

GFSMBIS Accord 2025: Truth and Information in a Digital Age

The challenge of the GFSMB International Symposium is for students, after examining the nature of and search for truth through lenses of history, philosophy, religion, and technology, to provide concrete steps by which truth can be better discerned and safeguarded for the common good of our various societies.

Introduction:

Throughout generations, truth has been fundamental to civilization as a means of power. Truth has contributed to both democracies and autocracies, to enslavement and abolition. Those who control the truth control their society. However, to understand how truth influences communities in the digital age, we must first understand how it evolved and what truth actually is.

The fact that truth is not absolute makes truth difficult to define. Information is reality: what we perceive through our five senses. Truth, on the other hand, is an individual interpretation of this objective reality.

For example, pagan cultures such as the Greeks believed that a pantheon of gods controlled every aspect of life. Now, people created scientific explanations for the phenomena that the Greeks attributed to divine powers. Despite their wholly different perspective on information compared to today's standards, they were one of the most advanced civilizations of their times, even in secular subjects such as math.

Clearly the truth has changed tremendously between the pagan era and today's world. To explain truth, we must first understand its evolution and why truth changes in the first place.

If we look at life during the seventeenth century, we see a major clash between two separate interpretations of the given information. Galileo, a famous astronomer, had discovered flaws in the view of the Catholic bible, the predominant religion at the time. This dissenting perspective threatened the power of the Church, so they fought back. This disagreement between objective facts and religious authority created confusion about the truth.

Galileo's view ended up winning over the Church's due to the dissemination of undeniable information through the invention of the printing press. In the digital age, anything can be posted for the whole world to see. Earlier, information was screened and spread through verified channels; now, without standards for social media posts, it's not solely information being spread but also perspectives, truths. So, the question becomes, how do we ensure that the cacophony of different interpretations align with the objective facts in a way that benefits society as a whole?

Media:

Over the course of human history, one of the most prominent sources of truth and information has been the media. Defined by Britannica as “the radio stations, television stations, and newspapers through which information is communicated to the public”, the media holds immense influence on truth in the digital age. The fostering and promotion of different forms of information, the establishment of new-age clashes between legacy and alternative media, and the varying power dynamics between governments and media entities result in a society that depends on unbiased media to prosper.

Misinformation and Disinformation in Media

Giving the sense of truth to the public is the base concept of the media as a whole. The integrity of people's knowledge lies in the journalistic obligation to provide a factual and complete account of reality. As the International Canon of Journalism states: "The journalist has an obligation and responsibility to seek truth and provide a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues." However, contemporary news media often deliver a fragmented picture driven by an insidious loop of not only commercial but also cognitive factors. Regarding disinformation, it can be separated into two subcategories: factually incorrect information and biased information that drives the reader to create their own disinformation

Fundamentally, the monetary profit motive dictates the media's agenda, which compels journalists to cherry-pick their sources and topics that are maximally generative and align with specific audience biases. The economic sensitivity results in an intentionally incomplete image commonly referred to as a biased article, whose simplified and emotionally driven narrative is easily consumed by the reader with a limited capacity for information digestion. The resulting feedback loop reinforces consumer bias as readers naturally gravitate to content that validates their already-existing worldview, which, in turn, pressures the media to further exaggerate and simplify.

The reason why certain media outlets are prone to becoming sources of dis- and misinformation created by the consumers can simply be defined by a chain of reasoning. The chain starts off with an intent. Every media source has a purpose or interest, which is either grounded in informing its specific audience, generating revenue, or

monetizing its services. If a source of media is based on information or revenue, then that oftentimes leads to cherry-picking information that aligns with the audience's preferences. This will, in effect, develop into bias to better align themselves with their audiences and, as a consequence, generate more traffic to their media outlets.

The so-called “reader-media-loop” will, in extreme cases, evolve into amplification of the incomplete image of reality, acting as a source of limited information, thus unofficial dis/misinformation that satisfies their consumers.

In order to make steps in solving the rising problem of disinformation, it is needed to primarily address the root causes of it, that being *cherry-picking sources*, *monetary factors* and *audience bias*, albeit these accompany the whole society from the time being.

Government and Media

The discussion on reliability of information leads to a new discussion, concerning the government and news agencies. The two have always had a peculiar relationship with each other, especially concerning the release of information to the public. The media, especially news media, has an agenda to promote all truths and release all perspectives to the public. The government, however, must ensure the maintenance of a national image and to guarantee the safety of all its citizens and personnel. This often results in conflict between the two parties in a battle for the front page, a twirling dance of power. The outcomes of this tango concern how much, and the quality and veracity thereof, information is supplied to the public. There is also a more consequential layer to this waltz, that of public trust in both the media sources and the government. So arises the question, where is the equilibrium between what the news can publish, and what the government can withhold?

