MODERN INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF POST-TRUTH: A PARADIGMATIC INQUIRY THROUGH THE LENS OF MATTHEW (28:11-15)

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Abstract
This paper explores the phenomenon of post-truth through an innovative philosophico-biblical approach, analysing the concept in the light of a paradigmatic hermeneutic of Matthew (28:11-15). The study employs Yuval Harari's perspective on misinformation as a framework, alongside a detailed exegesis of the Matthian passage, for an understanding of the phenomenon of post-truth. The analysis reveals key post-truth elements in the biblical narrative. These elements mirror contemporary post-truth tactics, demonstrating that the prioritization of narrative power over objective reality is not a uniquely modern phenomenon. The philosophico-biblical approach underscores the complex interplay between truth, power, and social cohesion, providing a deeper understanding of how false narratives gain traction. The paper submits that the recognition of the historical continuity of truth manipulation enhances the ability to critically engage with information and foster a more truth-oriented society.

Keywords: Post-Truth, Philosophical, Biblical, Matthew, Manipulation

Introduction

In an era where the concept of truth seems increasingly fluid, the phenomenon of "post-truth" has emerged as a critical subject of inquiry across multiple disciplines. This paper seeks to examine the dynamics of post-truth through an innovative philosophico-biblical approach, focusing on the narrative found in the gospel of Matthew (28:11-15) as a historical case study. Through the interweaving of contemporary philosophical discourse with biblical exegesis, the study aims to demonstrate that the challenges posed by post-truth are not merely a product of our digital age but are rooted in longstanding human tendencies to manipulate and construct reality.

The philosophico-biblical approach employed in this paper offers a unique contribution to the ongoing scholarly on-going conversations about post-truth. This bridging of ancient wisdom with modern philosophical thought, seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of how false

narratives, powered on emotions and subjective whims, gain traction and persist in cultural consciousness. This interdisciplinary perspective allows the study to explore the complex interplay between truth, power, and social cohesion in both historical and contemporary contexts. Furthermore, our research addresses key philosophical questions about the nature of truth, the social construction of reality, and the ethical implications of narrative manipulation. We examine how economic disparities, institutional authority, and strategic communication have been leveraged throughout history to shape public perception and suppress inconvenient truths. This historical continuity challenges humanity to reconsider its approaches to combating misinformation and fostering a more truth-oriented society in the digital age.

The manipulation of truth for political or social gain is not a modern phenomenon. Scholars have long recognized that the construction and dissemination of narratives, regardless of their veracity, have been crucial tools in shaping public opinion and maintaining power structures. Arendt's seminal work on totalitarianism highlights how the systematic distortion of truth can undermine the very fabric of society.[35] Orwell's prescient observations about political language and its capacity to make "lies sound truthful and murder respectable" continue to resonate in contemporary discussions of post-truth politics.[36] These foundational thinkers laid the groundwork for understanding how deliberate fabrications can become entrenched in public consciousness, a theme that is central to our analysis of Matthew (28:11-15).

The concept of post-truth has gained significant traction in recent years, with scholars across disciplines attempting to define and analyze its implications. McIntyre argues that post-truth represents not a denial of truth's existence, but rather the subordination of truth to personal beliefs and political agendas.[37] This perspective aligns closely with our examination of how religious authorities in Matthew's narrative prioritized maintaining their power over acknowledging factual events. Kalpokas extends this analysis, suggesting that post-truth thrives in an environment where the rapid circulation of information outpaces our ability to verify its accuracy.[38] This modern dynamic adds a new dimension to the age-old practice of truth manipulation, as illustrated in our biblical case study.

The intersection of philosophy, theology, and narrative studies provides a rich terrain for examining the nature of truth and its manipulation. Ricoeur's work on narrative identity offers insights into how stories shape our understanding of reality, both individually and collectively.[39] This philosophical framework complements theological perspectives on truth, such as those

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[35] Arendt, H. 1966. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 474.

[36] Orwell, G. 1968. "Politics and the English Language". In Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Eds.). *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (122-130). London: Secker & Warburg, 127.

[37] McIntyre, L. 2018. *Post-Truth*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 5-6.

[38] Kalpokas, I. 2019. *A Political Theory of Post-Truth*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 27-28.

[39] Ricoeur, P. 1984. *Time and Narrative*. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Trans.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 52-54.

explored by Vanhoozer, who examines the concept of truth in biblical narratives.[40] By synthesizing these interdisciplinary approaches, the study can develop a more nuanced understanding of how narratives like that found in Matthew 28:11-15 operate on multiple levels—historical, theological, and philosophical—to shape perceptions of truth.

