The Righteous Will Live by the Truth: A Kierkegaardian Proposal for a Trinitarian Epistemology

Eli Maga, PhD
Vice President of Crossover Global
Email: e.maga@crossover.global

Robert Falconer, PhD
Coordinator of Master's and PhD Programmes
South African Theological Seminary, South Africa
Email: robertf@sats.ac.za

Doi:

Abstract

This article contends that truth is trinitarian and that theology ought to treat epistemology existentially. To demonstrate this, a brief historical study is conducted on the development of the concept of truth and how different approaches revolve around the definitions of truth as ἀλήθεια, *veritas,* and אֱמֶת. Even though these words translate the same in English, historically each one discloses different angles of truth. By emphasizing one of the definitions in detriment of others, it is argued that truth has been fragmented in distinct concepts apparently opposed. While ἀλήθεια emphasizes the Greek concept of truth, *veritas* highlights the Latin, and אֱמֶת the Hebrew. The concepts are representatively demonstrated in the thoughts of Plato, Tertullian, Augustine, Descartes, Kant, and Kierkegaard. Accordingly, this article argues for the need to develop an epistemology that is not trichotomic with the concepts of truth dissociated in different spheres of knowledge, but rather, as an inseparable single trinitarian truth. It is argued that there is a need to recover the meaning of truth from the Hebrew אֱמֶת, as an important concept that exposes truth as trinitarian, merging the concepts of ἀλήθεια and *veritas* under human existential reality. The study proposes that the epistemology of the Christian philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, is helpful for this understanding, especially concerning his concept of appropriation of truth. To exemplify the argument, Abraham's test of sacrificing Isaac is analyzed. The trinitarian orientation of truth as proposed in this article provides a theological posture, framing truth as incarnational where "the righteous will live by the truth" (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38). Finally, this article also presents some implications for contemporary theology and the church, proposing that trinitarian epistemology is a theological antidote to current relativism. It also encourages the church to approach truth with a more comprehensive attitude, recognizing that every truth is God's truth. Moreover, it invites the church to inoculate the anti-intellectualist mood present in some evangelical circles, approaching truth doxologically.

Keywords: Theological Epistemology, Trinitarian Epistemology, Kierkegaardian Epistemology, Søren Kierkegaard, Living by the Truth.

Introduction

In this article, I argue that theology should address epistemology existentially instead of merely rationally, and that truth should be understood as an embodied category. As

Jesus is truth who "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), it is important to have a more comprehensive theological epistemology. Comprehensive in the sense that it does not neglect important aspects of truth or its unity. The following sections will develop the argument that, while truth has been addressed ontologically and epistemologically, both by philosophers and theologians, an existential approach to truth is also necessary to understand its conciseness. For this reason, an argument from the thought of the Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard is appropriate to grasp this principle. The research methodology used addresses the concept of truth by doing a philosophical and theological analysis as a panoramic approach. After which, the concepts are analyzed biblically and applied theologically. Finally, some implications for the Church are highlighted.

Truth has been understood throughout history using different concepts, as will be demonstrated in this article. To represent these different views, the correlating words used for truth in Hebrew (אֱמֶת), Greek (ἀλήθεια), and Latin (*veritas*) will be used. Though these three different words are translated as truth, each one offers a distinct concept, as pointed out by some scholars (e.g., Waal, 1972; Chauí, 1997, 99; McGrath, 1997, 72-80). However, their approach usually revolves around the distinctions between definitions rather than their unity. This article argues for the indivisible unity between these concepts as a trinitarian truth. As mysterious as the trinitarian character of God is, truth also possesses a paradoxical nature (Psalm 119:160; John 14:6).

It will be argued that the key to disclosing this paradigm is the incarnation, or in Kierkegaard's vocabulary, appropriation. Consequently, we will present the argument that "The righteous will live by truth" as a coherent application to Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17, and Hebrews 10:38.

The next section will do an overview of the different concepts of truth in Church History. It will not start with the Hebrew concept of truth as אֱמֶת, but from the Greek, because of the Hellenized context where the Church lived in the first centuries. The reason truth as אֱמֶת will be the last analyzed, is because of its relation to Kierkegaard's definition.

Therefore, the following subsections will be presented in the first section: the Greek concept of truth as ἀλήθεια; the Latin concept of truth as veritas; the synthesis made between ἀλήθεια and *veritas* by Augustine; truth in rationalism and empiricism; truth and German idealism; Kierkegaard and truth; and finally, truth as אֱמוּנָה and אֱמֶת. The second section defines what is trinitarian epistemology, raising an important unfolding for theology. We then propose that the "Righteous live by the truth", using the narrative of Isaac's sacrifice by Abraham. Finally, we highlight important implications for theology.

