

INTRODUCTION TO CATHOLICISM

Chapter 25



The Seventh & Tenth Commandments

Justice and Charity

Chapter 25

The Seventh & Tenth Commandments

Tom and John were late for the high school basketball game, so they took a short cut through the team locker room. New uniforms were laid out on the bench.

“Hey, Tom, look at those. Let’s take a couple – no one will know.”

“C’mon, John, I don’t want to be a thief.”

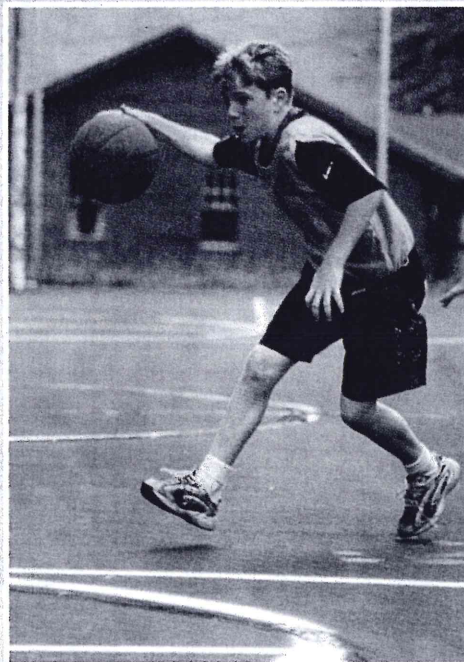
“Tom, it’s not stealing; the school has lots of money.”

They each took one uniform.

Later on, Tom’s conscience bothered him, and he asked John to give him the uniforms so he could return them. John agreed, and Tom returned the uniforms. When Tom and John met on their first break from college, John brought up the uniform incident.

“You know, I’ve asked myself a hundred times, why did we do that? I am glad you talked me into returning them.”

“Well, John, I never told you, but when I returned the uniforms, I found out the kids who were given the uniforms were told they had to pay for them. From the looks on their faces I learned that I can never realize how much theft could hurt someone. I promised myself I would never steal anything again.”



THE SEVENTH AND TENTH COMMANDMENTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

You shall not steal. (Ex 20:15)

You shall not covet... anything that is your neighbor's. (Ex 20:17)

The seventh commandment forbids unjustly taking or keeping the goods of one's neighbor and wronging him in any way with respect to his goods. It commands justice and charity in the care of earthly goods and the fruits of men's labor. For the sake of the common good, it requires respect for the universal destination of goods and the respect for the right to private property. Christian life strives to order this world's goods to God and to fraternal charity. (CCC 2401)

The Pentateuch records that after the creation, God entrusted the earth and its resources to the first man, Adam, and to his heirs. In subsequent chapters of the Old Testament, God lists specific rules governing property. In addition to forbidding theft, he sets out laws regulating the tithing of produce, the keeping of slaves, and the treatment of those who borrow money, as well as warning that prosperity can be dangerous to the Jewish people's relationship with God.

Through our inheritance from Adam, the earth and all it produces is meant for all people. This ultimate purpose of the fruits of the earth is known as the *universal destination of goods*.

The fact that the products of the earth should benefit all people, however, does not cancel out the use of private property. Man does in fact have a right to own and make use of private property—because ownership can benefit both individuals and societies. For individuals, this right is united with man's dignity because private property allows him to secure basic needs for himself and those for whom he is responsible. For societies, private property can contribute to proper order within a community because respect for ownership leads to natural unity among men.

There may seem to be some tension between the right to private property and the universal destination of goods. Some may ask, "how can the earth belong to all people, while at the same time individuals have a right to own part of the earth and its products?" This problem is solved when you realize that ownership is not absolute.

The *right to private property*, acquired or received in a just way, does not do away with the original gift of the earth to the whole of mankind. The *universal destination of goods* remains primordial, even if the promotion of the common good requires respect for the right to private property and its exercise. (CCC 2403)

Property is held from God in stewardship: everything that exists belongs to the Lord, who has placed us in charge to manage it for him. Therefore, we must use things responsibly in ways that glorify him, not in any way we please. Stewardship, then, requires that a person take care of his family's needs first and use the excess of need for the good of others, who in fraternal charity have a right to what is left over. People are required to use their belongings to help those in need as much as is possible and reasonable. A portion of what a person has in excess of his own needs should go to the poor.

