

COLLOQUY

A CONVERSATION WITH GUTENBERG COLLEGE



Summer 2023

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Truth Is Faith's Greatest Ally

Chris Swanson

Truth is a casualty of our modern era. Not only is knowing the truth challenging, but even seeking the truth is getting harder. Our culture has assumptions and structures that positively discourage developing the habit of truth seeking. Shortcuts, soundbites, and cynicism leave us in a desolate land where truth has few friends.

A reporter from *The Wall Street Journal* recently said this about ChatGPT, a new artificial intelligence program that answers questions like a human:

ChatGPT makes mistakes: It directed me to a nonexistent study while I researched this column. But whether ChatGPT is "right" misses the point.... "What a large language model is trying to do is not to provide correct answers, but pleasing answers," said Jim Manzi, a partner at Foundry.ai, which develops AI applications for business. "Its job is to anthropomorphize, to give answers people like."

Friedrich Hayek, in his famous treatise on economics, *The Road to Serfdom*, wrote a chapter called "The End of Truth." There he argues that the habit of truthfulness can easily be destroyed in a culture by overemphasizing economic and political outcomes. When such outcomes take precedence, those goals enslave messaging and words, destroying truth. In public schools and universities, students are told over and over that truth is relative or has been replaced by agendas. Such a claim is counterproductive, however, since it undermines education. School becomes a hoop to jump through or a means to self-validation. As truth is devalued, the intellectual space of our lives is filled with lies and half truths. Truth is still there to be found, but one must dig vigorously through the mountains of deceit.

As Christians, we are called to be truth seekers and to resist the cultural devaluation of truth. Over and over, God calls the Israelites to worship Him, the true God, and not to worship false gods. Jesus claims, somewhat enigmatically, to "be" the truth. Paul is constantly reminding his readers to remember the truth of what was preached to them and not to embrace false teaching. But in the midst of a culture of cynicism, relativism, lies, and agendas, what possible hope is there for finding the truth?

Perhaps we can look to the past. But despite the very long relationship between the truths of God and the knowledge of men, Israelites and Christians have often gone astray seeking polytheistic idolatry, Greek philosophy, Enlightenment rationality, and materialism. History can provide good insights and lessons, but it is not always a reliable guide in the search for truth.

Perhaps we can look to science and secular experts. But that also is a mixed bag. Secular teaching is vast, fascinating, difficult, sometimes ennobling, and sometimes destructive. It is impossible to ignore and impossible to embrace. Because we are finite, we cannot

¹ *The Wall Street Journal*, "The Robots Have Finally Come For My Job" by Greg Ip, April 5, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-robots-have-finally-come-for-my-job-34a69146>

know everything. In fact, the more we learn, the more we realize how much we do not know. The sheer quantity of knowledge can be demoralizing; after all, we can learn only a few drops in the bucket of knowledge, and many of the drops are muddied with falsehood.

Our knowledge may be limited, but what is important—indeed vitally important—is not how much we know but rather our attitude toward the truth. The mark of a believer is a person’s orientation to truth. It is not for nothing that Satan is called the father of lies. A truth seeker believes that God is the author of truth and has given us tools to know Him, His creation, and ourselves. He revealed His word to us so that we might know Him and gave us minds so that we might learn. An attitude of resistance to the truth is thus a rejection of Him. It is a way to hide from what He has given us to know.

So what is a healthy and godly approach to truth? I would like to examine three ways that pursuing truth is an ally to our faith: understanding the Bible, understanding our cultural heritage, and understanding ourselves.

Pursuing the Truth in the Bible

The Bible is our best source of truth and our best aid to faith. But it is not always understood correctly. The Pharisees of Jesus’ time provide a clear example of the significance of failing to understand the Scriptures. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus criticized the Pharisees’ understanding. They read the law of Moses and mistakenly thought that God desired rigid obedience to law. They followed the letter of the law but not its spirit. In addressing this, Jesus said, “Now go and learn what this means: ‘I desire compassion, rather than sacrifice’” (Matthew 9:13, NASB). The Pharisees read the Scriptures poorly, which prevented them from knowing the truth.

Understanding the Bible is difficult. It was written at a time and in a culture that differs vastly from our own. It was written in complex foreign languages. It was written in the form of stories, poetry, prophecy, parable, and letters, most of which require hard work to interpret. God did not provide us with a systematic theology book to guide our understanding. It takes effort and skill to read the Bible well. It takes a recognition of our own assumptions. It takes tenacity and repeated exposure. Like all great works of literature, the meaning does not appear all at once or with a cursory read. It takes experience and repeated readings to develop an accurate framework for understanding the text.

