

## **The search for truth: in conversation with Cornel du Toit**

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### *Abstract*

Cornel du Toit is an exploratory thinker. He is a wide thinker, who refuses to be confined by the limitations of a specific discipline or dogma. In the years that I have worked with Du Toit, I have found his work to be innovative and fresh, ground-breaking and constantly testing the limits of convention. It is such a mind that is helpful in the tensions between science and religion, between religion and politics, and between existentialism and metaphysics. Underlying his work is the nugget which drives every researcher: a quest for the truth. In this article I wish to celebrate the work of Cornel du Toit by commenting on the different ways he has grappled with the question of truth, while holding the reins of the bucking horses called religion and science. I will do so by describing Du Toit's perspectives of the locus of truth in religion and science, and his exploration of the tension between these two entities. I conclude with ideas about the direction in which our understanding of truth in science and religion may be heading.

### **Introduction**

“What is truth?” John 18:38 in the Bible is a poignant question. Pilate asks Jesus this question during His trial. Pilate's question is rhetorical, responding to Jesus' claim that those who listen to His voice belong to the truth. “What is truth?” John might have struggled with this question himself and so he cleverly juxtaposes the human and the divine. Truth is seated in the divine and Pilate's retort points to the idea that humanity will forever seek truth which perpetually evades it. What is truth and how do we find it? Are there any instruments we can use to catch a glimpse of it?

Perhaps one should refrain from speaking about truth *per se* and rather focus on sources of truth. After all, the search for truth sparked enquiry, giving rise to philosophy and influencing theology. Later it became the foundation for scientific investigation. What is truth? Perhaps truth is the unseen; that which we strive for as portrayed in the dualistic teachings of Plato. Or is it the achievement of a Freudian equilibrium between the id and the superego? Perhaps truth is locked up not in this dimension, but in the culmination of quantum universes, each of which, it is theorised, contains its own interpretation of the truth. Then there are the philosophical undertones in history that offer a glimpse into a place where the locus of truth is to be found. Premodernism, for instance, depended largely on religion, philosophy and metaphysics to get a handle on what was perceived to be the truth. Modernism started to question metaphysics and located the source of truth in the methodology of science (reductionism) (Du Toit 2007:31). Postmodernism believes that truth is not something that is contained, but a subjective existential notion only for religion, science and philosophy to ponder about and to come to certain conclusions about aspects of the truth (Du Toit 2007:32) An ontological absolute truth is therefore unlikely to exist and, if it does exist, would be too complex to capture in the physical frameworks at our disposal.

Furthermore, if there is a truth, what does it say? How is it assessed to ascertain whether it is in fact *the* truth? More so, does any measure able to quantify truth not become by default a greater truth than that which is in process of being measured? Pilate's question is a question for today and with strides being made in scientific discovery, philosophy and theology, is much more complex than he could have imagined.

Cornel du Toit's lifework has been concerned with *a* search for forms of truth. I deliberately do not say “*his* search for truth”, as it is evident that Du Toit is quite comfortable to engage with different disciplines and their understandings of truth, even if they seem to be mutually exclusive – none more so than the truth claims made in the rivalry between science and religion. Also, I hesitate to say “*the* truth” as such an undertaking would be largely presumptuous and unattainable. Instead I intentionally describe his search for *forms* of truth as the truths revealed in different puzzle pieces may generate a greater picture which is more than the sum total of truths conveyed individually. It is here that Du Toit dances graciously between the two worlds (at least) of science and religion, recognising the importance of each while posing challenges to both disciplines, urging them not to fall into the trap of absolutism. Absolutism shows total disregard for perspectives that differ from its own. I will first explore Du Toit's engagement with religion and science, particularly their claims to truth. As Du Toit is a Christian, a minister of religion schooled in the discipline of theology, it would be appropriate to start by investigating his understanding of Christian theological and religious truth.

