



“You shall not bear false witness nor lie” (Ex 20:16)

Truth, speech, and coherence in the Christian life

1. The Eighth Commandment: much more than “not lying”

When we hear the Eighth Commandment, many people automatically think: “*don’t tell lies.*” But the moral tradition of the Church teaches us that this commandment is **far broader and deeper**. It is not limited to avoiding an occasional falsehood, but rather **protects the sacred value of truth**, justice in speech, and charity in communication.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains this clearly:

“*The eighth commandment forbids misrepresenting the truth in relations with others*” (CCC §2464).

Telling the truth is not merely a moral obligation: **it is a requirement of Christian love**. Christ Himself presents Himself as “*the Way, the Truth, and the Life*” (Jn 14:6). Therefore, **living in falsehood distances us from Christ**, even when the lie seems small, socially acceptable, or “useful.”

In a culture saturated with misinformation, half-truths, emotional manipulation, social media, and ideological narratives, the Eighth Commandment becomes **urgent and prophetic**.

2. Truth: a moral good, not an opinion

Catholic moral theology clearly distinguishes between:

- **Objective truth**
- **The intention of the heart**
- **The harm caused to one’s neighbor**

Not every truth must always be spoken (*prudence*), but **it is never permissible to lie**. A lie is defined not only by the damage caused, but by **the deliberate intention to deceive**.



“A lie consists in speaking a falsehood with the intention of deceiving” (CCC §2482).

Moreover, the Eighth Commandment protects:

- **Good reputation**
- **Honor**
- **Justice**
- **Social trust**
- **Ecclesial communion**

For this reason, sins against this commandment are not only sins **of speech**, but also **of thought, omission, culpable silence, and indirect dissemination**.

3. Sins Against the Eighth Commandment

An exhaustive guide for the examination of conscience

What follows is a **broad and meticulous list**, explicitly designed so that a traditional Catholic may **examine his or her conscience deeply**, without scrupulosity, but with sincerity before God.

A. Lying (in all its forms)

- Deliberately lying, even in small matters
- Telling “white lies” without a grave reason
- Lying to avoid correction or responsibility
- Lying to appear good or preserve one’s image
- Lying out of convenience or laziness
- Lying out of fear of what others may think
- Lying to obtain economic or social benefit
- Lying at work, in studies, or in official procedures
- Lying in confession or concealing mortal sins



- Lying within marriage or family life
 - Lying through calculated silence that leads others into error
 - Living a double life, presenting a false image of oneself
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B. False appearances and hypocrisy

- Pretending to possess virtues one does not practice
 - Displaying outward religiosity without inner coherence
 - Acting differently depending on the audience
 - Seeking spiritual approval without real conversion
 - Scandalizing others through incoherent living
 - Harshly judging others while hiding one's own sins
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C. False testimony

- Giving false testimony against another person
 - Exaggerating facts to harm someone
 - Remaining silent about the truth when one has the duty to speak
 - Manipulating testimonies or versions of events
 - Making accusations without evidence
 - Defaming others in civil or ecclesial contexts
 - Participating in unjust or ideologically motivated accusations
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D. Calumny

(Saying false things about someone)

- Attributing sins or evil intentions that do not exist
- Repeating unverified rumors
- Spreading false accusations
- Damaging another's reputation out of revenge or resentment
- Calumniating authorities, priests, or laypeople
- Failing to repair the damage after discovering the falsehood



E. Detraction

(Revealing true faults without just cause)

- Revealing the sins of others without necessity
 - Speaking ill of others “because it’s true”
 - Publicizing defects that others do not need to know
 - Revealing confidences received in trust
 - Exposing past faults that have already been forgiven
 - Participating in gossip even when it is true
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F. Rash judgment

- Thinking badly of others without evidence
 - Attributing bad intentions without certainty
 - Habitual suspicion
 - Always interpreting actions negatively
 - Internally condemning others without knowing the facts
 - Failing to give others the benefit of the doubt
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G. Gossip and murmuring

- Speaking about others without charity
 - Taking pleasure in another’s loss of reputation
 - Sharing rumors in informal conversations
 - Passive participation without correction
 - Creating division in families, parishes, or groups
 - Justifying gossip as “venting”
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H. Sinful use of social media and digital platforms

- Spreading false or unverified news
 - Sharing harmful content for ideological reasons
 - Publicly attacking individuals
 - Humiliating, mocking, or canceling others
 - Spreading scandal
 - Using anonymity to harm others
 - Manipulating information to gain followers
 - Silencing uncomfortable truths for personal interest
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I. Culpable silence and omission of the truth

- Remaining silent when one must defend the innocent
 - Failing to correct one's neighbor out of human respect
 - Allowing injustice out of convenience
 - Failing to report grave abuses when one has the duty to do so
 - Consenting to lies out of fear
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J. Failure to make reparation

- Failing to apologize after lying
 - Failing to repair damaged reputations
 - Minimizing the harm caused
 - Justifying lies after the fact
 - Refusing to publicly correct falsehoods
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4. Healing, truth, and confession

The Eighth Commandment reminds us that **words have the power of life and death**. Every lie, every unjust judgment, every act of gossip breaks something in communion.

But there is also good news ☐



Christ is **the physician of souls**.

In confession:

- Truth sets us free
- The heart is reordered
- Speech is purified

“The truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32)

Preparing a thorough examination of conscience is not an exercise in guilt, but **an act of love for truth and for one’s neighbor**.

5. Final prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ,
Eternal Truth of the Father,
purify my words,
heal my memory,
guard my tongue,
and give me a sincere heart.*

*May I never use truth without charity,
nor charity without truth.
Amen.*