

## QUESTION 104

### Obedience

Next we have to consider obedience (*obedientia*). And on this topic there are six questions: (1) Does one man have to obey another? (2) Is obedience a specific virtue? (3) How is obedience related to the other virtues? (4) Is God to be obeyed in all things? (5) Are subjects obligated to obey their superiors (*praelati*) in all things? (6) Are believers (*fideles*) obligated to obey secular powers?

#### Article 1

##### Is one man obligated to obey another?

It seems not to be the case that one man is obligated to obey another:

**Objection 1:** Nothing is to be done contrary to what God has established. But God has established that a man be ruled by his own counsel—this according to Ecclesiasticus 15:14 (“From the beginning God made man and left him in the hand of his own counsel”). Therefore, it is not the case that one man is obligated to obey another.

**Objection 2:** If someone were obligated to obey another, then he would have to have the will of the one doing the commanding as the rule of his action. But only God’s will, which is always right, is a rule of human action. Therefore, a man is not obligated to obey anyone other than God.

**Objection 3:** The more spontaneous (*magis gratuita*) things are, the more they are accepted [by God]. But what a man does because of an obligation (*illud quod homo ex debito facit*) is not spontaneous. Therefore, if a man were bound because of an obligation to obey others in doing good works, than by that very fact his good work done out of obedience would be rendered less acceptable. Therefore, it is not the case that a man is obligated to obey another man.

**But contrary to this:** Hebrews 13:17 commands, “Obey your leaders (*obedite praepositis vestris*) and submit to them.”

**I respond:** Just as the actions of natural things proceed from natural powers, so, too, human operations proceed from the human will. But among natural things it was necessary for the higher to move the lower to their actions through the excellence of the natural power conferred upon them by God. Hence, in human affairs it is likewise necessary for superiors, through their will, to move their subordinates by the power of their divinely ordained authority.

Now to move someone through reason and will is to command (*praecipere*). And so, just as by the natural order itself that has been established by God the lower among natural things must be subject to the movement of the higher things, so, too, in human affairs, by the order of natural and divine right (*ex ordine iuris naturalis et divini*), the subordinates are obligated to obey their superiors.

**Reply to objection 1:** God left man in the hand of his own counsel not in the sense that man is permitted to do whatever he wants to, but in the sense that he is not forced by a necessity of nature to do what he should do, in the way that non-rational creatures are, but is instead to do it by a free choice that proceeds from his own counsel. And just as he ought to proceed by his own counsel in doing other things, so, too, he ought to proceed by his own counsel in obeying his superiors. For as Gregory says in *Moralia* 35, “When we submit to another voice with humility, we conquer our very selves in our hearts.”

**Reply to objection 2:** God’s will is the first rule by which all our rational acts of will are regulated and to which one act comes closer than another according to a divinely established order. And so the will of the man who gives the commands can be, as it were, a second rule for the will of the other man, who is obeying.

**Reply to objection 3:** There are two ways in which something can be judged to be spontaneous: (a) *on the part of the work itself*, viz., because the man is not obligated to do it; and (b) *on the part of the one doing the work*, viz., because he does it with a free will.

Now a work is rendered virtuous and praiseworthy and meritorious mainly insofar as it proceeds

from the will. And so even though it is obligatory to obey, if one obeys with a prompt will, his merit is not thereby diminished, especially in the eyes of God, who sees not only the exterior works but also the interior act of willing.

## Article 2

### Is obedience a specific virtue?

It seems that obedience is not a specific virtue:

**Objection 1:** Disobedience (*inobedientia*) is opposed to obedience. But disobedience is a general sin; for Ambrose says that sin is “disobedience against divine law.” Therefore, obedience is a general virtue and not a specific virtue.

**Objection 2:** Every specific virtue is either a theological virtue or a moral virtue. But obedience is not a theological virtue, since it is not contained under either faith or hope or charity. Similarly, neither is it a moral virtue, since it does not lie in the middle between *excess* and *deficiency* (*non est in medio superflui et diminuti*); for the more one is obedient, the more he is praised. Therefore, obedience is not a specific virtue.