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Goods of production—material or immaterial—such as land, factories, practical or artistic skills, oblige their possessors to employ them in ways that will benefit the greatest number. Those who hold goods for use and consumption should use them with moderation, reserving the better part for guests, for the sick, and the poor. (CCC 2405)

In spite of God's plan for the universal destination of goods, many people live in poverty. When someone is facing the hardships of poverty, he is perfectly just to want the basic goods—food, shelter, clothing, etc.—that he sees others possessing. This desire is not sinful—a person has a right to these goods if he cannot justly earn them. If basic goods cannot be acquired through charity from others, then the state has an obligation to offer assistance.

THE SEVENTH AND TENTH COMMANDMENTS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

And he said to them, "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Lk 12: 15-21)

In this parable, Jesus makes clear two sins against the seventh and tenth commandments. First, he warns against desiring more goods than one needs, and second, he warns against securing goods without regard for salvation. Every human person needs the products of this life, but goods and the desire for them must not take priority over one's relationship with God. This tendency is a problem of particular importance in our time.

The second half of the twentieth century enabled ordinary men in many places to acquire goods and property on a scale formerly reserved to the rich. This accumulation of wealth has led to the false idea that people can use their property as they wish, without regard for the needs of others. This attitude is clearly demonstrated by the rich man in the parable, who was concerned only for his own personal happiness.

The example of many people in sports and entertainment has led to easy acceptance of the so-called "good life" mentality, which sees in wealth the opportunity to sit back and enjoy life however one's desires dictate. Christians are obliged in charity to assist their neighbors with the excess of their property. Each person is required to use his goods in moderation so there will be a portion left for the sick and the poor.

On coming into the world, man is not equipped with everything he needs for developing his bodily and spiritual life. He needs others. Differences appear tied to age, physical abilities, intellectual or moral aptitudes, the benefits derived from social commerce, and the distribution of wealth.¹ The "talents" are not distributed equally.²



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These differences belong to God's plan, who wills that each receive what he needs from others, and that those endowed with particular "talents" share the benefits with those who need them. These differences encourage and often oblige persons to practice generosity, kindness, and sharing of goods; they foster the mutual enrichment of cultures. (CCC 1936-1937)

Since we are interdependent, we ought to practice social charity. Social charity, or solidarity, is a virtue which is manifested by setting up programs to insure the fair distribution of goods and equitable compensation for work. A commitment to solidarity will overcome the tendency within communities for men to seek unfair advantage over their neighbors. The net result will be a reduction of tensions and conflicts between different social classes and economic groups. Social charity requires the good will of all men and becomes more dispersed to the extent that it is practiced. One of the best witnesses to social charity is the giving of alms to the poor.

For human dignity to be respected, not only must social charity be practiced, but also the virtues of temperance and justice:

- † Temperance moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods;
- † Justice makes it possible to have a constant and firm will to give both God and neighbor their dues.

Those who prefer Jesus to the goods of this world will have a correct balance between goods and love of God. This is set forth in the first beatitude, which states, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall see God" (Mt 5:3-10). The vision of God is a greater blessing than all the earth's treasures, and life with and in God is preferable to any other happiness. Those who want to achieve life with God must strive to live as if they had no goods; then their goods will not possess them.

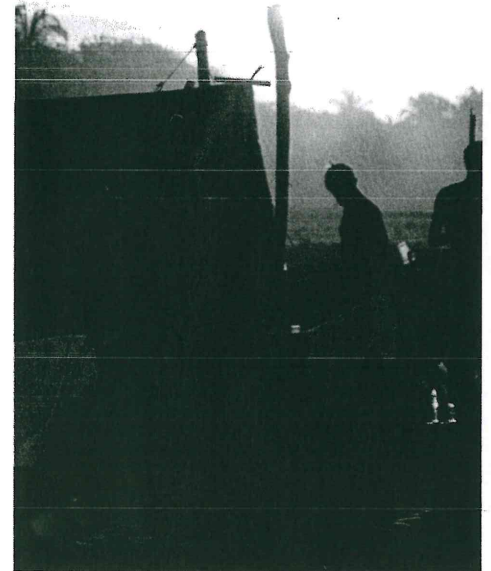
We are not required, however, to give all money that is not spent on food, shelter, and clothing to charity. Since leisure is necessary to restore energy, it is moral to set aside a portion of one's income for entertainment. This would include games of chance, which are not immoral but can become so when they deprive someone of what is necessary to supply his own needs or his dependents' needs.