A key factor that plays into the formation of this dynamic equilibrium is the ownership of the media and how much influence the officials have over it. Modern-day media can be separated into private and public media, with the main difference being the ownership.

Private media is best represented in Colombia. The use of private media has many benefits, especially when it comes to public education and information. A clear example of this is the use of radio as an educational tool, as it has a wider reach (all social classes use it daily), along with development and content diversity.

However, this same mechanism also has its cons. Private companies led by a small group with economic and political power design their content to change narratives and, thus, manipulate listeners. This is achieved because private companies don't have as many filters to review information, unlike a state-run media outlet.

The balance in Colombia between the content of the media is not ideal, as according to a 2020 report, 70% of the country's media outlets were owned by just 10 business groups in a country of 52 million people. These previously mentioned groups have interests in various sectors and contexts, such as economic, political, and social. Thus, the media in Colombia may not be entirely impartial and, in fact, may be susceptible to influencing and presenting biased perspectives. Although these issues allegedly occur, the citizens have the power to decide which content seems more truthful according to their perspective and their truth, and make decisions aligned with critical thinking and collective efforts for the future of a transparent and responsible country.

In public media, the pros and cons are equally significant. Due to it being government-funded, it does not have to rely on viewership to generate revenue and can therefore remain largely neutral in its statements to better represent the diverse perspectives and points of argument in each article. However, due to the fact that it is government-run, it can be difficult to steer clear of government influence in its stories. An example to embody this phenomenon is the current media landscape in Australia. The Australian Broadcasting Company [ABC] is the largest government-owned media corporation in Australia, and has one of the largest audience reaches of around 97% annually. Due to its relationship with the government, its image concerns that of government trust as well, and its independence is therefore protected by law. This makes it the most trusted source of information in Australia, and it has been able to stand under constant scrutiny as it has yet to fail a single fact check. To further consolidate this point, the Reuters Institute reports that 70% of Australians trust the ABC, making it the most trusted media outlet in the world. However, the selection of articles has been a point of discussion. Especially in recent years under the Labour Party, there have been very opinionated articles published on the ABC regarding political issues such as ,“Donald Trump kicked off his re-election campaign by making socialism into 2020’s dirty word”, and criticism of the previous right-leaning prime minister Scott Morrison. These articles suggest that the ABC is not exactly neutral in its stance, but rather influenced by the government. Further leaked letters confirm that the government has a heavy hand in deciding the board members of the ABC, which questions their neutrality. This has been a heavy hit on government and media trust, which defeats the purpose of the government attempting to control the media.

The equilibrium, therefore, lies in how much control the government has over the media.

In the case of Columbia, the news is controlled by private individuals which allows for noncentralized information. In the case of Australia, the media is generally central with a large amount of public trust, yet the government's influence is still existent. What matters is how well represented the different perspectives are, and the neutral use of language. An equilibrium is reached when the media can still produce articles that outline both sides of the arguments, but also does not cast a hostile filter upon either itself or the government.

Legacy vs. Alternative Media

The sources of media discussed above are of great concern to news agencies, which are known as legacy media. The gradual proliferation of legacy media, as well as the more recent surge of alternative media, has led to conflicting worldviews and erosion of trust in truth in the digital age. The media ecosystem of the United States of America, which has produced long-established legacy media giants such as FOX News and MSNBC, is currently being undermined by the influence of recently emerging alternatives such as Newsmax and various figures on social media. To demonstrate, figures such as Joe Rogan, Tucker Carlson, and David Pakman account for a colossal following. In February of 2025, Rogan accumulated over 51 million downloads on his podcast across all platforms, whilst CNN's average monthly viewership is about 117 million, indicating the undeniable significance of alternative information outlets. Such outlets pose a threat to society through the amplification of polarization through increased partisanship, as stated by the Pew Research Center, which claims that alternative news consumers are ideologically more homogenous. Additionally, alternative sources often lack the editorial standards of establishment news institutions, eroding the distinction between fact and opinion due to the lack of credibility of their information bearers. These dynamics thus often result in an

increasingly more ambiguous media and information sphere that undermines objectivity and credibility.

Despite its many drawbacks, the cultivation of alternative news sources can be beneficial to society as well. Alternative projects, such as Andrew Callaghan's Channel 5 news outlet, are able to effectively convey news on personal and local scales without the presence of vested interests that are often associated with legacy media, such as large corporate or political influence on reporting and brand loyalty. For this reason, non-legacy media can also question and challenge the government to a greater degree due to its increased freedom to counteract establishment narratives that traditional media is often tied to - leading to an environment of greater governmental accountability.