By examining post-truth through this philosophico-biblical lens, the paper intends to contribute valuable insights to ongoing discussions about epistemology, media literacy, and the nature of truth in our contemporary world. Ultimately, this paper seeks not only to deepen our understanding of post-truth as a phenomenon but also to equip readers with a historical perspective that may enhance our collective ability to critically engage with information and navigate the complex landscape of truth and falsehood in the 21st century.

Philosophico-Biblical Approach

The philosophico-Biblical approach makes a beautiful combination of the theological and philosophical patterns of thinking and research. At the philosophical level, a conceptual approach is undertaken. The conceptual approach is undertaken at the philosophical level because philosophy engages mainly in the study of concepts with the aim of clarifying their objects and understanding them. Given that an analysis of concepts may help the understanding of the phenomenon that the term denotes. At the level of theology, a biblical-exegetical method is adopted for the purpose of using philosophical concepts for a better understanding of scripture, and the employment of scripture to further a contemporary philosophical appreciation of reality. This complementary approach is based on the connection between theology and philosophy, as there is an inescapable philosophical element in every theology[41].

Unlike the Patristic approach that employed philosophy at the service of theology, giving Christian interpretations to Neoplatonic concepts such as logos, divine mind, soul, creation, problem of evil universals, particular, freedom and foreknowledge, thus creating no clear cut distinction between philosophy and theology[42], the present approach employs philosophy and scriptural texts for the

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[40] Vanhoozer, K. J, 1998. *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 198-200.

[41] Kanu, I. A. 2010. "A Discourse on the Romance between Philosophy and Christian Theology". *International Journal of Theology and Reformed Tradition.* 2. 185-198; Kanu, I. A. 2011. "Corruption in Africa and its Challenges for the Enterprise of Christian Theology". *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences.* 4. 492-500; Kanu, I. A. 2012. "On the Possibility of Miracles". *International Journal of Theology and Reformed Tradition.* 4. 81-89.

[42] *Schulman, Jana K. 2002.* The Rise of the Medieval World: 500–1300: A Biographical Dictionary. *Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 45; Davies, Brian. 2004.* Aquinas. *Continuum International Publishing Group. 14; Gracia, Jorge J. E. and Noone, Timothy B. 2003.* A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages. *Oxford: Blackwell, 16;* Kretzmann, Norman *and Stump, Eleonore. 2002.* The Cambridge Companion to Augustine. *Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 50; Hyman, J., Walsh, J. J. 1967.* Philosophy in the Middle Ages: The Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Traditions. *New York: Harper & Row;* Catarina Dutilh Novaes *& Stephen Read. 2016.* The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Logic. *Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*

service of each other. Therefore, while the exegesis of a scriptural text deepens an understanding of a philosophical concept, philosophical concepts, which are useful tools for clarification and development of ideas, helps a better understanding of what is happening in the scriptural text. In this case, the philosophico-biblical approach finds a nexus between the scriptural and the philosophical.

Theoretical Framework

Harari developed a framework in which he argued that fake news is old news, implying that at the outset of the 21st century, truth is not in worse shape than it was in previous epochs. In arguing that it is not a new phenomenon, he avers that the fake news is a phenomenon that typifies homo sapiens, which is rooted in the human ability to create stories and fabrications and even believe them. He thinks that this is the basis of the human fabrication of myths, religions, and ideologies, which enable the creation of cooperation and ties between complete strangers[43].

The purpose for this fabrications is based on the preference of homo sapiens for power over truth, and have invested more time and effort in ruling the world than in trying to understand it. Differentiating the approaches towards fake news in the different ages in human history, is the advent of technology, which enables the human person in the present age to tailor propaganda on an individual basis, and match the lies to the individual prejudices. These created stories, which are lies are used to reinforce the prejudices of those believing in them, to exacerbate the rifts in society, and puncture the democratic system from within.

Philosophical Understanding of Post-Truth

The concept 'post-truth' gained significant attention in recent years, particularly after being named the 2016 Word of the Year by Oxford Dictionaries[44]. Post-truth describes a cultural and political context in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief[45]. In a post-truth society, the boundary between truth and falsehood becomes blurred, leading to a situation where subjective interpretations and false information can

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[43]Harari, N. Y. 2018. Op. Cit.

