

Rome Life Forum

“Città dell’Uomo versus Città di Dio – Ordine mondiale globale *versus* Cristianità”

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**Filial Piety and National Patriotism
as Essential Virtues
of the Citizens of Heaven at Work on Earth**

Our happiness during our earthly pilgrim and at its destination, eternal life, depends on the conformity of our daily living with the truth, that is, with the good order with which God has created and sustains the world and, in a most particular way, man and woman. Our Lord Who alone is our salvation describes Himself as “the way, and the truth, and the life.”¹ He also teaches us that the truth alone will make us free: “If you continue in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”² He likewise describes His own vocation and mission as obedience to the will of the Father: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work.”³

It is the virtue of piety, an integral part of the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit, which expresses our recognition of the truth and our humble obedience before the truth. Louis Bouyer provides a succinct but full description of piety:

The gift of piety, in the Thomistic synthesis of the spiritual life, in the service of charity not only perfects the virtue of religion (seen as the form of justice toward God), but also every practice of the virtue of justice. Just as our duties toward God are raised to the highest perspective of a supernatural filial relationship, our relationships with others are transfigured in the light of the brotherly fellowship within the divine charity poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 5,5; see St. Thomas Aquinas, *Sum. Theol.*, Ia-IIae, q. 68, and IIa-IIae, q. 80 ff.). The virtues of filial piety and piety toward fatherland are more special; they are annexes of the virtue of justice, but the influence of the same gift gives

¹ Jn 14, 6.

² Jn 8, 32.

³ Jn 4, 34.

them a specifically Christian coloring (*ibid.*, q. 101).⁴

Piety is the part of the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit, poured forth into our hearts from the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus, which inspires and strengthens us to live the truth of our being as creatures created in the image and likeness of God to know, love and serve Him in this life, and to be happy forever with Him in the life which is to come.

I now reflect on an essential aspect of our daily life, which pertains to the grace of piety and the practice of the virtue of piety. It has to do with a truth which is called into question in our time. I refer to our relationship with our homeland, which demands of us the practice of that part of piety which is called patriotism. Before the challenges of our time, there are those who propose and work for a single global government, that is, for the elimination of individual national governments, so that all of humanity would be under the control of a single political authority. For those who are convinced that the only way to achieve the common good is the concentration of all government in a single authority, loyalty to one's homeland or patriotism has become an evil. It is often called nationalism, a term which evokes the evils of a misguided or corrupt national identity, obscuring the truth of our natural identity with a certain land and its culture. Already in July of 2007, the 16th Université de Renaissance Catholique devoted itself to the theme: "Le patriotisme est-il un péché?"⁵ Given the contemporary somewhat widespread doubt and confusion about the virtue of patriotism, it will be helpful for us to spend some time now reflecting upon what the Christian life demands of us regarding our homeland and its civil government.

The virtue of patriotism reflects excellence in the fulfillment of the demands of the Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue, the first of the last seven commandments which treat our relationships with the world and others, in accord with the primary demands of our relationship with God, which is treated in the first three Commandments. While the Fourth Commandment commands us to honor our father and mother, to show to our parents the piety which flows from the recognition that they have cooperated with God in giving us the gift of

⁴ "Le don de piété, dans la synthèse thomiste de la vie spirituelle, perfectionne au service de la charité non seulement la vertu de religion, considérée comme la forme de la justice envers Dieu, mais tout l'exercice de la vertu de justice. Ainsi, comme nos devoirs envers Dieu sont élevés dans la perspective plus 'élevée d'un rapport filial surnaturel, nos rapports avec autrui se transfigurent dans la lumière de notre communion fraternelle à l'intérieur de la charité divine répandue dans nos cœurs par le Saint-Esprit (cf. *Rom.* 5, 5). Voir saint Thomas, *Sum. Theol.*, I^a II^{ae}, q. 68, et II^a II^{ae}, q. 80 ss. Plus particulières sont les vertus de piété filiale et de piété envers la patrie, annexes de la vertu de justice, mais auxquelles l'influence du même don communique une coloration spécifiquement chrétienne (*Ibid.*, q. 101)." L. Bouyer, *Dictionnaire théologique* (Tournai: Desclée & Co., 1963), p. 530. English translation: Louis Bouyer, *Dictionary of Theology*, tr. Charles Underhill Quinn (New York, NY: Desclée Co., Inc., 1965), pp. 350-351.

