

**Third Disputation  
On the Merit of Christ the Lord,  
And of Others through Him.**

**QUESTION ONE  
What is merit, and how is it divided?**

**ARTICLE ONE  
The nature of merit is defined, and its principal division given.**

Before we descend to the merit of Christ specifically, we must treat of merit in general. Although the word merit taken generically is, in itself, indifferent—able to refer to a good or evil work, and to signify merit not only of reward and recompense, but also of punishment and penalty (in which sense the Apostle seems to have taken it when he said, “He will render to each according to his works”)—nonetheless, it has come to pass that merit, simply stated, is commonly taken in a good sense only, namely as merit of reward. For the merit of punishment and penalty is more customarily called demerit.

Merit, in this sense, is a certain quality or affection of moral actions belonging to a rational creature, by reason of which some recompense is due, as St. Thomas teaches (*Summa Theologiae*, I–II, q. 21, a. 3). For moral actions are called meritorious by reason of their ordination to such recompense, or rather by their worthiness thereof. And in this sense, we distinguish between merit before God and merit before men: just as services rendered to God are worthy to be rewarded by Him, so too services rendered to men are worthy to receive recompense from them.

Scotus defines merit in various places—especially in *Sentences* I, dist. 17, q. 2; dist. 18, q. 1; and *Quodlibet* 17, a. 3, as noted by Bargius and Vulpes. Most often he defines merit before God, and especially the merit called *de condigno*, as can be seen in the cited places. Only in *Sent.* I, dist. 18 does he seem to define merit in general, when he says it is “something accepted or to be accepted in another, for which the one accepting is bound to render something in return to the one in whom it is found—as though a debt to him for such merit, or to another for whom he merited.” This definition is explained at length by the Doctor [Scotus], and also by Faber (*Disp.* 43, bk. 3, ch. 1) and Centinus (*Disp.* 2, ch. 4).

But since this definition cannot be exactly understood unless the conditions of merit are explained—and especially because its understanding depends on a certain condition of merit much debated in the Schools (namely, whether to the nature and completeness of merit it is necessary that on the part of the rewarder there intervene a pact and promise of recompense, which will be treated below)—we may now define merit, in this general sense, as: “A praiseworthy act that in some way demands the conferring of a reward.”

This definition is also drawn from Scotus in the same place (as Poncius rightly notes in *Disputation* 36, Question 1), when he explains the previously given definition of merit, stating

that merit formally expresses the ordering of a praiseworthy act in the one meriting toward the one accepting, who accepts it in order to reward it. And this is further proven, since no meritorious act can be assigned to which the above definition does not apply, nor does it apply to anything that is not merit.

Next, this can be proven by examining each part individually.

It is called an act because the more common opinion requires for the nature of merit some act, at least an interior one, denying the possibility of a pure free omission that is good and meritorious. Or, if such a free omission can indeed be good and meritorious, as others argue, then the term "act" also includes such free omissions (on which more below). It is called praiseworthy because the first and principal condition of merit is that it be a morally good work—for evil works do indeed merit, but they merit punishment, not reward. Praiseworthiness, however, pertains only to morally good acts.

It is said to demand a reward because, from this formal ordering to reward, says the Doctor, the praiseworthy act has the essence of merit. And the reason is that the demand for reward—which is the formal reason by which an act is constituted as meritorious—is a demand for a reward distinct from praise itself, not a demand for praise as a reward, as Vasquez thought (Part 2, Disputation 114, Chapter 5), where he asserts that the essence of merit is the worthiness of praise. This, however, is not quite rightly said, since we see that to various merits in particular there correspond rewards other than praise, such as merit in respect to glory, grace, dignity, stipend, or even wealth. Unless perhaps one says, with Meratius (*Tractatus de Gratia*, Disputation 13, no. 3), that even pecuniary rewards have the nature of praise, and every reward the nature of praise or blame, whereby merit is constituted universally by worthiness or the demand for praise or blame.

On this point, however, there is no need to be overly anxious, since the debate is about a mere manner of speaking, as Ovid notes (*Tract.* 9, *Contra* 1, *Punct.* 1). For reward can only be called praise by inference, insofar as in the one rewarding it presupposes a good estimation of the one rewarded, and because from that fact this inference follows.

Finally, the phrase "in some way" is added so that under this definition may be included not only merit de condigno—which absolutely and simply deserves a reward—but also merit de congruo, which deserves reward as it were by a certain fitness and congruity. For this reason, the Doctor also added to his definition the diminutive phrase "as if a debt," so that merit de congruo might be included, and to distinguish it from a gift or donation, which brings with it no obligation in the giver to return something to the recipient, as Centinus notes in the same place.

Thus, merit can not inaptly be defined, with Averroes (*Quest.* 114, *Sect.* 1) and others, as: "A certain moral worth in good human actions for obtaining some reward from the rewarder."

Here, by "moral worth" is meant the dignity of the act, by reason of which, according to moral estimation, some kind of recompense is considered appropriate for the meritorious act. The phrase "human action" is added so that the worth of merit might be distinguished from the worth of money and other things, which is typically considered in buying and selling and other human exchanges. For this kind of worth is not properly merit, just as what is given on account

of it is not properly a reward, but rather a price. The same reasoning applies to the worth of the action of a hired laborer working in another's vineyard, just like the worth of a field that is sold—for the daily wage owed to him should not properly be called a reward, but a wage or price.

It is further said "of a good action" to indicate that merit, or the nature and worth of merit, pertains to the human action insofar as it is formally good, not merely materially. Hence, if an action is both laborious and morally good, the compensation corresponding to the labor is called a price, wage, or stipend; but the compensation corresponding to the moral goodness is called a reward. Thus, a prince gives to a brave soldier not only the common stipend for labor, but also a reward in view of his courage. Therefore, we say that the worth of an action insofar as it is good is properly merit, which is what is currently under discussion.