Ultimately, the media holds undeniable power over truth and societal perception of information. Choices made by major media entities and the circumstances that surround them can shift global events through dynamics such as mis- and disinformation, governmental and private ownership, and the clashes between traditional and alternative media, resulting in a society vulnerable to the volatility of the media ecosystem.

Politics

Safeguarding Truth in Politics

Truth faces a complex situation now more than ever. It is either penalized or punished, discredited or simply reduced to nit-picked half-truths that serve a specific political agenda all around the world. Moreover, in extreme cases, it can even be completely ignored simply because it becomes unbeneficial. Despite that, however Sisyphean the task of defending truth in a political environment set on morphing it may seem, proper measures are feasible.

Outside Influences to Politics

Public figures are essential to the spread of information and the shaping of truth. People are attracted to charismatic qualities, and showmanship can often help leaders gain sway over an audience without the promotion of their policies. We learned that people do not seek out news as we have defined it, which is information put across through verified sources. This means that non-news outlets, which still contain new information and content, are more likely to reach audiences and influence perspectives, even subconsciously. Non-news sources don't have to be verified, and information is not put across in an authoritative sense. Figures who are popular on “non-news” sources are used as vessels to push agendas, and politicians, though not speaking through them, can choose to uphold certain public figures over others. Take Donald Trump and his campaign. The fact that we can associate certain public figures with their policies tells a lot about how political agendas are pushed. Charlie Kirk was a recent example of a figure who was extremely influential, and his influence resulted in his public assassination. Kirk was not a politician, yet the coverage of his death and the honoring of his legacy were extremely prominent in the media. Even though he was not a politician, his death was treated as “politically motivated,” giving Trump an elevated cause to speak up about it. Contrasted to the handling of other deaths of figures within the political scene, it is clear that Trump has, or is attempting to create, meaning from his death and an awareness of his influence. Melissa Hortman, a democratic senator who was assassinated in a targeted attack during the Trump campaign, did not have the American flag lowered in her honor, whereas Charlie Kirk has. From what we can tell, Trump has intentions to award Kirk the Presidential Medal of Freedom as well. By uplifting the voice of one so drastically, one who is involved in the political scene but not a politician, Trump can push certain viewpoints by not necessarily manipulating the truth of the

situation, but the public perception of its severity and the importance of certain voices in society.

Public events can also be used by political parties before facts are verified to support a certain agenda, leading to the perceived ambiguity of certain events. During the Black Lives Matter movement, there were many examples of police brutality that were showcased. While many were verified as intentional brutality, some were rushed to support conclusions when they were in fact not related to their fight. In Ferguson, Missouri, an eighteen-year-old Michael Brown was shot and killed by a white police officer after an altercation broke out between the two. His friend, Dorian Johnson, claimed that Brown put his hands up in surrender, but the police officer killed him anyway. This incident sparked a political slogan, “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot,” used by various figures such as New York Representative Hakeem Jeffries on the House floor. Despite the endorsement and widespread use of this slogan, the Department of Justice discovered some false interpretations of the event. Forensic evidence combined with eyewitness testimony led to the determination that Brown had not put his hands up in the manner described, and it was never fully confirmed that the attack was racially motivated. Despite the lack of evidence supporting the narrative, the democratic party used it as an example, further demonstrating the effect of communicated uncertainty. The sensationalist story had a significant public outreach, and the use by the Democratic Party caused the public to take the misinformation as truth. This demonstrates the effect public figures have on the spread of information. If they spread the wrong information, the truth can be distorted and erased from reality.

In an accelerating landscape where putting a specific political spin on every event is crucial to the party's success, these political figures tend to display information before it is verified. Looking forward, we must assess on a global level whether this type of race to get their own perspective out is as valuable to society as the truth. For example, the New York Times has a rigorous approach to screening sources and data before it publishes a piece on it. While this process can result in slower dissemination of the facts, it ensures the truth. On an individual level, people must learn to independently ascertain the truth through their own verification and cross-checking, especially with primary sources, rather than relying on one source.

Selective Truths

In political communication, truth is often created or constructed through omission, where facts are deliberately withheld to avoid accountability. In June 1994, Christine Shelley was questioned by a journalist to characterise the ongoing killings in Rwanda as “genocide”. Rather than labelling the killings as genocide, she responded: “Well, as I think you know, the use of the term “Genocide” has a very precise legal meaning.” (Shelly qtd. in *Washington Post*). Through the avoidance of the term, Shelly dodged legal and moral implications of declaring genocide, softening the U.S responsibility. Her careful phrasing exemplifies how a truth discussed can mask more direct realities. By acknowledging the acts but refusing to address them with their legal names, what the public and policy makers consider real could be heavily shaped.

