## Aeneid Book III Analysis 9: Aeneas: *Pietas*



Pius is a difficult word to translate but, as we have already noticed, it is very important in the Aeneid. Aeneas himself is often described as pius Aeneas throughout the Aeneid. It does not have the rather negative force that it does in English to constantly describe your main character as "good/virtuous/pious/dutiful/religious". Rather it emphasises what to Romans was a most important virtue: pietas. Above you can see a Roman coin depicting Aeneas leaving the burning city of Troy. On his back he carries his old father Anchises and in his hand he bears the Trojan household gods or lares. The Romans would see this behaviour as the embodiment of pietas.

It is Anchises himself who utters the word *pios* in the IGCSE set lines. *Di, prohibete minas; di, talem avertite casum et placidi servate pios*, he prays as the Trojans prepare to leave the Clashing Islands after the prophecy of Celaeno. The word *pios* is the masculine plural form, Anchises is describing the whole Trojan party. "Gods, avert these threats, gods, prevent these acts, and, in peace, protect the virtuous – the *puis*. In this speech Anchises uses the term pios (masculine plural) and applies it to Aeneas and all his companions.

What did Romans understand by pietas? Cicero defined pietas in this way: pietatem, quae erga patriam aut parentes aut alios sanguine coniunctos officium conservare moneat. "piety, which admonishes us to do our duty to our country or our parents or other blood relations." Duty to parents was considered especially important and this is what particularly singled out Aeneas. In the picture which heads today's lesson you see a statue of him carrying his lame father, Anchises, out of the burning ruins of Troy, a supreme act of pietas. Notice that duty to country Patria comes even before duty to parents in Cicero's list. Aeneas and his Trojan party, toiling to carry out the command of the gods to found a new city and carrying with them the Lares or household gods of Troy, were fulfilling their duty to patria.

As with all man made religions, the Roman system was one of salvation based on human effort. The truly virtuous, provided all the correct rites have been observed, arrive after death in the Elysian Fields where according to Virgil, reincarnation is possible. The rest remain in Hades.

The Bible, on the other hand, teaches that the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden leads to sin and therefore death and punishment passing on the entire human race. As a consequence we are all naturally rebels against God. No matter how hard we try we can never be wholly good all the time. God in his mercy and kindness sent his own Son to die for rebellious sinners, taking the punishment they deserve. By repenting of our sin and trusting in Jesus Christ we can have everlasting life.

The Bible sets out God's standards of goodness for two reasons. Firstly, when viewed honestly, we can see that our lives do not match up to this standard. Secondly, Christians want to try to live their lives in ways that please Jesus Christ because they love Him and are eternally grateful for His salvation. We know what pleases Him because he has told us in his word, the Bible.

We can compare Roman *pietas* with the Biblical/Christian moral code as we have it in the Ten Commandments and especially in Jesus's summary in Matthew 22:38-9. Firstly we see that the Bible's moral code is based on love: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." In the Ten Commandments themselves we see this also. It is love (Exodus 20:6) that leads us to desire to keep God's commandments. The Christian's love is directed firstly to God himself. All the commandments in the first table of the law are to do with our love for God.

Interestingly, in the Bible, the second table of the law starts with honouring our parents. This is where we can make a direct comparison with Cicero's summary of *pietas*. Cicero puts country before parents. However, although the Christian strives to be a good and useful citizen, his highest allegiance is to his Heavenly City. According to Cicero, *pietas* stops at our duty to our country or our parents or other blood relations. The Bible has a much higher standard: we must loved our very enemies. (Matthew 5:43-8)

at sociis subita gelidus formidine sanguis
deriguit: cecidere animi, nec iam amplius armis,
sed votis precibusque iubent exposcere pacem,
sive deae seu sint dirae obscenaeque volucres.
et pater Anchises passis de litore palmis
numina magna vocat meritosque indicit honores:
'di, prohibete minas; di, talem avertite casum
et placidi servate pios.' tum litore funem
deripere excussosque iubet laxare rudentis.

a. Pater Anchises (line 264) Whose father is he?

- [1]
- b. Write out and scan line 627 marking the long and short syllables and divisions between the feet.

[2]

- c. *Pios* (line 266) To what extent do you consider from your reading of Book 3 of the Aenid that the Trojans deserve this description? Support your answer with reference to the text. You should write at least 100 words.
- d. How does Virgil make his writing more vivid in line 261?

[2]

Specimen answers on the next page.

- a. Anchises is Aeneas's father.
- b. Check your answer with your flashcards.
- c. On the one hand the Trojans show a woeful lack of *pius* respect to the Harpies, the agents of the Gods whose job is to punish erring mortals and who are the owners of the Clashing Islands. [1]First the Trojans steal their cattle [1] and then when the Harpies arrive to punish them for this they try to kill them. Celaeno is quick to point out their transgression. [1]

On the other hand when they arrived at the Clashing Islands, the Trojans have behaved as *pius* Romans would at a feast or any meal by beginning with an offering to the gods. [1] They have called on Jupiter himself and the gods to join them. [1] When driven away from their food by the Harpies they show their *pietas* by relighting the altar fires [1] and when they were forced to leave

the island, Anchises prayed to the gods for protection and "declared the due sacrifice." [1] All this shows *pietas* in the religious sense. When Achaemenides the Greek appears, the Trojans show *pietas* even beyond what is strictly considered a Roman duty. [1] Taking pity on and rescuing an enemy does not feature in the *pietas* of Cicero, for instance, whose description of duty begins with country (*patria*) and ends with near relations. [1] Here the Trojans behave with a *pietas* that seems to foreshadow Christian morality which requires "loving your enemy" as they receive Achaemenides.[1]

You may have had different answers but must make 10 points/examples/quotes.

d. Virgil makes his writing more vivid in line 261 by employing Zeugma. [1] The phrase exposcere pacem relates to the weapons and also to the vows and prayers. It has a (slightly) different meaning in each case. You can seek peace (i.e. relief from annoyance) with weapons. This is what Aeneas and his followers had been doing when they attacked the Harpies. This is different to begging for peace (i.e. for cessation of hostilities) from the enemy. The weapons might be suitable for dreadful birds but prayers are more suited to goddesses and the contrast is vivid.[1]