⁵ Cf. *Le patriotisme est-il un péché ? Actes de la XVI^e Université d'été de Renaissance Catholique*, Villepreux, juillet 2007 (Issy-les-Moulineaux: Contretemps, 2016).

human life, it also commands the piety owed to the wider community in which marriage and family are possible and indeed flourish. Saint Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologiae* teaches us:

*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.*⁶

It is clear from the Angelic Doctor's exposition that, not only is patriotism not a sin, but it is a requirement of nature itself. The term, worship, when applied to one's parents and one's country clearly, as Saint Thomas makes clear, is distinct from divine worship which is given to God alone. The second sense of worship is analogous and refers to the piety or devotion shown to those who cooperate with God for our good.

Reflecting upon the virtue of patriotism as an integral part of the gift and virtue of piety, in accord with the teaching of the Angelic Doctor, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* illustrates how the practice of patriotism is a form of the charity by which we live fully the truth of our being in its relationship with God and with the rest of His Creation. The author of the entry on patriotism writes:

But patriotism as a form of charity, or love, has a more specific object in its actuation than mankind or the human family as such. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the particular love of one's fatherland is an important aspect of that preferential form of charity that is called *pietas* (ST 2a2ae,

⁶ “**Respondeo** dicendum quod homo efficitur diversimode aliis debitor secundum diversam eorum excellentiam, et diversa beneficia ab eis suscepta. In utroque autem Deus summum obtinet locum, qui et excellentissimus est, et est nobis essendi et gubernationis primum principium. Secundario vero nostri esse et gubernationis principium sunt parentes et patria, a quibus et in qua et nati et nutriti sumus. Et ideo post Deum, maxime est homo debitor parentibus et patriae. Unde **sicut ad religionem pertinet cultum Deo exhibere, ita secundo gradu ad pietatem pertinet exhibere cultum parentibus et patriae.**” *ST* IIa IIae, q. 101, art. 1. English translation: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Vol. 3 (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1948), p. 1626.

101.1). Through piety the person has an obligation of love to God, parents, and fatherland. Each is in some sense a principle of man's being: God through creation; parents through procreation and education; fatherland through a formation of one's cultural and historical identity.⁷

Patriotism is an aspect of the grace of piety, which in its turn is an essential part of the matter of charity. Christ gives the grace of piety, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, in order that we can live the truth of our human nature.

Patriotism as such is a precept of the natural law. We see it reflected, for example, in the story of Aeneas and his father Anchises, as it is recounted by the Roman author Virgil. In fact, Virgil describes the greatness of Aeneas with the adjective, *pious*. Commenting on the *Aeneid* of Virgil and, in particular, on the excellence of the virtue of piety in Aeneas, Anthony Esolen writes:

The name that Virgil gives Aeneas is not Odysseus' *polytropon*, the man of shifts and dodges, but the Latin word *pious*. Aeneas embodies a virtue we hardly recognize in our time: piety, which meant for the Romans a willingness to do your duty by your father and mother, your elders, your household gods, the city and state, and the great gods above.

This piety is at once a deeply personal virtue and a powerful force to bring together the generations, allowing the young to take root in the soil of the old and the old to engraft their experiences onto the young, so that we sense that home is a place where the passing day partakes of long ages past and to come.⁸

Through the grace of Christ, the piety of the pagan world is elevated and perfected to be a response to God, our Creator and Redeemer, who has desired to bring us to life in Christ in the family and in a homeland. In the words of Louis Bouyer, "our relationships with others are transfigured in the light of the brotherly fellowship within the divine charity poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit."⁹

The exposition of the Fourth Commandment in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* speaks of the honor due to civil rulers, intimately connected with the honor due to parents and

⁷ J. J. Wright, "Patriotism," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 10 (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 1102. [NCE].

⁸ Anthony Esolen, *Nostalgia: Going Home in a Homeless World* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 2018), p. xxiii.

