

QUESTION 101

Piety

Next, after religion, we have to consider piety (*pietas*). The vices opposed to it will become known in our consideration of piety itself. As regards piety, there are four questions: (1) To whom does piety extend? (2) What is supplied through piety to certain individuals? (3) Is piety a specific virtue? (4) Should the duty of piety be set aside for the sake of religion?

Article 1

Does piety extend to determinate human persons?

It seems that piety does not extend to determinate human persons (*pietas non extendat ad determinatas personas aliquorum hominum*):

Objection 1: In *De Civitate Dei* 10 Augustine says, “Piety, which the Greeks call *eusebia*, is usually understood, properly speaking, as the worship or veneration of God (*Dei cultus*).” But it is called the worship or veneration of God not by a relation to men, but only to God. Therefore, piety does not determinately extend to any human persons.

Objection 2: In *Moralia* 1 Gregory says, “In her day piety gives a banquet, because she fills the depths of the heart with works of mercy.” But as is clear from Augustine in *De Doctrina Christiana* 1, the works of mercy are rendered to everyone. Therefore, piety does not extend determinately to any specific persons.

Objection 3: As is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 8, in human affairs there are many other social groups besides blood relatives and fellow citizens (*multae sunt aliae communicationes praeter consanguinitatem et concivium communicationem*), and on each of them is founded some form of friendship, which seems to be the virtue of piety, as is explained by Gloss 2 on 2 Timothy 3:5 (“... having the appearance of piety”). Therefore, it is not the case that piety extends only to blood relatives and fellow citizens.

But contrary to this: In *Rhetorica* Tully says, “Piety is that by which duty (*officium*) and diligent veneration (*diligens cultus*) are rendered to those joined to us by blood and to those who love our country.”

I respond: A man becomes a debtor to others in diverse ways in accord with the diverse types of their excellence and the diverse benefits that he receives from them. In both these regards, God occupies the highest place, since He is the most excellent of all and the first principle of both our being and our governance. But in second place, the principles of our being and governance are our parents and our country (*parentes et patria*), by whom and in which we are born and governed. And so, after God, a man is especially indebted to his parents and to his country. Hence, just as [the virtue of] religion involves venerating God (*cultum Deo exhibere*), so, at the second level, [the virtue of] piety involves venerating one’s parents and country. Now the veneration of one’s parents includes venerating all of one’s blood relatives, since, as is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 8, they are called blood relatives (*consanguinei*) from the fact that they proceed from the same parents. On the other hand, the veneration of one’s country includes the veneration of one’s fellow citizens and of all the friends of one’s country. And so piety extends mainly to these people.

Reply to objection 1: What is lesser is included in what is greater. And so the veneration that is owed to God includes within itself, as something particular, the veneration that is owed to one’s parents. Hence, Malachai 1:6 says, “If I am your father, where is my honor?” And so the name ‘piety’ refers also to the worship and veneration of God (*ad cultum Dei*).

Reply to objection 2: As Augustine says in *De Civitate Dei* 10, “By common custom the name ‘piety’ is also frequently used in the case of the works of mercy. I believe that this happened because God commands mainly that these works be done, and He gives us to understand that they please Him in the

place of sacrifices. Because of this custom it has come to be the case that even God Himself is called pious.”

Reply to objection 3: The social groups consisting of blood relatives and of fellow citizens have more to do with the principles of our being than do other social groups. And so it is to them that the name ‘piety’ extends in a greater degree.

Article 2

Does piety provide sustenance for parents?

It seems that piety does not provide sustenance for parents:

Objection 1: The commandment of the Decalogue, *Honor your father and your mother*, seems to pertain to piety. But nothing is commanded there other than showing honor. Therefore, providing sustenance for one’s parents does not pertain to piety.

Objection 2: A man ought to save up for those whom he is obligated to provide sustenance for. But according to the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 12:14, “Children ought not to save up for their parents.” Therefore they are not obligated by piety to provide sustenance for them.

Objection 3: As has been explained (a. 1), piety extends not only to one’s parents but also to other blood relatives and fellow citizens. But one is not obligated to provide sustenance for all blood relatives and fellow citizens. Therefore, neither is he obligated to provide sustenance for his parents.

But contrary to this: In Matthew 15:3ff. our Lord criticized the Pharisees for making it difficult for children to provide sustenance for their parents.

I respond: There are two ways in which something is owed to parents: (a) in its own right (*per se*) and (b) incidentally (*per accidens*).

What is owed to them in its own right is what is fitting for a father insofar as he is a father. Since a father is, as it were, a higher existing principle, reverence and service are owed to him by his child.