## Religion, theology and truth

In light of common religious truth claims, it is quite interesting that Du Toit starts with a bold statement that denies religion the right to claim absolute truth as its own (Du Toit 2007:93). Christian theology has always endeavoured to speak correctly of God. The very word “theology” implies it, stemming from two words: “theos” meaning “God” and “logos” meaning “word”. To speak about God, or by engaging in God-talk, is a risky task. The speaker appropriates what is believed to be ultimate truth and applies it to the context of life. God-talk is dabbling in truth and truth notions. It is therefore almost natural for theology and theological discourse to drift towards absolutism, with little or no regard for perspectives which may be counter-intuitive. This is certainly true for literalist and fundamentalist expressions of Christian theology. It is here that Du Toit steps in to remind us that “theology is always a human enterprise” (Du Toit 2007:9). To speak about God or, in this context, about divine or ultimate truth is a secondary action if we were to assume that truth itself is locked up in the divine.

At times theology may claim that it itself is the truth, but this is an unfeasible claim. Theology can at best be orthodox, correct teaching (balanced by orthopraxis or correct action), but it cannot replace or give a comprehensive reflection of the truth as found in God. (Christian) Theology is concerned with truth and, in its most outstanding form, sees divine truth revealed in the form and person of Christ, in the power of the Spirit. It points to this revelation as the display of God’s truth in the context of the created realm. For this reason the perceived truth of theology is tied to a dimension of the relationship between God and the created order in the form of God’s self-revelation (Du Toit 2007:10). If Christian theology points to the revelation of truth, then the truth of theology is always given as a response to the self-revelation of God in existential reality (Du Toit 2007:11). The message of theology is based on revealed truth, which is in essence not the complete truth, but a projection of truth. The proclamation of theology should be seen as an interpreted version of the revealed truth (Bentley 2008:19). There is an interesting dynamic which exists in the relationship between God as truth, the phenomenon of revealed truth and a theological interpretation of truth. One could say that theology is not a primary source of truth; theology receives truth second-hand and when it retells truth, the message moves further away from its source, down the line of interpretation, retaining only some preferred truths and losing large parts of the message in the retelling. The answer offered by Christian theology would be that this dilemma is resolved through the doctrine of the Spirit. The Spirit is at work in the life of the individual or community and takes the proclaimed truth and establishes it in the hearer as a first degree of revealed truth. Each hearing of the proclaimed truth is in itself a revelation of God’s truth. This truth speaks specifically to the needs, situation and context of the individual (or community) and establishes within them the sense that they had a direct encounter with God.

Dallas Willard conveys this thought eloquently in the following quote from an article he wrote on lessons he learnt as a Christian minister: “One of my great joys came when I got up from a chair to walk to the podium and the Lord said to me, ‘Now remember, it’s what I do with the Word between your lips and their hearts that matters’” (Willard n.d.). Willard’s expression is admirable and in my opinion should be the perspective of anyone who dares to engage in God-talk, but not all who exercise the ministry of proclamation share in Willard’s devotional desire. The sad reality is that proclamation in the name of God has a close relationship with power. The assumption that God’s name is synonymous with truth leads to the appropriation of God’s name for the advancement of many different causes, especially politics (Hauerwas 2011b:118; Hauerwas 2011a). This appropriation of God and truth leads to the assumption of power (Rieger 2007:316), and its most visible and destructive forms are commonly exercised by hardnosed evangelicals and religious extremists. The term “fundamentalists”, although not a term that can be used exclusively for these groups, is accepted for such persons.

Du Toit points out that fundamentalism claims its own individual truth as absolute truth or divine truth (see Bentley 2008:17) and it does not lend itself to growth or to conversation. Thus it closes itself to any form of critique or engagement with perspectives that are fundamentally (excuse the pun) different from its own. Such a faith will find it difficult to relate to a world where it is acceptable to question assertions and where every conceivable ‘constant’ is placed under the microscope for further investigation. From a secular perspective there is no limitation to enquiry, no area of existence that is off-limits to questioning, even if religious fundamentalism bars such exploration in the name of divine sanctity. It is precisely in this area that science and religion have experienced most conflict. For the sake of illustration the reader is reminded of the various religious objections to scientific discoveries, including even to the notion that the earth revolves around the sun!<sup>1</sup> Even in light of evidence, fundamentalism leads the person of faith to a situation of cognitive dissonance – a new truth which cannot be accepted, because it differs so radically from the person’s own truth claims.

