

## Thomas Cajetan

### Commentary on Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 2–2 q. 113

[I.] In question 113, nothing specific about irony alone occurs to be said: but rather, it is to be asked universally about the opposites of the virtue of truth, whether opposite vices are sufficiently assigned to the virtue of truth. For it seems not. Both because. . . .

And because it belongs to the truthful to make true what they say by keeping promises, as is found in *ST* 2–2.80 ad 3. But to the observation of promises neither mendacity, nor simulation, nor boastfulness, nor irony is opposed, but rather perfidy. Of which there is no mention in the text. Therefore, it seems that it is insufficiently determined here concerning the opposite of truth, and concerning truth itself with respect to the act of faith. . . .

II. To the first of these is said. . . .

III. But to the second, satisfaction is not obviously easy. Indeed, it is necessary to discuss many [things] here. *First*, whether faith coincides with truth. And if not, how is it that faith [in this sense: fidelity to promises] is omitted [from the list of virtues]? [But] if so, why is it not determined concerning the act of faith and its opposite? — *Second*, whether faith has a proper matter, and [if so] what. — *Third*, whether [faith] is with respect to all. — *Fourth*, whether it has obligatory force, and how much one who breaks faith sins.

And *of the first* the reason for doubt is that truth consists in conformity of external signs to what is inside us. But faith consists in the conformity of deeds to what is said. But these are diverse species of conformity. Therefore faith is not the same truth. — And this is confirmed from the opposites: because, that is, mendacity is directly opposed to truth, but infidelity is directly opposed to faith.

But in opposition is the authority of the text above in q. 80 [ad 3]. . . .

But *of the second*, the reason for doubt is that faith is “that by which was has been said is done” (*qua fiunt dicta*).<sup>[1]</sup> But all [things] can be said. Therefore all [things] can be the matter of faith. — Moreover, whatever can be promised can be the matter of faith. But all that possibly is done by anyone can be promised. Therefore there is not some certain genus of those [things] which are the matter of faith.

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<sup>1</sup>[Below Cajetan attributes this to Cicero, but it isn’t an exact quote. In book 4 of his *Republic*, Cicero says “For faith [*fides*] seems to me to have its very name since [by faith] what is said is done [*fit quod dicitur*].”]

But in opposition is that a special virtue has a special matter. Therefore, [etc.].

*Of the fourth*, finally, the reason for doubt is that to keep faith belongs to the precept of natural justice. But what is of this kind obliges out of necessity [*ex necessitate*]. And, according to this, if one does not do it, one incurs mortal sin. — Furthermore, infidelity removes the companionship [*convictus*] of human society, because, unless they keep faith with one another, human beings could not live together [*convivere*]. Therefore it is contrary to charity, by which a human being, a social animal, ought to live together with others, and, by this, is opposed to charity as to love of one’s neighbor. Therefore it is of its own nature [*ex suo genere*] a mortal sin.

In opposition is that a simple promise does not oblige out of necessity, but only from probity [*de honestate*]. Therefore infidelity of this kind is not a mortal, but a venial sin.

IV. For the proof of these, it is to be known that faith, “by which what has been said comes to be” (*qua fiunt dicta*), about which we are speaking, is taken in three ways: first, as one fulfills promises out of legal, that is, civil, duty [*debitum*], according to Tully’s [i.e., Cicero’s] definition in *De officiis* 1.7: “Faith is truth in what is said and in conventions”; second, as one fulfills promises out of moral duty; third, as one fulfills promises out of duty, not determining of what kind this duty is, whether moral or civil. And if faith is taken in the first way, it is not a special virtue, but rather coincides with diverse virtues: for, in keeping a promise, one who renders what is due [*debitum*] to a creditor exercises an act of justice; [while] one who fulfills an oath completes a work of religion. Similarly, if it is taken in the third way, it is not the name of a single special virtue, but rather is a name in common to all faith by which what has been said is done. If, however, it is taken in the second way, it is the name of a special moral virtue: for it signifies that virtue by which a human being is well related to another in that they do as they have said, in those things to which they are not bound out of a legal, but only out of a moral, duty. For this act is morally a human good, having a special praise, from this itself, that one does what one has said, the matter and circumstances remaining the same, and is [a good] towards another; nor does it proceed from civil duty (whence they cannot be forced by a judge if they do not do what they have said), but from moral duty, without which probity of character [*moris honestas*] is not preserved; for, violating faith, probity of character does not remain, as is obvious. And therefore it requires

a special virtue, an adjunct of justice.

But it seems that this virtue is the same as the virtue of truth, for the reason that it seems to be by the same character that a human being speaks the truth, and by which they make true what they have said. For truth is to say what is true, while faith is to make true what has been said. Whence Tully defines faith by truth, saying that it is “truth of statements [and conventions].” The sign of which is that we call “truthful” those who fulfill what they say. Therefore the virtue of truth is called faith, insofar as it is the principle of making true what has been said. And according to this it is said that faith reduces to truth. — But its proper act as such is not truly signifying, for this is the proper act of truth: rather, it is making true what has been said.

