



FAITH SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

VOLUME II

A Complete Course in Theology

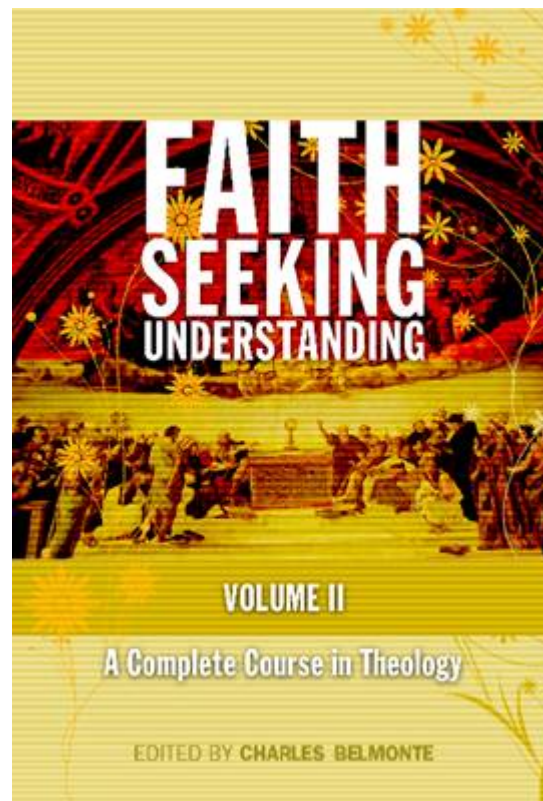
EDITED BY CHARLES BELMONTE

Faith Seeking Understanding

Volume 2

A Complete Course in Theology

Edited by Charles Belmonte



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by Charles Belmonte

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The Object of Moral Theology

THE *CATECHISM OF the Catholic Church* tells us that “God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength.”¹

Human persons, as well as all human goods, are *created* by God, and thus, they cannot be the reason and purpose of themselves.

Moral theology studies “the final end of man created in the image of God: beatitude, and the ways of reaching it—through right conduct freely chosen, with the help of God’s law and grace”²

1. The Subjective Last End

St. Thomas Aquinas studies the final end of man and concludes that every conscious act of man is done for a purpose.³ The purpose of the action is called its *end*, and can be defined as *that for which the action is done, or that at which the agent aims by applying the means*.

The end or purpose of a human action is either absolute in itself or subordinated to another. In the latter case, the end becomes a means for a second end (for example, working in order to earn money). That second end can in turn be subordinated to a third one, and so on. However, there is always an end that never becomes a means, but is sought in itself. It is precisely because of that end that all the others are sought. Without it, the others would not be sought, just as a traveler would not take one step ahead if he had not resolved to go somewhere.⁴

This absolute end is called the *last end*. We should note that this expression does not imply any chronological order; it is not what comes at the last moment, or what befalls man at the end of his life. It is rather the ultimate end of every human action—what, in the last analysis, man seeks in his actions.

Obviously, there is no need to be conscious of this chain of ends in order to act. But it always exists, even if the agent, when asked, is not able to give a complete account of the ultimate reason of his action. If we were to insist—as children do—asking “why” after every answer, we would eventually come to the last end, and the agent would acknowledge, albeit somewhat confusedly, it to be (subjectively) seeking happiness.

Happiness (or the traditionally equivalent terms of *bliss* and *beatitude*) is precisely the name we give to the subjective last end.⁵ It can be defined as *the never-ending possession of what absolutely satiates the desires of man*. It is thus obvious why happiness is ultimately sought. Knowing, however, what specifically fulfills a person and absolutely satiates all his desires is not as easy. We will now examine this question.

2. The Objective Last End

In order to discover the objective last end, we should now change our viewpoint. Instead of focusing on one's behavior, we will direct our attention to God's plans for creation.

God is an intelligent being and always acts for a purpose. Imperfect agents project some of their perfections in their external actions, but always receive some benefit from these actions as well. God, however, cannot receive anything, because he has everything and can lose nothing. Therefore, he can act only with the intention of sharing his perfections, showing his goodness. Thus, God's purpose in the act of creation can only be to communicate his perfections to his creatures, and because of his omnipotence, this end is fully achieved.⁶

The First Vatican Council summarizes all this: "In order to manifest his perfection through the benefits that he bestows on creatures—not to intensify his happiness nor to acquire any perfection—this one and only true God ... created both orders of creatures [spiritual and corporeal]."⁷

On the other hand, every creature tends toward its perfection (what perfectly and absolutely perfects him or her),⁸ which consists in possessing its own likeness to the divine perfection in the fullest possible way. In other words, the end of each creature coincides with God's end in creating it: to manifest the divine perfections. This is the true meaning of the expression "to give glory to God."

It follows that the end of the act of creation is not something extraneous and added to that act, but is inseparably united to it. Without a purpose, God would not have created. This finality, moreover, is not alien to the being of the creatures. God's purpose is an essential component of the being of the creatures and, therefore, of their activity. We can conclude that the end of man—and every creature—is *the glory of God*, and that the ultimate objective end of his actions is *the manifestation of God's perfection*.

As regards the creature's way of acting, we must also note that even irrational creatures seek an end in their actions. "Every agent acts for an end; otherwise one thing would not follow more than another from the action of the agent."⁹ Irrational creatures seek this end by means of a

natural inclination. In animals, this inclination is caused by the sensible apprehension of the object sought.

In rational creatures, however, this inclination is caused by the deliberation of the intellect—which knows the end as good—and the free decision of the will.¹⁰ Thus, man seeks his last end in his actions by knowing that last end (God) and wanting it.

Summarizing the thought of St. Thomas, we can say that *man has been created to know, love, and serve God (objective last end), and thus save his soul*. In other words, man is destined to be eternally happy in heaven and also happy—though in a limited way—on earth (**subjective last end**).

We must observe that man's subjective last end (happiness) coincides with his objective last end; only the possession of God can give happiness.

3. **The Meaning of *Natural* and *Supernatural***

We must now consider the meaning of the terms *natural* and *supernatural*. Though not strictly belonging to this treatise, these concepts will help us keep in the right perspective the ideas to be introduced in the succeeding chapters.

God is absolutely simple, but we know him through creatures, and thus we speak of his several *perfections*. These must be found in him in an eminent degree, since he is the cause of the perfections that are found in creatures. The term *perfection* comes from the Latin *per-ficere*, “to finish thoroughly or completely.” In this sense, the term can be applied to creatures, which can be more or less completely made, or finished. Its application to God, however, is not as accurate, since he has not been made and is not subject to evolution.

The term *natural*, as ~~opposed to~~ differentiated (or distinct) from the term *supernatural*, refers to all the perfections found in God and also—in a participated way—in the nature of creatures. In other words, natural is what is possessed by the “Being-by-himself” (*ipsum esse subsistens*), the only necessary being, and in which contingent beings can participate. The latter are beings by another, not having in themselves the ultimate reason of their being.

On the other hand, what is found in God but cannot be part of the nature of creatures is called *supernatural*. We know, however, that humans and angels receive a participation in the supernatural.

Humans and angels are beings endowed with intellectual knowledge, that is, they are capable of a form of knowledge that is not intrinsically bound to matter. This implies a radical openness to knowledge, to love, and to being, which enables God to elevate them above their natural active capabilities, to a participation of the supernatural as defined above. This capacity to be elevated is called *obediential potency*, or capacity to obey. It is analogous to the capacity of a block of stone to become a sculpture through the artist’s work.

God has actually elevated angels and men to the supernatural level. He has done it through the infusion of a habit—an accidental, permanent, and supernatural modification—called *sanctifying grace*. It is a *grace* because it is gratuitous, and it is *sanctifying* because it makes us divine.

