



CHAPTER ONE

The Divinity–Truth Connection

Thomas Aquinas begins his most comprehensive theological work, the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, by identifying the final cause of all intellectual endeavors. He writes:

Now, the end of each thing is that which is intended by its first author or mover. But the first author and mover of the universe is an intellect, as will be later shown. *The ultimate end of the universe must, therefore, be the good of an intellect. This good is truth. Truth must consequently be the ultimate end of the whole universe, and the consideration of the wise man aims principally at truth.* So it is that, according to His own statement, divine Wisdom testifies that He has assumed flesh and come into the world in order to make the truth known: ‘For this was I born and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth’ (John 18:37). (Aquinas, *SCG* 1.1.2)¹

The chief end of the intellect, then, is to pursue truth. The wise man, however, should not be satisfied by the investigation of any mundane truth but should rather focus his energy on ‘that truth which is the origin of all truth, namely, which belongs to the first principle whereby all things are’ (Aquinas, *SCG* 1.2.2). For Thomas, this first principle

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 1: *God*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (1265; repr. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 60; emphasis added. Anton C. Pegis, in fact, characterizes the *Summa Contra Gentiles* as ‘a work devoted to the exposition and defense of divine truth’ (Anton C. Pegis, General Introduction to *Summa Contra Gentiles*, by Thomas Aquinas [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014], 32).

and origin of truth is the God of the Bible ‘who is truth one and simple’ (Aquinas, *SCG* 1.9.1).

Thomas was not the first theologian to articulate this deep-rooted connection between God and truth,² and many thinkers have professed this connection since the Dominican friar’s death.³ Indeed, even secular philosophers such as Simon Blackburn, an outspoken opponent of theism, have noted the connection.⁴ Blackburn writes, ‘There is an air of divinity that hangs over the concept of truth,’ and he frequently uses religious language to describe truth as possessing

2. For instance, significant figures in classical theism such as Augustine and Anselm had addressed the relationship between God and truth well before Thomas. For a sample of Augustine’s writings concerned with the relationship between God and truth, see Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, The Fathers of the Church, trans. David L. Mosher (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 37, q.1; Augustine, *Eighty-Three*, 42, q.9; Augustine, *The Usefulness of Belief*, in *Earlier Writings*, The Library of Christian Classics, ed. and trans. J. H. S. Burleigh (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 318; Augustine, *The Soliloquies*, in *Earlier Writings*, The Library of Christian Classics, ed. and trans. J. H. S. Burleigh (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 24; Augustine, *Of True Religion*, in *Earlier Writings*, The Library of Christian Classics, ed. and trans. J. H. S. Burleigh (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 254. For Anselm’s views, see Anselm, *On Truth*, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, Oxford World Classics, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). This principle continued to transcend Thomas as the Westminster Confession of Faith emphasized the relationship between God and truth listed above in sections 1.1, 1.4, 1.5, 2.1, 8.3, 18.2, 21.6, and 23.3 (Westminster Confession of Faith [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2015]). This is reiterated in the London Baptist Confession of Faith in sections 1.1, 1.4, 1.5, 2.1, 8.3, 14.2, and 20.6 (The Baptist Confession of Faith 1689 [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012]).

3. Thomas is frequently described as a Dominican monk, but this is technically incorrect. See Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibetal Questions*, trans. Turner Nevitt and Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), li, lv; Richard J. Reagan, Introduction to *Compendium of Theology*, by Thomas Aquinas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5.

4. In terms of religious affiliation, Blackburn adopts the term ‘infidel.’ For more information concerning Blackburn’s religious opinions, including his campaign for a less religious society and the problems of theism as he perceives them, see Rick Lewis, ‘Interview with Simon Blackburn,’ in *The God Issue, Philosophy Now* 99 (2013). Blackburn has written numerous books concerning truth theory, including Simon Blackburn and Keith Simmons, eds., *Truth*, Oxford Readings in Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Simon Blackburn, *Truth: A Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Simon Blackburn, *On Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). He also serves as the editor of the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, which may explain why some definitions within the dictionary have a noticeably anti-theistic bias.

