JBAS Journal of Biblical and Ancient Studies
vol. 2, no. 1 (2026): 108-126.

DIAMOND OPEN ACCESS

DOI: https://doi.org/10.23364/JBAS.2026.2.1.59467

Truthful Witness in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Johannine Theology, Misinformation, and the Common Good

Dmitry Erokhin
Research Scholar, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, Ph. D.
Orcid. iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5191-0579

Received: Apr. 14, 2026
Revised: May 24, 2026
Accepted: Jun. 29, 2026

Abstract

The rise of generative artificial intelligence has intensified a crisis that is technological, political, and moral at once. AI systems can now produce fluent prose, realistic images, synthetic voices, and persuasive video at scale. These capacities create new possibilities for education, medicine, accessibility, communication, and public service. However, they also weaken the ordinary practices by which persons and communities test testimony, assign trust, recognize manipulation, and share a common world. Existing AI ethics frameworks rightly emphasize transparency, fairness, accountability, human oversight, privacy, safety, and dignity. These frameworks are indispensable, yet they leave open a deeper question of moral and epistemic formation of what kinds of persons, communities, and institutions become capable of truthful witness under digital conditions. This article argues that Johannine literature offers a distinctive contribution to that question. Through close engagement with the Prologue, the Gospel's testimony passages, the Farewell Discourses, the Passion narrative, and 1 John, the study shows that Johannine theology joins truth, witness, love, and life in a coherent moral framework. The article's central research question is therefore how the Johannine theology of truth, witness, love, and life can provide a morally serious and publicly intelligible framework for responding to artificial intelligence and misinformation in a pluralistic digital age. The answer developed here is that Johannine theology reframes AI ethics around truthful witness, i.e., embodied accountability in the face of synthetic media, testimonial integrity in the face of manipulated provenance, neighbor-love in the design and deployment of automated systems, and life-giving public practices in the face of technological power.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, misinformation, deepfakes, witness, truth, Christian ethics.

1. Introduction*

Artificial intelligence increasingly shapes how societies speak, judge, remember, decide, and trust. Generative systems produce text, image, audio, and video with a speed and fluency that earlier digital media did not possess. Predictive and classificatory systems influence decisions in education, employment, credit, policing, health care, welfare, border control, journalism, and public administration. The ethical debate around AI therefore concerns more than technical reliability. It concerns the conditions under which human beings recognize one another, assign authority, test claims, and sustain shared life.

AI ethics guidelines contain recurring emphasis on transparency, justice and fairness, non-maleficence, responsibility, and privacy, while also significant disagreement about implementation[1]. UNESCO places human rights, dignity, environmental sustainability, fairness, transparency, and human oversight at the center of its global AI recommendation[2]. The OECD frames trustworthy AI in relation to human rights and democratic values[3]. NIST describes trustworthy AI systems through validity, reliability, safety, security, resilience, accountability, transparency, explainability, privacy enhancement, and bias management[4]. The EU AI Act gives legal expression to a risk-based framework for regulating AI in Europe[5].

Though these frameworks are necessary, they depend on virtues, habits, and institutional cultures that regulation alone cannot create. A transparent system can still be misused by careless actors. A labeled deepfake can still inflame a community already rewarded for outrage. A formally accountable institution can communicate in ways that erode public trust. A system designed for efficiency can treat human beings as data profiles rather than persons. The digital crisis is therefore formative as well as procedural. Societies need reliable rules, and they also need people and institutions capable of truthful witness.

The Fourth Gospel places this concern at the center of its narrative world. The question "What is truth?" appears in John 18:38, when Pilate confronts Jesus during the Passion. Truth is tested inside a political drama of fear, accusation, calculation, public pressure, and imperial violence. Jesus has just said that he came into the world "to testify to the truth" and that those who belong to the truth listen to his voice (John 18:37). Truth in John is never a possession held by detached observers. It summons hearers, forms communities, exposes falsehood, and

---

* This article is published as a special contribution in the 'Theological Reflection' section.

[1] A. Jobin, M. Ienca, and E. Vayena, "The global landscape of AI ethics guidelines," *Nature Machine Intelligence* 1/9, 2019, 389–99.

[2] UNESCO, *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence* (Paris: UNESCO, 2022).

[3] OECD, "OECD AI Principles overview," *OECD.AI*, accessed 24 May 2026.

[4] NIST, *Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework (AI RMF 1.0)*, NIST AI 100-1, 2023.

[5] European Commission, "AI Act," *Shaping Europe's Digital Future*, last updated 11 May 2026, accessed 24 May 2026.

requires witness.

This study asks how that Johannine theology of truth can speak to AI and misinformation. The research question guiding the article is how the Johannine theology of truth, witness, love, and life can provide a morally serious and publicly intelligible framework for responding to artificial intelligence and misinformation in a pluralistic digital age. The question asks, first, what Johannine literature itself contributes through close textual engagement. It asks, second, how that contribution can be translated into public moral reasoning without treating Christian claims as coercive dogma.

