

The Sociology, Theology, and Intricacies of Truth in Modern Society

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Abstract: *In this article I am prompted to question the centrality of truth in our situations as individuals, community, or religious affiliations. More often than not, the question surrounding the centrality of truth has been either pushed to the domain of religion or law. In religion the emphasis on truth is just overwhelming to the extent that it has been viewed as the bridge to liberation. In as much as I content that truth is essential, and above all the subject behind all our research works, we must address it holistically as a subject of morality, ethics, sociology, philosophy and other sciences. Every research is undertaken with the sole purpose to establish either a premise or truth that would guide our thoughts and decision making processes.*

Every culture has its own definite mechanisms of dealing with the issues of truth. However, there are some commonalities which cut across cultures. When must we tell the truth, for example, is a critical question that cuts across all cultures. Conventional wisdom requires that truth must be spoken carefully. The holy Christian scripture talks of truth being spoken in love. It is my task to show that despite its centrality in our research protocol, daily communications, judicial processes, the telling of truth must be guided by certain considerations. It is such considerations that will enable us weigh when, where, and how we can tell the truth. The other question I am addressing in this article is about the extent of this disclosure. Should we tell the truth, the whole of it, nothing but the truth or should we tell it piecemeal? For any avoidance of doubt, situations may dictate that telling the "whole" truth may not be a wise idea after all.

Key five words: *Definition of truth; who needs truth; when is truth life promoting; concept of truth in Africa; ethical dimension of truth.*

I. Introduction

In this article, I want us to look at the most controversial word probably in all cultures: truth. Every culture and every religion will always accord truth a special place among its virtues. There is no religion which does not talk about truth, emphasize truth, and probably elevate it to a level that would be almost equivalent to a commandment. But whereas truth itself may not actually be something which is independently identifiable, it is perceived to define almost every aspect of our life and relationships.

This article does not intend to bring a new meaning to it, but to open a new debate regarding its social significance in our daily life. Different questions will therefore suffice. What is the actual definition of truth? Is there a single definition? How is truth perceived of in our society, religious teachings, culture, laws of the land etc? It is my assertion in this paper that truth is essential to the extent that the society cherish it. I want to take you through different ways truth has been perceived of in our society and the intricacies involved. Religious people perceived of truth differently from the legal fraternity, and there are numerous cases of contradictions in the way we embrace it. However, there is one thing which is certain, that truth is important, and every society would think of it as an essential element in establishing a fact.

My assertion is that there are as many understanding of truth as there are many institutions in our society. I want us to examine various institutions and see how they perceive of truth in their core values or *modus operandi*. We shall look at the bible, the law, the ethics, and politics and see how they influence the determination of truth.

II. What is truth?

According to Meridian Webster dictionary, truth is defined as the real facts about something : the things that are true, the quality or state of being true: a statement or idea that is true or accepted as true¹. This definition leaves us one certain thing: truth is relative and it cannot independently stand on its own. Its existence, quality and validity is subject to its being accepted. It is this word "acceptance" that is critical in giving truth its legitimacy

¹<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/truth>

as a moral excellence. It goes without saying, that truth gains its very features or qualities from the context of a larger body of believers. One single person would have nothing to do with the problem of truth. Real facts about something are only critical on demand. One cannot demand for himself, this “acceptance; real facts about something” unless the second or third party is involved. It is the coming together of the second and third parties that gives “truth” its value. This also explains why we have different ways of understanding truth.

III. Aspects of Truth

(1) Ontological

Ontological truth, i.e. accurate and adequate idea of existence as ultimate reality. In this sense it is a term of metaphysics, and will be differently defined according to the type of philosophical theory accepted.²

(2) Logical

Logical truth is expressive of the relation between the knower and that which is known, and depends upon the arrangement of ideas with reference to a central or composite idea. Truth in this sense involves the correspondence of concepts with facts.³