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<sup>1</sup> It has been well documented how heliocentric theories by Galileo, Copernicus, Kepler and others were at first resisted by both the Protestant and Catholic traditions.

Throughout history this assumption of ultimate truth of religion, even in the presence of contradictory evidence, has diminished the position of religion in society, especially its moral position, so much so that religion in secular democracies has become merely one voice among many when it chooses to air its views. Du Toit phrases it as follows: “The end of Christianity’s dominance on the ethical level as well as to having the ‘only truth’, outside which there is no salvation, also influences the future of theology” (Du Toit 2007:15). Theology has to tread carefully when speaking of absolute truths, because its audience is not afraid to question or to pose opposing arguments in return. Fundamentalism, however, is not only found in religion or theology; in opposition to religion a new kind of fundamentalism has arisen, namely an atheistic fundamentalism. For example, Richard Dawkins, who sees himself as an agnostic rather than an atheist, is so fundamentally convinced of the answers of science and has become so disillusioned with religion (one should be more accurate and say that his definition of religion actually refers to religious fundamentalism), that he will fight tooth and nail to disprove the relevance of theology and religion in the modern world (Dawkins 2006).

This tug of war between the different forms of fundamentalism has boiled down to one question: Does God exist? If religious fundamentalists succeed in proving the existence of God they may call themselves the founders of truth. Likewise, if Dawkins and company disprove the existence of God, they can claim for themselves the right of truth according to science. Where does Du Toit stand on this? Being a good theologian and a good scientist, he gives a thoughtful answer to this dilemma, albeit an answer that does not award victory to either side: “God’s existence cannot be verified or falsified. But one can believe in him, although faith is not proof.” (Du Toit 2013a:3)

For this reason truth claims cannot be universalised or absolutised. Du Toit’s response removes from this dilemma the assumption that truth is in fact obtainable, hinging on a yes or no answer. In theological and scientific fundamentalism the locus of truth situated in either the existence or the non-existence of God is therefore misplaced. It could rather be said that from a religious (specifically a Christian) perspective, God’s ‘truth’ as manifest in a person’s life is a truth that is not always accepted by this world, but it adds to the person’s life a sense of orientation, meaning, value and wonder (Bentley 2008:15). This is a life which has enough confidence in its own truth claims to celebrate new, discovered truths; it allows growth in understanding by respectfully engaging with a diverse world.

### **Working from texts**

One of the problems in religious and theological fundamentalism is that its source of truth is not an experience of the divine as described in the section above, but religious texts. Du Toit poses the following question: From where do religions gain their insights? He suggests that most religions, but in particular the three Abrahamic religions, draw significantly from their sacred texts to understand reality, to appropriate truths and to define what it means to live life in accordance with divine truth. For Christianity it is the Bible, for Islam it is the Koran and for Judaism the Torah (and I acknowledge the further use of other sacred writings such as the Talmud and Shulchan Aruch), each appropriating truth claims which are then projected onto their respective worldviews and become the aim of their respective missionary activities.

