

THE NATURE OF TRUTH

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In evangelical circles truth is commonly understood to be solely a matter of true propositions. The following may be taken as statements with which many would agree: According to Gordon H. Clark, "truth is a characteristic of propositions *only*. Nothing can be called true in the literal sense of the term except the attribution of a predicate to a subject."¹ C. F. H. Henry has affirmed: "Nothing can be literally true but a propositional statement."² N. Geisler has stated: "One can safely say that the normal and consistent New Testament usage of 'truth' is of truth in the cognitive, propositional sense."³

The simple propositional view of truth is not universal among evangelicals, however. A. F. Holmes affirms that truth is both propositional and personal⁴ and contends for the unity thereof on the basis that "truth is first a matter of inner character and only derivatively of words and deeds."⁵ He states that "the ultimate locus of truth is . . . in the utter reliability of the true God."⁶

E. J. Carnell advanced the view that there are "*three kinds of truth*: ontological truth, truth as propositional correspondence to reality, and truth as

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¹G. H. Clark, "The Bible as Truth," *BSac* 114 (April 1957) 158 (italics his).

²C. F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco: Word, 1979), 3, 430. Henry does say: "To be sure, God tells us of himself by his works and deeds. But . . . these . . . do not fully or adequately represent God's speaking to man" (p. 410). But he does not take this statement seriously. If he did his criticism of the existentialist view of revelation might be just as trenchant as it is but would have quite a different character than it has. Moreover he says subsequently: "The theory of a non-propositional 'plus' actually encourages skepticism instead of preserving valid knowledge of God" (p. 459).

³N. Geisler, "The Concept of Truth in the Inerrancy Debate," *BSac* 137 (October-December 1980) 333.

⁴A. F. Holmes, *All Truth Is God's Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 34-38.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 35. In support of his view he says of Jesus' claim to be the truth in John 14:6: "Here . . . is the idea of God's perfect faithfulness, now revealed in his Son." But surely Jesus' claim in John 14:6 means that it is not only God's faithfulness that is revealed in his Son, but God himself. Holmes fails to see that the ultimate locus of truth is not in the character of God but in the being of God. That his view of truth is therefore defective is also seen in his suggestion that the idea of fidelity is evident in John's use of "true (*alēthinos*)." He says, "John uses. . . (*alēthinos*) to contrast the 'true light' with a less reliable one and the 'true bread' with corruptible manna" (p. 34). Surely "true" in such usage does not mean "more reliable" but "genuine" as opposed to apparent or putative.

personal rectitude."⁷ The unity of truth is apparently indicated in his statement that "essence and existence are united by right moral decision."⁸

A. C. Thiselton⁹ contends that there are five major connotations or "nuances of meaning" of the word "truth" in the NT¹⁰ and insists that "truth in the New Testament is a polymorphous concept."¹¹

It appears, however, that the majority view of truth in evangelical circles is the simple propositional or correspondence view. As we sketch briefly the results of our own examination of Scriptural usage and add some theological reflections, we shall have this view primarily in mind.¹² It should, perhaps, be added that what we consider to be the view of truth implicit in the Scriptures need not have been the conscious understanding of any Biblical writer, though the author of the Johannine gospel and epistles evinces such an interest in "truth" and, as we shall see, has such things to say about it that one may wonder whether he, at least, may not have had such an understanding.

⁷E. J. Carnell, *Christian Commitment* (New York: Macmillan, 1957) 29 (italics his); see also pp. 14–17.

⁸Ibid., p. 16. We are in agreement with Carnell in his view that truth is threefold and that moral rectitude unites essence and existence. We disagree with him when he accords ontological truth priority over propositional truth, a position he is able to assume because he thinks of existence as rational (see pp. 75–79). But if existence is rational it does not need uniting with essence. It is already united therewith. Furthermore careful study of his view limits personal rectitude to the kind of love that is pure regard for others without any element of self-regard (see pp. 207–211), thereby making it really an element in existence and thus incapable of uniting essence and existence (see p. 229).

⁹Some may question whether he should be included among "evangelicals." Whatever the case may be, his view is of such importance that it merits inclusion here, even though we are not seeking to be exhaustive of alternatives to the simple propositional view.