(3) Moral

Moral truth is correspondence of expression with inner conception. Taken in its full meaning of correspondence of idea with fact, of expression with thought and with intention, of concrete reality with ideal type, this is the characteristic sense of the word in the Scriptures. Here the aim of religion is to relate man to God in accordance with truth. In apprehension man is to know God and His order as they are in fact and in idea. In achievement, man is to make true in his own experience the idea of God that is given to him. Truth is thus partly to be apprehended and partly to be produced. The emphatically characteristic teaching of Christianity is that the will to produce truth, to do the will of God, is the requisite attitude for apprehending the truth.⁴

(4) Religious

Religious truth is a term frequently met in modern literature, but it has no sound basis in reason and it has none at all in the Bible. All truth is ultimately religious and only in a superficial way can religious truth be spoken of as an independent conception. Least of all can religious truth and scientific truth be at variance.⁵

The Christian concept of truth cannot be any closer to the truth of law. Legal truth is determined by several factors: the written code, the legal argument, the power of conviction from the parties involved, and above all the perception of the judge.

We often hear people swear in courts of law and made to saying the following: I swear that what I am about to say in this court is whole truth, nothing but the truth.” These are formal ways of intimidating a person who may not have the option to say the contrary. It is my assertion that no one has the capacity or the knowledge of the “whole” truth. The “wholeness” of truth depends on several factors:

Power of memory:

It is critical to understand the speed at which human memory lapses. For one to be exact in narrating the actual event that had taken place, his retentive memory must be sharp enough to recollect the “actual” facts about what had taken place. It is the comprehensive recollection of these facts that would eventually determine the “wholeness” of truth. But this recollection will always find several obstacles in the form of memory lapses, inevitable distractions, the longevity of the time the event had taken place. It is likely that the closer the time of the event, the clearer the memory, and the longer the time of the event, the more obscure the memory.

IV. Personal interest:

Personal interest is a paramount feature that would determine the willingness of a person to tell the “whole” truth. People rarely are in the business of digging their own graves. Personal interest is inherent in every human being irrespective of one’s saintly convictions. Personal interest is an inevitably inherent force in us that will always direct us towards a certain direction- it always borders on egocentrism. If telling truth, the whole truth can lead us win Oscar award, or a place in genus book of world record, or if it can guarantee us freedom or even earn us accolades of whichever kind, then we would go for it. There is however, a great deal of reluctance when it is obvious that telling the truth might land us into some problem. Personal interest could as well be informed by our religious conviction. It is also true, that in an event that our willingness to tell the truth becomes overwhelming, that due to personal interest we can be persuaded or even intimidated with some incentives. To this extent, the “whole truth” idea loses its essential feature as a freewill disposition of facts and becomes a commercial venture.

² www.biblestudytools.com

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ *Ibid*

V. The clientele:

Who needs the whole truth rather than its bits and pieces? It is critical to understand the nature and the context in which the wholeness of truth is required. Who needs it, just the whole of it, thus creating in us a sense of guilt if we fail to tell it all? The pain of satisfying the client, might as well lead us to add *extras* depending on the degree of the demand as well as the seriousness and capacity of the client to either reward us with praises or intimidate us with fear of dire consequences. Consciously or unconsciously, the temptation to satisfy the egos of the client might lead one to give not only the truth, or the whole of it, but also the *extras*. In the course of telling the whole truth, there is likelihood that a person would try to bring in some *reinforcements* to blend his story. The story must be packaged in such a manner that it is not just convincing to the clients, but also consistent with their expectations. Again this is where one stands the possibility of going astray. The expectation of the client might overwhelm the truth teller to a point that the focus is no longer the truth he is prepared to tell, but how to meet the client's expectation. The weight of the client would determine the level of expectation that the truth teller would struggle to meet. Take for example, a small child demanding to know why the parent had come home late. In as much as the parent would be diplomatic in his response, the sphere of the child is radically limited to warrant the whole disclosure. An employee, who has come to work late because she had overslept, may not have the potential to give this as a justification.