For instance, the Bible gives Christians insight into a concept like the Kingdom of God. Further reading of the text suggests that the Kingdom of God is the ideal which should be realised on earth and Christians are called to realise this ideal. History tells us of how different interpretations of the Kingdom of God moulded the methodology used in the Christian Church to advance its mission. Think of Constantine and the Christianising of the Roman Empire, Augustine’s “City of God”, the Crusades, Luther’s Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the World (and how this theology informed the Reformation), and Karl Barth and Moltmann’s teachings on the Kingdom of God during and after World War II, and the recent post-millenarianist teachings of evangelical Pentecostalism. Dependence on the authority of Scripture is fundamentally linked to truth-claims and how it impacts on peoples’ understanding of God, the world and themselves. One only has to watch the broadcasts of sermons on television in South Africa (and admittedly these are mostly from one strand of the Christian tradition, namely Pentecostalism) to find this dependence on Scripture for truth claims playing out. The modus operandi is very similar in these proclamations. First, a problem is highlighted. Then the problem is expanded on and explained using real-life or hypothetical examples, and the solution is found in one or more Bible verses. The preacher expounds on the universal significance of the truth which this portion of Scripture conveys and how it can meet needs of the worshippers.

Needless to say, a lot of criticism can be levied against this approach to the Bible and its avoidance of Biblical and current context, genre, history and so forth. One may argue that this strand of the Christian tradition is not representative of the Christian faith as a whole in South Africa, but it is well worth noting that these traditions are some of the fastest growing Christian faith communities in the country, adopting former members of mainline denominations and regularly filling huge venues with its Bible-based preaching.

Are these traditions wrong in their approach to the Bible and, more specifically, in how they lift texts from Scripture in order to bring their points across? Coming from a mainline denomination where emphasis is

placed on a historical-critical reading of the Bible, I personally have some difficulty with the twisting of Scripture and putting words in God's mouth, which is what I perceive in many megachurch environments. In my view "The Bible says ..." does not put the stamp of universal truth on that which is proclaimed from the pulpit (or elsewhere). The Bible says many things and when selectively strung together, can legitimise almost any kind of gospel or evil under the sun.

Du Toit seems to agree with my sentiment as he reminds us that the sacred texts themselves do not contain ultimate truth (Du Toit 2007:vii). Texts per se are symbols, part of a sign system which is afforded meaning by the arranging of words in a particular order, but not only that. Texts are also afforded meaning by context and, most of all, interpretation (Du Toit 2007:72–73). Sacred texts like the Bible should not be read as if they were historically isolated, devoid of contextual and other prejudice. They should not be read as if we were looking at ultimate truth that dropped down to earth in book form, in languages that we can read and understand.

What fundamentalists and literalists ignore in the reading of Scripture is that "to write is to interpret" (Du Toit 2007:78). The very truth put forward by fundamentalists and literalists as universal truth is in fact subjective and interpreted revealed truth. Furthermore, their reading of Scripture is subject to their own interpretations and the proclamation adds nuances which were unintended to the first writers of these same words. At this point one wonders whether it is at all useful to refer to Scripture in an attempt to gain insight into life and all that is. Can Scripture be trusted as a source of truth? Is it not just all up to interpretation and re-interpretation?

But then Du Toit draws us back to the value of Scripture and truth by suggesting that the texts speak of a reality which is another dimension of self-perception. The reading of Scripture as a source of truth is similar to the experience of truth in the utterance of a prayer: "The prayer may be written down or repeated, but it cannot replace the event, the 'encounter' of prayer" (Du Toit 2007:87). I deduce that Du Toit would also emphasise the "encounter" aspect of the reading of Scripture and not promote the idea that one should stare blindly at absolute truth captured between the covers of sacred texts. Truth is therefore not captured by, contained in or confined to different elements of religion or theology. However, these elements give individuals and communities tools that enable them to encounter truth which will remain greater and more profound than any truth-claims that may arise from religious or theological practices on their own. "Truth is the ever present possibility of connecting and understanding utterances, different beliefs and sign systems" (Du Toit 2007:93), but will never be limited to the utterances, beliefs or sign systems themselves.

Religion and theology which purport that no truth is found outside their own truth claims are, in Barth's words, "Religie als Unglaube" (Barth 1987:327). This form of religion and theology replaces truth (God) with its own presence, betraying its existence as 'witness' and promoting itself as the vessel containing the Living Water. Notions like mystery, awe, majesty or even being overwhelmed by the magnitude of God's Being are conspicuously absent from such a belief system. All that seems to matter is that the faith itself is the sole bearer of truth.

