

Images, images, images. We see them everywhere. We see them in every shape. At one time they were carved out of stones. But today, technology has given us different gadgets to create them and to give them life. They move, speak, shout, fly, eat, sing, cry, and rejoice. The film, television, and computer industries thrive on our obsession with images.

But, perhaps the most astonishing fact in the history of images is that we can finally interact with them in ways never before imagined. We can create them, modify them, communicate with them, and destroy them. Modern images are so close to the real that we refer to them as "virtual reality."

Thus it seems easier for humans to deal with images than with reality itself. But if we move to the cosmic plane, the fundamental issue is one of image versus reality, falsehood versus truth. In Seventh-day Adventist thinking, the great cosmic conflict is about the nature of ultimate reality. Intelligent beings throughout the universe have been confronted with an image of God conceived in the mind of a rebellious creature. Therefore, the most important question at the cosmic level is one of truth. For an answer, we turn to Jesus. He gave an altogether different definition of truth never before made on this planet: "I am the . . . truth" (John 14:6).^{*} He said. This striking claim leads to some assertions about truth.

1. Truth is transcendental

Ultimate reality is to be found outside the universe and not within its structural and functional unity. That does not mean that we cannot grasp some elements of truth through the use of our rational abilities. We can gain some knowledge. However, knowledge is not something we create but something we discover. This knowledge is fragmented. In order for it to be really meaningful, it has to be placed within the larger frame of reference provided by ultimate truth.

That perspective is inaccessible to us because it requires us to transcend the universe. This is simply impossible. But truth came down to us, entered into our world in the form of a person, and said, "I am . . . the truth. I am the only one who can integrate everything into a meaningful whole; because through me all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. I am before

all things, and in me all things hold together" (see Colossians 1:16-17).

This statement of Jesus was a penetrating blow to what the Greeks called *autárkeia* or self-sufficiency. They believed that truth was the manifestation of the eternal, immovable, and changeless essence of things and that humans could uncover it through rational analysis. Ultimate truth was located in the immaterial world of ideas, which was formed by rational abstractions of the

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human mind. As opposed to this, Jesus proclaimed that truth is beyond the reach of the unaided human mind; it is a revelation. By saying "I am the truth," Jesus rejected any attempt to define the origin, nature, and destiny of the human race from a naturalistic perspective.

Further, He was laying claim to absolute truth. He did not say, "I am a dimension of truth, an aspect of truth, an element of truth." He who spoke was the Eternal "I am," God in human form. In Him all knowledge finds its center and meaning.

The Bible states that truth or wisdom can be obtained only if one is willing to recognize that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). The Bible rejects *autárkeia* as an avenue to truth. To the immature person tempted to be autonomous comes the counsel, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight" (Proverbs 3:5). This is indeed difficult for the *autárkes* person.

2. Truth is a Person

To say that ultimate truth is located beyond the sphere of human action is to state something that is not popular or

easily accepted. The transcendental nature of truth sets limits to our pride and tends to make us uncomfortable. But perhaps even more disturbing to human logic is the assertion of Jesus that in Him resides truth—truth is a Person.

Philosophy searches for truth in terms of abstractions, identifying the essence behind our sense experience. But Jesus counters such notions by saying that truth is not a set of abstract concepts or universals that we can use to integrate the phenomena we observe. He suggests that everything that came into existence was the result of the activity of the Person from whom all other persons derive their personhood. What holds the universe together is a Person—not a law, not a principle, not a simple force.

Truth as a Person means that truth is rational and intelligible. Its apprehension does not require a rejection of rational abilities. On the contrary, through our rationality we can have contact with the truth. This is possible because Jesus as truth made Himself available to us. Therefore, we need to develop our rational capacities to the utmost and to do so within the sphere of truth provided by the One who said, "I am the truth."

