VT NON SIMVS HOMINES AUGUSTINE'S EXHORTATIONS AGAINST LYING IN HIS *SERMONES AD POPVLVM*

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Abstract

For a generation, scholars have paid close attention to Augustine's homiletic efforts and especially to his *Sermones ad populum*. This attention has resulted in manuscript discoveries, the publication of critical editions, and advances in chronological precision. Recently, scholars have endeavored to situate the content of the extant sermons into Augustine's theological, polemical, and pastoral views, e.g., his theory of *praedestinatio* for the *electi*. This study contributes to the latter trend by reading Augustine's sermons in light of his antagonism toward lying. To what degree does Augustine burden his listeners with the views regarding lies that he exalts in *De mendacio*, *Contra mendacium*, and *Enchiridion*? By culling two groups from his extant sermons, this study shows that Augustine used diverse techniques to call his audiences to a modified version of his extreme standard. His techniques include rhetorical performances; theological reminders about the "adopted" position of the children of God; pastoral reminders of the dangers of assuming that God's self-revelation could contain untruth or that the occasional lie does no harm; as well as "fire and brimstone" warnings about the perils that await those who are alienated from the truth. It also shows that Augustine's position is central for his vision for living the Christian life in this fallen world: He believed that all Christians have been called to be more than the typical post-lapsarian human being and that part of his pastoral role was to remind his audiences to strive to imitate Christ, the God-man who was never (intentionally) duplicitous.

Keywords

Sermones ad populum, *mendax*, lying, *De mendacio*, *Contra medacium*, *Enchiridion*, *Wisdom* 1:11, *Psalm* 116:11

In a recent study, Gert Partoens and Anthony Dupont surveyed Augustine's *Sermones ad populum* for indications that Augustine actually preached what he claimed to believe with regard to God's radical predestinating activity.[1] Their project is a natural extension of

[1] My initial exposure to the work of Prof. Dupont and Prof. Partoens was via a presentation entitled "Augustine's Preaching on Grace and Predestination," which was given in November 2013 at the Annual Meeting of the *Society of Biblical*

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the fact that, near the end of his life, Augustine infamously asserted that the doctrine of predestination is one that not only can, but, in fact, should be preached to the common people, albeit only in sensitive and specific ways.[2]

This study attempts something similar for Augustine's equally infamous teaching with regard to lies and lying.[3] Scholars have long noted that, even within the Judeo-Christian tradition,[4] Augustine occupies an extreme place on the spectrum that charts the permissibility of lying, but they have yet to reckon with the question of whether

Literature that was held in Baltimore, MD (USA). This presentation was part of the *Contextualizing Christian Sermons in Late Antique North Africa* session. More recently, Prof. Dupont and Prof. Partoens graciously granted me access to a version of this paper. That text includes the following summary of their research: "Augustine's basic strategy consists in addressing the members of his audience as all belonging to the 'predestined', while remaining silent about the fact that, according to his own thinking, some or even many will not receive the gift of final perseverance."

[2] See *De dono perseuerantiae* 57-62 (CSEL 105: 263-267). See also *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 8.16 (CSEL 105: 194), where Augustine asserts that one should not worry overmuch about predestination but should just attempt to lead a good life and let the eternal chips fall where they may.

[3] Thomas Feehan has observed that Augustine is "one of the principal thinkers over time who has helped us to understand just what is morally wrong with lying and liars." For this see his "Augustine's Own Examples of Lying," *Augustinian Studies* 22 (1991): 165-190, esp. p. 181. For an interesting attempt to connect Augustine's views on truth and lies to his Manichaean background, see W. Beltz, "Augustins 'manichäischer Erbteil' dargestellt an *De mendacio* und *Contra mendacium (Ad Consentium contra mendacium)*," in *Augustine and Manichaeism in the Latin West: Proceedings of the Fribourg-Utrecht International Symposium of the International Association of Manichaean Studies (IAMS)*, eds. J. van Oort, O. Wermelinger, and G. Wurst, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 49 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 16-23. For a brief but practical overview of Augustine's teaching on pursuing truthfulness, see P. van Geest, *Waarachtigheid. Levenskunst volgens Augustinus* (Zoetermeer: Meinema-Averbode, 2015[2]), esp. "4. Eerlijkheid als Drijfveer. *De Mendacio* en *Contra Mendacium*."

[4] Origen of Alexandria provides a good example of a less extreme view on lying from within the Judeo-Christian tradition. According to Joseph Trigg, Origen did not regard it as impossible that God might deliberately deceive, especially if such tactics might help to convert unbelievers. Moreover, Origen also "considered such deception acceptable on the part of spiritual Christians in their dealings with simple believers and employed it himself." For this see Trigg's "Divine Deception and the Truthfulness of Scripture," in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, eds. C. Kannengiesser and W.L. Petersen, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 1 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 147-164, esp. p. 162. For an interesting study of the permissibility of lies and lying from a prominent thinker outside the Judeo-Christian tradition, i.e., in the thought of Aristotle, see J.S. Zembaty, "Aristotle on Lying," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31/1 (1993): 7-29. While fundamentally against lying, Aristotle does allow for exceptions when the lies in question meet a handful of specific criteria.

he communicated these views without modification when he preached to people who, in all probability, could not be relied upon to always tell the truth on any given day.[5]

If stated in the form of a research question, the aim of this study would be to answer the following: To what degree does Augustine burden those to whom he regularly preached with the extreme standard regarding the permissibility of lies that he consistently exalts in dedicated works such as *De mendacio*, *Contra medacium*, and more briefly in composite works such as *Enchiridion*?[6]

In pursuit of an answer, this study will proceed in four main steps. First, by way of a reminder, I will briefly review Augustine's position on lies and lying as it can be recovered from his non-homiletic compositions. My second and third steps will bring in data from the *Sermones ad populum* themselves. For step two, I will look at a few sample passages from those sermons in which Augustine addresses the phenomenon of lying head on and by an explicit reference to

[5] Of course, it is now impossible to offer anything more than anecdotal analysis of the social and communal habits of Late Antique people. Thus, this claim is based largely on the assumption that human nature in Late Antique North Africa and the contemporary United States, about which we know far more, has not altered overmuch. Social scientists have determined that the average American lies twice a day. See B. DePaulo, D. Kashy, S. Kirkendol, M. Wyer, and J. Epstein, "Lying in everyday life," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70 (1996): 979–995, cited in K. Serota, T. Levine, and F. Boster, "The Prevalence of Lying in America: Three Studies of Self-Reported Lies," *Human Communication Research* 36/1 (2010): 2-25, esp. p. 3. Retrieved May 28, 2020, from https://msu.edu/~levinet/Serota_etal2010.pdf