All Christ's faithful are to "direct their affections rightly, lest they be hindered in their pursuit of perfect charity by the use of worldly things and by an adherence to riches which is contrary to the spirit of evangelical poverty."³ (CCC 2545)

SINS AGAINST THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

The most obvious sin against the seventh commandment is theft, the taking of another's property against his reasonable will. This sin deprives someone of what is rightly his.

Every use of another person's property without permission, however, does not constitute theft. For example, if you know the owner would have no objection to the use, or if his refusal would be contrary to justice, right reason, and the universal destination of goods, no theft is committed. Nor would it be theft in cases of obvious and urgent necessity. Two examples:



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The Seventh & Tenth Commandments

- ◆ A friend has a heart attack, and no ambulance is available. You have no automobile but are aware that a neighbor who is not home leaves his keys in the car. It would be moral to use his car to get your friend to a hospital;
- ◆ Skiers are lost in the mountains, and a snowstorm is raging. If their lives are in danger, it would be moral for them to take shelter in the cabin of a person who is not present.

Listed below are some common sins against the seventh commandment:

- ◆ Robbery, the taking of another's goods through force;
- ◆ Keeping borrowed property;
- ◆ Work purposefully done poorly;
- ◆ Use of stolen credit cards;
- ◆ Paying politicians bribes to secure unfair advantage;
- ◆ Willfully damaging property;
- ◆ Breaking promises that are morally upright;
- ◆ Destroying your own property when it could be sold to assist the poor;
- ◆ Cheating on tests and at games;
- ◆ Stealing from an employer;
- ◆ Buying or selling stolen goods;
- ◆ Charging unfair interest rates;
- ◆ Committing fraud in business;
- ◆ Charging higher prices to those in dire need;
- ◆ Cheating employees out of commissions;
- ◆ Refusing to do work for agreed wages;
- ◆ Breaking contracts;
- ◆ Evading taxes.

In cases of fraud, damage to property, theft, and robbery, the guilty person is required to make restitution: to return or replace the goods stolen or their value to the person or persons harmed. Restitution may be made secretly.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT AND COMMERCE

Christ has given the Church the authority to make judgments about economic and social matters to defend the fundamental rights of all persons, for a minimum of wealth is necessary to enable one to save one's soul. The Church's instructions on relations between individuals in society are called *social justice* or *solidarity*. The purpose of this teaching is to explain how secular life among members of society should be lived in light of Christ's teachings. It is a collection of papal teachings that began with Pope Leo XIII in the nineteenth century. It lists the principles that should direct the public life of society. It is a collection of truths based on natural law, the Gospels, moral principles, and magisterial teachings. Its purpose is to order men to act justly toward their neighbors in all financial dealings.



Christ has given the Church the authority to make judgments about economic and social matters to defend the fundamental rights of all persons.

Man has been made by God to be the author, center, and goal of all economic life. Business is not to have profit as its highest goal. Though profit must be a consideration if the business is to survive, the main goals of economic activity should be the support and development of individuals through work and service of human beings:

† By his work, man participates in the work of creation, and in a sense, participates in the redemptive work of Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter who was crucified for the sins of all men. Every occupation, however high or low, offers an opportunity for man to find perfection and save his soul. Work also entitles man to a just wage determined by both his contributions and his needs and the needs of his dependents;

† The earth is abundantly supplied with resources, and individuals are abundantly supplied with unique skills and talents, all of which come from God. The goods and services brought about by economic life ought to reach everyone if the virtues of justice and charity are practiced.

Everyone has the *right of economic initiative*; everyone should make legitimate use of his talents to contribute to the abundance that will benefit all and to harvest the just fruits of his labor. He should seek to observe regulations issued by legitimate authority for the sake of the common good.⁴ (CCC 2429)

The seventh commandment forbids acts or enterprises that for any reason — selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian — lead to the *enslavement of human beings*, to their being bought, sold and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit. [As a call to solidarity] St. Paul directed a Christian master to treat his Christian slave “no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, . . . both in the flesh and in the Lord.”⁵ (CCC 2414)

This obligation to solidarity includes giving assistance to the extent it is possible to those who suffer inequalities in their standard of living, as occurs in many parts of the world.

The earth is made for all people, so its fruits must be treated in a responsible manner. Natural resources are destined for the common good not only of those living now but also of people who will live in the future. The use of vegetable, mineral, and animal resources, then, cannot be separated from the obligation to use them responsibly, as God intended.

Medical and scientific experimentation upon animals, for example, is legitimate when it is kept within reasonable limits since it contributes to caring for or saving human lives. But intentionally harming animals without cause is an abuse of the earth and its resources.