VI. The relationship with the environment:

The environment can easily affect our sense of memory and by extension ability to tell the whole truth. For example, the nature of the truth may be such that it is just afew whom we would be free to share with. The content of truth is what would determine our readiness to share it. This is where the customer plays an important role. For example, in many African cultures, there are certain things that can only be shared amongst peers, relatives, or those who may be in a position to influence our life in one way or the other. A patient may find it difficult to disclose the nature of his illness to friends or even those closer to him whereas at the same time, would disclose everything to his doctor. Likewise, an accused may find it difficult to disclose everything before a judge, whereas would comfortably share everything with his lawyer. The relationship we have with people and the environment we operate would definitely determine how much we can disclose. The whole of it, or just a bit of it can really be a tricky business. There are some truths which we can share only with certain people depending on their relationship with us.

VII. Consequences:

Both negative and positive consequences would determine how much we may be ready to disclose truth either in its entirety or in part which is normally referred to as half truth. If it is established that the disclosure could land us into trouble then the most logical, in this case human thing to do is to be as economical with truth as much as possible.

VIII. Why telling the truth:

The reason why we must stretch our memory and willingly tell the truth depends on several other factors, which in this case I would call secondary factors. There are various reasons why people want to know the truth. There are some people who are bound to gain from the mere knowledge of the truth. Their main objective is limited to knowledge and nothing more. For example, a motorist would stop his engine by the roadside to check out what the large crowd is doing. His intension is just to know what is going on and nothing more. After being told of the accident that had occurred, he will just take off. The mission accomplished. Such a person may not be interested in the whole truth or rather the details regarding the accident. That remains the business of the traffic police, and possibly the insurance companies. The utmost good faith is a principle used in insurance contracts, legally obliging all parties to reveal to the others any information that might influence the others' decision.⁶ The other reason why people look for truth is simply to establish facts of a case or an issue. Now I want to take you through various categories of truths and their efficacies in social life.

IX. Legal truth

There are several different ways that law can make things true. Sometimes law makes things true just by creating categories and distinctions that define certain situations or conduct vis-à-vis other kinds of situations or conduct, or that make things equivalent or different from the standpoint of legal doctrine. Sometimes law makes

⁶ Free Dictionary

things true by creating causes of action or rights, as in sexual harassment law or intellectual property law.⁷ Going by the legal definition and description, it comes out that truth is a product of human creation to a certain level. Everything that the law sanctions to be true will remain true until the same laws dictates otherwise.

In Kenya the law prohibits homosexual or same sex marriage whereas in South Africa the law allows it. In Nigeria, the penalty for same sex relations or even its indirect application is punitive according to the human rights activists. When one is confronted with the question whether same sex marriage is right or wrong, there will be different answers which might not address the real issue of truth. However, when the question is rephrased to enquire whether the law of Kenya approves of same sex marriage or not the answer will respond to the question of truth. It is true that Kenyan law prohibits same sex marriage. The first question was of a moral nature and therefore had no relation whatsoever with the subject of truth.

Truth is in itself not a moral terminology, whereas the right and wrong are. When we consider ethical considerations, then there is a high probability that truth, a specific truth, can be wrong, thus unacceptable to be publicly disclosed. Such truths should remain under lock and key. Jack Balkin insists that law is continuously proliferating truth into the world. It is making things real. It is making things true and false. These things are not true and false from the standpoint of mathematics or natural science. Rather, they are true and false from the standpoint of law. But the truth that law produces is nothing to sneeze at. Because law is a form of power that is backed up by and helps constitute the authority of the state, what the law says is real, and what the law says is true or false has important consequences in the world.⁸ The recognition that the principal purpose of legal proceedings is to identify the true factual circumstances of any matter in dispute is of fundamental significance for the administration of justice and the maintenance of public confidence in that system. If this recognition constitutes a modification of the adversary system, it is a modification that should be made. The search for truth is a fundamental cultural value which, at least in Western civilization, is a necessary component of social cohesion and of progress. The law must reflect that fundamental value and do so at the core of its processes.⁹

Justice Spigelman asserts that it is not the responsibility of a court to discover truth in any case. The burden of proof for truth rests with the party in dispute. It is the duty of the judge to determine when the so called proof is in consistence with the provisions of the law.