¹⁰A. C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 411–413. For a more extensive treatment of the concept, see his "Truth" in NIDNTT (1978), 3. 874–901. That there are different connotations of the term in the NT seems clear enough, though we would argue that truth as "revealed doctrine" is only a special instance of truth as "correspondence with the facts," despite Thiselton's assertion to the contrary (*Horizons* 412–413). Also we question the exegesis by which he arrives at the judgment that "sometimes truth is used in contrast to that which is hidden" (p. 413). We believe that there are really only three different connotations.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 413–414. He does say that "we must allow for the use of the word 'truth' in an overarching way that holds together several of these" uses and finds an example thereof in John 14:6, saying that "John has already introduced his readers to the idea that the testimony of Jesus is valid; that he reveals the truth of the gospel; that his words correspond with his deeds, and that his statements correspond with the facts. Hence, none of these concepts of truth can be excluded." He insists, however, that this "in no way invalidates our argument that truth in the New Testament is a polymorphous concept." Our only comments at this point are (1) that previous usage in the fourth gospel is not sufficient reason for believing that "truth" in John 14:6 has an "overarching meaning" and (2) that Thiselton really provides no clue as to how truth may be a unity beyond the suggestion that it is in the context of Christology that such unity may be found.

¹²Though we have examined every Scriptural occurrence of the relevant vocabulary, plus much of the relevant usage in the inter-Biblical literature and in the apostolic fathers, to say nothing of considerable attention to the writings of philosophers and theologians on the subject, we have limited ourselves to a brief sketch, which, we have reason to believe, will stand the test of the most rigorous examination of the sources.

I. TRUTH AS A QUALITY OF PROPOSITIONS

It must be agreed that there are quite a number of passages in Scripture in which it is assumed that truth is a quality of propositions.

In the OT we not only have recurring emphasis on speaking "truth" or "the truth" (2 Chr 18:15; Ps 15:2; Prov 8:7; 22:21; Jer 9:4; Zech 8:16; cf. 2 Sam 7:28; Eccl 12:10; etc.), but we have also such a statement as the one attributed to the Queen of Sheba: "The word was truth which I heard in my own land of your affairs and of your wisdom" (1 Kgs 10:6).

In the NT we have such passages as the following: "The woman . . . told him all the truth" (Mark 5:33). "I tell you the truth" (John 16:7). "I am speaking the truth in Christ" (Rom 9:1). "They turn away their hearing from the truth" (2 Tim 4:4). In addition, statements are often described as "true" or "not true": "The saying is true" (John 4:37). "You know our testimony is true" (3 John 12). Perhaps most significant in this connection is the statement attributed to Jesus: "[I have] told you the truth which I heard from God" (John 8:40).

That truth is propositional is unquestionably a Biblical understanding, and no view of truth is Biblical that does not include such an understanding.

II. TRUTH AS A CHARACTERISTIC OF PERSONS AND THINGS

Having insisted that truth is a quality of propositions, we must go on to contend that such a view is not exhaustive of the Biblical conception of truth. An additional point that must be made is that truth is a characteristic of persons and things. For such to be characterized by truth means that they are real and genuine as opposed to what is only apparent or putative. To borrow terminology from Francis Schaeffer, they are really "there."

Biblical evidence that anything that really exists may be said to be characterized by truth is, in part, as follows: "A sign of truth" (Josh 2:12) is shown by the context to be "a sure sign" (*RSV*), and "a reward of truth" (Prov 11:18) is "a sure reward" (*RSV*). "Worship . . . in truth" (John 4:23), whatever else it may be, is worship that is real; and love that is not "in word or speech but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18) is love that is expressed in appropriate conduct and therefore real. The adjective "true," as in "the true [riches]" (Luke 16:11), "the true light" (John 1:9; 1 John 2:8), "the true worshipers" (John 4:23), "true food" (6:55), "the true vine" (15:1), "the true grace of God" (1 Pet 5:12), indicates that the respective entities are objectively real.