These examples of selective truths and truth omission have only intensified in our digital age, where politicians have the ability to release biased and curated narratives, controlling which facts are available to the public and which remain buried. Regarding Rwanda, the

U.S government's hesitation to state genocide caused a delay in the intervention sent to Rwanda, further complicating moral clarity (Graybill, 92). In our modern world, a similar dynamic can be observed when news feeds, algorithms, and "framing" enable leaders to provide partial truths while concealing nuance. To guard the truth in such environments, mechanisms of accountability must be adopted, including cross-referenced and archived official statements, independent fact-checking bodies, and media literacy regarding omission for citizens to ensure detection of selective truths. By spotlighting the truths left unsaid, its capacity can be restored to serve the common good.

Disinformation in Politics

Moreover, exploiting select truths or even compiling one's own truth that is factually unreasonable has become an obstacle to truth in politics. More and more politicians and candidates running for office are starting to rely on controversial theories to gain trust and support of the wider public, often bordering on populist ways of campaigning. For instance, Remigijus Žemaitaitis, the leader of the far-left party *Nemuno aušra* (The Dawn of Nemunas) gained political support, which led to the party placing third and gaining thirty mandates in the parliamentary elections, by touring smaller villages in Lithuania and spreading misinformation in order to escalate distrust in political institutions. During his meetings with voters, he emphasized the negative impact of the introduction of the euro and claimed that it had destroyed the country's economy. Another aspect that is present in regard to Remigijus Žemaitaitis and spreading misinformation to achieve political goals in general is the exploitation of limited education and political literacy. Furthermore, it is especially prominent in Eastern European countries that have been part of the USSR or in its impact zone. Due to limited political experience of participating in elections and cross-

checking political campaigns, only a slimmer of the societies of ex-USSR countries are, as of now, able to tell political propaganda and factual misinformation from the truth.

Going even further, the phenomenon of political chaos-agents is gaining more and more momentum. Self-proclaimed fighters for the well-being of a society attain enormous following and, therefore, a huge impact on the political climate in countries. What's more, their ideas and legacy are often built upon the discontent in society. A clear example of this is Lithuania; given the recent harsh conditions the country has faced: COVID-19, the Ukrainian-Russian war, and recent parliamentary elections being only a few examples, it became the perfect environment for such figures to arise. For instance, Antanas Kandrotas, an infamous tax fraudster, managed to use the instability present in Lithuania at the time and, through populist means, gain following as well as instigate a violent movement before being sentenced to four years in prison. However, what makes the situation even more dire is the fact that even after being convicted for his crimes and actively discredited, this individual managed to maintain his presence and is still an extremely influential figure today.

Nevertheless, guarding truth in politics from disinformation is possible through rational, well-rounded means, one of them being proper legislation regarding politicians. Establishing legal penalties for one-sided, manipulated facts and extremist ideas present during campaigns, political events and movements fosters responsibility for one's actions and words. This way, misinformation could be legally prosecuted if proven to be intentional.

Lastly, the combination of selective ignorance, disinformation, and manipulation of truth for political gain, especially in today's polarized climate, creates an environment where politicians can pass oppressive laws that harm marginalized groups. Disinformation often takes a form of fear-mongering, emotional appeals or distorted facts that play on people's insecurities - making complex social issues seem like threats. As all these practices become more prevalent in politics, truth is becoming harder to find and the divisions within a society deepen. This results in people turning against each other and fosters mutual distrust. The polarization created then benefits politicians as it: (1) distracts citizens from systemic issues by making them to fight amongst themselves; (2) weakens opposition, making it less likely that people will unite to challenge harmful legislation; (3) creates fear and a sense of dependency on politicians who do mislead them and don't act in their best interest. When people are constantly bombarded with fear, their attention shifts away from deeper structural issues, such as corruption, inequality or failing institutions. Instead of questioning decisions of those in power, they blame and attack each other. By encouraging mistrust between social groups, politicians make it harder for people to find common ground, which makes collective resistance less likely and less effective.

This dynamic was evident in Slovakia's recent constitutional amendment, where misinformation played a huge role in shaping public opinion. Media narratives selectively supported certain interpretations of the law focusing on "national identity" and the prevention of so-called "progressivism." People were made to believe that the constitution amendment is purely meant to protect the traditional concept of a woman and a man, which directly addressed fear of gender propaganda that became wide-spread in conservative

communities in Slovakia, and affected only transgender people. However, the media failed to give other parts of the constitution amendment the same media coverage.