X. Morality and Spirituality of Truth

From moral perspective, there are various ways of dealing with truth. Whereas, morality would go beyond the fact of truth, spirituality would give truth a naked approach. By nakedness here I mean telling the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth. All religions have a positive approach towards truth. For example, all major religions emphasize on truth as the main pillar, or epicenter of faith. According to Buddhists, there are four noble truths which every person must adhere to on the path to liberation:

1. Life often—in fact almost always—involves suffering.
2. The reason for this suffering is that we want things we cannot or do not have. Or, more important, we become "attached" to those things
3. The way to cure suffering is to stop the wanting.
4. The way to stop wanting is to follow the *Noble Eightfold Path*, which focuses not on changing things around us, but instead it focuses on changing our own mind on how we view things.¹⁰

In Christianity, truth is not just a subject of morality and law, but it is the most defining factor in the ministry and life of Jesus Christ. It is so much central that he elevated it to a status of a deity. This is not to say that Jesus expected his people to worship truth, but to embrace it as an instrument necessary for their liberation. According to Jesus moral teachings, every person willing to inherit the kingdom of God, must first of all embrace the truth. In every matter of emphasis, he would expect his followers to recognize him as the Truth. By extension, for Jesus to refer to himself as the truth, it signifies two things: first, that truth is a divine matter that cannot be limited to humanity. Everything divine has the potential for reverence. Secondly, he reaffirms the position of many religions, that truth is the gate way to eternal life. The personification of truth by Jesus is a clear indication of the centrality of truth in the entire gospel discourse.¹¹

⁷ To be published in the Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy. Copyright 2003 by Jack M. Balkin. All Rights Reserved.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Truth and the Law The Sir Maurice Byers lecture New south Wales bar association Address by the honorable J J Spigelman Chief Justice of New South Wales Sydney, 26 may 2011 <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1855798>

¹⁰ Read Buddhism. It is the four noble truths that lead to the ten noble paths. In this context, it is critical to observe the centrality of truth in Buddhist religion.

¹¹ John 10:7, 9a-10 (NIV)

Paul the apostle uses the term plain truth¹² to mean its wholeness. This usage tends to promote the concept of purity, clarity and openness with which truth is addressed or appreciated. It also denotes the latter's accessibility. When something is plain, it is easy to understand. According to A.W. Tozer Truth in Scripture is more than a fact. A fact may be detached, impersonal, cold and totally disassociated from life. Truth, on the other hand, is warm, living, and spiritual. Truth that is not experienced is no better than error, and may be fully as dangerous.¹³ Paul emphasizes the seriousness of living for truth. Everyone who fails to embrace truth would perish. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.¹⁴

XI. Truth and the rule of law- Pilate way

Pilate had a problem struggling to understand what Jesus meant by telling the truth. Such realism about the slippery nature of truth was no doubt a product of Pilate's journey to power as a representative of the Roman Emperor. He would have travelled widely and have been confronted by the diversity of religions, philosophies and ways of making sense of the world.¹⁵ In Hebrew the words for truth and for faithfulness come from the same verbal root. But the connection in thoughts is even more important than the link of the word forms. Truth is something which brings understanding and provides meaning and purpose for life.¹⁶ The question Pilate raised of "what is truth?" dramatizes not just the unforgettable moment of confrontation between a Roman governor and his Jewish prisoner, but a confrontation between two great cultures. Pilate represents the culture of western world with its intellectual roots in Greece and its pragmatic roots in Rome. Jesus represents the culture of the people of the Book, a culture rooted wholly in the Book of Old Testament scriptures. Truth for Pilate meant one thing, for Jesus it meant something different.¹⁷ Truth is regarded as the function of the intellect, and in the western way of thinking, finds its appropriate expression in propositions, concepts, and calculations. It was therefore difficult for a person like Pilate to understand it expressed in any other way.¹⁸ But truth in the Biblical sense of the word is another kind of truth, and does express itself in another way. It is expressed not only in propositions but also in people-supremely in the person of God. The Hebrew word for truth is *emeth*. That root meaning is "trustworthy," "faithful," "reliable".¹⁹