Du Toit sets another cat among the pigeons by challenging such fundamentalism to the core with the following image:

God is a text. Like most texts, it is criss-crossed by other texts, full of traces of other traditions, never finally interpretable but always open to reinterpretation of existing interpretations. Hence the document that is God is an open canon. It is destined always to be rewritten, and each author is eclipsed by the palimpsest author of the next version. No final claim to power is possible and every power strategy is deconstructed in each new 'truth claim'. God is a quotation and exists by restarting himself differently in each new quotation. The name of God must always be accompanied by a footnote, an apology for the incorrectness of the text, for in reality he is different. Thus religion is a never-ending interpretation of the name of God. (Du Toit 2007:66)

If this is true, then religion and theology should resist the temptation to think of themselves more highly than they ought to, for they do not stand over and above anything else, but are participants in life. Theology should speak with the understanding that the truth it proclaims when referring to God is dynamic, speaking afresh in every moment and context, a truth which will not allow a fraction of its own self-revelation to be absolutised or used to promote the agendas of theology or religion. One does not have to look far to see examples of the moulds of forced indoctrination being broken and reshaped constantly.

Du Toit points out that the Christian notion of truth in the South African context has changed radically during history. Initially missionaries conveyed a single truth which was held onto as the sole truth (Du Toit 2009:l.1553). This was the truth of Western superiority over indigenous African people and their beliefs. But even among Christian theologians there was discomfort with the dominant Calvinist-based imperialism manifest specifically in the apartheid system. Resistance intensified through theologies like Black theology and other forms of liberation theology that challenged the dominant theology of the time. Through these theologies, people tasted the flavours of new truths and truth claims. In post-apartheid South Africa notions of truth in

theology and religion again changed significantly (Du Toit 2007:8). Moving from the apartheid system to a secular democracy stripped the Christian religion and its theology of a dominant position in the country, allowing the people of South Africa to be governed by the South African Constitution. The Constitution affords every religion an equal voice. Every citizen has a constitutional right to practice his or her religion with the proviso that it should not impinge others' right to religious freedom.

A new generation of people who were born after the advent of democracy now forms the majority of the South African population. As a result religion and theology will experience ever greater pressures if they limit the notion of truth only to their own understanding thereof. One of the characteristics of democracy is that it does not only represent the interests of the majority – it is driven by a market which serves its own interests (Du Toit 2002:78–79) and subsequently leads consumers to new truth claims. These truth claims in turn inform norms and morals, which then ultimately shape peoples' experience of life.

There has clearly been a transition in truth understandings in South Africa. Missionary prudence has been replaced by a prosperity gospel, humanitarian notions like Ubuntu have been substituted with materialism, and religious piety has been given up for a slice of the consumerist cake. Of course this is a negative view of the consequences of democracy and I am the first to admit that democracy has also had many positive consequences that can be cited since the transition. South Africa now forms part of the global world and can no longer be regarded as an “isolated theocracy”, as those who upheld the old dispensation believed. Truth notions will change. They will shift and as part of a world which is increasingly democratised, secularised and commercialised they will be influenced by the prevailing trends that dominate peoples' perception of being. Du Toit writes: “Globalisation cannot be understood without tenaciously questioning human motives and driving forces” (Du Toit 2002:85). From a religious point of view, the stark reality is that these motives and driving forces are less and less anchored in religion or theology. For religious and theological truth to be honest and to have a place in the realities of a changing world, it needs to find strength not in its immovable truths, but in admitting that it is context-dependent, dynamic, alive, subject to influence and in tune with the reality in which it operates.

### **Science and religion**

So, what is truth? Let us consider Du Toit's other passion, namely the investigation of truth notions in the natural sciences.