⁹ Cf. footnote 4.

the pastors of the Church. Making reference to Saint Paul's teaching in the Letter to the Romans¹⁰ and the First Letter to Timothy,¹¹ and to Saint Peter's teaching in his First Letter,¹² it underlines the truth that the honor given to civil rulers is essentially connected to the honor which we owe, above all, to God. It explains:

For whatever honor we show them [civil rulers] is given to God, since exalted human dignity deserves respect because it is an image of the divine power, and in it we revere the providence of God who has entrusted to men the care of public affairs and who uses them as the instruments of His power.¹³

Patriotism is the recognition of the good order which God has placed in civil society, so that those who govern must respect, first and foremost, God's law, and so that those who are governed respect the civil community in which the common good is to be safeguarded and promoted.

The Catechism goes on to treat the situation of wicked rulers, reminding us that the honor shown to them is not reverence toward their wrongdoing but rather toward "the authority from God which they possess."¹⁴ At the same time, the Christian citizen must not obey their commands, if they are contrary to the moral law. The Catechism teaches us:

However, should their commands be wicked or unjust, they should not be obeyed, since in such a case they rule not according to their rightful authority, but according to injustice and perversity."¹⁵

In our time, many governments fail to or refuse to recognize that their authority comes from God, and, therefore, make laws which violate directly and grievously the moral law, for example, regarding the respect owed to all human life, from the moment of conception to the

¹⁰ Rom 13, 1-9.

¹¹ 1 Tm 2, 1-8.

¹² 1 Pt 2, 13-14.

¹³ "[N]am si quem eis [regibus, principibus, magistratibus, et reliquis, quorum potestati subiicimur] cultum tribuimus, is ad Deum refertur: habet enim venerationem hominum excellens dignitatis gradus, quia divinae potestatis est instar: in quo etiam Dei providentiam veneramus, qui publici muneris procuracionem iis attribuit, quibusque utitur tamquam potestatis suae ministris." *Catechismus Romanus seu Catechismus ex Decreto Concilii Tridentini ad Parochos Pii Quinti Pont. Max. iussu editus*, ed. Pedro Rodríguez (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1989), p. 459. [Catechismus Romanus]. English translation: *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests*, tr. John A. McHugh and Charles J. Callan (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1923), p. 415. [Catechismus Romanus Eng].

¹⁴ "... sed divinam auctoritatem quae in illis est." *Catechismus Romanus*, p. 459. English translation: *Catechismus Romanus Eng* p. 415.

¹⁵ "At vero, si quid improbe, si quid inique imperent, cum id non ex potestate, sed ex iniustitia, atque animi perversitate agant, omnino non sint audiendi." *Catechismus Romanus*, p. 460. English translation: *Catechismus Romanus Eng*, p. 416.

moment of natural death, regarding the integrity of human sexuality ordered to marriage and the family, and regarding the free exercise of religion itself. In many societies, there dominates an anti-life, anti-family, and anti-religious culture in open rebellion before the good order with which God has created us.

The practice of the virtue of patriotism thus faces a great challenge: the challenge to show due respect for our homeland and its government, while at the same time refusing to comply with unjust laws. Here it is important to note the witness of numerous faithful individuals and families who heroically live the faith without compromise in totally secularized cultures. Before evil laws and the pressures of a totally secularized culture, they follow the example of Saint Peter and the Apostles who, when they were brought before the high priest, demanding that they deny Christ and His teaching, replied: “We must obey God rather than men.”¹⁶ The Christian citizen must frequently fulfill the demands of patriotism today by martyrdom, which is often white but sometimes red. His witness to the truth of the moral law regularly meets with the white martyrdom of indifference, ridicule and persecution, and even, in some circumstance, with the red martyrdom of death.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* promulgated by Pope Saint John Paul II on August 15, 1997, in its treatment of the Fourth Commandment, contains a lengthy exposition on the duties of civil authorities and of citizens. It makes clear that the authority which the civil government exercises comes from God and must respect the law which He has written in nature. It declares:

The exercise of authority is measured morally in terms of its divine origin, its reasonable nature and its specific object. No one can command or establish what is contrary to the dignity of persons and the natural law.¹⁷

The Catechism goes on to explain that the exercise of authority in civil society must respect the God-given rights of the individual and, therefore, should safeguard and promote the common good.¹⁸

Regarding the duties of citizens, the Catechism of the Catholic Church repeats the constant teaching of the Church which requires that “[t]hose subject to authority should regard

¹⁶ Acts 5, 29.

