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Biblical Truth and Theological Education: A Rhetorical Strategy

PATRICK R. KEIFERT

We have been asked to attend to two key questions about the role of the Bible in theological education:

When we say that the Bible is true, what do we mean?

What methods of interpretation appreciate the truthfulness of the Bible?

I propose to use a rhetorical strategy for attending to the question of truth and interpretive methods, one that, in a surprising way, confounds modern expectations about the speaker, the audience, and the ways in which the subject — namely, God and the Word of God through the norming norm of the Scripture — are to be present. These two questions drove the thinking of a course that Donald Juel and I taught at Luther Seminary for some fourteen years; and with these questions as referents, I have sought to address thoughtful Christian biblical scholars who want some starting points for helpful conversations about theories of truth and the teaching of the Bible in their classrooms.¹ This argument begins with the assump-

1. See the introduction to this volume; see further Juel and Keifert, "A Rhetorical Approach to Theological Education," in *To Teach, To Delight and To Move: Theological Education in a Post-Christian World*, ed. David S. Cunningham (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2005), pp. 281-96; see

tion that the Bible is the Christian Bible, and, more importantly, that the Bible is Scripture. That is, as Scripture the Bible makes a claim about us and on us: our attention is not unidirectional, as if we alone are posing the question of the Bible's truth. Rather, we attend conversationally: God through the Bible also poses a question to us about the ultimate truth of our lives. To understand the Bible as Scripture, as rhetorical conversation, is not to deny that the Bible's truthfulness can be assessed in other ways — for example, for its accuracy as historical knowledge about ancient Near East cultures or as a source of anthropological data in these cultures. In theological education, however, the most life-giving questions we can ask are about the Bible as Scripture, that is, about what is being asked about the truth of our own lives.

Ethos and Speaker

Permit me to set the horizon within which I answer these questions as a way of getting at the identity of speaker in the study of the Bible as Scripture. As the setting for this conversation, I am imagining how I would begin a conversation with a classroom of theology students in a North American Christian denominational seminary.²

Theological education has its center in understanding God truly.³ Yet,

also Keifert, "The Bible and Theological Education," in *The Ending of Mark and the Ends of God*, ed. Beverly R. Gaventa and Patrick Miller (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2005), pp. 165-82.

2. I currently teach classes that are largely secular in a private, church-related law school, as well as church-renewal training classes for lay Christians and others. In principle, there are significant similarities in the way I would confront the truthfulness of the Bible in a denominational seminary and in a secular private law school and in a church-related law school, even though my students' attention is not so directly focused on the question of the Bible as Scripture.

3. My debt to the work of David H. Kelsey, especially his *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological about a Theological School* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), is obvious. But unlike Kelsey's proposal, which is an extremely helpful space for a conversation about truth, this chapter reflects not a universal but a particular location for theological and confessional reflection on the question of biblical truth.

contrary to the expectations of some beginning seminarians who hope for some immediate and clear insight or transformative experience, to understand God truly we must often begin at most unlikely sources. Indeed, the looks on their faces when we make our first reading assignments tell us just how impossible it seems to them that they will begin to understand God truly in this classroom setting. But we must begin in unlikely places, for God is only known indirectly.⁴ The simultaneously hidden and revealed nature of God⁵ necessitates an indirect knowing, a learning that is accomplished through a set of practices.⁶ These practices of knowing God largely grow, not within the self, for the self, and out of the self, according to the common wisdom; but they grow out of the congregation, that is, the face-to-face interaction of persons through the public practices of the Christian thing.⁷

Indeed, the congregation is the primal setting or location of all the practices that make possible the indirect knowing of God truly. Chief among the ways we practice the Christian thing is in worship, and for one important reason: at its center, worship as a practice reflects the Christian community's belief that the chief speaker in our conversation — the chief actor in our movement toward understanding — is not us but God. (Needless to say, Christians are also involved in practices of understanding God truly in other important locations. However, they do not function in the same primal way as the face-to-face gathering around word and sacra-

4. Kelsey, *Understand*, pp. 34ff.

5. Clearly, in this proposal I follow the Reformers, especially Luther and Calvin, on the hiddenness of God. I find B. A. Gerrish's analysis of Hiddenness I and II, especially in Luther, a most helpful framework for discussing the nature of this hiddenness. See B. A. Gerrish, "To the Unknown God: Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God," in *The Old Protestantism and the New* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 131–49. Luther's argument as pursued by Gerrish is in clear contrast to the various doctrines of God implied in indirect understanding found in other classic Christian figures.