The exponential increase in the number of discoveries made by the natural sciences seems to be creating a culture which believes that truth statements can only be made within the domain of empirical studies. The scientific approach, namely to test a theory and to assess its truth based on whether results can be predicted and duplicated under similar conditions, is becoming the benchmark for formulating what we understand to be reality and therefore what can be assumed as being truth. Reductionism and modernism, both underlying foundations of the empirical natural sciences, have admittedly transformed peoples' experience and views of life. Take for instance the development in modern medicine: much more emphasis is placed on the medico-scientific identification and treatment than on a metaphysical approach to illness. Who would a patient with a dreaded disease rather believe, a medical doctor or a spiritual leader?

Modern civilisation has a lot to be thankful for. As a result of modernism and reductionist scientific methods we live in a world where progress is made every day. Food security is being addressed, communication and travel have improved, and knowledge about physical well-being has increased. Admittedly ethical questions could be asked about all these advancements, but we will not address them here. The point I am trying to make is that science, in its attempts to respond to existential need, has made a substantial contribution. But is science the answer to meaning and can it make a sufficient contribution in our desire for truth? Du Toit writes: “Truth is not identical with science. Scientific language serves to verbalise observations, formulate theories, explain phenomena – not to present the blueprint of truth. Empirical sciences produce probable findings, not ultimate truths” (Du Toit 2007:95). McGrath echoes this sentiment by remarking that science can only make foundational assumptions *a posteriori*, not *a priori* (McGrath 2004:100–127). In Du Toit's mind science is therefore a human enterprise which is devoid of a natural human inclination thereto; it is in fact counter-intuitive (Du Toit 2013a:4). Science is sparked by enquiry, discovery made through inquisitiveness. It supplements existential reality by describing it and predicting the outcomes of processes. In itself science is not the foundation for universal truth.

I agree with this perspective up to a point. It must be emphasised that the effects of science and empirical natural sciences on peoples' experience of life undeniably influence their perception of reality and therefore their notions of truth. For example, if the electricity supply to Manhattan is down for a single day, it would be reported on the front pages of national newspapers. It would probably be called a tragedy. Those who benefit from the effects of science tend not to separate the reality and truth facilitated by the effects of science and their own general expectations of what life has to offer. Electricity supply has changed from a privilege and an addition to the experience of life, to a necessity without which the new reality does not make sense.

It would be an omission if I fail to say that notions of truth cannot be perceived as a by-product of the impact of science. It is equally incorrect to use scientific methods to deduce, as Boyer does, that religion and its notions of truth are simply evolutionary aspects of humans, an human effort made to try and make sense of life and to construct notions of morality and identity (Boyer 2008:1038). Du Toit points out that such an undertaking, for science to 'kill God', is counterproductive. As we noted in the discussion on God, science and religion, God is not an entity which can either be proved or disproved, or in this case considered to be a by-product of evolutionary development in response to the question "What is truth?". Any attempt to do so using either religion or science will fail; it cannot contain that which cannot be limited. In response to the God-is-dead theology of the 1960s and the attempt by science to co-opt an expression of Nietzsche, Du Toit reminds us of the following: "Perhaps the [God of] God-is-dead theology deserved to die, because theology had pinned Him down rationally. This, of course, is what Nietzsche had in mind with his 'God is dead' dictum – it is the God of Modernism [which is referred to]" (Du Toit 2007:65).

Science has taken the lead in existential exploration and has done its work splendidly. It has provided explanations and is continuously offering answers. However, the answers it has given are mostly pragmatic. Science has depended on other disciplines such as philosophy and religion and their notions of ethics, values, morals and norms to guide its methodology and to ensure that its practices would benefit the world.

There are therefore two different disciplines, each of which makes a substantial contribution to our sense of life in the present. On the one hand religion speaks of truths stemming from a higher source. On the other, science observes, describes and discovers the physical and transforms it into accessible tools for advancement. Each impacts significantly on the formation of perceptions of reality, what is considered to be normative, guiding perspectives of identity, meaning and scale. One could argue that it would be easy to adopt Gould's NOMA<sup>2</sup> from this vantage point, or in fact that Du Toit's position is not far from Gould's. But this is not where Du Toit finds himself.

