

Plain Truth and the Double Heart: Augustinian Absolutism and African Christian Ethics

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary African Christian contexts face a deep ethical tension between traditional communal values, which often prioritise social harmony through practical survival, and the strong theological demand for complete integrity. This research explores the resulting “crisis of conscience” and the reliance on situational ethics by combining Augustinian theological reflections with modern philosophical ethics and African social and religious realities. The research uses an intersectional approach. It combines knowledge studies, theological discussion, and cultural analysis to assess the moral significance of speech acts. The study develops a systematic classification of truth and deception to sort speech acts by how internal beliefs, external expressions, and objective reality align. A key part of this argument is the difference between the failure of the intellect and the corruption of the will. The research identifies “Material Error” as an objective mistake made with honest intent, making the person “formally innocent.” In contrast, it points out the “Illusory Lie,” where moral blame arises from a “lying heart” (duplex cor) even if the factual details are accidentally correct. The investigation also critiques the spread of “fake miracles” and prosperity-driven deceit in the modern African church as a spiritual attack on the local value of *Eziokwu bun du* (Truth is life). Ultimately, the study argues that St. Augustine's complete ban on lying offers a strong basis for integrity in modern Africa. By promoting “Plain Truth,” which combines internal beliefs and objective reality, the research encourages a transformative discipleship that restores God's genuineness in the community.

Keywords: *Augustinian Absolutism, African Christian Ethics, Moral Intent, Plain Truth, Systematic Taxonomy*

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

In modern Africa, lying remains a significant problem. It creates a tension between traditional community values and the expectations of modern Christian life. In their struggle to survive, people may say or do anything, even misrepresenting themselves, as long as it helps them get by. In many African societies, keeping social harmony and meeting family obligations often put individuals in situations where telling the absolute Truth is seen as a potential threat to the community's well-being. This leads to a moral landscape where "white lies" are sometimes accepted or even encouraged. Here, the intent behind the lie often matters more than the lie itself. However, the spread of Christianity across the continent has brought a different perspective: a strong call for integrity based on God's nature as Truth.

This mix of Indigenous beliefs and Christian teachings calls for a closer look at how we define Truth and assess moral guilt. Defining Truth in this context involves more than just words. It requires understanding different ways of knowing, perspectives, and beliefs. We need to distinguish between a statement's factual accuracy and the speaker's personal beliefs. A worldview that values community survival might see a 'tactful' lie as an act of kindness.

In contrast, a theological viewpoint rooted in God's character considers any departure from the Truth a serious challenge to divine order. This paper aims to connect these viewpoints by revisiting Augustinian moral standards and applying them to the specific ethical issues that African Christians face today. By combining timeless wisdom with current social and religious challenges, we can create a framework that respects the complexity of human relationships while adhering to the biblical call to tell the Truth.

2.0. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, conceptual synthesis that integrates Augustinian theological reflections with contemporary philosophical epistemology and an indigenous African cultural hermeneutic. Rather than relying on empirical field data, the research adapts Saint Augustine's classical framework on

deception—specifically his concept of duplex cor ("double heart") and his exceptionless prohibition of lying from De Mendacio. This approach draws on modern theoretical systematizations of Augustinian ethics by scholars such as Remo Gramigna, D. A. Conway, and Paul J. Griffiths.

Furthermore, the methodology synthesizes these theological foundations with traditional African ontology, drawing notably on the Igbo maxim *Eziokwu bun du* ("Truth is life"). This interdisciplinary method is crucial to the research because it provides the analytical tools needed to unpack the contemporary African "crisis of conscience" and situational ethics. By synthesising these streams, the research constructs a four-fold systematic taxonomy that evaluates speech acts based on the alignment among subjective belief, external expression, and objective reality (Formal Lie, Illusory Lie, Material Error, and Plain Truth). Consequently, this methodology allows the study to distinguish between mere intellectual oversight ("Material Error") and moral corruption of the will ("the lying heart"). With this methodology, the research demonstrates that Christian absolutist integrity is not a Western colonial imposition but an indigenous imperative for communal survival that directly counters modern socio-religious deceptions such as fake miracles and examination malpractice.