2. Methodology

The study uses a close exegetical and theological reading of selected Johannine passages. The Prologue is read as the foundation for John's account of truth as embodied revelation (John 1:1–18). The Gospel's testimony passages are examined to show how truth is mediated through accountable witness (John 1:6–8; John 5:31–47; John 19:35; John 21:24). The Farewell Discourses are treated as a central site for understanding the Spirit of truth, communal memory, discernment, love, and mission (John 13–17). The study also draws on 1 John, where truth is closely joined to fellowship, confession, discernment, and concrete love (1 John 1:1–10; 1 John 3:16–18; 1 John 4:1–21).

This textual work is placed in conversation with recent Johannine ethics scholarship. For example, Koester has argued that the Gospel's themes of life, truth, and love together create a substantial ethical perspective centered on God's action in Jesus[6]. Hartog similarly identifies believing, loving, following, abiding, serving, obeying, testifying, and imitation as central features of Johannine moral thought[7]. Bennema describes the Johannine writings as a moral narrative world in which human character and conduct are transformed through participation in divine reality[8]. Andrew reads truth in John through encounter, testimony, and mediated relation to Jesus[9].

After the exegetical analysis, the study brings Johannine theology into dialogue with contemporary discussions of AI ethics and misinformation. It asks how John's account of truthful witness can illuminate present problems such as synthetic media, algorithmic opacity, automated persuasion, deepfakes, loss of provenance, and the erosion of shared trust. In this

---

[6] C. R. Koester, "Rethinking the ethics of John: A review article," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 36/1, 2013, 85–98.

[7] P. A. Hartog, "Johannine ethics: An exegetical-theological summary and a 'desiderative' extension of mimesis," *Religions* 13/6, 2022, 503.

[8] C. Bennema, "Moral transformation in the Johannine writings," *In die Skriflig* 51/3, 2017, 1–7.

[9] M. Andrew, "What is truth? A Johannine theological epistemology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 74/2, 2021, 158–67.

sense, Johannine theology provides a lens through which the moral stakes of AI become clearer.

Since these questions arise in pluralistic societies, the article also uses a mode of public moral translation. Johannine theology remains theologically rich, yet its ethical insights are expressed in terms that can be discussed beyond explicitly Christian communities including accountable communication, truthful institutions, protection of vulnerable persons, responsible use of power, discernment in receiving testimony, and commitment to the common good. This approach is informed by Rawls's account of public reason, which addresses justification amid reasonable pluralism[10], and by Habermas's work on religion in the public sphere, which recognizes that religious traditions may contribute to public deliberation when their claims are opened to shared argument and translation[11].

The study's contribution lies in showing that the Fourth Gospel and 1 John offer more than general religious inspiration for digital ethics. They provide a serious moral framework for truthful witness in a technological culture where speech, image, authority, and trust are increasingly unstable.

3. The Prologue

The Prologue gives the Fourth Gospel its theological horizon. "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1) places the story of Jesus in relation to creation, divine speech, and the order of reality. All things come into being through the Word. In him is life, and that life is the light of all people (John 1:3–4). Truth in this horizon is larger than factual accuracy. It is the self-disclosure of God in the one through whom the world exists and by whom the world is illuminated.

This claim matters for digital ethics because AI systems often operate within a narrowed account of knowledge. They classify, predict, rank, generate, and optimize. These capacities can serve genuine human goods. They can also encourage societies to treat knowledge as pattern extraction and communication as content production. The Prologue offers a thicker account. Reality is gift before it becomes data. The world is intelligible because it is addressed by the Word. Speech therefore carries moral weight. It can illuminate, deceive, heal, dominate, or bear witness.

John immediately complicates any simple confidence that light will be received. The light shines in darkness, yet the world does not recognize the Word (John 1:5, 10). Revelation can be refused. Visibility does not guarantee recognition. This Johannine insight speaks directly to the digital age. More information does not automatically create wisdom. More data does not automatically produce trust. Greater visibility can even increase confusion when images, voices, and documents circulate without accountable provenance.

---

[10] J. Rawls, "The idea of public reason revisited," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 64/3, 1997, 765–807.

[11] J. Habermas, "Religion in the public sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14/1, 2006, 1.

The decisive claim appears in John 1:14 when the Word becomes flesh. Johannine truth is embodied. The Word enters vulnerability, location, relation, history, and human dependence. The glory seen by the witnesses is full of grace and truth. Truth arrives through a life capable of being seen, followed, loved, misunderstood, rejected, and crucified.

That incarnational pattern has direct ethical relevance for synthetic media. Generative systems can imitate the signs of embodiment through, for example, a familiar voice, a face, a gesture, an apparent memory, or a persuasive confession. They can simulate presence without personal accountability. The Prologue gives a criterion. Truth worthy of trust remains answerable to embodied reality and life-giving relation. Digital mediation is not inherently false. The Gospel itself is mediated testimony. The moral problem arises when mediation is detached from responsible authorship, truthful provenance, and the flourishing of persons.

John the Baptist's role confirms this testimonial structure. He comes as a witness to testify to the light, while he himself is not the light (John 1:6–8). Johannine witness is referential. It points away from itself toward the reality it serves. In digital culture, where attention economies reward self-display, personal branding, and confident assertion, John's witness offers a modest and demanding model. Truthful speech does not make the speaker the center. It serves the truth to which it points.

