

**DISTINCTION XVI**  
**On Merit of Congruity**

**SOLE QUESTION**  
**Is there truly merit of congruity?**

Preliminary Considerations

Since the resolution of this question can already be sufficiently understood from the preceding distinction, we will examine it here only briefly.

From what has been stated, it is clear that merit is defined in relation to the retribution of a reward for some good work. A reward can be deserved in two ways:

By a certain fittingness and congruity, that is, by the generosity and honor of the one granting the reward.

By some obligation of justice, which necessarily demands the reward.

From this distinction, merit is generally divided into two types:

Condign merit (*meritum de condigno*), which is based on strict justice.

Congruous merit (*meritum de congruo*), which arises from the appropriateness or fittingness of granting a reward.

Thus, we now definitively determine that there truly exists merit of congruity, which only a very few have denied.

Thesis

There truly exists in humans a merit of congruity, by which God, moved by the fittingness of the value of a work, rewards it with something supernatural.

This is the position of Scotus (Book 2, Distinction 28, Sole Question, § *Hic dicitur*; and Book 4, Distinction 14, Question 2, § *De principalibus*).

Proof

Contrition, or even certain other supernatural acts elicited by a sinner, truly have a certain congruous value and constitute a kind of merit.

This is evident because, once contrition is present, the supernatural gift of justification follows infallibly.

Consequently, justification is in some way due to contrition, not by strict justice, but because of the fidelity of God's promise, which is frequently stated in Scripture.

Thus, merit of congruity truly exists, in that it grants some imperfect right to expect a promised reward—not by strict justice, but by the fittingness of a good and noble work.

For more proofs, see the previous distinction, Questions 1 & 2.

Objection and Response

Objection:

The nature of merit consists in the fact that a reward corresponds exactly to a work.

But no work can deserve a reward in strict correspondence unless it proceeds from sanctifying grace.

God, in justice, owes nothing to the sinner except punishment and retribution.

Therefore, no work of a sinner can be meritorious.

Response:

I deny the major premise.

Merit of congruity exists only when it is fitting for God to reward a certain good work with a corresponding benefit.

For example:

It is fitting that God grants the prayers and mortifications of the just for the conversion of sinners.

Likewise, it is fitting that God grants grace to repentant sinners who seek forgiveness, as St. Augustine teaches.

St. Augustine (Epistle 106) affirms:

"If anyone says that faith merits the grace to do good works, we must not deny it, but rather gladly confess it."

## **DISTINCTION XVII** **On Merit of Condignity**

### **QUESTION I**

#### **Is there truly merit of condignity by which we merit eternal life?**

Although the resolution of this question can be sufficiently understood from Distinction 15, we will examine it here in more detail. This is especially necessary since Vasquez (Disp. 213) and some others deny that condign merit acquires a true right of justice before God. They argue that the reward is due only out of gratitude rather than justice. Likewise, Durandus (Book 2, Distinction 27, Question 2) denies proper condign merit, arguing:

God cannot be obligated in justice toward man.

Meritorious works lack equality with the eternal glory they seek as a reward.

Against these positions, we assert:

## Thesis

Humans truly merit eternal life before God by condign merit, that is, by justice and equality between the work and the supernatural reward.

This is the position of Scotus (Book 1, Distinction 17, Question 3).

## Proofs

### 1. From Scripture

Wisdom 3:5 – God tested them (the just) and found them worthy of Himself.

2 Thessalonians 1:5 – In all your persecutions and afflictions, you endure them as an example of the just judgment of God, so that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which you suffer.

Revelation 3:4 – They shall walk with me in white garments because they are worthy.

Hebrews 6:10 – God is not unjust to forget your works and the love you have shown in His name.

2 Timothy 4:8 – A crown of justice is laid up for me, which the Lord, the just judge, will render to me on that day.

From these passages, Scripture clearly indicates that a true right and equality is acquired through the merits of the just.

### 2. From the Council of Trent

Session 6, Chapter 16 attributes both justice and equality to the good works of the just:

It speaks of justice by stating: God, as a just judge, rewards eternal life as a recompense and a crown of justice.

