



## **THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT**

***“You shall not steal”***

***2. Social Doctrine, Social Justice,  
Solidarity among Nations, Love of the Poor***

***Texts from the  
Catechism of the Catholic Church***

### **THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH**

#### ***Based on the teaching of Christ***

Christian revelation promotes a deeper understanding of the laws of social living. The Church receives from the Gospel the full revelation of the truth about man. When she fulfils her mission of proclaiming the Gospel, she bears witness to man, in the name of Christ, to his dignity and his vocation to the communion of persons. She teaches him the demands of justice and peace in conformity with divine wisdom. (2419)

The Church makes a moral judgement about economic and social matters, when the fundamental rights of the person or the salvation of souls requires it. In the moral order she bears a mission distinct from that of political authorities: the Church is concerned with the temporal aspects of the common good because they are ordered to the sovereign Good, our ultimate end. The Church's social teaching comprises a body of doctrine articulated with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, in the light of the whole of what has been revealed by Jesus Christ. (2420-2422)

#### ***The disordered desire for money and profit***

Any system in which social relationships are determined entirely by economic factors is contrary to the nature of the human person and his acts. A theory that makes profit the exclusive norm and ultimate end of economic activity is morally unacceptable. The disordered desire for money cannot but produce perverse effects. It is one of the causes of the many conflicts which disturb the social order. (2423-2424)

A system that subordinates the basic rights of individuals and of groups to the collective organization of production is contrary to human dignity. Every practice that reduces persons to nothing more than a means of profit enslaves man, leads to idolizing money and contributes to the spread of atheism. “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13) (2424)

#### ***Totalitarianism, individualism, centralized planning***

The Church has rejected the totalitarian and atheistic ideologies associated in modern times with “communism” or “socialism”. She has likewise refused to accept, in the practice of “capitalism”, individualism and the absolute primacy of the law of the marketplace over human labour. Regulating the economy solely by centralized planning perverts the basis of social bonds; regulating it solely by the law of the marketplace fails social justice, for there are many human needs which cannot be satisfied by the market. Reasonable regulation of the marketplace and economic initiatives, in keeping with a just hierarchy of values and a view to the common good, is to be commended. (2425)

### **ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

#### ***Human work and economics in God's plan – work is for man not man for work***

The development of economic activity and growth in production are meant to provide for the needs of human beings. Economic life is not meant solely to multiply goods produced and increase profit or power; it is ordered first of all to the service of persons, of the whole man, and of the entire human community. Economic activity, conducted according to its own proper methods, is to be exercised within the limits of the moral order, in keeping with social justice so as to correspond to God's plan for man. (2426)

*Human work* proceeds directly from persons created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the earth, both with and for one another. (Cf. Gen 1:28) Hence work is a duty: “If any one will not work, let him not eat” (2 Th 3:10). Work honours the Creator's gifts and the talents received from him. It can also be redemptive. By enduring the hardship of work in union with Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth and the one crucified on Calvary, man collaborates in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work. He shows himself to be a disciple of Christ by carrying the cross, daily, in the work he is called to accomplish.

Work can be a means of sanctification and a way of animating earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ. Work is for man, not man for work. Everyone should be able to draw from work the means of providing for his life and that of his family, and of serving the human community. 2427- (2428)

#### ***The right of economic initiative and the responsibility of the state***

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 labour. He should seek to observe regulations issued by legitimate authority for the sake of the common good. (2429)

Efforts should be made to reduce conflicts in economic life by negotiation that respects the rights and duties of each social partner: those responsible for business enterprises, representatives of wage-earners - for example, trade unions - and public authorities when appropriate. (2430)

*The responsibility of the state.* Economic activity, especially the activity of a market economy, cannot be conducted in an institutional, juridical or political vacuum. On the contrary, it presupposes sure guarantees of individual freedom and private property, as well as a stable currency and efficient public services. Hence the principal task of the state is to guarantee this security, so that those who work and produce can enjoy the fruits of their labours and thus feel encouraged to work efficiently and honestly... Another task of the state is that of overseeing and directing the exercise of human rights in the economic sector. However, primary responsibility in this area belongs not to the state but to individuals and to the various groups and associations which make up society. (2431)

#### ***Business, employment, a just wage, and strikes***

Those *responsible for business enterprises* are responsible to society for the economic and ecological effects of their operations. They have an obligation to consider the good of persons and not only the increase of profits. Profits are necessary, however. They make possible the investments that ensure the future of a business and they guarantee employment. (2432)