The Prologue therefore establishes three claims for the rest of the article. Truth is life-giving illumination. Truth is embodied in the Word made flesh. Truth is mediated through witness that remains accountable beyond itself. These claims provide a basis for assessing AI systems and misinformation ecosystems. Technologies that detach speech from accountable witness corrode trust. Systems that treat persons primarily as prediction targets or behavioral data obscure the relation between truth and life. Institutions that invoke transparency while shielding their own power fail the testimonial logic of Johannine light.

4. Witness and accountable testimony in the Fourth Gospel

The Fourth Gospel is saturated with the language of testimony. John the Baptist testifies (John 1:7–8). The Samaritan woman bears witness through invitation (John 4:28–30). Jesus names multiple witnesses in John 5:31–47. The Spirit testifies, and the disciples testify (John 15:26–27). The eyewitness at the cross testifies so that others may believe (John 19:35). The Gospel closes by affirming the truthfulness of the beloved disciple's testimony (John 21:24).

This repeated emphasis shows that the Gospel understands faith as mediated. Readers do not bypass testimony. They enter a world where truth comes through witnesses, signs, Scripture, memory, and communal reception. That fact is ethically significant. John does not imagine human beings as autonomous knowers who possess truth apart from relation. People learn truth through trustworthy mediation.

John 5:31–47 is especially important for digital ethics. Jesus says that self-testimony alone is inadequate (John 5:31). The passage then invokes John, Jesus' works, the Father, and the Scriptures as a layered field of witness (John 5:32–47). The truth of Jesus' identity is not presented as unsupported assertion. It is embedded in a network of testimony, interpretation,

action, and divine agency.

Synthetic media present the opposite temptation. A video appears to show what happened. A voice appears to speak. A document appears to come from a trusted institution. A chatbot appears to know. The Johannine witness pattern insists that apparent self-presentation is insufficient. Claims require accountable relation to source, context, purpose, and community. In contemporary governance language, this points toward provenance, traceability, auditability, source transparency, and institutional accountability. NIST's concern for trustworthy and accountable AI and the EU AI Act's transparency obligations for certain AI systems and AI-generated content can be read as public policy analogues to a testimonial concern that communication must remain answerable to its origin and means.

The Samaritan woman in John 4 shows another aspect of witness. Her testimony begins with invitation: "Come and see" (John 4:29). Her words do not close inquiry. They open a path for others. The townspeople later say that they have heard for themselves (John 4:42). Healthy witness therefore does not demand blind dependence. It leads hearers toward shared recognition. This is a powerful model for information environments where credible testimony helps people move from report to verification, from trust to understanding, from dependence on a witness to participation in truth.

The eyewitness claim in John 19:35 deepens this point. The witness testifies to what was seen at the crucifixion, and the reader is invited to trust mediated testimony grounded in embodied perception. The Gospel acknowledges the vulnerability of mediated knowledge while refusing despair about it. Human beings often know through witnesses. The ethical task is to protect the conditions under which witness can be worthy of trust.

Misinformation studies describe a contemporary crisis of exactly this kind. For instance, Lazer and colleagues showed how networked media can scale falsehood and undermine democratic knowledge practices[12]. Vaccari and Chadwick found that deepfakes can increase uncertainty and reduce trust in news on social media[13]. Chesney and Citron warned that deepfakes can generate a "liar's dividend", in which dishonest actors dismiss authentic evidence as fabricated[14]. These studies describe a collapse of witness. When testimony becomes easy to fabricate and easy to discredit, the public world becomes fragile.

The Fourth Gospel's witness theology resists both gullibility and cynicism. It invites trust, yet it places trust inside accountable testimony. It values witness, yet it requires witness to point beyond itself. It calls for belief, yet belief serves life (John 20:31). This offers an important criterion for AI-mediated communication. Digital systems should sustain the social conditions

---

[12] D. M. J. Lazer, M. A. Baum, Y. Benkler, A. J. Berinsky, K. M. Greenhill, F. Menczer, M. J. Metzger et al., "The science of fake news," *Science* 359/6380, 2018, 1094–96.

[13] C. Vaccari and A. Chadwick, "Deepfakes and disinformation: exploring the impact of synthetic political video on deception, uncertainty, and trust in news," *Social Media + Society* 6/1, 2020, 2056305120903408.

[14] B. Chesney and D. Citron, "Deep fakes: a looming challenge for privacy, democracy, and national security," *California Law Review* 107, 2019, 1753.

under which truthful witness remains possible.

5. Truth, freedom, and the danger of weaponized certainty

John 8:31–47 is one of the Gospel's most difficult ethical passages. It contains the famous claim that truth makes free (John 8:32), while also including severe polemic about falsehood, slavery to sin, and the devil. Its reception history requires vigilance.

The passage begins with abiding: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples" (John 8:31). Truth is connected to duration, remaining, and discipleship. This is crucial for digital ethics. Misinformation thrives through speed. Viral systems reward quick reaction, emotional intensity, and identity performance. Johannine truth requires patient dwelling. It forms people who can remain with a word long enough to be corrected by it.

The dialogue that follows shows how self-description can resist truth. Jesus' interlocutors appeal to their descent from Abraham and deny their bondage (John 8:33). Narratively, the point is that inherited identity can become a shield against self-knowledge. Contemporary misinformation often works the same way. Falsehood persuades most effectively when it protects a group's preferred image of itself or confirms its fears about others. Herdt's account of partisan epistemology in Christian ethics is helpful here[15]. Communities under perceived threat can begin to treat truth as a possession of the group, replacing humility and correction with identity defense.

