"Thou shalt not steal" -Ex. 20:15

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house…or anything that belongs to your neighbor." -Ex. 20:17

1. Ownership of Goods

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, while the tenth commandment forbids the coveting of the belongings of others. They command justice and charity in the care of possessions and the fruits of men's labor. They also require (for the sake of the common good) respect for the universal destination of goods and respect for the right to private property. Christian life strives to order this world's goods to God and to fraternal charity.

2. Property: Universal & Private

In the beginning, God entrusted the entirety of creation to the stewardship of man. Stewardship refers to the fact that man cares for and tends creation, as well as exercises dominion over it, but he is not its ultimate Lord. Man is to "till and keep" creation for God (Gen. 2:15). Man is to master creation by his labor and enjoy the fruits thereof.

Thus, the goods of creation are destined for the whole human race and the common good of all. However, earth is divided up among various families and tribes of men for the purpose of security. Therefore, property is amalgamated among individual nations, tribes, families and even persons. This division is legitimate for guaranteeing the freedom and dignity of persons and for helping each to meet their basic needs and the needs of those under their care (CCC 2402). Therefore, there is a true right to private property recognized by the Church, but it is superseded by the original gift of creation to all mankind, which is more fundamental and is prior to the right to private property. One ought to remember that his goods do not exist solely for his own enjoyment, but also for the helping of those in need. Private property does not dispense with the obligation to be charitable to others (see Luke 16:19-31), and those who are blessed with abundance ought to use their goods in a way that will benefit the greatest number.

3. Respect for persons and their goods

Respect for the goods of others is a form of temperance, which moderates our attachment to earthly things, as well as a form of justice, which renders to others what is their due. It is also a demonstration of solidarity with others, remembering the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12), as well as with the Lord, who "though He was rich, yet for your sake became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich" (2.Cor. 8:9).

First and foremost, the seventh commandment forbids theft. Theft is defined as usurping another's property against the reasonable will of the owner. There is no theft if (1) consent can be presumed, or (2) if refusal is contrary to reason and to the universal destination of goods, as in

the case of urgent necessity, when the only way to provide for immediate needs it to put at disposal the goods of another (CCC 2408).

Any form of unjustly taking and keeping the goods of another is against the seventh commandment, even if it is not contrary to the civil law. The Catechism lists several examples:

"Deliberate retention of goods lent or of objects lost, business fraud, paying unjust wages, forcing up prices by taking advantage of ignorance or hardship, speculation in which one manipulates the price of goods artificially in order to profit at the detriment of others, corruption and bribery, appropriating public goods for private uses, work poorly done, evasion of legitimate taxation, forgery of checks and invoices, excessive expenses and waste, and willful damage of public or private property. All of these practices are immoral and require reparation" (CCC 2409).

Promises and contracts must be kept to the extent that their terms and obligations are morally just. A large part of economic life depends on honoring contracts.

Reparation for injustice, a form of the virtue of justice, disposes us to make restitution for any goods stolen or obtained unjustly, as is seen in the case of Zaccheus, whom Jesus blesses for his pledge: "If I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold" (Luke 19:8).

Games of chance, gambling, card games, etc. are not in themselves immoral, but become so when they deprive someone of the means to support themselves and those in their care. Gambling always risks becoming an enslavement. Unfair games, as well as cheating, are always gravely wrong, except when the damage inflicted is so slight as to be negligible.

The seventh commandment also forbids, for whatever motive, the enslavement of human beings, who are sold and bought like merchandise. This is a sin against the dignity of persons and a erroneous view of human nature which sees mankind as a mere tool for economic gain.

4. Respect for Creation

The seventh commandment enjoins respect for creation. Animals, plants, and the natural resources of the earth are destined for the common use of humanity, both those alive now and those yet to be born. Man's dominion over nature is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life for his neighbor.

"Animals are God's creatures. He surrounds them with his providential care. By their mere existence they bless him and give him glory. Thus men owe them kindness. We should recall the gentleness with which saints like St. Francis of Assisi or St. Philip Neri treated animals (CCC 2416)." Animals are entrusted to the care of man, and thus it is legitimate to make use of them for food and clothing, and they may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure. Medical and scientific experimentation upon them is permissible within reasonable limits. However, it is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer and die needlessly (CCC 2418). It is also unworthy to spend money on them that should by priority go to the relief of

human misery. "One can love animals; one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons."

5. Catholic Social Teaching

The Gospel contains the full revelation of the truth about man, even concerning his social relations with other persons. Thus, the Church makes moral judgments about economics and social matters. The Church cares about the temporal aspects of the common good because they are ordered to the attainment of the Supreme Good.

The Catechism says, "The Church's social teaching proposes principles for reflection; it provides criteria for judgment; it gives guidelines for action" (CCC 2423). The following are some economic/social forms of organization that are condemned by the Church:

- Any system in which social relationships are determined entirely by economic factors is contrary to the nature of the human person and his acts (John Paul II, Centessimus Annus).

- Any theory that makes profit the exclusive norm and final end of economic activity is morally unacceptable (Gaudium et Spes, 63). A disordered desire for money cannot but produce ill effects. As St. Paul says, "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10).

- Systems that subordinate the basic rights of individuals and groups to the collective organization of production (GS, 65).

- Communism and socialism are rejected by the Church (Pope Pius XI, Divini Redemptoris, see also CCC 2425), as is unregulated capitalism. "Regulating the economy solely by centralized planning perverts the basis of social bonds…reasonable regulation of the marketplace and economic initiatives…is to be commended" (CCC 2425).