[6] Not only is Augustine's view extreme within the broad sweep of the ca. 3000-year-old Judeo-Christian tradition, but it also seems extreme within the Late Antiquity of the late-4th and early 5th-century. Cf., e.g., his *s.* 89.4 (CCSL 41Ab: 512), where he insists that "in the apostles [is] the truth" (*commendauimus in apostolis ueritatem*). This is easily contrasted with Jerome, whose published belief that even the characters of the New Testament, such as Peter and Paul, were willing to deceive their audience in order to teach a larger lesson, generated a protracted exchange of some seventeen letters with Augustine, and who was not above claiming that he, Jerome, had been intentionally deceptive when he published his highly controversial *Contra Iouinianum*. As part of an attempt to mitigate the damage the *Contra Iouinianum* had done to his reputation, Jerome penned his "apologetic" *ep.* 49 to Pammachius, a letter in which "Jerome suggested that his own words should not be taken at face value and that dissimulation was an acceptable method of argumentation in the biblical writers." For this see D. Hunter, "Between Jovinian and Jerome: Augustine and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7," in *Papers Presented at the Fourteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2003. Augustine, Other Latin Writers*, eds. F. Young, M. Edwards, and P. Parvis, Studia Patristica 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006): 131-136, esp. p. 136 and n. 17.

the term *mendax*.[7] For step three, I will look at passages in which Augustine addresses the phenomenon of lying more obliquely and by way of a powerful biblical admonition (i.e., Wis. 1:11) against the practice.[8] Then, in step four, I will attempt to summarize the results of my investigation and offer a brief but straightforward answer to the aforementioned research question.[9]

1. Step One: Augustine's Position on Lying in His non-Homiletic Compositions

What exactly was Augustine's position on lies and lying as it can be recovered from his non-homiletic compositions, and why do scholars typically regard it as extreme?[10]

As early as 395 CE, the year in which he penned his essay *De mendacio*, Augustine became convinced that, in all cases, lying is wrong, sinful, and intrinsically evil.[11] As a result, he became equally

[7] Similar to contemporary English, Augustine's Latin offered a wide and nuanced vocabulary to describe and label many types of (verbal) error, dishonesty, and deception. Thus, his works could be profitably searched using any number of terms. For discussion of Augustine's usage of various terms, see M. Sánchez Manzano, "La expresión de la falsedad y del error en el vocabulario agustiniano de la mentira," *Augustinus* 34 (1989): 267-279.

[8] As highlighted in some detail below, like the choice to pursue his use of the term *mendax*, Augustine's use of Wis. 1:11c is far from the only biblical verse that could be profitably studied in order to answer the question at hand. In methodological terms, all that is necessary is to demonstrate that one has reviewed a sufficiently large number of relevant passages from his extant *sermones*.

[9] Of course, the method followed here—esp. in steps two and three—is not the only way that this study's research question could be pursued. Nevertheless, as will be demonstrated in what follows, this study's two-pronged approach has delivered both a sufficient and a sufficiently clear data set from which conclusions may be drawn.

[10] For an additional summary of Augustine's position, see C. Levenick, "*Exceptis igitur iocis*: Augustine on Lying, Joking, and Jesting," *Augustinian Studies* 35/2 (2004): 301-323, esp. 302-305. For an interesting modern view on lying that is quite "Augustinian" insofar as it rejects all lies as wrong, see C.O. Tollefsen, *Lying and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). See esp. his "Chapter 8: Lying for a Good Cause," which takes up the "classic" question of whether we owe the truth even to those who are likely or even certain to use the information we provide to commit various atrocities including murder. On p. 180 he writes: "And so I conclude: lying is not to be done, even to the Nazis, for a good personal cause."

[11] Alfons Fürst has authored helpful overviews of Augustine's views on lies and lying as well as of his two principal treatises on the subject. See "*Mendacio* (*De* -)," "*Mendacium*," and "*Mendacium* (*Contra* -)," in *AugLex*, Vol. 3,

convinced that lying always generates culpability for the liar. In the words of George Lawless, for Augustine, "Veracity is a greater good than chastity, or wealth, [or] self-preservation, or life itself."[12] Though Augustine's full rationale for this position need not be traced exhaustively here, his reasons include both theological and anthropological points. His view is theological in that, both exegetically and philosophically, he finds it perfectly legitimate to equate God with truth.[13] And his view is anthropological in that he is convinced that to abandon the truth—even temporarily, something which we do any time we communicate a falsehood—is to diminish ourselves and to reduce our degree of likeness to Christ, the goal to which Augustine thinks God is calling (at least some of) us.[14]

coll. 1257-1270. There is at least some evidence that, prior to 395 CE, Augustine's view was less rigid than it soon would become. The most important text comes from *en. Ps.* 5.7 (CCSL 38: 21-23; trans. *WSA* III/15: 97), where Augustine does seem to allow those who disagree with him to commit to telling "only those lies which are unavoidable" (*uel sola huius necessitatis habeat mendacia*). Some have argued that this *enarratio* may be dated as early as 392 CE, a date that M. Puffer, "Retracing Augustine's Ethics: Lying, Necessity, and the Image of God," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 44/4 (2016): 685-720, esp. 696-698 and the accompanying nn., accepts (without argument or explanation) and then uses in support of his claim in favor of a less-than absolute prohibition against lying in Augustine's thought. Chronology to one side, it bears noting that, even here, Augustine holds those who would be "perfect" (*perfecti*) to his absolute prohibition: "But we have no evidence that perfect disciples have ever been allowed to make false statements (*Falsum autem dicere, non inuenitur concessum esse perfectis*)." In other words, even in *en. Ps.* 5 it is not the standard that has been compromised; rather, it is whether or not this standard ought to be applicable to all Christians at all times and regardless of their level of spiritual maturity.

[12] G. Lawless, "Augustine of Hippo and His Critics," in *Augustine: Presbyter Factus Sum*, eds. J. Lienhard, E. Muller, and R. Teske (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 4-27, esp. p. 10. Here Lawless does admit that, although Augustine does sometimes identify truth and chastity, "chastity is always subordinate to the truth."