[44] OxfordLanguages. 2016. *Word of the year 2016*. https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016. Oxford Living Dictionaries. 2016. Op. Cit.

[45] *Harsin, J. 2018.* "Post-Truth and Critical Communication Studies". Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication, *20; Kalpokas, I. 2018. A political theory of post-truth. Cham, Switzerland, 23; Cosentino, G. 2020. Social media and the post-truth world order : the global dynamics of disinformation. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 50.*

gain more traction than verified facts[46]. It represents a significant shift in the way information is perceived and disseminated.

The question of truth has been a major preoccupation of philosophy, and perspectives on post-truth always draws from a particular theory of truth. Even though scholars like Baggini have argued that post-truth has nothing to do with the philosophical traditional theories of truth, when he wrote that:

> The merits of these competing theories are of mainly academic concern. When people debate whether there were weapons of mass destruction in Saddam Hussain's Iraq, whether global warming is real and anthropogenic, or whether austerity is necessary, their disagreements are not the consequence of competing theories of truth[47].

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[46]*D'Ancona, M. 2017. Post truth: The new war on truth and how to fight back. London, 25; Rommetveit, K. 2022. Post-Truth Imaginations: New Starting Points for Critique of Politics and Technoscience. London: Taylor & Francis, 16.*

[47] Baggini, J. 2024. *What can philosophy add to the post-truth crisis?* https://www.the-tls.co.uk/philosophy/contemporary-philosophy/post-truth-philosophers-essay-julian-baggini

However, looking at this more broadly, reveals that the issue of post truth cannot be discussed without relations to truth, which has been a major philosophical issue over the years. Post truth draws on historical precedents, not only where propaganda and misinformation have been used to influence public perception[48], but also in philosophy, where philosophers in the likes of Hannah Arendt, Bruno Latour, Max Weber, Friedrich Nietzsche, etc., constitute fundamental conceptual resource for the development of post truth theory.

In recent times, it has been used to describe a distinctive kind of politics that is full of deception. Arendt had argued that truthfulness and honesty have never been counted among the virtues of a politician[49]. Discussions on post truth always goes back to Orwell who wrote that: "Political language – and, with variations, this is true of all political parties, from conservatives to anarchists – is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind"[50]. It is in this sense that Hannah Arendt and George Orwell are considered among those who already in the mid-20th century identified the harbingers of the post-truth phenomenon[51]. The philosopher McIntyre argues that the post-truth phenomenon is not a denial of the existence of truth and facts, but the subjugation of facts to personal subjective perspective[52]. Dennett, during an interview describes the post truth era as a period of epistemological murk and uncertainty, such that we have not experienced since the Middle Ages. Marmot discussed the post truth phenomenon in relation to the lies of the Brexit supporters and US President Trump and his administration[53]. While the America philosopher Frankfurt talked about post truth differentiating between a liar and a "bullshitter", who both are concealing something from their audience[54]. In the face of these perspectives, Brahms avers that:

> The variety of interpretations of the post-truth phenomenon reflects one of its most prominent characteristics – the confusion surrounding it and the difficulty in understanding it. But one common denominator within this diversity is the sense that something is happening: whether it's an old phenomenon, a new phenomenon, or the revamping and intensifying of an old phenomenon, people are rallying around the new concept and calling it the post-truth phenomenon. All consider the post-truth phenomenon detrimental, and try to understand it in order to cope with it[55].

These notwithstanding, the advent of digital media and social networks has amplified the spread of misinformation, making it easier for falsehoods to reach a wide audience rapidly[56]. This digital

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[48] *Maras, S. 2013.* Objectivity in journalism. *Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press; Heit, H. (2018).* "There Are No Facts ...' Nietzsche as Predecessor of Post-Truth?". *Studia Philosophica Estonica. 11 (1): 44–63; Sokal, A., Bricmont, J. 1999. Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of science. Picador USA; Foucault, M. 2001. Truth and Power. In Faubion, James (ed.).* Power: Essential Works of Foucault. *New Press.*

[49] *Arendt, H. 1972. Op. Cit.*

[50] Arendt, H. 1972. Op. Cit. And Orwell, G. 1968. Op. Cit.

[51] *D'Ancona, M. 2017. Op. Cit.*

[52] McIntyre, L. 2018. Op. Cit.

landscape allows for the rapid dissemination of information without the rigorous vetting processes typically associated with traditional media outlets.

