

## St. Thomas Aquinas

# The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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### OF PIETY (FOUR ARTICLES)

After religion we must consider piety, the consideration of which will render the opposite vices manifest. Accordingly four points of inquiry arise with regard to piety:

(1) To whom does piety extend?

(2) What does piety make one offer a person?

(3) Whether piety is a special virtue?

(4) Whether the duties of piety should be omitted for the sake of religion?

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### Whether piety extends to particular human individuals?

**Objection 1:** It seems that piety does not extend to particular human individuals. For Augustine says (De Civ. Dei x) that piety denotes, properly speaking, the worship of God, which the Greeks designate by the term {eusebeia}. But the worship of God does not denote relation to man, but only to God. Therefore piety does not extend definitely to certain human individuals.

**Objection 2:** Further, Gregory says (Moral. i): "Piety, on her day, provides a banquet, because she fills the inmost recesses of the heart with works of mercy." Now the works of mercy are to be done to all, according to Augustine (De Doctr. Christ. i). Therefore piety does not extend definitely to certain special persons.

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[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS101.html](#) of kindred and citizenship, as the Philosopher states (Ethic. viii, 11,12), and on each of them is founded a kind of friendship, which would seem to be the virtue of piety, according to a gloss on 2 Tim. 3:5, "Having an appearance indeed of piety [Douay: 'godliness']." Therefore piety extends not only to one's kindred and fellow-citizens.

**On the contrary**, Tully says (De Invent. Rhet. ii) that "it is by piety that we do our duty towards our kindred and well-wishers of our country and render them faithful service."

**I answer that**, Man becomes a debtor to other men in various ways, according to their various excellence and the various benefits received from them. on both counts God holds first place, for He is supremely excellent, and is for us the first principle of being and government. In the second place, the principles of our being and government are our parents and our country, that have given us birth and nourishment. Consequently man is debtor chiefly to his parents and his country, after God. Wherefore just as it belongs to religion to give worship to God, so does it belong to piety, in the second place, to give worship to one's parents and one's country.

The worship due to our parents includes the worship given to all our kindred, since our kinsfolk are those who descend from the same parents, according to the Philosopher (Ethic. viii, 12). The worship given to our country includes homage to all our fellow-citizens and to all the friends of our country. Therefore piety extends chiefly to these.

**Reply to Objection 1:** The greater includes the lesser: wherefore the worship due to God includes the worship due to our parents as a particular. Hence it is written (Malach. 1:6): "If I be a father, where is My honor?" Consequently the term piety extends also to the divine worship.

**Reply to Objection 2:** As Augustine says (De Civ. Dei x), "the term piety is often used in connection with works of mercy, in the language of the common people; the reason for which I consider to be the fact that God Himself has declared that these works are more pleasing to Him than sacrifices. This custom has led to the application of the word 'pious' to God Himself."

**Reply to Objection 3:** The relations of a man with his kindred and fellow-citizens are more referable to the principles of his being than other relations: wherefore the term piety is more applicable to them.

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## Whether piety provides support for our parents?

**Objection 1:** It seems that piety does not provide support for our parents. For, seemingly, the precept of the decalogue, "Honor thy father and mother," belongs to piety. But this prescribes only the giving of honor. Therefore it does not belong to piety to provide support for one's parents.

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according to the Apostle ([2 Cor. 12:14](#)), "neither ought the children to lay up for the parents."  
Therefore piety does not oblige them to support their parents.

**Objection 3:** Further, piety extends not only to one's parents, but also to other kinsmen and to one's fellow-citizens, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)). But one is not bound to support all one's kindred and fellow-citizens. Therefore neither is one bound to support one's parents.

**On the contrary,** our Lord ([Mt. 15:3-6](#)) reproved the Pharisees for hindering children from supporting their parents.

**I answer that,** We owe something to our parents in two ways: that is to say, both essentially, and accidentally. We owe them essentially that which is due to a father as such: and since he is his son's superior through being the principle of his being, the latter owes him reverence and service. Accidentally, that is due to a father, which it befits him to receive in respect of something accidental to him, for instance, if he be ill, it is fitting that his children should visit him and see to his cure; if he be poor, it is fitting that they should support him; and so on in like instance, all of which come under the head of service due. Hence Tully says (*De Invent. Rhet. ii*) that "piety gives both duty and homage": "duty" referring to service, and "homage" to reverence or honor, because, as Augustine says (*De Civ. Dei x*), "we are said to give homage to those whose memory or presence we honor."