Because of its importance and challenges, the Bible is the most carefully read book in all of history. But much of what we know about the Bible has been told to us, filtered through others in the form of doctrines and sermons. Importantly, not all teachers agree. And the many different interpretations and traditions cannot all be correct. Each of us misunderstands the Bible to some extent, and those misunderstandings can impede our living as God desires since they lead us to value things that God does not value and to pursue things God would not have us pursue. However, a deep desire for the truth should encourage us to seek out our misunderstandings and correct them.

In the end, our desire and will are more important than our scholarly ability. The Bible may be a complex book to interpret, but the task is impossible if we do not want to find out we are mistaken. The head and heart must be aligned, as challenging or scary as that may be. Pursuing the Bible is pursuing the truth, and that is not a safe activity, for it reveals to us our misunderstandings. But more importantly, it confronts us with our own sin. And there is no greater ally to faith than confronting our sin.

Pursuing the Truth about Our Cultural Beliefs

By necessity, we must discover the truths of the Bible from within the culture in which we find ourselves. In our case, we inhabit a largely secular culture. Thus, discerning the truth about our culture is as important—and difficult—as discerning the truth about the Bible. In fact, the two work closely together. If our framework for reading the Bible is composed of false cultural and religious assumptions, we will be led astray. At the same time, the poorer our understanding of the Bible, the harder it is for us to critique our cultural assumptions.

All of us have a set of assumptions by which we live our lives. Some call this a worldview; others a preunderstanding, framework, or paradigm. It is the water we swim

(Continued on page 4)



Breathe Blue

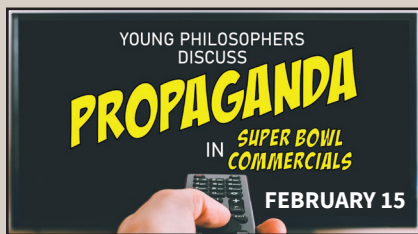
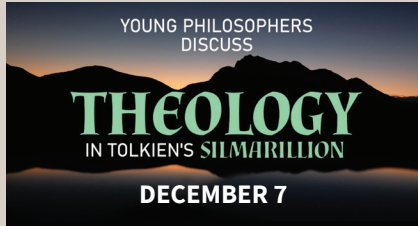
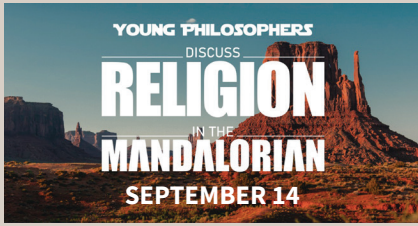
A New Recording from
Tutor Eliot Grasso

Breathe Blue is a new recording that features arrangements of Irish traditional music by Gutenberg tutor Eliot Grasso (tin whistle) and Boston guitarist Adam Henhey. The album is inspired by the abstract art of former Gutenberg tutor Wes Hurd, in whose work the color blue often represents both hope and the presence of the spirit of God, and named for his painting *Breathe Blue*, which now hangs in Eliot’s office.

From the artists: “There are thousands of tunes in the Irish tradition—short melodies that have been lovingly handcrafted over the centuries. Adam and I have found great beauty in these small tunes and have made *Breathe Blue* to bring this beauty directly to you, our listeners. We hope that this album will give you the opportunity to find peace in beautiful moments and reflect on that which invites reflection.” Learn more about Eliot’s music at eliotgrasso.com. *Breathe Blue* is available at <https://eliotgrasso.bandcamp.com/album/breathe-blue>.



Young Philosophers



We invite high-school-aged students to join us for Young Philosophers in 2023-2024, as we examine some prominent examples of pop culture and discuss their artistry, ideas, and significance.



The Gutenberg Podcast brings the complex world of ideas to a broader audience. Every other week, Gutenberg alumnus and host Gil Greco and a Gutenberg-tutor “guest” explore the Great Books from a Christian perspective, recognizing their complexity in the light of competing views.

Truth is Faith’s Greatest Ally, continued from page 3

in. We are all stuck with a framework, both articulated and unarticulated, that provides a lens through which we interpret our experiences and make decisions. In particular, this lens plays a critical role in our journey of faith. It sets our priorities and guides our actions and words. God gives us the desire and inclination to trust and follow Him, but our framework of beliefs is directing how we act on that desire.

The question is not whether we have a framework but whether the one that we have matches reality. Unfortunately, a huge portion of our beliefs comes from our culture. We soak up our beliefs like a sponge absorbs water. Thus an examination of our culture is at the same time an examination of the truth about ourselves and the people we live with.