Of course, since God is real he can be described as "the God of truth" and "the true God." Jer 10:10 and 2 Chr 15:3 make it clear that what is meant by "the God of truth" is that he is objectively real. "The true God," a phrase that occurs in 1 John 5:20 and in variant forms in John 17:3; 1 Thess 1:9, also bears the meaning "the God who is there." But since the God of the Bible is not only real but is also the ultimate reality, "the truth" sometimes occurs as virtually a synonym for deity. And because of their deity, Christ and the Holy Spirit are sometimes described as "the truth." So significant is this appellation that we examine its main occurrences at length.

1. The most famous occurrence is in the saying of Jesus: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6).

In speaking of himself as "the truth" in this passage Jesus does not simply mean that he conveys the truth, even though such an interpretation would accord with statements he is represented as making in 8:40; 12:49; 14:10, 24; 17:8. Our reasons for saying that it does not simply mean that he tells the truth are as follows:

(1) It is not the literal meaning of the words, and we know of no evidence that such a manner of speaking was, or could be, used as an idiomatic way of saying: "I proclaim (or 'make known' or some such) the way and the truth and the life." (2) The latter part of the verse does not favor it. "No one comes to the Father but by (*di*) me" does not speak of coming to the Father through what Christ ministers but through Christ himself. And this is in accord with the Johannine emphasis on "having" the Son: "He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life" (1 John 5:12; cf. John 6:53-58). (3) The verses that follow in John 14 lend further support to what we have been contending: "If you had known me you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him. . . . He who has seen me has seen the Father." Here we have knowledge not of information—at least not of information only—but of experience, as the emphasis on seeing makes clear. And similar emphasis on "seeing" by those who are Christ's is found in 1 John 3:6, "No one who sins hath either seen him or known him," and in 3 John 11, "He who does evil has not seen God." Somewhat comparable is the Johannine concern with respect to "fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3; cf. v 6) and with respect to abiding "in the Son and in the Father" (1 John 2:24; cf. John 6:56; 15:4-7; 1 John 2:5-6, 27, 28; 3:6, 24; 4:12-16). The kind of knowledge involved fits Christ's being the way and the truth and the life. It does not fit Christ's merely telling about them.¹³ (4) The other "I am" sayings in John's gospel, when carefully considered in their respective contexts, usually indicate that Christ's person is being described as well as his words and/or deeds (see John 6:35-55; 10:1-28; 11:25-26; 15:1-11).

In light of the evidence, R. Bultmann's comment on John 14:6 is justified: "So truth . . . is God's very reality revealing itself—occurring!—in Jesus."¹⁴

2. "The truth" has the same significance in John 5:33-34, 36: "You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Not that the testimony which I receive is from man. . . . The testimony which I have is greater than that of John." "The truth" here is not a proposition but is Christ himself.¹⁵ Bearing

¹³If it be suggested that we should translate "I am the way, both the truth and the life," and that we should understand "the truth" as a reference to the propositions he uttered and "the life" as a reference to what he is in himself, it must be replied that "the truth" and "the life" are paralleled in such fashion that for one to refer to what Christ does and the other to what he is seems to be excluded. Likewise the suggestion that we should understand Jesus to mean that he is "the true and living way" seems farfetched, especially since we find quite direct ways of making such a point in the fourth gospel (e.g. 1:9; 4:10). Cf. L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 641 n. 17. But see R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966-70), 1. 621, 630.

¹⁴R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1951-55), 2. 19.

¹⁵Cf. Brown, *John*, 1. 355.

witness on John's part was through the articulation of reliable propositions concerning "the truth"—i.e., about Christ—but those propositions were not themselves "the truth" here mentioned. They were only the means of bearing witness thereto.

3. Of special interest is John 8:31–32: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." The reference to continuing in his "word" may suggest that "the truth" here is solely propositional, but the context makes clear that the freedom Christ has in mind is moral freedom, not intellectual. He says, "Every one who commits sin is a slave of sin. . . . If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (vv 34, 36). And in this gospel it is emphasized repeatedly that freedom from moral bondage does not result from the mere reception of certain information. Though Jesus can say, "You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you" (15:25), he does not mean that intellectual understanding is sufficient of itself to make men clean. Besides believing that his words are true, to be "free indeed" men must "receive him" (1:12); they need to "eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood" (6:53); they need to be born "of water and the Spirit" (3:5). Of course this means that the truth that makes one free is more than information to which one may assent; it is Christ himself, the "ultimate reality."