Therefore, on 26 September 2025, the Slovak parliament voted for a constitutional change that formally recognizes only two genders (male and female) determined by biology, bans surrogacy and adoption by same-sex couples, and grants the state full sovereignty in defining national identity. The imbalance in media coverage - which emphasised the “protection of values” - misled much of the public into supporting a policy that ultimately harms everyone, not just those directly targeted. By denying recognition and rights to transgender people, the amendment legitimizes discrimination and deepens social divides, which goes against the values of the European Union. Additionally, full sovereignty of Slovakia in defining national identity also disregards the efforts of the European Union to increase equality, making it likely that sanctions will be imposed upon Slovakia - ultimately affecting every citizen - not just LGBTQ+ people. This shows how selective ignorance and disinformation deeply affects politics, worsening lives of citizens, making it especially difficult for the most vulnerable people from marginalized communities.

Public Health

Safeguarding Truth in Public Health

The digital world is not a neutral space; it actually makes existing health inequalities worse. Under-resourced communities frequently face a compounded burden; they are often hit by a public health crisis while simultaneously starved of reliable digital information. Individuals in these communities often rely on fragmented information from social media platforms, or TV- shows that advertise for "quick-fix miracle supplements for muscle

pain.” This creates a dangerous cycle where lack of reliable information leads to poorer health outcomes. When professional health care is financially out of reach, people are often forced to rely on traditional, home- based remedies to manage health issues. They seek alternative treatments because of financial constraints and they are more likely to use home remedies due to high costs associated with conventional medical care. Limited health literacy in rural areas is linked to poorer healthy outcomes, including increased emergency room visits and higher hospitalization rates.

These disparities highlight how truth in public health is not equally accessible. While people in well-resourced communities could easily access accurate guidance online, under-resourced populations often lacked the resources. They rely on word-of-mouth, home treatments, or traditional medicine. These challenges lead to higher rates of chronic health conditions in many rural communities compared with urban communities. Under-resourced communities face greater barriers to medical information and treatment; highlighting the urgent need for equitable access to health resources and education.

Even in cases where reliable health advice and funding are readily available, the truth alone does not necessarily guarantee improvements to health outcomes. Both structural and practical barriers that extend beyond accurate health information influences reliable healthcare access. Take Australia for example, where citizens and permanent residents are provided with free or subsidised healthcare; with individual spending accounting for approximately 17 percent of total healthcare expenditures. Despite the universal coverage and relative affordability of healthcare, median wait times for elective surgeries were 46 days in 2023-2024, with this figure increasing with distance from urban areas. These

barriers have serious consequences that may delay or even leave conditions untreated, exacerbating negative health outcomes. Hence, individuals turn to more accessible but less accurate treatment options such as telehealth or self-medication which may be ineffective in treating health conditions.

Beyond this, the efficacy of medical treatments in improving health outcomes is highly dependent on both environmental, social and genetic factors. For example, children of parents with obesity are predisposed to obesity themselves due to a combination of inherited genetic traits as well as shared family lifestyle factors. Thus access to reliable health advice and treatments are necessary but far from sufficient.

Technology in Relation to Diagnosis:

The advent of new technologies, especially AI, shapes our world for the better, enhancing efficiency and accuracy in diagnostics and patient care. Consulting statistics, 80 % of hospitals in the United States are already using AI to enhance diagnosis and patient care; this number is sure to rise in the future. What's more, the AI healthcare market grew to \$32.34 billion in 2024 and is projected to increase by 1347% by 2032. We can all agree that the most important goal of the medicine sector is correctly identifying the problem, in this case meaning disease, and most effectively and cost-effectively treating it. The sooner doctors find the correct treatment, the better it is for all sides, both from the economical and health perspectives. We already have a variety of medical test procedures, implemented with intricate machines and tools, however, the need to interpret this expansive quantity of gathered data remains crucial. AI's ability to quickly and efficiently categorise, analyse and interpret vast amounts of input stands as a yet-not-fully-exploited technological resource. Artificial intelligence excels not only in roentgen picture or symptom analysis, it has been

proven that this technology beats humans in early diagnostics as well, helping not only with the cure, but with the workload as well. This is crucial for diseases like cancer, where colorectal cancer for example yields a 14% survival rate when diagnosed in later stages but can be around 90% with early diagnosis. AI has also been used for non-diagnosis medicine-related matters: Omdena's AI-powered algorithm identifies most-vulnerable areas in Liberia for malaria spread, enabling authorities to take proactive measures, saving an innumerable amount of lives. Thus, we propose AI to be a great help to public health.