An Overview of the Concept of Truth in Church History

Clashes between faith and reason, science and religion, philosophy and theology are based on apparent contradictions. These alleged inconsistencies are unsolved if the trinitarian nature of truth is not recognized. To understand the trinitarian truth, it is first necessary to comprehend each one of the three different concepts of truth approached in the Church history, here represented by the words ἀλήθεια, *veritas,* and אֱמֶת. I propose that the popular idea that scientific, philosophical, and religious truths are not the same; or that the rational, empirical, or existential realities are in conflict, is rooted in a trichotomic view of fragmenting truth. In this popular perspective, the three approaches are separated which results in conflict. In this case, it is not only theology that is considered at odds with science, but science is also at odds with philosophy. This promotes a post-truth and confused society where truth is at odds with itself. From a fragmented truth, historical events lose their factual value, becoming constructions of

mere narratives. Hermeneutics no longer seeks the meaning intended by the author, but the meaning desired by the reader. This is particularly present in the thought of Jacques Derrida, the creator of deconstructionism, who significantly impacted hermeneutics in general (e.g., Derrida, 2001; 2016). McGrath (2021, 124) asserts that Derrida deconstructs the concept of textual objectivity, where the author fails to communicate its real intentions, transmitting what was not intended, making any interpretation valid. Vanhoozer (2010, 27) and Mohler (2005, 60) also warn of Derrida's overemphasis on subjectivity, where the truth of a text lies in the hands of the reader and not of the writer. What is this, if not a result of a fragmented truth? With truth, the concept of wrongness also degrades, and moral values are no longer considered absolute, but relative constructions. This degradation directly affects ethics, religion, politics, and other areas. Moreover, the truths of different religions became equally and incoherently accepted, for being produced by the human subjective experience. Consequently, religious truths were reduced to subjectivity, deprived of rational, historical, or empirical coherence. With the fragmentation of truth, society accepts conflicting truths between different religions, which, in the name of tolerance, tolerates the intolerable, incoherence, contradiction, and untruth. This has generated a pluralist and incoherent society.

Although different terms throughout history express distinctive approaches to truth, each expression gives weight to a specific aspect when looked at carefully. The words ἀλήθεια, *veritas*, and אֱמֶת exemplify how truth was understood differently throughout Christian history. The following three sections will address each one of these concepts.

Truth as ἀλήθεια, and the Greek Epistemology

Socrates believed that only knowledge could free a person from ignorance, leading to truth (Plato. Meno. 85b-86c; Johnson, 2016). In his view, the source of evil was caused by ignorance, generating vices and immoral behavior in human beings, while knowledge caused wisdom and genuine virtue (Plato. Thea. 176b-e). Socrates believed that knowledge was already present in every human, even though the human is ignorant of this. For him, ignorance was a state of forgottenness of the soul, where truth is reached through recollection. Truth, therefore, was conceived in terms of bringing to light what was hidden or forgotten.

Socrates' concept of truth relates to the meaning of the Greek word ἀλήθεια, which etymologically means 'not hidden' or 'not forgotten' (Chauí, 1997, 99; Brague *et al.,* 2014, 1159; Heidegger, 2018a, 109). It is derived from the Greek prefix α (no) with λανθάνω (concealed, hidden), bringing the meaning of truth as 'unhiddenness' (McGrath, 1997, 73).

For the Platonists, ἀλήθεια was the truth that could be grasped by reason, opposing ψεύδω, which is false and deceptive (Chauí, 1997, 99; Coenen & Brown 2000, 1274, 1277; Brague *et al.,* 2014, 1159). ψεύδω is the camouflage, a simulacrum of truth (Coenen & Brown, 2000, 2603). Therefore, a person's ignorance is one of error, a pseudo-existence where the person lives a lie in self-deception (Plato. Rep. II, 382a). Unlike what the Bible reveals about sin, Platonic thought understands evil as caused by ignorance; and virtue and justice as consequences achieved by knowledge and truth.

Socrates saw himself as a midwife, helping people give birth to innate knowledge through reasoning (Plato. Thea., 150; Davie et al., 2016, 680). He argued that knowledge and perception are not the same because perception is often influenced subjectively, like sweet wine for a healthy person but is bitter for those who are sick (Plato. Thea. 159d-164d). Therefore, perception should not always be trusted. This platonic concept of ἀλήθεια is better exemplified in his myth of the cave (Plato. Rep. VII), where Socrates contrasts truth with the shadows, the things as they are with the way in which they only

appear. In this view, truth as ἀλήθεια relates to reality, the things as they are in the present, "in both the sense of being contemporaneous and immediately present to the mind." (McGrath, 1997, 73). Truth is when you perceive what the thing is in reality. Something is true when its perception is coherent with the thing itself. In this aspect, ἀλήθεια is more ontological, defining truth as reality.

Truth as *veritas*, and Latin Epistemology

Tertullian (155 – 220 CE) was influenced by the Greek idea that the human problem was ignorance, and knowledge the solution (Tert. Rep. I-V; Vardy, 2008, 23). However, he was also influenced by the Roman thought, and their concept of truth can be perceived in his writings. He wrote in Latin, where his "theological method was the drive for truth." (Groh, 1992, 390). In Tertullian, and later in Jerome, truth was the Latin, *veritas*, which reveals a shift in the epistemological understanding of ἀλήθεια. Even though it is difficult to identify who was responsible for this shift in Roman thought, evidence seems to suggest that Tertullian was the one responsible to import it to the church.