**Objection 3:** In *Moralia* 35 Gregory says, “The less of oneself obedience contains, the more meritorious and praiseworthy it is.” But every specific virtue is such that the more of oneself it contains, the more it is praised, since, as *Ethics* 2 points out, it is required for a virtue that one will and choose it. Therefore, obedience is not a specific virtue.

**Objection 4:** Virtues differ in species because of their objects. But the object of obedience seems to be the command of a superior, and this seems to be multiply diversified in a way corresponding to the diverse levels of superiority. Therefore, obedience is a general virtue containing many specific virtues under itself.

**But contrary to this:** As has been pointed out above (q. 80, obj. 3), obedience is posited by some as a part of justice.

**I respond:** A specific virtue is directed toward all the good works that receive a specific type of praise. For it properly belongs to a virtue to render an act good. Now as has been shown (a. 1), to obey one’s superior is obligatory according to the divine order infused into things and, as a result, to obey one’s superior is good, since, as Augustine says in *De Natura Boni*, the good consists in “mode, species, and order.”

Now this act receives a specific type of praise because of its special object. For even though subordinates ought to bestow many things on their superiors, there is one that is special among the others, viz., that they are obligated to obey their commands. Hence, obedience is a specific virtue, and its specific object is either a tacit or explicit command. For the will of the superior, in whatever way it is made known, is a certain tacit command, and the obedience seems more prompt to the extent that one anticipates the explicit command by obeying as soon as the superior’s will is understood.

**Reply to objection 1:** Nothing prevents two specific characters, looked to by two specific virtues, from coming together in one and the same material object; for instance, in defending the king’s camp, a soldier executes (a) a work of *fortitude* by facing up to the danger of death for the sake of some good, and (b) a work of *justice* by rendering due service to his master.

So, then, the character *command*, which obedience looks to, comes together with *acts of all the virtues* and yet not with *all the acts of the virtues*, since, as was established above (*ST* 1-2, q. 96, a. 3 and q. 100, a. 2), not all the acts of the virtues fall under a command or precept. By the same token, it is also the case that sometimes certain works fall under a command without belonging to any other virtue, as is clear in the case of those things that are bad only because they have been forbidden.

So, then, if obedience is taken in its proper sense, insofar as it *looks by its formal intention to the character of a command*, then it will be a specific virtue, and disobedience will be a specific sin. On this score, it is required for obedience that one fulfill an act of justice or of some other virtue *while intending to fulfill the command*, whereas it is required for disobedience that one *actually disdain* the command.

On the other hand, if obedience is taken in a broad sense for *the execution of something that can fall under a command*, and if disobedience is taken for the *non-execution of a command with any intention whatsoever*, then obedience will be a general virtue and disobedience a general sin.

**Reply to objection 2:** Obedience is not a theological virtue. For its *per se* object is not God, but is instead the command of some superior, whether explicit or implicit, i.e., the simple word of the leader indicating his will, which the prompt and obedient individual obeys—this according to Titus 3:1 (“Admonish them ... to obey at a word”).

Instead, obedience is a moral virtue, since it is a part of justice and lies in the middle between *excess* and *deficiency*. Now its *excess* is not quantitative, but has to do instead with other circumstances, viz., insofar as someone obeys either an individual *whom* he should not obey or in matters *in which* he should not obey—just as we explained above in the case of the virtue of religion (q. 81, a. 5). Likewise, as the Philosopher explains in *Ethics* 5, just as one can say in the case of justice that *excess* exists in the one who holds on to what belongs to the other, whereas *deficiency* exists in the one who is not repaid what he is owed, so, too, obedience lies in the middle between *excess*, which exists on the part of the one who withholds the obedience that is owed to his superior because he abounds in fulfilling his own will, and (b) *deficiency* exists on the part of the superior who is not obeyed. Hence, in accord with this, obedience will not lie in the middle between *two* bad actions (*non erit medium duarum malitiarum*)—just as was explained above in the case of justice (q. 58, a. 10).