On the other hand, what is owed to a father incidentally is that which is fitting for him to receive, depending on what has happened to him. For instance, if he is sick, then he should be visited and his cure tended to; and if he is impoverished, then he should be provided with sustenance; and so on for other things of this sort, all of which are contained under the debt of service. This is why Tully says that piety supplies both duty (*officium*) and veneration (*cultus*), so that ‘duty’ refers to service (*obsequium*), whereas ‘veneration’ refers to reverence or honor (*ad reverentiam sive honorem*). For as Augustine says in *De Civitate Dei* 10, “We are said to venerate men whom we frequent by honoring them or by remembering them or by our presence.”

Reply to objection 1: As our Lord interprets it in Matthew 15, what is understood in honoring one’s parents is all the assistance that ought to be supplied to one’s parents. And this is because assistance is given to one’s father as something that is owed to one who is greater.

Reply to objection 2: Since a father has the character of a *principle* whereas a child has the character of one who is *from the principle*, it is *per se* appropriate for a father to support his child; and because of this, he ought to assist him not only for the hour, but for his whole life, i.e., to save up for him. By contrast, the fact that the child supports the father is incidental, by reason of some necessity of the moment in which the child is obligated to support him, but not to have saved up for him over a long period of time, as it were. For parents are not naturally successors of their children, whereas the children are the successors of their parents.

Reply to objection 3: As Tully says, veneration (*cultus*) and duty (*officium*) are owed “to those joined to us by blood and to those who love our country,” and yet not to all of them equally, but mainly to one’s parents, and then to others in accord with our ability and the appropriateness for the persons.

Article 3

Is piety a specific virtue distinct from other virtues?

It seems that piety is not a specific virtue distinct from other virtues:

Objection 1: Giving service and veneration to someone stems from love (*ex amore*). But service and veneration pertain to piety. Therefore, piety is not a virtue distinct from charity (*distincta a caritate*).

Objection 2: Giving worship or veneration (*cultum exhibere*) to God is proper to religion. But as Augustine explains in *De Civitate Dei* 10, piety likewise gives worship or veneration to God. Therefore, [the virtue of] piety is not distinct from [the virtue of] religion.

Objection 3: The piety that gives veneration and duty to one's country seems to be the same as legal justice, which has to do with the common good. But as is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 5, legal justice is a general virtue. Therefore, piety is not a specific virtue.

But contrary to this: Piety is posited by Tully as a part of justice.

I respond: A virtue is a *specific* virtue by the fact that it looks to an object in accord with some *specific character*. Now since the character of justice involves what is due to another, where there is a specific type of indebtedness to a given person, there is a special virtue. But one is indebted in a specific way to an individual by virtue of that individual's being a connatural principle that gives being to and governs one. But it is this principle that piety looks to insofar as it weighs out duty and veneration to parents and country and to those who are ordered toward them. And so piety is a specific virtue.

Reply to objection 1: Just as religion is a certain sort of profession of faith, hope, and charity by which a man is fundamentally ordered toward God, so, too, piety is a certain sort of profession of charity that someone has with respect to his parents and his country.

Reply to objection 2: God is a principle of being and governance in a far more excellent way than a father or a country is, and so religion, which gives worship and veneration (*cultus*) to God, is a virtue different from piety, which gives veneration to parents and country. But as Dionysius explains in *De Divinis Nominibus*, what belongs to creatures is transferred to God by means of a certain super-excellence and causality. Hence, it is through excellence that piety is called veneration for God, just as God in His excellence is called our Father.

Reply to objection 3: Piety extends to our country insofar as it is a certain sort of principle of being for us, whereas legal justice looks to the good of our country insofar as it is the common good. And so legal justice has more of what it takes to be a general virtue (*magis habet quod sit virtus generalis*) than piety does.

Article 4

Does religion provide an occasion for the duties of piety toward one's parents to be set aside?

It seems that religion provides an occasion for the duties of piety toward one's parents to be set aside (*videtur quod occasione religionis sint praetermittenda pietatis officia in parentes*):

Objection 1: In Luke 14:26 our Lord says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and brothers and children and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." Again, Matthew 4:22 says, in praise of James and John, "Leaving behind their nets and their father, they followed Christ." And Deuteronomy 33:9 says, in praise of the Levites, "Whoever has said to his father and his mother, 'I do not know you', and to his brother, 'I know you not', and does not know his own children—these are the ones who have kept Your word." But in order not to know one's parents

and other blood relatives, or even in order to hate them, it is necessary for the duties of piety to be set aside. Therefore, the duties of piety are to be set aside for the sake of religion.

Objection 2: In Matthew 8:21-22 and Luke 9:59-60 it is reported that to someone who says to our Lord, “Let me first go and bury my father,” He replies, “Let the dead bury their dead. You, however, go and announce the kingdom of God”—which pertains to religion. But burying one’s father involves a duty of piety. Therefore, a duty of piety is to be set aside for the sake of religion.

Objection 3: God is called our Father *par excellence* (*per excellentiam*). But just as we venerate our parents through the service that belongs to piety, so we venerate God through [the virtue of] religion. Therefore, the service that belongs to piety is to be set aside for the sake of the veneration that belongs to religion.