In relation to politics, post-truth politics poses significant challenges for democratic societies. In a landscape where facts are sidelined, public discourse can become polarized, and trust in institutions can erode[57], it can lead to a fragmentation of shared reality, where different segments of the population base their beliefs on entirely different sets of facts. More so, the erosion of a common factual foundation undermines informed decision-making, which is crucial for the functioning of a healthy democracy and society[58]. Addressing the post-truth phenomenon requires a multifaceted approach[59].

Biblical Exegesis of Matthew 28:11-15: A Post-Truth Narrative

Historical and Literary Context

The historical context of Matthew (28:11-15) is situated in the immediate aftermath of Jesus' resurrection. It involves the Roman occupation of Judea and the political tensions between Jewish religious authorities and Jesus' followers. From the literary point of view, this passage is unique to Matthew's gospel and provides a counter-narrative to the resurrection story. In this regard, the author of the Gospel presents two narratives of the event: on the one hand, from the immediate context, the disciples of Jesus were convinced that the tomb where Jesus was buried is empty, implying that Jesus rose from the dead (28:1-10). On the other hand, in the context of the present text (28:11-15) there is scheme by the elders to conceal the truth through falsification and financial gratification of the truth bearers, namely the guards. The text runs as follows:

> While they were going, behold, some of the guards went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sum of money to the soldiers and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So they took the money and did as they were directed; and this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

Literary Structure of Matthew 28:11-15

[53] Marmot, M. 2017. "Post-Truth and Science". *The Lancet* 389. No. 10068: 497-98.
[54] Frankfurt, H. G. 1986. *On Bullshit*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 19.
[55] Brahms, Y. 2024. *Philosophy of Post-Truth.* https://www.inss.org.il/publication/philosophy-of-post-truth/#_edn12
[56] McIntyre, L. 2018. Op. Cit.
[57] Suiter, J. 2016. Post-Truth Politics. *Political Insight.* 7(3): 25-27.
[58] Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K. H., & Cook, J. 2017. Beyond Misinformation: Understanding and Coping with the "Post-Truth" Era. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*. 6(4): 353-369.
[59] Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. 2017. *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making*. Council of Europe, 33.

The literary structure of Matt 28:11-15 in this paper is built around the element of post-truth therein. Based on this, it comes in a linear form with four divisions designated as A, B, C and D. "A" is tagged as "Initial report" consisting of only one verse (v. 11), where the guards are said to have reported the strange experience they had. However, in vv. 12-13 (B) the elders, fearing the implication of the report, contrived and carefully crafted a conspiracy that would counter the disciples' resurrection claims. In "C" (v. 14) they hatched a preemptive damage control that would assuage Pilate's punitive measures. The narrative ends by reporting the execution of the false narrative and successful outcome, which is designated as "D" (v. 15). Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, the literary structure of Matthew 28:11-15 is spelt out thus: Initial Report (v. 11), Conspiracy Formation (vv. 12-13), Preemptive Damage Control (vv. 14) and Execution and Propagation of False Narrative (v. 15)

a.   *Initial Report (v. 11)*

In v. 11 the story commences with a presentation of two groups hurrying away from the tomb with a message to deliver: "the women have a message of hope and victory for the disciples, the guards one of confusion and failure for the priests."[60] Thus, the guards are reported as going to report to the chief priests (*archiereusin*) about their experience of earthquake and "what took place" which moved them to say, "Truly this was the Son of God!" in 27:54. The term *koustōdias,* which is the plural of the Latin loanword, *custodia* refers to guard composed of soldiers. These guards may most probably be referring to those Pilate speaks about in 27:65. This links Matt 28:11-15 to 27:62-66.[61] France argues consistently and convincingly that the soldiers may most probably be Jewish Temple guards and not Roman Platoons as attested in 27:65-66. In this regard, he advances a few reasons: first, he argues that if they were Roman soldiers, they would have reported to Pilate and not the priests. Second, their willingness to take orders from the priests about what they are to say and not Pilate instead and even accept money as bribe; and third that the priests and elders believe that it is possible for Pilate to be kept in the dark about the matter.[62]

Still in v. 11, the title *archiereusin* refers to the head of the Jewish religion and president of the Sanhedrin as attested to in Mark 14:60f, 63; John 18:19, 22, 24.[63] Albright and Mann aver that by reporting to the Chief Priest first, the soldiers must have thought that the matter is of utmost concern to the former.[64] Some writers affirm that perhaps Matthew writes about the experience and report of the soldiers to underscore the point that the empty tomb story is accepted by both believers and unbelievers.[65]

b.   *Conspiracy Formation (vv. 12-13)*

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[60] France, R. T. 2007. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1104.