Sanctifying grace gives us a participation in what is deepest in God, in the intimate reason of his Godhead: the Holy Trinity. In a very particular sense, it makes us children of God, partakers of the divine nature (*consortes divinae naturae*), and temples of the Holy Spirit. Grace enables us to perform supernatural deeds by means of supernatural faculties called *infused virtues*, and we are able to know all this—albeit imperfectly—through a supernatural light called *faith*.

It follows from the above that these supernatural realities remain in a higher sphere, which creatures can neither reach nor know through their natural means.

Just as in God there is no opposition between the natural and the supernatural,¹¹ there is no opposition in the creature's participation in both kinds of perfections. There is only a difference in the way they belong to the creature. Natural perfections are participated as something proper to and consistent with the contingent being. This is the case of the physical and chemical properties, the place, or the “natural” forms of a stone. The participation in supernatural perfections is much more precarious and fluid, but also richer in content, like the stone's participation in the form of the sculpture.¹² The supernatural does not destroy or transform the natural. It does perfect the natural within its own order, adding something congruent with it, but not strictly due.

4. _____ The Supernatural Last End

God may be thought of as a sort of family, a community of three divine persons. His aim in creating us is to enlarge his natural family by bringing into being new persons who are able to choose freely to share in the life of the Trinity. This is eternal happiness or beatitude. Freedom is our great dignity. God does not compel us to become members of his household. He invites us and enables us to answer his invitation, but he leaves the decision to us.¹³ God has elevated us to a *super-natural* level so that we will be able to make this decision; beatitude makes us “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pt 1:4; cf. Jn 17:3) and of eternal life. With beatitude, man enters into the glory of Christ and into the joy of the Trinitarian life. God has proposed to man a supernatural last end, giving a supernatural finality to his life. At the same time, he has given man the means to attain it.

This *supernatural last end* includes and transcends the natural last end. It consists in *knowing the Blessed Trinity, that is, God not just as Supreme Being, Lord, and Creator, but in the very intimacy of his divinity.*

This elevation cannot be achieved by natural powers alone; it is supernatural. Nothing in human nature requires or demands it. As we said before, God performs this elevation by the communication of *habitual sanctifying grace*. This is a permanent (hence the term *habitual*) and free gift (hence *grace*) that, by a mysterious participation in the intimate being of God, enables man to resemble him who is the Holy One par excellence (hence *sanctifying*).

This elevation preserves and assumes nature, and the supernatural last end encompasses and assumes the natural one. Summarizing:

Man has as the *ultimate purpose* of his life to live “for the praise of God’s glory” (cf. Eph 1:12), striving to make each of his actions reflect the splendor of that glory.... The *moral life presents itself as the response* due to the many gratuitous initiatives taken by God out of love for man. It is a response of love.¹⁴

5. Moral Theology

Moral theology is the theological study of human behavior or customs (*mores* in Latin). More precisely, *moral theology is that part of theology that judges and directs human acts toward the supernatural end under the guidance of revelation.* It therefore studies man's way to God in the light of what God himself has revealed about man.

We know that theology is the science of faith, that is, the study of revelation by reason illumined by faith. We also know that faith is man's assent to what God has revealed. Since this revelation is supernatural, the assent is also supernatural, in such a way that a special divine help is needed in order to give it.

There is a radical unity between dogmatic and moral theology; the division of theology in these two branches is done for didactic purposes only. The sources of moral theology are the same as the rest of theology: Sacred Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium, in a harmonious unity.

6. Natural and Supernatural Morals

Moral philosophy is the science that studies how man should behave in order to reach his natural end, which derives from human nature. It is also called *natural ethics* or simply *ethics*. Moral philosophy uses natural reason alone. Thus, man can know what is ethical with his natural intellect, without any special help.

Moral theology, on the other hand, studies the proper behavior of man after being elevated to the supernatural order. Man cannot acquire knowledge of this science through his intellect alone, but he can acquire it in a supernatural way, when he knows revelation through his intellect aided by faith.

Morality is not just a qualification of deeds, but a dimension of the person who performs these deeds. Man determines himself by his actions: By committing injustice, he becomes unjust; by lying, he becomes a liar.

~~The~~ **7. Division of Moral Theology**

The study of morals can be divided into three parts:

- i) The first—which is the one studied here—covers the first principles: fundamental questions of morals, which apply to every aspect of human behavior.
- ii) The second part—to be studied in a separate treatise—could be called special morals. It covers the different fields of human behavior, the moral norms that govern them, and the virtues that facilitate their fulfillment.
- iii) The third part studies the obligations concerning the reception and administration of the sacraments. It is included in the treatise on the sacraments.

In the two first parts—and also in the third in what regards marriage—we will continuously refer to the substratum of natural morality, which forms the basis of supernatural morality.

8. Outline of Fundamental Moral Theology

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides a summary of moral theology at the beginning of its Part Three, “Life in Christ,” which we shall follow in this treatise.

- The *dignity of the human person* is based on his creation in the image and likeness of God—the primary aspect of human dignity.
- The dignity of man is accomplished in his vocation to eternal happiness (also called *beatitude*).
- The human person should *freely* reach this accomplishment—the second aspect of human dignity.
- Through his deliberate *acts*, the human person conforms himself or not to the good that is promised by God.
- This good is attested by the *moral conscience*.
- Human beings *build themselves* and grow from within; they turn all their material and spiritual life into raw material for their growth.
- They grow in *virtue* with the help of grace, avoid *sin*, and, if they have committed it, go—like the prodigal son—to seek mercy from our Father in heaven. Thus, they enter into the perfection of charity.¹⁵
- Finally, we shall study *divine* and *human laws*.

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1. CCC, 1.

2. *Ibid.*, 16.

3. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 1, a. 1.

4. Cf. *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 1, a. 4.

5. Cf. *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 3, a. 1.

6. Cf. *Ibid.*, I, q. 44, a. 4.

7. DS 3002.

8. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 1, a. 5.

9. Cf. *Ibid.*, I, q. 44, a. 4.

10. Cf. *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 1, a. 2.

11. In order to avoid confusions, we must clarify that, in God, everything is natural, since everything corresponds to his divine nature. This terminological distinction is introduced in relation to creatures and their participation in divine perfections.

12. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 94, a. 6, ad 2.

13. Cf. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p. 222.

14. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 10.
15. Cf. CCC, 1700–1729.

2

The Dignity of the Human Person

9. Man, Image of God

Morality is based on revealed anthropology. In Christ, the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15; cf. 2 Cor 4:4), man has been created to the image and likeness of God. Man is a person, thus *endowed* with a spiritual soul, and, accordingly, he is born with intelligence and will. With the first potency, he is capable of discovering the truth; with the second, he is able to choose freely, thus determining his life according to the truth. This first aspect of the person’s dignity is an *endowment*.

The second aspect of human dignity is an *achievement*. Man has a task ahead of him: to determine himself. Man’s reason—that voice of God compelling him to do good and avoid evil¹—enables him to know the truth about himself and the world around him. This good is established as such by divine wisdom, and it is known by man’s natural *reason* (hence it is called *natural law*). Man also possesses a will and hence, *freedom*, “an exceptional sign of the image of God.”² Furthermore, he is inwardly capable of receiving *grace*, our Lord’s own divine life. By freely choosing to shape his life according to the truth, and with the help of divine grace, man gives to himself and participates in the dignity to which he is called.

