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Long's "Truth telling in a post-truth world" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Long, D. S. (2019). *Truth telling in a post-truth world*. Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church. 176 pp. \$28.99. ISBN 9781945935503

D. Stephen Long is an ordained United Methodist minister and professor of Christian ethics, systematic theology, and moral theology in the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. Long's description of the current post-truth political culture in the United States focuses on President Trump and Trumpism which Long presents as the greater systemic issues of which the Trump presidency is both a symptom and perpetrator. However, Long is careful to demonstrate that the struggle between truth and power is nothing new, and he frames his examination of the current American political climate with historical parallels ranging back to Plato. The intention of the work is to lead a general audience to answer the question, "Can we still affirm that truth is a condition for freedom, or has it been replaced?" (p. xiii), but the response is obscured by the overwhelming number of truth-related discussions Long introduces in an attempt to orient the general reader to the complex interplay of societal, historical, ethical, and philosophical influences which shape the topic. These considerations include Trumpism, truth, power, freedom, prophetic leadership, white nationalism, capitalism, nihilism, goodness, Christian nationalism, human flourishing, free speech, and virtue. While the presentation of such a wide array of subjects introduces much that is of interest, a lack of clear connections between ideas makes the book's argument difficult to follow. Long has previously published or presented a variety of shorter works on the topic of truth, and several of these works were repurposed for inclusion in this volume. Approximately one eighth of the book is an analysis of nihilism in the Martin Scorsese film *The Wolf of Wallstreet* that Long prepared as part of a project on theology in Scorsese's oeuvre. The film analysis is interesting, but its relevance to the discussion of power as a guarantor of freedom is not well articulated. Better editorial choices in selection of chapter and section titles might have improved the cogency of Long's argument for the reader. For example, the film treatise on marketplace nihilism was the bulk of a chapter titled "Will Power Free You?" which did not include significant engagement with the concepts of power and freedom. Closer editing would also have remedied incorrect ordinal references to the Ten Commandments; the third commandment is referred to as the second, and the ninth commandment is repeatedly referred

to as the eighth. The book's conclusion, rather than drawing together the threads of the many concepts proffered theretofore, introduces new discussions including the feminist ethics of care and income inequality. The reader is left without a clear summative articulation of the definitions of truth and freedom and their relationship to one another.

Reviewer

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