

Truth and Faith

SoCM Lesson on Christian Apologetics

What is Truth?

- Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth?” (Jn 18:38)
- Jesus says: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6)
- Jesus says: “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (Jn 17:17)
- What is truth?
- Is Christian truth really true and knowable?
- There are major challenges today:

Agnosticism

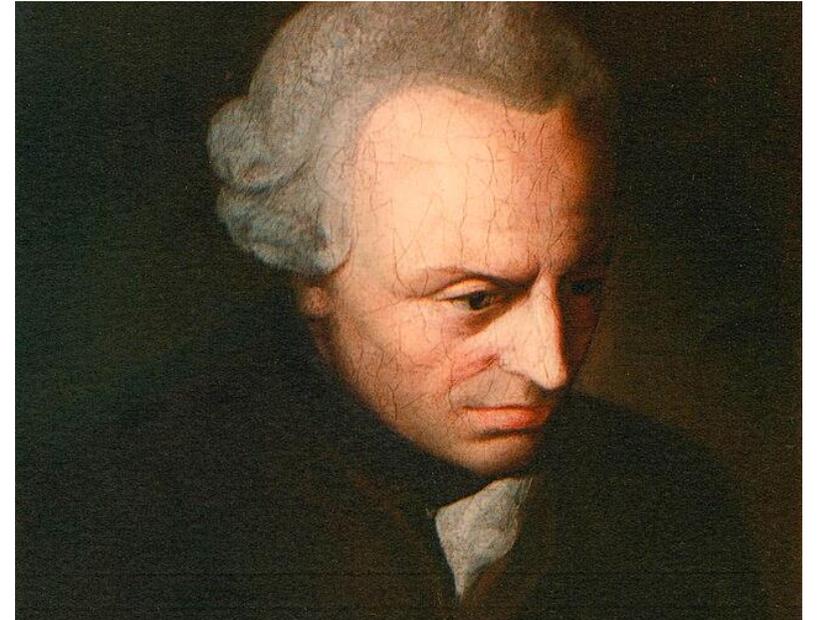
Agnostics, such as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), argue that there is a world or reality out there. But the content of all knowledge comes via the human senses, which are structured in our mind.

We can only know **what something is to ourselves** (perceptions or empirical), but never what something is in itself (metaphysics).

We cannot know God for who he is.

Christianity is really about morality or ethics.

Response: It is ultimately self-defeating.



Relativism

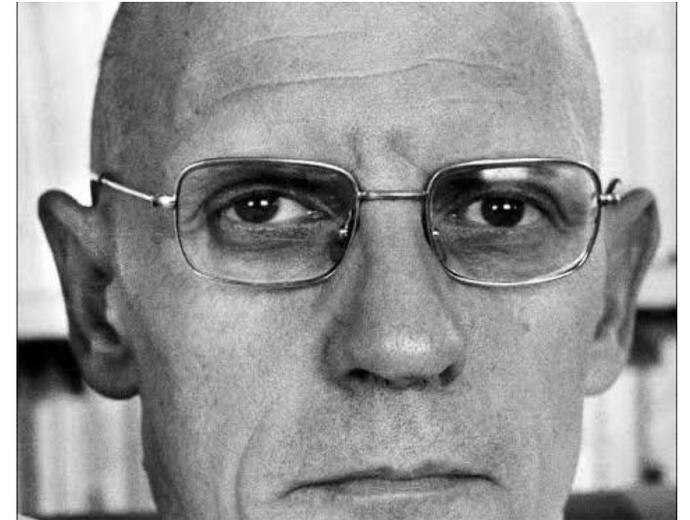
Michel Foucault (1926-1984), a French philosopher (Sorbonne), rejects the notion of objective truth accessible to the individual observer

Instead, he argues that truth or knowledge is historically and socially conditioned aimed to the exercise of power

Truth is relative and exists only for certain people and at certain times

Thus, there could only be perspectives, but objective or absolute truth is an illusion