3.0. AUGUSTINE AND THE THEOLOGY OF DECEPTION

Lying is a choice, but telling the Truth? That is something we owe to ourselves and to God. Both Lying and truth-telling are pretty straightforward, but they lead to very different outcomes. Lying might give you a quick thrill, but it leaves a heavy guilt behind. On the flip side, being honest can set you free, though it might upset some people along the way. When someone chooses to lie, they imply a few things: first, that God is a liar; second, that He cannot be trusted; and third, that He does not want what is best for us (see Genesis 3:4-5). St. Augustine really shaped how we think about Truth in Western ethics. He worked hard to pin down what a lie really is, trying to clear up some of the

messy grey areas we face every day. His first big work on this topic, *De Mendacio* (On Lying), dates back to around 395 CE and dives deep into what Lying means and whether it is ever okay. For Augustine, figuring out whether something is a lie goes beyond checking whether it is factually wrong; it is more about the intentions behind it. He defines lying as an intentional act in which a person uses signs to mislead others. This brings us to his main definition: "a false statement said with the intention to deceive."

In Augustine's theology, the key idea is the "double heart" (*duplex cor*). Moral judgment occurs in the interaction between what someone truly believes and how they express that belief. A person is not judged for lying based on whether their words align with reality but on the intention behind their thoughts. Consequently, "He lies... who holds one opinion in his mind and who gives expression to another through words or any other outward manifestation."¹ This duplicity marks a fissure between thought and utterance that Augustine finds inherently sinful. The "evil proper to lying" is this deliberate duplicity, which characterizes the lie as a violation of speech's God-given purpose.² This means anyone who lies, according to Augustine, does not do so absentmindedly; they choose to withhold or distort the Truth to make something false seem true. The scriptural foundations for Augustine's absolute rejection of the lie are deeply rooted in the Decalogue and the teachings of the New Testament. He draws significant authority from the Ninth Commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false

witness," and the words of Christ in Matthew 5:37 to "let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.'"³ In Augustine's view, every lie falls under the prohibition against false witness because any statement a person makes serves as testimony to the content of their own mind.⁴

Furthermore, he frequently cites the sobering warning from the (apocryphal) book of Wisdom 1:11 that "the mouth that lies slays the soul."⁵ When confronted with instances in sacred texts that seem to portray lying in a positive light—such as the Hebrew midwives in Exodus or Rahab in Joshua—Augustine uses sophisticated hermeneutical manoeuvres to maintain his exceptionless ban. He argues that instances of apparent untruthfulness in the Bible are often allegories or figures with metaphorical meaning rather than literal endorsements of deception.⁶ For Augustine, lying is the original evil—the act by which the mind turns away from the supreme good toward lesser things—and it represents the fundamental origin of every sin.⁷ For some, evil is like the opposite of good, but it is not and cannot even be compared. It is just like saying Satan is the opposite of God. Falsehood does not exist on its own; it is like a parasite that feeds on a host. Without Truth, falsehood would not even be considered to exist. Falsehood, or lying, is Truth spoken with negative intent. This absolute stance suggests that Lying is always more harmful to the speaker's soul than any temporal benefit gained by deception, even if that benefit is the preservation of life.⁸

¹ St. Augustine, "On Lying," in *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 16, trans. Sister Mary Sarah Muldowney (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1952), 55.

² Paul J. Griffiths, *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 29.

³ William Araga Abang, "Christian Ethics and Examination Malpractice: A Biblical and Theological Response," *UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 1, no. 9 (2025): 395.

⁴ Remo Gramigna, "Augustine on Lying: A Theoretical Framework for the Study of Types of Falsehood," *Sign Systems Studies* 41, no. 4 (2013): 465.

⁵ St. Augustine, "On Lying," 101.

⁶ Gramigna, "Augustine on Lying," 450.

⁷ Matthew Puffer, "Retracing Augustine's Ethics: Lying, Necessity, and the Image of God," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 44, no. 4 (2016): 686.