**Reply to objection 3:** Just like any other virtue, obedience ought to involve a will that is prompt with respect to its proper object, but not prompt with respect to what is incompatible with that object. Now the proper object of obedience is a command or precept (*praeceptum*) that proceeds from the will of another. Hence, obedience renders a man’s will prompt to fulfill the will of another, viz., of the one who issues the command.

Now if what is commanded of him is something that he wills for its own sake, even in the absence of its being commanded, as happens in the case of favorable matters, then he is already tending toward it by his own will, and he seems to do it not because of the command, but because of his own will. On the other hand, when what is commanded is no way willed by him in its own right but is instead, considered in itself, repugnant to his own will, as happens in the case of difficult matters, then it is altogether clear that it is done only because of the command.

This is why Gregory says in *Moralia* 35 that “obedience that has something of oneself in favorable matters is no obedience or less obedience,” viz., because one’s own will seems to tend mainly not toward fulfilling a command, but toward pursuing what it wills on its own, “whereas in adverse or difficult matters the obedience is greater,” because one’s own will tends toward nothing other than the command.

However, this should be understood to be the case according to the *external appearances*. By contrast, according to the *judgment of God*, who searches hearts, it can happen even in favorable matters that obedience that contains something of oneself is not on that account less praiseworthy, viz., if the proper will of the one who obeys tends no less avidly toward fulfilling a command.

**Reply to objection 4:** Reverence looks directly to the *excellent or superior person (directe respicit personam excellentem)*, and so it has diverse species corresponding to diverse types of excellence or superiority. By contrast, obedience looks to the *command* of the excellent or superior person, and so is of [just] one type.

However, since it is out of reverence for the person that obedience is owed to his command, it follows that even though all acts of obedience belong to the same species, they nonetheless proceed from causes that are diverse in species.

### Article 3

#### Is obedience the greatest of virtues?

It seems that obedience is the greatest of virtues:

**Objection 1:** 1 Kings 15:22 says, “Obedience is better than sacrifices.” But the offering of sacrifices belongs to religion, which, as is clear from what was said above (q. 81, a. 6), is the most important of all the [other] moral virtues. Therefore, obedience is the most important of the virtues.

**Objection 2:** In *Moralia* 35 Gregory says, “Obedience is the only virtue that implants other virtues in the mind and guards what has been implanted.” But a cause is more important than its effect. Therefore, obedience is more important than all the [other] virtues.

**Objection 3:** In *Moralia* 35 Gregory says, “One ought never do through obedience what is bad, but sometimes one ought through obedience to interrupt something good that is being done.” But it is not the case that something is interrupted except for what is better. Therefore, obedience, for which the goods of the other virtues are interrupted, is better than the other virtues.

**But contrary to this:** Obedience is praiseworthy because it proceeds from charity. For in *Moralia* 35 Gregory says, “Obedience is to be preserved not by servile fear but by the affection of charity, not by the fear of punishment, but by the love of justice.” Therefore, charity is a more important virtue than obedience.

**I respond:** Just as sin consists in a man’s disdaining God and adhering to changeable goods, so the merit of a virtuous act consists, to the contrary, in a man’s adhering to God and disdaining created goods. Now the end is more important than the means to the end. Therefore, if created goods are disdained in order to adhere to God, then more praise for the virtue comes from the fact that one adheres to God than from the fact that he disdains earthly goods. And so those virtues by which in their own right one adheres to God, viz., the theological virtues, are more important than the moral virtues, by which something earthly is disdained in order to adhere to God.

Moreover, among the moral virtues, a virtue is more important to the extent that it disdains something more in order to adhere to God. Now there are three genera of human goods that a man can disdain for the sake of God. The least among them are *exterior goods*; in the middle are the *goods of the body*; and the highest are the *goods of the soul*, among which the most important is in some sense the *will*, viz., insofar as it is through the will that a man makes use of all the other goods.