Du Toit does not regard reality and truth as ontological entities which can only partly be described by religion and science. Instead he states that science and religion have a much closer relationship and in principle need to overlap. The radical distinction between science and religion is an artificial one. History tells us that science and religion are two sides of the same coin. Historically, theology gave birth to the sciences, and throughout its journey, science has influenced theology (Du Toit 2007:19), so much so that because of science, theology as it is practised today differs dramatically from the theology of the second century! Science has informed our understanding of the cosmos, the miniscule, the self, the dynamics of groups, scale and so forth. Even though science has posed arguments which fly right in the face of religion, it has never succeeded in eliminating religion and theology altogether. It is in this tension that Du Toit sees the potential for truths to be revealed about existence. These truths will be much greater than the truth that science or religion on their own can offer.

### **Reality, truth and transcendence**

Perhaps the search for truth should be accompanied by an admission: "Reality is ultimately a highly subjective concept and the 'self' as the seat of all self-awareness and judgement is not a reliable, fixed point of reference" (Du Toit 2007:75). So far we have noted that religion and science both offer understandings of truth based on our notion of being. "The notion of truth is linked to the notion of being. To answer the question of being is to get to the truth. We want truth because we believe in it and feel it is beneficial to all of us" (Du Toit 2007:89).

As soon as we have been exposed to the possibility of different truths and truth claims, we intuitively create a hierarchy, differentiating between various levels of truth, placing truths in seats of priority. For religious and theological fundamentalists, for instance, truths of faith take precedence, while for Dawkins there is no higher truth than the truth offered by science.

Bhaskar (2008) speaks of stratified reality, describing ontological reality as the culmination of different strata of reality; religious and scientific realities are but individual levels of reality. Could one speak about truth in the same way? Is truth made up of layers of truth? Are religious and scientific truths but two levels of a greater unit? This account for truth is fraught with problems and I cannot imagine that Du Toit would agree with it. Can one, for instance say that religious truth is higher up in the hierarchy of ultimate truth than scientific truths, or vice versa? Are religious and scientific truths so fundamentally different that they can be separated into different layers? Are these different layers constructively building a cohesive truth even though they contain contradictory elements? This model of truth seems to lead to another power struggle. Can we suggest something else? Is truth transcendental? (I do not use the term transcendental in its metaphysical sense here, because that would imply that religion and theology offer greater truths than science.)

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<sup>2</sup> NOMA is Gould's abbreviation for his term, Non-Overlapping Magisteria. Gould uses this term to suggest that science and religion operate from two independent vantage points, use different methodologies and address separate questions. The two disciplines should theoretically remain independent without intersecting. (Gould 2002)

Let us take a step back and consider our vantage point. Our perception is limited, yet it influences our understanding of reality, truth and existence. Admittedly, we do not look at life *sub specie aeternitatis*. From a religious and theological point of view we cannot claim to stand on the shoulders of God and make pronouncements that are absolute as if we carry with us the wisdom of aeons, projecting into the future with confidence that which we now perceive as elemental to what it means to experience life. At the same time, from a scientific point of view, we do not encounter life clinically, completely confined to the limitations of described existence as if it were taking place in a laboratory. Life is too dynamic, filled with too many variables (surprises) to suggest that truth is to be found in the improbable event of discovering a formula that clarifies all our questions about life, reality, the physical and the metaphysical.

Du Toit speaks to both religion and science when he states that the experience of life and the search for truth point to our innate tendency towards transcendence:

We usually personalise our experiences. To experience reality is to experience a subjective force (Being/God/the Other/Fate) that uses us to make history. That is the experience as immanent transcendence. It is immanent because the reality we experience is this-worldly; it is transcendent because it surpasses my expectations, demolishes my self-centred autonomy and descends on me from an open future (Du Toit 2013a:13).