6. Kelsey, in *Understand*, distinguishes four methods of Christian wisdom, or ways in the understanding of God: "contemplation, discursive reasoning, the affections, and the action that comprise a Christian's life." I develop these four ways, or methods, differently from Kelsey because of the particular piety out of which I teach Christian theology.

7. Following Kelsey, *Understand*, p. 32: "I will use the phrase 'nominalistically' simply as a place-holder for all communities of practice and belief who call themselves 'Christian.'"

ment does. These locations are indeed different in kind, for in word and sacrament God has specifically promised to be present as self-giving, self-sacrificing, liberating, justifying, and loving. God can, of course, be present to us in this distinct way in all times and in all places by the power of the Holy Spirit; however, the entire Christian thing is warranted by the *promise* of God's saving presence in the moment of word and sacrament.)

As the chief speaker, the chief actor, God promises to make God's self present as self-sacrificing, self-giving, liberating, justifying, and reconciling love.⁸ God promises through word and sacrament to gather people and the entire creation into the triune life of God. In its broadest sense, worship is whatever one does when one is aware of the presence of the holy.⁹ But for us as seminary teachers — and this is critical to our teaching of the practice of worship — Christian worship is whatever we Christians do out of the awareness that we are being called, gathered, and enlightened by the ongoing breaking-in of the promise of God's presence. We are thus the responsive audience in that rhetorical moment, not the One who speaks the truth. For Christians, consequently, while word and sacrament are central, worship cannot be contained in the formal liturgy of the people, in what we speak back in particular moments. Rather, worship continues as Christians encounter the word of God speaking to them in their everyday lives. This encounter, this listening, this worship is the Christians' *leiturgia* and *diaconia* — their reasonable service.

8. This list of metaphors for the presence of God is not exhaustive but it does include some of the central metaphors for the unique presence of God that warrants the Christian thing. Since the theory of truth out of which this proposal works especially reflects the metaphorical nature of the experience of truth, these metaphors are more than mere images of another thing, such as salvation — as if salvation is not just one more metaphor. Rather, these metaphors make present what they signify. As metaphors, they function as freeze-dried narratives or poems or prophetic utterances.

9. Here I borrow from a substantial philosophical discussion of worship, especially from the work of Ninian Smart, *The Concept of Worship* (London: Macmillan, 1972).

Pathos and Audience

Christian worship is always directed toward the world for the sake of the mission of God in the world. The practices that make up a true understanding of God, then, are practices that move us toward the world. So, for example, though meditation and contemplation of God are important Christian practices for knowing God truly, they do not lead Christians away from the world to some other place where God dwells, some other moment where one can be alone with God. Nor do other Christian practices, such as social action or critical reflection. All of these practices seek to de-center the self, to help the self recede so that we may understand God truly through the other. They are all practices that play on the biblical metaphor of hospitality to the stranger.¹⁰ And they are all mediated through the written Word of God.¹¹

The biblical metaphor of hospitality to the stranger suggests that, in understanding God indirectly, we experience three major de-centering moments, moments that again confound modern common sense about the “audience” for our understanding. In modern common sense, we who want to know or understand are the major actors, those who control the stage of knowledge or control the end of our rhetoric. Our conversation partners or the objects of our knowledge are, effectively, the audience for our understanding, the stage on which we move. When we are hospitable to the stranger, however, we are de-centered from our central role as rhetors, as actors by (1) the other, (2) the self, and (3) the Other.