The Johannine connection between truth and freedom speaks directly to AI-driven personalization. Recommendation systems can surround users with material that confirms their fears. Generative systems can supply persuasive rationalizations for almost any position. Chatbots can produce confident answers without genuine understanding. Under such conditions, freedom cannot mean frictionless access to preferred content. Johannine freedom means liberation from the falsehoods that flatter the self. It requires communities, systems, and institutions that make correction possible.

Empirical research on misinformation supports the ethical importance of this formation. Accuracy prompts can reduce misinformation sharing by redirecting attention toward truth-evaluation[16]. Research on intellectual humility suggests that people who recognize the limits of their knowledge are less vulnerable to misinformation and more willing to investigate claims[17]. These findings resonate with Johannine discipleship. Abiding in truth requires habits that slow reaction, invite testing, and loosen the grip of identity-protective certainty.

---

[15] J. A. Herdt, "Partisan epistemology and post-truth power," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 35/1, 2022, 3–15.

[16] G. Pennycook and D. G. Rand, "Accuracy prompts are a replicable and generalizable approach for reducing the spread of misinformation," *Nature Communications* 13/1, 2022, 2333.

[17] S. M. Bowes and L. K. Fazio, "Intellectual humility and misinformation receptivity: a meta-analytic review," *Advances.in/Psychology* 2/1, 2024.

1 John 1:5-10 extends the point into communal life. It declares that God is light and insists that claims to fellowship are false when a community walks in darkness (1 John 1:5-6). The same passage warns against claims of sinlessness: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8). A community of truth must be capable of confession. It exposes deception outside itself and inside itself. This is one of the strongest Johannine resources for Christian participation in AI ethics. Christian communities can speak credibly about truth only when they practice correction, evidence, repentance, and public responsibility.

6. The Farewell Discourses

The Farewell Discourses (John 13-17) are the theological center of Johannine moral formation. They prepare the disciples for life after Jesus’ departure. The community will live by remembered words, mutual love, and the Spirit’s guidance. It asks how truth is sustained when direct sight is absent and testimony must be carried across time.

The Paraclete is called the Spirit of truth (John 14:16-17). The Spirit teaches and reminds the disciples of Jesus’ words (John 14:26). The Spirit testifies, and the disciples testify because they have been with Jesus from the beginning (John 15:26-27). The Spirit guides into all truth (John 16:13).

This guidance should not be mistaken for instant certainty. In the narrative setting, the Spirit’s work is tied to memory, interpretation, and witness. The Spirit sustains testimony rather than bypassing it. The Spirit keeps the community answerable to Jesus’ words rather than granting detached authority to private inspiration. Johannine truth therefore has a communal and temporal shape. It is received through abiding, remembering, discerning, and testifying.

This insight is especially relevant to AI systems that acquire quasi-oracular authority. Large language models answer quickly and confidently. Their fluency can create the impression of wisdom. A distinction between proximate and ultimate concerns in Christian AI ethics is useful here. Proximate concerns include fairness, accountability, transparency, and sustainability, whereas ultimate concerns involve personhood, telos, and the meaning of technological life[18]. Johannine theology presses the ultimate question with particular force: what kind of authority is being granted to a system that cannot testify in the Johannine sense, because it cannot remember, love, suffer, confess, or bear responsibility?

The Farewell Discourses also connect truth with sanctification and mission. Jesus prays, “Sanctify them in the truth” and sends the disciples into the world (John 17:17-18). Truth forms a community for public witness. It does not create withdrawal into private purity. The unity of the disciples has communicative force, so that the world may believe (John 17:21).

Digital misinformation fractures precisely this kind of social form. It produces suspicion, contempt, epistemic segregation, and rival realities. Misinformation threatens the epistemic

[18] M. S. Burdett, “Proximate and ultimate concerns in Christian ethical responses to artificial intelligence,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 36/3, 2023, 620–41.

integrity on which democratic life depends[19]. Johannine theology names this as a deformation of communal witness. When communities lose shared practices of testing and correction, truth loses social habitation.

The Farewell Discourses therefore support public norms for AI ethics. AI-mediated communication should preserve memory by maintaining reliable provenance. It should support discernment by making sources, limitations, and uncertainties visible. It should serve truthful communion by strengthening shared capacities for understanding. These norms overlap with policy language about transparency and accountability, yet they ask for more than disclosure. Disclosure can become a legal gesture. Johannine truth asks whether communication helps persons and communities become capable of faithful recognition.

7. Love as the credibility of truth

John 13 gives Johannine truth its visible moral form. Jesus knows that his hour has come and that the Father has given all things into his hands (John 13:1-3). This knowledge leads him to wash the disciples' feet (John 13:4-5). The one who knows his divine origin and destiny performs an act of humble service.

This passage links knowledge and power to service. In technological contexts, knowledge often creates asymmetry. Companies know users through data extraction. Platforms know patterns of attention. Predictive systems know populations through classification. Institutions know citizens through records, scores, and risk profiles. Johannine ethics asks what powerful knowledge does to vulnerable persons. The footwashing offers a moral criterion for informational power. Knowledge becomes disordered when it refuses service.