Lastly, the phrase "for obtaining a reward" is added because, from this orientation to reward, as the Doctor says, the good human action formally possesses what makes it to be called meritorious. For merit, as merit, is a correlate to reward; hence, even though from the side of the one receiving it, merit is merely an extrinsic denomination taken from the moral goodness of the human act and the connotation of reward, yet in our way of conceiving things it is understood as an ordering and relation to reward. Thus, Scotus says in *Quodlibet* 17, B, that merit adds to a good act two rational relations: one to the will of the one accepting, and the other to the reward to which the accepting will ordains it. And these suffice for the definition of merit as such, which will be made even clearer from the conditions of merit explained later.

Merit, taken in this broad sense, is divided according to the common opinion of theologians into merit *de condigno* and merit *de congruo*, as even Scotus concedes in Book 4, Disputation 14, Question 2, Article 3. And although this division is commonly proposed with reference only to merit that leads to eternal life, yet it does not seem that this distinction should be limited only to merit with respect to eternal life and things conducive thereto. For it may also be applied to temporal rewards—not only with respect to God but also with respect to men. Among men too, sometimes labor and merit are remunerated precisely in proportion to what is owed, which pertains to merit *de condigno*; and sometimes they are rewarded beyond what is owed, by a greater gift, which pertains to merit *de congruo*.

Thus, the division seems useful, since by it merit as such can be adequately divided, insofar as it abstracts from merit before God or before men. But here we will speak of both types of merit, especially as found in man before God, and in relation to eternal life. Although there are various ways of explaining the parts of this division, especially as it is given with respect to merit *de condigno* and *de congruo* before God in relation to eternal life (as can be seen in Poncius, Disputation 36, Question 3), the more common way of explaining these parts in every school is as follows:

Merit *de condigno* is said to be that which has equality with the reward; merit *de congruo*, on the other hand, does not have that equality. Furthermore, what is given on account of merit *de condigno* is like a wage or a crown; but what is given on account of merit *de congruo* is owed only by a certain fitness or congruity. For this reason, merit *de congruo* is so called.

Therefore, merit de condigno is usually called absolute and proper merit, while merit de congruo is called merit only in a qualified sense.

So, according to this common mode of explanation, this twofold type of merit is distinguished thus: Merit de condigno is the merit of a work that possesses worthiness and value in proportion to the reward; merit de congruo, on the other hand, is the merit of a work which, although good in itself, does not have a dignity and value corresponding to so great a reward, but to which the rewarder grants a reward out of liberality and gratitude—a reward which otherwise surpasses the value of the work itself.

Hence, merit de condigno demands and requires so great a reward, while merit de congruo does not require it of itself, but can nonetheless be recompensed, depending on the liberality of the one rewarding. And this is the principal distinction which theologians commonly assert between these two kinds of merit, as Averroes noted in the cited place. This distinction was also acknowledged not only by Scotus in the cited place, but also by St. Thomas (Book 2, Distinction 27, Question 1, Article 3), when he says that someone is said to merit de condigno when there is an equality between the reward and the merit according to right estimation, but only de congruo when such equality is not found.

Because it is this equality between merit de condigno and the reward that causes the reward to be conferred—not by any liberality of the one giving it, but by right reason—this is not found in merit de congruo, whose reward is granted only with some new grace. Thus, the former is usually called the merit of justice, the latter the merit of mercy. And hence, theologians commonly call merit de condigno that to which retribution or reward is due by justice or right; but merit de congruo, that by which we do not deserve a reward by justice, but only by a certain congruity and moral fitness.

And they speak this way not only those theologians who suppose a proper and special virtue of justice between God and man, by which they defend the retribution of merits before God, but also those who do not admit such a special justice between God and man, except in a less proper sense (to be explained further below). For at least some equality between the aforementioned merit and the reward must be found. In the meantime, whatever may be said below in discussing whether there is a proper and true justice between God and man, this must clearly be admitted: that if an obligation of justice between the meriting person and the rewarder is not otherwise repugnant, and if the one rewarding is capable of obligation by justice, then this merit could be grounded in the value it possesses—that is to say, the value of merit de condigno is such that it is entirely suitable to found an obligation by justice, if other circumstances are not lacking, as Oviedo also admits in the cited place, Punct. 2—even if he otherwise denies a proper justice between God and man.

## **SECOND ARTICLE.**

### **Some difficulties are resolved.**

Concerning the foregoing, there are certain difficulties which are briefly to be resolved: First, how the *equality* and *proportion in meritum de condigno* with its reward is to be explained—this being what distinguishes it from *meritum de congruo*. The reason for doubt is this: such equality and proportion do not seem capable of being observed according to the *entity* of the meritorious act and its reward. For, if one compares the meritorious act of a man with the reward of glory, the latter—namely the vision and fruition of God in the heavenly homeland—is far more perfect and noble than any act whatsoever of man on the way, even one proceeding from actual and habitual grace. Indeed, in the acts of penance, for example, there cannot be found as much pain and discomfort as there is pleasure and felicity in eternal rest, in accord with that saying of the Apostle: “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.”

Oviedo discusses this matter at length in *Tractatus 9, Controversy 5, Point 5*.

But briefly, it must be said that this equality is not absolute or formal according to the *entity* or the *quantity of mass*, but only an equality of proportion—so to speak, according to the measure of power. Thus, between merit and reward, a comparison is to be understood according to a certain value, just as money—though made from a base material—can, in estimation, have value equal to something more precious. This, in general, is how more recent theologians explain it, drawing from St. Thomas (STh I-II q.114 a.3–5), where he says that grace, by which man merits, is equal in *power* to glory, just as the seed of a tree has the power to generate the whole plant.