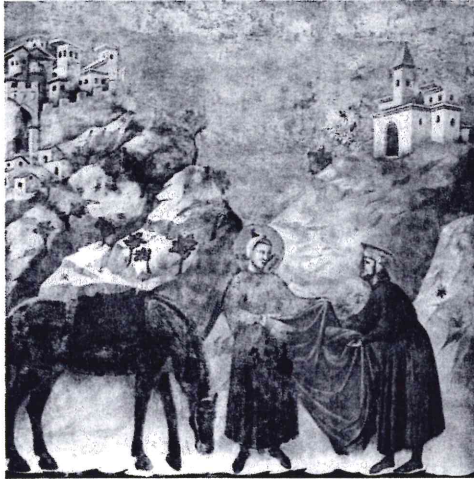
It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly. It is likewise unworthy to spend money on them that should as a priority go to the relief of human misery. One can love animals; one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons. (CCC 2418)

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Envy is one of the capital sins, and it is good to remind ourselves that the sin of envy entered the world with the devil's envy of God.



St Francis Giving his Mantle to a Poor Man

The poor need special care and consideration as a matter of justice and charity.

YOU SHALL NOT COVET YOUR NEIGHBOR'S GOODS

The tenth commandment forbids *greed* and the desire to amass earthly goods without limit. It forbids *avarice* arising from a passion for riches and their attendant power. It also forbids the desire to commit injustice by harming our neighbor in his temporal goods:

When the Law says, "You shall not covet," these words mean that we should banish our desires for whatever does not belong to us. Our thirst for another's goods is immense, infinite, never quenched. Thus it is written: "He who loves money never has money enough."⁶ (CCC 2536)

A person who covets has a sinful desire for the goods of another. Covetousness takes many forms:

- ◆ Desiring goods to which you have no right;
- ◆ Wishing your neighbor would lose his goods out of envy;
- ◆ Reducing the quantity of goods to create artificial scarcity.

Envy is one of the capital sins, and it is good to remind ourselves that the sin of envy entered the world with the devil's envy of God (Wis 2: 24). It is wrong to be sad at the good fortune of another. Those who wish their neighbor grave harm out of envy are guilty of mortal sin. Envy is a form of sadness that results from lack of charity toward one's neighbor. It must be banished from the human heart. Envy can only be conquered by abandonment to God's providence as an act of humility.

CONCLUSION

According to the wise plan of God, man seeks his salvation in society. As a member of society, he has a right to own and use property. The right ordering of society requires that all use their property in keeping with the norms of justice and charity. This means that no one has a right to deprive a person of property unjustly, nor does ownership allow someone to use his belongings however he wants, without regard to the needs of others. Detachment from riches is necessary for entrance into God's kingdom.

The poor need special care and consideration as a matter of justice and charity. One way to accomplish this is through alms-giving.

True development of society concerns not just a more efficient economic system but the whole person. Societies should strive to increase each person's ability to respond to the call of God to save his soul. If a person is reduced to nothing but his "productivity," this call is being ignored.

It should be obvious that man can live in peace only to the extent that he is willing to deal with his neighbor in charity and justice. These two virtues enable human solidarity to flourish even among people of different races and cultures. Where there is a willingness to love one's neighbor, there will be a strong inclination to work out any problems that arise by negotiation rather than by conflict.

The Seventh and Tenth Commandments

Chapter 25 Study Guide

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

John Bernadone was born in Assisi, a small town in the Umbrian region of Italy, in 1182. The son of Peter Bernadone, a prosperous cloth merchant who traded heavily with the French, John was quickly nicknamed Francis, a name people have used now for centuries.

In his youth, Francis had a genuine passion for living. He was outgoing and charismatic, traits that made him popular with the other young people of the town. This zeal would lead him to revel a bit too much in material pleasures. Because his father enjoyed seeing Francis so popular among the other wealthy youths of the area, Peter Bernadone gladly supported these expensive tastes. Francis, however, never became a wanton sinner, having too much good sense to fall into such traps.

As part of his love for life, Francis relished the ideal of knighthood, painting a picture for himself of chivalry and high adventure. When his hometown went to war with the nearby town of Perugia, Francis quickly volunteered to fight. He was soon captured by the Perugians, and spent one year in captivity. His father eventually paid ransom to release Francis, but Francis fell seriously ill for a year.