[13] Augustine's biblical proofs for this equation are many. Certainly, among the most frequently occurring is Jn. 14:6, a verse in which Christ claimed to be "the way, the truth, and the life" as well as the exclusive access point to the Father. Augustine's theological claims regarding lying even extend to his vision of Creation and what God intended when he granted human beings the capacity to communicate verbally. Cf. *Enchiridion* 7.22 (CCSL 46: 62; trans. *WSA* I/8: 287-288): "Words were surely instituted not so that people could deceive each other with them but so that each person could make his thoughts known to another. So, to use words for deception (*ad fallaciam*), and not for what they were instituted, is a sin (*peccatum est*)." Cf. n. 21 *infra*.

[14] When viewed from the horizontal plane, lies also have a soteriological component in that each and every one that we tell takes us further and further from the Truth, i.e., from Christ, which, of course, is exactly where or, better, in whom we want to be found at the end of our days and/or on the Day of Judgment. Cf. *mend.* 6.9,

In the fall of the aforementioned 395, Augustine turned forty-one years old. And the position that he established in that year's *De mendacio* is one that he unwaveringly defends for the next thirty-five years,[15] a period which saw him produce a second essay on this theme, the *Contra mendacium*.[16] This consistency is a significant part of what allows Boniface Ramsey to conclude that, in Augustine's analysis, "a lie is never an acceptable moral option" and is something that "Scripture never allows under any circumstances."[17]

Still, if one is looking for a forthright summary of Augustine's thoughts on lying, it is hard to do better than his *Enchiridion*, a sort of doctrinal handbook that Augustine produced in about the year 421 CE, just a year or so after completing his *Contra mendacium*. Here, over the course of three (non-sequential) paragraphs, Augustine discusses his views in digest form.

At *Enchiridion* 6.18, Augustine defines a liar with some care. What emerges from this brief discussion is that, for Augustine, a liar is anyone who "has one thought hidden in his breast and another ready on his tongue,"[18] a definition that makes it plain that intent is always crucial if one is to be regarded as a genuine *mendax*. Indeed, no one is to be judged a liar who says something false while believing it to be

where Augustine flatly asserts that "eternal life may be lost by lying" (cf. CSEL 41: 426: *Cum igitur mentiendo uita aeterna amittatur* [...]).

[15] Here is Augustine's definition of a liar from *mend*. as translated by B. Ramsey: "He is a liar who has one thing in his mind but expresses something else by words or by any other signs whatsoever." For the claim that Augustine does in fact depart from this view near the very end of his life and at the time he is finishing up Book 15 of *trin*., see M. Puffer, "Retracing Augustine's Ethics," 698-706. Cf. n. 11 *supra*. Without argument, Puffer asserts that Book 15 was completed in ca. 426 CE. Even if Puffer is correct and Augustine's thinking about lying is less absolute and extreme than is traditionally thought, that fact need not impinge upon the question that this study is pursuing, viz.: Does Augustine hold his congregations to his extreme standard with respect to lies and lying and, specifically, one that reflects his teaching found within his extant works on the subject?

[16] *C. mend*. was completed ca. 420 CE. Although this later essay adds relatively little to what one finds in *mend*., Augustine seems to have regarded *c. mend*. as superseding the former, not least because he saw the argumentation of *c. mend*. as being clearer and easier to follow (cf. *retr*. 1.27 [CCSL 57: 87-88] and n. 11 *supra*).

[17] B. Ramsey, "*Mendacio, de/contra mendacium*," s.v., in *Augustine through the Ages. An Encyclopedia*, ed. A.D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 555-557. Cf. P.J. Griffiths, *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 30: "The truly Augustinian lie is the intentionally duplicitous utterance, no more and no less; and the true Augustinian liar is the man who knows that he has a double heart, a *duplex cor*."

[18] Trans. *WSA* I/8: 284; cf. CCSL 46: 58: […] *aliud tamen clausum in pectore aliud in lingua promptum est* […].

true, since, as far as the speaker is concerned, he is not deceiving but deceived. Likewise, nobody is to be judged a liar "who considers true false things in which he has placed his belief too incautiously."[19] For Augustine, the genuine liar is the converse of this: He is "the one who says something true which he believes to be false" (*qui dicit uerum quod putat falsum*). Likewise, the person who "unknowingly speaks the truth with his mouth while his conscious will is to tell a lie" also renders himself guilty.[20] One of Augustine's most extreme views is found in his belief that, although the one who lies with the intention of helping does not sin in the same way as one who lies with the intention of doing harm, the well-intended person still sins.

But determining one's precise degree of guilt is not Augustine's only concern. At *Enchiridion* 5.17, Augustine floats the intriguing pastoral claim that people "are more to be pitied (*miseriores*) when they deceive by lying than when they themselves are deceived by putting trust in liars." Liars are to be pitied precisely because they are "deceived in thinking that [their] lie does [them] no harm, since sin is always more harmful (*obsit*) to the person who commits it than to the one who suffers it."[21]

As any reader of a handbook might expect, in this same context Augustine briefly addresses some of the more obvious implications of his teaching regarding lies. Are there any situations in which it is actually the duty of a just person to lie? No, there are not.[22] Should

[19] Trans. *WSA* I/8: 283-284; cf. ibid.: *Non itaque mendacii sed aliquando temeritatis arguendus est qui falsa incautius credita pro ueris habet* […].

[20] Trans. *WSA* I/8: 284; cf. ibid.: […] *sciens autem uoluntate mentitur*.

[21] Trans. *WSA* I/8: 283; cf. ibid.: […] *cum magis facienti quam patienti obsit omne peccatum*. One of the more philosophical reasons for Augustine's absolute rejection of lies—especially when compared to a consequence such as the "death of the soul"—and, indeed, one that features more prominently in his two treatises on lying than it does in his *sermones*, is his claim that lying hinders our ability to encounter the truth. See, e.g., P. van Geest, "Ethik," in *Augustin Handbuch*, ed. V.H. Drecoll (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 526-539. According to van Geest, for Augustine, speaking truth and meeting the Truth are often all but synonymous. While "not all of his subtlety was reproduced by later scholars," Augustine's theory of the damage done by lying was clearly adopted by many medieval thinkers. Peter Comestor, for example, claimed that "it is impossible for a lie to do no harm," and Hugh of St. Victor held that "a lie extinguishes truth in the speaker's heart." Also relevant for the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of Augustine's theory is the fact that not a few of his medieval readers confessed that his reasoning was sometimes opaque. Indeed, while Bonaventure could accept that "all lies are sins," he also admitted that it is "hard to explain why." For these quotations and translations, see L.J. Smith, *The Ten Commandments: Interpreting the Bible in the Medieval World*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 175 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), 158, 160, and 161.