God put us in the world *to know, love, and serve him*, and so to come to paradise; thus, the human person is destined since his conception to the eternal happiness or beatitude. Human persons are the only created material entities whom God has made for themselves and whom he has called to life in union with himself. Every human being is an irreplaceable and non-substitutable person, a kind of good that cannot be treated as an object of use or as a means to an end.³

In coming into existence, each new human person ought to come—according to God’s original plan—within a community in friendship with God. Humankind, however, lost that friendship with God by original sin. Man, having been persuaded by the devil, abused his freedom at the beginning of history. He succumbed to the temptation and did evil (cf. Gn 1:26–29; 2:5–25; 3:1–24). He still retains the desire of goodness, but his nature carries the wound of original sin. This wound inclines him to evil and keeps him subject to error.

As a result of original sin, we do not come into existence as members of God’s family. But membership is still offered to us through the

commitment of faith. God has not abandoned us. He has simply given us a different way—a better way—of being in friendship with him.

Jesus, sent by the Father, assumes the role of leader in order to establish and head the community in friendship with God that we are invited to join—the community of the New Covenant, which is Jesus' Church. God's family is now a permanent society in the world, open to all human beings who choose to join it.

Through his Passion, Christ set us free from Satan and sin, merited for us a new life in the Holy Spirit, and transformed us with his grace. Whoever believes in Christ and is baptized, is made a child of God. This filial adoption transforms him, and enables him to follow the example of Christ; that is, with the help of grace, he can act correctly and practice goodness. This union of man with his Savior is *sanctity*, the perfection of charity. A moral life, matured with grace, reaches its accomplishment in eternal life, in the glory of heaven.⁴

The question that the rich young man of the Gospel put to Jesus of Nazareth, "Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" (Mt 19:16), is an essential and unavoidable question for the life of every man, for it is about the moral good that must be done, and about eternal life. The young man senses that *there is a connection between moral good and the fulfillment of his own destiny.*⁵

10. The Beatitudes

“People today need to turn to Christ once again in order to receive from him the answer to their questions about what is good and what is evil.... He opens up to the faithful the book of the Scriptures and, by fully revealing the Father’s will, teaches the truth about moral action. Christ sheds light on man’s condition and his integral vocation. Consequently, “the man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly—and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being—must ... draw near to Christ.”⁶

At the heart of Jesus’ preaching, we find the eight Beatitudes. The Beatitudes take up the promises to the chosen people since Abraham. In his preaching of the Beatitudes, Jesus gathered the promises that were made to the chosen people and perfected them, directing them not merely to the possession of the earth, but to the eternal happiness in the Kingdom of heaven.⁷ The Beatitudes:

- portray Jesus’ charity,
- express the vocation of the faithful: to be associated with the glory of Jesus’ Passion and Resurrection,
- shed light on the actions and attitudes that are characteristic of the Christian life,
- are the paradoxical promises that sustain hope in the midst of tribulations,
- proclaim the blessings and rewards that are already secured—however dimly—for Christ’s disciples,
- have begun in the lives of the Virgin Mary and all the saints.

The eight Beatitudes do not deal with specific kinds of actions but with basic attitudes or general dispositions in life. *They express Christian moral principles.* We act responsibly when we live with the right attitude and make our choices in accord with it. As a result, we integrate ourselves with these good choices, become morally good persons, and attain our integral human fulfillment (everlasting happiness) in Jesus Christ.

11. Man's Desire of Happiness

The Beatitudes respond to man's natural desire for happiness. This desire is of divine origin. God has placed it in the human heart in order to draw man to the One who alone can fulfill it.

To the questions "What is God's purpose in creating me?" or "What is the ultimate end of man?" the Beatitudes reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts: God calls us to his own beatitude. This vocation is addressed to each individual personally, but also to the Church as a whole.

Once we are aware that beatitude (heaven, everlasting happiness) is the ultimate end of man, the next question is "What are the means to it?" or "How do I fit into it?" Specifically, one will have to ask how authentic human goods are to be pursued, and how human acts are to be performed, so that he plays the role that God intends for him. The answer, as we shall see, is the same: explicitly and consciously living all the moral implications of Christian faith (with the help of God's grace) to reach integral fulfillment in Christ, thereby attaining good.

Thus, *man's happiness lies in fulfilling himself* and attaining the end to which he is ordained. The fuller he attains of the end, the more intense is his resulting happiness, and the greater he rejoices in the good attained. Man's happiness (beatitude) is directly related to his sense of responsibility in living the implications of God's will and thereby attaining good.

12. God and Morals

Only God can answer the question about what is good, because he is the Good itself. To ask about the good, in fact, ultimately means to turn toward God, the fullness of goodness.... The goodness that attracts and at the same time commits man has its source in God, and indeed is God himself. God alone is worthy of being loved “with all one’s heart, and with all one’s soul, and with all one’s mind” (Mt 22:37). He is the source of man’s happiness.⁸

The beatitude that we are promised (eternal happiness) confronts us with decisive moral choices. It invites us to purify our hearts of bad instincts and to seek the love of God above all else.

When man acts with moral rectitude, he is seeking God, his last end. Even if he lacks clear knowledge of God, he is still seeking him, albeit in an obscure way. On the other hand, when man acts without rectitude of intention, he is moving away from God and substituting something else for him, even though, theoretically, he may know well what his last end is. This does not mean, however, that there is an explicit denial of God in every bad action.⁹

The knowledge of the Absolute Good necessarily moves the will to want it. But on earth, this knowledge is necessarily imperfect, and God is not perceived as the Absolute Good. Thus, not even he necessarily attracts the will; much less can participated, partial goods necessarily attract it. Thus, the will can always choose between different goods.

The objective last end is God, sought in either a natural or a supernatural way. When death comes, the last end chosen remains fixed forever as such last end. Thus, beatitude—heaven—essentially consists in the *supreme fulfillment of the love of God*. Hell, on the other hand, consists in the frustration of a hopeless self-love. It is hopeless because it excludes the real good, the only thing that can give a supreme and permanent satisfaction. Therefore, it becomes hatred of self, God, everything, and everybody.

The promise of the beatitude—eternal happiness—makes us face decisive moral options with regard to earthly goods; it gives us the guidelines to the use of earthly goods according to the law of God; it also purifies our heart, leading us to love God above everything.¹⁰

The attainment of a temporal good and an eternal good are implicitly intertwined in each choice. The concrete actions of a person and his moral

goodness cannot be separated. Moreover, the moral goodness of a human act cannot be measured solely by its supposed conformity with rational nature, without any reference to man's essential relation to God (the need of loving God as ultimate end). Even more, when a person puts aside that essential relation to God in his actions, these actions can still retain some goodness if they contribute to temporal welfare, but they will not be wholly good or worthy of man.

13. The Principles of Morality

We choose beatitude when we freely choose a right conduct, with the help of God's law and grace.¹¹ The Church affirms the existence of an ordered set of true propositions (which is called the *natural moral law*) about what we are to do if we are to be the beings that God wants us to be.¹² These true propositions or precepts are a participation of God's wisdom and are recognized by reason.

14. Christian Morality

As we have studied, human behavior is always governed by purpose; each human action has an end. There is an objective and *natural ultimate end* of all human acts, which is also the end of human nature: God. After the elevation to the supernatural order, we can also speak of a *supernatural end of man*. This supernatural end is also God, but in a more intimate way: God as *sub ratione deitatis*. The latter does not destroy the former, but assumes, completes, perfects, and deepens it.

This applies to all aspects of human behavior. Generally speaking, Christian morality fully assumes and retains natural morality, without modifying it. It also perfects natural morality within its own order, giving it a higher goal. This perfection has two aspects:

i) A better knowledge of natural morality (since the Church has received the task of determining its scope and enjoys a special divine assistance to this effect)

ii) An assistance that makes its fulfillment easier

By analogy, the same applies to the relationship between the science of supernatural morality (moral theology) and that of natural morality (ethics).