‘omnipresence’ and ‘authority.’⁵ Furthermore, he approvingly quoted a pragmatist who entitled the consensus opinion fated to be achieved by researchers as the ‘predestinate opinion.’⁶

In secular journalism, the connection between God and truth has been suggested by *Time Magazine*, which featured nearly identical cover photos more than fifty years apart asking the questions, ‘Is God Dead?’ and ‘Is Truth Dead?’, respectively.⁷ The editors of *Time* were so committed to drawing this connection between God and truth that they produced the latter cover by hand as they ‘could find no modern type foundry which has an exact interpretation of the one used on the original cover.’⁸ The lengths that the editors of *Time* were willing to go, to draw a comparison between God and truth suggest that the connection between the two transcends religious adherence and can be recognized across disciplines both sacred and secular. Theologians, philosophers, journalists, and the laity all recognize one common idea – as God goes, so goes truth. As the Lutheran scholar Jordan Cooper writes, ‘Once truth is divorced from God, and hence from any value or inherent goodness, its foundation has already collapsed.’⁹

This work will emphasize the aforementioned divinity–truth connection by demonstrating that God is the source and definition of metaphysical Truth and the provider of all creaturely meaning. Unlike humans, God does not receive knowledge from His creatures, but instead knows all things through the knowledge of His own essence. God’s comprehensive self-knowledge includes the knowledge of all creation because God knows how His essence is imitated by His

5. Blackburn, *On Truth*, 13, 32-33. He continues, ‘Deception is an insult to this divinity, as well as an insult to its target. . . . Sometimes we have to settle for mere opinion or guesswork, but the god of truth is better served by attendant deities, such as reason, justification and objectivity’ (Blackburn, *On Truth*, 13).

6. Blackburn, *On Truth*, 40. The full quote from C. S. Peirce reads, ‘No modification of the point of view taken, no selection of other facts for study, no natural bent of mind even, can enable a man to escape the *predestinate opinion*. This great law is embodied in the conception of truth and reality.’

7. See ‘Is God Dead?’ *Time Magazine* 87, no. 14 (1966); ‘Is Truth Dead?’ *Time Magazine* 189, no. 12 (2017).

8. See D. W. Pine, ‘Is Truth Dead? Behind the Time Cover,’ *Time*, March 23, 2017, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://time.com/4709920/donald-trump-truth-time-cover/>.

9. Jordan Cooper, *In Defense of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful: On the Loss of Transcendence and the Decline of the West* (Ithaca: Just and Sinner, 2021), 60.

creatures. Creatures receive their being from God and, therefore, receive their perfections by participating in the likeness of the divine essence. If a creature has life, for instance, it is because God has shared pure, unlimited life with the creature as fitting to its finite mode of existence. This rule, known as the *modus principle*, applies to all creaturely perfections – wisdom, truth, beauty, being, etc. Any derivative good that may be found in a creature can first be found perfectly and eminently in the Creator. In this way, creatures receive their truth by participating in the first Truth, God Himself.¹⁰

The Biblical Case for the Divinity– Truth Connection

That a divinity–truth connection exists cannot be denied by Bible-believing Christians. Scripture presents the God of Israel as one who is ‘abounding in lovingkindness and truth’ (Exod. 34:6, cf. Gen. 24:27; Pss. 57:3 [LXX 56:4]; 61:7 [LXX 60:8]; 89:14 [LXX 88:15]).¹¹ This God of truth is ontologically different than man, as He *cannot* lie, does not repent, and always fulfills what He has promised to do (Heb. 6:18, Num. 23:19, 1 Sam. 15:29, Titus 1:1-2).¹² As Thomas Schreiner writes, ‘He wouldn’t

10. Mark McIntosh summarizes this argument as such: ‘Few points have emerged more clearly throughout this book than the intense wonder and joy that awaken in the exponents of the divine ideas tradition as they contemplate the Trinitarian ground of all creatures. Moreover for them this wondering joy is really a threefold awareness: first, that in knowing Godself God knows the cherishable and inclusive truth of all creatures; second, that this eternal act of self-knowing is the ground of truth itself, the very source and transformative goodness of all truth; and third, more wonderfully still, this divine act of self-knowing – in which God knows all creatures and in which truth itself is established – is also the basis of God’s infinite and inexhaustible joy, the beatitude or happiness that is the very life of God.’ See Mark A. McIntosh, *The Divine Ideas Tradition in Christian Mystical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 167.

11. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are retrieved from the New American Standard Bible (NASB) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002). Some English translations, such as the ESV, render the passages from Psalms with the term ‘faithfulness’ instead of ‘truth,’ but the LXX uses *alēthia* rather than *pistis* on each occasion. Truth may necessarily include an aspect of faithfulness, but the LXX translators chose not to employ *pistis* in these passages even though they did elsewhere.