4. A further example of "the truth" as a virtual synonym for "ultimate reality" is to be found in 1 John 5:7 (6): "The Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth." In the context the author is concerned about belief in Jesus as the Son of God (vv 5, 10), who came "by water and blood." Witness that he is the Son of God is borne by the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit is the truth. In other words the witness of the Spirit to Christ is dependable because of who the Spirit is. He is "the truth," and so his witness is the witness of "ultimate reality." 1 John 1:1–3, to say nothing of John 5:31–39; 20:30–31, makes it clear that our author knew that there is need for a stronger foundation for faith in the Holy Spirit's witness than a dogmatic statement to the effect that he tells the truth. What he does do is remind his readers that the Holy Spirit is himself the truth. As we have said, his testimony is the testimony of ultimate reality. Our author is aware, of course, as 1 John 4:1–6 makes clear, that there is need for one or more criteria as to whether testimony that is received is testimony of the Holy Spirit, but once it is established that it is the Holy Spirit who is bearing the testimony, the relationship of the Holy Spirit to ultimate reality is highly significant.

We have not exhausted the evidence by any means, but we have adduced sufficient thereof to make it clear that in the Biblical view truth is not only a quality of propositions but is also a characteristic of objects and persons—and it is supremely characteristic of deity.

III. TRUTH AS A QUALITY OF CONDUCT

But even so, there is more to be said. In the Scriptures truth is also a quality of conduct.

This understanding is common in the OT—if indeed it is not the most char-

acteristic assumption of the OT concerning truth. Over and over again the OT makes clear that truth is worthy and commendable action. We note only a few examples: "The deeds of his hands are truth and justice" (Ps 111:7). "Hezekiah . . . did the good, the right and the truth" (2 Chr 31:20). "Thou hast done truth, and we have acted wickedly" (Neh 9:33). Examples could easily be multiplied.

In the NT the conception of truth as commendable action is in evidence in John 3:20-21: "Everyone who does evil hates the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God." In these verses there is a contrast between the one "who does evil" and the one "who does the truth." There is a similar contrast between "those who have done evil" and "those who have done good" in John 5:29, and between the one "who does evil" and the one "who does good" in 3 John 11. And the parallel with "did . . . the truth" in 2 Chr 31:20 is striking. Whatever else may be implied—and in our opinion more is implied—it is clear that doing the truth in John 3:21 is engaging in action of a commendable quality.

The same is to be said of "doing the truth" in 1 John 1:6: "If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not do the truth." Truth here is not, or at least not only, something to be intellectually grasped. It is also something to be done—and, moreover, its practice is practice of a particular quality.

Similarly in Phil 1:18: "Whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed." The question here is not that of the correctness or incorrectness of the propositions that were being articulated. Indeed it is implied that the propositions being articulated on both sides were true. Truth here is the quality of the conduct involved in the articulation of the respective propositions.¹⁶

In summary, we note that the Biblical view sometimes assumes that truth is a matter of propositions, sometimes that it is a matter of persons and things (and especially a matter of ultimate reality), and sometimes a matter of conduct or action. Nowhere, so far as I am aware, is there any indication of the way in which these various usages are united, unless it be implied in the prologue of John, where truth is identified in some fashion with the Logos. According to John 1:14, 17, the coming of the Logos includes the coming of "grace and truth." In this connection we note (1) that truth as a matter of propositions corresponds to the Johannine dictum that the Logos was with God, (2) that truth as a matter of ultimate reality corresponds to the asseveration that the Logos was God, and (3) that truth as a matter of action or conduct corresponds to the insistence that the Logos became flesh. The Johannine prologue, in stating that truth is intimately related to the Logos, suggests that the unity of the Logos is also the unity of truth.

IV. CONSEQUENCES AND CONCLUSIONS

We have discussed the Biblical evidence concerning the simple propositional view of truth and have found that it is a partial view needing important sup-

¹⁶In this verse it is implied that it is not sufficient that conduct be formally commendable for it to be described as "in truth." It must be rightly motivated as well. This is not evident in John 3:20-21 or in 1 John 1:6.

plementation. Before concluding we deal briefly with the simple propositional view from the perspective of philosophical theology.