⁸ Griffiths, *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity*, 230. In some circumstances, people lie to save their lives or the lives of those around them. The lie will still serve the same purpose as presented above: that 'God is a liar,' that 'God cannot be trusted,' and that 'God does not seek our ultimate good.' Hence, lying, whether man likes it or not, is a total rebellion against the authority of God. The sinfulness of lying is not what is obvious (misleading); it is what is not obvious that really destroys man (the rebellious implication against God). When man lies, he does not see rebellion against God but rather that a fellow man has easily been led astray. The truth hurts because human sinful nature loves

4.0. A SYSTEMATIC TAXONOMY OF TRUTH AND DECEPTION

To comprehend the ethical ambiguity of African Christian situations, one needs to transcend a dichotomous conception of Truth versus lie, as observed above. This systematic taxonomy has its origins in the tradition of Augustinianism but also accounts for more modern epistemological

differences, making it possible to evaluate moral obligation more coherently. This taxonomy divides speech acts according to the correspondence (or absence thereof) between internal conviction, external expression, and objective reality. The table below is formatted to provide the reader with a reconstructive meaning of this taxonomy.

Table 1: Taxonomy of Intellectual Accuracy and Moral Intent⁹

		Subjective Belief (Speaker's Mind)	
		Truth	Falsehood
External Signification (Utterance)	Truth	Plain Truth (Formally Virtuous)	Illusory Lie (Formally Guilty) (Truth is accidental)
	Falsehood	Material Error (Formally Innocent) (Falsehood is accidental)	Formal Lie (Formally Guilty)

falsehood and not truth. This includes the holiest of society; if they want to spare a life outside God's will, they'll say a lie and then call it 'a necessary lie.'

⁹ Conway, D. A. *Did Jacob Lie? Were His Words Inspired? Examining Genesis 27 in Light of Augustine, Aquinas, and Lombardo*. New Blackfriars, 104(1054), 294–305, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12818>

4.1. The Formal Lie: Total Deception Through Willful Falsehood

The researcher would like to begin the analysis of the above table from the last to the first. The "Formal Lie" represents the most egregious deviation from the moral order. It is easily identified by lovers of Truth and falsehood alike. People can even laugh at such lies because they are so obvious that they can easily be understood or dismissed. In this state, the speaker deliberately uses signs (verbal, written, or gestural) to signify something they believe to be false, with the explicit aim of misleading the listener.¹⁰ This aligns with the traditional definition of lying (L1) found in philosophical discourse: "A lie is a statement made by one who does not believe it with the intention that someone else shall be led to believe it."¹¹ The person who speaks the lie must not necessarily believe that what is being said is true but wants the one who is listening to accept it as a fact. The thought of liars believing their own words is like a dog going back to its vomit.

Formal lies can also take another form: factual Truth but with a few unidentifiable deviations. Without careful discernment, one would even vouch that what was said is completely true. The hidden lie in what is said must be small but very delicate, able to destroy the whole Truth. It is the anchor of that statement, but because there is so much factual Truth, details are no longer needed (and that is the danger). However, since there is an intent, they have to act accordingly; otherwise, 'they will bite their tongue.' Within an African

framework, this corresponds to the Igbo concept of *asi*, which carries heavy moral weight and undermines an individual's ethical integrity because it is fundamentally rooted in manipulating Truth for selfish gain.¹²

4.2. The Illusory Lie: Subjective Guilt and the "Priority of the Will"

The phrase "Illusory Lie" shows that moral obligation is anchored in the heart rather than the facts. In this scenario, a person intends to deceive by stating what they believe to be false. However, their statement accidentally aligns with objective reality.¹³ For Augustine, such a person is still a liar because they have a "double heart" and have willed to depart from the Truth.¹⁴ "He may say a true thing and yet lie if he thinks it to be false and utters it as true, although in reality it be so as he utters it."¹⁵ This reminds us that even if what one says is factually true, he may have a false motive. You would be surprised to see God punish someone for speaking the factual Truth (because that person intends to lie and would take the chance if the opportunity arose). This highlights the theological principle that God is the *cordis inspector* (inspector of the heart), judging the agent by their intent to violate the bond of trust rather than the incidental accuracy of their words.¹⁶

4.3. Material Error: Objective Inaccuracy and "Invincible Ignorance"

Here, a "Material Error" occurs when a fissure opens between the intellect and reality but the

¹⁰ Remo Gramigna, "Augustine on Lying: A Theoretical Framework for the Study of Types of Falsehood," *Sign Systems Studies* 41, no. 4 (2013): 449.