Tertullian rejected the Greek ontological concept of truth mainly because heretics used philosophical thought, distorting the idea of ἀλήθεια, claiming to possess a hidden knowledge: γνῶσις (knowledge) (Osborn, 2001, 41; Smith 2016). Tertullian argued that "philosophers are without reason when they knock at the gates of truth." (Tert. Test. I). This offers background for understanding why Tertullian called philosophers the "patriarchs of all heresy" and asked rhetorically, "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" (Tert. Heretics. VIII; Tert. Hermog. VIII; Geisler, 1999, 721; González, 2006, 323–324). Tertullian mocked their presumed truth by presenting the Christian truth in terms of a coherent narrative of the past. The Greek ἀλήθεια emphasizes truth as it currently is, while Tertullian's Latin *veritas* focuses on truth as it was. Yet, the two are not in contradiction while truth as ἀλήθεια follows an ontological approach, truth as *veritas* is more epistemological.

Tertullian "does not hide his sympathy for Seneca" (Osborn, 2001, 31), the Roman orator and philosopher (Tert. Soul. XX.1). This sympathy helps us understand that his concept of truth started to orbit around a Roman idea, influenced by rhetoric and law. As Tertullian was versed in rhetoric, he used legal vocabulary extensively, exploring, for example, the concepts of satisfaction, penalty, guilt, and justification, frequently using legal terminology.[1] For instance, he invites the soul to be a witness, using it as a source of evidence that can prove his rhetorical arguments (Tert. Test. I). Tertullian's legal vocabulary may have imprinted a juridical character in later theology. Thus, in Tertullian, truth moved from Athens to Rome, leaving the Garden of Academus to enter the Roman courts. In Tertullian, ἀλήθεια becomes *veritas*. McGrath (1997, 73) affirms that Cicero was the most influential in this "historically oriented concept of truth."

In Tertullian's approach to the Christian faith, he emphasized *veritas*, transmitting the idea of coherence and logic, in terms of correspondence between inner and outer reality (Tert. Marc. I.18; Groh, 1992, 390). The Latin *veritas* became a reference to the logical accuracy or coherence and precision in a discourse, on rhetorical announcements (Chauí, 1997, 99; Brague *et al.,* 2014, 1159). What is *verum* (true) is what is exact, and precise, it is a narrative of past events, "particularly associated with history," or "with the legal requirement that a witness shall give a truthful account of what was observed to happen." (McGrath, 1997, 73).

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[1] e.g., Tert. Rep. 4, 5, 6, 9,10, 12; Tert. Bap. 5, 20; Tert. Pray. 23; Tert. Pat. 4. Tert. Marc. 2.4; 4.14; 4.18; 5.7.

Consequently, Tertullian developed a logical and juridical theology, presenting repentance in rational terms, considering sin as irrationality or illogical ignorance (Tert. Rep. I; Tert. Soul. XVI; Tert. Marc. II.8-11; Frame 2015:99). While the Greek ἀλήθεια was gnoseological, the Latin *veritas* was juridical; while the first is focused on the present, the second is on the past (Chauí, 1997, 99; McGrath, 1997, 73; Brague *et al.,* 2014,1159). While ἀλήθεια is the truth self-evident, as it is; *veritas* is the truth verified, as it was. While ἀλήθεια used the deductive method to reach knowledge from reason alone, *veritas* is focused on the inductive method, using logic and external evidence.

The Augustinian Synthesis between ἀλήθεια and *veritas*

The Greek and Latin concepts of truth influenced Augustine. The Platonists, and especially Cicero exerted considerable influence on Augustine, who assimilated much of their vocabulary (Chroust, 1944; Cross & Livingstone, 2005, 129; Puchniak, 2016, 11). From a profoundly Neo-Platonic basis, Augustine presented his theory of enlightenment, connected to the platonic idea of ἀλήθεια (Aug. Magistro.). The truth could only be grasped rationally and not by the senses because he believed that are deceptive, affirming that the intellect relates to truth and the senses to the false (Aug. City. 8.7; Harrison, 1999, 852). The soul grasps the truth, but the body is distracted by the shadows.
Augustine also distinguished 'truth' from 'true', making use of Platonic and Stoic arguments (Aug. Soli. I.15; Harrison, 1999, 853). He defined truth as "that which shows what is" (Aug. Vera Rel. 36.66), which points to ἀλήθεια. But he differentiates truth from true, affirming that "what is true is so because of truth" (Aug. Soli. I. 15.27), pointing to *veritas*. Therefore, his distinction between 'truth' and 'true' is the same as the concepts of ἀλήθεια and *veritas*.

Augustine wrote in Latin, addressing *veritas* (truth) and *verum* (true), not ἀλήθεια. However, his *veritas* is coherent with the Greek ἀλήθεια, while his *verum* is consistent with Tertullian's *veritas*. What Augustine did was apply to truth the principle of 'participation', as Plato developed in the dialogs Parmenides and Phaedo (Plato. Parm. 130b, 151e; Plato. Phae. 100c-101c). Participation explained the relation between qualities in the material world with a transcendent realm of forms, or ideas (Plato. Phae. 109a-111c; Plato. Phaedr 247c). In the famous Allegory of the Cave, Plato contrasted the limited truths of the sensible world, to the intelligible and transcendent realm of eternal truths (Plato. Rep. 514a-520a). In Phaedo, for example, Plato argued that something beautiful participates in the eternal form of beauty, so Augustine also argued that what is temporarily true participates in the eternity of truth. Although something true may disappear, truth is eternal. This important platonic-Augustinian concept exerted a significant impact on Kierkegaard.