St. Bonaventure expresses this even more clearly (*Sent. II, dist. 27, art. 2, q. 3*, at the end), when he says that even if there is not a commensuration by an all-encompassing equality, yet there is a commensuration by a suitable proportion—just as fruit is rightly said to be commensurate with the seed when it exceeds it only so far as is fitting to the fertility of the woman and the fruitfulness of the earth.

Thus, according to this explanation, *meritum de condigno* signifies an equality between merit and reward according to *estimation*—which, even if it is not always according to the thing itself and the quantity of the mass, ought to be at least according to power, so that, considering the power and value of the merit, it may equal the estimation of the reward. On the other hand, *meritum de congruo* signifies that the meritorious work does not, according to its power, reach the value of the reward, but only establishes a kind of congruence, such that, considering the liberality of the rewarder, a reward may be conferred in view of it.

This same kind of equality is seen in the eternal torments corresponding to the pleasures of the flesh, as it is written in the Apocalypse 18: “As much as she hath glorified herself, and lived in delicacies, so much torment and sorrow give her.” Here the words “as much” and “so much” do not denote an absolute or formal equality according to the reality or the quantity of the mass of the pleasures of this world as compared with eternal torments—as though those pleasures were formally equal in themselves to those torments in essence—but because to the

malice of the actions, as it were of the seed and of its power, there corresponds an equality of torment in measure. Hence Scotus calls this an equality of *proportion*, not of *quantity* (*Sent. IV, dist. 46, q. 4*, at the end).

But although this whole doctrine is true, the aforementioned equality of *meritum de condigno* to its reward is not yet fully explained. For it is still questioned whether such equality befits merit by nature, or rather from some legal ordinance—an opinion that many more recent theologians seem to assert. Yet the latter is proven from human polity, as Faber notes (*Disp. cit. c. 1*): for no wage is equal in value to any work *in itself* and *by its nature*, but only by *legal agreement* and human convention. Without these, there is no just price. For that a measure of wheat is worth so many coins does not come from the nature of wheat, but from legal agreement and human convention by which this is established as the just price of wheat or wine or a day's labor in a vineyard.

All of this Aristotle explicitly teaches (*Ethics V, c. 1*), saying that the just is what is according to law, and the unjust what is contrary to law. The same is said in chapters 2 and 5, where he treats of commutative, civil, and political justice, saying that in this matter too, the just and equitable is to be considered in human contracts what is determined by the laws of the Prince or of the Republic and human agreements.

This is also clearly illustrated by the parable of the householder in Matthew 20, when he said to the hired laborers: “Go you also into my vineyard, and whatever is just I will give you.” By these words, he implies the estimation and custom of the community. For if by the nature of the thing, the labor of the workers were worthy of such and such a wage, then everywhere the same set wage would correspond to a day's labor. But experience shows this to be false: in one region, a higher wage corresponds; in another, a lower; which variation arises from different customs of people and places—a fact so evident that no one can deny it.

If this is true in human polity, it is all the more true in the polity of God, and concerning our merits before God. For when considered in themselves and by nature, they are greatly inferior to the magnitude of the reward to which they are ordained. What comparison, for example (leaving aside other things), can there be in duration between the labors and sorrows of this momentary life and the eternity of heavenly beatitude, whether essential or accidental?

Thus, our merits are proportioned and equal to that reward only insofar as they proceed from actual grace and are dignified by habitual grace. Hence, merit does not have dignity strictly from the meritorious act itself, but from habitual grace, as from a form that dignifies and establishes condignity and equality to the reward in the human act, as St. Bonaventure teaches (*loc. cit.*).

Moreover, it is evident from what was said in Book 2, Disputation 7, Question 1, that the habit of grace or charity, by its nature in the order of being, does not make man pleasing to God,

nor a partaker in the divine nature, nor an adopted Son of God; nor does it, by the nature of the thing and physically, establish a hereditary right to eternal life, but only morally and by divine ordination. Therefore, similarly in the present subject, it must be asserted—following the same reasoning—that the formal constitutive element of man's merit before God is not posited by the nature of the thing, nor is an equality and value of that merit to the reward of eternal life asserted by the nature of the thing, but only by divine ordination.

And therefore, the merit of man before God is not to be considered except in dependence on the divine legal ordination, by which God established that the good work of a just man, precisely because it proceeds from the inclination of grace, possesses a value proportionate and equal to the reward—as the Doctor (i.e. Duns Scotus) proves in various places, particularly in Disputation 25, Article 5 and 6—where he clearly sets forth the formal constitutive of *meritum de condigno* and its distinction from *meritum de congruo*.

Hence, he aptly concludes that the division of man's meritorious works before God into *meritum de congruo* and *de condigno* is not based in the order of nature or morality, but only theologically, by a purely extrinsic divine disposition established by law.

Some more recent theologians object, saying that this entirely destroys the distinction between *meritum de condigno* and *meritum de congruo*. For, as was said above, that distinction is grounded in the equality between *meritum de condigno* and its reward, such that the reward is of such a nature that—excluding all liberality of the one rewarding—it can, according to right reason, be moved to be conferred. This is not the case with *meritum de congruo*, in view of which the reward is not conferred without some new grace; for this reason, we say that the former is called merit of justice, and the latter of mercy.

I reply: the adversaries themselves cannot honestly deny that even in their doctrine *meritum de condigno* before God is, in some way, founded upon the liberality of God as rewarder and remunerator. For they say, and especially Oviedo (Controversy 5, q.67), that between sin and merit this is the difference in the dignity of punishment and reward: that sin is, of itself, worthy of eternal punishment and does not presuppose in the sinner any form from which it receives this dignity; whereas merit possesses dignity not precisely from the meritorious action itself, but taken from habitual grace as a form that dignifies, by which the meritorious action is formally constituted with condignity and equality to the reward.