12. For a classical theist’s explanation of the divine ‘repentance’ terminology found in Scripture, see Steven J. Duby, “‘For I Am God, Not a Man’: Divine Repentance and the Creator–Creature Distinction,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 12, no. 2 (2018): 149–69.

be God if he could lie.¹³ This repeated biblical theme suggests that truth, however it may be defined, is grounded in the divine nature.¹⁴

Indeed, God associates Himself with truth in Isaiah 65. In this passage, God says, ‘... he who is blessed in the earth will be blessed by *the God of truth*; And he who swears in the earth will swear by *the God of truth*; ...’ (Isa. 65:16).¹⁵ Blessings from God are elsewhere associated with truth in Psalm 85:

I will hear what God the LORD will say; For He will speak peace to His people, to His godly ones; ... Lovingkindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth springs from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. Indeed, the LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its produce (Ps. 85:8-12 [LXX 84:11-13]).

Likewise, God brings judgment against those who deny truth. Isaiah 59:14 cites the lack of justice, righteousness and truth within His covenant community as an example of the wickedness that has incited His judgment. Indeed, God desires ‘truth in the innermost being’ (Ps. 51:6 [LXX 50:8]), and this desire is demonstrated by the commands against lying and false testimony throughout the Old and New Testaments (Exod. 20:16; Prov. 6:16-19; 12:22; 19:9; Col. 3:9-10; Eph. 4:25; Rev. 21:8).¹⁶

13. Thomas Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Andreas J. Köstenberger, and Thomas R. Schreiner (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015), 203.

14. Herman Bavinck, citing Augustine, explains this difference by writing, ‘He is pure being. *He does not possess but is the truth*. “O Truth, which you truly are!”’ See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 209; emphasis added. See Augustine, *Confessions*. Oxford World Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 10.41, 7.10, 12.25.

15. Of course, it should be noted that according to the evangelical doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration, all the verses cited throughout Scripture would be examples of God’s self-identification as the God of truth, even when He is not the explicit speaker. Still, it is noteworthy that in these examples, God explicitly draws this distinction Himself rather than have it applied to Him by others. The ‘God of truth’ is a title that God freely chooses to apply to Himself.

16. This abbreviated list shows God’s command against lying across the testaments. Other verses concerning God’s hatred of lying include but are not limited to the following: Lev. 19:11; Pss. 5:6; 31:18; 34:13; 58:3; 101:7; 119:163; 120:2; Prov. 12:5, 19; 13:5; 14:5, 25; 19:5, 22; 21:6; 26:18-19, 28; Jer. 23:32; Hosea 4:2; Zeph. 3:13; Matt. 15:18-20; Luke 16:10; James 3:14; 1 Pet. 3:10. Furthermore, lying is not limited to uttering false propositions but also includes the commands issued against dishonesty in business and ethics such as described in Prov. 11:1.

In one of the most memorable expressions in Scripture, the incarnate Son proclaims Himself to be ‘the way, and *the truth*, and the life’ (John 14:6). John introduces readers to this Son within the first chapter of his Gospel as one who, like the Father, is ‘full of grace and truth’ (John 1:14).¹⁷ As such, even though no one has seen the Father, ‘the only begotten God’ displays two of the former’s chief characteristics – grace and truth (John 1:18). It is not surprising that when Jesus explains His kingdom mission by proclamation of the truth, Pilate, who is ignorant of Jesus’ true identity, responds with the quintessential postmodern question, ‘What is truth?’ (John 18:38).¹⁸ ‘Jesus is God’s embodied truth claim,’ writes Kevin Vanhoozer, ‘a covenant proposition made personal (John 14:6), whose history displays how things ultimately are (or will be).’¹⁹ Similarly, Thomas described Jesus as *ille homo esset ipsa divina veritas* – ‘this human being is divine truth itself.’²⁰

Likewise, in three of five passages concerned with the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit is identified as ‘the Spirit of truth’ (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). D. A. Carson explains, ‘Coming so soon after 14:6, where Jesus claims to be the truth, “the Spirit of truth” may in part define the Paraclete as the Spirit who bears witness to the truth, *i.e.* to the truth that Jesus is.’²¹ Jesus’ assertion that the Spirit of Truth will testify about Him

17. Some have argued that *alētheia* is used in John’s prologue to demonstrate ‘covenant faithfulness’ or ‘steadfastness.’ For example, see C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1958), 139. However, as A. C. Thiselton surveys the Johannine usage of *alētheia*, he concludes, ‘[T]he evangelist probably took it to mean “divine reality” in a more strongly ontological sense (cf. v. 17) as he understands *alētheia* in 4:23; 8:44; 14:6; 17:17; 18:37d.’ See A. C. Thiselton, ‘Truth,’ *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3:89. Thiselton is positively quoting R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 1:273.