The participation doctrine is also related to Plato and Aristotle's teachings of universals and particulars. According to them, the universals are eternal forms, transcendent and general, while the particulars are singular expressions of the universals (Frame, 2015, 10). While Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine agree on the universals manifested in the particulars, they disagree on where the universals exist. For Augustine, God is the source where the universals exist (Aug. Trin. 12.XV.24; Aug. Soli. 1.I.3; 1.VIII.15).

Augustine treated faith and wisdom in terms of rational truth and mathematical logic, a synthesis between ἀλήθεια and *veritas* (Aug. Conf. VI.4.6; Aug. Free. II.11.30; II.15.39). The role of reason is essential in Augustine's theology. For him, if Christianity is true, it must necessarily be seized by reason and evidenced by its logic. As the opposite of ἀλήθεια and *veritas*, evil was conceived by Augustine as the lack of knowledge, synonymous with ignorance, incoherence, illogic, falsehood, focused on the rational aspect.

Augustine also reshaped the meaning of faith, stating: "for what is believing but consenting to the truth of what is said? Moreover, this consent is certainly voluntary." (Aug. Spir. Let. 54). For him, the proper response to faith was understanding (Aug. Free. 1.II.4). Consequently, faith became synonymous with rational acquiescence to Christian truth. Therefore, Kierkegaard later criticized Augustine for the 'incalculable harm' he made because he 'confused the concept of faith' (Watkin, 2000, 95; Puchniak, 2016, 14; Kierkegaard, 2017, 437)

The problem Kierkegaard identified was that this confusion generated by Augustine led to a very objective and rationalist Christianity. The Christian faith gradually became the intellectual recognition of its doctrines. However, like Augustine treating the 'true' as a participation in the 'truth', Kierkegaard (2013; 2019) argued that the true knower is the one who participates in the truth. He argued that truth should be paradoxically understood, both objectively and subjectively, and only appropriated through the passions of faith and love. The human being's existential need is not to know truth merely cognitively, but existentially. For Kierkegaard (2010, 104), an authentic self is the one grounded in God by the passion of faith, having Christ as the true measure of what it means to be human.

Truth in Rationalism and Empiricism

René Descartes raised the essential doubt with his, "I think; therefore, I am," restricting truth to the realm of reason which may be grasped mathematically (Descartes, 1999; Geisler, 1999:195; Cross & Livingstone, 2005:475). Even though Descartes argued for the existence of God and believed that divine truth could be grasped rationally, his thought paved the way for later skeptics like David Hume and Immanuel Kant.

After Descartes, the paradigm between ἀλήθεια and *veritas* was transformed into the paradigm between rationalism and empiricism. For rationalism, the truth was transcendent and could be discovered by the intellect. On the other hand, for empiricism, it was immanent and could be acquired only through the senses (Thiselton, 2002, 71; Carlson, 2017, 206). The rationalist philosophers claimed that truth was immediately available through reasoning, but the empiricists claimed that truth was not immediate, but mediated by evidence of the senses. The first emphasized the deductive method, the other the inductive. In Augustinian terms, if 'truth' is transcendence, 'true' is immanent; while 'truth' was *a priori* reality for the rationalists, 'true' was *a posteriori* for the empiricists. Consequently, rationalists and empiricists put ἀλήθεια and veritas, truth and true at odds.

Truth and German Idealism

No one tried to do a more remarkable synthesis between the concepts of truth than Immanuel Kant, who condensed ἀλήθεια and *veritas*, synthesizing rationalism and empiricism, giving birth to German idealism (Geisler, 1999, 402; Frame, 2015, 252). However, instead of integrating ἀλήθεια and *veritas*, Kant produced an epistemology that ended up denying ἀλήθεια, affirming the total dissociation between what exists and what we perceive. If we use Plato's myth of the cave, it is correct to say that Kant claimed that the human being is destined to live in the cave incapable of knowing anything. Kant's philosophy led to agnosticism, the essential doubt about the reality of things. In his 'Copernican revolution', Kant placed the human intellect as the shaper of reality (Chauí, 1997, 104; Thiselton, 2002, 155; Frame 2015, 254-255; Taliaferro and Marty 2018, 155) One might call his revolution anti-Copernican. While Copernicus discovered that the universe does not revolve around the earth, Kant argued that the epistemological universe revolves around the human intellect.

Kant differentiated the 'noumenal' from the 'phenomenal' reality: the world as it is and the world as it presents to reason (Chauí, 1997, 104; Thiselton, 2002, 155; Frame, 2015, 254-255; Taliaferro & Marty, 2018, 155). The 'phenomenal' knowledge does not belong to the 'noumenal' but is composed by the mind. The 'noumenal' is the world, but the 'phenomenal' is produced by our senses and mind, shaping an idea of the 'noumenal', therefore, it is a shadow of truth. For Kant, it was impossible to know the 'noumenal', the thing as it is, only by the 'phenomenal', the thing as it is shaped by the mind. Kant's distinction, I argue, produced a rupture between ontology and epistemology, creating the perfect scenario for future relativism. Kant casted doubt on both ἀλήθεια and *veritas*. If ἀλήθεια cannot be known, then eternal truths are unattainable. If the truths we perceive are constructs of our minds, then *veritas* becomes contextual and relative to each person. With the deconstruction of truth, the reality is groundless, leading to atheism and subjectivism. Therefore, history is now treated as a mere narrative, and the individual becomes the sun which all truths orbit around.