Even though they assert that this property belongs to grace by the nature of the thing and physically, and not merely morally and by divine ordination (as we say), nevertheless they still cannot deny that this grace—by their own admission—is a pure benefit of God and a gratuitous gift, by which the works are dignified. And thus, at least in this regard, they too are forced to admit that the value and condignity of merit is in some way founded in the liberality of God who rewards and recompenses—inasmuch as He freely and wholly gratuitously bestows grace upon us, which dignifies our good works and elevates them to an equality with the heavenly reward.

Thus, even granting this, they still preserve the true and proper notion of *meritum de condigno*, not only in human polity, but even before God—through the condignity and equality of the work to the reward. Even if this in some way antecedently depends on the liberality and

benevolence of God who recompenses and rewards, we too will say the same according to our principles.

The reason for this is that it does not belong to the essence of *meritum de condigno* that it be found only in matter of perfect justice—as many of the adversaries themselves freely concede—but only that the condignity of the work to the reward and a perfect right to it belong to its definition (as St. Bonaventure teaches *loc. cit.*), even if that condignity antecedently depends in some way on the liberality of the rewarder.

Therefore, even if between God and man there does not intervene perfect and rigorous justice—as we also more probably hold, based on what will be said below—yet this does not hinder the existence of a perfect merit between us and God, as we shall immediately say.

Therefore, in response to the proposed objection, it must be said that the assumption is verified only in human polity, where one man can merit *de condigno* from another, excluding all liberality on the part of the one rewarding—so that his merit is found in matter of perfect justice. But not in the polity of God, who is absolutely the Lord of all and from whose gift alone it comes that we have *meritum de condigno* with respect to eternal life—by means of habitual grace, which dignifies and renders our works proportionate to such a reward, whether it does so by its own nature and in the order of being, or solely by divine ordination and in the order of gift and benefaction.

Thus, merit from the strictness of justice—which excludes all grace and liberality on the part of the one rewarding—can be admitted only in human polity, not in the divine. Such condignity with respect to the reward is by no means necessary from the total rigor of justice for the notion of *meritum de condigno*, as it is distinguished from *meritum de congruo*; for between us and God there does intervene perfect merit (as we shall say), though not perfect and rigorous justice.

And even if one wishes to concede the assumption, one must still deny that it destroys the distinction between *meritum de condigno* and *meritum de congruo*. For when we say that the equality of *meritum de condigno* with its reward makes the reward such that, excluding any liberality of the one rewarding, it can be moved to be conferred—we do not mean this absolutely and simply, but only in that sense in which liberality of the rewarder intervenes in the recompense of *meritum de congruo*.

For to reward that, some new grace of the rewarder is required—one that does not intervene in the reward of *meritum de condigno*. For once the habitual grace has been conferred, if the just man performs a good work from its inclination, such a work does not require new divine favor or benevolence in order to be considered worthy and proportionate to a reward—whereas *meritum de congruo* does require this. For it suffices that the grace itself has been conferred, and that the favor is included within it.

And if some other divine promise or ordination is necessary for *meritum de condigno*—distinct from the ordination included within grace itself—clearly this is not necessary to establish condignity and value in the act proportionate and adequate to the reward. For this,

the ordination essentially included within grace alone suffices, if the other conditions required for merit are present.

But such a distinct divine promise or ordinance would only be necessary to induce an obligation in God for the bestowal of the reward. For since He is the absolute and supreme Lord of all, He cannot be obligated or made a debtor to anyone unless by His own pact, promise, and special acceptance—as we shall treat of below and as St. Bonaventure excellently teaches (*loc. cit.*).

## **Second Difficulty**

The second difficulty is whether between us and God there truly and properly exists merit. The heretics of our time deny that good works have any notion of merit; hence Calvin, in *Institutes*, Book 3, Chapter 15, Section 2, vehemently inveighs against the very name of merit.

Among Catholics, however, Durandus (*Sent. II, dist. 27, q. 2*) distinguishes a twofold merit *de condigno*: one improper and broadly so called, arising from divine ordination and acceptance; the other proper, which entails an obligation of justice on account of the equality of the work. The former he admits in relation to glory, but he denies the latter. And Amicus (*Disp. 35, sect. 1*) says the same follows from the opinion of the Scotists, who teach that the works of the just are not of themselves condignly meritorious of eternal life, but are accepted to such a reward by the extrinsic will and law of God.

Nevertheless, the common opinion—and the one to be held, from which even the Scotists do not depart—is that there is admitted a true and proper merit, which is *meritum de condigno*, between us and God with respect to beatitude. This is clearly deduced from many places in Scripture, in which eternal life is promised as a reward for our works, as a crown, prize, or reward—names which plainly correspond only to merit truly and properly so called, that is, *meritum de condigno*.

It is also gathered from those passages of Scripture in which the very name of dignity, which constitutes *meritum de condigno*, is attributed to the works of the just, as in *Wisdom 3:5* (“God tried them and found them worthy of Himself”), *Revelation 3* (“They shall walk with me in white, because they are worthy”), and *2 Thessalonians 1* (“That you may be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God”).

And finally from those texts in which it is said that eternal life is retributed according to justice, as in *2 Timothy 4* and *Hebrews 6*. This is confirmed by the Council of Trent (*Session 6, Chapter 16 and Canon 32*), where, in declaring absolutely that the just merit eternal life and an increase of grace through good works, it is entirely to be understood of *meritum de condigno*. For it did not say that the first justifying grace falls under merit—not even that of congruous merit—but only that, in relation to the increase of grace, merit is granted and declared, and this merit must surely be understood as *condign merit*.

And although the Council did not explicitly use the term *de condigno*, it clearly implied it when it said that we truly merit an increase of grace, since the term “truly” signifies proper and

real merit, which is only *meritum de condigno*, and indeed signifies more than *meritum de congruo*. This is also explicitly taught by St. Bonaventure (*loc. cit.*).