Response: It is ultimately self-defeating

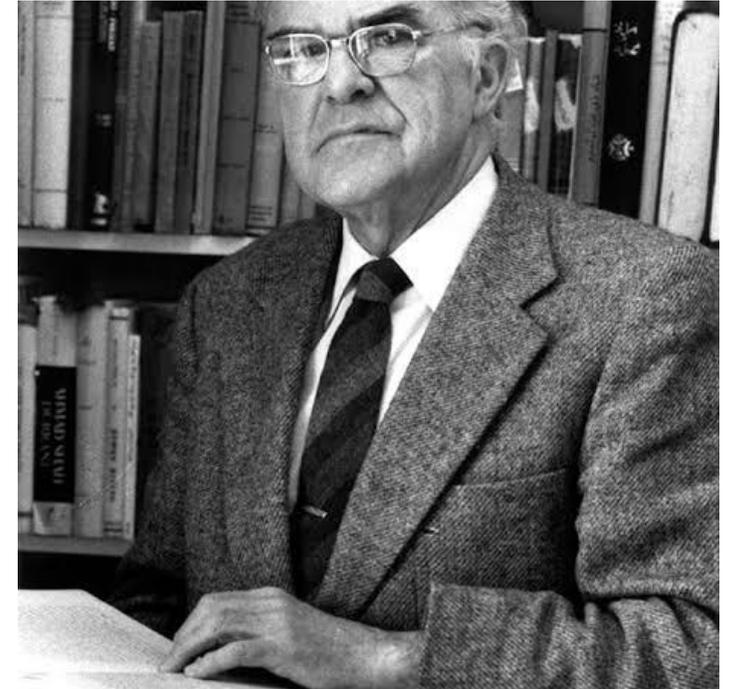


Religions as Personal Truth

Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000), a former Harvard professor of comparative religion, argues that religions should be understood as “**personal truth**,” the inner, subjective faith of persons

Because Smith regards religions as one’s personal and subjective encounters with God, he rejects the idea of propositional or objective truth in religions

According to Stephen Hawking, the late Cambridge professor of physics, truth in the modern world only resides in science or in the observable (empirical) universe



What is Faith?

The term “faith” (πίστις) can be used in at least two senses:

Belief or trust **in** God, commitment to God, walk with God

Belief **that** certain statements about God are true (Bible and doctrines)

“**Faith**” in the NT refers to believing or trusting in Jesus on the truth of his life, death, and resurrection

NT writers attest to eyewitness accounts of Jesus’ resurrection for Christian faith and hope (1 Cor 15)



Truth, Faith, and Reality

According to William Alston (1921-2009), an American Professor and Philosopher of Religion from the University of Chicago, a concept of truth is as follows:

“A statement (proposition) is true if and only if what the statement says to be the case is actually the case in reality” (Alston 1996, 5)

True realism is closely related to the “correspondence theory of truth,” which holds that “for a statement to be true, there must be some appropriate correspondence between true statements and the actual features of the world” (Alston, 7)



Christianity in Singapore

- How should Christians view other religions—are they all the same?
- Roland Chia, a Methodist theologian at TTC, writes: “The nuggets of truth found in these religions loosen the soil of the hearts of pagan and make them receptive to the gospel. But salvation is found only in Jesus Christ” (Chia 2015)
- The teaching of the church, tracing back to the Patristic Fathers of the first century, is that God’s grace is to be found in every culture
- This does not mean religions are “vehicles” of salvation,” but rather a “preparation for the Gospel”
- 50% of Christians in Singapore believe other religions can be true:
<https://saltandlight.sg/news/10-causes-of-concern-for-the-church-what-surprised-us-from-pew-research-religious-survey/>

Sharing the Truth of the Gospel in Singapore

- Roland Chia observes that Christians who make exclusive truth claims about Christ can potentially engender intolerance, exclusion, and violence in religiously diverse environments like Singapore (Chia 2018)
- Therefore, our Christian witness in the public sphere must be restrained by respect and love for others who disagree with us
- Christian witness should also include dialogue with religious others as a form of “social intercourse between persons”
- Christian proclamation of the truth of the gospel must avoid extremism, arrogance, and abrasive language

Conclusion

- Christians do not have complete, exhaustive knowledge of God in his essence, but we can know him partially
- We can know God in Jesus Christ and in his word, which is a metanarrative using correct analogical language (road map) to describe the nature and work of God
- John Calvin says in the 16th century that God condescends to us using “baby-talk” to communicate with us