¹¹ J. E. Mahon, "The Definition of Lying and Deception," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, 2016). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/lying-defintruention/>

¹² Ratzinger E. E. Nwobodo, "A Locust of Fake Miracles in African Churches: A Need for Reorientation on the African Value of Truth," *ISIR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* (2025): 12.

¹³ St. Augustine, "On Lying," in *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 16, trans. Sister Mary Sarah Muldowney (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1952), 55.

¹⁴ Gramigna, "Augustine on Lying," 453.

¹⁵ Augustine, "On Lying," 55.

¹⁶ Gramigna, "Augustine on Lying," 457.

will remains intact. A speaker in material error believes their statement to be true and utters it sincerely, even though the statement is objectively false.¹⁷ This person can fully guarantee they will speak the Truth if they notice the error before they say it and correct it.

People can make unintentional mistakes that result in misleading information. This is a lack of knowledge but still falls under the category of lying. This is an intellectual failure, often attributed to human infirmity or what some theologians term "invincible ignorance."¹⁸ Within the African value system, this is described as *obughi eziokwu* ("it is not good talk"), which signifies an inaccurate statement that does not necessarily carry the moral judgment of a lie unless there is evidence of intentional deceit.¹⁹

4.4. Plain Truth: The Perfect Alignment of Conscience and Reality

"Plain truth" is the ethical ideal where the speaker's internal conviction, external expression, and the objective state of affairs are in perfect harmony. Sincerity, in this context, is the disposition to match what the speaker expresses to what the speaker feels, creating a relationship of consistency within the self.²⁰ This state reflects the nature of Christ, who is described as "The Way and the Truth," and fulfils the biblical mandate to "let your 'Yes' be 'Yes.'"²¹ In this perfect alignment, language fulfils its original purpose: to serve as a bridge of truthful knowledge between human minds.²²

5.0. EPISTEMOLOGY AND MORAL AGENCY

The distinction between intellectual accuracy and moral intent is vital for a robust Christian ethic. Epistemologically, Truth is often viewed through the lens of correspondence—*adaequatio intellectus ad rem* (the adequacy of the intellect to the thing).²³ However, in moral agency, we do not judge a person merely by their ability to grasp facts. A person who utters a falsehood is not a liar if they firmly believe or opine that what they say is true.²⁴ The liar's fault lies not in a lack of data but in their "desire to deceive in the spoken words of their mind."²⁵

Logic serves as a necessary precondition for all thought, including theology, but logic alone cannot determine sin. While theology is a rational discourse about God (a *logos* about *theos*), the moral status of a speech act is determined by the will's orientation toward or away from the supreme good.²⁶ In many African societies, the quest for "fake miracles" illustrates a collapse of this distinction, where ministers may stage spectacles to manipulate the faithful's beliefs for gain.²⁷ This is not a failure of information; it is a failure of the will, as the minister knowingly creates a sign that contradicts their own internal knowledge of reality. Material error must be categorised as a natural evil resulting from human finitude, not a moral evil. Error is a "misknowing"—a deficiency of knowledge that mistakenly takes what is false to be true.²⁸ Unlike the lie, which involves a "double heart," error involves a "false heart" only in the sense of being deceived.²⁹ Augustine says that "he is deceived who thinks what he says to be true and therefore says it

¹⁷ Matthew Puffer, "Retracing Augustine's Ethics: Lying, Necessity, and the Image of God," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 44, no. 4 (2016): 708.