The infusion of supernatural life also brings with it some obligations that are essential to its preservation and growth. These specific duties of the Christian, as opposed to those that are common to all people through human nature itself, make reference to:

- infused virtues,
- reception of the sacraments,
- the duty of spreading the faith.

The Christian is a human person by nature but also divine by the grace of the Holy Spirit—he is God’s child by adoption—while yet remaining one person. There is no more conflict in the Christian’s being both human and divine than there is in Jesus’ being both God and man. Christian life must be authentically and thoroughly human, but, at the same time, fully and authentically divine. The task of moral theology is to demonstrate that a humanly fulfilling life is one in which fulfillment here and now is intrinsically oriented to eternal fulfillment in heaven.¹³

Christian morality includes and assumes natural morality and all of its demands. Christian morality adds to the latter a new and higher perspective (sometimes referred to as *supernatural outlook*) and certain modes of behavior that are required by the new condition of children of God.

God wanted to establish a perfect, everlasting covenant with human kind; he wants to share his goodness with us. Jesus, divine and human, is at the center of the communion between God and man. He relates perfectly to both sides of the relationship. As the Word, he is God, equal of the Father and the Spirit. As a member of the human family, he is the first-born among many brethren (cf. Rom 8:29), our elder brother, our head, our leader. In communion with God through Jesus, human beings can now live and die in Christ and rise in him to everlasting life. Thus, Christian morals imply following and imitating Jesus Christ, each Christian being “another Christ”—*alter Christus*. It implies:

- a calling or vocation,
- man’s response,
- following Christ,
- discipleship (learning from Christ, the Teacher),
- imitation of Jesus’ life, being *alter Christus*.

Faith and charity transform the natural principle of morality into the basic principle of specific Christian morality: *to live for the sake of the Kingdom, in which all things—including man—will find fulfillment in Jesus.*

15. Characteristics of Christian Morality

We can summarize the main characteristics of Christian morality in these ten:

- i) Christian morality affects first one's *being* and, as a consequence, one's *behavior*.
- ii) It affects the internal as well as the external aspect of man.
- iii) It takes into account the deep attitudes chosen by man.
- iv) It emphasizes more *what must be done* than what must be avoided.
- v) It does not merely demand what is "just" but demands *sanctity*.
- vi) Although Christ proclaimed a series of moral norms, Christian morality is not merely a series of moral precepts, but the *way of salvation*.
- vii) It includes "reward" and "punishment."
- viii) It results in man's *true freedom*.
- ix) It is fulfilled in this life but looks toward future happiness.
- x) It begins and reaches its apex *in charity*.

1. Cf. *GS*, 13.

2. *Ibid.*, 17.

3. Cf. William E. May, *An Introduction to Moral Theology* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1991), 23; Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. Willetts (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1981), 41.

4. Cf. *CCC*, 1701–1715.

5. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 8.

6. *Ibid.*; cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.

7. Cf. *CCC*, 1716–1717.

8. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 9.

9. In the case of a person committing a sin, his immediate intent, his ulterior end in acting, is the participation in some appealing good. Thus, the sinner need not "intend" to offend God and turn aside from him. The sinner may be seeking only to gratify himself. He may, of course, be willing to turn away from God as a *means* to this gratification, and he surely "intends" to do what he knows is opposed to God's law of love as a *means* to the good in which he seeks to participate. The sinner's choice can and ought to be compatible with love of God and neighbor, but the sinner's chooses to act in a way that he knows is not compatible with that kind of love. His pursuit of this particular created good here and now means putting love for it above his love for God and neighbor. In this way, he puts some created good in the place of God. Cf. William E. May, *An Introduction to Moral Theology*, 147.

10. Cf. *CCC*, 1723.

11. Cf. *Ibid.*, 16.
12. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1954ff., 1978–1979; G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*, 54–56; William E. May, *An Introduction to Moral Theology*, 60–63.
13. Cf. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*.

3

Human Acts and Freedom

THE SECOND ASPECT of human dignity is that we are intelligent and free persons, capable of determining our own lives by our own free choices. We give this dignity to ourselves (with the help of God's grace) by freely choosing to shape our lives and actions in accord with the truth; that is, by making good moral choices. Such choices are in turn dependent upon true moral judgments.¹ These choices performed as free persons are called *human acts*.

16. The Structure of the Human Act

Human acts are those acts that man does as a man, that is, of which he is properly master because he does them with full knowledge and of his own will. *Human acts are therefore those acts that proceed from a deliberate will.*² In them, the will is properly enlightened by the knowledge supplied by the intellect.

Freedom makes man a moral subject. When man acts in a deliberate manner, he is—so to speak—the *father of his acts*. Man is thus responsible for those acts; he can acknowledge that he has done them because he wanted to, and he can explain why he decided to do them. These acts can be morally classified; that is, they are either good or evil.

The intervention of the intellect and the will are not two successive acts, but two elements of every human act. It is not the intellect that knows and the will that decides, but man who both knows and decides, through the simultaneous use of his intellect and will. In a human act, the will directs the intellect to know, and the intellect directs the will to want the object that it proposes.

The only object that necessarily attracts the will is the Absolute Good, perfectly known as such. Partial goods, or even God himself imperfectly known, will not attract the will necessarily.

The will is naturally inclined to the good, but man may deliberately choose something that is morally bad. In this case, the will chooses a partial good that the will itself has commanded the intellect to present as such. Because of its fixed inclination to good, the will can choose something bad only when it is presented under its good aspects. This error of appreciation of the intellect is due to a disordered disposition of the will with respect to its last end, and the means leading to it; therein lies the culpability (guilt) of the choice.

17. Acts of Man

Acts of man, as opposed to human acts, are those acts that man performs without being master of them through his intellect and will.³ In principle, acts of man are not the concern of morals, since they are not voluntary. The acts of man include:

- The natural acts of vegetative and sense faculties: digestion, beating of the heart, growth, corporal reactions, and visual or auditive perceptions. However, these acts become human acts when performed under the direction of the will, as when we look at something, or arouse ourselves.
- Acts of persons who lack the use of reason. Such is the case with children or insane persons.
- Acts of people who are asleep or under the influence of hypnosis, alcohol, or other drugs. In this case, however, there may still be some degree of control by the will. Also, there is indirect responsibility if the cause of the loss of control is voluntary, as we shall see later.
- Quick, nearly automatic reactions, called *primo-primi* acts. These are reflex and nearly instantaneous reactions, such as withdrawing one's hand after suffering an electric shock, in which the will does not have time to intervene.
- Acts performed under violence or threat of violence. This includes physical or—in some cases—moral violence.

18. Intrinsic Principles of the Human Act

The *intrinsic principles* of the human act, that is, the intrinsic causes that produce it, are the *intellect* and the *will* acting together.

We will now study how the volition of the will and the knowledge of the intellect should be present for the act to be properly human, that is, for man to be really the master of his act and, hence, fully responsible for it.

19. Freedom

God created man as a rational being and conferred on him the dignity of a person endowed with initiative and self dominion of his acts. God “left him in the power of his own inclination” (Sir 15:14) so that man would seek his Creator without coercion. By adhering to him, man could freely reach his full and happy perfection.⁴

19a) The Existence of Freedom

We must clarify that we refer here to *internal* or *psychological freedom* (the freedom to decide), not to external freedom (the freedom to carry out one's decision). The latter presupposes the former, and would be meaningless without it. Besides, the latter can be easily impeded by external coercion or by lack of ability or means in the agent.

Internal freedom, or *free will*, exists when the decision of the will is not necessary and unavoidable.⁵ It consists in choosing the means for an end.⁶ This includes the freedom to choose between doing an action or not, and of choosing between two possible actions. The end can also be chosen as a means for an ulterior end. This is particularly clear in the case of large choices of a vocational nature. In deciding, for example, to be a lawyer or to get married, an individual sets out on a path that will demand innumerable choices before he reaches its end.