[22] Cf. Levenick, "*Exceptis igitur iocis*," 302-303.

it ever be thought that we can sometimes do another person good by lying to them? Again, no.

But even these unequivocal teachings are mitigated by the fact that Augustine did not expect the life of even the most well-intentioned Christian to be free from the sin of lying. This view is implicit in *Enchiridion* 7.22, when he strings together two distinct portions of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. He first cites *Matthew* 5:37 and Jesus's exhortation to be consistently forthright: "Let your word be yes, yes or no, no: Anything more than this comes from the evil one (*a malo*)." This is then immediately paired with the fourth petition of the *Pater Noster*, namely, "Forgive us our trespasses" (*dimitte nobis debita nostra*). According to Augustine, this petition needs to be daily on the lips of any Christian precisely because of the spiritual opposition constantly engendered by the evil one, who "never ceases to insinuate (*subrepere*) himself into our mortal affairs."[23]

2. Step Two: Augustine's *Sermones* that Reference *mendax*

One methodologically sound approach to the study of what Augustine's homiletical exhortations contribute to his teaching on lies and lying is the philological one. And, while there are many ways—including the periphrastic—that Augustine could introduce this theme,[24] a straightforward search via *mendax* (and related noun and verbal forms) already produces a wealth of data. In fact, Augustine references *mendax* in his extant *Sermones ad populum* more than 250 times. A more detailed review of these makes it clear that a large handful of his extant sermons discuss lying as an obvious thematic element—especially *ss*. 81, 133, 166, 231, 257, 328, and 335E—though, not surprisingly, these thematic discussions also incorporate or otherwise reference biblical passages relevant to lying or to speech ethics more generally.

Given that these seven sermons contain much that is similar, it would be both tedious and unnecessary to discuss each of them in detail. Therefore, before quoting from a few of the most relevant ones for my research question, I will briefly summarize how sermons 231, 257, 328, and 335E address lying.

[23] Trans. *WSA* I/8: 288; cf. CCSL 46: 62: […] *quia subrepere in hac mortalitate non desinit* […].

[24] Cf. n. 7 *supra*, esp. Sánchez Manzano, "La expresión de la falsedad y del error."

In Paragraph 4 of *sermo* 231 Augustine—drawing upon *Psalm* 4:2's rhetorical question of "Why do you love futility and seek after lies?"[25]—exhorts his hearers to give up lying since lies are frequently told in order to secure wealth, honor from others, and/or secular advancement. His premise for this exhortation is that, ultimately, none of these things will bring true happiness.[26]

Sermon 257, at least in its extant form, is comprised of just three brief paragraphs. Its brevity could well be due to its occasion, since it was preached on the "Octave Day of Easter" while the congregation was gathered at the "Shrine of the Twenty Martyrs" for what was probably not the only service to be held that day. Augustine's text is *Psalm* 116:11's assertion that "Every man is a liar."[27] Instead of offering a contextually-based interpretation, Augustine immediately begins wrestling with two related concerns: On the one hand, he wants to uphold the assertion's veracity given that it is a claim made by an author of scripture; on the other hand, he wants to be sure that his audience does not use the assertion's veracity as an excuse to rationalize lying since this verse can be read as ascribing it to the human condition. Augustine's solution is to read *Psalm* 116:11 not only as true, but also as an encouragement to "flee from ourselves and run to God, who alone is truthful," and who alone can help us be more than mere human beings.[28]

Interestingly, both sermon 328 and 335E also reference *Psalm* 116:11. *Sermo* 328, like *sermo* 257, was given in connection with a martyrological celebration. The question being addressed in its first half is, if anything, even more pointed: Augustine wonders aloud how *Psalm* 116:11 could possibly be universally true if the martyrs also spoke the truth. Here his solution is rooted in *Matthew* 10:19-20 and Jesus's claim that, in times of persecution, "you are not the ones who

[25] Trans. *WSA* III/7: 21; cf. SC 116: 252: *Filii hominum, quousque graui corde? Vtquid diligitis uanitatem, et quaeritis mendacium?*

[26] This premise is stated quite bluntly a bit later in Paragraph 5 (cf. *WSA* III/7: 23): "[…] this earth isn't the region for the good thing you are seeking. What are you seeking? A happy life. Well, it isn't to be found here." Cf. SC 116: 254: […] *terra ista non est regio eius rei quam quaeris. Quid quaeris? Beatam uitam. Sed non est hic.*

[27] Although probably relevant to this portion of the study, R. Leonhardt, "*Omnis homo mendax* (Ps 116,11)? Das Problem der Lüge aus der Sicht der evangelischen Ethik," in *Dürfen wir lügen? Beiträge zu einem aktuellen Thema*, eds. R. Leonhardt and M. Rösel (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002), 228-248, remains unavailable to me.

[28] Trans. *WSA* III/7: 173; cf. SC 116: 342: […] *ut fugiamus nos ipsos, et curramus ad deum, qui solus est uerax.*

speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you."[29] In other words, because the words of Christ are true and will be continuously fulfilled whenever a true martyr is being persecuted, it follows that *Psalm* 116:11 can also be true at the same time. Augustine summarizes his position by noting that "if you speak, you speak lies, because 'every man is a liar.' So the Lord himself […] gave the martyrs his Spirit […] so that […] they would not be liars, but would be telling the truth. […] that's why [the martyrs] were truthful."[30]

Sermo 335E yet again addresses this problem. Although this sermon's discussion is considerably more detailed and wider-ranging, Augustine's ultimate solution is strikingly similar. How can *Psalm* 116:11, which—as Augustine notes this time—is both employed and reaffirmed by Paul in *Romans* 3:4, be squared with the claim about the 144,000 martyrs that is found in *Revelation* 14:5, namely, that those martyrs were "blameless" and that "in their mouths no lie was found"? Augustine's answer comes in Paragraph 5: "Insofar as they were men, [those martyrs] were liars […] [since] every man is […] a liar in himself, [but] truthful in God."[31] In other words, the only reason that the martyrs can be said to be truthful is their connection with the only real source of hope; they were rendered truthful precisely because they received God's help.

