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The great St. Augustine wrote: "Truth is a great reality, life is a great reality; if only it were possible for my soul to find them!" Are we not all searching for truth, especially the truth of what life is all about? I have come across some fellow pilgrims who speak to me about seeing these qualities with the eye of my soul.

The Belle of Amherst, Ms. [Emily Dickinson](#), left the world a legacy of more than 1,700 poems. She told us that she was a "nobody," that this world "is not a conclusion," and that life is meaningful if we stop hearts from breaking or help a fainting robin. Underneath her hundreds of poems, there is the search for truth, a hunger to know reality and a need to share that understanding with a world that never wrote to her (how sad).

She begins a poem: "[Tell all the truth but tell it slant](#)," because truth is often too much for us to accept. Its brightness can overwhelm the soul and its surprise can shatter the heart. In the end, the truth must be told gradually or blindness might result. Illusions and delusions imprison us. Truth frees us.

Shakespeare was on the same page. In "[The Tempest](#)" we read: "The truth you speak doth lack some gentleness, / And time to speak it in; you rub the sore, / When you should bring the plaster." The manner in which truth is told and the timing of its telling makes all the difference in the world. Truth can destroy a soul. Truth can be a weapon. But for that, truth must be treasured and honored.

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But what is truth? [Pilate's question](#) still echoes 2,000 years later. The Anglican theologian [John Macquarrie](#) maintains that the fundamental meaning of truth is to bring to light "what is ... to see things as they really are without distortion and concealment." Did Joe Smith kill his wife? Did the Packers win the Super Bowl in 1997? Is there a God? Is human nature basically corrupt?

In an age of "fake news," truth is hard to come by. Was Shakespeare correct: "[There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so](#)"? This type of thinking takes us into the land of subjectivity; objective truth cannot be found there.

Assuming there is objective truth, where can it be found? Will Barrett, a fictional character in Walker Percy's [The Second Coming](#), "had learned over the years that if you listen carefully, you can hear the truth from the unlikeliest of sources, from an enemy, from a stranger, from children, from nuts, from overheard conversations,

from stupid preachers." Other sources abound: in the thoughts of philosophers and the research of scientists, in the visions of mystics and in farmers' fields, in the experiences of grandparents and in grandchildren's stories, in Scripture and in the history of world religions. The Latin adage tells of another: *In vino veritas* (in wine, there is truth.) Maybe even in good German beer.

What about anthropologist and writer [Ernest Becker](#)'s comment: "The man [woman] of knowledge in our time is bowed down under a burden he never imagined he would ever have: the overproduction of truth that cannot be consumed"? I don't think there is an overproduction of truth, but there is an overproduction of facts and theories and limitless social media messages. Our modern minds are scrambled like our morning eggs, causing mental indigestion — a psychological issue of great import today. To add to the confusion and to muddy the water even more, the poet [Edwin Arlington Robinson](#) speaks of "half-truths," even "quarter-truths," whatever they are.

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Murder mysteries have been popular for centuries with their "Who done it?" Was it the butler or the maid, the mistress or the boyfriend, the paperboy or grandmother? Along come the "truth-finders" — Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple, Sherlock Holmes, Columbo — who gather the scattered clues and reveal the killers with a smile. Life itself is a mystery. Clues are scattered all over to tell us who we are, where we are going, how to get there and where cookies are. We need the Holy Spirit, gracing us with wisdom and discernment, to arrive at some meaning and significant degree of truth.

The great Southern writer [Flannery O'Connor](#) was almost obsessed with her pursuit of truth. She is well-known for saying that a culture that is deaf and blind, that cannot truly hear or see, may need someone, a prophet or a poet — or short story writer — to shout and draw large distorted pictures. They are needed to wake people to the truth. Violent and grotesque characters fill many other stories that attempt to shake people into reality. At the same time that she is searching for the truth, O'Connor humorously knows the human condition: "Around here it is not a matter of finding the truth but of deciding which lie you live with better."

Another realist, [Kurt Vonnegut](#), a prolific American writer and humorist, gives us the task of epistemological humility: "The truth is, we know so little about life, we don't really know what the good news is and what the bad news is." Vonnegut is not in his humorous mode here. He's reminding us of our limitations and our want of wisdom.

Nonetheless, we have some inkling of the good news. Faith, a great source of truth, would have us believe: "For the truth is that we are immersed in God, receiving life and being and love at every moment, as constantly as the air we breathe throughout our lives" (Thelma Hall). The truth is that God is Light, Love and Life. Even James Joyce seems to concur: "Ancient free and accepted order. Light, life and love, by God" ([Ulysses](#))."

Yes. *In vino veritas*: Let us drink to the truth.