18. It is interesting to note that some modern and postmodern skeptics proclaim Pilate as the clear winner of this exchange and hero of the narrative. For more info, see Bruce D. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-2.

19. Kevin Vanhoozer, ‘Truth,’ *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 819.

20. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, vol. 2, *Chapters 6–12*, trans. Fabian Larcher and James A. Weisheipl, 3 vols., Thomas Aquinas in Translation (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 8.188

21. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 500.

strengthens Carson’s argument (John 15:26). As such, the triune life is one of consistent proclamation of truth by truth itself.²² Believers, then, may be pulled into the triune life as Jesus tells His disciples that the ‘Spirit of truth’ is the divine person who leads them into ‘all the truth’ (John 16:13). Elsewhere, John contrasts the Spirit of God with the spirit of the antichrist. In so doing, John encourages his readers to listen to the gospel message and differentiate the ‘spirit of truth’ from the spirit of error (1 John 4:2-6).

As has been shown, Christians cannot separate the concept of truth from the doctrine of God without subverting a wealth of biblical texts. However, while Scripture makes it clear that the divinity–truth connection exists, it does not articulate a specific definition of ‘metaphysical’ truth.²³ In other words, the Bible expresses truth by teaching readers that which is true, and thus affirms that something called ‘truth’ exists in some capacity, but it does not explain how best to understand that which it names ‘truth.’ This observation comes with a host of difficulties and can be linked to heated debates regarding the reality of abstract objects, the different interpretations of nominalism and realism, and what it means for something to ‘exist.’

While some of these topics will be briefly discussed in later chapters, the point at this juncture is to acknowledge that the authors of Scripture presupposed that truth meant *something* without explicitly stating exactly what that *something* must entail. Thus, the distinction between truth and that which is true is sometimes quite difficult to parse. Christians, therefore, are left to theological and philosophical argumentation to pinpoint the proper definition of truth in a growing field of options. It stands to reason, however, that due to the strong relationship between

22. Augustine writes, ‘*Truth itself, speaking as a human being* among others, said to those believing in Him: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free”’ (Augustine, *On Free Will*, 59).

23. Biblical scholars and theologians are divided on a biblical theological definition of truth. For the perceived distinction between the Hebrew and Greek understanding of truth, see Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2016), 1:436-37; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 2:3. For a more nuanced view that suggests a greater continuity between the Hebrew and Greek usage, see A. C. Thiselton, ‘Truth,’; Norman Geisler, ‘The Concept of Truth in the Inerrancy Debate,’ *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1980).

divinity and truth as highlighted above, a proper view of God will, at the very least, aid in constructing a proper definition of truth.

If humanity confessed a singular view of God, then perhaps the divinity–truth connection and a correlating definition of truth would be uncontroversial. As it stands, however, various proposed models of God are sometimes accompanied by varying models of metaphysical truth, especially in the latter half of the twentieth century. Claims concerning the nature of God that mainstream Western thought once considered to be self-evident, or at least logically demonstrable, have been called into question due in part, to changes in philosophical presuppositions as the surrounding culture of ideas continues to shift from premodernity to modernity and postmodernity. As such, even the most popular views of God within Christianity can vary significantly, and this diversity of views places any potential Christian consensus on the proper definition of truth on unstable ground.

The Metaphysical–Epistemological Divide

The difficulty in distinguishing ‘truth’ from ‘that which is true’ is closely related to the broader conversation concerning the distinction between metaphysics and epistemology. Peter Kreeft provides a helpful definition of ‘metaphysics’ as the ‘philosophical science of being qua being, i.e., the science of the most universal principles that hold true of everything that is.’²⁴ Thomas Joseph White further identifies the subject matter of metaphysics as ‘every categorical mode of created being (substances, with their various qualities, quantities, etc.) as well as the transcendental characteristics of created beings (their existence, goodness, unity, truth, etc.).’²⁵ Metaphysics, then, could simply be called the philosophical investigation of *being* – a subject’s most basic act of existence.²⁶

24. Peter Kreeft, ed., *Summa of the Summa: The Essential Philosophical Passages of St. Thomas Aquinas’ Summa Theologica Edited and Explained for Beginners* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 44n30.

25. Thomas Joseph White, *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God*, Thomistic Ressourcement Series 19 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 229.

26. For the definition of ‘being’ as an act, see Andrew Davison, *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics*, paperback ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 182, 218.