Since we live *inside* our culture, we must look for ways to find a vantage point *outside*. One of the best ways to do that is to look at our culture’s origins and assumptions by exploring influential writings of the past. We can compare our current views with previous views, holding them side by side. Such an examination opens the mind to possibilities and enables critique. We are not hopelessly bound to our current framework—even though many modern people say we are. Because God created reality, we can be confident that there is a true and coherent picture about the world, man, society, and God. By comparing frameworks and ideas, we are pursuing the truth.

We may be capable of learning from the writings of the past, but should we? Previous cultural perspectives may be no better than our own. So, one might argue, for all the good in our tradition, much is also bad, and engaging in such a study may leave us worse off than before; thus we need to protect ourselves from false ideas. (Intellectual protectionism is certainly a growing fad on both the left and right.) For children, some protection is justified based on the age-appropriateness of the information. And even for adults, some protection from those who could prey upon our weaknesses is appropriate. For example, we want to protect ourselves from debased ideas and images that inflame our passions of fear,

lust, and envy. Unfortunately, however, most “protection” from the ideas that formed our culture usually takes the form of social control, especially when accompanied by methods such as censorship, indoctrination, and shaming. But our past informs our present, and so it is worthwhile to explore our heritage. Our own beliefs and the beliefs of those around us stem from past ideas. We cannot step outside our own framework if we are ignorant of how it was formed.

At Gutenberg College, we read and discuss the classics of our culture, including many books that run counter to the biblical worldview. The authors make significant claims about our world that simply aren’t true. On the other hand, some of what they say is true and amazing. In either case, true or false, it is what we have been bequeathed. A sober examination of our culture in light of our past is an important avenue to a more accurate framework and, consequently, an ally to faith.

Pursuing the Truth about Ourselves

The third way that seeking the truth aids our faith is through knowing ourselves. We do this by reflecting on our innermost desires, purposes, goals, and the deepest beliefs of our heart. Through self-reflection, we become aware of our sin and mistakes so that we might mourn them and seek God’s help.


I know from personal experience how easy it is to hide from myself and justify my actions. We all bury things that are too painful to confront. We explain away our own failures. We run from the truth. Only through the great act of God’s mercy can we begin to turn our sights on what God designed us for.

This dynamic of resistance to self-knowledge is commonplace in the Bible. The Pharisees were notorious for their failure to understand themselves. In their zeal for the law, they did not see their lack of love and mercy toward others. Jesus points this out in a story about a Pharisee. “The Pharisee stood and began praying this in regard to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people’” (Luke 18:11, NASB). Their

hearts were hard toward the truth about themselves. And the problem is just as severe with believers as with non-believers. Peter lacked self-knowledge when he claimed that he would never deny Jesus, even though Jesus said he would do so three times. Peter's denial of Jesus was deeply humbling for him; he learned a truth about himself.

Like other pursuits of truth, seeking the truth about ourselves is hard. We resist it by constructing various stories or realities, often to satisfy some unrighteous desire or as a form of protection from pain. These stories run deep and are hard to recognize and even harder to change. But we are called to change, to be "transformed by the renewing of [our] minds," as Paul says in Romans 12:2. Fortunately, God works in our lives with patient loving-kindness to bring us to self-knowledge so that we might mourn for our own sin. He takes us on a journey of faith.

But we do not journey alone. God provides many tools and aids. He provides us with His Word. He gives us mental faculties to learn. He confronts us with suffering. He provides us with relationships and tasks that reveal our hard hearts. He brings other believers into our lives to correct or encourage us. And then we have a choice: We can use these gifts to confront the truth about ourselves, or we can reject the truth. To seek and accept the truth, even when it is hard, deepens our faith in God.

Finding the truth is a lifelong task. It is part of our journey of faith. Knowing the truth is not the same as having faith, but it is the greatest ally along our path. It leads us toward God because God is truth. We know that lies abound in our world and that we have surely absorbed and believed many of them. But we have no need to fear. As long as we are wanting what is true and seeking it avidly, God will reward us. 

Chris Swanson is the president and a tutor at Gutenberg College where he teaches science and leads discussions in Microexegesis, Western Civilization, and the Great Conversation. He holds a Ph.D. in Physics from the University of Oregon.

Congratulations to Our 2023 Scholarship Recipients!



James Hall received the **Søren Kierkegaard Scholar Award**, given to a student who has shown initiative and interest in pursuing a clear direction or path upon graduation from Gutenberg and who is an outstanding representative of the ethos of the college, having displayed diligence and interest in the type of inward purity of heart espoused by Kierkegaard.



Bethany Dewberry received the **David W. Crabtree Scholarship** for academic performance and diligence, but most importantly, for having taken the content of the curriculum to heart—thinking about the issues raised and allowing the truth to change the way she thinks about life and how to live.