Jesus interprets his action as an example for the disciples (John 13:15). Johannine ethics is mimetic. It forms communities through participation in Jesus' pattern. Hartog emphasizes the importance of imitation, love, abiding, and testimony in Johannine moral theology[20]. Bennema similarly describes Johannine moral transformation as participation in divine life and conduct[21].

The love command follows: "love one another" as Jesus has loved (John 13:34). Love has testimonial force. By this, others will know that the disciples belong to Jesus (John 13:35). Love makes witness recognizable. The community's claim to truth becomes credible through mutual regard.

1 John 3:16-18 gives the same logic practical sharpness. Love is known through Christ's self-giving. Those with resources who refuse a sibling in need cannot credibly claim divine

---

[19] S. Lewandowsky, U. K. H. Ecker, J. Cook, S. van der Linden, J. Roozenbeek, and N. Oreskes, "Misinformation and the epistemic integrity of democracy," *Current Opinion in Psychology* 54, 2023, 101711.

[20] P. A. Hartog, "Johannine ethics: an exegetical-theological summary and a 'desiderative' extension of mimesis," *Religions* 13/6, 2022, 503.

[21] C. Bennema, "Moral transformation in the Johannine writings," *In die Skriflig* 51/3, 2017, 1–7.

love. Love must appear "in truth and action" (1 John 3:18). Truth and action belong together. Speech separated from concrete care becomes empty religious performance.

This Johannine claim matters in digital spaces where "truth" often becomes a slogan for branding, factional identity, or the humiliation of opponents. Neufeld's study of 1 John shows that truth talk and accusations of lying can be used to negotiate authority, exert epistemic control, define communal identity, and defend innovation amid competing claims[22]. Johannine literature itself therefore teaches caution. Truth-language must be tested by love and life.

For AI ethics, love as truthful action has practical implications. Systems used in health care, welfare, education, employment, and pastoral care should be evaluated by how they affect vulnerable persons. AI in health care can intensify surveillance, cost containment, and depersonalization while weakening practices of accompaniment[23]. The concern extends beyond medicine. Automated advising, grading, screening, and pastoral chatbots can promise access while weakening human responsibility.

Johannine love does not require rejection of every AI tool. It requires moral ordering. AI can assist human service when it reduces burdens, expands access, identifies neglected needs, or supports careful judgment. It becomes dangerous when it replaces relational responsibility with automated convenience, shields decision-makers from those affected by decisions, or invites users to treat simulated empathy as equivalent to accountable care.

The same criterion applies to churches and theological institutions. Recent research on churches and AI adoption shows that Christian communities negotiate AI through concerns about mission, dignity, solidarity, and agency[24]. Johannine ethics gives these negotiations a textual criterion asking whether the tool helps the community love concretely, witness truthfully, and foster life. A sermon produced quickly by AI may save time, yet it may weaken the pastoral practices of prayer, study, listening, and embodied address through which a congregation is known and served. A pastoral chatbot may provide immediate language to a distressed person, yet it cannot bear the responsibility of friendship, sacrament, confidentiality, and long-term accompaniment.

The credibility of Christian truth in the AI age will depend on this integration of speech and care. Communities that denounce misinformation while circulating unverified claims damage their witness. Institutions that invoke dignity while exploiting data or labor contradict their own moral vocabulary. The Johannine love command gives Christian AI ethics its most demanding public test. Truthful witness becomes visible in practices that protect and serve others.

---

[22] D. Neufeld, "The socio-rhetorical force of 'truth talk' and lies: the case of 1 John," *HTS: Theological Studies* 67/1, 2011, 1–10.

[23] P. Scherz, "Data ethics, AI, and accompaniment: the dangers of depersonalization in Catholic health care," *Theological Studies* 83/2, 2022, 271–92.

[24] P. H. Cheong and L. Liu, "Faithful innovation: negotiating institutional logics for AI value alignment among Christian churches in America," *Religions* 16/3, 2025, 302.

8. Testing the spirits

1 John 4:1 commands the beloved community to test the spirits. The immediate issue is christological. The community must discern true confession of Jesus Christ come in the flesh (1 John 4:2-3). The wider moral pattern remains highly relevant. Claims that sound spiritual, authoritative, technical, or confident require testing.

The criterion in 1 John is incarnational and communal. The opening of the letter grounds proclamation in what has been heard, seen, and touched (1 John 1:1-4). The testimony invites fellowship. Truth is not detached from embodied life. That emphasis speaks directly to synthetic media, which manipulate the signs people ordinarily associate with presence such as the face, the voice, the document, the familiar style of a trusted person. The new danger is not merely that false claims exist. False claims are ancient. The distinctive problem is that digital systems can manufacture the texture of presence at scale.

Testing the spirits also addresses algorithmic authority. AI outputs often arrive without sufficient explanation of training data, uncertainty, source provenance, or institutional incentives. Users may treat outputs as neutral because they appear technical. Johannine discernment asks questions that are moral as well as informational. What does this claim imply about the human person? What practices does it encourage? Whose vulnerability is protected or ignored? Can the claim be corrected? Who is accountable if harm occurs?

