

UNDERSTANDING



A connection with
Ultimate Truth

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“One can never wrestle enough with God
if one does it out of pure regard for truth.

Christ likes us to prefer truth to him
because, before being Christ he is truth.
If one turns aside from him go towards truth,
one will not go far before falling into his arms.

Simone Weil (1909-1943)

COVER: The Dance, 1910. Henri Matisse (1869-1954)

P R E F A C E

We hear a lot about core-values lately, and it occurred to me that we may all have a different set of them. The couple who snatch the silver salt and pepper shakers from a restaurant table I'm sure do not consider themselves criminals, or those that cry "soak the rich" totally justify themselves with the notion that "they have more than they need;" regardless of whether they earned it or not. The folks in the Near East seem to have little compunction about murdering the innocent completely understanding that it is the right thing to do.

We all know many people with whom we agree or disagree based on our core values which appear to be quite different from their core values. Are core values intrinsic or are they learned, or both? Sociologists have been kicking that around for centuries. The world is populated by human beings wonderfully different on the outside but, in fact, there all pink on the inside. Eyes are blue, brown, hazel, etc., but to my knowledge, all blood is red. Whether we like it or not we are all descended from the same *Homo Sapiens* couple. This would suggest to a reasonable mind, we are all in the same family.

To my knowledge every civilization in the history of the world came up with a set of rules by which its people were to live and conduct their lives. Generally, they were all very much the same. There was a god to be sated in one manor or another so that the culture wouldn't come to ruin and the people could live happily. What made many of them think that a god would require human sacrifice can only be answered with the notion that "life," as they saw it, was the most precious thing they had to offer. Later, to defend something very important, like your core values with your life, deserved a higher form of praise than any other sacrifice one could make.

The following is one persons look at the process of understanding which is offered for your perusal warts and all. If you get a few interesting points from it, great! If not, that's okay too.

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Meaning needs to be understood. The meaning of things, the core, the heart of something, its one and only reality is inexorably and absolutely tied to the pure truth of its being and its purpose. The intellect or “that by which we know” is the means of understanding. It is unique to man and is how man *is* who he is.

It has become very common in today’s dialogue that people exchanging thoughts and ideas make an extra effort to be understood. They use the terms: “You know what I’m saying?”, “Do you understand?”, “Get it?”, “Catch my drift?” etc. They want to be certain that they’re understood. In any exchange, presuming the parties are attentive, both need to grasp each others meaning. First in a categorical sense, and beyond that with the recognition of deeper meaning, that is, whether the truth is being served in the name of what is good rather than simple subjectivism, idle talk or “jabber.”

Outright lies from some people with a distorted will, create false meanings for the purpose of deluding an unknowing other, thus turning the good on its head.

Those who express themselves out of ignorance, who have little or no understanding of the matters they’re expressing, are, in effect, lying to themselves. Their presumption is again what turns the good topsy turvy; truth becomes flexible. They may very well believe what they’re saying is true without any confirmation, only a hollow conviction. This way, half truths or false information is spread.

Ignorance is not innocence for those who are able to reason, but a distortion of the truth for selfish reasons always goes against the good.

In many cases, the facts pertaining to the truth of a situation may be harsh and hurtful and an easing of those facts in the interest of the greater good may be employed. This has gotten to be known as “the white lie.” The truth can be brutal if its applied thoughtlessly against a vulnerable person or a person who is too young or unable to reasonably evaluate it. Truth then, is given in moderation and temporarily the greater good is served out of propriety or charity.

Conversely, truth can be turned into a weapon by those who want to satisfy selfish motives by consciously using it to hurt another. This is, again, using truth for nefarious purposes totally opposed to the good.

The truth is absolute. It’s like the ultimate answer to a higher mathematics problem that has yet to be solved; the answer is there no matter how long it takes to get to it.

Truth, in itself is ultimately and absolutely right, and being so, it is the ultimate good. Consensus may declare itself to be right, but it’s only a numbers game based on multiple subjectivity.

“Consensus must not try to pass itself off as a substitute for the truth”...”The question of freedom is inseparably linked to the question of truth. When truth is not a value in itself, which merits both active interest and the expenditure of time independently of its results, profit can be the only criterion with which to evaluate knowledge. If this is the case knowledge has its *raison d’être* no longer in itself but the objectives which it serves. Then it belongs to the domain of ends and means. In other words in one form or another it is subordinate to power and its acquisition.” (Benedict XVI)

Only when truth has value in itself and a glimpse of it outweighs every success, only then are we free; and this is why the only authentic freedom is the freedom of truth. (Benedict XVI)

We are required to live by the truth in all respects; without it there can be no justice, no freedom. Meaning in life then, is in truth, the pursuance of the ultimate good. That's easy enough to say, but since our life on earth winds up being generally unfinished business, persistence is the issue. David Bentley Hart says:

“Each of our lives is an opus imperfectum (an imperfect work), which within its own immanent terms must in (sum) sense end largely thwarted and unrealized.”

I must add, no matter how great we think we are or how much we might have attained or accumulated.

