

Truth and revelation

Our truth is the sort of truth that acknowledges that we see through a mirror dimly.

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

March 13, 2017



“Truth” has been under fire for a long time in the U.S., with our peculiar popular mix of propaganda and advertising. It’s a particularly painful burn these days. When people were trying to figure out the results of the election, and how false [rumors about Hillary Clinton](#) had overshadowed Donald Trump’s very real ethical concerns, [Fake News](#) became a matter of interest.

In reaction, like a child on a playground crying, “I’m not stupid, *you’re stupid*,” President Trump began to attack trusted, historic news sources, calling *them* [fake news](#) and the enemy of the people. This is worrisome, for a strong democracy relies on independent, trustworthy news sources.

Not only is there finger-pointing about which outlets are fake news, but the White House seems to be okay with conjuring up falsehoods themselves. When asked about the White House's Press Secretary's fabrications about Trump's inauguration crowd size, Kellyanne Conway explained that Sean Spicer did not lie, he presented ["alternative facts."](#)

We have a President who likes to wake up in the middle of the night, and instead of quietly reading a book with a nightlight like most of us do, he allows those monsters from under his bed to get him all worked up and paranoid. Then he hops on Twitter and [regurgitates conspiracy theories that have little basis in truth.](#)

Our jester/prophet, Stephen Colbert, warned us of this 12 years ago, when [he coined the word "truthiness."](#) That was during the days when Facebook was in its infancy. Since then, the problem of truthiness has become much more pronounced. The Internet idealists were hoping that more voices would allow truth to rise to the top, that there would be a democratizing of ideals, and the world wide web would allow more room for truth.

Yet, it seems at this moment, our insatiable hunger for fear and anger has outsized our nutritional needs for reasoned truth. Even those trustworthy news sources rely on ratings and subscriptions, which are too often fueled by our anxiety and fury.

Truth is a big deal for us, as Christians. Jesus said that he is the truth, and proclaimed that the truth will set us free. We are encouraged to love, "not in word or speech, but in truth and action."

Yet, we've had our own difficulties with "truth." In Christian traditions, we have people who hold to biblical inerrancy, and they believe that literally every word of the Bible has to be factually and scientifically true, or else the whole thing is meaningless. They are the people who say that the world was created roughly 6,000 years ago, even though mountains of scientific evidence points to a planet that is billions of years old.

So are the biblical literalists correct? If we care about truth, as Christians, then what about the Bible? Are we creating alt-facts within our faith? Are we dealing in "truthiness"? Must we believe every word of our text or it all becomes false? Are the new atheists correct in saying Christianity is in false because we have creation myths that were created with limited scientific knowledge?

I don't think either the literalists or the new atheists are correct on our Christian understanding of truth. You see, before the Enlightenment, there were different ways of understanding truth. There was *mythos* and *logos*. *Mythos* is the sort of truth that Christians work with—it is the unattainable reality that has meaning in its mystery and depth in its ungraspable qualities. It is the sort of truth that acknowledges that we see through a mirror dimly. It's the truth that claims revelation (or “uncovering”) is an on-going act throughout history. Because of that, the truth will always be partially obscured and covered.

That was something people understood before the Enlightenment. Now, we read pre-enlightenments texts with post-enlightenment minds. So it's difficult for us to break out of the strict rules that science and history set up and embrace the mysteries of sacred texts. Our faith does not claim the scientific *logos*, it is something different. Our text is a different sort of genre.

But then, what is the difference between the truth we claim and the lies of propaganda and marketing?

The distinction is that **our mysterious truth comes with the humility of people who are sorting things out, who understand that we will never know the fullness of God, humanity, or even ourselves.** Yet, we are endlessly curious and that curiosity leads to a faith that seeks understanding. We're like toddlers, who are always trying to fit syllables around a longing that is beyond our grasp. We make leaps of faith and dare to utter those things we cannot possibly understand. Our truth is one in which we struggle together, because we cannot help but delight in the awe and the mystery of the vast and the unknowable.