New Year

THE NEW SHOFAR

"How many legs would a dog have if you called a tail a leg? Four. Calling a tail a leg doesn't make it a leg." Abraham Lincoln.

Remember – TRUTH is always preferable to fear

I remember Oprah Winfrey's interview with Prince Harry and the Duchess of Sussex Meghan Markle. Oprah asked, "How do you feel about the palace hearing you speak ***your truth*** today?" It made me ask myself what ***their truth*** might mean in real terms. Mind you, it is not just their royal highnesses who have their own truths. We live in a world governed by the notion of truth being relative – *if I believe something is "true" then you have no right to challenge me. My truth is as good as your truth!*

Truth relativism

Truth relativism means that when someone makes a claim, that claim is made true or false **by <u>what they believe</u> or <u>how they feel</u>**, rather than **by the way the world actually is.** Today's world (especially the press and politicians) seems to be spending more time and energy these days judging each other's opinions as being "loving" or "hateful," "ignorant" or "enlightened," "bigoted" or "tolerant," "outrageous" or "spot on," "scientific" or "science-denying," rather than on simply considering whether our opinions are ***true or not.*** And here, by "truth" we mean simply, commonsensical, "reality," or "that which is true"; and by "true" we mean simply "accurate," "factual," "real."

But is it True?

While this focus on the truth may sound rather severe or austere or even fanatical, it is, ultimately, probably the most loving and life-supporting approach to take in our encounters with other hearts and minds and souls. We too often hear people say that everyone has a "right to their opinion." That is true. But if we leave it at that, and fail to engage with (and perhaps even challenge) those opinions, are we not really telling each other that some of our most important beliefs are not worth engaging with (or struggling over)? If we are not willing to challenge each other's beliefs, are we not really telling each other that we do not trust ourselves or each other enough to be willing to see how our opinions about reality stack up against reality itself? Seeking not just the truth but the *whole* truth together is the *only* foundation upon which meaningful conversation on important topics can proceed. This needs to become a Christian priority in 2026, sharing the Truth about Jesus Christ, died and risen.

What is missed in back-and-forth arguments is the fact that both sides are making *truth claims . . .* that is, both sides are saying that "the reality is such-and-such"—Why not, then, engage on that level? Why not say, "I don't believe it is true that salvation is to be found only in Jesus ***because*** . . .," or "I don't believe climate change is real ***because*** . . .," or "I do believe that Marx was aiming for personal liberty ***because*** he said . . .." With the *reasons* introduced by the word "because" there come (perhaps) some things that can be discussed,

or considered, *together*. However, if we engage the same individual by saying that "your beliefs in question are not *true because* . . .," then, with that simple word "because," we show her respect by taking her truth claim seriously enough—*as* a truth claim—to give our reasons for disagreement.

Apologetics in the year of the Horse

In the Chinese zodiac, 2026 is the year of the horse. Interesting enough, the horse is seen as representing diligence, perseverance, honesty, down-to-earth persistence, reliability, stability, and patience and hard work. While the idea of celestial bodies having some impact on our lives is nonsense, it does offer us something of an opening into Christian responsibility to evangelise. Those qualities are ones we need, characteristics that are a part of the abundant graces already poured out onto us at our baptisms. We have those powers.

If there was one thing needed more than anything else in our world in 2026 it is for Christians to live and to proclaim that life changes, along with societal changes become real when we live under God's Truth, a divine Truth that is to be found in the person, mission, teachings and commands of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. We need to be courageous, and compassionate, clear whist generous, loving in the way we challenge alternative small "t" truths with the capital "T" Truth which is from God.

For this to become a reality for all of us – and not just the clergy – we will need to be able to give the "**because**" part of the equation: Jesus is the long-awaited prophet spoken of in the Old Testament, the one sent by God to bring salvation to all and inaugurate the reign of God in creation. He died on the cross for our sins, rose from the grave and now rules from God's throne. We are invited to join him after we go through our own deaths and burials returning to the dust of the earth from which we were created. This Jesus Christ is the ultimate arbiter of ***what is Truth.*** And so, we need **to know** and **to be living** that Truth.

Every Christian needs to be able to affirm that this is True ***because***…. All who bear the name "Christian", is called upon to make this year the year of **apologetics -** Apologetics being the art of bridge building and conversation. Rooted in evangelism and early Christianity, apologists respond to people's questions about life, faith, the world and much more. In doing so, they were helping others in need to move closer to Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Gospels. As such, apologetics ought to always be practiced with warmth and respect. One biblical mandate for apologetics is taught by St Peter who says that all believers should be prepared to make a defence of the things in which they put their faith and hope… *always be prepared to make a defence [apologia] to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; <u>yet do it with gentleness and respect</u>***. (1 Pet. 3:15)**

2026 the year we commit to growing in our understanding of the Faith

I have been studying the Christian faith for more than fifty-five years and am not foolish enough to say that I "know" everything about it. I will continue to study and reflect until the day I die. Each one of us should be the same: This year join a study group, a prayer group, a bible study group. Do something that will better equip us to be Christ's apologists in today's world. Only then will we feel comfortable in offering to the world the all-important, the life transforming ***because*** when we talk with others about Christ.