

Topic 33: The Seventh and Eighth Commandments

Christian life strives to order the goods of this world to God and to fraternal charity. Both temperance, to moderate their use and possession, and justice, to respect the rights of our neighbour, are important. Solidarity should be added to these two virtues. The eighth commandment forbids the misrepresentation of the truth in one's relations with one's neighbour. Christians have the duty to bear witness to the

Truth who is Christ and to
acknowledge Him before men.

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“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 respect for the right to private property. Christian life strives to order this world's goods to God and to fraternal charity” (*Catechism*, 2401).

God entrusted the earth to mankind to cultivate it and to benefit from its fruits. This is a gift that God gives to all men and women, and therefore

“the appropriation of property is legitimate for guaranteeing the freedom and dignity of persons and for helping each of them to meet his basic needs and the needs of those in his charge” (*Catechism*, 2402). This is not contrary to the right to private property, but, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, it must be a channel for helping those most in need (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 69, 1). The Church has rejected both totalitarian ideologies that seek to do away with private property, and the “savage” and individualistic capitalism which seeks to monopolise the majority of the means of production in the hands of a few, leaving many people in a very precarious situation.

The use of created goods: temperance, justice and solidarity

Regarding the use of created means, both temperance, to moderate their

use and possession, and justice, to respect the rights of others, are important. Solidarity should be added to these two virtues (cf. *Catechism*, 2407).

The virtue of poverty, as part of temperance, does not consist in not having, but in being detached from material goods, in being content with what is sufficient to live temperately,^[1] and in administering goods to serve others. Our Lord gave us an example of poverty and detachment right from his coming into the world until his death (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). He also taught us the harm that attachment to riches can cause: “It will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:23).

Justice, as a moral virtue, consists in the habit of giving to each person, with a constant and firm will, what is due to him or her. Justice between individuals is called commutative

justice (for example, the act of paying a debt); distributive justice regulates what the community owes to citizens according to their needs and contributions; and legal justice is that of the citizen towards the community, which takes the form, among other things, of the payment of just taxes.^[2]—

The virtue of solidarity is “is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.”^[3]—

Solidarity is “the sharing of spiritual goods even more than the sharing of material ones” (*Catechism*, 1948).

The seventh commandment forbids the unjust taking or retention of another’s property, or causing unjust damage to another’s material goods. Theft or robbery is committed when one takes another’s goods by

concealment. Robbery is the violent seizure of other people's property. Fraud is theft that is carried out by deceiving one's neighbour with cheating, false documents, etc., or by withholding a fair wage. Usury consists in claiming more interest than is lawful for the amount lent (generally by taking advantage of one's neighbour's material need). Corruption is also unlawful, as is any kind of wastefulness.

Whoever has committed an injustice must repair the damage caused, insofar as this is possible. Restitution of what has been stolen – or at least the desire and intention to make restitution – is necessary in order to receive sacramental absolution. Physical or moral impossibility excuses from the duty of restitution, for as long as it lasts. The obligation can be cancelled, for example, by the creditor's forgiveness of the debt.^[4]

Social Doctrine of the Church

The set of teachings on the principles that should regulate social life is called Social Doctrine and is part of the Catholic moral teaching.^[5] It is important to underline that “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” (*Catechism*, 2442).

The mission of the hierarchy of the Church is of a different order from the mission of political authorities. The purpose of the Church is supernatural and its mission is to lead men and women to salvation. Therefore, when the Magisterium refers to temporal aspects of the common good, it does so insofar as they should be ordered to the supreme Good, our ultimate end. The

Church expresses a moral judgement, in economic and social matters, when the fundamental rights of the person or the salvation of souls require it.

Some fundamental teachings of the Church's Social Doctrine are: 1) the transcendent dignity of the human person and the inviolability of his or her rights; 2) the recognition of the family as the basic cell of society founded on true and indissoluble marriage, and the need to protect and foster it through laws on marriage, education and public morals; 3) teachings on the common good and the role of the State. In recent years, the Magisterium has insisted on the relevance of ecology and care for our common home as an important part of social doctrine.^[6]—

“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. Hence work is a duty: 'If anyone will not work, let him not eat.' Work honors the Creator's gifts and the talents received from him. It can also be redemptive" (*Catechism*, 2427). By carrying out our work in union with Christ, we become a collaborator with the Son of God in his redemptive work.^[7] Work is a means for sanctifying persons and earthly realities, informing them with the Spirit of Christ. "Since Christ took it into his hands, work has become for us a redeemed and redemptive reality. Not only is it the background of man's life, it is a means and path of holiness. It is something to be sanctified and something which sanctifies."^[8] —

Social justice is an expression that came into use in the 20th century to refer to the universal dimension that the problems of justice have

acquired. “Society ensures social justice when it provides the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is their due, according to their nature and their vocation” (*Catechism*, 1928). Many elements come into play when dealing with social justice: the responsibility of the State, the role of employers, the possibility of access to employment, etc.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* (no. 197) we read that “God’s heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself ‘became poor’ (2 Cor 8:9). The entire history of our redemption is marked by the presence of the poor.” This is not only a matter of carrying out actions or programmes of social advancement, but of an attitude of care and concern for one’s neighbour, for the needy.