Sermones 81, 133, 167 have been singled out in my analysis due to the amount of space they devote to the issues of lies and lying. It bears noting again that the Bible is far from absent in these discussions; on the contrary, various verses make frequent and, in some cases, repeated appearances. The very first words of sermon 81, for example, endorse and reaffirm the role that scripture plays in Augustine's thought and the role that he clearly hopes that it will play in the thought of his audience.[32]

Sermon 81 actually takes up the theme of lying in its second half. The text upon which the sermon is based, *Matthew* 18:7-9, is Jesus's famous warning to avoid "stumbling blocks" or "scandals" regardless

[29] Trans. *WSA* III/9: 177; cf. *Revue Bénédictine* 51 (1939): 16: *Non enim uos estis qui loquimini sed spiritus patris uestri qui loquitur in uobis*.

[30] Trans. ibid.; cf. *Revue Bénédictine* 51 (1939): 16: *Si enim uos loquimini mendacium dicitis quia 'omnis homo mendax.'* […] *ergo ipse dominus* […] *dedit martyribus spiritum suum* […] *ut non essent mendaces sed ut essent ueraces*.

[31] Trans. *WSA* III/9: 237; cf. PLS 2: 784: *Prorsus in quantum homines fuerunt, mendaces fuerunt*. […] *Omnis* […] *homo* […] *in se mendax, in deo uerax*.

[32] The first line of Hill's translation (*WSA* III/3: 358) reads: "The divinely inspired readings, which we heard chanted just now […]" Cf. CCSL 41Ab: 300: *Diuinae lectiones, quas modo, cum recitarentur, audiuimus* […].

of the cost—even if it becomes necessary to cut off a foot or gouge out an eye. By Paragraph 4, Augustine, after reminding his hearers that other people can easily become the source of stumbling blocks, begins to discuss the "scandal" of being asked to lie or bear false witness by a rich or powerful individual. Paragraph 5 contains Augustine's pastoral advice about how to respond. He counsels that the best response ought to include a willingness to suffer physically—even up to the point of death—rather than forfeit the integrity of one's soul.[33] It is in Paragraph 6, however, that a rare, if not altogether unique aspect of Augustine's exhortation to love and to pursue truthfulness is introduced. Here, Augustine makes a direct appeal to the spiritual identity of his audience in order to persuade them not to lie. Invoking *John* 1:12, which claims that all who "received Christ," by faith were granted by Christ the right to become children of God, and alluding to Paul's language of "adoption" by grace (cf. Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:4-6; Eph. 1:5), Augustine rhetorically asks: "If you are sons of God, if redeemed by the grace of the Savior, if bought by his precious blood, if born again by water and the Spirit, if predestined to the heavenly inheritance, then of course you are sons of God […]. What's lying got to do with you?"[34]

Although briefer, *sermo* 166 makes a very similar point. This four-paragraph sermon includes one of the New Testament's most direct exhortations to avoid lying, *Ephesians* 4:25, as its base text. This verse explicitly commands Christians to "put aside" lying and to speak the truth and it is (along with *Psalm* 116:11, which, as we have seen, asserts that "every man is a liar") cited by Augustine in the sermon's opening lines. In addition to being concerned to explain that these two bits of scripture are not in tension with each other, Augustine's aim is to show that in asking Christians to stop lying, God has not commanded the impossible. Augustine's solution here is once again to appeal to Christians' true identity: "What God is commanding is that we should not be human" (*ut non simus homines*). Augustine then explains:

> If you desire to be a human being, you will be a liar; don't desire to be a human being, and you won't be a liar. Put on Christ, and you will be truthful; so that whatever you speak won't be like your very

[33] Paragraph 5 contains references to Wis. 1:11c, Exod. 20:16 (cf. Deut. 5:20), Ps. 116:11, Ps. 5:6, and Matt. 10:28, almost all of which are invoked in other sermons and in contexts where similar situations are discussed and almost all of which are discussed in some detail in the next section of this study.

[34] Trans. *WSA* III/3: 363; cf. CCSL 41Ab: 309: [...] *si filii dei, si gratia saluatoris redempti, si pretioso sanguine comparati, si aqua et spiritu renati, si ad hereditatem caelorum praedestinati, utique filii dei.* […] *Quid ad te uult mendacium?*

> own, and established by you, but will belong to the truth which shines on you and enlightens you (cf. Jn. 1:9). I mean, if you are stripped of light, you will remain in your own darkness, and all you will be able to speak is lies […]. if a human being is deprived of illumination by the truth, he will remain as though stripped naked of the garment of light, and will be able to speak nothing but lies. The judgment [of Ps. 116:11] will remain on him.[35]

One final example of Augustine's preaching specifically on lies and lying may be treated very briefly, even though sermon 133 is not a brief composition. Augustine's text for this sermon is *John* 7:2-10, a passage that record's Jesus's "secret" trip up to Jerusalem for the Jewish Feast of Booths, a trip that he made even after telling his brothers that, no, he would "not go up to this feast because my time has not yet fully come" (7:8). This text has become a problem for Augustine because, apparently, he has heard some invoke it in order to prove that Christ did in fact lie. Augustine's unsurprising response is that "neither Christ nor [John] the evangelist told a lie."[36] It is also a response based on a very close reading—some might even say parsing—of what the text of *John* actually attributes to Jesus. Augustine latches on to Jesus's use of the relative pronoun "this" in 7:8 in order to claim that Jesus was actually referring to *this particular day* of that year's Feast of Booths, a festival which normally lasted eight days. According to Augustine, this "this" (*istum*) was "added" (*addidit*) in order to avoid lying, even as Jesus spoke directly to his brothers about "'not going up,' in order to remain hidden."[37]

[35] Trans. *WSA* III/5: 209 (slightly modified); cf. CCSL 41Bb: 314: *Si homo uis esse, mendax eris. Noli uelle esse homo et non eris mendax. Indue Christum et eris uerax, ut quae locutus fueris, non tua sint quasi propria et abs te instituta, sed illustrantis te et illuminantis ueritatis. Nam si spoliaberis lumine, remanebis in tenebris tuis et non poteris nisi mendacia loqui.* […] *Nam si ablata fuerit homini illustratio ueritatis, remanebit tamquam nudus indumento luminis et non poterit nisi mendacia loqui. Hoc enim in illo remanebit quod in psalmo scriptum est: Omnis homo mendax.*