**Reply to Objection 1:** According to our Lord's interpretation ([Mt. 15:3-6](#)) the honor due to our parents includes whatever support we owe them; and the reason for this is that support is given to one's father because it is due to him as to one greater.

**Reply to Objection 2:** Since a father stands in the relation of principle, and his son in the relation of that which is from a principle, it is essentially fitting for a father to support his son: and consequently he is bound to support him not only for a time, but for all his life, and this is to lay by. On the other hand, for the son to bestow something on his father is accidental, arising from some momentary necessity, wherein he is bound to support him, but not to lay by as for a long time beforehand, because naturally parents are not the successors of their children, but children of their parents.

**Reply to Objection 3:** As Tully says (*De Invent. Rhet. ii*), "we offer homage and duty to all our kindred and to the well-wishers of our country"; not, however, equally to all, but chiefly to our parents, and to others according to our means and their personal claims.

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## Whether piety is a special virtue distinct from other virtues?

**Objection 1:** It seems that piety is not a special virtue distinct from other virtues. For the giving of service and homage to anyone proceeds from love. But it belongs to piety. Therefore

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**Objection 2:** Further, it is proper to religion to give worship to God. But piety also gives worship to God, according to Augustine (De Civ. Dei x). Therefore piety is not distinct from religion.

**Objection 3:** Further, piety, whereby we give our country worship and duty, seems to be the same as legal justice, which looks to the common good. But legal justice is a general virtue, according to the Philosopher (Ethic. v, 1,2). Therefore piety is not a special virtue.

**On the contrary,** It is accounted by Tully (De Invent. Rhet. ii) as a part of justice.

**I answer that,** A special virtue is one that regards an object under a special aspect. Since, then, the nature of justice consists in rendering another person his due, wherever there is a special aspect of something due to a person, there is a special virtue. Now a thing is indebted in a special way to that which is its connatural principle of being and government. And piety regards this principle, inasmuch as it pays duty and homage to our parents and country, and to those who are related thereto. Therefore piety is a special virtue.

**Reply to Objection 1:** Just as religion is a protestation of faith, hope and charity, whereby man is primarily directed to God, so again piety is a protestation of the charity we bear towards our parents and country.

**Reply to Objection 2:** God is the principle of our being and government in a far more excellent manner than one's father or country. Hence religion, which gives worship to God, is a distinct virtue from piety, which pays homage to our parents and country. But things relating to creatures are transferred to God as the summit of excellence and causality, as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. i): wherefore, by way of excellence, piety designates the worship of God, even as God, by way of excellence, is called "Our Father."

**Reply to Objection 3:** Piety extends to our country in so far as the latter is for us a principle of being: but legal justice regards the good of our country, considered as the common good: wherefore legal justice has more of the character of a general virtue than piety has.

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## Whether the duties of piety towards one's parents should be omitted for the sake of religion?

**Objection 1:** It seems that the duties of piety towards one's parents should be omitted for the sake of religion. For Our Lord said ([Lk. 14:26](#)): "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." Hence it is said in praise of James and John ([Mt. 4:22](#)) that they left "their nets and father, and followed" Christ. Again it is said in praise of the Levites ([Dt. 33:9](#)): "Who hath said to his father, and to his mother: I do not know you; and to his brethren: I know

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who knows not his parents and other kinsmen, or who even hates them, must needs omit the  
duties of piety. Therefore the duties of piety should be omitted for the sake of religion.

**Objection 2:** Further, it is written ([Lk. 9:59,60](#)) that in answer to him who said: "Suffer me first to go and bury my father," Our Lord replied: "Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou, and preach the kingdom of God." Now the latter pertains to religion, while it is a duty of piety to bury one's father. Therefore a duty of piety should be omitted for the sake of religion.

**Objection 3:** Further, God is called "Our Father" by excellence. Now just as we worship our parents by paying them the duties of piety so do we worship God by religion. Therefore the duties of piety should be omitted for the sake of the worship of religion.

**Objection 4:** Further, religious are bound by a vow which they may not break to fulfil the observances of religion. Now in accordance with those observances they are hindered from supporting their parents, both on the score of poverty, since they have nothing of their own, and on the score of obedience, since they may not leave the cloister without the permission of their superior. Therefore the duties of piety towards one's parents should be omitted for the sake of religion.