[61] Harrington, D. J. 1991. *The Gospel of Matthew*. In Daniel J. Harrington (Ed.). *Sacra Pagina*, vol. 3 (400-415). Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 410.

[62] France, R. T. 2007. Op. cit., 1104.

[63] Gingrich, W. 1979. *Archiereus*. In *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 27.

[64] Albright, W. F. and Mann, C. S. 1971. *Matthew, The Anchor Bible*. New York: Doubleday, 359.

[65] Albright, W. F. and Mann, C. S. 1971. Op. cit.

Fearing that the deception they had earlier suspected of the disciples might come to fruition,[66] the Chief Priests contrive with Jewish elders to conceal the testimonies of the soldiers.[67] They are charged to change the narrative – from what they saw and attested to (27:54) to accusing the disciples of stealing Jesus' body from the tomb 28:130. To buy their silence, they (chief priests and elders) bribed them. The money (*arguria*) given in bribe is qualified here with the adjective *hikana* (large). However, Gingrich says that while the term can be literally translated as "large," in the given context, it refers to something that has reached or attained the "extent that is quite enough."[68] France corroborates this rendering and posits that Matthew employs the use of *hikanos* idiomatically to mean "substantial quantity." Perhaps the rendering *arguria hikana* here therefore, is meant to convey the idea that the bribe is "enough money,"[69] quite a sufficient sum,[70] beyond resistance and could easily buy the truth from the soldiers.

At this juncture, it is worth noting that the plan of the high priests and elders, who have been the chief antagonists of Jesus since the beginning of the passion story, is called a *symboulion*. According to Timothy Friberg, this is a consultation with a negative and malicious connotation which is a consistent characteristics of the Sanhedrin in their relation to Jesus[71] (see Matt 12:14; 22:15; 27:1, 7). It suffices to say therefore, that what is playing out here is an assembly of powers (chief priests and the elders), whose agenda is deliberate fabrication and "plotting together" powered by economic manipulation.[72]

c. *Pre-emptive Damage Control (vv. 14)*

The religious leaders believe that Pilate, like them, would be keen to prevent any public excitement or potential rebellion that might arise due to the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb. They assume Pilate shares their concern about maintaining order and avoiding unrest among the people.[73] Thus, to ensure that the soldiers do not entertain fear that Pilate may impose punitive measures on them upon learning of the falsified report, they (Jewish leaders) allay their anxiety through proactive damage control measures. The word employed for convincing Pilate here is "*peisomen*." In his analytical lexicon Friberg renders the word *peisomen* variously as "convince, persuade, strive to

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[66] Ibid

[67] Pilani, M. P. 2023. Amos Polemical Mission Against Religious Hypocrisy (Amos 5:21-27) in African Context. In Michael Ufok Udoekpo, Mary Jerome Obiorah, and Luke E. Ijezie (Eds.). *Biblical Approach to Mission in Context: A Festschrift in Honour of Sister Professor Okure, SHCJ*. Paulines Publications West Africa.

[68] Gingrich, W. 1979. Op. Cit. 93; Danker, F. W. 2000. W*ho is also of the same opinion in his work, The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Chicago: University Press, 20.

[69] France, R. T. 2007. Op. Cit. 1103.

[70] Arndt W. F. and Gingrich, W. F. 1979. *Hikanō. A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University Press, 374.

[71] Friberg, T. 2005. S*ymboulion*. In *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 350; Harrington, "The Gospel of Matthew," 410.

[72] France, R. T. 2007. Op. Cit., 1105.

[73] Harrington, D. J. Op. Cit. 410.

please (possibly with bribes or promises)" or even "to mislead" by persuasion.[74] France believes that the Jewish elders "know their man well enough to be confident that, if necessary, he can be kept happy with a further bribe."[75] At this point, with sufficient financial gratification and punitive threat neutralized the truth as initially attested to by the soldiers can be laid off, even perpetually as the following verse (15) affirms.