The awareness that “I am” is in itself a transcendent experience, for it detaches me from the notion of merely being and allows me to experience life with reference to past, present and future. The perception of meaning then comes into play, suggesting that my existence in this context and time is not by accident or the product of physical chance, that I came to be only as the result of natural and physical processes, but that I am and my being serves a purpose. Even the most scientific perspective would suggest that purpose exists: the only purpose being the physical participation in perpetuating the existence of the human species.

It is in the unfolding of all aspects of life that ever greater realities come to be or are realised. This moves the experience of life and notions of truth beyond what can only be deduced from nature through a process of reductionism, and is aptly described by the scientific-philosophical term 'emergence'. According to Du Toit human consciousness is probably the highest form of emergence in the human sense of being, imposing understanding of the world and reality within the confines of the physical. He also states that these views are always subject to scientific evidence (Du Toit 2013b:168). It must be, for it takes place in the locus of the physical. But this does not mean that science has the final say in what we perceive to be truth. Science can only speak of and prove the truth we experience in the realm of physics. This truth is also dynamic because constructing reality *a posteriori* is vulnerable to change even through something as intangible as time (Bentley 2013:33). Religion and theology have asked important questions about the meaning of being, our relationship with creation, and our place in time and space. To simply wipe from history any influence of religion on our sense of being would be to erase a vital part of our understanding of self. This does not mean that either religion or theology should be embraced in a pre-modern manner, placing its own truth above the truths offered by the sciences.

Perhaps the key to truth is an openness to the possibilities that arise in the perception of reality, facilitated by but not limited to science and religion. To put it in other words: “Emergence should be seen as a metaphor for all the complex processes that give rise to new developments, like large numbers, adequate time, ideal circumstances and chance. The elements assume metaphysical features because the nature of the emergent phenomena is unpredictable” (Du Toit 2013a:10). A new fundamental arises, namely emergence itself (Shkliarevsky 2011:83). It is this: We will not know what truth is until truth unfolds and even then we will not fully appreciate it, because our perspective is limited by our finite existence. With tongue in cheek, perhaps there is some wisdom to be found in 1 Corinthians 13:12. With the help of religion and science we can get to know different aspects of truth as it unfolds. It is extremely unhelpful to create a dualism or, more accurately, a rivalry between science and religion which contributes significantly to our sense of reality.

To come to some undefined conclusion, we could draw from Du Toit's engagement with another topic, namely evil. Du Toit (2006:75) draws on Shermer (2005) and uses evil as an adjective and not a noun. Can one ask if Du Toit uses notions of truth in the same way? Can one say that truth should not be seen as a noun, something that exists, but as an adjective, pointing towards something beyond the concrete and tangible? Can one therefore speak of an act of truth, a spoken truth, true intensions and so on, suggesting that there is something of greater value than that which we have to offer plainly? These questions are not an attempt to strip empirical truths of anything they bring to the table, but to defuse the tension between the notion that truth per se belongs to a specific discipline or realm.

Everything comes together in the great melting pot of experienced reality and it would be prudent to explore all things and not to throw out the baby with the bathwater when we have been convinced by one stream of truth. To continue this line of thinking, Du Toit is currently investigating the notion of an a-causal God, a study which will be well worth following (see for instance Du Toit 2013c). As for truth, only a fool would claim to have harnessed it.

## Conclusion

In this article I have commented on Du Toit's engagement with religion and science, specifically regarding their respective understandings of truth. Du Toit's perspective is that while both science and religion contribute significantly to our understanding of reality and give insight into notions such as meaning, neither can lay claim to having packaged ultimate truth through their methodologies, histories or praxes. Truth is not to be contained, and so science and religion have a vital role to play in our understanding of meaning, the cosmos and our responsibility to live life in a significant way.

The search for truth is an inherent driver in our psyche that sets us apart from other forms of life on earth. Though we keep striving to attain truth, it continuously evades us, reminding us that we have no right to claim absolutes as normative directives. We are subject to unfolding realities and notions of truth, which in turn are subject to our interpretations.

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