*Access to employment* and to professions must be open to all without unjust discrimination: men and women, healthy and disabled, natives and immigrants. For its part society should, according to circumstances, help citizens find work and employment. A *just wage* is the legitimate fruit of work. To refuse or withhold it can be a grave injustice. (2433-2434)

*Recourse to a strike* is morally legitimate when it cannot be avoided, or at least when it is necessary to obtain a proportionate benefit. It becomes morally unacceptable when accompanied by violence, or when objectives are included that are not directly linked to working conditions or are contrary to the common good. (2435)

It is unjust not to pay the social security *contributions* required by legitimate authority.

*Unemployment* almost always wounds its victim's dignity and threatens the equilibrium of his life. Besides the harm done to him personally, it entails many risks for his family. (2436)

## JUSTICE AND SOLIDARITY AMONG NATIONS

### *Relations between rich and poor nations*

On the international level, inequality of resources and economic capability is such that it creates a real "gap" between nations. On the one side there are those nations possessing and developing the means of growth and, on the other, those accumulating debts. (2437)

There must be solidarity among nations which are already politically interdependent. It is even more essential when it is a question of dismantling the "perverse mechanisms" that impede the development of the less advanced countries. In place of usurious financial systems, iniquitous commercial relations among nations, and the arms race, there must be substituted a common effort to mobilize resources toward objectives of moral, cultural and economic development. (2438)

*Rich nations* have a grave moral responsibility toward those which are unable to ensure the means of their development by themselves or have been prevented from doing so by tragic historical events. It is a duty in solidarity and charity; it is also an obligation in justice if the prosperity of the rich nations has come from resources that have not been paid for fairly. (2439)

### *Aid and development*

*Direct aid* is an appropriate response to immediate, extraordinary needs caused by natural catastrophes, epidemics, and the like. But it does not suffice to repair the grave damage resulting from destitution or to provide a lasting solution to a country's needs. It is also necessary to *reform* international economic and financial *institutions* so that they will better promote equitable relationships with less advanced countries. The efforts of poor countries working for growth and liberation must be supported, especially in the area of agricultural labour. Peasants, especially in the Third World, form the overwhelming majority of the poor. (2440)

An increased sense of God and increased self-awareness are fundamental to any *full development of human society*. This development multiplies material goods and puts them at the service of the person and his freedom. It reduces dire poverty and economic exploitation. It makes for growth in respect for cultural identities and openness to the transcendent. (2441)

It is not the role of the Pastors of the Church to intervene directly in the political structuring and organization of social life. This task is part of the vocation of the *lay faithful*, acting on their own initiative with their fellow citizens. Social action should always have the common good in view and be in conformity with the message of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church. (2442)

## LOVE FOR THE POOR

### *The spiritual and corporal works of mercy*

God blesses those who come to the aid of the poor and rebukes those who turn away from them. It is by what they have done for the poor that Jesus Christ will recognize his chosen ones. When "the poor have the good news preached to them" it is the sign of Christ's presence. (Mt 11:5) (2443)

The Church's love for the poor is a part of her constant tradition. This love is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus and of his concern for the poor. Love for the poor is even one of the motives for the duty of working so as to "be able to give to those in need" (Eph 4:28), and it extends also to the many forms of cultural and religious poverty. (2444)

Love for the poor is incompatible with immoderate love of riches or their selfish use. (2445–2446)

The *works of mercy* are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbour in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting, are *spiritual works of mercy*, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently.

The *corporal works of mercy* consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God. (2447)

### *The compassion of Christ*

In its various forms - material deprivation, unjust oppression, physical and psychological illness and death - human misery is the obvious sign of the inherited condition of frailty and need for salvation in which man finds himself as a consequence of original sin. This misery elicited the compassion of Christ the Saviour, who willingly took it upon himself and identified himself with the least of his brethren. Hence, those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defence and liberation, through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere. (2448)

When her mother reproached her for caring for the poor and the sick at home, St. Rose of Lima said to her: "When we serve the poor and the sick, we serve Jesus. We must not fail to help our neighbours, because in them we serve Jesus." (2449)

## IN BRIEF

• **The Church makes a judgement 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. (2458)**

• **Man is himself the author, centre 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. (2459)**

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

• **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. (2461)**

**Giving alms to the poor is a witness to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God. (2462)**

• **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)? (2463)**