

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

August 31, 2012 at 1:02pm

Whatever happened to telling the truth?

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NCR Today

I remember sitting in a Catholic high school classroom discussing the question of lying. Was it ever OK? Well, to save someone's life, yes. You could tell a would-be murderer, for example, that his or her intended victim was not in your house, even if they were. But in normal circumstances? Never. Truth-telling, honesty, was a high moral value.

Then there is the world of politics. OK, I know political campaigns have had a long history of sleazy tactics, taking liberties with the truth and stretching the facts, but one might reasonably expect that people running for public office (the public trust, as it is sometimes called) might at least tell the truth, take pains to get their facts straight and not seek to mislead voters.

Yet the Republican presidential campaign this year seems to have reached a new level of dishonesty. Vice presidential nominee Paul Ryan's speech to the Republican convention featured a wide array of whoppers. The fact-checkers were out in force, analyzing its truthfulness.

The one that got me especially dealt with the GM plant in Janesville, Wis., Ryan's hometown. President Barack Obama visited that plant in early 2008 and said, "If our government is there to support you, this plant will be here for another hundred years." Then, Ryan said, it did not last another year; it's "locked up and empty."

Intended message from Ryan: Obama's misguided economic policies were responsible. The facts: GM announced the closing in June 2008, months before Obama took office. It was closed -- actually, GM says it's on standby and could be opened again -- under President George W. Bush, not Obama.

Then there is Ryan's blaming Obama for not following up on the recommendations of the Simpson/Bowles economic report, but he neglected to mention that he served on that commission and

voted against the report. On this, his speech might be correct factually, but it omits the highly significant context of the story, and thus misleads.

These examples only touch the surface. There are allegations that Obama removed work requirements for welfare (not true) and that Obama endangered Medicare to fund health care reform (also not true). Then there are statements taken out of context, like: "You didn't build that," claiming Obama is devaluing entrepreneurship. When you hear Obama in context, he does nothing of the sort. He simply says that no one builds a business without some government help, either through roads, bridges, educational opportunities, etc. In fact, this lie became a chant at the convention.

Paul Ryan is a Catholic. I'm sure he learned the same lessons I did about the importance and centrality of honesty. In fact, I know of no faith tradition in which truth-telling is not considered a high moral value. If the Republican Party actually wants to claim to be a party that respects religion, its candidates might start by telling the truth in their statements.

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