In this context, justice and solidarity between nations are of particular

importance. “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” (*Catechism*, 2439).

The eighth commandment of the Decalogue

“The eighth commandment forbids misrepresenting the truth in our relations with others . . . Offenses against the truth express by word or deed a refusal to commit oneself to moral uprightness” (*Catechism*, 2464).

The person’s inclination to know the truth and to manifest it in word and

deed has been twisted by sin, which has wounded human nature with ignorance of the intellect and malice of the will. As a result of sin, love for the truth has diminished, and men deceive one another, often out of selfishness and self-interest. But with Christ's grace each person's life can be governed by truth.

The virtue that inclines a person to always tell the truth is called truthfulness, sincerity or frankness (cf. *Catechism*, 2468). Three fundamental aspects of this virtue are:

– sincerity with oneself: this means recognising the truth about one's own conduct, both external and internal: intentions, thoughts, affections, etc.; without fear of the truth, without closing one's eyes to reality;^[9]__

– Sincerity with others: human coexistence would be impossible if

people did not trust each other, that is, if they did not tell each other the truth or did not behave uprightly, e.g. by respecting contracts and agreements (cf. *Catechism*, 2469);

– Sincerity with God: God sees everything, but since we are his children, He wants us to show Him our concerns openly. “A child of God treats the Lord as his Father. He is not obsequious and servile, he is not merely formal and well-mannered: he is completely sincere and trusting. Men do not scandalise God. He can put up with all our infidelities. Our Father in heaven pardons any offence when his child returns to him, when he repents and asks for pardon. The Lord is such a good Father that he anticipates our desire to be pardoned and comes forward to us, opening his arms laden with grace.”^[10] —

Sincerity in the Sacrament of Confession and in spiritual direction are extraordinarily effective means to grow in interior life: in simplicity, in humility and in the other virtues.

^[11] Sincerity is essential for persevering in following Christ, because Christ is the Truth (cf. Jn 14:6).

Sacred Scripture teaches that the truth must be spoken in charity (Eph 4:15). Sincerity, like all the virtues, is to be lived out of love and with love (for God and mankind): with gentleness and understanding. A beautiful manifestation of this is fraternal correction, an evangelical practice (cf. Mt 18:15) which consists in warning another person of a fault committed or of a defect, so that he may correct himself. It is a great manifestation of love for the truth and of charity. Sometimes it can be a grave duty.

Bearing witness to the truth

“Witness is an act of justice that establishes the truth or makes it known” (*Catechism*, 2472). Christians have the duty to bear witness to the Truth who is Christ and to acknowledge Him before men.

“Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose, to whom he is united by charity” (*Catechism*, 2473). Although most Christians are not called to this extreme expression of love for God, all are to manifest the truth of God and of what God has revealed even at the cost of losing their prestige or social position. Sometimes sincerity can require carrying out, with the help of supernatural fortitude, heroic acts in defence of the truth.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* some of the sins against truthfulness are pointed out as paradigmatic examples of attitudes that impede a convincing and attractive evangelisation (cf. no. 100).

“A lie consists in speaking a falsehood with the intention of deceiving’ (Saint Augustine, *De mendacio*, 4,5). The Lord denounces lying as the work of the devil: ‘You are of your father the devil . . . there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies’ (Jn 8:44)” (*Catechism*, 2482). Its gravity is measured according to the truth it distorts, the intention of the one who tells it and the consequences of the lie. It can be a matter of mortal sin when it gravely injures the virtues of justice and charity.

“When it is made publicly, a statement contrary to the truth takes on a particular gravity. In court it becomes false witness. When it is under oath, it is perjury” (*Catechism*, 2476).