Misinformation research supports the need for this kind of formation. Accuracy prompts can reduce misinformation sharing[25]. Intellectual humility is associated with lower receptivity to misinformation[26]. Research on religion and conspiracy susceptibility suggests that some forms of religious interpretation can increase vulnerability to conspiratorial narratives, while more reflexive forms may reduce it[27]. This finding should matter to churches. Johannine discernment begins inside the community that claims to walk in the light.

The Epistles also hold truth and love together. 1 John 4:7-21 identifies love as the sign of knowing God. A technically accurate statement can still be used lovelessly. A community can defend correct doctrine while practicing contempt. A digital user can expose falsehood in a manner that deepens dehumanization. Johannine discernment asks whether truth is being spoken in a form answerable to love.

For public AI ethics, testing the spirits can be translated into layered discernment. Technical testing asks whether a system is reliable, secure, fair, explainable, and robust. Institutional testing asks whether those deploying the system remain accountable to affected persons.

---

[25] G. Pennycook and D. G. Rand, “Accuracy prompts are a replicable and generalizable approach for reducing the spread of misinformation,” *Nature Communications* 13/1, 2022, 2333.

[26] S. M. Bowes and L. K. Fazio, “Intellectual humility and misinformation receptivity: a meta-analytic review,” *Advances.in/Psychology* 2/1, 2024.

[27] A. Jedinger and P. Siegers, “Religion, spirituality, and susceptibility to conspiracy theories: examining the role of analytic thinking and post-critical beliefs,” *Politics and Religion* 17/3, 2024, 389–409.

Communal testing asks whether the system strengthens or weakens shared trust. Moral testing asks whether the system serves life and neighbor-regard. This layered discernment prevents technical evaluation from becoming morally thin.

9. AI, misinformation, and the collapse of witness

The contemporary misinformation crisis can be described as a collapse of witness. Speech circulates detached from accountable speakers. Images circulate detached from reliable provenance. Platforms reward engagement without equal regard for truth. Users become targets and distributors at the same time. Public figures can exploit confusion by dismissing authentic evidence as fabricated. The result is a corrosion of the social conditions under which truth can be shared.

AI intensifies this collapse by lowering the cost of persuasive falsehood. Synthetic media give fabricated claims sensory force. Personalization adapts messages to particular fears and hopes. Automated accounts can create the appearance of consensus. Deepfake awareness can foster cynicism even when no deepfake is present. AI-generated media intensify the problems of a post-truth world and produce a broader subjective crisis of knowledge[28].

Johannine theology helps name the moral character of this collapse. In John, truth is faithful disclosure, trustworthy witness, and life-giving relation. Misinformation is therefore more than wrong content. It is anti-witness. It breaks the relation between speech and reality, between speaker and hearer, between communication and love. It manipulates the trust on which communal life depends.

This perspective avoids shallow technological solutionism. Detection tools matter. Provenance standards matter. Regulation matters. Platform design matters. Yet a society can possess better detection tools and still lack truthful citizens. It can label AI-generated content while continuing to reward manipulation. It can enforce disclosure while normalizing indifference to the vulnerable. Johannine ethics directs attention to the formation of witnesses, not only the identification of false artifacts.

The Gospel's witness structure suggests concrete public practices. Institutions that use AI to communicate should disclose when content is generated or substantially altered by AI, identify accountable human agents, preserve audit trails, and provide meaningful routes for correction. Media organizations should treat provenance as part of public service. Platforms should evaluate recommendation systems by their effect on truthful public discourse, not only by engagement. Educational and religious communities should teach verification as a moral practice of checking sources, pausing before sharing, distinguishing confidence from evidence, and correcting errors publicly.

Johannine ethics also cautions against generalized distrust. The Gospel itself depends on

---

[28] P. Scherz and L. Vera, "AI and the subjective crisis of knowledge," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 53/2, 2025, 193–216.

testimony. Its purpose is that readers may come to believe through mediated witness (John 20:30-31). A culture that responds to synthetic media by declaring all evidence suspect has lost the ability to receive witness. The public good requires discerning trust careful enough to test claims, generous enough to remain open to truth, humble enough to revise judgment, and courageous enough to act when evidence is sufficient.

Christian communities have particular responsibility here. They often possess practices that can train discernment including confession, testimony, communal reading, pastoral accountability, catechesis, fasting from impulsive desire, and care for neighbors beyond one's group. However, these practices can also be distorted. Johannine truthfulness thus demands that Christian communities examine their own information habits before addressing the wider culture.

10. Human dignity, life, and the common good in AI governance

The Johannine language of life provides an ethical criterion for AI beyond accuracy and efficiency. The Prologue declares that life in the Word is the light of all people (John 1:4). The Gospel states its purpose so that readers may believe and have life in Jesus' name (John 20:31). Koester's work on Johannine ethics emphasizes that life, truth, love, and following Jesus together shape the Gospel's moral vision[29].

AI governance often speaks of human dignity, rights, safety, and trustworthiness. Johannine theology thickens those terms by connecting dignity to life-giving relation. Human beings are more than users, data subjects, consumers, workers, patients, students, or risk profiles. They are embodied persons whose flourishing depends on recognition, care, freedom from manipulation, and truthful participation in community. AI systems should therefore be evaluated by their effects on the life of persons and communities.