This position is also proven by the reasoning derived from the doctrine already laid out concerning *meritum de condigno*, which we said consists in a certain equality according to proportion between the reward and the merit. And this equality is had by the good works elicited by a just man precisely because they proceed from habitual grace. For habitual grace bestows upon a man such dignity that he is called an adopted Son of God and a partaker in the divine nature; therefore, works that proceed from such grace likewise participate in such dignity, that they may have an equality of value in order to eternal life, according to the proportion already explained.

For by that very fact, they are constituted in the same supernatural genus and order as the reward, and by that very fact they are considered proportionate merits, and apt for attaining that reward—in which consists the already explained equality of proportion.

And this is the true and genuine doctrine of the Scotists (*Sent. I, dist. 17, q. 2, lit. GG*), where he explicitly teaches, in explaining the nature of *meritum de condigno* in relation to eternal life, how the habit of sanctifying grace is the reason why both the nature and the act are accepted as meritorious of eternal life. This is repeated again below in Article 2 from the beginning: just as grace makes man worthy of eternal life, so likewise it makes his works—provided they possess the other necessary conditions for merit—also worthy of eternal life.

For the same proportion that grace establishes between nature and eternal life, it also grants to works which are dignified by the mode of merit in relation to the same eternal life. Nor does the Doctor (i.e., Scotus) acknowledge any new or superadded ordination and acceptance from which the dignity of a meritorious act is to be taken, other than that which is included in grace itself.

And if some other divine promise and ordination be necessary beyond that, such is not necessary for establishing the dignity and value of the act adequate to the reward (as was said above), but only for inducing in God an obligation to retribute the reward, as will be further explained below. And this is the extrinsic ordination and acceptance by which the Scotists say (as is seen in *Vulpes, Disp. 25, Art. cit.*; and *Smising, Tract. 3, Disp. 4, q. 5, n. 71*) that the works of the just acquire condignity with the reward—which they call extrinsic only insofar as they deny that it agrees with grace intrinsically, and by nature, as though grace were by its very nature a form ordered to eternal life. Rather, they say all of this comes from the extrinsic will and law of God.

This was also clarified in Book 2, Disputation 7, Question 1. And perhaps in this same sense Durandus spoke, calling this merit *de condigno* in a broad sense, inasmuch as it is not a merit from the total rigor of justice excluding all grace and liberality of the one rewarding—since such merit has no place between man and God, just as there is not perfect and rigorous justice (as will be said below). And in the same sense have other Scotists spoken, who seem to require some

superadded acceptance and divine ordination—or else have simply misunderstood Scotus's intent, as Vulpes says (*loc. cit.*).

Thus, the reasoning of Rada (Part 3, Contra 12, Art. 1, Note 2) is not sufficiently convincing to me, where, in order to establish condignity and value in our works toward beatitude, he requires, beyond the divine acceptance and ordination included in grace under the aspect of grace, a further new and superadded acceptance. For this unduly cheapens and diminishes the excellence of the gift of justifying grace (see below, n. 23).

Finally, this position is also proven by the parallel of evil works in relation to punishment: just as by mortal sins we condignly merit eternal punishment (which is the privation of eternal life), so likewise it must be conceded that by good works elicited from grace we condignly merit eternal life. And just as that punishment corresponds to sin not by nature but by the extension of divine ordination (Book 2, Disp. 6, n. 195), so too does eternal beatitude correspond to our good works in grace, not by nature, but only by the ordination and divine acceptance included in grace itself under the aspect of grace.

From all of which it follows, as Scotus teaches (Sent. IV, dist. 21, ad 2), that just as sin in human acts is not divided into venial and mortal in the order of nature or morals, but only theologically and by divine ordination alone—because this alone removes the grace of spiritual life in the soul and brings eternal punishment—so also a good and meritorious work of man in relation to God is divided into *meritum de congruo* and *de condigno*, not in the order of nature and morals, but only theologically, from the extrinsic divine disposition and law, as Vulpes also observes (Art. 4, n. 11).

But an objection is often raised, namely that Scripture and the Fathers frequently call eternal life grace, as in Romans 6, where it is said: "The grace of God is eternal life." Therefore, if eternal life is grace, it cannot be a reward.

Second, in Romans 8 it is said that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come," which Rada, in the cited location, interprets of good works even done in grace, in order to exclude the common reply that the Apostle is speaking of works elicited solely by the force of free will and sufferings not dignified by grace.

Third, because asserting *meritum de condigno* appears to derogate from the merits of Christ the Lord.

Fourth, because *meritum de condigno* is merit from justice; but between God and man there does not exist true and rigorous justice—therefore, merit *de condigno* cannot exist before Him.

Fifth, because if our works were condign, then God could not deny glory to a man who has merited well.

Sixth, because the just do not acquire a right to glory through their merits, since God can, without any injustice, deny them glory; therefore, their merits have no condignity with respect to glory, since that is founded on a perfect right of justice.

And finally, because if man merits from God *de condigno*, God would be constituted as a debtor to us—which is impossible, since, being Lord of all, He can owe nothing to humans out of justice, but only at most from faithfulness.

Response: Scripture and the Fathers also frequently call eternal life a reward and a crown; so if sometimes they call it grace, they certainly do not speak in such a way as to exclude from it the notion of reward. Rather, they imply that the root and principle of merit—that is, habitual justice—is given to us freely, just as the helps of actual grace are freely given to perform the acts by which we are disposed for it *de congruo*. For this reason, Augustine (*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, ch. 8 at the end) calls it grace for grace, by which the verse in Psalm 102 is also explained: "Who crowns you with mercy and compassion."