Whence it is plain that its proper matter is the matter of promises, thus that whatever cannot be the matter of promises, is far away from the matter of faith. By which it happens that whatever is either an evil or impeditive of a greater good cannot fall under faith. According to what is said in [the *Decretum* of Gratian], causa 22, q. 4, c. 5 [quoting Isidore of Seville]: “Break faith in bad promises.” And, if we consider diligently, faith requires the same accompaniments as does an oath of promise: namely justice, judgment, and truth. For it is necessary that what it to be done by keeping faith be just, that is, not evil; that it be prudent [*discretum*], that is, reasonable (and thence are excluded indifferent and stupid [things]); but faith itself consists in making it true. . . .

V. These [things] having been seen, we shall speak one by one to the questions raised. And to the first, indeed, is said, that faith coincides in the same species and number with truth, and differs from it in *ratio* alone, because truth is said insofar as signs conform to what is signified by them, but faith insofar as deeds [*facta*] conform to what has been said. But it has not been wholly omitted by the author [Thomas]. Because he did determine about promises above [q. 88], and in q. 110, a. 3 ad 5, he declared that someone can be excused for infidelity in two ways, as is plain there. . . .

VI. But to the second question it is said, that faith has a proper matter, to wit, a good work not otherwise owed [*debitum*], possible to be done by the promisor. For no one promises [anything] but that which they have in their power: nor is a promise valid unless it is of some good. And because affirmation and negation are of one genus, by the appellation of “good work”

you are to understand also “or good omission,” so that, if someone promises not to go hunting on such a day [this *not* being a “good omission”?], let it not impede his hunting. And if such a good is otherwise owed [*debitum*] from this one to their neighbor, then it is no longer owed out of faith alone. . . .

VIII. To the fourth doubt, finally, it is said, that to violate faith is without doubt a sin. For a human being is obliged, in the forum of conscience, by any promise whatsoever, to make true what has been said: for natural reason thus dictates, as the opposite [of such faith] manifestly harms the tranquility of human society. But it must be discerned when it is a venial sin, when mortal. That alone is mortal which is contrary to charity. But just as, in the text [q. 110, a. 4], mendacity has been distinguished, so to is it to be distinguished of infidelity. For some is pernicious, some not: and pernicious [infidelity] is indeed a mortal sin, but the rest do not go beyond [*non transcendunt*] venial sins. But it is pernicious if it is contrary the love of God or of one’s neighbor: as if someone promises to help someone first thing in the morning, when the battle begins, and does not keep [the promise], and similarly if someone promises to keep some secret such that it matters greatly if it is revealed; [or] if a physician promises to help someone dangerously ill, who, the hope [of medical aid] being frustrated, is notably injured. And, universally, one must regard the condition of the thing promised, whether it is useful or necessary to one’s neighbor, such that its opposite is harmful to one’s neighbor, because then it is contrary to charity towards them. For out of the *ratio* of a violated promise alone the *ratio* of sin may be derived [*liceat . . . habeatur*], because it is contrary to the rectitude of natural reason; the *ratio* of mortal sin, however, will not be derived, unless it descends to something contrary to the charity towards God or toward one’s neighbor. For to violate a promise imports nothing other than to deceive; but to deceive one’s neighbor is not of its own nature [*ex genere suo*] mortal, as is clear of one who lies, who lies for this, so as to deceive, and [yet] it is established that they do not sin mortally unless thanks to a pernicious matter.

But there are, according to Tully,<sup>[2]</sup> two cases in which, without any sin at all, [an obligation of] faith rightly assumed is not kept. The first is when to keep faith has become injurious [*inutile*] to the one to whom it is to be kept, as when someone has promised someone a sword, who in the meantime becomes mad, then is faith not to be kept to them. The second

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<sup>2</sup>[*De officiis* 1.10, 3.25]

is when keeping faith has become more harmful to me than the observance of it would be useful to you, as, if someone had promised that they will be advocate [in court] in [someone's] cause tomorrow, and an illness befalls his own son, requiring paternal care, he is not then held to keep faith. But the author [Thomas], following Seneca, posits one universal case, in q. 110 [a. 3 ad 5], namely change, when he says that all things must remain the same if pacts are to be kept. Therefore one must consider supervening impediments and compare [*conferre*] them with the thing promised, and, the comparison [*collatio*] having been made, conditions of places, persons, times, and affairs [*negotiorum*] having been weighed, execute that which right reason advises.

To the first objection on the opposite side, therefore, it is said that not everything that is against the law of nature is a mortal sin, as is clear from mendacity, which is “of itself wrong [*pravum = φαῦλον*],” as is said in *EN* book 4 [4.7.1127<sup>a</sup>28–9]. More is required for mortal sin: namely that it be contrary to love of God or one's neighbor. Whence, from this [alone], that the law of nature is violated, nothing else results [*habetur*] than that the violation of faith is a sin.

But to the second objection it is said, that faith as it extends itself to civil duty [*debitum*], indeed obliges mortally, because its opposite would remove both law and social life. But faith included within the limits of moral duty must be considered with respect to subject matter, and it may be said, distinguishing, as it concerns those perfidies which would turn against God or one's neighbor, it obliges mortally, because such perfidy removes the good of divine and human society; as, however, concerns those perfidies which do little or no harm to anyone, it does not oblige mortally. Nor do such perfidies remove the good of the companionship of human society, although they do impede its tranquility somewhat: for it is rather other than such good than against it.

And let these things that have been said about the whole treatment of the virtue of truth and its opposite be sufficient.