¹⁸ C. Stephen Evans and R. Zachary Manis, *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking About Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 194.

¹⁹ Nwobodo, "A Locust of Fake Miracles," 12 to deceive.

²⁰ Gramigna, "Augustine on Lying," 455.

²¹ William Araga Abang, "Christian Ethics and Examination Malpractice: A Biblical and Theological Response," *UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 1, no. 9 (2025): 395.

²² Gramigna, "Augustine on Lying," 457.

²³ Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Philosophy*, trans. William McNeill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 32.

²⁴ Augustine, "On Lying," 55.

²⁵ Augustine, "On Lying," 55.

²⁶ Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1980), 263.

²⁷ Nwobodo, "A Locust of Fake Miracles," 9.

²⁸ Puffer, "Retracing Augustine's Ethics," 706.

²⁹ Augustine, "On Lying," 55.

because he thinks it true... The error lies in human infirmity, not in the soundness of the conscience."³⁰ In pursuing academic or religious integrity, distinguishing between the two is crucial. For instance, in cases of examination malpractice in Nigeria, a student who provides a wrong answer due to genuine misunderstanding (material error) is intellectually failing.

In contrast, a student who uses a "cheat sheet" (formal lie) sins against God and the community.³¹ Though the outcome may differ, the problem is unintentional self-deception (cf. 1 John 1:5-10). Moral responsibility requires the power to respond truthfully; where the intellect is mistaken, the agent remains "formally innocent" because they intended to align with the Truth.³² By exonerating material error, we preserve the rigours of truth-telling while acknowledging the limitations of the human mind in a fallen world.

6.0. AFRICAN WORLDVIEWS AND ETHICAL DEBATES

6.1. Cultural and Religious Worldviews on Truth and Communal Reliability

Take, for instance, the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria, who operate under a profound ontological maxim regarding the nature of speech: "Eziokwu bun du—Truth is life."³³ The Igbo perspective defines Truth as a prerequisite for existence, where the true is equated with vitality and the false is viewed as a state of non-existence or death.³⁴ According to this ontological model, Truth is the crucial force that upholds the community; thus, a lie is more

than a cognitive mistake but a spiritual attack on the shared life.

The spread of so-called fake miracles in modern churches in Africa (orchestrated performances that mimic divine agency in its absence) directly assaults this value system in the traditional African church. If providing the good talk (Eziokwu) of the Igbo is the measure of social cohesiveness, then ministers who perform fake healing are literally putting death into the communal habitus. This creates a crisis in which the religious leadership, supposed to guard the Truth that is life, becomes a locust feeding on the people's spiritual life for material rewards. Truth-telling is the vital lubricant of communal reliability. When this is lost, the person, without whom the clan is incomplete, becomes estranged from the vital force that makes them.

6.2 Critical Analysis Of Situational Ethics Versus Absolute Truth In African Contexts

The debate between situational ethics and absolute Truth finds its flashpoint in the theory that anything and everything is right or wrong, depending on the situation, provided the actor proceeds based on agape love.³⁵ Situational ethics argues that absolute moral prohibitions should be avoided because the specific existential context determines an act's ethical weight.³⁶ This "new morality" fundamentally clashes with the indigenous African belief system, which maintains that Truth is a cornerstone of morality that cannot be compromised by human convenience.

³⁰ St. Augustine, *Sermon 113*, quoted in Gramigna, "Augustine on Lying," 476.

³¹ Abang, "Christian Ethics and Examination Malpractice," 396.

³² Anthony Kenny, *What is Faith? Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 70.

³³ Ratzinger E. E. Nwobodo, "A Locust of Fake Miracles in African Churches: A Need for Reorientation on the African Value of Truth," *ISIR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2025): 37.

³⁴ C. Eje, "A Critical Examination of the Concept of Truth in the Igbo Thought System," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 2, no. 1

(2019): 40, quoted in Nwobodo, "A Locust of Fake Miracles," 41.

³⁵ Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 124, quoted in Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 850.