The first moment of de-centering is perhaps the most obvious. When the self recedes in attending to the other — whether the other is Scripture, the Christian tradition, our own or others’ cultures, the society around us,

10. My reference is to the many passages of Scripture wherein God is present through the stranger, the irreducibly other. For a more sustained discussion of this way of interpreting Scripture through its own metaphors, especially “hospitality to the stranger,” see Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991). Of course, this formulation of the question of truth and Scripture is deeply indebted to the work of the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, as my discussion in *Welcoming the Stranger* indicates.

11. This notice of the written Word of God leaves open the very important question of the relationship between the *viva Vox* and the written word.

the faces of the poor and the vulnerable, the call of the neighbor, the fellow creature, and so forth — the possibility of understanding God truly arises.

The second moment is less obvious, though equally clear if we think about it. When we are de-centered by these Christian practices, we also experience our own self as another.¹² The illusion that we are selves fully possessing ourselves, fully controlling who we are, evaporates. The common sense that life is a process in which we are finding or becoming or gathering together a single, unencumbered self proves a deadly chimera. The wisdom that the meaning of life is about “getting yourself together” for yourself proves foolish. The Christian practice of understanding God truly through the other gives us a new self, a self for the other, and a self as another. In my own Lutheran tradition, this is what we mean when we speak of Christian liberty.¹³ If the moment of knowing God truly is the moment in which we experience the call of the other and of the self as other, then the nonsense that the Christian is the perfectly free lord of all and the perfectly dutiful slave of all begins to make sense.

The third moment of de-centering that takes place in the Christian practices of understanding God truly is the moment when we encounter God through the other. Within the Lutheran tradition this encounter is summarized in two ways: in any encounter with a fellow creature, we come before an irreducible other that gives evidence of traces of the Other who obliges us to be of service to that other human. In the encounter with the other in the shadow of the cross, we also encounter the mystery of the One who promises life in the midst of death, victory in the midst of defeat, and participation within the very life of God hidden in the everyday practices of the Christian’s life.

12. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

13. Martin Luther, *On Christian Liberty* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003). In this text Luther explores the metaphorical logic of the conjoined phrases “perfectly dutiful slave of all” and “perfectly free Lord of all,” his way of understanding Christian freedom and faith. Note also the very helpful analysis that follows my line of argument in Eberhard Jüngel’s commentary *Freedom of a Christian* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988).

Practices

As the most obvious example, meditation and contemplation as ancient practices of understanding God are not an improvement on or substitute for the indirect knowledge of God. They do not do away with the necessity of engaging in other disciplines or practices of understanding God truly. They are simply among those practices. Contemplation and meditation are, to be sure, important practices because they bring together and overlap with the affection, passions, and primal *sensorium* of the human person.¹⁴ In the tradition that I practice, singing a hymn until my self-consciousness recedes links the practices of contemplation and meditation to my primal senses. As I engage in a practice designed to help my self-consciousness recede, I meditate on the presence of God through the other and then contemplate God's presence in word and sacrament.¹⁵ And if I choose a hymn from my Lutheran or another Christian heritage, hymn-singing also links my particular liturgical and theological tradition to older Christian practices of contemplation and meditation.

Social action on behalf of the poor and those most vulnerable is a similarly venerable and proven practice for understanding God truly. But social action dovetails with — even joins with — the ascetic practices of contemplation and meditation rather than competing with or excluding

14. Here my debt to Walter Ong's concept of the human *sensorium* is obvious. His concept also shapes the later discussion of ways in which the experience of the truth is shaped by the rhetorical events of Scripture in Christian practice.

15. The experience of the truth that is irreducibly that of identity in difference rather than identity in similarity is, then, irreducibly metaphorical in character. It is also the encounter of identity only through the irreducibly other. Here I follow both Paul Ricoeur, especially in *Oneself as Another*, and Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 53ff., where he correctly, I believe, criticizes notions of truth based on individual autonomy that have dominated Western theories of truth. I also follow Robert Scharlemann's construal of the question of truth as "the experience of truth as a theological problem," in *The Being of God: Theology and the Experience of Truth* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981). While I recognize that these figures have significant differences on questions of the interpretation of the self and truth, the conversation they engender on understanding God and the questions of truth are for me the most fruitful for my overall proposal.

them. Perhaps the most profound lesson Mother Teresa left us is that social action and ascetic practice are not different in kind or opposed to each other but of a piece — indivisible — in understanding God truly.

