

‘Where is Truth Now?’ — Agenda for Action

“Industry would be incredibly interested in hearing the perspective of the faith communities on the topic of ‘truth’.” — A leading representative of the UK technology industry

This was among the conclusions that arose from a symposium on ‘Where is Truth Now?’ held at Lambeth Palace in on 24th April 2019. The event, which was sponsored by St Albans Diocese, drew together two dozen eminent delegates, of various faiths and none, from the worlds of media, journalism, business, science, technology, the military and the arts. The goal was to provide a ‘safe space’ in which to discuss the issues of ‘post truth’, ‘fake news’ and ‘disinformation’. The event resulted in many thoughtful and thought-provoking ideas. The most important are summarised below.

1. **Countering the ‘Evils’** — The assault on truth represents a genuine and dangerous threat to all liberal democratic institutions. The London School of Economics has identified ‘five giant evils of the information crisis – confusion, cynicism, fragmentation, irresponsibility and apathy’,¹ (to which ‘simulation’ might be added) each of which needs to be countered. Faith communities could take a lead in this area.
2. **Celebrating ‘Truth Defenders’** — We must recognise and celebrate ‘truth defenders’ who epitomise truth telling in public life. Likewise, we must take steps to ensure that those who intimidate and threaten individuals with whom they disagree are called to account.
3. **A Manifesto on Truth** — There is the need for a clear, short, practical manifesto on truth in public life. This should be produced by a coalition of participants from all sectors, not least faith groups and civil society stakeholders. It should set out a framework of core values and principles against which individuals and organisations could gauge their personal lives and working practices regarding the area of truth. Moreover, it could provide an ‘anchor’ for some of the current regulatory, technological, and political debates.
4. **Publications** — Although much has been written on this subject, the faith communities have been largely silent. There is the need for a short publication on a faith-based approach to misinformation. This might also address issues of authority, leadership, trust, and societal and personal responsibility, as well as the underlying ‘theology of truth in a post truth world’.
5. **An Outreach Programme** — There is the need for an outreach programme of structured debates, workshops or discussions on this topic. Whilst these are needed for everyone, it would be vital to engage prominent influencers in face-to-face conversation. This is an area in which senior faith leaders could play a key role.
6. **A Focus on Non-Digital Reality** — An emphasis on our created humanity leads us to celebrate and protect non-digital realities: embodied personhood, face-to-face communication, diurnal and seasonal rhythms, and the human longing for truth and meaning.
7. **Faith Communities** — While not presuming to lead on this issue, faith communities have important contributions to make in response, both institutionally and at the local level. In particular:
 - They encapsulate time-tested values, narratives and spiritual practices, which have both guided individuals and served as catalysts for the advancement of civil society;
 - They can act as ‘honest brokers’ in helping to facilitate good disagreement, recognising that while many may be ‘truth seekers’ it is dangerous to absolutize truth itself; and
 - They can offer sanctuary, safe debating spaces and ‘human-sized’ communities, especially for those who are concerned about the loss of identity and culture.

29th May 2019



The Revd Canon Dr Tim Bull — St Albans Director of Ministry and Residentiary Canon at St Albans Cathedral
The Revd Peter Crumpler — Former Director of Communications for the Church of England
John Forrest — Film maker and formerly a producer with BBC TV and radio
Nizam Uddin — Senior Head of Mosaic and Community Integration at *The Prince's Trust*

¹ <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/2018/11/22/truth-trust-and-technology-so-whats-the-problem/>