triune God course.*

11 *Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, q 2, a.3, Second and Revised Edition, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920), at New Advent, www. New Advent.org*
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Back to Main Page of Teachings of SCTJM...



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