

6<sup>th</sup> October 2021

# Truth

**“Still closing up truth to truth as we find it.”**

*John Milton, Areopagitica*

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was an 18<sup>th</sup> century German writer, philosopher and dramatist and a key figure in the “age of the enlightenment”. Towards the end of his life, his main focus was theology and religion, and in his research, he discovered an unpublished manuscript that attacked the historicity of the Christian religion. Against much advice, he published sections of the manuscript in order to stimulate discussion. However, his honourable and scholarly motives led to him being rounded on by other writers, and a fierce public debate ensued.

In time, the government intervened, and a law was enacted which effectively amounted to the censorship of Lessing’s writing. He wasn’t finished, however, and using his skills as a playwright, he continued to air his enlightened ideas, particularly through his most famous play, *Nathan the Wise*, the first example of German “literature of humanity”. In the play, Lessing has a character debate “truth” with Nathan the prophet, in an attempt to find which religion, life-stance or philosophical position was the only one to follow. The core of the debate is summed up in another piece of Lessing’s writing, *Ein Duplik*, which includes this:

*If God were to hold out enclosed in His right hand all Truth, and in His left hand just the active search for Truth ... and He should say to me: Choose! I should humbly take His left hand and say: Father! Give me this one; absolute Truth belongs to Thee alone.*

Lessing is right. The search for truth will, and should always be, just that – a search. Religion, life-stance, a philosophical position, a belief-system will always be a product of influence, study, reason, intellect and faith. It is not, and should never be, an endpoint, an attainment, a conclusion, but always a process of discovery. Which of us, even if we are committed to our Christian position, could ever say “we have all truth” when there is so much more to know, reason with and understand? Absolute Truth? Not yet. An active search for truth? “Give me this one ...”

## **A prayer for today**

*Lord, today I take both your hands, knowing that my search and your Truth will always be better being held together. Amen*