We begin with the contention that truth is propositional, whether such a view is exhaustive of its meaning or not. If truth is solely existential—that is, if whatever exists is truth—then there can be no such thing as error, and there can be no such thing as wrongdoing. Indeed we suggest that it is the simple existentialist view of truth, whether conscious or unconscious, that makes such things as homosexuality and involvement with the occult acceptable. The fact that such a view of truth does not produce people who are entirely without scruples is due to inconsistency on the part of the people concerned and has no justification in the view itself.

In support of the simple existentialist view of truth it may be contended that words and propositions are existents. Certainly it is often insisted that words are deeds. And, of course, this is correct. But the significant question is whether the concepts and ideas expressed in words and propositions are existential or not. We simply comment that if the ideal and the existential, essence and existence, being and becoming, form and content, cognition and volition, are not to be distinguished, we must give up all talk about error and immorality. Indeed, apart from such a distinction we do not see how such concepts as error and immorality could have arisen. Heidegger,¹⁷ who insists that truth is neither a matter of propositions nor a matter of correspondence, holds that truth is “letting—something—be—seen” and “being false . . . amounts to deceiving in the sense of *covering up*.”¹⁸ He further defines being false as “putting something in front of something (in such a way as to let it be seen) and thereby passing it off *as* something which it is *not*.”¹⁹ But given Heidegger’s existentialist view, we fail to see how covering something up can be described as being false. It seems to us that if he were thoroughly consistent he would say that covering up is just as much a matter of truth as that letting something be seen is a matter of truth. So far as we can see, his view leaves no room for such a conception as that of falsity.²⁰ The orthodox Christian must insist, however, that there is error and there is sin, and therefore he must oppose the purely existentialist view of truth.²¹ We must insist that truth is a matter of propositions. Whether such a view is exhaustive of the nature of truth we must go on to consider.

¹⁷It is sometimes stated that he is not a typical existentialist, but that he is an existentialist is obvious from his statement in *What Is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper, 1968) 104: “The primal being of beings is the will.” Cf. pp. 91, 92, 107.

¹⁸M. Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper, 1962) 56–57 (italics his).

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 57 (italics his); see also *ibid.*, pp. 261 ff.; *Thinking?* xi, 19, 209.

²⁰For a different criticism of Heidegger’s conception of truth see Thiselton, *Horizons* 199 ff.

²¹T. Molnar, *Theists and Atheists* (The Hague: Mouton, 1980) 176, reports that H. Jonas in a lecture at Drew University in 1964 contended that “Heidegger’s system . . . leads to . . . no distinction between true doctrine and heresy; the very idea of a true doctrine disappears. Since Being’s revelation is undecipherable and only our answer to its call can have a meaning, this human answer can be anything, ‘the Bible as well as Hitler’. Ultimately, the revelation comes from man.”

We begin this further consideration by noting that truth is something; it is not nothing. If it were nothing, we would not have a subject to discuss. This is not to say anything about the nature of its existence. Some things exist "materially" as well as "formally," such as mosquitoes, mustard and moons. Some things seem to exist only "formally," such as mermaids, centaurs and unicorns. Whether the formal existence of the latter is "real" or only "nominal" is much debated and does not concern us at the moment. We are only concerned at this point to note that truth is something, not nothing.

In the next place, we note that, for an orthodox Christian, at least some truth exists eternally. An orthodox Christian must say, for example, that it is eternally true that "God is."

What are the ways in which truth can be eternally true? If it be assumed that truth is solely a matter of propositions, can it be that God is a proposition or set of propositions? The problem with such a view from the Christian standpoint is that a proposition or set of propositions cannot create. Indeed it cannot do anything whatever; it just is. One may draw out the implications thereof, but that is an action on the part of another, not an action on the part of a proposition itself, or of propositions themselves, and the implications add nothing to the proposition or propositions. They only enable the one who draws them out to be more fully aware of what is already in the proposition or propositions. In this connection it is to be noted that Plato's realm of ideas could not produce the extended universe. In addition there had to be unformed matter and a Demiurge. And one may note further, as has been suggested, that one cannot love a proposition or set of propositions.²² If God is only a proposition or set of propositions, what Christ called the first and great commandment is ludicrous.