After his recovery, still in love with the idea of knighthood, Francis joined the company of a knight who was off to fight for the pope. Well dressed, as usual, and also wearing fine armor, Francis' company came across a knight who had fallen on hard times. Taking pity on this man, and probably realizing that the knight was more in need than he himself was, Francis traded clothes with the knight.

That evening, Francis had a powerful dream. He saw his father's house transformed into a castle and covered with shields, all marked with the sign of the Cross. When Francis awoke, he felt the dream predicted success for himself as a knight, but this was not to be. Again, Francis fell ill. While lying helpless, he



St. Francis of Assisi
(1181-1226)
Feast on October 4

heard a voice telling him to return home and “serve the Master rather than the man.” Francis returned to Assisi, confused about what God wanted him to do. He knew he was tired of trivial pleasures and gains, but he did not know to what he should dedicate his life.

While walking one day in a field, thinking about what was being asked of him, Francis came upon a leper. Although the sores of the leper initially filled Francis with disgust, he quickly recovered and kissed the hand of the sick man. At the same time, Francis gave all of his money to the leper.

This act gave Francis such peace and happiness that he then began visiting the sick and giving all that he had to the poor—for he realized that when he served the suffering he

Continued

SUPPLEMENTARY READING CONTINUED

was serving Christ. While all this was occurring, many people in Assisi, including Francis' father, noticed the changes in the young man. Some even thought he had gone mad.

The next turning point in Francis' life came during a pilgrimage to Rome. While he was leaving St. Peter's Basilica, Francis was approached by a group of beggars. He pulled aside the one who looked most in need and traded clothes with the man. Francis then spent the rest of the day begging with the poorest of Rome. This was the future saint's first serious pursuit of the love of his life, poverty. Francis' desire for poverty was so intense that artists have portrayed poverty as a beautiful woman, Lady Poverty, whom Francis was courting.

After his pilgrimage to Rome, Francis went to his father's warehouse, and, out of pure generosity and love, took a horse-load of cloth to the market and sold both the cloth and the horse.

He took the money to a poor local priest, offering it as support for the parish while asking for a place to stay and reflect. The priest accepted Francis' company but refused the money. Francis placed the money on a windowsill.

When Francis' father, Peter, realized his horse and cloth were missing, he tracked down his son. Peter was calmed a bit when the priest gave him the money, but he still demanded to see Francis.

The young man, however, hid himself and spent the next few days in solitary prayer. He then went to see his father, who was again angered, this time by his son's shabby appearance—a result of Francis' generosity to the poor. Peter beat his son, chained him to a wall, and locked him away. But Francis remained determined to live a life of poverty and service to the poor.

Eventually his mother set him free. One final confrontation with his father followed, in which

Peter demanded that Francis obey or lose his inheritance. Francis gladly chose a life of poverty, and they went before the local bishop to formalize the disinheritance. While before the bishop, Francis so wanted to stress his love of poverty and disregard for belongings that he even gave the clothes he was wearing back to his father, saying, "Hitherto, I have called Peter Bernadone father. . . . From now on I say only, 'Our Father who art in heaven.'" The bishop was deeply moved by this act. He covered Francis with his own garments, until someone could get some clothes for the young saint. Given a simple robe, Francis marked the sign of the Cross on the shoulder with a piece of chalk.

Francis went on to found a religious order that renounces ownership of trivial belongings on earth, stressing poverty, love, and service to all, especially the poor. This order now bears his name. During the thirteenth century, the Franciscans helped revive the spiritual life of a struggling Church, making people realize that it was not treasure on earth that matters, but treasure in heaven.



St. Francis of Assisi Receiving the Stigmata

VOCABULARY

ARTIFICIAL SCARCITY

Hoarding of goods, especially in times of disaster.

BRIBERY

Knowingly offering money or other valuable objects so as to corrupt a person.

ENVY

Resentment or sadness at another's good fortune, and the desire to have it for oneself.

FRAUD

Sin of deception related to cheating.

GREED

The desire to amass earthly goods without limit.

PRIVATE PROPERTY

Individual ownership of a part of creation.

ROBBERY

Stealing by force or threatening of force.

SOCIAL CHARITY

The principle of friendship or solidarity manifested first in the distribution of goods and the remuneration of work.

STEWARDSHIP

God's entrusting of the resources of the world to mankind to care for it, master it by labor, and enjoy its fruits.

THEFT

Unjustly taking and keeping the property of another, against the reasonable will of the owner.