True beliefs portray the world as it is; false beliefs portray the world as other than it is. A straight ruler appears bent when half-submerged in a glass of water. What is the truth of the matter? Truth's character is both logical and empirical. The logical 'principle of non-contradiction' ensures that the contradictory propositions 'the ruler is straight' and 'the ruler is not straight' cannot both be true at the same time, and in principle observation should settle which is the case.²⁰

Truth is the main theme or aspect of what is true. A statement can either be true or false, depending on how it corroborates with people's moral expectations, religious convictions and legal concept. A true thing may not be a right thing. In a culture that devotes much consideration to what is right, truth may not be wholly exposed or shared beyond certain bounds. It is therefore a wrong thing to yell with a forbidden truth as a way to prove a point. In my own culture, it is abominable for one to say what he knows about his parents that may bring some disrepute. Even if one sees a parent naked by mistake, this would remain a top secret not to be shared with anyone whatsoever. True is a word that has broad range of meaning and usage, including personal, relational, and behavioral dimensions.²¹ During Jesus ministry, there were reported cases of healing which he instructed not to be told of. "Don't tell anyone" statements which are common in the New Testament is a clear testimony that certain truths must remain the preserve of just a few who have the capacity to handle them. More often than not, truth shared with irresponsible people end up being destructive in the long run. Instead of promoting life, it becomes life threatening. In Pilate's case, Jesus was his victim and it was within his jurisdiction to determine the fate of his victim. Whichever the case, truth was to be a very integral aspect of his judgment. But he couldn't

¹² 2 Cor 4:2b-4

¹³ <http://www.acts17-11.com/truth.html>

2 Thes 2:10b-12 (NIV)

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ann Morisy *Journeying out* (2005) Morehouse London page 117

¹⁶ Hinson David F (2011) *Theology of the Old Testament* SPCK page 135

¹⁷ Watson-Prit, Ian (1986) *A Primer for Preachers* Baker Book house page 94

¹⁸ Ibid page 96

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ http://philosophynow.org/issues/86/What_Is_Truth

²¹ Wright J.H. Christopher and Lamb Jonathan (2009) *Understanding and Using the Bible* SPCK page 12

understand it at least from Jesus perspective. Judgment before truth is established nullifies the possibility of justice and fairness to the accused.

Truth cannot be divorced from witnessing. Miroslav Volf points out that the power of truth is a power different from the power of Caesar. In a profound sense, truth is not a thing of this world, rather a power from a different world. The instrument of this power is not violence but “witness”. A witness role is not to produce the truth but to point to it.²² This makes it imperative for everyone that is involved in the business of establishing the truth to have a clear understanding of what it entails, the intrigues involved in its search, including but not limited to risks and benefits. In witnessing for truth we pledge to be honest not only to ourselves but also to everyone who dares to listen to our story. The risk is that there are certain characters who may be offended as we confess the truth, nothing but the whole of it. And this too begs the question of how the society is treating the messengers of truth. In law, there is a witness protection act. The main object of the act is to guarantee witnesses’ maximum freedom and environment friendly to narrate their stories without threats of any other act of coercion. It must dawn on us that the way individuals perceive of morality is different and sometimes would go against the collective interest of the larger society. Instrument of law must therefore be applied to protect such witnesses. This also begs the next question of how the society screens the witnesses to ensure that every message is clear of contamination. It is for this reason, that truth can never be the subject of exclusivism. Parameters are therefore developed through mechanisms acceptable by the larger society to determine what constitute the contents of truth.

In Christian Scripture, truth is characterized by both qualitative and quantitative aspects. In the historical narratives of the Old Testament, truth is identified with personal veracity and historical factuality. Before identifying himself to his brothers, Joseph desires to test them by commanding them to send one of their brothers as a prisoner, to see if there is truth in them. Both Joseph's brothers and Achan claim to be speaking the truth when they confess their respective sins.²³ The most famous Solomonic wisdom, was developed as a way of testing truth. Two women were desperate to prove the biological birth to a baby boy had to be tested for truth. It was difficult to know at that time the true biological mother of the baby. The scenario coming at a time when science and technology was still primitive, it was Solomon’s wise decision that led him to know who between the two women actually told the truth. The decision to cut the baby into half definitely would draw the anger of a person with feelings for life. Such a person would rather forgo her right for the sake of saving life. A person who tells the truth, would equally exhibit a good sense of rationale, emotional feelings, and respect for what is right.²⁴