And so, speaking *per se*, the virtue of obedience, which disdains one’s own will for the sake of God, is more praiseworthy than the other moral virtues, which disdain certain other goods for the sake of God. This is why Gregory says in *Moralia* 35, “Obedience is preferred over the sacrifices of the Law because through the sacrifices the flesh of something else is put to death (*mactatur*), whereas through obedience it is one’s own will that is put to death.”

Hence, any of the other works of the virtues, whatever they might be, are meritorious in the eyes of God because they exist in order that God’s will might be obeyed. For instance, even if someone undergoes martyrdom, or even if he gives away all his possessions to the poor, if he does not order these things toward fulfilling God’s will—which pertains directly to obedience—then they cannot be meritorious, just as they would not be meritorious if they were done without charity, which cannot exist without obedience. For 1 John 2:4-5 says, “Anyone who says that he knows God and does not keep His commandments is a liar ... but he who keeps His word, in him the charity of God is truly perfected.” And this is because friendship makes the friends will the same things and will against the same things (*quia amicitia facit idem velle et nolle*).

**Reply to objection 1:** Obedience proceeds from reverence, which gives veneration (*cultus*) and honor (*honor*) to a superior. And in this regard obedience is contained under diverse virtues—even though, considered in its own right as looking to the character of a *command*, it is a specific virtue.

Therefore, insofar as it proceeds from reverence for one's superiors, obedience is in some sense contained under *respectfulness (observantia)*, whereas insofar as it proceeds from reverence for one's parents, it is contained under *piety (pietas)*. On the other hand, insofar as it proceeds from reverence for God, it is contained under *religion (religio)* and belongs to devotion (*devotion*), which is the main act of religion. Hence, on this score it is more praiseworthy to obey God than to offer sacrifice—and again, as Gregory says—because in a sacrifice the flesh of something else is immolated, whereas through obedience it is one's own will that is immolated.

However, in the specific case that Samuel was talking about (1 Kings 15:23-26), it would have been better for Saul to obey God than to offer in sacrifice the fatty animals of the Amalekites, [because offering these sacrifices was] contrary to a command of God's.

**Reply to objection 2:** Insofar as they are contained within a command (*prout sunt in praecepto*), all the acts of the virtues involve obedience. Therefore, to the extent that the acts of the virtues contribute causally or dispositively to the generation and conservation of the virtues, obedience is said to implant all the virtues in the mind and to guard them.

However, it does not follow that obedience is absolutely prior to all the virtues, and this for two reasons:

First, because even if the act of a virtue falls under a command, someone can nonetheless perform the act of virtue without adverting to the notion *command*. Hence, if there is a virtue whose object is naturally prior to *command*, then that virtue is said to be *naturally* prior to obedience. This is clear in the case of [the virtue of] faith, through which what is made known to us is the sublimity of the divine authority by which the power to command belongs to God.

Second, because the infusion of grace and of the virtues can precede, even temporally, every virtuous act. And on this score, obedience is not prior to all the other virtues either *temporally* or *naturally*.

**Reply to objection 3:** There are two kinds of good:

One is such that a man is necessarily obligated to do it, e.g., to love God or something like this. And this sort of good should in no way be interrupted for the sake of being obedient.

But there is another sort of good that a man is not necessarily obligated to do. And a man should sometimes interrupt this sort of good work for the sake of an act of obedience that he is necessarily obligated to do, since a man should not do any sort of good work by incurring a sin. Yet as Gregory says in the same place, "If someone prevents his subjects from doing any one good work, then he must allow them to do many good works, lest the mind of the one who obeys should perish completely if he starves by being driven away completely from every good work." And so the loss of one good work can be compensated for through obedience and other good works.