It speaks of equality by quoting Scripture: The momentary and light affliction we endure works for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.

The Council thus affirms that the works of the just are considered worthy of the reward of eternal life.

### Objections and Responses

#### Objection 1:

There can be no justice between God and a creature.

Therefore, even if the just truly merit condignly, they do not acquire a right of justice before God.

Consequently, eternal life is not due to them by justice, but only by gratitude or fidelity.

#### Response:

Distinguish the premise:

There can be no strict justice (rigorous justice) → Granted.

There can be no true justice at all → Denied.

This distinction is explained in theological treatises on justice and rights.

It is not repugnant for humans to possess a true right of justice in relation to God if this right originates from God's free promise.

Scripture itself affirms such a right and justice (as seen in the first proof).

Every conditional promise that includes a work proportionate to the promised reward imposes an obligation of justice on the one making the promise.

But God has promised eternal life under the condition of good works performed in grace, which possess a proportionate value to the reward.

Therefore, God is now obligated not merely by gratitude or fidelity, but by justice.

Objection 2:

If this were true, the justice would have to be commutative justice (i.e., strict exchange of goods).

But commutative justice cannot exist between God and man because:

No one is obligated to another in commutative justice unless he receives something useful or advantageous.

But God can receive nothing useful or advantageous from creatures.

Therefore, condign merit cannot be a matter of true justice.

Response:

I deny the minor premise.

Commutative justice can be fulfilled either:

By rendering something pleasing based on an agreement or promised reward, or

By rendering something truly useful to another.

Although all supernatural works of man are more God's work than man's (because they primarily result from God's cooperating grace), they are still properly human because they are performed freely by man.

Man can offer them to God for His glory or for some other intention.

Thus, God can be obligated not only by fidelity but also by justice, since He has freely made Himself a debtor to man through His promise.

Objection 3:

Everything God gives to man is either given out of:

Gratitude

Fidelity

Mercy

Therefore, nothing is given to man by true justice.

Proof of Premise:

If God gives something without any prior obligation, it is a pure act of mercy.

If He gives something because of a prior promise, it is an act of fidelity.

If He rewards something based on a human action, it is merely an increase of gratitude.

Therefore, nothing is given out of justice.

Response:

I deny the premise.

Besides these three categories (gratitude, fidelity, and mercy), there is a fourth way in which God gives—namely, by justice.

Justice is actually less repugnant to God than gratitude.

Gratitude properly applies to a benefit freely given,

Merit, however, is not a benefit freely given, but rather an act of service and obedience to God.

Yet, all service to God—even that done in obedience to His command—cannot match the gifts He first gave to man.

As Romans 11:35 says: Who has given to God first, that He should repay him?

Likewise, Luke 17:10 states: When you have done all that is commanded, say: We are unprofitable servants.

If human obedience can obligate God by gratitude, then it can even more so obligate Him by justice.

Objection 4:

If the just could truly merit eternal life condignly, given God's promise,

Then they should also be able to merit condignly for others the grace of conversion and the remission of mortal sin.

But this is against the Church Fathers, who affirm:

No pure creature can merit or satisfy for mortal sin condignly.

The satisfaction of Christ was necessary for our sins.

Therefore, condign merit cannot be true.

Response:

Deny the major premise.

It is far more difficult for a just person to merit condignly for another person in mortal sin than for himself:

A just person already possesses grace and is therefore worthy of eternal life.

Eternal life is due to him as an inheritance by virtue of sanctifying grace.

However, this does not mean he has the power to give that same grace to an enemy of God.

A friend can merit a benefit from a friend more easily than from his enemy.

Alternatively, deny the minor premise:

When the Fathers deny that a pure creature can satisfy condignly for mortal sin, they speak only of strict justice, which is not applicable to merit de condigno.

However, they do not deny the possibility of proportional equality, by which a creature could, in some sense, satisfy for mortal sin, as many theologians argue with Scotus in his *Treatise on the Incarnation*.