Obviously, there is a general consensus on the existence of free will; “otherwise, counsels, exhortations, commands, prohibitions, rewards and punishments would be in vain.”⁷ And there is consensus because free will does exist. This is proved by many scriptural texts (cf., for example, Sir 15:14–18). It has also been explicitly defined by the Council of Trent, condemning the error of Luther—who denied its existence—and reaffirmed by the recent Magisterium.⁸

Some people raise a theological objection to free choice: “God causes everything, including free choices; but if God causes choices, they can hardly be said to be free.” This would be quite true if God's causality were like any other. In that case, it would be absurd to say that something is both created and free. But God's causality is *not* like any other. As we do not understand what God is in himself, so we do not understand what it is for him to cause. The seeming contradiction arises from supposing that we understand how God causes, when in fact we do not.⁹

19b) Freedom and Truth

The foundation of freedom is the will, the spiritual appetite possessed by spiritual beings. In other words, the will is the appetite corresponding to the spiritual cognitive faculty of spiritual beings—the intellect. The intellect “apprehends the common note of goodness; from which it can judge this or the other thing to be good.”¹⁰ When the intellect presents to the will a good that is not clearly known as the supreme and Absolute Good, the will is free to choose it or not.

Hence, if man were purely matter, he would not be free. Choice would be merely the result of many complex, not-well-understood material forces. Internal freedom would be just an illusion. Some people maintain this in theory, but nobody does so in practice, as is shown by the widespread use of advice and exhortations.

Freedom implies knowledge; ignorance is an obstacle to the capacity to choose. Thus, freedom depends on truth. Even more, freedom makes man more capable of loving truth and growing in the knowledge of moral values. Truth is not the same as “opinion” or “one’s own judgment,” but rather an objective reality.¹¹

19c) Freedom and Good

Evil can be wanted only by self-delusion, by deliberately seeing only the partial good aspects of that evil. It is thus obvious that the duty of not wanting evil is not a limitation of freedom. Freedom does not consist in the possibility of choosing evil. This possibility is just a sign of freedom and a consequence of the creature's imperfection. As man does good, he becomes more free. There is no authentic freedom if it is not at the service of goodness and justice. Choosing disobedience to God and evil is an abuse of freedom and leads to the slavery of sin (cf. Rom 6:17).¹² Freedom is not based on the "physical capability" of doing evil, but *on the "moral duty" of choosing good.*

20. Freedom and Voluntary Acts

A free act is always voluntary, since something is chosen through the will (*voluntas*), according to what the intellect—also led by the will—concludes and presents. However, in some voluntary acts, there is no choice and, according to the definition given above, no freedom either. Thus, God is not free to know and love himself or not; man is not free to want to be happy or not; the blessed who see God in heaven are not free to love him above all things or not. All these acts are intensely voluntary, and their not being free as regards freedom of choice does not imply any limitation of their freedom.

What happens is that, in the great majority of cases, freedom is a necessary condition for acts to be fully voluntary. Specifically, it is necessary as regards external freedom. In fact, because of its practical importance, people are usually concerned with, and talk about, external freedom. Internal freedom is usually taken for granted (even when its existence is denied). This may lead to confusing the terms *free* and *voluntary* if one does not realize that freedom is desirable only as a means to be able to do voluntary acts, which is what really matters.

It is not a limitation for God to be unable to choose evil, or to fail to love himself. Neither is it a limitation for man to be unable to want his unhappiness or to fail to love God above all things once in heaven. The strength of the voluntary act does not stem from the possibility of choice, which is often out of the question. The strength with which a mother says, “I love my child,” does not come from the fact that she could also choose not to love him.

Although, in common language, *free act* and *voluntary act* are often synonymous, the emphasis here is placed on *voluntary* rather than *free*. The importance that is usually ascribed to the concept of freedom corresponds rather to that of voluntariness.

This can also be clarified if by *freedom* we understand (rather than the choice itself) mastery over one’s acts: self-mastery and self-determination, which allow man to master himself and to act by himself.

20a) Freedom and Responsibility

Freedom makes man *responsible* for his acts to the extent that they are voluntary. The way to acquire and develop one's freedom is to make good use of responsibility.¹³

21. Freedom and God

Freedom is not only the choice for one or another particular action; it is also, within that choice, *a decision about oneself* and a setting of one's own life for or against the Good, for or against the Truth, and ultimately, for or against God.¹⁴

Because of their importance, we will review these same concepts in connection with the last end. We will now be in a position to understand them better.

Objectively speaking, man cannot select his last end; it is given to him by nature itself. Because of its imperfection, however, the human intellect can present as last end something different from God. This is a mistake, since it really means choosing to be unhappy; it is a culpable mistake and thus a sin. We could say that man is physically or psychologically free to choose or reject God, but morally free only to choose God. This moral limitation is not really a limitation, just as the duty of not choosing self-destruction is not a limitation.

Rejecting God as last end—either directly or through lesser but still serious concrete infractions—is tantamount to voluntarily taking the road to self-destruction. Thus, conceiving the moral norm as a limitation is an aberration; it is precisely our guide to the last end. It is accurate to consider *freedom as the ability to choose God as last end and choose the means leading to him*. The ability to reject God and choose evil, moreover, can be rightly defined as a defect of freedom, caused by the bent inclination of our will and made possible by the limitation of our intellect. In a certain sense, it can be said that what is proper to freedom is good actions.

Properly speaking, freedom can neither increase nor diminish. Either one can choose or one cannot.¹⁵ However, one may remove the obstacles to the exercise of the will, by fostering love for the truth, seeking to dispel ignorance, and striving to master one's passions. This facilitates the exercise of the will and, in a sense, increases freedom. For the same reason, sin diminishes freedom.

A person who chooses a last end that is different from God is choosing something that is only relatively good. That partial good is absolutized precisely because of its relation to the person. Thus, the person is actually choosing himself as last end. This last end, loving oneself above

all things, is ultimately a hopeless love; no creature is worthy of being thus loved. It is bound to end in frustration and even hatred of oneself.

Choosing God as last end means choosing the objective last end. This entails choosing to follow the norms leading to God, and choosing to obey his will and his laws. These norms are not arbitrary decrees, but elements of God's wise plan, the observance of which provides for our full and authentic well-being. There is no incompatibility here between obedience and freedom, because one freely chooses to obey. The same can be said of one's fidelity to freely acquired commitments; acquiring or being faithful to such commitments does not diminish freedom in the least.

God respects human freedom even when man refuses his plan of love and abuses the gift. God's grace does not annul our freedom, but helps us to make better use of our freedom.

22. Freedom and Self-Determination

There is a profound way in which choice determines a person. In choosing, one both accomplishes and limits oneself. Self-determining choices make him *to be* the kind of person he is. Through the actions that a person freely chooses to do, he gives himself an identity, for weal or for woe. This is how we shape our lives.

Morality is indeed in the heart (cf. Mt 15:10–20; Mk 7:15–23; Lk 6:45); it resides in the goodness or badness of our choices, which are acts of inner self-determination. By choosing, one places oneself in a new relationship to human goods. *Human goods* here mean the basic, fundamental purposes on behalf of which human beings can act. In this sense, they constitute a kind of outline of human personhood, the sum total of what human beings are capable of becoming by their choices and actions.