Kierkegaard and Truth

Kierkegaard considered Kant's rational epistemology a form of 'intellectual idolatry' for trying to understand what only God can (Dew & Gould 2019, 65). Kierkegaard rejected both the objectivism and immanentism of Feuerbach, and the subjectivism of Schleiermacher, these were different developments from Kant's idealism (Reichmann & Valls, 2019, 12).

For Kierkegaard, finitude prevents humans from fully knowing truth; truth is a transcendent reality, eternal, and infinite (Rudd, 2015, 487). A finite being cannot grasp the totality of the infinite truth. Therefore, humans are incapable of seeing truth absolutely, for absolute truth and total objectivity can only be seen by God (Kierkegaard, 2019, 33–36; 2013, 219).

Kierkegaard's opposition to rationalism, idealism and other forms of philosophical and theological objectivism should not be understood as rejecting rationality. Indeed, several Christian thinkers have misinterpreted Kierkegaard as teaching fideism, renouncing the need for reason, teaching a blind leap of faith (e.g., Geisler, 1999, 409; Mavrodes, 2015, 193; Robert, 2016). This accusation, in our view, is however groundless. Kierkegaard's idea of a leap of faith is an answer to Lessing's accusation that the Christian truths request a 'leap' where reason should be ignored (Reichmann & Valls, 2019, 14). Kierkegaard never argued that belief in the existence of God required a leap of faith, as for him all human beings already possess the natural ability to perceive the divine (Kierkegaard, 1985, 191-192; 2009, 291). For him, the existence of God was a self-evident truth, imprinted on human subjectivity and in nature. The leap of faith that he talked about, was the leap of trust in Jesus Christ in response to his message (Rae, 2010, 56; Evans, 2019, 41, 44).

Throughout his work, Kierkegaard displays a high appreciation for philosophy, and quoted the reasoning of the reformers and church fathers accordingly and praises the historical revelation of God through the Scriptures. However, he claims that intellectual knowledge is insufficient to save. Knowing the truths of Christianity, or even acknowledging them, is not enough for salvation. Only the appropriation of truth by faith leads to salvation.

Kierkegaard rejected both the idealism of Kant and Hegel, who confined the truth to the realm of abstraction and intellectual knowledge. For him, the truth was existential and should be evaluated existentially. Kierkegaard (2019; 2010, 114-115) also opposed the Greek idea of sin as ignorance, attributing the problem of evil not to reason or knowledge

but to passion and will. People do not merely sin because they are unaware of what is right and just but do so because they choose to do evil. Following the apostle Paul, who said, "For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do —this I keep on doing" (Romans 7:19; NIV), Kierkegaard argues that the human problem is not ignorance, but a subjective attitude opposed to God. Even though humans possess the condition to know the truth, they exist in a state of untruth (Kierkegaard, 2019, 33). While for Socrates, learning was through remembering, Kierkegaard claimed that it was through appropriation. Therefore, evil cannot be avoided by acquiring objective knowledge but by the personal appropriation of truth (Rae, 2010, 3; Kierkegaard, 2013, 38, 48).

Kierkegaard's thought should be interpreted under Augustine's concept of participation as previously presented. As the temporal 'true' participates in the eternal 'truth', Kierkegaard claimed that truth itself participates in God, for he is the ground of truth. Applying it to the different definitions of truth, we may say that ἀλήθεια is universal, while *veritas* is particular. While ἀλήθεια is the universal grounded in God; *veritas* is present in the particulars of creation, as an analogic manifestation of ἀλήθεια. While ἀλήθεια is transcendent, *veritas* is immanent. What is logical, juridical, empirical, and historically *veritas* participates by analogy in the universality of ἀλήθεια.

This is the background to understand Kierkegaard's principle of appropriation, for the human needs to participate in truth, instead of only acknowledging it. By participating in truth, the human being participates as an analogy of God. For, to be God's analogy is to be authentically his image. As Jesus is the truth, the perfect image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15), he is the universal human being, and every human is supposed to be a particular expression of him. Or, as Kierkegaard (2008, 296; 2011, 320) used to call it, the 'particular', or the 'single' individual. While for Socrates, one can know God when one knows oneself, for Kierkegaard a person only knows what means to be human, by knowing Jesus. The universal truth of what means to be human can be appropriated by faith by the particular individual.

Kierkegaard (2013, 199) argued that truth in the world is always in the empirical form, meaning, expressed in the becoming of truth. This, I argue, is *veritas*. As humans cannot grasp the wholeness of ἀλήθεια, because of their finitude, truth only relates to humanity through *veritas*. Therefore, humans relate to truth by approximation, through the mediation of *veritas* in the temporality of human life. And it is in this temporality, in the moment of being next to truth, where the individual chooses between truth or otherwise, where the choice is made by faith (Ibid, 200). Therefore, epistemologically speaking, every act of knowing is an act of faith.

