

The following commentary by Professor William B. Lawrence, dean of Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University, was originally broadcast on KERA public radio on Monday, September 14, 2009.

Truth

Among all of the legal proceedings over the years that have been nicknamed “trial of the century,” one has probably been the most pivotal. It was a small and unspectacular event. The defendant was a Palestinian Jew named Jesus. He was judged by a politically appointed regional magistrate named Pilate who would have preferred not to be there or to handle the case. Still, Pilate had authority either to exonerate him or execute him.

At one point, Jesus did what everyone involved a trial has to do—he said he would tell the truth. Pilate, in a rather surprising moment of candor, responded with a question: “What is truth?”

Let’s give Pilate some credit for that. Like all major leaders in business and politics and government, he was a busy man with many things on his plate. All of us lose things from time to time. Somewhere along the way, Pilate lost track of truth. At least he was courageous enough to admit it.

We had a president in the 1990’s who looked the American people in the eye and insisted that he “did not have sexual relations with that woman, Ms. Lewinsky.” It took a while, but we learned that he had lost track of truth.

The next president and vice president insisted that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass

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