UNIVERSAL DESTINATION OF GOODS

Term used to describe the idea that the earth was originally given for the good of all mankind and that all resources should be used accordingly.



STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Does man have a right to own property? If so, is this right absolute?
2. What should the extra goods that a person has be used for?
3. What are some of the overlooked sins against the seventh commandment?
4. What is the purpose of economic activity?
5. Why does the Church have a right to give teachings on social and economic matters?
6. Is every case of taking or using a person's belongings a sin against the seventh commandment?
7. Are we required to give all money that is not spent on essentials to the poor?
8. What is the purpose of private property?
9. The biggest problem in economics is scarcity—the principle that each person has “unlimited wants but limited resources.” How does the ninth commandment free us from this problem?
10. What do you think is the minimum amount of wealth that a person requires for salvation?

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Jim is employed at a small grocery store. The owner pays him less than he pays the full-time employees who do the same work. The reason he gives is that part-time employees have less value than full-time. Would it be all right for Jim to take money from the register to make up for the difference in pay?
2. Bart and Jim plan to “T-P” the rival football captain’s house for homecoming. Is there a moral problem with a “harmless” act of vandalism like this? Why or why not?
3. While Teresa was at college, she purchased a new wardrobe on a time payment plan. She used the information she learned in law school to file bankruptcy and kept the clothes. What she did was perfectly legal, but what is the moral nature of her actions? Can something be immoral if it is legal?
4. Put together a clothing/canned food drive at your school and/or parish. Ask your classmates, teacher, principal, pastor, family, and friends to help support the needy in your area.

FROM THE CATECHISM

2450 “You shall not steal” (Ex 20:15; Dt 5:19). “Neither thieves, nor the greedy..., nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:10).

2451 The seventh commandment enjoins the practice of justice and charity in the administration of earthly goods and the fruits of men’s labor.

2452 The goods of creation are destined for the entire human race. The right to private property does not abolish the universal destination of goods.

2453 The seventh commandment forbids theft. Theft is the usurpation of another’s goods against the reasonable will of the owner.

2454 Every manner of taking and using another’s property unjustly is contrary to the seventh commandment. The injustice committed requires reparation. Commutative justice requires the restitution of stolen goods.

2455 The moral law forbids acts which, for commercial or totalitarian purposes, lead to the enslavement of human beings, or to their being bought, sold or exchanged like merchandise.

2456 The dominion granted by the Creator over the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be separated from respect for moral obligations, including those toward generations to come.

2457 Animals are entrusted to man’s stewardship; he must show them kindness. They may be used to serve the just satisfaction of man’s needs.

2458 The Church makes a judgment about economic and social matters when the fundamental rights of the person or the salvation of souls requires it. She is concerned with the temporal common good of men because they are ordered to the sovereign Good, their ultimate end.

2459 Man is himself the author, center, and goal of all economic and social life. The decisive point of the social question is that goods created by God for everyone should in fact reach everyone in accordance with justice and with the help of charity.

2460 The primordial value of labor stems from man himself, its author and beneficiary. By means of his labor man participates in the work of creation. Work united to Christ can be redemptive.

2461 True development concerns the whole man. It is concerned with increasing each person’s ability to respond to his vocation and hence to God’s call. (cf. CA, 29)

2462 Giving alms to the poor is a witness to fraternal charity; it is also a work of justice pleasing to God.

2463 How can we not recognize Lazarus, the hungry beggar in the parable (cf. Lk 17: 19-31), in the multitude of human beings without bread, a roof or a place to stay? How can we fail to hear Jesus: “As you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me” (Mt 25: 45)?

2551 “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mt 6: 21).

2552 The tenth commandment forbids avarice arising from a passion for riches and their attendant power.

FROM THE CATECHISM CONTINUED

2553 Envy is sadness at the sight of another's goods and the immoderate desire to have them for oneself. It is a capital sin.

2554 The baptized person combats envy through good-will, humility, and abandonment to the providence of God.

2555 Christ's faithful "have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal 5: 24); they are led by the spirit and follow his desires.

2556 Detachment from riches is necessary for entering the Kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

2557 "I want to see God" expresses the true desire of man. Thirst for God is quenched by the water of eternal life (Cf. Jn 4:14).

Endnotes

1. Cf. *GS*, 29 § 2.

2. Cf. Mt 25: 14-30; Lk 19: 27.

3. *LG*, 42 § 3.

4. Cf. *CA*, 32; 34.

5. *Phlm* 16.

6. *Roman Catechism*, III, 37; cf. Sir 5: 8.