As a result of one's choice, one has a greater affinity for the good that one has chosen than for other goods that are not chosen. Having made certain large choices (fundamental options), we must follow them up by further choices to implement them. *By choosing, I make myself.*

Thus, if a person chooses to commit adultery, he makes himself *to be* an adulterer. Furthermore, choices last. He will remain what—or who—he has made himself by an act of self-determination (an adulterer) until he determines himself otherwise by another, radically contrary choice. Even if he repents, he will remain an adulterer, but now a *repentant* adulterer, one who has given to himself a newer identity, one who repudiates his former choice and wants—with God's grace—to amend his life, and be a faithful spouse.¹⁶ Free choices are not merely particular events or physical processes, but spiritual realities that persist.

Free choices build not only persons, but also moral communities; that is, choice determines their identity. This applies to a family or married couple as well as to a political society or nation.¹⁷

23. Freedom and Law

In the Book of Genesis we read: “The Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die’” (Gn 2:16–17).

Thus Revelation teaches that the power to decide what is good and what is evil does not belong to man, but to God alone. Man is certainly free, insofar as he can understand and accept God’s command. And he possesses an extremely far-reaching freedom, since he can eat “of every tree of the garden.” But this freedom is not unlimited; it must halt before the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil;” it must accept the moral law given by God. In fact, human freedom finds its authentic and complete fulfillment precisely in the acceptance of that law. God, who alone is good, knows perfectly what is good for man, and by virtue of his love proposes this good to man in the commandments.

God’s law does not reduce, much less does away with human freedom; rather, it protects and promotes that freedom.¹⁸

24. The Knowledge Required for a Human Act

The knowledge that is required for an act to be “human” extends to the act itself, to its consequences, and to the morality of both. The knowledge can be considered in itself (and then its opposite is *ignorance*), or as knowledge present in the action (its opposite then is *inadvertence*).

24a) Ignorance

Ignorance here refers both to *erroneous knowledge* (error) and to simple *lack of knowledge*.

The effect of ignorance in human actions can be seen in common expressions like: “I did not have enough data to decide” or “I didn’t know.” In both cases, the implication is that, because of ignorance, one could not do a responsible act, or that the act performed was not a responsible one.

Ignorance may refer to the *fact* (someone does not know that there is a gas leak in the room, and that lighting a match would cause an explosion), or to the *law* (somebody thinks that a marriage between non-Catholics can be dissolved, or that he should go to Mass on Monday if he was not able to go on Sunday).

For practical purposes, however, the most useful classification refers to the voluntariness of the ignorance. We can distinguish *vincible*, *invincible*, and *concomitant ignorance*.

(1) *Invincible ignorance*

Invincible ignorance, or *antecedent* ignorance, is prior to any act of the will to which it refers, and, therefore, it is not under the control of the will. Objectively bad actions done with invincible ignorance are absolutely inculpable.¹⁹

(2) *Vincible ignorance*

Vincible ignorance, or *consequent* ignorance, is posterior to a related act of the will and, therefore, is a direct or indirect consequence of it. It is thus called vincible because it is under the control of the will. There are three types:

- i) *Simple vincible ignorance*. After having doubts about the lawfulness of the intended action, there is some negligence in solving the doubt, or there is a slight negligence in getting to know one’s obligations.
- ii) *Gross or extreme vincible ignorance*. The negligence is serious. Vincible ignorance does not make the action morally involuntary, but it does diminish its voluntariness. Gross vincible ignorance, however, does not diminish the voluntariness enough for a mortal sin to be only venial.

iii) *Affected ignorance.* Vincible ignorance could also be explicitly wanted, so as not to forego an action in case it happens to be sinful (*studied* or affected ignorance). Far from excusing, this ignorance accuses the sinner; it stems from the bad will of the agent, who wishes to sin without qualms of conscience, or from his contempt of the law.

(3) *Concomitant ignorance*

Concomitant ignorance (from *comitari*, “to accompany”) accompanies the action but does not influence it. It is the case of a person who steals a car unaware that it is needed to carry a sick person to the hospital, but who would steal it just the same if he knew. This kind of ignorance does not diminish the voluntariness of the action in any way.

24b) Inadvertence

Inadvertence can be better understood if we compare it with its opposite, advertence. *Advertence* is the *necessary presence of knowledge in the human act*. It is necessary because the will cannot move itself unless the light of the intellect is present in it. Forgetfulness is practically equivalent to inadvertence.

Advertence is *actual* if the light of the intellect is present in the action through an actual consideration of the mind. It is *virtual* if that light is present because of a previous consideration whose strength (*virtus*) remains in the action as it is performed. Thus, a priest may be distracted while he says the words of the absolution. Still, it is not the same as saying them in a dream; he actually wants to absolve, and, for this reason, he sat in the confessional.

Virtual advertence is enough for an act to be properly human. Many perfectly voluntary actions are done with virtual advertence. It is enough, for example, to turn a bad action into a sin, or for the valid administration of the sacraments (though, in the latter case, actual advertence would be much better).

Advertence is *full* if a person with the full use of his reason is completely aware of what he does. It is *partial* if he only partially realizes what he does or the morality of the act, as happens when one is half-awake.

Advertence is *distinct* if one is clearly and exactly aware of the act and of its morality. It is *confused* when the morality of the act is perceived only in an indistinct manner. For example, someone may realize that what he does is wrong without knowing clearly to what extent and which commandment he is violating.

25. The Volition Required for a Human Act

25a) Voluntary Acts

The voluntary act is the fruit of the decision of the will after being enlightened by the intellect. *Consent* is the will's agreement to want the real or apparent good presented by the intellect.

The consent may be *simple* (voluntary *simpliciter*), if the object is wanted without any reservation, or *qualified* (voluntary *secundum quid*), if it is wanted with some repugnance, as a lesser evil. The latter would be the case of a person who decides to undergo surgery in order to save his life, or to join the army because otherwise he would go to jail for evading draft. This is still a voluntary act because *to prefer* something is *to want* something.

A voluntary act can be *directly* willed (direct voluntary act), when the act is wanted in itself in order to obtain a certain end. It can also be *indirectly* willed (voluntary *in causa*, or indirect voluntary), when the act is the effect of a directly wanted cause, but the effect is not explicitly wanted or is even rejected. This is the case of a person who eats a lot, but does not want to get fat; of a student who doesn't study, but still doesn't want to fail; of a person who uses illicit means to get a job, but doesn't want to harm other applicants; or of an imprudent driver who doesn't want to have an accident.

25b) Obstacles to the Decision of the Will

The decision of the will can be affected in different ways by several factors: physical violence, moral violence or fear, passions, habits, and some pathological states. We shall study each one in turn.

(1) *Physical violence*

An *elicited act* of a faculty is the act formally and immediately produced by that faculty. The act of wanting, for example, is elicited by the will. A *commanded act* is the act that a faculty orders another faculty to perform. The act of looking, for example, is ordered by the will and performed by the faculty of vision. With this, we can easily understand the following principles:

- Physical violence cannot affect the proper, elicited acts of the will, such as love or hatred; no one can want something without wanting it.
- Physical violence can affect the acts commanded by the will. A person can be made to perform, through external means, acts that are normally commanded by the will. Someone can be forced to shoot a gun against his will by having his finger involuntarily pushed against the trigger. More complex actions can be forced through more refined techniques. For example, the confession of a secret can be obtained through drugs. In theory, at least, it would be possible to force any act commanded by the will.

A forced act is not imputable to the extent that it does not proceed from the will. It would be imputable, however, if the will consents to a commanded act started under violence.

(2) *Moral violence or fear*

Besides physical violence, another kind of violence may force an action. Indirect pressure may be applied to make a person decide to perform an act, and so avoid the threat of a future or imminent evil. The *disturbance caused by the threat of a future or imminent evil is called fear*.

In principle, an action caused by fear continues to be voluntary, since it has been preferred to the evil threatened. To prefer is also to want. Nevertheless, it is evident that the action is much less voluntary than it would be without fear. In order to study this more in depth, we will consider the different degrees of fear.