Objection 4: Those in religious life are obligated by a vow, which cannot be transgressed, to fulfill the observances of their religious life. In accord with these observances, they are prevented from assisting their parents, both (a) because of poverty, since they lack the means, and also (b) because of disobedience, since without the permission of their prelates it is not licit for them to leave the cloister. Therefore, for the sake of religion the duties of piety toward their parents are set aside.

But contrary to this: In Matthew 15:3ff. our Lord criticizes the Pharisees, who taught that for the sake of religion one should withdraw the honor owed to his parents.

I respond: Religion and piety are two virtues. But no virtue is contrary to or incompatible with any other virtue, since, according to the Philosopher in the *Categories*, a good is not contrary to a good. Hence, it cannot be the case that piety and religion mutually impede one another in such a way that the act of one of them is excluded because of the other. For as is clear from what was said above (*ST* 1-2, q. 18, a. 3), the act of each virtue is limited by its appropriate circumstances, which are such that if they are absent, the act is no longer an act of virtue, but is instead an act of vice. Hence, piety involves giving duty and veneration to parents *in the right manner* (*secundum debitum modum*).

Now it is not the right manner that a man should intend to venerate his father more than to venerate God; rather, as Ambrose says in *Super Lucam*, “The piety of divine religion takes precedence over the needs of one’s family.” Therefore, if venerating our parents were to draw us away from venerating God, then it would not be an act of piety to insist on venerating one’s parents in opposition to God (*iam non esset pietatis parentum insistere cultum contra Deum*). Hence, in *Epistola ad Heiodorum* Jerome says, “Trample upon your father, trample upon your mother, fly forth to the standard of the cross. It is the highest kind of piety to have been cruel in this matter.” And so in such a case the duties to one’s parents are dismissed because of the divine veneration of religion.

On the other hand, if, in supplying due service to our parents, we are not drawn away from the veneration of God, then this service will once again belong to piety. And in that case it will not be necessary to desert piety for the sake of religion.

Reply to objection 1: In commenting on these words of our Lord, Gregory says, “We have to ignore parents whom we suffer as adversaries on the path of God, by hating them and fleeing from them.” For if our parents incite us to sin and draw us away from venerating God, then, as regards this matter, we have to run away from them and hate them.

And it is this way that the Levites are said to not to have known their blood relatives, since, in accord with the Lord’s command, they did not spare the idolaters, as we read in Exodus 32:26ff.

Again, James and John are praised for following the Lord after leaving their parent, not because their father was inducing them toward something bad, but because they judged that he could lead his life in a different way when they were following Christ.

Reply to objection 2: The reason why our Lord forbade his disciple to bury his father was, as Chrysostom says, that “by doing this our Lord was snatching him away from many bad things, e.g., the sadness and grief and other such things that one would expect from this point on. For after the burial, the father’s will would have to be scrutinized, the inheritance divided, and other such things. And He did it

mainly because there were others who could carry out the burial after the funeral.”

An alternative reply is that, as Cyril comments in *Super Lucam*, “This disciple was not asking to bury a father who was already dead; instead, he was asking to provide sustenance for a father who was still living in his old age, up to the time when he would bury him. Our Lord did not make this concession because there were others, bound by the line of kinship, who could take care of him.”

Reply to objection 3: We direct toward God whatever we do out of piety for our parents of the flesh, just as the other works of mercy that we do for any of our neighbors are seen as being offered to God—this according to Matthew 25:40 (“What you have done to one of these least of mine, you have done to me”). And so if our service is necessary, in the sense that without it our parents cannot be sustained, and if they do not induce us to do anything in opposition to God, then we should not abandon them for the sake of religion.

However, if we cannot without sin devote ourselves to serving them, or if they can be sustained without our service, then it is permissible to set aside our service to them in order to devote ourselves more fully to religion.

Reply to objection 4: One thing should be said about someone who is still established in the world, and something else should be said about someone who is already professed in the religious life.

For if the one who is still established in the world has parents who cannot be sustained without him, then he should not leave them behind and enter the religious state, since the precept concerning the honoring of one’s parents would be transgressed.

This is so, even though there are those who claim that even in a case like this he can licitly abandon his parents, committing their care to God. However, if we consider the matter correctly, this would be to tempt God, since, already knowing by human counsel what he should do, he would be exposing his parents to danger under the hope of divine assistance. On the other hand, if his parents could live their lives without him, it would be licit for him to leave them and to enter the religious state. For, as has been explained (a. 2), children are not obligated to sustain their parents except in a case of necessity.

By contrast, one who is already professed in the religious state is now thought of as dead to the world. Hence, he should not, in order to sustain his parents, leave the cloister, in which he is buried with Christ, and once again involve himself in worldly affairs. Still, while preserving his obedience to his prelate and to the state of his religious life, he is obligated to exercise pious attentiveness to the question of how his parents are being assisted.