Authority in Public Health:

Authority figures can both help and hurt public health information. With the dichotomy of helpful and hurtful information, we must determine who should be trusted. When searching for truthful information regarding medicine, which voices should people trust, and which voices should be viewed with skepticism?

For the sake of truth in public health, we propose that society view the government with skepticism when searching for information about medicine. The problem with political administrations as authorities in public health comes from the fact that these administrations often act as interpreters, not presenters.

As interpretation often leads to confusion and misinformation in public health, the only source of authority should be raw data and statistics. The private organizations that interpret this raw data can be helpful tools to find the truth, but these organizations can sometimes misinterpret or misconstrue their findings. We encourage schools to educate students on how to find and interpret scientific data. Schools should also educate students on

identifying biases in medical findings. With this education, we can be sure that those in power are unable to misrepresent scientific data in order to benefit their agendas.

Rise of Distrust, Misinformation and Disinformation:

A distrust towards treatments and procedures ordered by doctors has increased significantly especially in the past few years as we face the progression in the domination of modern technology. People nowadays rely steadily more on unverified medical advice from the internet, rather than consulting their doctor beforehand. Such a phenomenon, however, likely diminishes the confidence of the relationship between the patient and their doctor as well as it possibly leads to further health complications since no precise actions are being taken.

Misinformation and disinformation within the field of medicine spread fast, specifically due to the emotional response they provoke in consumers. While being aware of how effortless it is to share one's opinion on a certain medical topic, it is inevitable to actually avoid being confronted with any of that content. Notably, an individual who shares information concerning public health does not necessarily have to be associated with medical expertise of any kind. Due to the absence of sufficient response addressing disinformation on the internet from the perspective of practitioners, the voices of medical experts are lost in the sea of information.

Additionally, the monetized nature of healthcare in many countries around the world should also be taken into consideration, given the assumption that charging money for even the simplest procedures may give patients the impression of being taken advantage of, and thus

lose its credibility. On the contrary, distrust in doctors is generally present in countries with free healthcare as well.

In order to combat the false misinformation and disinformation and seek truth in medicine, we as a society need to obtain more opinions and perspectives. This should be done by consulting multiple specialists and taking advice from the internet with a grain of salt and from various sources. We as future doctors have to find a way to make our voices louder and clearer when addressing delusions and misconceptions in the digital space by coming to a consensus and creating unity within the field.

Religious Philosophy

Safeguarding Truth in Religious Philosophy

Religion has long stood as one of humanity's most paradoxical inventions, a construct not merely born from the search for truth, but from the existential need to make sense of the inexplicable. As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz once observed, *"Religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivation in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence"*. Before religion evolved into a systematic search for metaphysical truth, it essentially developed as a framework for comprehending life's uncertainties, including death, suffering, morality, and purpose. It serves as a moral compass and a mirror of the contradictions of civilization, pointing societies in the direction of virtue while also occasionally securing them in dogma.

Global Positive Level

On a global scale, religion has long influenced how societies conceptualize truth, morality, and human responsibility. Beyond individual belief, religious philosophies provide

frameworks for collective understanding, guiding ethical norms, promoting social cohesion, and encouraging reflection on what is just, authentic, and meaningful. Hinduism provides a clear example of this global positive impact. Central to Hindu thought is the concept of *Satya* (truth), understood as the alignment with moral, spiritual, and cosmic order rather than mere factual accuracy. This principle encourages both individuals and communities to act with integrity, honesty, and ethical awareness. A specific example of this global influence is the widespread adoption of yoga and mindfulness meditation, practices rooted in Hindu philosophy as expressed in the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Upanishads*. These practices are now embraced worldwide to cultivate self-reflection, ethical awareness, and alignment between thought, word, and action. Organizations such as the Art of Living Foundation, founded in India, have introduced millions to these teachings, emphasizing personal integrity, compassion, and non-violence (*Ahimsa*) as living expressions of truth. By shaping how people think, act, and reflect across cultures, Hinduism illustrates how religion can positively influence global approaches to understanding and embodying truth. While religion can inspire moral reflection and ethical behavior on a global scale, it can also be a source of tension, division, and social constraint. Just as faith has the potential to unify communities and promote universal principles, it can equally reinforce rigid hierarchies, suppress alternative viewpoints, and limit personal and collective freedom. The global impact of religion is therefore dual, capable of both fostering ethical progress and perpetuating intolerance or exclusion.

Individual Level

At the individual level, this influence is evident in how religion shapes personal morality and ethical conduct. Lutheranism is a major denomination of Protestant Christianity that began during the 16th-century Protestant Reformation and the teachings of Martin Luther.