Samuel Tardibono was awarded the **Ron Julian Memorial Scholarship** for exemplifying Ron's passion, character, and desire to pursue biblical truth.

To find out more about these annual scholarships and how you can help fund the David W. Crabtree Scholarship and the Ron Julian Memorial Scholarship, please visit gutenberg.edu/give.



Class of 2023: We'll Miss You!



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Senior men working hard



The culmination of four years together



Welcome! Look at you—you're here. Congratulations! Thank you for the honor of inviting me here.

I have a story I'd like to share. I had a friend named Jan back in North Carolina. We were unlikely friends, born into very different subcultures; we never had much in common, much like you. What we shared though were the thrashing questions we brought from our very different backgrounds and experiences—again, much like you. The questions came to us harshly in those early years, when she was diagnosed with advanced breast cancer at age twenty-nine. We were young enough that we didn't expect such things. And we thought, "Surely this is not the sort of thing that a good God does."

Yet those first years changed us. Our questions mounted as Jan faced her grueling treatment, followed quickly by the sudden illness and premature death of her mother, whom she loved dearly. She also faced the responses from her church people, who, like Job's friends, urged her to find her unconfessed sin so that God could heal her. Her increasing questions reflected my own, as I had only just begun to acknowledge the impact on me and my own family of the early loss of my eldest brother Steve to leukemia when I was just a toddler. We thrashed a good bit, struggling to understand how tragedy could signal anything about the existence of a good God.

Eventually, Jan's cancer went into remission. Our lives took us different directions. I moved to Oregon. Yet over

the years, we stayed connected, and we asked and wrestled and struggled with this God we were trying to trust.

The question you are likely being asked over and over at this momentous occasion is this: What are your plans? What will you DO from here? Of course, the question is typically asked as it relates to career and vocation, and this is an important question. You have a long life ahead of you, and will need to find work that will sustain it. And perhaps as an added bonus, this work can be meaningful and even enjoyable. Most work will be both, some of the time, but not all of the time.

But I want to ask this question a different way: What will you DO from here? What will you do with becoming, as an existing individual human being, locked in time, yet related to Eternity?

Why this story? Why this question? What will you DO? Our friend Kierkegaard talks a lot about striving, about becoming. What does he mean by "striving"? In our vernacular, it means "working harder" or maybe "doing it right" or "working up a sweat." You have certainly been doing this kind of striving as you have worked to finish this rigorous course of study! But I don't believe that this is the striving that Kierkegaard intends. Rather, his "striving" has to do with living life in a reflective way, listening to your life, allowing your life to raise your questions, over and over again.

You have also begun this process, and I want to encourage you to continue. It can look like seeking understanding

when life presents questions that don't have easy answers. It is listening, being willing to keep asking these questions that may not have answers at all. It is staying engaged in this process—the process of knowing that we are both temporal, locked into this existence in time with evil around us and within us, and also eternal, meant for something far beyond this, a beauty that we see only glimpses of here and now. Our business—in these moments that press us—is with the Eternal, with God.

I had an interesting experience a few weeks ago, and some of you were there for it. During the junior/senior special-topics class, tutor Brian Julian gave a twenty-minute overview of "Second-wave Feminism." This was the period that includes what we call "the Women's Movement" of the 1960s and 1970s. As I shared then, I arrived at Louisiana State University for college in 1974—the same year a woman could open a credit card in her own name without a co-signer and just four years after women were allowed to wear pants on LSU's campus. As I listened to Brian's summary of the movement, I became aware of having lived the history he was now summarizing. It felt strange to hear as history, events and times I had experienced first-hand. Because I was deeply impacted by coming of age as a woman during that decade, this history is very personal to me. And it caused me to reflect on something else that Kierkegaard talks about: History is an approximation.

You have spent the past four years studying history—history of events and also of ideas. This is a truly unique and vital education for understanding our lives in their context, coming down to us through a "Great Conversation" that you have now listened in on. But all of that history, all of those stories, those ideas, were lived by individuals. The telling of it was done by those who decided to write it down and by those who decided to read their writings. The people living during those times, the great masses, were ordinary people living ordinary lives, impacted by the events around them, no doubt, but still existing as human beings locked in their times and also tasked with eternity in their hearts.

Becoming "world-historical"—that is, having an impact on the actual direction

in which world history unfolds—is accidental. Some may seek it and not attain it; others who don't seek it do attain it. What will YOU DO? Even without seeking it, what you do with your life could have world-historical consequences, accidentally. Even our “small work” can make a big difference in the world, and it matters. And yet, history is lived by individual human beings, making individual human choices. Like you.