#### Article 4

##### Should God be obeyed in all things?

It seems not to be the case that God should be obeyed in all things:

**Objection 1:** Matthew 9:30-31 says that our Lord ordered the two blind men who had been cured by saying, "See that no one finds out about this." However, "they went out and spread His fame throughout the whole land." Yet they are not blamed for this. Therefore, it seems that we are not obligated to obey God in all things.

**Objection 2:** No one is obligated to do anything that is contrary to virtue. But one finds divine commands that are contrary to virtue; for instance, as Genesis 22:2 tells us, God ordered Abraham to kill his innocent son, and, as Exodus 11:2 tells us, God ordered the Jews to steal the possessions of the

Egyptians, and God ordered Hosea to take an adulterous wife, which is contrary to [the virtue of] chastity. Therefore, it is not the case that God is to be obeyed in all things.

**Objection 3:** If someone obeys God, then he conforms his will to God's will even with respect to the thing willed by God (*etiam in voluto*). But as was established above (*ST* 1-2, q. 19, a. 10), we are not obligated to conform our will to God's will with respect to all the things willed by God. Therefore, it is not the case that a man is obligated to obey God in all things.

**But contrary to this:** Exodus 24:7 says, "All the things the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient."

**I respond:** As was explained above (a. 1), he who obeys is moved by the command of the one whom he is obeying, just as natural things are moved by their movers. Now as is clear from what was said above (*ST* 1-2, q. 9, a. 6), just as God is the first mover of all things that are moved naturally, so, too, He is the first mover of all wills. And so just as all natural things are subject to God's moving them by natural necessity, so, too, all wills are obligated to obey God's command by a certain necessity of justice.

**Reply to objection 1:** Our Lord did not tell the blind men to keep the miracle hidden because He intended to obligate them by the force of a divine command; instead, as Gregory explains in *Moralia* 19, "He was giving an example to His servants who follow Him, in order that they might desire to hide their virtues, and yet that those virtues might be involuntarily revealed, in order that others might profit by their example."

**Reply to objection 2:** Just as (a) God does nothing *contrary to nature*, because, as we read in a Gloss on Romans 11:24, "the nature of each thing lies in what God does in it," and yet (b) He does some things *contrary to the ordinary course of nature*, so, too, God cannot command anything contrary to virtue, since virtue and the rectitude of the human will consist principally in one's being conformed to the will of God and following His direction (*imperium*), even if it might be *contrary to the usual mode of the virtue*.

Accordingly, then, the command made to Abraham, that he should kill his innocent son, was not contrary to justice, since God is the author of death and of life. Similarly, it was not contrary to justice that God ordered the Jews to take the possessions of the Egyptians, since all things are His and He gives them to whom He wills. Similarly, the command to Hosea to take an adulterous wife was not contrary to chastity, since God Himself imposes order on human generation, and a mode of having intercourse with women (*modus mulieribus utendi*) that God establishes is an appropriate one. Hence, the individuals in question did not sin either by obeying God or by willing to obey Him.

**Reply to objection 3:** Even if a man is not always obligated to will what God wills, he is nonetheless always obligated to will what God wills him to will. And what God wills him to will is made known to a man mainly through God's commands (*per praeceptum divinum*). And that is the way in which a man is obligated to obey God's commands in all things.

## Article 5

### Are subjects obligated to obey their superiors in all things?

It seems that subjects are obligated to obey their superiors in all things (*subditi teneantur suis superioribus in omnibus obedire*):

**Objection 1:** In Colossians 3:20 the Apostle says, "Children, obey your parents in all things (*per omnia*)." And later on (3:23) he adds, "Servants, obey your fleshly masters in all things." Therefore, for the same reason, other subjects ought to obey their leaders in all things.