Since the idea that God is a proposition or set of propositions is untenable, is it possible to hold to the simple propositional view of truth and contend that truth corresponds to "reality"? But if truth is only like God, and is not God, then the fact that at least some truth is eternal means that we have two eternal: God, and the truth that is eternal. This of course is contrary to the Athanasian Creed, which affirms that there is only "one eternal." It also commits us to an ultimate dualism, which means that neither God nor truth is absolute. They condition each other, and that which is conditioned is not absolute.

It does not help to suggest that eternal truth is in the mind of God, because then one must ask how truth came to be in his mind. No doubt some truth is eternally created in the mind of God, such as the concept of an extended universe. As has been said, God "likes matter. He invented it."²³ But God could not create or invent the truth that "God is," because this would mean that "God is" is not true apart from the creative activity of God. An existentialist may say that God's being is his activity, but such a one would have to say that the correspondence view of truth would only be possible if one held that the truth that God is were a creative activity distinct from the creative activity involved

²²Cf. R. H. Countess in a review of Gordon H. Clark's *Language and Theology in Christianity Today* 25/14 (August 7, 1981) 56: "Can one love a proposition? Be consoled by a proposition?"

²³C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: G. Bles, 1952) 51.

in the positing of God's selfhood. The fact that the correspondence view of truth means that truth is to be distinguished from "reality"—it only "corresponds" thereto—requires such a conclusion. But if the positing of the truth that God is is to be distinguished from the positing of God's selfhood, the positing of God's selfhood would not make it true that "God is"—an intolerable conclusion, I contend. The idea that all truth that is in the mind of God is there as a result of his creative activity is not tenable.²⁴

There is another alternative—namely, that the truth that "God is" is in the mind of God by way of generation,²⁵ using this term in the same sense (or in much the same sense) as its use in the historic doctrine of the generation of the Son. Just as the Son is said to be generated by the Father, and so is said to be God and to be with God, so the truth in God's mind that "God is" derives from God in such fashion that it both is God and is "with him" in his mind. God's self-consciousness is not something he creates, but it is the essence of himself eternally issuing into his own mind. Of course this means that God's being is conceptualized, which in turn means that it may be set forth in propositional form—though I do not think that it needs to be. Of course this means that the reality that "God is" may now be expressed in the proposition "God is."

But there is an important implication of God's self-awareness—i.e., of his consciousness that he himself is—and that is that the affective component of his being has a possible object.²⁶ And so the fact that God is—i.e., the essence of deity plus the awareness thereof—results in "God" as the object of the divine affection. "God is" is therefore the formal or essential component of God's affection—i.e., God loves himself.²⁷

But since it is of the very nature of affection to be dynamic, God's self-love means that he actively expresses his appreciation of the fact that "God is." In other words, he acts in such fashion as to glorify himself. He does so in the generation of the Son.²⁸ He does so in the spiration of the Spirit in conjunction with the Son. He does so in creating angels and in creating the extended universe. But of course this means that the truth that God is cannot be divorced from action. God's action may be said to be the doing implicit in the fact that God is.

This consideration of philosophical theology has led us to conclude that the

²⁴According to the Stoic view, the universe is a fragment of God. But if truth were a fragment of God, it would neither be God nor would it correspond to God. Truth would not be truth. At best it would only be a part of truth.

²⁵Why we do not state that it is there by way of procession, we do not stop to discuss. Though we consider the distinction important, so far as we can see it does not affect the argument of this paper.

²⁶Affection is impossible without some awareness of something existing, an awareness that has a cognitive component. Infants, imbeciles and animals are no exception.

²⁷Self-love is essentially good. Cf. Mark 12:31; Eph 5:28–29.

²⁸According to Biblical doctrine, the Father is God (see 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6; Phil 2:11; cf. Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3; Rev 1:6; John 17:3). Though the Son and the Holy Spirit are also God, the Father is the fount of deity, as various theologians have affirmed.

truth that God is—i.e., ultimate truth—is the essential component of his being, of his self-consciousness and of his loving action. But it has also led us to see that “God is” is not only inseparable from his being, his self-consciousness and his loving action, but that it would not be “true” apart from them. In other words, ultimate truth is a matter of reality, of proposition and of action. It is notable that we observed the same three components of truth in our study of the Biblical conception of truth. Our Biblical study, however, failed to clarify the unity and the hierarchical relationship of the components of truth, as our study of philosophical theology has done.