Its central beliefs include justification by grace through faith alone, the authority of the Bible alone, and the gospel of Christ as the ultimate source of salvation. It emphasizes God's grace in salvation and views good works as a natural result of genuine faith. Lutheranism deeply influences morality in Tanzania. Doing right becomes less about earning favor and more about reflecting divine mercy. For example, a Lutheran teacher in Iringa was quoted in Tanzania's Lutheran Magazine, saying once that he never accepts "thank-you" envelopes from parents after exams. For him that was faith: "God sees me," he said, smiling. His morality is not about fear of being caught, but about gratitude for grace; teaching with honesty feels like a form of worship. Most Tanzanians shaped by this faith often describe morality not as a set of rules but as a way of life of honesty, humility, and care that flows from gratitude. To lie, cheat, or exploit others is viewed as a disruption of one's relationship with God. Lutheran sermons and teachings delivered in Swahili also emphasize confession, which builds a moral culture grounded in authenticity, where people learn that integrity begins with the smallest of things: in how one speaks when no one is watching, how one acts in an exam room. Most of all, Lutheran morality humanizes faith; this has created generations of people who see moral living not as a burden but as the most natural expression of their faith, a quiet, enduring honesty that survives long after Sunday mass and even when no one is watching. Religion thus exists in tension between two forces: the sincere human quest for meaning and the institutional systems that manage belief. It is this tension that defines religion's influence on different "truths" on an individual and global scale. On one hand, it molds ethics, social order, and cultural identity; on the other, it can distort or commodify the very values it seeks to uphold. Whether serving as a source of moral clarity or as an instrument of manipulation, religion remains inseparable from humanity's ongoing struggle to define what truth really is.

However, religion's impact on individuals is not uniformly positive. While faith can inspire integrity and ethical behavior, it can also impose rigid doctrines, fear or guilt, that constrain personal freedom and critical thought. In some contexts, adherence to religious rules may become less about internalized moral conviction and more about obedience, social pressure, or avoidance of punishment. This can distort the pursuit of personal truth, limiting self-expression and autonomy, and sometimes even causing psychological or emotional harm. For instance, some politicians in Tanzania attend major church events or give donations during Lutheran gatherings not purely as acts of faith, but as performances of moral credibility. When a minister stands before a congregation and speaks the language of "peace, unity, and work," it can sound spiritual, yet it often echoes the state's development slogans. For instance, when pastors are about to begin a sermon in churches they start off with the president's slogan "*Jamhuri ya Muungano wa Tanzania, Kazi Iendelee*" which translates to "*The United Republic of Tanzania, Let the work continue*". In that instant, faith becomes entangled with nationalism. Congregants who came seeking spiritual nourishment find themselves reciting political mantras, often without realizing it. This eventually forces state controlled narratives even within holy spaces.

A commonality of all religions is that they all claim access to *Ultimate* truth. For another perspective on an individual scale, certain ideas revealed in religion are presented as absolute facts and too divine to be challenged. For centuries, many societies saw religious conflict precisely because of the necessity they thought of to suppress the falsehoods taught by other religions, when we consider the wars and persecutions between Catholics and Protestants, or the pressure on nonbelievers to conform.

All religions are equally true and each faith may grasp aspects of a larger Truth. From a pluralist perspective, seeking truth is very much a cooperative venture among religions. But Pluralism itself can still be challenging and in need of provisions. A devout Christian might struggle with how to remain faithful to the claim while respecting a buddhist's path to enlightenment, and vice versa. The question hitherto rises: Can we affirm our own truths while honoring those of others? This is both a philosophical and practical challenge. Quakerism offers one model here: it has Christian roots but long ago discarded the notion of enforced creed, as it makes Quaker meetings surprisingly diverse, that attendees could be Christ-centered or even agnostic Friends. The Quaker focus on experience over doctrine means they can welcome different perspectives under a shared practice of silent worship. At Germantown Friends, students are free to hold on many faiths or no faith, yet all sit together in Meeting for Worship to seek whatever truth is meaningful to each. This contrasts to the unswerving principles that most orthodox religions hold onto: creating spaces for open dialogue doesn't reduce credibility of one another; instead, it allows for us to remove the arrogance that we alone possess the entire truth.