Approximation, therefore, does not mean relativism but the act of moving or not moving towards truth. Applying this theologically, one can see that the gospel was preached as being 'near' to those who repent (Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17; 10:7), requiring the movement of faith towards its direction. Faith is the movement that appropriates God's truth. Therefore, Kierkegaard's thought puts faith at the center, as the foundation of epistemology.

Truth as אֱמֶת and אֱמוּנָה

Kierkegaard's concept of truth as subjective concretization, or appropriation (Kierkegaard, 2013:201-220), is more aligned with the Hebrew view of truth. The Hebrew words אֱמוּנָה (*Emunah*) and אֱמֶת (*Emet*) mean truth, but could also mean honesty, fidelity, and faithfulness (Swanson, 1997, §575, §622; Coenen & Brown, 2000, 2605; Mangum, 2014; Brague *et al.,* 2014, 1159-1160). In the Old Testament, אֱמוּנָה "is truth in the sense of trust." (McGrath, 1997, 74). What is true is faithful because it is relied on in the Lord

(Ramsdell 1951:264). In this sense, truth is grounded in the present who looks to the future (McGrath, 1997, 74). God is אֱמוּנָה because he is a "faithful God" (Deuteronomy 32:4; NIV). The psalmist says that he will proclaim the אֱמוּנָה of God to all generations (Psalm 89:1). God asks Jeremiah (5:1) to search if he can find one person that seeks his אֱמוּנָה and "does justice" (ESV) or "executes judgment" (NKJV), relating God's truth with the action of doing justice. Therefore, truth as אֱמוּנָה is action, for it always involves the individual appropriating it.

Truth as אֱמוּנָה is not conceptual but concrete, as the hands of Moses were אֱמוּנָה, firm and trustworthy in a concrete sense (Exodus 17:12). Truth is not an abstract concept but a tangible reality that should also be concretized in every believer. The fact that the Bible is written in the form of narrative is evidence that truth is presented concretely, historically, and is incarnated. Truth is action, for it is recognized in the act of God and his servants. Jesus said that he "can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." (John 5:19; NIV). Truth and faith are always in co-relation in the act of moving toward God's will.

The word אֱמוּנָה is derived from the same root of the word אֱמֶת, which is primarily used for truth. It is truth because it is firm, reliable, and trustworthy. In the LXX, אֱמֶת was frequently translated as ἀλήθεια (truth) and πίστις (faith), demonstrating that in Hebrew thought, the two concepts were not separated, while in Greek, they were distinct (Coenen & Brown, 2000:2605; Brague *et al.,* 2014: 1159). Truth and faith are so related in the Old Testament that it is impossible to separate them. While truth as אֱמוּנָה is clearly theological, I argue that it grounds every epistemology, for trust is at the foundation of epistemology, as demonstrated before in Kierkegaard's argument. Every truth, whether abstract or empirical, mathematical, scientific, historical, or philosophical, is based on trust in something or someone. Whether it be reliance on human reason, the senses, or even the report of historians, there is no truth that is not recognized through faith. Therefore, whether consciously or unconsciously, the secular thinker always grounds his epistemology on a personal, and secular type of theology. His theology establishes the faith framework for the ontological and epistemological foundation of his thinking. Kierkegaard (2009a), and recent Christian thinkers have shown that modern society is a theological construction built from a non-Christian lens (Milbank, 2006; Tyson, 2019).

Faith, as אֱמוּנָה, is not a blind leap, because even if the human being is in the untruth of sin, God made him with the condition of understanding the truth (Kierkegaard, 2019, 33). As we are the image and likeness of God, and God is the truth, when we encounter truth, we realize that it reflects something of us, revealing what we should be. However, whether we appropriate that truth or not, is still a matter of faith. Therefore, objective truth can be validated subjectively. As Stewart (2017, 55) commented about Kierkegaard's argument, "The key point in this is that the individual, with its own reason, must evaluate whether what has been stated is true."

The Trinitarian Epistemology

The fact that the concept of truth received different interpretations throughout history does not mean that they are distinct truths, as demonstrated. Just as God progressively revealed himself through history, so the very notion of truth can also be understood progressively. The problem, therefore, is not that the church has appropriated the truth as ἀλήθεια or *veritas*, but that it slowly forgot that truth is also אֱמוּנָה or אֱמֶת. In fact, the church seems to have forgotten that truth is the merge of the three concepts. This 'trinitarian truth' should conceive the truth as univocally one but in three inseparable ways: ἀλήθεια, *veritas,* and אֱמוּנָה.

While ἀλήθεια relates to the transcendent truth and *veritas* to the immanent, אֱמֶת is what unites transcendence and immanence, as truth also embodies, appropriates, and acts. No wonder Kant's dissociation between ἀλήθεια and *veritas* produced an agnostic and faithless epistemology.

The transcendent ἀλήθεια relates directly to the immanence of *veritas*, as God reveals himself to humanity, as Romans 1:20 states, "God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse." It is in the things God made where God's universal ἀλήθεια is communicated as particular *veritas* to humanity. Moreover, it is in אֱמֶת and אֱמוּנָה where God's truth incarnates, becoming verified, concrete, and humanly evidenced. Truth as אֱמֶת confidently moves towards divine truth. It is the appropriation of truth by faith in the temporality of one's human existence, where the incarnation of Jesus's universal humanity happens within the Christian, who becomes a new individual, authentically reflecting God's image as a true human being.