It is to be noted, furthermore, that our study in the area of philosophical theology has revealed that the nature of truth is in accord with the trinitarian model, according to which the one divine essence is the essence of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but that the Son is begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. As we have seen, “God is” is the essence of God’s being, of his self-consciousness and of his loving action, but we have also seen how his self-consciousness derives from his being, and how his loving action depends on his being and his self-consciousness.²⁹ This means, of course, that the structure of ultimate truth may be described as trinitarian.

So far, we have only been considering ultimate truth. Does other truth have a similar structure? If other truth is “created” by God, one would expect it to have a similar structure, inasmuch as in creation God is glorifying himself, which means that he is giving expression to himself, albeit in an analogous rather than in a univocal way.³⁰ Moreover we submit that, upon examination, other truth is seen to exhibit the same fundamental structure. For example: “There is an extended universe,” if true, means that there exists a reality the essence of which is to be described as “extended universe.” Dependent on the existence of that reality for its “truth” is the proposition in someone’s mind: “There is an extended universe.” And on the part of that person there is an “emotional” response,³¹ said response being dependent on the reality of the extended universe plus the awareness thereof. This being so, a trinitarian

²⁹The influence of rationalism has led some theologians to deny the hierarchical relationship of members of the Trinity. Orthodox theology, which insists on the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit, implies such a relationship. Indeed it implies a kind of subordination of the Son and the Spirit, a subordination quite different from that taught by Arius, because it also insists on the unity of the essence. Moreover it is essential subordination that is involved. Economic subordination without essential subordination is often proposed, but such a view makes the Son deny his own nature and makes Jesus Christ misrepresent deity when he prays and in much of what he says.

³⁰If God were to give univocal expression to all that he is, would he not be denying the uniqueness of his deity? And if he were to give univocal expression to only part of what he is, would he really be expressing himself? And would that partial expression not qualify as a fragment of another deity? Whatever difficulties there may be in the conception, we suggest that God can only express himself analogically. This even holds with respect to the Son as the “expression” of the Father. Inasmuch as the Son is generated, he is not a thoroughly univocal “expression” of the Father, who is ingenerate.

³¹“Aesthetic” is perhaps a more accurate term than “emotional” in this context. We have used “emotional” to emphasize that we are concerned with the affective component of personality. We have put the word in quotation marks to signify that we are using it in a somewhat specialized sense.

structure is manifest. The same kind of structure can be discerned if we only deal with the idea of an extended universe in God's mind. The idea must exist in God's mind, God must be aware of the idea in his mind, and God must respond to the idea of which he is aware. (He loved the idea and actualized it.)³²

That truth always has the kind of structure we have outlined is evident upon careful analysis. This means that the simple propositional view of truth, and some other views as well, are correct but inadequate, just as the doctrine that God is one is a sound but inadequate view of God. A thoroughly evangelical view of truth is one that insists not only on a trinitarian view of God but on what may be called a trinitarian view of truth as well.

³²The idea of evil is somewhat odd. Nevertheless there is partial correspondence with the structure we have outlined. For God to create free creatures, he had to create the idea of evil—i.e., he had to create the possibility of evil, though he did not need to actualize it. Moreover he had to be aware of this idea. But whereas other ideas he creates are ideas in which he rejoices, leading him to actualize them, in the case of evil he responded with hatred toward any actualization thereof. The idea of evil therefore participates in truth, but not completely. No truth is complete that does not include action (cf. Jas 2:22; Gal 5:6). Platonic idealism must be rejected in order to take seriously the volitional and affective components of personality, if for no other reason.

The truth involved in the actualization of evil is also odd. It means that there is truth that is not in accord with the ultimate truth that "God is." But that which does not accord with the truth that "God is" is not true; it is false. The actualization of evil is therefore both true and false. The law of contradiction, also called the law of noncontradiction, is important but not an absolute.