The witness must have a history of honesty, reliability, mental clarity, holistic knowledge of the subject matter, and above all, the sense of security to disclose what he knows. In respect to the above, it becomes crystal clear, that truth is not a stand alone, kind of a moral precept. The inclusive nature of truth takes cognizance of the interest of everyone around us. The ninth commandment in the Bible forbids one to bear false witness against a neighbor.²⁵ Paul in Ephesians commands that let everyone speak the truth with his neighbors for we are members one of another.²⁶

In Christian theology, there are some few criteria for judging the truth: 1. The statements must be coherent among themselves. 2 equally important is the test of coherence with our other founded beliefs, derived from the sciences, from history and other disciplines.²⁷

XII. Challenges to truth

There are several instances where the bible gives explicit cases of deceptions even from men of great honor. Moreover the Old Testament patriarchs such as Abraham and Jacob were apparently great deceivers, and did not the Hebrew midwives have a strategy for deception? These instances caused the early fathers much distress; they struggled by all sorts of tortuous exegesis to escape from their unpalatable character. This led Augustine to propound a quite explicit absolute law: Christians must always tell the truth and nothing but the truth.²⁸

There is a scenario here. For Augustine to insist that Christians must tell nothing short of truth at whatever cost, is almost like a suicidal act. The moral and practical aspect of our behaviors must not be divorced from their context. The context will definitely determine the wholeness of truth that we must tell. Abraham was caught up between a rock and a hard surface. The lesser evil principle would prevail in such situations. What Christians holding this traditional view need to understand is that they are not God. We are human beings; and our lives are

²²Miroslav Volf (1996) *Exclusive and Embrace* Abingdon Press page 267

²³www.biblestudytools.com ([Gen 42:16](#)) ([Gen 42:21](#) ; [Joshua 7:20](#))

²⁴Ibid

²⁵Exodus 20:16

²⁶Ephesians 5.37

²⁷Macquarrie John (1977) *Principles of Christian theology* Macmillan New York page 147

²⁸Jones Richard G. *Groundwork of Christian Ethics* (1984) Epworth page 227

patterned to accommodate just a certain amount of heat. The motive behind telling deception, must be given due consideration before we condemn the act. There must have been a history of deception, the motive must be wicked, and it is only then that one needs to be judged. From the Christian concept, it is Jesus, who is said to be the truth. He died for this truth, i.e. for himself. The lesser evil principle requires that we appreciate the practical aspect of telling the truth. Does telling the truth going to yield a desired positive result? How will it affect the society as a whole? What would be at stake should anything on the contrary be the case? Christian ethics does not confine its investigative assumptions on false or true kind of a case. The truth is not restricted to the word "true", but rather it covers several other attributes. Abraham knew so well that if he had introduced Sara as his wife, he would lose his life. The lesser evil in this case is deception. The great classical tradition of catholic ethics, developing through Thomas Aquinas, abandoned absolute position of Augustine's. It was concerned to evaluate the intention behind each different act involving truth-telling, and came with a rather elaborate conclusion. There is a general obligation upon us all to see that nothing which we say with our lips contradicts what is in our minds. We must be as well acquainted with the facts of the matter as possible. But we are neither obligated nor permitted to speak all that is in the mind. There is a legitimate place for secret, and for the privilege of keeping to oneself one's own point of view, or information which pertains to oneself.²⁹

The diverse approaches to truth are another challenge we are bound to face. Different considerations are relevant in judging the claim to truth. But this does not imply that any statement whatever could claim to be true and then have this claim supported by some highly esoteric concept of truth. There is something common to all the varieties of truth, and this would seem to be the claim that when a statement is true, it lets us see things as they really are, without distortion or concealment.³⁰ Again we tend to move to another challenge of knowing more than a specific truth. Newbigin, a Christian theologian, insist that the only way to become convinced of the truth of any claim is to base it on another more foundational claim that cannot be doubted. He emphasized on the importance of tradition in knowing and faith.³¹ From this perspective, it is understandable if some variances are seen in the manner we perceive of truth. One has to be well acquainted with the cultural background of a person telling the truth. One's traditional belief would significantly affect his sense of knowing and interpretation.