- As regards its intensity, fear can be *light* or *serious*. Serious fear is caused by the threat of a serious evil. It can be *absolutely serious* if the evil is serious for everybody, like death. It can be *relatively serious* if the cause is light in itself, but because of the characteristics or situation of the person, it produces a serious fear. Such is the fear of a child of his parent's anger when he receives poor grades, or of a person locked in a dark room with rats. *Light* fear is caused by the threat of a small evil, or of a serious but improbable evil.
- As regards its cause, fear is *justly caused* when the person threatening has the right to inflict that evil. For example, a creditor may threaten to sue the defaulting debtor in court. Someone may threaten to call the police when a neighbor plays music late at night. Fear is *unjustly caused* when the person threatening has no right to carry out the threat. For example, a creditor cannot threaten to spread calumnies or send poison letters.
- As regards its timing, we distinguish antecedent fear and concomitant fear. *Antecedent* fear precedes the action, which is accordingly done out of fear. *Concomitant* fear accompanies the action, as in the case of a thief who, while carrying out the theft, is afraid of being caught. Obviously, the latter does not influence the action, and no further mention of it will be made.
After these distinctions, we can establish the following principles:
- Antecedent fear makes the action involuntary if it is so intense that it prevents the use of reason. Otherwise, it only diminishes its voluntariness. He who prefers something wants it. This diminution would not be enough, for example, to make a mortal sin only venial.
- Positive laws, both human and divine, do not usually bind under serious fear. There is no obligation to fulfill them "at the cost of great hardship"—*cum gravi incommodo*. Still, they may oblige, in such circumstances as when the omission would cause a serious harm to the common good, God, the Church, or souls.
- Acts or contracts made under serious, unjustly caused fear are valid in themselves, because he who prefers wants. They are rescindable, though, because the victim has suffered an injustice, which can be repaired by making the act or contract void. In some cases, like vows, marriage, or ecclesiastical elections, positive law itself declares the acts invalid.

(3) *Passions*

The cognitive act of the intellect is followed by a volitive act of the spiritual appetitive faculty, the will. In the same way, sense perceptions presented by the imagination (sounds, visual images, or recollections) are followed by acts of the sense appetitive faculties. These are two: the *concupiscible appetite* (from *concupiscere*, “to desire”), which tends to the sensible good, and the *irascible appetite*, which aims at removing—violently, if necessary—the obstacles to the attainment of the good.

The acts of these sense appetites are called *passions*.²⁰ The term *passion* indicates that the subject passively suffers it, being attracted by the object presented.²¹

Following Aristotle, St. Thomas distinguishes eleven passions,²² that is, eleven possible types of acts of the two sense appetites:

i) Acts of the concupiscible appetite:

- *Love* (attraction toward a sensible good) and *hate* (aversion toward a sensible evil or, rather, privation of a sensible good)
- *Desire* (caused by the inclination to attain a sensible good), and *aversion* (disgust toward a sensible evil that is not yet suffered)
- *Delight* or *joy* (rest in the possession of a sensible good), and *sadness* (sorrow caused by the absence of a sensible good that has not been attained)

ii) Acts of the irascible appetite:

- *Hope* (caused by the knowledge of an absent good, difficult to obtain, but still achievable) and *despair* (when the same good is perceived as unattainable)
- *Courage* (rebellion against and rejection of a present sensible evil) and *fear* (uneasiness toward a future evil that is deemed unavoidable)
- *Anger* (prompting a wish to revenge a present sensible evil)

Passions are not inclinations or tendencies, but acts. They generally coincide with what we call *feelings* or *emotions*.

Nevertheless, in order to avoid confusions, we should keep in mind that the term *passion* is commonly used in a different sense, not that of Aristotle and St. Thomas, but that of Plato and the Stoics. In this latter sense, passions are *acts*, or even permanent inclinations, of the *disordered* sense appetites. We will have to rely on the context to identify which sense

of the term is used. In philosophy and theology, *passion* is ordinarily used in the former sense.

The term *concupiscence* has several meanings as well:

- A specific passion: desire
- A synonym for passion in general
- A permanent evil inclination of either appetite—sensible or spiritual—caused by original sin

Passions, just like the senses, are necessary for human life. They are present in every person. Christ himself felt sadness, joy, and anger (cf. Mt 21:12; 26:37; Lk 19:41; 10:21). Passions prepare, accompany, and perfect the acts of the will in the same way as the acts of the sensible knowledge prepare and accompany those of intellectual knowledge. Although the will can direct itself to a singular sensible good without any previous movement of passion, passions facilitate the operation of the will. For example, a sick person who has lost his appetite has to exert a great effort to feed himself. The proper use of passions perfects the voluntary act, making it easier and more intense. This applies both to material and spiritual goods. Moral perfection requires that man be moved, not only by his will, but also by his sense appetite, according to the psalm, “My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God” (Ps 84:2).²³

Sense appetite is at the service of reason. Man can arouse or mitigate sense appetite through the will and through representations and images. Passions can foster or hinder the execution of good actions. Sadness, for example, may fetter a person and lead him to withdraw into himself. But it may also lead him to seek its causes and fight against them. Original sin, however, has introduced a disorder in the sense appetites that personal sins aggravate. Thus, passions can interfere with the exercise of reason and therefore with that of the will.

Adam’s sense appetite was perfectly subject to reason. After he rebelled against God with original sin, his reason was darkened and his appetites were left in disarray. In the present, wounded state of human nature, the appetites can tend to an object against the right order of reason, further darkening the latter. Instead of facilitating the right movement of the will, they can hinder it.

If man does not struggle, personal sins further this degradation of reason and will. Only grace and correspondence to it through ascetical struggle can enable man to recover dominion over his sense appetites. The disorder of the will against God caused the darkening of the intellect and the rebellion of the appetites. In the same way, union with the will of God through charity begets light in the intellect and order in the sense appetites.

It is thus easy to understand that sense appetites work in different ways in the just man and the sinner. Sanctity of life renews the harmony between the spiritual faculties of the soul and those based on matter—although never completely in this life. In a man who seeks sanctity, the sense appetites gradually become subject to reason. Conversely, in an unrepentant sinner, the disorder of the passions worsens, and they become more and more difficult to control.

Keeping this in mind, we will now see to what extent passions affect the voluntariness required for a human act.

- *Antecedent passions*: Feelings or passions can precede the decision of the will, thus diminishing the voluntariness of the human act. If they incline to evil acts, these are not as evil as when done without passion, and are called sins of weakness. Even then, these sins can be mortal.
- *Consequent passions*: Passions can also follow the act of the will. This may happen in three ways:
 - i) The will can provoke the passion in some way, although without seeking a posterior act. The passion would then be voluntary in its cause, and would increase the voluntariness of an eventual act insofar as the act is or should be foreseen.
 - ii) The will can arouse the passion in order to carry out the act with more energy (consequent passion *per modum electionis*), as when someone uses the imagination to arouse the desire of something, good or evil, in order to attain it more easily. These passions increase the voluntariness of the action.
 - iii) The passion may also appear while the action is done (consequent passion *per modum redundantiae*): when the will decides something with energy, feelings usually accompany it. These feelings do not increase the voluntariness of the act, but are a sign of the intensity of the volition.

(4) *Habits*

Habits are permanent inclinations to act in a certain way.

Voluntary habits, that is, those caused by the repetition of voluntary acts, increase the voluntariness of the act, whether good or bad.

However, if the will is resolved to remove it and there is struggle, the habit becomes *involuntary* and diminishes the voluntariness of the acts.

(5) *Pathological states*

Some pathological states may diminish the voluntariness of an act. Such are obsessions and other psychological disorders.