While Quakerism embraces a pluralistic environment where everyone feels welcomed to speak, there are instances where these different perceptions of truth collide with each other. For instance, if two people, both felt moved by the spirit to speak the truth, reach opposite conclusions on issues as climate justice or LGBTQ+, the problem appears: which truth is more accurate and which one is chosen to become public? Without clear doctrines, different people may claim contradictory "truths," and it is hard to draw firm lines on controversial issues. Thus, the decision-making process can be notoriously slow, complicated, and even

postponed. Quakerism's rejection of structural hierarchy could lead to limited access to make impacts that are powerful to society at scale. The critics are concerned that Quakerism nowadays is more stagnant than ever in certain parts of the world, such as decline in memberships in Europe, and the ideologies are turned into a "moral performance" rather than practical steps that moves us forward and transform our lives and the lives of others.

Global Negative level

In Colombia, religion has shaped the cultural, social, and moral construction of the nation, but it has also sometimes had negative effects. Until recently, Catholicism was rarely discussed openly in homes; it was more of a daily practice and inherited tradition than a subject for reflection or debate, accepted without question. From a global perspective, this strong attachment has drawn criticism for fostering intolerance, bias, lack of pluralism, and excessive political influence.

In many communities, religion acts as a source of division rather than unity. Non-religious perspectives are often viewed with suspicion or hostility. In some rural areas, questioning faith or expressing atheism can lead to social rejection and discrimination. Many young people grow up in environments where discussing diversity is considered immoral, limiting personal freedom. Nevertheless, in recent decades, the country has moved toward a more open and plural model, with younger generations promoting dialogue between faith, reason and freedom of conscience. Globally, religion is often treated as a social expectation rather than a personal choice, and when challenged, it can restrict critical thinking, personal autonomy, and the pursuit of truth.

In conclusion, religion's pursuit of truth is both unifying and divisive. While all faiths claim access to Ultimate truth, pluralistic approaches, they demonstrate that embracing multiple

perspectives can foster dialogue, inclusion, and moral reflection. Although even in such environments, differing interpretations can create tension, complicate decision making, and limit societal influence. Finally the study of religion reveals a delicate balance: affirming one's own convictions while respecting the truths of others in a continual, practical, and philosophical challenge, highlighting that truth is rarely absolute, and its pursuit is as much about co-operation and understanding as it is about certainty.

Religious philosophy has accompanied human kind in the search for meaning and understanding of the world. Over time, beliefs have been transformed and sometimes distorted, shifting from absolute truths to diverse interpretations. In trying to answer humanity's deepest questions, religion has served as a moral and spiritual guide for most people around the world. However, as knowledge and science have advanced, the human perception of truth has also evolved.

Today, truth is no longer seen as an imposition or a certainty, but as a process in constant change and construction. The different religious perspectives and traditions, when they move away from dogma and imposition, can become a space for dialogue where faith and reason complement each other.

Modern religious philosophy has the task of reconciling the role of critical thinking with the spiritual dimension. Only through dialogue between cultures, knowledge, and beliefs can we recognize that truth does not belong to a single doctrine.

CONCLUSION:

The challenge of the GFSMB International Symposium is for students, after examining the nature of and search for truth through lenses of history, philosophy, religion, and technology, to provide concrete steps by which truth can be better discerned and safeguarded for the common good of our various societies. In conclusion to the accord of GFSMBIS 2025, it is clear that the path to obtaining truth faces immense obstacles. What we once saw as concrete, validated facts within this world are now under constant scrutiny. Potholes of mis- and disinformation lie on the road to truth, as the media plants more and more every day. People bear the coat of professionals offering misleading advice to the truth seekers. Religions, of which 85% of the world belongs to, have become an entanglement of confusion, as it has been heavily influenced by dogma and imposition. As the world becomes more interconnected, politics is now a key part of our lives, and to satisfy their political agendas the politicians have no limits. In times like these, we must ask ourselves, how do we obtain the truth to our world?

The reality is, the truth is based on the inclusion of different perspectives. One needs to step away from the social constraints and pressures in order to find the piece of truth within us. With open hearts, religion can once again become a space for dialogue where faith and reason coexist. With an equilibrium between control and free rein, the public can once again obtain veritable truth from the media around the world. Within politics, one must gain more accountability, and be ready to scrutinize and criticise information released by more powerful sources. Within public health, trust needs to be built on the basis of effectiveness, where professionals can be expected to cure and effect change.

Within the modern world, the key point lies in the acceptance of diverse perspectives. We need to be open-hearted, but still questioning of what we receive in this world. As mentioned by the computer scientist Sanjay Jain, data is a collection of observations, but truth has added human experiences and perspectives. Truth is no different to verify truth, it must be tested across diverse perspectives, experiences, and discussion. Thus lies the effectiveness of a symposium as such. With a combination of different people of different backgrounds, nationalities, perspectives, and experiences, we can further explore the truth in our world, and the truth in the future. Congratulations to all, and thank you.