The Ultimate is not here and now, we are only on a path to it. We sharply sense division from it since it's always quite beyond our reach. We know that intellectually. We have been provided with an understanding of “purposeful meaning,” a knowledge of the existence of the greatest good, which we also have been given the freedom to reject. It is the intellectual knowledge of the good as truth, living in us that makes us human.

Conscience then becomes the battleground where sensuality and the transcendental notions of the ultimate good compete for dominance. The use of the senses for the good is what helps make life a joy, but we have the freedom to use our senses for nefarious purposes as well. Most of us know that sensation is transitory or finite as opposed to the Ultimate Good which exists beyond the limits of time in the infinite reality of the truth. Think about it, is truth only as we see it, or is Truth ultimate, in itself, beyond our horizon? If we call that truth God, then it is definitely the Truth that sets us free. We may even have known of the Ultimate Truth, then lost it and need to find it again. What would be more important to attain or obtain?

Now we begin to understand, intellectually, the meaning in the statement: “I am, the way the truth and the life.”

Is it possible that one person could be all these things just because he said so, or did he prove it by being restored to an Easter living-reality other than the one we know, his resurrected state? Didn't he promise that we could do the same?

There is nothing stupid about the efforts of science trying to find the ultimate truth, the "Mind of God" as they call it; the question is, can it be found in finite terms or must one reach out beyond temporality, beyond the cosmos or any other so called graspable reality.

The "real" uncertainty principle is that the infinite is open ended and cannot be rationalized. It is found by a leap of faith! John Polkinghorne says:

"Truth always exceeds what can be proven."

What we know intellectually, cannot be proven empirically. Cardinal Newman restated what Locke believed:

"There are cases, in which evidence, not sufficient for scientific proof, is nevertheless sufficient for assent and certitude." Meister Eckart warns us:

"Just as it would be presumption and reckless not to believe unless you have understood, so too it would be sloth and laziness not to investigate by natural arguments and examples what you believe by faith."

Saint Anselm sums it up beautifully:

"What answer is one to give someone who, out of an inability to understand why it is, concludes that an inevitable fact is an impossibility?"

If a person doesn't understand something, that doesn't make it untrue. The lack of understanding calls for an intellectual conclusion, not resignation or disparity. Belief in the ultimacy of Truth takes one quite beyond the self centeredness of our "modern" age. The opposite stance would be retrogression; back to the burrows and trees from whence we came.

We can't leave reasoning out of the picture because that's what we do, but "intellectus" is the facilitator of reason. It is a means of knowledge, unfettered by the senses. It is understanding that there is an answer to that math problem, though it cannot provide it. Schrodinger helps us here:

"A mathematical truth is timeless, it does not come into being when we discover it."

The presence of the Ultimate Good is inherent in the human species. A species that progressed over time by the process of "evolution" as we inevitably reached the brain to mind transition.

Finally, at the Incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth through the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, the human family is brought to a full understanding of the meaning of life. We were created by the Father, redeemed by the Son and are guided by the Spirit of Truth to an eternity based primarily on how we use our freedom. What language do we have other than the understandable language of humanity in Truth, including an open dialogue with the Trinitarian God.

We tend to want to speak to presumed space aliens in understandable terms including pictographs, etc., believing in an unconfirmed "truth" that they've got to be out there, are similar to us, and that they will understand who we are. The only true reality that we understand and we need the aliens to understand is the reality we have created. There can be no other. Even when we broaden our ideas of being, we create parallel universes: some sort of "mirror images" of ourselves. We may still be eating the fruit of the "Tree of Good and Evil," here in the twenty-first century.

Could our great mistake be that we have gotten so far into ourselves that we have become blind to a way out? These words then may have a little more meaning for us:

"For judgement I have come into the world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." (Jn. 9:39)

When the Spirit of Truth advises us from within — are we listening, or have we become so overcome by our “external” existence that our mind’s eyes and ears are closed to Truth’s prompting. St. Augustine put it clearly:

“You were within me, and I was in the world outside myself.”

When Huxley said that all knowledge must be based on reason, and that we cannot rationally claim to have access to knowledge that is beyond the power of the intellect, he was only partially right. What he was saying, was that reason controls the intellect. Yet it is rational to understand that the intellect has reasons beyond our coherency, beyond our thinking about it, what Freud called our subconscious. Our thinking is the process of our intellectual capacity and comes before our rationality. This is precisely one of the ways we are made in God’s image.

Thinking about space aliens is reasonable based on current knowledge, but it is by our intellectual faculty that these thoughts arise. Intellect is not the sum of our reasoning. Pierre Rousselot (1878-1915) “the first and most original genius of what has come to be called ‘transcendental Thomism’,...In an emerging departure from faculty psychology dominant in his day showed that Aquinas’s ratio (reason) meant a lower performance of intelligence.” On pg. 57 of his *Intelligence* he said:

”We must remember that where the truth is concerned differences between persons change nothing: when you speak the truth you are invincible, no matter who your adversary....The entire value of judgements of intelligence comes precisely from this, that intelligence is the faculty of the divine.”