[36] Trans. *WSA* III/4: 338; cf. *Augustiniana* 66 (2016): 52: *Ecce nec Christus nec euangelista mentitus est.*

[37] Trans. ibid.; cf. *Augustiniana* 66 (2016): 51: *Non ascendo, ut occultaretur. S.* 133 raises the interesting possibility of locating aspects of the rhetorical device of *aequiuocatio* either in Jesus's own words or in Augustine's extant homiletic or exegetical compositions. Relevant questions include: Is Augustine ever explicit about the principle of *aequiuocatio*? If so, what exactly is his attitude toward it? Is his exegesis and application of Jn. 7:2-10 elsewhere consistent to what he does in *s.* 133? And, while he must have been aware of the device and its rhetorical usefulness, does he ever clearly and explicitly authorize Christians to employ it—especially in light of Jesus's admonition (cf. Matt. 5:37 and Jas. 5:12) to "let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no'"? Providing satisfactory answers to these and related questions

More important for the purposes of this study is the fact that Augustine's response is not, at the end of the day, ultimately about the text of the Gospel of John, however crucial guaranteeing that text's integrity may have been to him. His concerns are both multiple and larger than this. One concern is pastoral. Augustine is worried that, if we conclude that Christ did in fact tell a lie, then "human weakness will take it as authorization to lie." In other words, Augustine has prejudged the investigation insofar as he knows that to conclude that Christ lied is to send all Christians hurtling down the slippery slope of verbal untrustworthiness. Another concern is theological: If we conclude that Christ did in fact tell a lie, then it must follow that there is some degree of falsehood in God himself. And if there is anything false in or about God, then we can trust nothing that we think we know about God, life, or creation. In other words, in order to have any truth at all, we must assume *a priori* that "truth cannot have flowed from a fountain of falsehood":

> Consider whether we ought not […] stop assuming anything false about truth, and rather give the Lord his due; let us give glory to the fountain, so that we may drink our fill. […] If you want to be filled, you must approach the fullness. […] But you say, "Beware of the fountain, there's a lie there." What else are you saying but, "There's poison there"?[38]

3. Step Three: Augustine's *Sermones* and Biblical Admonitions against Lying

Even the least biblically literate among us would not be surprised to hear that the collective Judeo-Christian scriptural tradition both warns against lying and praises speaking the truth.

Within the Jewish tradition, both *Torah* and the Wisdom tradition are replete with exhortations to tell the truth.[39] These include

would seem to require a separate study; nevertheless, I thank the anonymous reviewer who rightly pursued this issue in her or his report.

[38] Trans. *WSA* III/4: 337; cf. *Augustiniana* 66 (2016): 50: *Vide igitur, uide ne forte debeamus* […] *de ueritate nihil falsi praesumere, dare Domino quod debetur; fonti gloriam demus, ut securi impleamur.* […] *si uult impleri, accedat ad plenum.* […] *Sed tu dicis: 'Caue fontem, ibi est mendacium.' Quid aliud dicis quam: 'Ibi est uenenum'?*

[39] This is not to claim that there is no tension on this point within the Jewish tradition. Rahab the prostitute (cf. Josh. 2 and 6:17-25), for example, intentionally and blatantly lies in order to guarantee the safety of the Israelite spies who had requested her help. Yet she seems to have been exalted as a heroine for her efforts,

Exodus 20:16, which is the commandment against bearing false witness,[40] *Leviticus* 19:11, which, in part, says "You shall not […] lie to one another," and any number of lines from both the *Psalms* and *Proverbs*, including *Proverbs* 12:19, which claims that "truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment."

Within the New Testament, in addition to Jesus's aforementioned exhortation to be a person who has a *simplex cor* (cf. Matt. 5:37-38), there are overt theological claims that address the value of truth, including Jesus's claim at *John* 14:6 that he is the Truth, Jesus's assertion at *John* 16:13 that the Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of Truth,"[41] and Paul's claim at *Titus* 1:2 that God Himself cannot lie.[42] On top of this, there are numerous pastoral exhortations against lying, and especially against lying to other members of God's community. Perhaps chief among these are the aforementioned *Ephesians* 4:25, which invokes the idea that Christians are all "members" of Christ's body, to exhort them to "lay aside falsehood, [and] speak the truth with their neighbor," and *Colossians* 3:9, which commands Christians "not to lie to one another," precisely because such "evil practices" are not compatible with the new self.

One of Augustine's favorite biblical statements about lying is the "c" portion of 1:11 of the *Wisdom of Solomon*. Typically referred to as "deuterocanonical," this work was written in Greek, and probably in Egypt, by Hellenized Jews in the latter part of the intertestamental period. Augustine, however, unquestionably accepted it as part of the Old Testament (and, hence, as fully authoritative). He cited from it on dozens of occasions.[43]

As for *Wisdom* 1:11c in particular, Augustine cites it with great consistency throughout his corpus: It almost always appears as *os autem quod mentitur occidit animam* or "the mouth that lies kills the soul," and appears in his extant works at least twenty-five times, the majority of which are in exegetical and homiletical

both by the author of *Joshua* and by no less than three authors of the New Testament (cf. Matt. 1:5; Heb. 11:31; and Jas. 2:25).

[40] A command which Augustine, in *mend.* 6 (CSEL 41: 4), thinks "encompasses" (*complectitur*) every classification of lies since whoever makes a statement "testifies to his own mind" (*testimonium perhibet animo suo*).

[41] Cf. also 1 Jn. 5:6, which directly asserts that "the Spirit is the Truth."

[42] A claim that is not too far distant from Augustine's assertion in *conf.* 10.24.35 that "wherever I found truth, there I found God, [who is] truth itself." Cf. CCSL 27: 174: *Vbi enim inueni ueritatem, ibi inueni deum meum, ipsam ueritatem* […].

[43] See A.-M. La Bonnardière, *Biblia Augustiniana: A. T. Le Livre de la Sagesse* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1970).

compositions. It appears in no less than eight of the *Sermones ad populum*.[44]

Due to shared common elements and ideological overlap, it is unnecessary to discuss all eight of these occurrences in detail. Nevertheless, before quoting from three of the most relevant for this study's research question, I will briefly summarize those sermons in which Augustine cites *Wisdom* 1:11c, but which for various reasons have been deemed to be of less interest.

