

TRUTH

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Abstract: Reprinted from *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*, ed. George Killian (4 vols., 2012) and the author's article in *his Christ As Centre and Circumference* (Verlag fuer Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2012).

Pontius Pilate's ironic question, "What is truth?" poses the central epistemological question for both philosophy and theology.

Philosophically, the fundamental issue is between those who hold truth to be absolute and those who maintain relativistic views of the nature of truth. Absolutists have generally maintained a *correspondence* understanding (truth is what corresponds to external reality), whilst relativists commonly hold to a *coherence* view (truth is found in internal consistency). Boston University philosopher Edgar Sheffield Brightman endeavoured to combine these insights by defining truth as *systematic consistency* (a true statement fits the facts of the external world and is internally consistent), and that approach was echoed theologically by Edward John Carnell (*An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*). More recently, the so-called Post-modernists have embraced a scepticism lying somewhere between solipsism (there is no external reality) and existentialism (one's personal existence determines the character of things): "My world is not necessarily your world, nor my story your story."

Theologically, a Post-modernist approach is generally regarded as incompatible with the thrust of Christian revelation, which asserts that the world is God's objective creation and the de facto object of his redemptive love in Christ. Moreover, where consistency appears to conflict with factuality (as in the case of Trinitarian doctrine or the tension between divine election and human freewill), theology chooses *fact*—for "God's ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts."

Among contemporary theologians, ideological conflict is often seen between truth as *objective event* (the factual reliability of the written Word, the Scriptures, and the events of the human life of Christ, the living Word) and truth as *personal commitment* (Jesus' affirmation that he personally is "the way, the truth, and the life"). But the two are surely not incompatible, since, in the final analysis, it is the truth of God's objective revelation which

justifies commitment to its personal centre: Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Bibliography. G. Pitcher, ed., *Truth* (“Contemporary Perspectives in Philosophy”; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1964); *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (8 vols. and Supplement; New York: Macmillan 1967-1996), arts. “Truth,” “Coherence Theory,” “Correspondence Theory”; J. W. Montgomery, “The Theologian’s Craft,” in his *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1970); J. W. Montgomery, *Tractatus Logico-Theologicus* (Bonn, Germany: Verlag fuer Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2004).