These practices or ways of understanding God are organically related to the practice of critical reflection, another way of knowing God truly. We moderns perhaps recognize critical reflection more readily as indirect, though the Christian tradition has not always isolated critical reflection as *the* indirect way of knowing God, as modern thought has taught us to do. But contrary to some claims about understanding God, Christians do not need to sacrifice intellect or discursive reasoning to understand God truly, nor to understand them as lesser ways of understanding. While the reasoning intellect is only one of multiple intelligences that make up human understanding, those who would claim that it is somehow inferior or demand that it be excluded as a means of understanding God fall into a difficult trap. They mistakenly assume that there is some method to construct boundaries between modes of human understanding without using human understanding, which would seem impossible. Critical reflection is necessary to the exercise of all of the multiple intelligences that are God's gift to us for understanding God truly.

Within this horizon, Christian theological education both presumes and teaches these Christian practices that are the Christian thing. Christian theologians invite critical reflection on and under these presumed and taught Christian practices. In my setting in a denominational seminary, and even more clearly when I teach in a secular setting, I cannot pretend that, when I am teaching about these practices while not actually practicing them, I am practicing the core of the Christian thing. For in my tradition that core is the movement of God toward the world in word and sacrament. I can, however, teach those practices and invite public discursive reasoning about which practices seem true to this understanding of God, and about how they can be adapted and instantiated to be true to that understanding. In short, a school of theology in my tradition cannot and should not simply presume, but should also teach, these varied practices for understanding God truly.

Since the movement of God toward the world as self-giving, self-sacrificing, liberating, and reconciling love drives all my action in the

world, it must drive my action in the classroom and my seeking for truth. And since the chief norming norm for all indirect evidence of God's movement toward the world through word and sacrament is the Bible, all my work in a school of theology must involve these practices related to the Bible. Notice, I have not said that the Bible is the object of my faith or its foundation. It is the norming norm of my indirect understanding of God truly. The question of biblical truthfulness, then, is not a separate question but a subset of the question of understanding God truly. I do not imagine that the Bible has some foundational status, not for persons of faith, much less for those who do not have faith in "the God who raised Israel's Jesus from the dead."¹⁶ I do not seek to demonstrate its truthfulness aside from its place within my search — with others — to understand God truly.

My initial answer to the question "When we say that the Bible is true, what do we mean?" is quite simply this: the Bible is true insofar as it makes possible the understanding of God truly. In addition, in my own heritage this can be focused further by saying: "What makes Christ present" within our practice of the Christian thing?¹⁷ Furthermore, those methods that appreciate its truthfulness are many. They include ascetic practices such as meditation and contemplation, singing, dancing, practices of social action on behalf of the vulnerable and poor, and the playful interaction of critical human understanding with text and tradition.¹⁸

16. Robert Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. I (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), p. 99: "The gospel identifies its God thus: God is the one who raised Israel's Jesus from the dead. The whole task of theology can be described as the unpacking of this sentence in various ways. One of those produces the church's trinitarian language and thought."

17. Martin Luther's "was Christum treibt" — what necessitates, drives us to, delivers Christ (from "Prefaces to the New Testament," *Luther's Works: American Edition*, ed. J. Pelikan et al., 55 vols. [Saint Louis: Concordia and Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1986], 35:396).

18. In these last few phrases, my proposal owes a profound debt to the work of Hans Georg Gadamer, especially in his concept of tradition as *Wirkungsgeschichte* (history-of-effects), truth-seeking as interpretative play, and *phronesis* (practical reasoning). I have extended the concept of *phronesis* in my development of Christian wisdom. However, one need not draw only on the continental tradition, as I have. The work of Stephen Toulmin, especially his discussion of human understanding and the history of Enlightenment thought, is congruent with this proposal; see his *Cosmopolis* (New York: Free Press, 1990) and *Human Understanding* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972).

