

[1960. In *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*. Everett F. Harrison, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.]

TRUTH The first Christian theologian to attempt any systematic exposition of the concept of truth was Augustine. His immediate aim was to refute skepticism. If man's mind is incapable of grasping truth, particularly if man is incapable of grasping the truth about God, the morality and theology are impossible. (See KNOWLEDGE. For an account of Augustine's epistemology, see B. B. Warfield, *Studied in Tertullian and Augustine*.) Augustine distinguished four senses of the term truth. First, truth is the affirmation of what is; e.g., three times three is nine, and David was king of Israel. Second, every reality (particularly the immutable, supersensible ideas) can be considered as an affirmation of itself: it is true when it merits the name it claims. In this sense beauty and wisdom are truth. Third, the Word of God, Jesus Christ, is the Truth because he expresses the Father. And fourth, in the realm of sensible objects, such as plants and animals, there is a resemblance, but only a resemblance, to the primary realities of point two above. Strictly speaking, a visible tree is not a true tree. But as the resemblance is real, even sensible objects have a degree of truth.

Many contemporary students of the Bible fearing that Augustine or others are too deeply influenced by Greek philosophy, attempt to specify the several senses in which truth is used in the Scripture. Hoskyns and Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament* (Rev. ed. pp. 33 ff.), after quoting Eph. 4:20-24, seek for a conception of truth that will have "not an intellectual but a moral and spiritual effect upon them." The common conception of truth as "a fact" or "what is real," so they assert, "has no moral or spiritual significance." The Hebrew notion of truth, with its close relation to God, is considered un-Greek. So also Gerhard Kittel (TWNT, Vol. I, pp. 240 ff.) distinguishes, more cautiously perhaps, between Hebrew and Greek usage, citing several passages in the Platonic dialogues.

One should, however, bear in mind that the technical concepts of the philosophers are hardly ever used by the majority of the population, whether in ancient Greece or modern America. The Bible, too, is written in colloquial language, and the sense in which it uses the term truth are not so different from colloquial usage anywhere.

One should also bear in mind that moral and spiritual truth is as much truth as mathematical, scientific, and historical truth. Non-intellectual truth is unthinkable. It is not true that the common conception of truth as a fact or what is real "has no moral or spiritual significance." We need only to recall that God gave the Ten Commandments.

Furthermore, the Greek philosophers did not divorce truth from moral and spiritual values. Plato went so far as to teach, to the consternation of the truth automatically guarantees a moral life. Both Pythagoreanism and Neoplatonism were systems of salvation; and even the Stoics and Epicureans made ethics the culmination of philosophy.

The differences between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Greek philosophies are rather to be sought in the nature and the method of the salvation proclaimed, in the concept of sin, of redemption, and the specific norms of morality; and not in the usage of the word truth. The relation between God and truth in the Scriptures is indisputably quite different from anything found in Greek philosophy, mainly because the concept of God is so different. It is in such theological content, not in philological usage, that the important distinctions are to be found.

The usage of the words in the Scripture supports this conclusion. Plain, ordinary, factual truth is the point of Gen. 42:26, “Ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you” (Cf. Deut. 13:14; 17:4, 22:20; Prov. 12:19; Jer. 9:3) Esth. 9:30 concerns legally certified information, and Josh. 2:12 points to a private oath.

It is not a different meaning but precisely the same meaning when the veracity of divine revelation is asserted. God tells the truth; he tells what is so; his assertions are correct. Cf. Dan. 8:26; 10:1; Pss. 19:9; 119:160.

For the NT Kittel lists six different meanings of the word truth, but adds that “in many individual cases the distinction is not certain.” One of the six meanings is “that which has existence or duration.” It is true that truth exists or endures, but it is not in this sense that Eph. 4:21 and Gal 2:5, 14 define truth.

Similarly one can rely on the truth without defining truth as “that on which man can rely.” Rom. 15:8 is not thus to be pressed; Cor. 7:14, 11:10; and Phil 1:18 be used for this purpose.

Rather, all these usages are derivative from the basic meaning of “the actual fact” or “the truth of an assertion.” Cf. Mark 12:14, 32; Luke 4:25; Acts 26:25; Rom. 1:18, 25. It is not another and different meaning of the term, but exactly the same meaning, in the NT as in the OT, when it is applied to correct doctrine or right belief. Cf. II Cor. 4:2; 6:7, 13:8; I Tim. 2:4, II Tim. 3:7.

Like other words, truth too can be used figuratively, by metonymy, in which the effect is substituted for the cause. Thus when Christ says, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” the word truth is just as figuratively as the word life. As Christ is the cause of life, so is he the cause of truth. That water freezes and that a sinner may be justified by faith are true because Christ creatively said, Let it be so.

GORDON H. CLARK