XIII. Sociology of truth

I had hinted earlier that truth cannot be relevant on its own accord, or independent of other ethical considerations. Greater exception would be required when we have divergent views and scenarios whenever we open our mouth to tell the truth, nothing but the whole truth. We are relational in every respect, and how our truth would transform the society in which we live is critical. Truth must be told, but it depends much on both timing and its consequences. When truth is told before the whole of it is known, it then gets baptized with another name, half-truth. Half truth is not the whole truth. It has a lot of missing gaps that would require further investigations. The whole truth cannot be on the periphery, but it belongs to the center where everyone would recognize it with ease. Center must hold firmly as a sure way of sustaining our focus on this phenomenological truth. I had said earlier that telling truth is a good idea, but the context in which it is told must be appropriate. The link between the context and the content of truth however, does not negate the substance of the latter. The context only reinforces the appropriateness with which truth is accommodated once it is told. Confessions which people usually make may not all be appropriate after all. The appropriateness of truth must be determined by several factors. First and foremost its effect on everyone who is involved must be taken into account. Who needs it? Why? Who needs to know the truth is critical enough to give it a positive welcome. It is true that not everyone would have a need for some truth. For example, just to use a bad but practical example, African culture does not allow a child to know of his parents' sexual life. It is a taboo to interfere with one's parents' bedroom! In every military operation there are only key people who are entitled to certain truths. Even the soldiers under command may not know the whole truth about the operation rather than obeying the matching orders. Definitely, it is also obvious that the enemy cannot be told the truth lest he uses it against you.

Our relationships with others are sustained by among others, our capacity to safeguard the truth we know about them. We also need to appreciate that some people are allergic to truth and the very moment we start telling them the truth, we must prepare to deal with resentment with equal measure. Even though it is said that the beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder, universally, there are certain beauty traits which would determine who is considered to be beautiful. To this extent, some people may be considered as either ugly, or to use a milder language, not good looking whereas others are either considered to be beautiful or good looking. In so far as this may be true, it is insensitive to tell such people to their face. The truth also is that most people would wish to have beautiful wives and handsome husbands. This is the ideal wish for everyone. However, the truth is also that

²⁹ Ibid page 228-229

³⁰ Ibid page 146

³¹ Veli-Matti Karkkainen 2003 An Introduction to the Theology of Religions Intervarsity Press page 251

not all that glitters is gold. Behind certain beauties there is wickedness that cannot be compensated for by mere physical attraction. It is on this basis that the term beauty has been variously defined depending on one's culture, beliefs, experience, and personal taste.

Truth telling is an inherent virtue and no one can genuinely be educated about it. There was a time I came across an article in the newspaper that supported this idea. However, the article which appeared to have been the work of a researcher went further to suggest that a child that tells lies, is more likely to be intelligent than the one telling the truth. The argument here is that it takes one time and reasonable care to construct a lie than truth. Truth is a plain fact. One would say, "I saw the thief climbing the roof top." There is no intelligence in that. At the same time another would say, "I think I saw something but I can't figure out what it was" whereas the truth is he also saw the thief, but was not willing to commit himself of a possibility of becoming a witness.

There is an African saying to the effect that truth is like a calabash that is dipped into the water. It eventually resurfaces. It cannot be hidden or buried forever.

Conventional experience is that truth gives people an ideal context for trust, confidence, liberty and a sense of spiritual commitment to higher virtues. However, we also experience situations where people invent lies and get liberated. To such people, a lie is a creation of the mind and it remains a lie to the extent that it is discovered to be so. In situations when it becomes difficult to disapprove of a possible lie, the latter will remain a glorified truth. The premise we set as a society is what would either create a possibility of truth or a lie. William James³² is equally categorical that the truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process namely of its verifying itself, its verification. Its validity is the process of its validation.