This paradox in which we live in time and eternity comes to us the most clearly, as Kierkegaard emphasizes, in one individual human in particular, at what he would argue is the central moment of world history. The eternal became temporal when Jesus showed up.


Tim Keller, founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, who died recently, said that the Christian gospel can be summed up in two important truths: First, you are more of a sinner than you ever imagined; and second, you are more loved than you ever imagined. These are two important truths. Let that sink in. You are loved.

But there is more. This Jesus who came also died and was raised from the dead. He conquered death! Because of this central and death-defying moment in history, we await a world made right. This world needs fixing. The promise of Christianity is that though we ourselves are more broken than we ever expect and the world more evil than we anticipate, it will be put right in the end: it will be made new, and those who want to be citizens there will be given new hearts, hearts that trust and love and know things we can't know here. The beauty we also see around us points to this new world, this glorified creation. So don't forget to listen to the beauty and the goodness in your life as well. It is a signpost of what is to come.

The big questions of our lives often arrive at times of transition. You are in a transition now, and I would encourage you to keep asking these big questions as you keep deciding what you will DO from here. This world will offer you answers, often compelling ones, sometimes despairing ones. I hope that you won't let the evil around you trick you into believing that it is definitive of what is truly real: this is distortion. Beauty, love, kindness, hope: these are definitive, signposts

in this world that can point us to the world to come, THIS world, redeemed and put right.

Back to my friend Jan. She remained cancer free for twenty-five years before it returned with a vengeance, this time as peritoneal cancer, cancer of the smooth tissue that lines the abdominal cavity. It was terminal. I visited Jan as we both knew she was dying. But this time, I was struck by our shared calm. Of course, we shared moments of panic and grief, but we weren't as thrashing as we used to be. It seemed we were trusting in a different way, with twenty-five years of life in between. The questions were still there, no doubt, and we were still asking, but we had come to accept that we don't always get answers. And we realized that a miracle had emerged. Not the miracle of a cure for her cancer or the removal of our pain, but rather, the miracle that we had kept believing, trying to trust this God who is okay with our questions, though not especially forthcoming with the answers. And along with our shared grief, the beauty of that last North Carolina spring we shared together was also very real.

So, what will you DO from here? (You do need a job.) But the bigger question is what will you DO? What will you DO when you hurt someone you love or are hurt by someone you love? What will you DO when life doesn't give you what you expect, when difficulty arises? What will you DO when life challenges you to ask questions that have no easy answer? Ask them anyway. Seek the answers. Strive for understanding. You are an existing individual human being. You are bound in time here and now, in these moments, in these choices, and they matter. And you are also engaged with the Eternal. These are the questions that can bring us into contact with God. Even more than Bible study, prayer, or other spiritual disciplines, it is when tragedy strikes or the world is in chaos or when I've hurt someone more deeply than I ever thought possible with my own selfishness or blindness—these are the moments I am called on to reflect. Who am I? Who do I want to be? Is there a God? Is He good? What is this life for? These are the questions that require striving, over and over again. And so my word to you is this: Go forth, and keep striving! And may God bless you always. 

Nancy Scott is a marriage and family therapist in private practice. She has a B.S. in zoology, an M.S. in biology, and an M.A. in marriage and family therapy. Until 2009, she served for many years on the staff of McKenzie Study Center and then on the faculty of Gutenberg College. In 2021, Gutenberg College welcomed Nancy back to the faculty.



Congratulations to the Gutenberg class of 2023!

Left to right: Ryanna Eyre, Isaiah Hall, Will Dowdy, Zoë Watts, Donovan Snider, Ariana Jones, Andrew Dewberry, Connor Cark, and Dane Miller

COLLOQUY SUMMER 2023



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Faith and Learning

EDUCATION CONFERENCE 2023
AUGUST 11 & 12
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In the last few centuries, the intellectual world has slowly but steadily abandoned Christianity, offering alternate secular perspectives to life's most important questions. As a result, Christian educators have become suspicious of "academia" and often seek to protect children from secular learning. In this conference, we will explore the dual goals of pursuing learning and promoting faith. How do we foster faith, encourage an

interest in truth, model confidence and humility, and avoid rebellion—all while embedded in a hostile world? Because truth is faith's greatest ally, we can embrace open and honest inquiry, trusting God to turn hearts to Him. In addition to plenary talks, there will be a selection of workshops and two small-group breakout discussions that will focus on readings about the pursuit of knowledge and living a life of faith.



Susan Wise Bauer



Wes Callihan



Jennifer Courtney



Andrea Lipinski



Eliot Grasso



Chris Swanson