d. *Execution and Propagation of False Narrative (v. 15)*

The falsified narrative appears to be easily propagated. But what they propagate is what they have been instructed (*edidachthēsan*). This word is an aorist passive of the verb *didaskō* (to teach, instruct). The gospel writer may have employed the use of this benign rendering, to show how easily it is for the chief priests and elders to conceal truth and lie; and that they even go as far as to "teach" or even give express "instruction" to others to do the same, so long as it suits their agenda against Jesus.[76] France insists that "The fact that the story is spread among Jewish people is further indication that it is Jewish temple guards who were spreading it, not Roman soldiers"[77] especially as the audience would typically be Jewish people and not non-Jews. The impression one gets here is that the guard readily agrees to conceal the truth to spread the false version of the resurrection story out of deference for the elders as well as the financial gratification that comes with the reverence they have for their employees, if we are agree with France on the identity of the guards. Two key factors are to be noted in the conclusion of the narrative, namely, the widespread dissemination of the false information and the long-term entrenchment of the lie in public consciousness as well as the unfortunate damaging effect of these two factors[78].

Assessing Post-Truth through the Lens of Matthew 28:11-15

From the foregoing exegesis of Matthew 28:11-15, the sacred author presents a striking example of post-truth dynamics in biblical narrative. This passage, unique to Matthew's gospel, offers a counter-narrative to the resurrection story, illustrating how truth can be manipulated and false information propagated for political and religious ends.[79] The passage begins with two competing narratives: the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection and the guards' report of the empty tomb.[80] This sets the stage for the manipulation of truth that follows. The juxtaposition of these narratives creates a tension that reflects the broader conflict between Jesus' followers and the religious establishment. The guards' report to the chief priests serves as a catalyst for the subsequent actions,

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[74]Friberg, T. 2005. *Peitho. Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 350

[75] France, R. T. 2007. Op. Cit., 1105.

[76] Ibid, 1106

[77] Ibid

[78] France, R. T. 2007. Op. Cit., 1106.

[79] Pilani, M. P. 2023. Socio-Political Neophobia: The Bane of Advancement in Nigeria As A Nation. In Kanu I. A. et al (eds.). *The Economy of Leadership and Social Transformation in Contemporary Africa: Essays in Honour of Professor Ichoku Hyacinth Ementa* (227-250). Jos: Augustinian Digital Press.

[80] Friberg, T. 2005. Op. Cit., 350.

highlighting how unexpected information can prompt powerful entities to engage in truth manipulation.

The chief priests and elders, representing established power structures, engage in a "*symboulion*" – a consultation with malicious intent.[81] Their response to the guards' report demonstrates key elements of post-truth. First, there is a deliberate fabrication of falsehood, as they construct a narrative that directly contradicts the guards' testimony. This fabrication is not merely a passive denial but an active creation of an alternative reality. Second, the passage reveals collaboration among influential figures to construct an alternative narrative. The chief priests and elders work together, pooling their authority and resources to create a more convincing lie.[82] This collaborative aspect underscores how post-truth often relies on networks of power rather than isolated individuals. Third, the use of economic power to manipulate truth-bearers is evident. The religious leaders leverage their financial resources to influence the guards' testimony. This demonstrates how economic disparities can be exploited in post-truth scenarios, with those in power using their wealth to shape narratives favorable to their interests.

The use of "*arguria hikana*" (sufficient money) to bribe the guards is a crucial post-truth element.[83] This highlights how economic incentives can be leveraged to suppress truth and promote falsehood. The term "*hikana*" suggests that the amount was carefully calculated to be just enough to ensure compliance, reflecting a strategic approach to truth manipulation. This financial aspect of post-truth demonstrates how economic pressures can be used to override ethical considerations and personal integrity. The leaders' promise to "*peisomen*" (persuade or possibly mislead) the governor showcases another post-truth tactic: anticipating and neutralizing potential challenges to the false narrative.[84] This preemptive action reveals a sophisticated understanding of information control. By addressing potential obstacles in advance, the religious leaders aim to create a seamless and unassailable false narrative. This aspect of post-truth highlights how those in power can manipulate not just the immediate narrative but also shape the context in which that narrative will be received and evaluated.

The instruction (*edidachthēsan*) given to the guards to spread the false story represents the institutionalization of the lie.[85] This demonstrates how post-truth narratives can be systematically disseminated through official channels. The use of the term "*edidachthēsan*" (were instructed) implies a formal process of indoctrination, suggesting that the false narrative is not merely suggested but becomes an official account that the guards are expected to propagate. This institutionalization of falsehood fired by emotions shows how post-truth can become embedded in

[81] Friberg, Timothy, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller. 2000. *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 200.