To the second: The meaning is that the Apostle is speaking of human sufferings considered in themselves, abstracting from the companionship of justifying grace, as St. Bonaventure teaches (*loc. cit.*), and as Vasquez argues (*Disp.* 214, c. 11) from the same discourse of the Apostle. But if one prefers to understand it, with others, of sufferings dignified by grace (*condignificatis*), then the passage must be explained regarding the condignity of works in terms of duration, according to which the Apostle is only comparing the sufferings of this very brief time with future glory. Otherwise, in terms of their intrinsic value, even the same Apostle clearly teaches in 2 Corinthians 4 that such tribulations merit eternal beatitude, when he says: "That which is momentary and light of our tribulation works in us an eternal weight of glory."

To the third: The assumption is denied. Eternal life is given to us not only by our merits, but also by the merits of Christ. It is given through His merits, insofar as He merited grace for us—which is the principle of merit. It is also given afterward by our own merits, insofar as, grace being presupposed, we perform works worthy of that reward. Hence, rather than diminishing Christ's merits, this enhances them, since He merited for us the grace by which we can perform such excellent works.

To the fourth: The major premise, as taken absolutely, is denied. As is clear from what was said in nos. 11 and 12 and from St. Bonaventure, it is not essential to *meritum de condigno*, as such, that it be found only in the matter of perfect and rigorous justice; rather, it suffices that there be condignity of the work to the reward, and an equality of proportion, that is, according to power (virtue) toward the reward.

Moreover, although commutative justice, strictly so called, does not exist between God and man, there nevertheless exists a justice by similitude, such as is between a servant and a master, as the Doctor (Scotus) teaches (*Sent.* IV, dist. 46, q. 1, in the whole question, especially in the solution to the first principal argument, and more fully below). Therefore, the argument at most proves that a perfect and rigorous merit—such as excludes all grace and liberality of the one rewarding, and which is called from the rigor of justice—cannot be had by man before God. Just as it cannot exist between a servant and a lord, according to Aristotle (*Ethics*), yet this by no means proves that, given certain suppositions—namely, the donation of habitual grace—there cannot be *merit de condigno* of man before God, properly and simply so called, as distinguished from *meritum de congruo*.

To the fifth: The consequence is denied. For God has many titles on account of which He can demand these works from man. For whatever we are able to offer to God, we owe to Him—and much more—under many titles, since both we and all that we are depend on Him for being, operation, and preservation. By the titles of creation, preservation, and redemption, we are infinitely indebted to Him. Therefore, He can justly deny us glory in view of these other titles by which He receives it.

To the sixth, those who deny that there is justice between God and the creature as a specific virtue grant the antecedent but deny the consequence. They also deny the implication that *meritum de condigno* must involve a right of special justice in the meriting party, and an obligation from justice in the one in whom the merit resides. They say that *meritum de condigno* does not require justice between the meriting and rewarding parties, but that an equality of value to the reward suffices—that is, an equality of proportion, or according to virtue.

Those, however, who admit some form of justice between God and the creature deny the assumption as taken absolutely. For even though the just do not acquire a right to glory by their merits according to rigorous justice, they do acquire a right according to the likeness of justice, as will be explained below: namely, a remote right by grace itself or by the ordination included in grace itself, and a proximate and complete right by some promise and superadded ordination concerning the retribution of the reward, distinct from the acceptance included in grace itself (as we will explain further below).

Therefore, the argument at most proves that the value of our works—even proceeding from grace—is not such as to have by itself alone the force of obligating God to give the reward of glory, as though He could not deny it without injustice. Rather, a further superadded divine promise and acceptance regarding the reward is necessary, distinct from the prior acceptance included in grace itself.

Finally, although obligation and debt indicate defect and subjection in the one obligated, when they arise from something extrinsic and are imposed by another—and this cannot apply to God, since such obligation belongs to a nature that is imperfect and acknowledges a superior—nevertheless, to obligate oneself by one's own will indicates no defect, nor does it make God subject to the creature. And when, on the part of the work offered, there precedes not only congruity to the reward, but also an equality and proportionate value, there will be owed not only a debt of faithfulness, but also of justice, though not rigorous. Hence St. Bonaventure says (*loc. cit.*, in the reply to the objection), that even if God cannot be obligated in the manner of a debtor by exchange, yet He is said to be obligated in a certain way by His own kindness, by which He has willed to promise Himself to those who diligently seek Him.

### **ARTICLE THREE**

#### **Other difficulties are examined.**

##### **Third Difficulty:**

The third difficulty is: How should the common axiom be understood, that God rewards our merits beyond condignity, just as He punishes demerits short of condignity? For this axiom seems altogether to destroy the condignity and equality of our merits to the reward of beatitude, as previously explained. For if those merits were *de condigno*—that is, with at least proportional equality—then they would not be said to be rewarded beyond condignity, but according to condignity.

On this difficulty and on the understanding of the axiom, there are various ways of speaking. Rada, in Controversy 12, art. 1, explains the matter along with other Scotists by saying that God is said to reward our merits beyond condignity because, although they proceed from grace and from the Holy Spirit, there nevertheless does not appear to be an equality between them and beatitude, but only a congruity and a certain fittingness, such that to the works which are from grace and from the Holy Spirit corresponds a glory and eternal reward fitting for the sons of God. Yet, although these things are great, and greatly increase the value of our works and elevate them supernaturally, they are still far inferior to beatitude, and do not equal or proportion to it, unless a divine promise and ordination of rewarding beatitude to those works is added. Then indeed the sufferings of this time are truly condign with the glory to come, and God is not said in this sense to reward beyond condignity, but according to it.

He grounds this discourse in the doctrine of Scotus (Sent. I, dist. 17, q. 2, LL), where he says that the reward is always a greater good than the merit, and strict justice does not give a greater good for a lesser one; therefore, merit does not have in itself an equality of value on which the retribution of justice can be founded. This is confirmed by saying that God rewards beyond condignity—that is, beyond the dignity of the meritorious act and beyond its intrinsic nature and goodness. Hence, he concludes that, apart from divine acceptance, the meritorious work is not merit simply, but only in a certain respect, and is like a work of congruous merit. This is how many other Scotists speak.