- Every practice that reduces persons to nothing else but a means to profit ends up enslaving man, leads to the idolizing of money, and contributes to the spread of atheism. The Church recalls Jesus' words, "You cannot serve both God and mammon" (Luke 16:13). Work is for man, not man for work

6. Economics & Social Justice

Economic activity is not meant for merely the multiplication of goods, but for the service of persons and of the entire human community. Human work is part of man's vocation to subdue to earth, both with and for one another. Hence, work is a duty, as St. Paul said, "If anyone will not work, let him not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). By enduring the hardship of work, in union with Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth and the one who was crucified, we can in some way cooperate in God's redemptive work.

Everyone has the right of economic initiative. This means the right to make legitimate use of his talents to contribute to the common good.

Economic conflict often occurs because of the different interests involved in economic life. Efforts should be made to reduce these conflicts by negotiation and (when appropriate) by public authorities (CCC 2430).

The principal economic task of the state is to guarantee security of private property, individual freedom, currency and public services so that those who work will be encouraged in their labors and can enjoy the fruits of their work. Those responsible for business enterprise are responsible to society for the economic, social and ecological effects of their operations. While it is legitimate to seek to make a profit in business, the have an obligation to consider the good of the person.

Access to employment must be open to all without any unjust discrimination. Society should, according to circumstances, help people find employment.

A just wage is the legitimate fruit of work. Refusal or withholding of it is a grave sin (Deut. 24:14). The Church defines a just wage as a wage that is sufficient to "guarantee man the opportunity to provide a dignified livelihood for himself and his family on the material, social, cultural and spiritual level" (CCC 2434). Pope Leo XIII in his 1891 encyclical Rerum Novarum said that it ought to be enough for a man to support his entire family with enough left over for charity and some to put away for savings (RN, 46).

Recourse to a strike is morally legitimate when it cannot be avoided, but becomes morally unacceptable when it becomes violent, or when objectives are included that are not directly related to the working conditions (CCC 2435).

7. Justice Between Nations

Inequality of resources on economic capability creates a real "gap" between nations. The Catechism says:

"Various causes of a religious, political, economic, and financial nature today give "the social question a worldwide dimension." 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 abusive if not 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, "redefining the priorities and hierarchies of values" (CCC 2438).

Rich nations have a grave responsibility to assist those who are unable ensure the means of their own development. Direct aid is an appropriate and praiseworthy response, but reform of institutions is encouraged as a more long-term solution to the problems of the Third World.

It is not the role of the pastors of the Church to intervene directly in the structuring of political life. This is the task of the lay faithful.

8. Love of the Poor

The Church's love for the poor is part of her constant tradition. Even in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, God enjoins the Israelites to be solicitous for the care of the poor (Deut. 24:19-22). Jesus Christ identifies Himself with the poor, and in the poor we recognize Him. Love for the poor extends beyond their material well being to other forms of poverty as well (cultural and spiritual poverty).

In as far as we are able we are called to assist the poor. St. John Chrysostom says that to fail to give to the poor is actually to steal from them. The Church sees our duty to the poor as a debt owed to them, not as a gift of charity (CCC 2446).

Our duties to the poor have been summed up by the Church's tradition in the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy

<u>Corporal Works of Mercy</u>

1) Feed the hungry
2) Give drink to the thirsty
3) Clothe the naked
4) Shelter the homeless
5) Visit the sick
6) Visit those in prison
7) Bury the dead

<u>Spiritual Works of Mercy</u>

1) Convert the sinner
2) Instruct the ignorant
3) Counsel the doubtful
4) Comfort the sorrowful
5) Bear wrongs patiently
6) Forgive injuries
7) Pray for the living and the dead

9. The Tenth Commandment

The tenth commandment forbids greed, the covetous desire for increase in material gain. It completes the seventh commandment, but also the ninth, as it deals with concupiscence, in this case, the "lust of the eyes" (1 John 2:16). Avarice has its origin in the idolizing of material objects, and thus is connected with the first commandment as well. Like the ninth, it concerns the intent of the heart.

Our sensitive appetite leads us to desire the things we need (to eat when we are hungry, get warm when we are cold, etc.). In and of themselves, these desires are good, but they can easily become disordered when they exceed the limits us reason and cause us to become covetous towards the belongings of others.

Sins against the tenth commandment include:

- Greed, the desire to amass earthly goods without limit.
- Avarice, the passion for riches and the power that comes with them.
- Envy, sadness at another's goods and immoderate desire to acquire them for oneself.

10. Desires of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit turns men's hearts away from greed and envy. Jesus calls His followers to prefer Him to everything and everyone, and bids them to renounce all that they have. For some, this call is fulfilled in the renunciation of material belongings and the profession of the evangelical counsel of poverty. But whether or not we are called to live in poverty as religious do, all are called to practice spiritual detachment, wherein we separate our hearts from affection to the material objects that surround us. This enables us to set the affections of our hearts on Christ and His kingdom rather than on the objects that so easily ensnare us. The Lord grieves over the rich because they attempt to find their consolation in their abundance of goods (see Luke 6:24). "Abandonment to the providence of the Father in heaven frees us from anxiety about tomorrow" (CCC 2547). A desire to see God, not to increase in material wealth, ought to be the focus of those seeking the Kingdom of Heaven.

11. Conclusion

A fitting conclusion is a meditation on Jesus' words from the Gospel of Matthew:

Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly

Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Matt. 6:25-34).

For Further Reading:

Deut. 24:14-15, 19-22;
Matt. 5:42, 6:25-34, 10:8;
Luke 16:19-31, 19:1-10;
James 2:15, 5:1-6;
1 John 2:16-17;
Catechism of the Catholic Church § 2402-2463, 2534-2557;
Pope Leo XIII, Rerum Novarum (1891);
Pope Pius XI, Divini Redemptoris (1937);
Pope John Paul II, Centessimus Annus (1991), Evangelium Vitae (1995)