Second, truth is irreducibly metaphorical. All truth — even the supposedly univocal truth claims — rely on indirect understanding through the other. Truth, even as correspondence — and a correspondence theory of truth can be reclaimed by way of a second naïveté — is identity in difference, not identity in sameness.¹⁹ The truth claims that Scripture makes on us take very different rhetorical shapes and strategies. We must attend to these rhetorical strategies and shapes to determine the kind of truth claim that is being made. Following a semantic, pragmatic model of truth would require us to admit that assessing the truth of “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” is rather different from assessing the truth of “I promise to be faithful to you.” The character of those rhetorical strategies must profoundly affect how we decide whether our processes of interpretation and assessment are appropriate to the public, communal character of our conversation.

For example, in assessing the truth of a promise, an act of commitment, of self-giving, I would probably not ask, “Is the promise true?” (as I might about the arithmetic equation), or “Did it really happen?” (as I might ask about a historical event). Rather, I would ask, “Was the promise fulfilled?” This is a more important question for the biblical scholar, because the inherent logic of promise, especially the eschatological promises, dominates much of Scripture. Without simply reducing Scripture to a set of narrative promises, it is still fair to say that an assessment of the Bible’s truth claims must depend on its truth claims to us and on us — on a response to the Promiser, an assessment of the faithfulness of the Promiser in fulfilling promises.²⁰

Still other passages of the Bible function more as personal stories, as acts of self-disclosure and self-communication. In looking at these passages, we might more appropriately ask whether the teller’s story coheres with what we know in other ways about the teller and about the world.

19. Robert Scharlemann, *The Being of God*, pp. 153–83.

20. Here I largely agree with Ronald Thiemann in *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame, 1985), and yet I part company with the Yale School’s practice of projecting the rhetorical category of narrative on all of Scripture. I agree with the friendly critique Mark Wallace makes (see Chapter 4 of this volume) of Lindbeck et al., using Ricoeur’s analysis of the primal rhetorical strategies of the Bible.

When the teller and the self-discloser is God, assessing the truth of the story involves assessing the story of all history, of all creation.²¹

As we recognize that the question of truth returns to us as a question that envelops and encompasses our own present discourse, we realize that we are unable to find some external, objective location or stance from which we can base our assessments. In practical teaching terms, this means at the very least that we cannot simply attend to some abstract “theory” of the Bible’s role in human experience. Rather, we must centrally attend to the lived practices that will dominate theology students’ peculiar role within Christian communities. Because my students are to be leaders in Christian communities of mission, I need to use interpretive methodologies to encounter Scripture that will teach them the skills appropriate to this leadership role.

As I have suggested, in the classroom I teach the use of Scripture as a way of understanding God truly through various Christian practices, particularly the practices of leadership. The interpretation and practice of teaching Scripture needs to embody a similar schema of practices and action. In addition to the venerable premodern traditions, I also try to provide a framework for students to use methods of interpreting Scripture in the modern period. I display these methods along a continuum, from the transparency of the text to a world behind the text to a complete opacity of the text to any reference — in other words, the text as self-enclosed world. Modern methods, in distinction to premodern and postmodern methods, are arranged from those that assume a high level of correspondence between text and referent to those that assume little or no correspondence between text and referent. When I teach students these diverse

21. This argument follows the work of my colleague Mary Knutsen, “The Holocaust in Theology and Philosophy: The Question of Truth,” in *Holocaust as Interruption*, ed. E. S. Fiorenza and D. Tracy (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1984), pp. 67–74. See also Donald Evans, *The Logic of Self-Involvement* (London: SCM, 1963), revising Ricoeur’s proposal in “Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,” in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). Ricoeur does not fully develop a semantic theory of truth in his attention to biblical rhetorical strategies and the kinds of assessments that stories of self-disclosure involving God might entail. His work raises the thorny question of how one might possibly assess the truth claims of a universal story that includes and encompasses our lives as well, including the part of our lives that is now engaged in talking with others about how to assess this story.

methods for interpreting Scripture, I differentiate those that explore the reference between the text and things behind the text (historical paradigm) from those that refer to things in front of the text (linguistic paradigm). I further divide these paradigms: I divide the historical methods between those who believe the text refers to events behind the text in the world of the ancient text and those who believe that the text can only truthfully refer to the world of the author of the ancient text. I divide the linguistic paradigm between those who focus on the rhetorical strategy²² of the text and those who hold that the text reflects deep structures of the culture of those who wrote them and similarly the deep structures of the readers who interpret them.