When the truth is reduced to ἀλήθεια, Christianity becomes rationalistic and abstract. When it is reduced to *veritas* it becomes legalistic and factual. Similarly, if disconnected from ἀλήθεια and *veritas*, אֱמֶt becomes fideism, eventually becoming cultic. Truth must be trinitarian, encompassing the three together.

We could say that all truth carries within itself an ontological (ἀλήθεια), epistemological (*veritas*), and theological character (אֱמֶt). While epistemology is grounded in ontology, ontology is grounded in God. Therefore, every epistemology is always theological. Even if someone denies God's existence, what is put in his place is an idol, an epistemology at odds with reality.

The Righteous live by the Truth

Although this article argues that the Trinitarian truth should be the ground for epistemology, it is its theological unfolding that requires special attention. In the Scriptures, it is possible to identify that God's servants did not walk in blind faith. Their acts of faith were based on the perceived ἀλήθεια of God revealed through his *veritas* in their personal history, and the history of Israel. In these people, ἀλήθεια, *veritas,* and אֱמֶt are found together.

Now, in order not to fall into a new trichotomous version of the truth, it is necessary to emphasize its unity, without neglecting its diversity. To clarify what the truth is in Scripture; it is important to reconceptualize it briefly based on what has been presented so far. The intention is to remove any confusion.

First, God's truth is eternal, infinite, and utterly transcendent. We have associated this with the Greek word ἀλήθεια. Second, the eternal truth is only accessible to humans through God's revelation, whether through nature (general revelation) or special revelation (Scripture). This two-fold revelation mediates God's eternal truth to humanity. It is God's transcendent truth reflected in the immanence of creation, which we associated with the Latin word *veritas*. One can identify truth only through what is true. As a mediation, *veritas* is temporal, contextual, and limited. Even though *veritas* participates and communicates ἀλήθεια, it is not itself ἀλήθεια. An example is in the law regarding the construction of a new house, where the builder must construct a parapet so that no one dies (Deuteronomy 22:8). The truth revealed in that specific historical context reflects and communicates elements of God's eternal truth, which in this case is his love for human life, and his justice to those who do not respect it. Various elements of God's eternal truth, ἀλήθεια, can be communicated through his *veritas*. For example,

God's historical acts of compassion reveal aspects of his love and grace. Equally, events of judgment in the Scriptures also reveal qualities of his justice and holiness.

Third, as truth is related to reality itself, and is grounded in God, our relationship to truth must not be mere acknowledgment, but participation. We called the truth that moves us to participation using the Hebrew term אֱמֶת, which is synonymous with trust. Learning is also trusting. In this sense, sin removes us from the participation of truth, conditioning us to exist in untruth. Untruth is a groundless existence. It puts us in contradiction with God, with ourselves, with nature, and with our neighbor. To live in untruth, the human being must deny the general revelation of God and deny his own reason. Moreover, one needs to harden one's heart, that is, deny the human emotions that communicate divine truths imprinted on the human being, such as love, mercy, a sense of justice, beauty, and so on. Only when a human being moves by faith in the truth does he become one with it.

Abraham's Example

A biblical example of a person who walked in the truth, where his relationship with God's ἀλήθεια and *veritas* can be perceived, was Abraham. If Abraham had met God only when God requested Isaac as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:2), no matter how clear he heard God's voice, why would Abraham trust him? Would the logical and empirical truth (*veritas*) of hearing God's voice be enough for him? Probably not. Abraham's obedience reveals that his action was grounded in a comprehensive experience he had with God's truth.

Abraham knew the essential elements of God's ἀλήθεια. Abraham could look back on his own personal journey and identify the *veritas* of God evidencing elements of his ἀλήθεια. History was a witness and a conduit of God's truth to him. He could recognize the love and power of God in conceiving him that he would father a son even though his wife was barren. He had already learned something about divine justice and holiness by witnessing God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1-29). He had also learned of God's mercy in interceding for the people in those cities (Genesis 18:16-38). God's eternal attributes of power, justice, mercy, love, and holiness were noticed by Abraham in his own experience.

That is why *veritas*, as the truth in the particularity of God's actions in his life and history was essential for Abraham to recognize aspects of God's universal ἀλήθεια. God was true to him; therefore, he could grasp elements of his eternal truth. However, even with the knowledge of *veritas* and discerning God's ἀλήθεια, the truth demanded action. After all, everything Abraham learned about God was through his actions.

The divine communication of His love, mercy, and justice to Abraham was only possible because they appealed to the divine impressions upon Abraham as God's image and likeness. This communication connected with the existential truths of Abraham, that to be consistent with himself as God's image, he needed to be coherent with God. The knowledge of *veritas* and ἀλήθεια was itself a calling to אֱמֶת, to be coherent with truth, appropriating it by faith. Ontologically, Abraham was inclined to walk in truth, but sin inclined him to untruth. His step of faith was a step toward truth.