¹⁷ “Auctoritatis exercitium eius origine divina, eius natura rationali et eius obiecto specifico moraliter regulatur. Nemo potest id praecipere vel instituere, quod personarum dignitati et legi naturali est contrarium.” *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), n. 2235. [CCC]. English translation: Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed. (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), no. 2235. [CCC Eng].

¹⁸ Cf. CCC, n. 2237.

those in authority as representatives of God, who has made them stewards of his gifts.”¹⁹ It reminds us that “[t]he love and service of one’s country follow from the duty of gratitude and belong to the order of charity,”²⁰ specifying the moral obligation “to pay taxes, to exercise the right to vote, and to defend one’s country.”²¹

The Catechism of the Catholic Church then takes up the obligations of “more prosperous nations ... , to the extent that they are able, to welcome the *foreigner* in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin.”²² Such welcome, as is clear from the text, is not indiscriminate, for it depends on the capacity of nations to accept such refugees from their homelands and on the impossibility of the refugees to find the means to live in their homelands.

The paragraph goes on to specify that “[p]olitical authorities, for the sake of the common good for which they are responsible, may make the exercise of the right to immigrate subject to various juridical conditions, especially with regard to the immigrants’ duties toward their country of adoption.”²³ The Catechism further underlines the obligation of immigrants “to respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, to obey its laws and to assist in carrying civic burdens.”²⁴

The Catechism then repeats the perennial teaching of the Church regarding a citizen’s obligation in conscience “not to follow the directives of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order, to the fundamental rights of persons or the teachings of the Gospel.”²⁵ It should be noted that the rights of persons in question are those rights inherent to the God-given moral order, not the many so-called rights, for example, the right to define life and death, and the right to define sexual identity and marriage, which have been invented by

¹⁹ “[i]lli, qui auctoritati sunt subiecti, suos aspiciunt superiores tamquam representantes Dei qui eos ministros Suorum instituit donorum.” CCC, n. 2238. English translation: CCC Eng, no. 2238.

²⁰ “Amor et servitium *patriae* ex officio oriuntur gratitudinis et ex ordine caritatis.” CCC, n. 2239. English translation: CCC Eng, no. 2239.

²¹ “tributorum solutionem, exercitium iuris suffragii, defensionem nationis.” CCC, n. 2240. English translation: CCC Eng, no. 2240.

²² “[n]ationes ditiores ..., in quantum fieri potest, *alienigenam*, qui securitatem quaerit et opes necessarias pro vita, quas in sua originis regione nequit invenire.” CCC, n. 2241. English translation: CCC Eng, no. 2241.

²³ “[p]oliticae auctoritates possunt ratione boni communis, cuius suscipiunt munus, exercitium iuris emigrationis diversis condicionibus subiicere iuridicis, praesertim observantiae officiorum emigrantis erga nationem adoptionis.” CCC, n. 2241. English translation: CCC Eng, no. 2241.

²⁴ “... cum gratitudine patrimonium observare materiale et spirituale nationis eum accipientis, eius oboedire legibus et ad eius conferre onera.” CCC, n. 2241. English translation: CCC, no. 2241.

²⁵ “... ne praescriptiones auctoritatum civilium sequatur, cum haec praecepta exigentiis ordinis moralis, iuribus fundamentalibus personarum vel doctrinis Evangelii contraria sunt.” CCC, n. 2242. English translation: CCC, no. 2242.

man in our time. In accord with the perennial moral teaching, resistance to unjust laws of a state does not permit a refusal to carry out one's fundamental duties toward the state.²⁶

The Catechism also spells out the moral requirements for a legitimate “[a]rmed *resistance* to oppression by political authority.”²⁷ Five conditions are given for legitimate armed resistance before an unjust political authority: “1) there is certain, grave, and prolonged violation of fundamental rights; 2) all other means of redress have been exhausted; 3) such resistance will not provoke worse disorders; 4) there is well-founded hope of success; and 5) it is impossible reasonably to foresee any better solution.”²⁸ Clearly, the Christian citizen is obliged to be steadfastly involved in fostering a just and charitable society. Such engagement may lead, in situations which meet all of the necessary conditions, to the use of resistance, in order to exercise faithfully the virtue of patriotism.