XIV Case studies

There are three case studies I wish to present in this paper. There are case studies gathered from some of my former students who for practical reasons would wish to conceal their identities.

INCESTIOUS RELATIONSHIP

John, not his real name, narrated to me a story of his long time relationship with his younger sister. They used to share one bedroom. One night the sister asked John to take her out for a short call. On their way back the two realized that something was happening with their chemistry. That marked the beginning of a long relationship that was only interrupted when both of them attended separate boarding schools. When they latter came to their senses and the prospect of being discovered they ended the relationship. According to John, he blamed their old living condition and regretted that such a relationship ever took place. He thanked God that pregnancy did not occur. Even though he later accepted to be a born again and a staunch Christian, John has never shared this with anyone. It is an abomination, an embarrassment that must be locked out from the public.

INFIDELITY

Childlessness can traumatize many people. A school teacher whom I interviewed told me of the long secret that she vowed not to share with her family. Knowing my profession as a counselor she narrated to me that the husband is not happy with her and needs another child. When I pressed her to explain this since they already have had a beautiful daughter, Mary, not her real name, gathered courage and told me the truth that the daughter does not actually belong to the husband. She had realized that the husband could not give her a child after three years of marriage and so decided to engage a close confidant who is a colleague at her place of work in an affair that resulted into a pregnancy. This truth is not even known to the colleague. She played it so secretively that only her late mother knew about it. And now, she is facing pressure again from the husband who thinks that she must be using contraceptives that is why she cannot conceive. She doesn't want to get another child out of wedlock neither does she want the husband to know the whole truth.

CHANGED WILL

Peter came across a document secretly kept in one of the drawers in their father's house. Out of curiosity, he discovered that it was a will the father had personally written and appeared to be awaiting presentation to a family lawyer. It was a comprehensive will with allocations of his assets given primary attention. What he discovered is that he was allocated the least share of his father's estate on the ground that he was not his biological son. This truth was never revealed to him whatsoever and none of the family members seemed to have known about it either. That day, Peter did not have his dinner and was dull throughout. His tears were visible. He left the table and went straight to work. When confronted, Peter declined to say a word, apart from

³²http://philosophynow.org/issues/86/What_Is_Truth

shading tears. There was a lot of worry in the family. The Dad tried to persuade him to say something but he refused. The following day, Peter took off to his maternal uncle and asked if he could stay with him. It is here that he revealed what he had discovered. The mother was called and was briefed of the reasons. The mother was tongue-tied and could not understand why her husband could do such a thing. She insisted that Peter is their biological son. The father later challenged her to reveal the identity of the boy's biological father since he was not the one. Later it was learnt that Peter's father had secretly taken DNA tests for all his children and Peter failed the test. The mother could not reveal the truth but would only insist that she was innocent and the boy is sacrificed because he was her favorite. I had the privilege of being told the truth that the Biological father was actually the Father in law. This was too hot a confession to be shared with the family.

XIV. Conclusion

Every society puts a lot of premium on truth. In this paper, I have tried to analyze various theories regarding truth and it is clear that human relations would be void or rendered incomprehensible if truth is relegated to the periphery of every consideration. My conclusion can simply be summarized in this unequivocal manner:

From religious perspective, life and truth appears to belong to the same league. It is a gateway to liberation in many religions. Christians even believe the personification of truth. However, from human point of view, truth can only be embraced in a situation of convenience. Critical moments will always arise when truth is lethargic and thus undesirable. It causes tension and must be avoided. In this context, we don't avoid it by telling lies, which in this case may be the only option for the moment, but we simply give it a cold shoulder. We don't refer to it whatever the case if in doing so we may likely land into more trouble.

I have also stated that every truth must have the potential to promote life, creating peace, and above all build a cohesive society where people respect one another on the basis of their shared humanity. It is illogical, abhorrent, and almost fatal thing to imagine that all "truths" would set people free. True realization of freedom must be regulated by among other things, common sense, wisdom, and strong resolve to move on. In practical sense, truth must be tested for it to be either accepted or rejected on the basis of its integral qualities to promote life.

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