This is not too difficult to grasp when our thoughts point in the direction of the ultimate such as omnipotence, omniscience, and omni-amorousness, etc. In short, to the

Absolute; our Father the Creator, the pure Spirit whom we choose to worship, who has been revealed to us particularly in Jesus of Nazareth, his life, death, and resurrection; the most historic/supernatural event of all time.

Can there be a world without understanding it's origin by the Creator, without the love and open arms it's Redeemer and the joyful presence of the Spirit of love?

If this is possible, it would have to be a world where satisfaction with the self, by whatever means available, is all there is. Where ignoring the promises made by Jesus of everlasting life would be ignoring what we know, intellectually of the Ultimate Truth. Where desperation and terrible anxieties are the result of a vision of emptiness facing us as “permanent annihilation,” belying itself and putting both what is good and evil on an equal basis — where there is no difference, all is simply relative.

It would be a world where meaning has no purpose and reflection, compassion, and sympathy are simply self serving conditions of a temporal nature. Where no one need answer for their actions, eliminating guilt so that any excuse is right. Where Freedom and Justice have no purpose beyond the authoritarian State; and oaths are empty of all commitment. One can only begin to imagine what a world like this would be like; yet, it all sounds so eerily familiar.

Fr. Richard John Neuhaus in his book *American Babylon* stated:

“The darkest and most relentless depiction of the modern political project was offered by Thomas Hobbes. He taught that the incarnate and resurrected God-man who lives and governs is to be replaced in the temporal world by a mortal god (*deus mortalis*) — a machine like man, mythologically known as Leviathan. Engraved on the title page of the 1651 edition of his book is (Job 41:24) ‘There is upon earth no

power like his.’ After Auschwitz and Gulag Archipelago, we cannot read those words without a moral shudder.”

In response to my cloying complaints about many of our hierarchy, clergy, and our “esteemed “ politicians, he sent me an e-mail response before he passed away on January 8, 2009.

“Re the difficulty of cutting through the great moral questions of our day: Often the wall of resistance is built much more from the distorted will than wrong reasoning, but we must never despair of the possibility of persuasion.” (July 22, 2000)

A fair question here would be: how did that “wall of resistance” which distorts the will become so prevalent in “our day?”

It’s been about fourteen billion years since the “beginning”, and most scientists have no definitive explanation or any empirical proof of the origin of the “Whole Shebang”. They offer only hypothetical and mathematical postulates as to “creation”. We know a lot about what happened after the Big Bang all the way up to this day, but, truly, nothing at all about a before.

Man, once he acquired the process of thinking with his larger brain, he knew of a Creator. He and She began to understand what the plan was and from whom it had come. Aristotle characterized this in his book after the Physics known as The Metaphysics. The word metaphysics has gotten the reputation of something unreal rather than the true reality of ungraspable phenomena known by the saints and sages who thought a lot about it.

From what I understand, our “nature” has been cumulative, we have evolved from the animal to the human, then, perhaps we’ll go on to the superhuman, our very own resurrected state as had been promised.

Coming out of the “Garden of Eden” with Intelligence, by what ever means has certainly been a progression. Right from the start, from the singularity to atoms and electrons, to chemistry, from living cells to human life, has become matter of careful investigation. We have the intellectual capacity to know what is most important and least important to us since we crossed the divide from animal to human. Unfortunately we have retained many of the instinctive traits of our former animal nature. Not bad in itself — for animals — but most disconcerting for humans.

As humans we may have built on those habits, elaborated on them with the power of reason and created an extended set of reasoned habits drawing us back to a lower existence, so much so it may have become what is known as “second nature” while still knowing the Ultimate Truth within us. Reason now has a double edge to it. We could reason about what would be sensually “good”, or what the “Ultimate Good” is as known by the intellect a priori, the conscience-forming Good, installed in us according the Creator’s plan and accompanied by the full freedom our forerunners did not possess.

It was through the Jews and with the Incarnation, at the “fullness of time”, that we finally found out what “supernatural” reality was all about, even though we had always been conscious of a reality beyond our own human experience. Man now had a better understanding of a super reality, the one promised by the Messiah, proven by his resurrection and attested to by the Apostles; the “new covenant” in the blood of the Lamb of God. “Truth as a person” spoke our language when the Ultimate Good became human, died for us, and rose again from the dead two thousand years ago.

The lessons of Jesus are clear: obedience to Our Father; Love for him who is Love and all he created, especially all who

are made in his image. The meaning of life becomes unmistakable. It is the pursuit of the Ultimate Good whom we know and have known, in the Spirit of Truth.

A leap of faith, trusting in our intellectual as well as our practical connections with the Father and the Son in the Spirit of Truth. It's available to all who ask in the name of Jesus Christ with a simple, humble, silent prayer.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matt 24:36) (Mark 13:31) (Luke 21:22)

There will be a new understanding, a new awakening to what we have always understood intellectually, and an unwillingness to have the will distorted and to lose sight of our connectivity or communion with the Ultimate Truth.