This has practical consequences. In health care, AI tools should support clinical judgment and patient care without turning vulnerable persons into objects of continuous surveillance. In education, AI should support learning while preserving attention, authorship, and intellectual responsibility. In employment, automated screening requires scrutiny for bias, opacity, and loss of human accountability. In public administration, affected persons should be able to understand and contest life-altering decisions. In pastoral and spiritual contexts, AI should never be allowed to simulate care in ways that obscure the need for embodied community.

The common good provides the public horizon for these judgments. Christian moral reasoning can enter plural societies when it articulates goods open to public deliberation such as protection of the vulnerable, truthful institutions, fair processes, accountable power, and social trust. These concerns overlap with secular governance frameworks. UNESCO emphasizes dignity and human rights. OECD stresses trustworthy AI aligned with democratic

---

[29] C. R. Koester, "Rethinking the ethics of John: A review article," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 36/1, 2013, 85–98.

values. NIST frames AI risk in relation to individuals, organizations, and society. Johannine theology contributes by asking whether these goods are being treated as procedural requirements or as conditions of life.

This question is especially important where AI is justified by innovation. Innovation can reduce suffering, expand access, strengthen knowledge, and assist communities in serving one another. It becomes morally disordered when speed, profit, surveillance, or competitive advantage govern development without adequate regard for those harmed. Johannine life is a criterion against technological prestige. The question is not how impressive a system appears. The question is whether its use fosters truthful, loving, and accountable life.

In public terms, the claim can be stated without requiring all citizens to accept Johannine theology. AI systems should be governed by their impact on human flourishing, shared trust, and the capacity of persons to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect them. The theological dimension remains visible, yet the public norm is discussable across traditions.

11. Christian communities as test cases of truthful witness

A Johannine contribution to AI ethics will fail if Christian communities present themselves as guardians of truth while refusing accountability for their own falsehoods. The Gospel and Epistles do not permit such complacency. 1 John 1:8 warns that self-deception is possible inside the community. 1 John 4:1 commands testing. John 13:35 makes love the sign of discipleship. John 17:21 connects unity with witness. These texts make the church a test case for its own claims.

Christian communities can embody truthful witness through concrete practices. They can teach members to verify claims before sharing them, especially claims that arouse anger or confirm prejudice. They can treat correction as a spiritual discipline. They can create pastoral guidance for AI use in sermons, teaching, counseling, administration, and communication. They can disclose AI assistance where it affects authorship or trust. They can refuse dehumanizing language about opponents. They can support those harmed by automated systems. They can participate in public debates about AI governance with humility, expertise, and concern for neighbors beyond their own institutions.

These practices are ways of walking in the light. A church that corrects misinformation publicly performs the truth it confesses. A theological institution that adopts AI transparently bears witness to accountable communication. A pastor who refuses to outsource care to simulated empathy honors the incarnational pattern of the Word made flesh. A Christian organization that protects vulnerable people from exploitative technologies enacts love in truth and action.

Christian rhetoric about AI should therefore avoid both panic and enchantment. AI is a set of socio-technical systems developed and deployed within human institutions marked by creativity, finitude, ambition, fear, generosity, greed, negligence, and care. Johannine theology has resources for this realism. Darkness is real, light shines. Falsehood deceives, witness remains possible. The world resists, the disciples are sent into it.

The public value of Johannine theology lies in disciplined witness. It speaks truthfully about technology without pretending to possess technical expertise it lacks. It learns from empirical research without surrendering moral vocabulary to measurement alone. It brings scriptural imagination into public debate without demanding coercive privilege. It holds Christian communities accountable to the truth they proclaim.

12. Conclusion

The ethical crisis surrounding artificial intelligence and misinformation is often described as a crisis of information. Johannine literature invites a deeper diagnosis. The crisis is a crisis of witness in the form of speech detached from accountability, images detached from provenance, knowledge detached from love, power detached from service, and technology detached from life.

The research question of this study asked how the Johannine theology of truth, witness, love, and life can provide a morally serious and publicly intelligible framework for responding to AI and misinformation. The answer developed here is that Johannine theology offers a coherent moral framework for truthful witness under digital conditions. The Prologue grounds truth in the embodied self-disclosure of the Word. The Gospel's testimony passages show that truth is mediated through accountable witness. The Farewell Discourses describe the Spirit of truth as sustaining memory, discernment, and communal testimony. The footwashing and love command make humble service the visible credibility of truth. The Johannine Epistles require testing, confession, and love in truth and action.

This framework supports transparency, provenance, auditability, and accountability because witness must remain answerable. It supports human dignity because truth is embodied and life-giving. It supports media literacy and intellectual humility because truth requires abiding, testing, and correction. It supports public regulation because power must serve the common good. It challenges Christian communities because truth claims become credible only when accompanied by love, confession, and responsible action.

The argument therefore differs from a generic claim that Christian values may be useful in technological ethics. Johannine theology is structurally necessary because it names the relation among truth, witness, love, and life with unusual depth. It shows why misinformation is morally destructive even when technically clever. It shows why AI systems should be judged by their effects on persons, communities, and shared trust. It shows why truthful witness in a pluralistic digital age requires embodied accountability, neighbor-regard, communal discernment, and practices that foster life.