³⁶ Geisler and Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 844. See also Goodluck Tamaramiye Layefa et al., "A Little White-Lie: Negotiating the Ethical Dilemma of Truth-Telling and Lying from an African Indigenous Religion Perspective," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 106, no. 1 (2025): 8.

While modern situationalists might argue that a "white lie" serves a higher purpose, the Afrocentric paradigm suggests that morals were given by God from the beginning and are not subject to the shifting sands of human circumstances. The attempt to justify deceit as an act of love fails to account for the long-term erosion of communal reliability and the betrayal of the spiritual consciousness that binds the society together. This contrasts with the Islamic doctrine of *taqiyya*, which allows Muslims to lie or conceal the Truth from non-Muslims for Islam.³⁷ The reliance on expediency over objective moral law in modern contexts (such as academic malpractice or "fake news") reflects a crisis of conscience where Truth is reduced to a tool for personal success at any cost. Sometimes people have to 'pay a price' to access the Truth.

7.0. COMMUNAL AND ECCLESIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The Impact of Augustinian Ethics on Individual Believers and the Community

Augustine's rigorous stance against deception is founded on the belief that whoever thinks there is any lie that is not a sin deceives himself falsely.³⁸ Lying represents a failure of conformity between the speaker's mind and speech, essentially betraying the hearer's trust and the natural order of communication.³⁹ For Augustine, language was formed to express ideas; therefore, using language to lie is a great injustice.

This moral acuity is especially applicable to African politics, where political

rulers often engage in deceit when they use the name of a god to seal a lie. When a leader transforms the authenticity of God into a dead authoritarian idea using deceit, the community is completely out of moral guidance, and this may lead to abandonment of the faith by the following generation. No relationship built on lies can withstand the test of time. The Augustinian emphasis on the lying heart as the location of moral guilt is a needed redress to a contemporary culture of autonomy, where the welfare of the community is subordinated to individual profit. Augustinian ethics defends society against the corruption of systematic deceit by establishing truth-telling as a precondition of sociality. Telling the Truth must not be a decision made by individuals alone; it should be a collective decision. Since a lie can ruin families and even a generation, a society like Africa's should protect against it. Individual and corporate sins exist; both carry negative consequences for individuals and society. Hence, as previously mentioned, because lying defies the power of the Creator, the defiant society demands God's punishment.

7.2 Theological Responses to Situational Ethics and Pastoral Concerns

In response to the pervasive influence of situational and prosperity-driven ethics, many African theologians argue that a Jesus who is narrowly concerned with saving the soul... but neglects the holistic issues of life... is not welcome in Africa.⁴⁰ African inculturation theology emphasises that the message of the

³⁷ Stefon, M. "Taqiyyah." Encyclopedia Britannica, March 16, 2026. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/taqiyyah>. Stefon argues that Taqiyyah, in Islam, is the practice of concealing one's belief and foregoing ordinary religious duties when under threat of death or injury. Derived from the Arabic word *waqa* ("to shield oneself"), *taqiyyah* defies easy translation. English renderings such as "precautionary dissimulation" or "prudent fear" partly convey the term's meaning of self-protection in the face of danger to oneself or, by extension and depending upon the circumstances, to one's fellow Muslims. Thus, *taqiyyah* may be used for either the protection of an individual or the protection of a community. Moreover, it is not used or even interpreted in the same way by every sect of Islam. *Taqiyyah* has been employed by the

Shī'ites, the largest minority sect of Islam, because of their historical persecution and political defeats not only by non-Muslims but also at the hands of the majority Sunni sect. This is a total contrast to Christianity, which would be happy to die for their belief in Jesus Christ.

³⁸ Augustine, *Enchiridion* 18, quoted in Remo Gramigna, "Augustine on Lying: A Theoretical Framework for the Study of Types of Falsehood," *Sign Systems Studies* 41, no. 4 (2013): 451.

³⁹ Stern-Gillet, "Sincerity and Self-Knowledge in Augustine," quoted in Gramigna, "Augustine on Lying," 455.