However, this way of explaining the axiom, though it appeals to some Scotists as if it were the Doctor's (i.e., Scotus's) mind, neither satisfies nor is it truly his teaching. For there Scotus distinguishes a twofold concurrence of the habit of grace in the meritorious act: one physical and from the nature of the thing, as a principal cause; the other moral and from divine ordination, as an instrument or moral disposition. He says the former is exercised by grace as a habit and theological virtue inclining to love God as its proper object; the latter is exercised inasmuch as it comes from God under the formal aspect of grace and charity, under which it constitutes man as *deiform*, a son and heir, as it essentially presupposes the divine ordination included in the habit of grace insofar as it is grace.

Scotus says the formal element of merit consists in the reference to habitual grace under this second formal aspect. Therefore, in Scotus's view, condignity of morally good, charitable acts toward the reward of eternal life follows from this same formal aspect. Hence, a twofold divine ordination or acceptance toward the reward of eternal life must be clearly distinguished (from Scotus, *loc. cit.*):

One is entirely prior to the work and pertains to grace itself as the principle of the meritorious act—namely, whereby God ordained to accept man adorned with grace as a son and heir of beatitude, and likewise to accept every good work elicited by him as merit de condigno of eternal life.

The other falls immediately upon the meritorious act itself, and is understood as grace superadded by a new divine will and positive law, by which He promises to give eternal life to all who observe His precepts.

This second acceptance does not confer condignity to the meritorious work equal to the reward, but presupposes it by the force of the prior acceptance. It merely induces obligation in the rewarder to give the reward. Thus, without this second acceptance, the merit would remain with all its equality and condignity to the reward (by force of the first acceptance), but without any obligation on the part of the rewarder. For this obligation arises only from the second acceptance.

That this is Scotus's genuine view is clearly shown in the cited place (Sent. I, dist. 17, q. 2, GG), where, explaining the reason for meritum de condigno and from where it gets its condignity toward the reward, he says it all derives from the habit of sanctifying grace—insofar as it is the reason not only for accepting the nature as worthy of eternal life, but also the good act proceeding from it as meritorious of eternal life. He repeats this again later (Article 2), saying that God accepts the nature and its act as meritorious of eternal life through the supernatural habit—thus, precisely by the force of grace and the acceptance included in it, and excluding any other, the act of the just man is meritorious de condigno and has condignity toward such a reward.

Hence, those Scotists are entirely mistaken who claim that an act—even one proceeding from grace—still lacks equality to the reward, and only acquires it by a new divine promise and ordination of retribution. For, as said, this new promise is not needed to establish condignity in the good works of the just, but only to induce in the rewarder an obligation to retribute the reward—since such obligation is not sufficiently understood to be induced in God by the prior acceptance included in grace. That acceptance establishes man as just, a son of God, and every good act elicited from grace as worthy of eternal life. But to induce obligation in God requires a further, later acceptance, falling immediately upon the act.

Scotus explicitly lays out this double ordination in the Reportata (I, dist. 17, q. 2), saying that every person in grace, even his act through created charity, is acceptable to God. Yet he adds that, because of fittingness and dignity for the reward, it is not necessary that God give eternal life—another acceptance and promise must be added, by force of which God is obligated as if by justice to give the reward.

#### **Fourth Difficulty**

The fourth difficulty is whether merit de congruo and de condigno agree univocally in the concept of merit—such that it would be a division of a univocal into its univocal parts—or at

least analogically. Some absolutely deny that merit de congruo possesses the true and proper notion of merit, and therefore say that "merit" is only said equivocally in this case. Thus Soto (*De Natura et Gratia*, book 2, ch. 4) and Medina (part 2, q. 114, art. 6).

More recent authors, although they admit that merit de congruo is true merit—not metaphorical, but properly so due to some genuine property—nevertheless say it is so imperfect that it is only merit analogically, not indeed by an analogy that is merely extrinsic and metaphorical, but by an intrinsic one through a certain imperfect participation in merit. In the same way that an accident is said to be analogically a being (*ens*), so Suarez says (*lib. 12, ch. 32*), and other modern theologians commonly speak in this way.

But we, since we on the one hand acknowledge merit de congruo as true and proper merit in its own order, and on the other hand do not admit a pure middle analogy between univocal and equivocal terms, but hold that when something intrinsically shares in a common notion—even imperfectly—it is said to agree univocally but with an admixture of analogy (as is evident from discussions in logic), must therefore consistently affirm that merit de congruo agrees univocally-analogically with merit de condigno in the common notion of merit, as assigned in Article I.

Therefore, that division is of something univocal-analogical into its analogates, as Vulpes notes (*disput. 25, art. 6*), and Lezana also affirms (*tract. 7, disp. 8, q. 1*).

And indeed, that merit de congruo is true and proper merit in its own order is thoroughly proven by Suarez (*ch. 32* cited), and convincingly demonstrated by Scotus (*IV Sent., dist. 14, q. 2, art. 2*) below. Otherwise, he says, one would have to claim that a sinner is justified without any sufficient disposition de congruo on his part—and consequently, it would be hard to maintain that there is no partiality with God, as he says he proves elsewhere.

This, in fact, can be clearly deduced: although merit de congruo does not exclude that what is given in view of it is a grace, it does exclude that the gift is a pure and sheer gift. For the conferral of some good is said to be a pure and sheer donation when on the part of the one benefiting there is no motive whatsoever that might, according to right reason, move the benefactor to confer the good, but the act comes entirely from the benefactor's generosity and liberality.