Finally, the Catechism of the Catholic Church takes up the situation of most states in our time, whose philosophical foundations and *modus operandi* are totally secular, that is, states do not recognize “man’s origin and destiny in God, the Creator and Redeemer.”²⁹ Quoting the teaching of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, the Catechism indicates that the refusal to recognize and obey an objective order of things leads to a totalitarian state, as history sadly illustrates. The Church, therefore, does not confuse herself with the political community, in accord with Our Lord’s own teaching in the Gospel,³⁰ but exercises her responsibility to be “both the sign and the safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person.”³¹ In that regard, the Catechism repeats the perennial teaching of the Church, set forth in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council: “It is part of the Church’s mission ‘to pass judgments even in matters related to politics, whenever the fundamental rights of man or the salvation of the soul requires it’.”³²

Times does not permit me to deepen further these initial reflections, but I trust that they provide the foundations for addressing the very serious demands of the virtue of patriotism in

²⁶ Cf. CCC, n. 2242.

²⁷ “[a]ctio resistendi oppressionis potestatis politicae ad arma.” CCC, n. 2243. English translation: CCC, no. 2243.

²⁸ “... 1. in casu in quo certo, graviter et continuo iura violantur fundamentalia; 2. postquam omnes alii recursus exhausti sunt; 3. dummodo ne peiores provocenter inordinationes; 4. cum spes fundata habetur prosperi exitus; 5. si impossibile est meliores solutiones rationabiliter praevidere.” CCC 2243.

²⁹ “... in Deo, Creatore et Redemptore, originem et destinationem hominis.” CCC, n. 2244. English translation: CCC Eng, no. 2244.

³⁰ Cf. Mt 22, 15-22; Mk 12, 13-17; and Lk 20, 19-26.

³¹ “... simul signum est et tutamentuum transcendentiae personae humanae.” CCC, n. 2245. English translation: CCC Eng, no. 2245. Cf. Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum Secundum, Constitutio Pastoralis *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 76.

³² “Ad missionem pertinent Ecclesiae <iudicium morale ferre, etiam de rebus quae ad ordinem politicum respiciunt, quando personae iura fundamentalia aut animarum salus id exigant, ...>.” CCC, n. 2246. English translation: CCC, no. 2246.

our time. Patriotism teaches us to recognize our natural condition as members of a family and citizens of a homeland. Our personal identity comes principally from the family but also, and indeed because the family thrives only in wider society, from our homeland. That natural condition defines our rights and duties as a citizen.

It is clear that we and our homelands have responsibilities within the international community, but those responsibilities can only be fulfilled through a sound life in the family and in the homeland. Patriotism, in fact, fosters the virtue of charity which clearly embraces citizens of other nations, recognizing and respecting their distinct cultural and historical identity.³³ Such charity is fostered by the Church's exercise of her moral authority, not assuming the role of Caesar but insisting that Caesar obey the divine authority which makes legitimate and just his governance. The divine authority, in accord with the order written upon the human heart, does not make just and legitimate a single global government. In fact, the divine law illumines our minds and hearts to see that such a government would be, by definition, totalitarian, assuming the divine authority over the governance of the world. Not without reason, the sinful pride which inspires the pursuit of a single global government has been likened to the pride of our ancient ancestors, after the Deluge, who thought that they could unite heaven with earth by their forces alone, building the Tower of Babel.³⁴ On the contrary, God meets us and orders our lives for the good in the family and in the homeland.

Thank you for your kind attention. May God bless you, your families, and your homelands.

Raymond Leo Cardinal BURKE

³³ Cf. NCE, p. 1102.

³⁴ Cf. Gn 11, 1-9; Ted Malloch, "GLOBALISM is the New Tower of Babel," <https://www.thegatewaypundit.com/2019/05/ted-malloch-globalism-is-the-new-tower-of-babel>.