⁴⁰ Malith Kur, "African Christian Inculturation Project: Theological Motifs of Liberation and

cross must speak directly to the social context and the people's daily survival. This demand for a holistic gospel has led to the emergence of a "Productivity Gospel" that rejects the mechanical manipulation of the "Prosperity Gospel" in favour of a strict work ethic.⁴¹ This theological reaction touches on pastoral issues since they educate that industry and faithfulness are worship practices, and, in that way, they save the oppressed group of people who should not be exploited through untruthful and fake pretences of miracles. By combining the gospel with the believer's everyday life, theologians are redefining success as rooted in morality rather than material gain. Though this approach has its own weaknesses regarding whether moral integrity can redefine success compared with God's grace, it challenges the prosperity gospel. It pushes me toward Truth in the Lord through practical engagement as a social agent. It calls on the church to be a prophetic community in the face of ethical failures, such as examination malpractice and the lust for gain among modern ministers, so that the church may be a beacon of plain Truth.

8.0. IMPLICATION

8.1 Embodying "Plain Truth" as a Fundamental Requirement for Christian Discipleship

When the Truth is uttered, the speaker has a sense that a burden has been taken off their shoulders, but that is the very reverse of the person who tells a lie. This study tends to the need for unadulterated Truth: the ideal compatibility of conscience and reality. Paul implicitly discusses this experience in Romans 13:5, where he describes the conscience's work in turning oneself over to the governing authority. It is not the fear of a sword that urges him to speak or act the Truth, but his conscience, which urges him to order.

In the African Christian paradigm, this belief in the absolute consistency between inner

conviction and objective assertion forms the ontological underpinning of discipleship, so that the lying heart will be essentially changed. Encountering this notion shows that, for the African believer, discipleship cannot be a mere intellectual activity but must be an expression of the "good talk" (Eziokwu) that holds the life of the community together. As the person decides to follow the Way, Truth and Life, Jesus Christ, he is in fact choosing to follow life in its purest form. This form demands a radical renunciation of the culture of success at all costs. Giving in to the will of the Creator, since Truth does not belong to a man and therefore should not be withheld under any circumstances. Truth is a gift and must be given freely. This dialogue indicates that the current crisis of conscience in African educational and religious institutions can be addressed only through a discipleship that makes truth-telling a condition of existence. The emphasis on the Plain Truth calls the church to address the "machinery of money-making" and the "locust of fake miracles" in terms of spirituality that values moral character over material accumulation. The call to discipleship is therefore a call to a regenerate mind able to see the Truth of God's revelation without the lies of a culture of autonomy or the spirit of poverty.

Furthermore, Christian discipleship requires that the believer emulate Jesus Christ by living their whole life in Truth, making their 'yes' be 'yes' and their 'no' be 'no' without the need for binding oaths.⁴² This view criticises the contemporary spread of perjury among leaders and the deification of the self in most charismatic circles. Pursuing Truth is not just a propositional task but a personal one; it is adherence to a gospel of productivity in which industry and honesty are regarded as worship. In this interaction, we find that this demands a hermeneutic of culture that critiques the practices of indigeneity as well as imported theologies in search of the truly life-affirming. Discipleship is therefore an activity of a

Decolonization," *Journal of the Council for Research on Religion* 2, no. 2 (2021): 5.

⁴¹ Joshua Robert Barron, "Is the Prosperity Gospel Gospel? An Examination of the Prosperity and

Productivity Gospels in African Christianity," *Conspectus* (2022): 1.

⁴² Jonas Sello Thinane, "Oath Taking Viewed Biblically, the y and Perjury by South African Politicians," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 103 (2022): 5.

prophetic community; the church models plain Truth for a society that is, in most cases, blinded by fake news and illusory lies. In doing so, this commitment is guaranteed so that the coming generation of African Christians does not abandon the faith because of the so-called death of God in the face of ministerial deceit. After all, the Truth personified is the highest merit for a Christian, giving a firm base to a society otherwise inclined toward the darkness of non-being.

