



Consensus

Volume 45
Issue 1 *Finding Common Ground in a Time of
Polarization*

Article 16

1-25-2024

Post Truth? Facts and Faithfulness

John Milloy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Milloy, John (2024) "Post Truth? Facts and Faithfulness," *Consensus*: Vol. 45: Iss. 1, Article 16.

DOI: 10.51644/IESK5852

Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol45/iss1/16>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

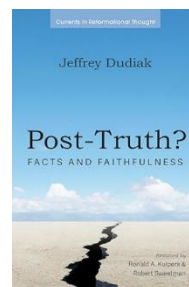
Book Review

Post Truth? Facts and Faithfulness

Jeffrey Dudiak

Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2022

What is truth?" This is one of the most profound questions ever asked. To understand truth is key to finding meaning and purpose in life. It is surprising, therefore, that it was Pontius Pilate that asked that question directly to Jesus in the Gospel of John. Unfortunately, Pilate never gave Jesus the chance to respond to this direct question creating a discussion about the nature of truth that continues to this day. Although Jesus may have described himself as "the way, the truth, and the life", Christians have spent centuries debating what is meant by the concept of "truth".



Debates about truth are of course not limited to theology. We live in a world that is increasingly being described by mainstream commentators as "post-truth". Instead of debating the substance of an issue based on an agreed set of facts, too many try to win arguments by putting forward their version of the "truth" in a way that makes it clear that other perspectives are false and unworthy of consideration. Our attitude increasingly seems to be "I have my facts", "you have your facts" and let's face it – mine are better and truer than yours.

Enter Jeffrey Dudiak, a Professor of Philosophy at the King's University in Edmonton, Alberta. In a short, and very entertaining book, *Post-Truth? Facts and Faithfulness*, Dudiak offers some observations on the current situation and suggests a way of addressing the current crisis.

The book, published as part of the Institute for Christian Studies' *Currents in Reformational Thought* series, is based on several lectures delivered by Dudiak in 2018. Divided into three short chapters, it begins by arguing that we truly do live in a "post-truth era". Our society, Dudiak argues, really does not "believe in truth anymore... there are no longer any authorities who are capable of providing us with truth claims that are acknowledged to be true by a broad general consensus" (pg. 3).

Dudiak has some sympathy for those unwilling to accept traditional authority. Later in the book he speaks of economic inequality and the growing gap between the educated elite and those left behind. For those on the margins, Dudiak points out, "the truth", which is controlled by the educated classes, has simply not worked for them."

...when the educated classes come along and speak condescendingly to them... and tell them that their whole way of life is backward, that they are 'uneducated' 'deplorables', that they are disciplining their children wrong, that the nuclear family is up for grabs, that their religious beliefs are nonsense, should it be any huge surprise that they are not all impressed with 'the truth'? (pg. 28)

Although Dudiak bemoans this current state of affairs, he also believes that our understanding of truth is "impoverished" (pg. 9). While most think of truth as being

synonymous with facts, Dudiak proposes a richer way to think about the concept, tying it to the idea of faithfulness. Although not as common a definition of truth, Dudiak points out that we occasionally still use it when we speak of being “a true friend” (pg. 11) or “being true to your school” (pg. 12).

By adopting this concept of truth Dudiak believes that we move from simply observing current facts into making a promise which extends into the future. He uses the example of marriage. Although we may promise to be true to our spouse at the time of our wedding, this promise can only be measured over time.

Dudiak argues that this understanding of the truth aligns with the Christian understanding of the concept. Christians acknowledge the hardships of the world but focus on imagining what is possible through Christ. As Dudiak argues in the book, the “fact” is that the world is full of “war”, “inequality”, and division but the truth through Christ is “peace”, “love and forgiveness”, and unity. “We pray with our whole selves, ‘thy Kingdom come’ as an expression of our faithfulness, not to ‘what is’ but to ‘what is not but could be, should be, and, we trust, will be’ the case, the fine day that the Kingdom comes” (pg. 17).

Dudiak expands on his approach through the rest of the book, challenging the prevailing view that facts are simply independent and isolated, arguing that they need to be understood as part of a larger story. Each of us, he argues, has a way of understanding the world and how it operates – a worldview – which gives facts meaning.

What about conflicting worldviews? In one of the most fascinating parts of the book, Dudiak makes an important distinction between what he understands as “worldview” and what he believes is too prevalent in our world today – “ideology”. An ideology, he argues, is a rigid understanding of the world “that is incapable of seeing anything new or unexpected, anything interesting or challenging” (pg. 34). A healthy worldview, however, is open and curious, constantly evaluating and reevaluating itself in the face of new information and perspectives. It is also prepared “to employ those facts in the cause of an ever deepening faithfulness...Are the hungry fed? Do the lame walk? Are the naked clothed” (pg. 35).

Dudiak ends the book with a short chapter that applies his observations about truth to the work of universities, especially Christian ones. Although he firmly believes that one of the roles of a university is to determine “facts,” it cannot stop there. Arguing that there is a difference between “knowledge as ‘knowing about’ and knowledge as ‘intimate familiarity’”, (pg. 38) he encourages our places of higher learning to challenge students to extend their understanding of truth beyond simply knowing external facts and instead gaining a deep understanding of their role in achieving the building of a more just society reflective of God’s call.

Although a heavy topic, Dudiak writes with a great deal of humour, interspersing a variety of personal anecdotes and cultural references to make his points come alive. It is rare to read a philosophy text that draws upon Woody Allen, Stephen Colbert and Kellyanne Conway as well as Plato and Hannah Arendt. Dudiak’s book is also unusually short – less than 60 pages – and written in simple and accessible language. He takes time to explain several philosophical concepts in a straightforward way, making the book an excellent resource for undergraduates. Indeed, I used it as a required text in a second-year class that I co-taught in the summer of 2023 where it proved quite popular.

Although an excellent foray into current debates about our “post-truth” world, Dudiak’s book leaves the reader wanting more. Those with a more academic interest who may want to explore many of the important topics raised further are left hanging by his

limited citations and short bibliography. Those interested in the partisan political side of the debate, meanwhile, may also not leave the book totally satisfied. Although his insights into the difference between “ideology” and “worldview” represent an extremely thoughtful foray into the current polarization that has gripped much of the political world, his concluding section moves the discussion away from politics and public policy into the world of higher education.

Leaving the reader wanting more is not necessarily a bad thing and Dudiak continues to explore this topic with great insight. This is certainly not his last word on the subject. Indeed, a chapter from an upcoming project on the same topic is part of this issue of *Consensus*.

In a world bitterly divided over so many issues, it is refreshing to hear a voice as measured and thoughtful as Jeffrey Dudiak's. His book adds much to the current discussion over how we address polarization and the potential role of Christianity. His book represents a timely call to expand our thinking as we try to heal our polarized world.

John Milloy
Martin Luther University College
Wilfrid Laurier University