The right to honour and good reputation – both one’s own and that of others – is a good more precious than riches, and of great importance for personal, family and social life. Sins against the good reputation of others are:

– reckless judgement: this occurs when, without sufficient grounds, a supposed moral fault of one’s neighbour is admitted as true (e.g. judging that someone has acted with bad intentions, without proof of this). “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned” (Lk 6:37) (cf. *Catechism*, 2477);

– defamation: this is any unjust attack on the reputation of a neighbour. It can be of two kinds. Detraction or slander (“speaking badly”) consists in revealing sins or defects that really exist in a neighbour, without a proportionately serious reason (it is called backbiting when it is done behind the back of the accused). Calumny consists in attributing false sins or defects to a neighbour. Calumny involves a twofold malice: against truthfulness and against justice (the greater the calumny and the more widely spread it is, the more serious it is).

It is advisable to avoid speaking carelessly about others (cf. Mt 12:36), since it easily leads to lies (inaccurate or unjust assessments, exaggerations, sometimes even calumnies).

Nowadays, such offences against truth and people’s good reputation are frequent in the media. Hence it is also necessary to exercise a healthy

critical spirit when receiving news from newspapers, magazines, TV, etc., as well as from social networks. A naïve or gullible attitude leads to the formation of false judgements^[12] or to the indiscriminate dissemination of unverified content.

Whenever defamation has been committed (whether by detraction or calumny), there is an obligation to use whatever means possible to restore to others the good reputation that has been unjustly damaged.

Cooperation in these sins must also be avoided. Those who cooperate in defamation, albeit to different degrees, are those who listen to the defamer with pleasure and enjoy what he says; the superior who does not prevent backbiting about a person under his responsibility, and anyone who – even if he dislikes the sin of detraction – out of fear, negligence or shame, does not

correct or reject the defamer or calumniator, and those who unthinkingly spread others' insinuations against the reputation of a third party.^[13]___

Respect for privacy

“The good and safety of others, respect for privacy, and the common good are sufficient reasons for being silent about what ought not be known or for making use of a discreet language. The duty to avoid scandal often commands strict discretion. No one is bound to reveal the truth to someone who does not have the right to know it” (*Catechism*, 2489).

“The secret of the sacrament of reconciliation is sacred, and cannot be violated under any pretext. ‘The sacramental seal is inviolable; therefore, it is a crime for a confessor in any way to betray a penitent by

word or in any other manner or for any reason' (CIC, 983, §1)”
(*Catechism*, 2490).

Professional secrets and, in general, all natural secrets must be kept. Revealing these secrets represents a lack of respect for the privacy of persons, and can constitute a sin against justice.

The media have a decisive influence on public opinion. Since the advent of the Internet, the spread of social networks and instant messaging, everyone has a responsibility for the content they create and/or disseminate. These are a very important field of apostolate for the defence of truth and making society more Christian.

Basic bibliography

Catechism of the Catholic Church,
2401-2499.

Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*,
186-216.

Recommended reading

Saint Josemaría, Homily "Open to
God and men" in *Friends of God*,
154-174.

Saint Josemaría, Homily "Christian
respect for persons and their
freedom" in *Christ is Passing By*,
67-72.

^[1] Cf. Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, 631.

^[2] Cf. *Catechism*, 2411.

[3] Saint John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, December 30, 1987, 38.

[4] “Those who, directly or indirectly, have taken possession of the goods of another, are obliged to make restitution of them, or to return the equivalent in kind or in money, if the goods have disappeared, as well as the profit or advantages their owner would have legitimately obtained from them. Likewise, all who in some manner have taken part in a theft or who have knowingly benefited from it – for example, those who ordered it, assisted in it, or received the stolen goods – are obliged to make restitution in proportion to their responsibility and to their share of what was stolen” (*Catechism*, 2412).

[5] Cf. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 41.

[6] Cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato sì*, 63.

[7] *Ibid.*, 98.

[8] Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, 47.

[9] Cf. Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, 33 and 34; *Furrow*, 148: “savage sincerity” in the examination of conscience.

[10] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 64.

[11] Cf. Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, 126-128.

[12] “The means of social communication (especially the mass media) can give rise to a certain passivity among users, making them less than vigilant consumers of what is said or shown. Users should practice moderation and discipline in their approach to the mass media. They will want to form enlightened and correct consciences the more easily to resist unwholesome influences” (*Catechism*, 2496). “By the very nature of their profession, journalists have an obligation to

serve the truth and not offend against charity in disseminating information. They should strive to respect, with equal care, the nature of the facts and the limits of critical judgment concerning individuals. They should not stoop to defamation” (*Catechism*, 2497).

[¹³] Cf. Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, 49. Gossiping, in particular, is a harmful enemy of unity in the apostolate: “Gossip is a disease that infects and poisons the apostolate. It goes against charity, means a waste of energy, takes away peace and destroys one's union with God” (Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, 445. Cf. *ibid.*, 453).