**On the contrary,** Our Lord reproved the Pharisees ([Mt. 15:3-6](#)) who taught that for the sake of religion one ought to refrain from paying one's parents the honor we owe them.

**I answer that,** Religion and piety are two virtues. Now no virtue is opposed to another virtue, since according to the Philosopher, in his book on the Categories (Cap. De oppos.), "good is not opposed to good." Therefore it is impossible that religion and piety mutually hinder one another, so that the act of one be excluded by the act of the other. Now, as stated above ([FS, Question \[7\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#); [FS, Question \[18\]](#), [Article \[3\]](#)), the act of every virtue is limited by the circumstances due thereto, and if it overstep them it will be an act no longer of virtue but of vice. Hence it belongs to piety to pay duty and homage to one's parents according to the due mode. But it is not the due mode that man should tend to worship his father rather than God, but, as Ambrose says on Lk. 12:52, "the piety of divine religion takes precedence of the claims of kindred."

Accordingly, if the worship of one's parents take one away from the worship of God it would no longer be an act of piety to pay worship to one's parents to the prejudice of God. Hence Jerome says (Ep. ad Heliod.): "Though thou trample upon thy father, though thou spurn thy mother, turn not aside, but with dry eyes hasten to the standard of the cross; it is the highest degree of piety to be cruel in this matter." Therefore in such a case the duties of piety towards one's parents should be omitted for the sake of the worship religion gives to God. If, however, by paying the services due to our parents, we are not withdrawn from the service of God, then will it be an act of piety, and there will be no need to set piety aside for the sake of religion.

**Reply to Objection 1:** Gregory expounding this saying of our Lord says (Hom. xxxvii in Ev.) that "when we find our parents to be a hindrance in our way to God, we must ignore them by hating and fleeing from them." For if our parents incite us to sin, and withdraw us from the service of God, we must, as regards this point, abandon and hate them. It is in this sense that the Levites are said to have not known their kindred, because they obeyed the Lord's command, and spared not the idolaters ([Ex. 32](#)). James and John are praised for leaving their parents and following our Lord, not that their father incited them to evil, but because they deemed it possible for him to find another means of livelihood, if they followed Christ.

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Chrysostom (Hom. xxviii in Matth.), "Our Lord by so doing saved him from many evils, such as the sorrows and worries and other things that one anticipates under these circumstances. For after the burial the will had to be read, the estate had to be divided, and so forth: but chiefly, because there were others who could see to the funeral." Or, according to Cyril's commentary on Lk. 9, "this disciple's request was, not that he might bury a dead father, but that he might support a yet living father in the latter's old age, until at length he should bury him. This is what Our Lord did not grant, because there were others, bound by the duties of kindred, to take care of him."

**Reply to Objection 3:** Whatever we give our parents out of piety is referred by us to God; just as other works of mercy which we perform with regard to any of our neighbors are offered to God, according to Mt. 25:40: "As long as you did it to one of... My least... you did it to Me." Accordingly, if our carnal parents stand in need of our assistance, so that they have no other means of support, provided they incite us to nothing against God, we must not abandon them for the sake of religion. But if we cannot devote ourselves to their service without sin, or if they can be supported without our assistance, it is lawful to forego their service, so as to give more time to religion.

**Reply to Objection 4:** We must speak differently of one who is yet in the world, and of one who has made his profession in religion. For he that is in the world, if he has parents unable to find support without him, he must not leave them and enter religion, because he would be breaking the commandment prescribing the honoring of parents. Some say, however, that even then he might abandon them, and leave them in God's care. But this, considered aright, would be to tempt God: since, while having human means at hand, he would be exposing his parents to danger, in the hope of God's assistance. On the other hand, if the parents can find means of livelihood without him, it is lawful for him to abandon them and enter religion, because children are not bound to support their parents except in cases of necessity, as stated above. He that has already made his profession in religion is deemed to be already dead to the world: wherefore he ought not, under pretext of supporting his parents, to leave the cloister where he is buried with Christ, and busy himself once more with worldly affairs. Nevertheless he is bound, saving his obedience to his superiors, and his religious state withal, to make points efforts for his parents' support.