In the age of synthetic speech and automated persuasion, Pilate's question remains urgent. "What is truth?" is answered in John by the Word made flesh, the witness who testifies, the Spirit who guides, the community that loves, and the life that light makes possible. A public ethic shaped by that vision can help societies navigate AI with greater humility, courage, and responsibility.

Received: Apr. 14, 2026; Revised: May 24, 2026; Accepted: Jun. 29, 2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.23364/JBAS.2026.2.1.59467

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Andrew, Matthew. "What Is Truth? A Johannine Theological Epistemology." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 74, no. 2 (2021): 158-167. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930621000338

Bennema, Cornelis. "Moral Transformation in the Johannine Writings." *In die Skriflig* 51, no. 3 (2017): 1-7. https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v51i3.2120

Bowes, Shauna M., and Lisa K. Fazio. "Intellectual Humility and Misinformation Receptivity: A Meta-Analytic Review." *Advances.in/Psychology* 2, no. 1 (2024). https://doi.org/10.56296/aip00026

Burdett, Michael Stephen. "Proximate and Ultimate Concerns in Christian Ethical Responses to Artificial Intelligence." *Studies in Christian Ethics* 36, no. 3 (2023): 620-641. https://doi.org/10.1177/09539468231180135

Cheong, Pauline Hope, and Liming Liu. "Faithful Innovation: Negotiating Institutional Logics for AI Value Alignment among Christian Churches in America." *Religions* 16, no. 3 (2025): 302. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16030302

Chesney, Bobby, and Danielle Citron. "Deep Fakes: A Looming Challenge for Privacy, Democracy, and National Security." *California Law Review* 107 (2019): 1753. https://scholarship.law.bu.edu/faculty_scholarship/640

European Commission. "AI Act." *Shaping Europe's Digital Future*. Last updated May 11, 2026. Accessed May 24, 2026. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/regulatory-framework-ai

Habermas, Jürgen. "Religion in the Public Sphere." *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 1. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x

Hartog, Paul Anthony. "Johannine Ethics: An Exegetical-Theological Summary and a 'Desiderative' Extension of Mimesis." *Religions* 13, no. 6 (2022): 503. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13060503

Herdt, Jennifer A. “Partisan Epistemology and Post-Truth Power.” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 35, no. 1 (2022): 3-15. https://doi.org/10.1177/09539468211050147

Jedinger, Alexander, and Pascal Siegers. “Religion, Spirituality, and Susceptibility to Conspiracy Theories: Examining the Role of Analytic Thinking and Post-Critical Beliefs.” *Politics and Religion* 17, no. 3 (2024): 389-409. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048324000130

Jobin, Anna, Marcello Ienca, and Effy Vayena. “The Global Landscape of AI Ethics Guidelines.” *Nature Machine Intelligence* 1, no. 9 (2019): 389-399. https://doi.org/10.1038/s42256-019-0088-2

Koester, Craig R. “Rethinking the Ethics of John: A Review Article.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 36, no. 1 (2013): 85-98. https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X13495133

Lazer, David M. J., Matthew A. Baum, Yochai Benkler, Adam J. Berinsky, Kelly M. Greenhill, Filippo Menczer, Miriam J. Metzger et al. “The Science of Fake News.” *Science* 359, no. 6380 (2018): 1094-1096. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aao2998

Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich K. H. Ecker, John Cook, Sander van der Linden, Jon Roozenbeek, and Naomi Oreskes. “Misinformation and the Epistemic Integrity of Democracy.” *Current Opinion in Psychology* 54 (2023): 101711. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2023.101711

National Institute of Standards and Technology. *Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework (AI RMF 1.0)*. NIST AI 100-1. January 2023. https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.AI.100-1

Neufeld, Dietmar. “The Socio-Rhetorical Force of ‘Truth Talk’ and Lies: The Case of 1 John.” *HTS: Theological Studies* 67, no. 1 (2011): 1-10. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v67i1.941

OECD. “OECD AI Principles Overview.” *OECD.AI*. Accessed May 24, 2026. https://oecd.ai/en/ai-principles

Pennycook, Gordon, and David G. Rand. "Accuracy Prompts Are a Replicable and Generalizable Approach for Reducing the Spread of Misinformation." *Nature Communications* 13, no. 1 (2022): 2333. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-022-30073-5

Rawls, John. "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited." *The University of Chicago Law Review* 64, no. 3 (1997): 765-807. https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclrev/vol64/iss3/1/

Scherz, Paul, and Luis Vera. "AI and the Subjective Crisis of Knowledge." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 53, no. 2 (2025): 193-216. https://ethics.nd.edu/news-and-events/publications/paul-scherz-and-luis-vera-journal-of-religious-ethics-june-2025-ai-and-the-subjective-crisis-of-knowledge/

Scherz, Paul. "Data Ethics, AI, and Accompaniment: The Dangers of Depersonalization in Catholic Health Care." *Theological Studies* 83, no. 2 (2022): 271-292. https://doi.org/10.1177/00405639221096770

UNESCO. *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*. Paris: UNESCO, 2022. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381137

Vaccari, Cristian, and Andrew Chadwick. "Deepfakes and Disinformation: Exploring the Impact of Synthetic Political Video on Deception, Uncertainty, and Trust in News." *Social Media + Society* 6, no. 1 (2020): 2056305120903408. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120903408