

## TRUTH IN LOVE

### Jefferson Scholar Baker Brings New Perspective to Issues

By Parris J. Baker  
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*Editor's note: Following is the first in an ongoing series of articles by new Jefferson Educational Society Scholar-in-Residence Dr. Parris J. Baker, an associate professor at Gannon University.*

If presented with an opportunity to write for the Jefferson Educational Society as a Scholar-in-Residence and were limited only by 700 words and your self-imposed imagination, what would you write about? Presented with this wonderful opportunity, I decided to write about truth in love. In 2015, I received The Most Reverend Lawrence Persico *Veritas in Caritate Award*. *Veritas in caritate* means “truth in love. [1]” This phrase is the motto of Erie Catholic Diocese Bishop Lawrence Persico and the award is given to a Gannon University faculty member who exemplifies this motto through the faith, hope and love that guides his or her life both in and out of the Gannon University Community [2].

I thought about the phrase “truth in love” and more specifically about the concept of truth. Though not Catholic, during this Lenten season I mused the philosophical query presented to Jesus by Pontius Pilate: In Latin, “*Quid est veritas*” or “What is truth?” Epistemology, simply stated, is the tenet of philosophical investigation concerned with how we learn and how we know what we know. Some have argued that there is only one absolute definition of truth, that is, the quality and characteristic of truth that can’t be exceeded, added to, or questioned. Others contend there are multiple truths based on the subjective perspective(s) of the observer.

The epistemologies of philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, John Locke, Rene Descartes, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Frederic Fitch’s “The Paradox of Knowability [3]” have provided voice, method, and context to the search for knowledge and truth. Lesser known but equally credible contemporary black philosophers such as Sojourner Truth (birth name, Isabella Baumfree), Fredrick Douglass, William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) DuBois, Sophie Bosedé Oluwolé, Fannie Lou Hamer, Angela Davis, bell hooks (birth name, Gloria Jean Watkins), Cornel West, and Ruha Benjamin add to our collective understanding of

truth. If you search on the internet for *contemporary or modern philosophers*, you won't find many of the names of the black philosophers listed here.

In this age of cancel culture, a presentation of truth without the voices of African and African American in philosophy, literature, mathematicians, social sciences, science and engineering, technology, education, and healthcare, ensures the extant dialectic discourse will remain incomplete and undetermined. Mofeli Kete Asante [4] (1990), an American philosopher and scholar, argues the presentation of African and African American narrated perspectives in educational literature are crucial for our shared understanding of history.

As a Jefferson Scholar, I hope to present another view of truth, one delivered in love. Allegorically, I hope to become a community teapot. Stay with me for a moment and follow the allegory. The I'm a Little Teapot [5] novelty song captures the essence of the allegory:

I'm a little teapot, short and stout. Here is my handle, here is my spout. When I get all steamed up then I shout, "Tip me over and pour me out." I'm a very special teapot, yes, it's true. Here's an example of what I can do. I can turn my handle into a spout. Tip me over and pour me out!

Parenthetically, I must add that many of my students, Millennials and Gen Zers, may not get this allegory, asking the question, "What's a teapot?"

Teapots have unique characteristics, such as size, shape and design that clearly distinguish it from every other type of pot. Seldom are teapots mistaken for other cooking utensils. Teapots are designed and manufactured with the explicit purpose of serving. To actualize that purpose teapots are filled with water, heated until the water boils, and poured into cups containing a teabag. What I find fascinating about making tea is the longer the teabag stays immersed in the hot water the stronger the flavor of the tea.

The water represents society and teabags represent education, experience, and purpose. There have been many "teapots" before me – men and women who were born to fervently serve others, who seemed to respond best in the "sweltering heat of injustice and oppression. [6]" In my life, these teapots were named Malcolm X, Muhammed Ali, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela. Other personally important teapots who unknowingly poured their passions into me were Grover Washington Jr., Nikki Giovanni, August Wilson, and Denzel Washington. Closer to home, these teapots were Fred Thompson, Bonita Booker, Fred Rush, Ernest Denny, and Mildred Horton. These freedom fighters endured the "heat" of social and racial unrest because they believed a "change is gonna come, [7]" that somehow it was possible to change if we just stayed in hot water (John Lewis referred to this as Good Trouble). These individuals poured into me and now it is my turn to pour into others.

What I hope to bring to readers is another, possibly different perspective on a host of topics and to extend an invitation for honest and civil debate; debate fueled by promulgated principles; not character castigations. It is my intention to develop a community where we all learn and grow together. I invite you to join me in the journey for truth, presented in love.

I am deeply grateful to the leadership of the Jefferson Education Society.

Dr. Parris J. Baker is an Associate Professor at Gannon University, where he is the Social Work, Mortuary Science and Gerontology Program Director. An alumnus of Gannon, Baker received his graduate degree from Case Western Reserve University, Jack, Joseph, & Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences and his doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work. Presently, Baker serves as the Senior Pastor of Believers International Worship Center, Inc. He is married and has five children.



Dr. Baker can be reached at:  
baker002@gannon.edu.

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### End Notes

1. Ephesians 4: 15
2. <https://www.gannon.edu/parents-and-family/commencement/celebration-of-excellence/>
3. Fitch, F., (1963). "A Logical Analysis of Some Value Concepts," *The Journal of Symbolic Logic*, 28: 135–142.
4. Asante, M.K. (1990). *Kemet, Afrocentricity, and knowledge*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
5. Lyrics by George Harold Sanders and Clarence Z. Kelley. Published in 1939.
6. Martin Luther King Jr.'s I Have a Dream speech, delivered August 28, 1963.
7. Sam Cooke, written in 1963. Recorded in Hollywood, CA in 1964.

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