But in merit de congruo there is always some motive that moves the benefactor to confer the good. Although it is not sufficient in itself to require the reward without new grace or the liberality of the rewarder, it still has a certain fitness and congruity to the reward, as was explained above in number 5 when assigning the formal distinction between merit de congruo and de condigno. For even in merit de congruo, we said, there is something on the part of the doer that moves toward the bestowal of the reward—even if it is not equal to the reward; the reward absolutely exceeds the merit, and thus does not exclude that the reward is given freely in view of the merit.

For example, if a rustic offers flowers or vegetables to the king, and the king gives much more than they are worth, this is called merit de congruo, because there is something on the rustic's part that moves the king to give the reward. Even though the service does not equal the

reward, it is still in accordance with reason for the king to give more by his generosity than the work deserves.

But if the king were to give money or something else to the rustic, when the rustic had done nothing at all—no offering or service—then the giving of that good would not only be free, but a pure and sheer donation.

Therefore, assuming that merit *de congruo* is true and proper merit in its own order, in the way just explained and not merely metaphorically, it must be said to agree univocally with admixture of analogy in the definition of merit, as already assigned and explained in Article I: namely, that merit is a praiseworthy act which in some way requires the conferral of a reward (which was the first definition), or a certain moral value of a good human action for obtaining some reward from a rewarder (which was the second definition).

From this it is proved that if a work meritorious *de congruo* did not in some way require a reward—whether by congruity or condignity—and if it had no moral value at all toward obtaining a reward, then it could in no way be called "merit," nor could what is given in view of it be called a reward, but only a gift or donation.

That this agreement is not purely univocal but with an admixture of analogy appears again from the fact that merit *de congruo* does not participate in the notion of merit as perfectly as merit *de condigno*. For the claim to a reward which merit *de congruo* has is not as perfect as that found in merit *de condigno*—for the latter's claim is one of condignity and justice, while the former's is one of fittingness and congruity. Likewise, the value of the former is not so perfect in relation to the reward as is the value of the latter; the latter is equal to the reward in proportion, but the former is unequal and very deficient in relation to the greatness of the reward.

For this reason, merit *de condigno* is said to be merit absolutely and simply, whereas merit *de congruo* is only merit in a certain respect. But you will object, since that which is simply such and that which is such in a certain respect have nothing univocal or univocally said in common. But merit *de congruo* and merit *de condigno* stand to one another in the concept of merit in such a way that the latter is said to be simply merit, while the former is said to be merit only in a certain respect. Therefore, etc.

Next, because to merit corresponds a due reward. But that which is to be given only by some fittingness cannot truly be said to be due. Therefore, merit *de congruo* cannot be true merit. For by the very fact that the qualifying phrase "*de congruo*" is added, the nature of merit is destroyed.

Furthermore, he who merits acquires some right to that which he merits. But if no such right is acquired, then there is no merit. But no right is acquired except by merit *de condigno*. Therefore, there is no true and proper merit unless it be *de condigno*.

Finally, because God cannot be made a debtor unless there precedes a promise under the condition of a burdensome work. Hence, without such a promise, there can be no merit. But if once such a promise intervenes, then the reward becomes due by justice, and it is merit *de condigno*. Therefore, etc.—thus argues Soto (*loc. cit.*).

Response: The major premise is verified when the inferior terms are said to be simply and in a certain respect such with reference to participation in the common notion itself. But not when they are said to be such only by comparison of one to the other.

In the present case, merit de congruo is not said to be merit in a certain respect as it pertains to the common notion of merit itself, but only insofar as it is compared to merit de condigno. Just as “being” (ens) in general is not said equivocally of substance and accident. Substance is said to be being simply, and accident being in a certain respect—but only because, when accident is called being in a certain respect, it is only in comparison to substance, not as it regards the common notion of being itself. For in that regard, accident truly and properly participates in the notion of being, just as substance does.

To the second objection, I say that “due” (debitum) taken simply and absolutely—that is, as strict debt and from justice—is not part of the definition of every kind of merit, but only of that which is simply so, i.e., perfect and de condigno. But if “due” is taken more broadly for a recompense arising from a certain fittingness on the part of the work and the doer, then in this sense it can be admitted that to merit de congruo there also corresponds a kind of proportionate “due.” For which reason Scotus wisely placed in the definition of merit as such (ut sic, i.e., in general) that qualifying phrase “quasi debitum”—to include under it both the strictly due and the relatively due. For to merit, as such, corresponds a “due” that abstracts from both extremes. Hence, one must speak of merit and of the corresponding “due” in proportion.

To the third, I say similarly that one must speak in proportion also of the right corresponding to merit, just as we spoke about the “due.” For if “right” (ius) results in “due,” then it must be said that the “right” taken simply and absolutely—that is, what pertains to justice—is not part of the notion of every kind of merit, but only of that which is simply and properly so, namely merit de condigno. But if “right” is taken more broadly, for any sort of action or title by which something may be obtained by way of reward in view of a work, then in this sense merit de congruo can also be said to give some right to the reward, as Suarez notes (loc. cit.).

To the fourth: The major, taken in both its parts, is granted. But the minor is denied. For as my colleague P. Bilatus rightly observes (Disp. 6 De Incarnatione, q. 2, n. 11), either the promise of the reward is under a condition and burden of a work which is required only by a certain fittingness or disposition, and not because in it there is condignity and an equivalent value to the thing promised—in which case such a promise, like a simple promise, induces only an obligation of fidelity, because by fulfilling the condition, the person does not acquire a true right to the thing simply speaking, due to the small value of the work.

Or the promise is under the burden of a work that has equivalent value to the reward or the thing promised—in which case such a promise does indeed induce an obligation of justice, because in fulfilling that condition, the person acquires a right, so that he may justly demand the reward. So that the obligation of fidelity and that of justice differ in this: the latter presupposes a true right to the thing promised on the part of the person to whom it is promised—the former does not.