By this time, it is no surprise to the reader that I invite students into interpreting Scripture through an imaginative free play around the questions of a rhetorical strategy.²³ As I have noted above, one practice of particular interest is that of public leadership in the church. This involves a specific rhetorical strategy on the part of the leader (student). Robert Terry provides an excellent heuristic tool for analyzing the present state of a community with respect to any question facing students and their ability to act.²⁴ Since the prejudice of my understanding of the relationship between biblical truth and interpretation is through shared action, Terry's focus on action fits my pedagogical purposes well. He describes six kinds of topics regarding action: existence, resources, structure, power, mission, and meaning. Within a community stuck on one of these topics, Terry shows how forward movement is to make progress in conversation leading to concrete action.

22. By using "rhetorical strategy," I deliberately avoid the habit of many biblical scholars to reduce rhetorical analysis to a genre analysis, a taxonomy of the text. A rhetorical strategy takes into account the shaping of audience, the disclosure of speaker, and the peculiarity of the speech. Thus, while narrative is a prominent rhetorical strategy in Scripture, even in the Pauline Epistles (since Paul presumes a shared narrative for his argument), the rhetorical strategies of Scripture are many, and they cannot be subsumed into a narrative analysis.

23. See further Juel and Keifert, "A Rhetorical Approach to Theological Education," cited above (n. 1).

24. Robert Terry, *Authentic Leadership: Courage in Action* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1993).

Terry's work on leadership can be more than a tool for furthering shared action. It can also be a helpful heuristic through which we might imagine the metaphors for the experience of truth within which our students can encounter Scripture in ways critical to their ministry of leadership. According to Terry, one way to imagine useful metaphors for the experience of truth is to think of a continuum: on one end are those practices that exhibit a high level of sameness, continuity, consensus, and agreed-on tradition; on the other end are those practices that display a high level of difference, discontinuity, dissonance, experimentation, invention, and innovation. For heuristic purposes, I imagine these theories of truth — now metaphors embodied in practices and actions — with at least seven zones of practice and action, as Terry enumerates them.²⁵

These tools are by no means the only tools for the teaching practices that I believe are faithful to the truthfulness of the Bible as the norming norm of our understanding God truly. Indeed, I use several others. My point in sharing these tools is to show how I teach students to use — and to evaluate their use of — Scripture in leadership practices that allow them to integrate the substantial critical theory they are usually taught in school with the critical practices for understanding God truly. It frees students to integrate a diversity of venerable practices into their lives as leaders of Christian communities, and it undercuts the tendency for them to presume that discursive reasoning is at best irrelevant to leadership and that modern practices of leadership do not embody certain notions of truthfulness and ways of understanding God. Even more importantly, it makes a theological critique of such practices of leadership far more likely. In short, one extremely important strategic value of this approach, for me, is how it obviates the theory-practice split.

One other strategic value is the integrating of public and private practices of understanding God truly. In the modern period, the divide between public and private became common sense. The supposedly public ways of understanding anything were associated with “critical reason,” which presumed an unencumbered self capable of placing all reasonable

25. Robert W. Terry, *Seven Zones for Leadership: Acting Authentically in Stability and Chaos* (Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black, 2001).

subjects within its domain. This strategy follows a recognition that such presumptions on a certain mode of understanding are unwarranted and, further, that a much more particular, specific, occasional, and rhetorical mode of understanding is warranted as reasonable and public.

I have been advancing a specific rhetorical argument in this chapter concerning the Bible and truth. The question of the truth of Scripture does not occur in splendid isolation from the practices of the church, which seek to understand God truly. Understanding Scripture as the norming norm of life and faith within real congregations helpfully embeds various theories of truth for the Bible within larger rhetorical strategies for congregational leadership. Such an approach to teaching and learning about the truth of the Bible reveals that modern practices of leadership in the church do indeed embody certain notions of truthfulness and ways of understanding God truly.