The sections of *sermones* 36, 107, 301A, and 330 that include *Wisdom* 1:11c are dominated by what must have been a real problem for some members of Augustine's congregation, namely, the oppression and manipulation of the poor by the rich.[45] Augustine apparently knows of cases in which a rich and/or powerful individual has used both the "carrot" and the "stick" to gain the cooperation of one or more of the poor in official proceedings. In this case, the carrot is money in the form of bribes or payoffs,[46] and the stick is threats of physical violence, up to and including threats against the poor person's life. In each case, the rich man's goal is clearly the suborning of perjury or other forms of false witness from the poor in exchange for money or the poor person's physical safety. And in each case, Augustine's response is to exhort the poor toward faithfulness, which he equates with avoiding perjury and/or the bearing of false witness—even if this requires the poor to surrender his physical life. *Wisdom* 1:11c appears in each context to remind those who are being threatened that, while they are powerless to guarantee their own physical safety, they do have all the power that they need in order to guarantee their own integrity and, in the process, to preserve their own souls.[47] From Augustine's point of view, the problem is that:

> You pay attention to what he is threatening you with; aren't you paying attention to what you yourself may be doing? He's threatening to

[44] *Ss*. 36.10, 65.6, 81.5, 107.10, 161.5, 180.8, 301A.5, and 330.3. For a more complete list than that from which La Bonnardière was working (cf. previous n.), see *Sapientia Salomonis*, ed. W. Thiele, Vetus Latina: Die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel nach Petrus Sabatier neu gesammelt und herausgegeben von der Erzabtei Beuron 11/1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1977-1985), 256. *S*. 81, though it does contain a reference to Wis. 1:11c (cf. Paragraph 5), is discussed in the previous section because it also contains a general treatment of lies and lying.

[45] Respectively, see *ss*. 36.10, 107.10, 301A.5, and 330.3.

[46] Strikingly effective is the way in which, in *s*.107.10 (PL 38: 632), Augustine expands the expected application of *auaritia* to also include a warning against "rapacity for life" (*caue auaritiam uitae*).

[47] It is clear, though not always explicit, that Augustine also has Jesus's exhortation as recorded in Matt. 10:28 ("Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable

> kill the flesh; "but the mouth that lies kills the soul" (Wis. 1:11c) […] He produces a sword to kill your flesh with; you produce a false tongue (*falsam linguam*) to slaughter your soul with. Which of you has struck a more serious blow? […] You have left yourself with nothing whole, once you have destroyed your heart. "The mouth that lies kills," he said, not the flesh, but "the soul" (Wis. 1:11c).[48]

Powerful though these exhortations are, they suffer in comparison with the ways that Augustine uses *Wisdom* 1:11c in *sermones* 65, 161, and 180.

Paragraphs 5 and 6 of sermon 161 are quite similar to the excerpt from sermon 301A that was just cited. Sermon 161, however, is even more explicit and direct. It is more direct in that it makes submission to Christ mandatory; it is more explicit in that it connects the practice of lying with alienation from God. In Paragraph 5, *Wisdom* 1:11c is linked to Christ's exhortation from *Matthew* 10:28, a link that is grounded in their shared phrasing regarding "killing the soul." Augustine claims "I prefer to listen to Christ speaking the truth, than to you muttering out of a false fear [of the one threatening you]. I mean, the Lord himself says 'Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul' (Matt. 10:28)." This is because, although it "can't be killed by him, [the soul] can be [killed] by you; not with a spear, but a tongue. The enemy who stabs you puts an end to this life. 'But the mouth that lies kills the soul' (Wis. 1:11c)."[49]

Although the liar's ability to kill the soul is clearly problematic *in se*, the fact that God is the owner of both the body and the soul is introduced in Paragraph 6. Augustine, in good Pauline fashion, observes that "the life of the body is the soul, the life of the soul is God. The Spirit of God dwells in the soul, and through the soul in the

to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell") in mind.

[48] Trans. *WSA* III/8: 294-295. Notable here is that Augustine clearly regards the "heart" (*cor*) and the "soul" (*anima*) as synonymous. Cf. *Miscellanea Augustiniana* 1: 86: *Quid ille minatur attendis: quid tu facias non attendis? Ille carnem occidere comminatur: 'os autem quod mentitur occidit animam.'* […] *Profert ille machaeram ad occidendam carnem tuam; profers tu falsam linguam ad trucidandam animam tuam. Quis grauius percussit?* […] *Nihil tibi integrum dimisisti, quando cor tuum perdidisti: 'os quod mentitur occidit,' dixit, non carnem, sed 'animam.'*

[49] Trans. *WSA* III/5: 138; cf. CCSL 41Bb: 127: *Melius audio Christum uera dicentem quam te timore falso murmurantem. Ipse enim dicit Dominus: 'Nolite timere eos qui corpus occidunt, animam autem non possunt occidere.'* […] *Ab illo occidi non potest, a te potest; non lancea, sed lingua. Inimicus qui te percutit, finit hanc uitam: 'os autem quod mentitur, occidit animam.'*

body, so that even our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, whom we have received from God" (cf. Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 2:12; 3:16; 6:19).[50] Moreover, for Augustine, God's right of possession of the Christian's body is rooted in his possession of the soul, since "the one who possesses the chief part, possesses the whole"; thus, "God, by holding […] your heart, your mind, your soul, automatically through the better part possesses the lower, which is your body."[51] The thoughtful congregant could hardly miss the implication that, by killing the soul via lying, the liar is risking both temporal and eternal alienation from God, his soul's "owner."

A similar sentiment can be found in Paragraph 8 of *sermo* 180. Here, Augustine is discussing the phenomenon of spiritual death, that is, how a person can be alive in body, yet be dead in soul. Once again, God's presence or absence is the key. After reminding his hearers that both the body and the soul are God's creation, Augustine employs both logic and scripture:

> God gives life to the flesh through the soul, and again he gives life to the soul through himself, not through the soul itself […]. The body dies when the soul departs; so the soul dies if God departs. The soul departs, when the body is struck with a sword; […] do you imagine that God doesn't depart, when the soul stabs itself with perjury? Do you want to see that the person you are talking about really is dead? Read scripture: "The mouth that lies kills the soul" (Wis. 1:11c).[52]

Having established that lying "kills" the soul by alienating God and compelling Him to evacuate the soul, which is His temple, Augustine offers his congregation an explicit warning against lying. He warns them that lying could well reduce them to a state of living death, a state that, because neither Augustine nor they can see it, must be accepted by faith in the transcendent truth and universal applicability of scripture: "You see the flesh lying there without the soul; you