[82] Pilani, M. P. 2022. Amos 7:10-17 A Paradigm for Interpreting Modern Ministers. In Bernard Ukwuegbu et al. (Eds.). *The Bible On Ministries and Ministers, ed. , Acts of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria Vol. 14* (69-87). Port Harcourt: CABAN, 87.

[83] Gingrich, F. Wilbur. 1983. *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 83.

[84] France, R. T. 2007. Op. Cit. 1104.

[85] Albright and Mann, Matthew, Op. Cit. 359.

societal structures, making it increasingly difficult to challenge or correct. Matthew's note that this story was "spread among the Jews to this day" illustrates the long-lasting impact of successfully propagated post-truth narratives.[86] This final observation underscores the enduring nature of well-crafted false narratives. Once a post-truth account gains traction, it can persist in the public consciousness for generations, shaping perceptions and beliefs long after its initial creation. This longevity highlights the challenges of combating post-truth narratives once they become established.

As a concluding remark, Matthew (28:11-15) provides a remarkably modern illustration of post-truth dynamics. It demonstrates how powerful entities can construct and disseminate false narratives, using financial incentives, institutional authority, and strategic communication to suppress truth and shape public perception. The deliberate creation and spread of misinformation by those in authority illustrate a key aspect of post-truth culture. This biblical account therefore, serves as a cautionary tale about the vulnerability of truth in the face of coordinated misinformation campaigns, offering insights that remain relevant in today's complex information landscape.

The Dynamics of Post-Truth: A Philosophico-Biblical Approach

Post-truth, as a concept, represents a significant challenge to both philosophical and theological understandings of truth and reality. From a philosophical perspective, post-truth can be seen as an evolution of longstanding questions about the nature of truth, knowledge, and social reality. The biblical narrative in Matthew (28:11-15) provides a striking historical example that illustrates many of the key dynamics at play in our modern conception of post-truth. At its core, post-truth represents a prioritization of narrative power over objective reality. As Harari argues, this tendency is deeply rooted in human nature and our capacity for creating and believing in shared fictions. The biblical account in Matthew demonstrates this clearly, showing how religious and political authorities actively constructed a false narrative to counter the truth of Jesus' resurrection. This aligns with philosophical perspectives that highlight how power structures often shape what is accepted as "truth" in society. The post-truth phenomenon, as seen in both contemporary discourse and the biblical narrative, reveals a complex interplay between truth, power, and social cohesion.[87] In Matthew's account, the chief priests and elders prioritize maintaining their authority and preventing social upheaval over adherence to factual truth. This echoes modern concerns about how post-truth politics can undermine democratic institutions and social stability.

Philosophically, post-truth challenges traditional epistemological structures. It doesn't necessarily deny the existence of objective truth, but rather suggests that emotional resonance and personal belief often take precedence over factual accuracy in shaping public opinion. The biblical narrative

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[86] Davies, W.D. and Dale C. Allison. 1997. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew.* Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 19.

[87] Usman J. H. and Paul, P. M. 2024. "Conflict Resolution Beyond Identity: Insights on Peacebuilding from Acts 6:1-7." *Journal of Religion and Society*. 13. 58-73.

illustrates this by showing how a fabricated story, backed by authority and financial incentives, can gain widespread acceptance despite contradicting eyewitness accounts. The use of economic power to manipulate truth, as seen in the bribery of the guards in Matthew's account, reflects philosophical concerns about the intersection of capitalism and truth. It raises questions about how economic disparities can be exploited to shape narratives and control information, a concern that remains highly relevant in our current media landscape.

From a theological perspective, the post-truth narrative in Matthew presents a profound challenge to the concept of divine truth. It shows how even in the face of miraculous event, human institutions can construct alternative realities that obscure spiritual truths.[88] This tension between divine revelation and human manipulation of truth remains a central concern in many theological traditions. The longevity of the false narrative, noted by Matthew as persisting "to this day," speaks to philosophical ideas about the social construction of reality. It demonstrates how collectively accepted narratives, even if false, can become deeply embedded in cultural consciousness and resist correction over time. In both the biblical account and modern post-truth discourse, the researchers see a strategic approach to narrative construction. The preemptive measures taken by the religious leaders to neutralize potential challenges to their false narrative mirror contemporary concerns about the sophisticated nature of misinformation campaigns. The philosophico-biblical approach reveals that post-truth, far from being a purely modern phenomenon, has deep historical roots. It suggests that the struggle between factual truth and socially constructed narratives is an enduring aspect of human society. However, modern technology and media landscapes have amplified these dynamics, creating new challenges for maintaining a shared understanding of reality. In conclusion, this philosophico-biblical discourse on post-truth highlights the complex interplay between truth, power, narrative, and social reality. It demonstrates how ancient wisdom and contemporary philosophical thought can provide valuable insights into navigating the challenges of our current "post-truth" era. By recognizing these longstanding dynamics, one may be better equipped to critically engage with information and strive for a more truth-oriented society.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing study, the following recommendations would be of great service for the good of modern society where post-truth is increasingly becoming a norm:

a. Develop educational curricula that integrate historical examples of truth manipulation, such as Matthew (28:11-15), alongside contemporary case studies. This approach can enhance critical thinking skills and media literacy by demonstrating the long-standing nature of post-truth tactics.
b. Interdisciplinary research collaborations between philosophers, theologians, and media studies experts should be encouraged to further explore the intersection of ancient wisdom

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[88] Richard, G. E., Paul, P. M. and Azuwike, A. 2024. "Religio-political situation in Northern Nigeria: The Limits of the Law and Fault Lines in Christian Response to Islam". *Journal of Religion and Society*. 13. 1-17.

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and modern information ecosystems. This could yield novel insights into combating misinformation.

c. Ethical guidelines for institutional communication that draw on both philosophical principles and religious teachings about truth-telling should be implemented. This could help organizations resist the temptation to engage in post-truth practices for short-term gains.

d. Public awareness campaigns that highlight the historical continuity of truth manipulation should be created, using examples like the Matthew narrative to illustrate how post-truth tactics have evolved over time. This could foster a more discerning public attitude towards information consumption.

e. In an era when scientific innovations are enhancing the quality human progress, there is need to develop AI and machine learning algorithms that incorporate historical patterns of truth manipulation to better detect contemporary forms of misinformation and manipulated news. This technologically enhanced approach, grounded in historical understanding, could improve fact-checking processes.

f. Community stakeholders should establish interdisciplinary think tanks focused on developing strategies to promote a "truth-oriented society." These groups should draw on philosophical, theological, and social scientific expertise to address the complex challenges of maintaining shared truths in a diverse, digital world.

Conclusion

This philosophico-biblical examination of post-truth, centered on Matthew (28:11-15), reveals that the manipulation of truth for political and social gain is not merely a modern phenomenon but a persistent feature of human society. This bridging of ancient wisdom with contemporary philosophical thought, is employed to illuminate the persistent nature of truth manipulation and its profound implications for our understanding of reality, power, and social cohesion. The striking parallels between the post-truth dynamics evident in the biblical narrative and those observed in our current digital age underscore the timeless challenge of maintaining a shared understanding of truth. From the deliberate fabrication of falsehoods by the chief priests to the economic manipulation of the guards, the Matthew account presages many of the tactics employed in today's post-truth landscape. This historical continuity suggests that our struggle with truth is not solely a product of technological advancement but is deeply rooted in human nature and social structures.

However, this realization need not lead to pessimism. Instead, it equips one with a broader perspective from which to address contemporary challenges. The recognition of the long-standing nature of truth manipulation, can aid one to develop more nuanced and effective strategies for promoting critical thinking, media literacy, and ethical communication in our increasingly complex information ecosystem. Moreover, the analysis highlights the crucial role of interdisciplinary approaches in tackling the post-truth phenomenon. Meanwhile, the synthesis of philosophical inquiry, theological insight, and historical analysis demonstrated in this study offers

a model for future research, emphasizing the value of diverse perspectives in understanding and addressing multifaceted societal issues.

As the human society traverse the turbulent waters of our post-truth era, the lessons drawn from Matthew's account remind all that the pursuit of truth has always required vigilance, critical thinking, and a willingness to challenge entrenched narratives. The persistence of truth manipulation throughout history should not discourage one but rather steel our resolve to foster a more truth-oriented society. In conclusion, this study not only deepens our understanding of post-truth as a phenomenon but also provides a foundation for developing more robust strategies to combat misinformation and promote truthfulness in public discourse. By learning from both ancient wisdom and modern scholarship, humanity can better equip itself and future generations to discern truth amidst the cacophony of competing narratives, ultimately striving for a society where factual accuracy and ethical integrity are valued above expedient fictions. In doing so, humanity can honour the enduring quest for truth that has characterized human inquiry throughout the ages, while addressing the unique challenges of our time with wisdom, discernment, and unwavering commitment to the pursuit of truth.

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