Truth as a Person also means that

the universe does not function in a mechanical way, controlled by impersonal laws. Yes, there are laws that govern all phenomena, seen and unseen. But those laws are the expression of the will and power of the Person who is the truth, who holds the universe together. "Thou art the Lord, thou alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and thou preservest all of them" (Nehemiah 9:6). The verb translated "to preserve" could be also rendered, "to keep alive." Life is preserved by life; intelligent life is preserved by the power and the very source of intelligent life. Ultimate reality cares for that which exists; only persons care.

Truth as a Person reveals the nature of ultimate reality: God is the truth. This truth humbled Himself in a mysterious way and entered our world in the form of a human being (see Phillipians 2:5-11). Ultimate reality is no longer exclusively transcendental because He was and is now among us. John says that we saw Him "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Truth thus expresses Himself in humility. He assumes the form of the needy and the unsophisticated, and embarrasses our pride and self-sufficiency.

Truth in Christ and through Christ is measureless. The student of Scripture looks, as it were, into a fountain that deepens and broadens as he gazes into its depths. . . . The truth as it is in Jesus can be experienced, but never explained. Its height and breadth and depth pass our knowledge. We may task our imagination to the utmost, and then we shall see only dimly the outlines of a love that is unexplainable, that is as high as heaven, but that stooped to the earth to stamp the image of God on all mankind.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 128-129.

The nature of truth was revealed not only in the incarnation, but at the cross as well. The Truth died in order to preserve alive the phenomena, the created world. He who holds the universe together died, and yet the universe did not collapse and die with Him! Once more the unexpected happened, and it was revealed that the truth can sacrifice Himself for the creature and continue at the same time to hold the universe together.

Truth as a Person further reveals the sublime reality that at the very core of the divine Being we can only find love, selfless love (see 1 John 4:8). On the cross the lie was unmasked: the image created by Satan about God and His love was clearly shown to be false. Truth conquered Satan's lie.

3. Truth is to be appropriated

When Jesus said, "I am the truth," He expected a response. Since Jesus is the truth, we are to relate to Him not in terms of a detached scientific objectivity but in terms of an "I-Thou" relationship. We understand people by being involved in their lives, by participating with them in the experience of being alive; through *koinonía*. We can have fellowship with the Truth because it is a person. In Him is located the origin, goal, and nature of our existence and of the whole world. It is in Him that a proper worldview is to be found, because He is the one who gives cohesiveness and meaning to the universe.


What is needed is willingness to surrender our *autárkeia* to Him. This in essence is freedom: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). We are slaves to sin that manifests itself in our claim to self-sufficiency. The lie consists in the belief that we can find our own way in the universe, that we can discover permanent meaning for our lives through scientific, technological or philosophical inquiries. Submission to the truth frees us from the narrowness of self-sufficiency and integrates us into fellowship with Him who said, "I am the truth."

Truth is apprehended not only through a personal encounter with the Lord, but also through His Word. Truth can be conceptualized, codified, embodied in words. God uses human language, in spite of its limitations, as a valid vehicle for the communication of truth. This takes place under the revelation and inspiration of God. Therefore Paul says, "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

Truth determines not only our understanding of reality and our comprehension of the world around us, but also the way we live. Any compartmentalization of truth in terms of ethics and religion, science and faith, is a rejection of the fact that truth is a Person and that it is He who integrates all knowledge into a single meaningful totality. We are to live according to the truth (see 1 John 1:6). We need to display truth both in speech and conduct.

Conclusion

The history of human thought indicates that we are by nature searchers. We probe the vastness of the universe, the depth of the oceans. We also seek to penetrate the microcosm. We explore all the realms of knowledge.

However, our search for ultimate truth is over. Yes, we are still challenged to seek a deeper understanding of truth, to explore its rich and complex forms; but the search for its very essence is over. It is over because He came to us and He said, "I am the Truth." His claim sets limits to our self-sufficiency, for truth is transcendental, revelational, and personal. And we can grasp that truth through personal fellowship with Him, and by obediently following Him. 

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**All Scripture passages in this article are quoted from the Revised Standard Version.*