8.2 Augustine's Legacy as a Foundation for Integrity in Modern African Christianity

St. Augustine will continue to play a central role in Africa in this paper because he is not just a saint; he is a genius whose innovative work will always have lasting appeal.⁴³ His strict taxonomy of lies (mendacity) and his total prohibition of lying offer a way to address the ethical dilemmas of particular cases in modern African churches. Interpreting this legacy suggests that Augustine's ethics are distinctly localised to the North African context and provide a continuum between the strictness of the ancient Christian tradition and modern moral imperatives. His warnings that lying is murder of the rational soul are harsh yet very necessary, a warning call to a religious environment that is all too easily lured by the Prosperity Gospel to compromise integrity with material wealth. Through an Augustinian approach, African Christianity will have an easier way of sailing through the wretched requirements of the saeculum without the white lie as a social grease. This interplay underscores that Augustine emphasised the mind's intention as the locus of moral judgment, providing a theological justification for the relativism of situational ethics.

In addition, the Augustinian tradition promotes the theology of the cross, which promotes humility and truth-telling, rather than the theology of human glory, which promotes the false pursuit of power.⁴⁴ This heritage provides

a source of integrity, reminding ministers that God is a trustworthy inspector who cannot be deceived by spectacles of miracles performed on purpose. Augustinian absolutism's engagement with African communal values shows that the convention of truth-telling is the sole lubricant that can keep communal reliability intact. African theologians can build a biblically faithful and culturally authentic Christocentric theology by following Augustine's ethics backwards. His work also gives the intellectual means to critique the veracity of the claims of the digital age so that the church can serve as a moral guide amid rampant corruption and malpractice. So, Augustine's legacy is not a dead authoritarianism but a living invitation to an undying plain truth that brings the genuine back to God in everyone's heart.

9.0. CONCLUSION

The research paper faces the ethical dilemma in which maintaining social harmony... frequently places people in a situation in which the Truth of what constitutes absolute reality is viewed as a threat. This search deals with the modern African crisis of conscience, in which survivalist pragmatism risks defeating the theological challenge of uncompromising integrity. The investigation will attempt to correct the instability of situational moralising in the ecclesia by interrogating the intersection of Aboriginal values and Christian doctrine, specifically addressing the systemic gap in discourse about how Truth and guilt are determined when the traditional expectations and the modern worldviews clash. The scholar identifies a structural lack of clarity in moral culpability in situations where communal demands and contemporary theological views intersect. After considering all the evidence, the paper finds that Augustine's unconditional disapproval of lying provides a strong basis for African Christian ethics. According to this thesis, moral culpability is predetermined by the lying heart, the will to lie, manifested in the

⁴³ Christopher Stead, "Augustine's Philosophy of Being," in *The Philosophy in Christianity*, ed. Godfrey Vesey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 84.

⁴⁴ Malith Kur, "African Christian Inculturation Project: Theological Motifs of Liberation and Decolonization," *Journal of the Council for Research on Religion* 2, no. 2 (2021): 8.

inner, but not by an intellectual mistake. This position offers an ontologically stable ground for discipleship. It distinguishes the agent's subjective point of view from the objective Truth of the statement, helping maintain the purity of the divine image in human speech and collective trust. This work contributes to Christian scholarship both by creating a taxonomy that respects the complexity of human interaction and by adhering to the biblical imperative to tell the Truth. The study fills a gap in ecclesial practice by affirming the gospel's productivity as a pastoral response to situational and prosperity-driven ethics. Combining the gospel with the truths of everyday survival replaces the prosperity gospel's mechanical manipulation with a theology of the cross that prefers humility and integrity to spectacular claims. This contribution makes the church a prophetic light against malpractice. It also provides intellectual tools to test truth claims in the digital age. These findings are justified by the methodology that the author employs: a conceptual synthesis of Augustinian theological contemplation with contemporary philosophical ethos and African socio-religious realities. This method combines exegetical fidelity and an indigenous cultural hermeneutic, demonstrating that Plain Truth is not a Western imposition but an indigenous necessity for spiritual vitality and the recovery of God's authenticity in the heart of every human being.

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