**Objection 2:** Leaders (*praelati*) lie in the middle between God and their subjects—this according to Deuteronomy 5:5 ("I was the mediator and stood between the Lord and you at that time, to announce

His words to you”). But one does not go from one endpoint to the other endpoint except by passing through the middle. Therefore, a leader’s commands are to be thought of as God’s commands. Hence, in Galatians 4:14 the Apostle says, “You received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.” And in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 he says, “When you had received from us the word of the hearing of God, you received it as the word of God, as it is indeed, and not as the word of men.” Therefore, just as a man ought to obey God in all things, so, too, he ought to obey his leaders in all things.

**Objection 3:** Just as, by their profession, those in the religious state (*religiosi*) vow chastity and poverty, so, too, they vow obedience. But someone in the religious state is obligated to observe chastity and poverty in all things (*ad omnia*). Therefore, he is similarly obligated to be obedient in all things.

**But contrary to this:** Acts 5:29 says, “It is necessary to obey God rather than men.” But sometimes the commands of superiors are contrary to God. Therefore, superiors are not to be obeyed in all things.

**I respond:** As has been explained (aa. 1 and 4), one who obeys is moved at the command of the one who orders him with a certain *necessity of justice* in the way that a natural entity is moved by the power of its mover with a *necessity of nature*. Now there are two ways in which it can happen that a natural entity is not moved by its mover:

In one way, *because of an impediment* that has its source in the stronger power of another mover, in the way that wood is not caused to flame up by a fire if the stronger force of water impedes this.

In a second way, *because of some defect in the way in which the movable thing is ordered toward its mover*. For even if it is in some respect subject to the action of its mover, it is nonetheless not subject to it in all respects—as, for instance, when a humor is subject to the action of bodily heat (*calor*) with respect to being heated, but not with respect to being dried out or consumed.

Similarly, there are two ways in which it can happen that a subject is not obligated to obey his superior in all things:

In one way, *because of a command that has greater force (propter praeceptum maioris potestatis)*. For as a Gloss on Romans 13:2 (“Those who resist will incur damnation for themselves” (*qui resistunt ipsi sibi damnationem acquirunt*)) says, “If the procurator issues an order, should you comply if it is contrary to what the governor commands? Again, if the governor commands one thing and the emperor another, is there any doubt that the former is to be disregarded and the latter obeyed? Therefore if the emperor commands something different from what God commands, you must disregard him and obey God.”

In a second way, a subordinate is not obligated to obey his superior *if the superior commands him to do something with respect to which he is not subject to the superior*. For instance, in *De Beneficiis* 3 Seneca says, “It is a mistake to think that servitude descends upon the entire man. The better part of him is excepted. The servile bodies (*corpora obnoxia*) are assigned to the masters, but the mind is his own.” And so in those matters having to do with the interior movement of his will, a man is obligated to obey only God and not another man. On the other hand, a man is obligated to obey another man in those things that are to be done exteriorly through his body. Yet even in these things, insofar as they involve the *nature* of the body, a man is obligated to obey only God and not another man; for all men are equal in nature, i.e., in those things that pertain to the sustaining of the body and the generation of offspring. Hence, servants are not obligated to obey their masters, or children their parents, in matters having to do with the contracting of marriage or the preservation of virginity or anything else of this sort.

However, in matters having to do with the disposition of human acts and affairs, a subject is obligated to obey his superior in accord with the sort of superiority he has; for instance, an army is obligated to obey its general in matters that have to do with battle, and a servant is obligated to obey his master in matters that have to do with carrying out servile tasks, and a son is obligated to obey his father in matters that have to do with his upbringing and the care of the household, and so on for the others.

**Reply to objection 1:** When the Apostle says “in all things” (*per omnia*), this should be taken to

mean “with respect to what pertains to the right of the father’s power or the master’s power.”

**Reply to objection 2:** Man is subject to God, absolutely speaking, with respect to all things, both interior and exterior, and so a man is obligated to obey Him in all things. By contrast, subordinates are subject to their superiors not with respect to all things, but instead with respect to certain things determinately. And it is with respect to those things that they stand between God and their subordinates. However, with respect to other things they are immediately subject to God, by whom they are instructed by natural law or written law.