[50] Trans. *WSA* III/5: 139; cf. CCSL 41Bb: 129: *Vita corporis anima est, uita animae Deus est. Spiritus Dei habitat in anima et per animam in corpore, ut et corpora nostra templum sint Spiritus sancti, quem habemus a Deo.*

[51] Trans. ibid.; cf. CCSL 41Bb: 129: […] *totum possidet qui principale tenet.* […] *Tenens Deus* […] *cor tuum, mentem tuam, animam tuam, profecto per meliorem possidet et inferiorem, quod est corpus tuum.*

[52] Trans. *WSA* III/5: 319; cf. CCSL 41Bb: 673: *De anima Deus uiuificat carnem; ipsam item animam uiuificat de se ipso, non de se ipsa.* […] *Moritur corpus, cum recedit anima; moritur ergo anima, si recedit Deus. Recedit anima, cum corpus percutitur gladio, et putas quia non recedit Deus, cum ipsa anima feritur periurio? Vis uidere quia mortuus est de quo loqueris? Lege scripturam: 'Os quod mentitur, occidit animam.'*

can't see the soul reduced to wretchedness without God. So believe, apply the eyes of faith. No perjurer goes unpunished. Not a single one; they all carry their punishment with them."[53]

The most explicit example comes from Paragraphs 6 and 7 of *sermo* 65.[54] What makes this sermon's content notable is the way in which it strings together what must have been familiar material in order to generate a particularly pointed warning against lying. Having explicitly noted in Paragraph 5 that it is "impiety and unbelief" (*impietas et infidelitas*) that causes the death of the soul, Paragraph 6 begins with a brief paean to the soul's exalted status: It is "so noble a creature, that it is capable, even though it is dead, of making flesh live."[55] In Paragraph 6, Augustine wonders if there is a way to find out if a given person possesses a soul that is both physically and spiritually alive. On the basis of scripture, he hypothesizes that this can be determined by listening to what that person says when he speaks:

> When I hear somebody talking I can tell the body is alive; I want to know what he says, to see whether the soul too is alive. He utters a lie. If he utters a lie, then the soul is dead. How do we prove this? Let's question Truth itself about it, and it says, "the mouth which lies slays the soul" (Wis. 1:11c). […] Why is the body dead? Because the soul, its life, has departed. Why is the soul dead? Because God, its life, has forsaken it.[56]

Then, in Paragraph 7, just in case any among his audience have not grasped the seriousness of the situation, Augustine bluntly summarizes by noting that "the soul is dead without God. Every person without God has a dead soul."[57] And this is followed by a brief

[53] Trans. ibid.; cf. CCSL 41Bb: 674: *Carnem enim iacentem sine anima uideres, animam miseram sine Deo uidere non potes. Crede ergo et adhibe oculos fidei. Nemo impunitus periurus, prorsus nemo; cum illo est poena sua.*

[54] Interestingly, according to this sermon's manuscript superscription, Matt. 10:28, which is common enough in Augustine's discussions of lying to almost be a *topos*, is its theme verse. Cf. *WSA* III/3: 194.

[55] Trans. *WSA* III/3: 195. Cf. CCSL 41Aa: 380: *Tanta, inquam, res est anima, tam excellens est creatura, ut idonea sit etiam mortua carnem uiuificare!*

[56] Trans. *WSA* III/3: 195-196. Cf. CCSL 41Aa: 382: […] *cum audio loquentem, intellego quia corpus uiuit. Quaero quid loquatur, utrum et anima uiuat. Mendacium loquitur. Si mendacium loquitur, ergo anima mortua est. Vnde et hoc probamus? Ipsam Veritatem interrogemus, quae ait: 'Os quod mentitur occidit animam.'* […] *quare mortuum est corpus? Quia discessit uita eius, anima. Quare mortua est anima? Quia deseruit eam uita eius, Deus.*

[57] CCSL 41Aa: 382-383: […] *animam mortuam esse sine Deo. Omnis homo sine Deo mortuam habet animam.*

dramatic dialogue in which Augustine imagines a conversation between himself and a "true martyr." This performance, in addition to implicitly reminding the audience that radical faithfulness in speech—even in the face of a gruesome death—is possible, makes Augustine's sense of exactly what is at stake plain by alluding once again to *Matthew* 10:28 and to the idea that hell is waiting for the verbally unfaithful. In the *persona* of the true martyr, Augustine asks: "Do you really want me, frightened of your slaying my body and of my soul departing from it, to slay my own soul and have my God depart from it?" Then, having reverted back to his own *persona*, Augustine responds: "No, don't be afraid, martyr, of the executioner's sword; be afraid of your own tongue, of you slaying yourself and killing not the flesh but the soul. Fear for your soul, lest it should die in the gehenna of fire."[58]

4. Step Four: Summary and Conclusion

To what degree then do Augustine's *Sermones ad populum* reflect his extreme standard regarding the permissibility of lies that he consistently exalts elsewhere?

By investigating two groups of his extant sermons, this study has shown that, via several divergent techniques, Augustine did consistently hold his audiences to a slightly modified version of his extreme standard. The label "slightly modified" is invoked because he seems never to have been as direct in his extant *Sermones ad populum* as he was in his treatises. It is more accurate to note that he presented his standards to his congregations using a host of indirect techniques including rhetorical performances, theological reminders about the "adopted" position of "child of God" that all Christians maintain by faith, pastoral reminders of the dangers of assuming that God's self-revelation could contain even a speck of untruth or of assuming that the occasional lie does no harm to the liar himself. These techniques also include the occasional "fire and brimstone" warning about the perils of hell that await all those who are alienated from the truth. Certainly not least among these techniques is a

[58] Trans. *WSA* III/3: 196. Cf. CCSL 41Aa: 383: […] *uis ut, cum timeo ne ferias corpus meum et recedat inde anima mea, ego feriam animam meam et recedat inde Deus meus? Non ergo timeas, martyr, gladium percussoris; linguam tuam time, ne tu te percutias et occidas non carnem, sed animam. Anima time ne moriatur in gehenna ignis.*

particular exhortation that dwells at the core of his vision for living the Christian life in this fallen world: Augustine was certain that all Christians have been called to be more than the typical post-lapsarian human being. In other words, Augustine was certain that part of his role as a pastor required him to remind his listeners that all Christians have been called to always strive to imitate Christ, the God-man who was never (intentionally) duplicitous.

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