Hebrews 11:19 says that Abraham "reasoned that God could raise the dead." (NIV). That is, Abraham's act of faith was based on his reasoning (NIV), and consideration (ESV), as the word used is λογίζομαι (pondered, thought about; Swanson, 1997a: §3357). Abraham walked in faith because he understood that it was the right thing to do. In his reasoning, he could remember God's *veritas*, pondered God's ἀλήθεια, and appropriated it by אֱמֶת. Therefore, I argue, that to walk by faith means walking in the truth. Walking by faith involves reason, knowledge of the works of God through his history, and the perception of universal divine truths that appeal to our particular and human life. The

timelessness of truth is expressed in the walk of the Christian, who looks back and sees the *veritas* of God, looks forward and recognizes his ἀλήθεια from afar, but acts in the now, taking steps in the אֱמֶת towards him.

Living by the Truth

The prophet Habakkuk wrote that the righteous will live by his אֱמוּנ (2:4), which the LXX translated as πίστεώς, meaning, faithfulness (NIV) or faith (ESV). The apostle Paul referred to the same verse, using the term faith, πίστεώς (Galatians 3:11). However, I argue that the verse might also be interpreted as "The righteous will live by truth," if the LXX had chosen the word ἀλήθεια instead of πίστις. This mix of concepts between truth and faith is perceived in some other verses where for example the NIV translated אֱמוּנָה as 'truth', but the LXX translated it as faith, πίστις (e.g., Proverbs 12:17; Jeremiah 5:1). This is because, as argued, truth and trust are undissociated.

What then are the major conceptual differences between walking by faith and walking by truth? There is no difference in the concept, as demonstrated, but it can change our contemporary reading. First, it helps us correctly adjust our very concept of faith, which has become synonymous with rational acquiescence to biblical truths. Churches that only recognize biblical truths but do not walk in them do not reflect what Scripture presents. Because the Church was not called to merely teach what Jesus taught, but to teach to "obey everything" he commanded (Matthew 28:20; NIV). When the truth is only recognized and taught, but not appropriated by faith, the Church becomes incoherent with Christ.

Second, it also helps us correct the mystical concept that faith is a blind leap not involving reason. Rational and intellectual knowledge of divine truths, whether in the history of biblical revelation or in the truths presented through nature is essential to walking in the truth.

Third, the dichotomy between faith and reason must collapse when we assume a trinitarian epistemology. That is why the redeemed human being must rediscover his call to the truth also in the study of the general revelation of God. The anti-intellectualism established in some evangelical circles toward the study of sciences and philosophy, for example, must be replaced by a new doxological intellectualism in worship and service of God.

Fourth, it can change the church's missiological perspective. When God spoke through Hosea, accusing his people that neither truth nor love was found in the land (Hosea 4:1), one can see the important role of truth as part of the mission of God's people. When the truth is lacking, the land suffers, and judgment falls on everyone in it. Why are evangelized places in the world still corrupt, with elevated levels of poverty, prostitution, and criminality? Did missionaries neglect aspects of truth that are essential to the transformation of society? Why is the gospel known and preached in churches, but the truth is lacking on the streets? It is essential that missiologists understand the role of the church as "the pillar and foundation of the truth" in each society (1 Timothy 3:15; NIV).

Finally, walking in the truth connects epistemology with Christian ethics. As the truth reveals God's holiness, justice, love, and other divine attributes, walking in truth becomes walking in love, justice, and holiness. The paradigm is not knowing the truth but incarnating it. Jesus is the incarnated truth, not just to be known, but to be followed. Christ is both God's gift and the prototype for human beings, who by faith need to embody his words (Ferreira, 2001, 11; Kim & Rasmussen, 2009, 181–184; Kierkegaard, 2011a,

307–308; 2012, 162). Walking in truth is incarnating God's words and participating in Jesus's body. When the Christian appropriates divine truth, one participates in Christ as a child of truth.

Conclusion

This article argued that the different approaches to truth in history contribute to a misunderstanding of truth. Different definitions of truth have fragmented it leading to relativism and a post-truth era. It is only through the rescue of epistemological unity as the Trinitarian truth that the Church and theology will be able to come out of their intellectual entrenchment. Just as philosophers and scientists neglect important aspects of the trinitarian truth, the Church also disregards other aspects of the same trinitarian truth. It is up to the Church to rebuild the concrete pillar of Truth in an increasingly 'liquid society'.

We demonstrated in this article how the concept of truth changed throughout history. In the first section, we used the three words, אֱמֶת (Hebrew), ἀλήθεια (Greek), and *veritas* (Latin), to exemplify the distinct emphasis given to the concept of truth. The next section worked on the concept of trinitarian epistemology, where the three concepts are seen together as dimensions of the same truth. In the last section, it was argued that "the Righteous live by the Truth", where Abraham's story was used to exemplify the paradigm of living by the trinitarian truth.

The significance of this article is that it presents truth in a comprehensive way, without neglecting important sources of knowledge, and exposes weaknesses when any of the important dimensions of truth are neglected. It is significant for proposing a better approach to truth and knowledge to the church, recognizing that every truth is God's truth, which should be approached doxologically. Trinitarian epistemology can inoculate the malady of anti-intellectualism affecting evangelical circles. Moreover, trinitarian truth is especially relevant for theology, demonstrating that the Christian life should not be based on the mere acknowledgment of spiritual truths. On the contrary, it must be grounded on truth's incarnation, on the existential appropriation of truth in Christian life.

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