**Reply to objection 3:** Individuals in the religious state (*religiosi*) profess obedience with respect to living out their rule (*ad regularem conversationem*), and it is in this that they are subject to their prelates. And so they are obligated to obey only with respect to what can pertain to the living out of the rule. And this is the obedience that is sufficient for their salvation.

However, if they also want to be obedient in other things, this will have to do with the full measure of perfection, as long as those things are not contrary to God or contrary to their profession of the rule; for obedience of that sort would be illicit.

So, then, there are three sorts of obedience that can be distinguished: one which is *sufficient for salvation* and according to which one obeys in those things to which he is obligated; a second, *perfect obedience*, which obeys in the case of all things that are permissible; and a third, *indiscreet obedience*, which, in addition, obeys in illicit matters.

## Article 6

### Are Christians obligated to obey secular powers?

It seems that Christians are not obligated to obey secular powers (*Christiani non teneantur saecularibus postestatibus obedire*):

**Objection 1:** A Gloss on Matthew 17:25 (“The children are free”) says, “If in every kingdom the children of the king who rules over that kingdom are free, then the children of the King to whom all kingdoms are subject should be free in every kingdom.” But through faith in Christ Christians have been made children of God—this according to John 1:12 (“He gave them the power to become children of God, those who believe in His name”). Therefore, they are not obligated to obey secular powers.

**Objection 2:** Romans 7:4 says, “You have become dead to the Law through the body of Christ,” and it is talking about the divine law of the Old Testament. But human law, through which men are subject to secular powers, is less important than the divine law of the Old Testament. Therefore, *a fortiori*, by the fact that they have become members of the Body of Christ, men are liberated from the law of subjection by which they had been constrained by secular rulers.

**Objection 3:** Men are not obligated to obey robbers who oppress them through violence. But in *De Civitate Dei* 4 Augustine says, “Once justice is removed, what are kingdoms except big domains of highway robbery (*magna latrocinia*)?” Therefore, since the secular dominion of rulers is most often exercised with injustice, or since they have seized the rule by unjust usurpation, it seems that secular rulers should not be obeyed by Christians.

**But contrary to this:** Titus 3:1 says, “Advise them to be subject to the rulers and powers.” And 1 Peter 2:13-14 says, “Be subject to every human creature for the sake of God, whether to the king as the highest authority or to the governors as sent by him.”

**I respond:** Faith in Christ is the origin and cause of justice—this according to Romans 3:22 (“The justice of God through faith in Jesus Christ”). And so the order of justice is strengthened by faith in Christ rather than destroyed by it. But the order of justice requires that subjects should obey their superiors, since otherwise the stability of human affairs (*humanarum rerum status*) would not be able to



be preserved. And so the faithful are not excused by faith in Christ from being obligated to obey secular rulers.

**Reply to objection 1:** As was explained above (a. 5), the servitude by which one man is subject to another involves the body and not the soul, which remains free. However, at present, in the state of this life, we are freed by the grace of Christ from defects of the soul, but not from defects of the body; this is clear from the Apostle in Romans 7:25 when he says of himself that with his mind he serves the law of God, but that with his flesh he serves the law of sin. And so, as is explained by a Gloss on 1 Timothy 6:1 (“If anyone is under the yoke of a servant ...), those who become children of God through grace are free from the spiritual servitude of sin, but not from the corporeal servitude by which they are bound to temporal masters.

**Reply to objection 2:** The Old Law prefigured the New Testament, and so it had to cease when the truth arrived. But this is unlike human law, through which one man is subject to another.

And yet one man is obligated to obey another by divine law as well.

**Reply to objection 3:** A man is obligated to obey secular rulers to the extent that the order of justice requires it. And so if their rule is *usurped* rather than *legitimate* (*si non habeant iustum principatum sed usurpatum*), or if they command what is unjust, then their subjects are not obligated to obey them—except, perhaps, incidentally (*per accidens*) in order to avoid scandal or danger.