Depending on their seriousness, these states can diminish the voluntariness of some or all actions. In extreme cases, they may even make them completely involuntary.

1. Cf. William E. May, *An Introduction to Moral Theology* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1994), 20.
2. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 1, a. 1.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, I, q. 83; I-II, q. 1, a. 1.
4. Cf. *CCC*, 1730–1748.
5. Cf. *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 10; 1, q. 59, a. 3.
6. Cf. *Ibid.*, I, q. 83, a. 4.
7. *Ibid.*, I, q. 83, a. 1.
8. Cf. DS 1555; *CCC*, 1730ff; John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*.
9. Cf. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*.
10. *ST*, I, q. 59, a. 3.
11. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 32, 34, 84.
12. Cf. *CCC*, 1733.
13. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1734.
14. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 65.
15. Cf. *ST*, I, q. 83; q. 59, a. 3, ad 3.
16. Cf. William E. May, *An Introduction to Moral Theology*, 29.
17. Cf. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*.
18. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 35.
19. Cf. *CCC*, 1859–1860.
20. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1762–1775.
21. Cf. *ST*, I, q. 83; q. 22, a. 1.
22. Cf. *Ibid.*, I, q. 83; q. 23, a. 4. St. Thomas later studies each passion in qq. 26–48.
23. Cf. *CCC*, 1770.

4

The Morality of Human Acts

Morality and its Norms

Freedom makes man a moral subject. When he acts deliberately, he is, so to speak, the *father of his acts*. Human acts, that is, acts that are freely chosen in consequence of a judgment of conscience, can be morally evaluated. The *morality* of a human act is its *condition of being good or bad*. An act is good or bad depending on whether or not it leads man to his last end—God—and therefore to his happiness.¹ As we see, there is more in goodness than conforming to nature. The good also has to do with unfolding a person's possibilities; it is not *static* but *dynamic*. Good signifies being and being more. Bad leads to being less and less.

To accomplish a good act, man makes use of his freedom to pursue an authentic good. This good is established as such by divine wisdom, which orders every being toward its end. This ordination that exists in God's mind is called *eternal law*. Eternal law is known to us both by means of man's natural reason (hence what man knows in this respect is called *natural law*), and through God's supernatural revelation.

Acting is morally good when the choices of freedom are *in conformity with man's true good* and thus express the voluntary ordering of the person toward his ultimate end: God himself, the supreme good in whom man finds his full and perfect happiness.

The first question in the young man's conversation with Jesus: "What good must I do to have eternal life?" (Mt 19:6) immediately shows *the essential connection between the moral value of an act and man's final end*. Jesus, in his reply, confirms the young man's conviction: the performance of good acts, commanded by the One who "alone is good," are the indispensable condition of and the path to eternal blessedness; "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Mt 19:17).²

An act will lead to man's true good and, ultimately, to his last end if it fulfills the following conditions, called *norms of morality*:

- It must be in agreement with *eternal law* (the supreme objective norm of morality).
- It must also agree with the norms derived from eternal law: *natural law, divine positive law, and human laws* (proximate objective norm of morality).
- These laws must be properly applied to the specific case through the judgment of reason called *conscience* (subjective norm of morality).

Moral norms are truths that guide us to act in ways that fulfill us, both as individuals and as persons living together in community. On account of these three norms, we can define morality as the *conformity or non-conformity of the human act with the norms that determine its ordination to the last end.*

Errors about Morality

Errors about morality stem from errors about God, the last end, the different laws, the sources of morality, and conscience. Some of these errors are:

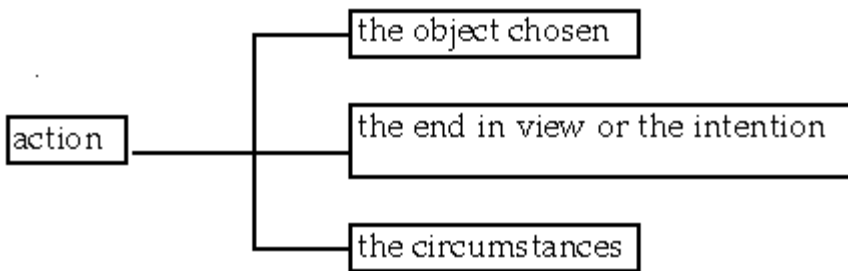
- *Epicureanism*, which identifies the standard of morality with what leads to the attainment of pleasure,
- *Social utilitarianism*, a variation of the former, which identifies morality with the attainment of the maximum welfare for the greatest number of people,
- *Stoicism*, which identifies the standard of morality with right reason so that man must live in accord with right reason without any regard for personal happiness,
- *Subjectivism*, which, in its different varieties, reduces morality to the good intentions of the agent, judged by subjective criteria,
- The false conception of the *fundamental option* according to which, once the person has chosen a right “fundamental option” or orientation in his life, he would not be accountable for the mortal sins he commits, as long as he does not change his overall attitude,
- *Consequentialism*, which claims that the morality of an action depends exclusively on the foreseeable consequences resulting from the choice of action (a technical way of stating that the end can sometimes justify the means),
- *Proportionalism*, which maintains that the morality of an action can be measured solely by weighing the values and goods being sought by the doer and comparing them with the resulting bad effects (this theory focuses merely on the proportion acknowledged between the good and the bad effects of a given choice.³

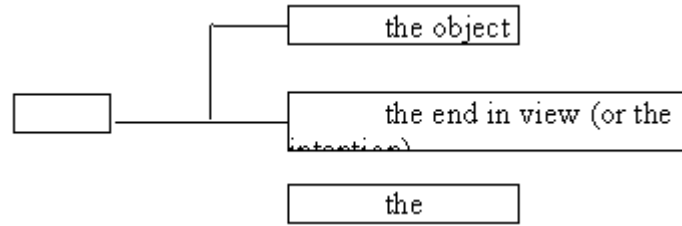
The Sources of Morality

The agreement between the action and the norms of morality must take place at two levels. Since the goodness of an action lies in its ordination to the last end, two conditions are required for it to be good:

- i) The act itself can be ordained to God.
- ii) The will of the agent actually ordains it to God.

Thus the two principal elements of the act, the *object* and the *intention* of the agent (the *end*), must be ordained to the last end. The *circumstances*, though accidental to the action, must also be ordained to the last end, since they could also be important.





These three elements (object, intention, and circumstances) are called *principles or sources of morality* of human acts.⁴ The ordination of human actions to God depends on them, in accordance with the condition of created beings. If the three principles are good, the action is good, because it leads to God and makes the agent better.

The Object of the Action

In a human act, the will chooses a course of action—a moral object—to achieve an end. The object chosen is a good toward which the will deliberately directs itself. It is *what the action by its own nature tends to*, independently of the intention of the agent and the circumstances that may accompany it.

The object is also called the intrinsic end or “end of the action”—*finis operis*. In order to avoid confusion with the end of the agent, the latter is also called the extrinsic end or “end of the agent”—*finis operantis*. We will refer to the former as *object* and to the latter as *end* or *intention*.

It is important to note that we are not referring to the physical object of the action, but to its *moral object*, insofar as it is subject to the above-mentioned norms of morality. Thus, the object of a robbery is not the stolen money or its transfer from one place to another, but its unjust appropriation.

Since the divine ordination is prior to its knowledge by human reason, human acts have an objective morality, which stems from their object. The objective rules of morality manifest the good or evil character of the object of the action; the agreement between these two (the rules of morality and the present object) is witnessed by the moral conscience of the individual. The morality of the object should be studied separately from the intention of the specific subject who accepts that divine ordination and applies it. Thus, the objective content of moral law must be studied by moral theology without judging the intentions of the subject.

“There are concrete acts that it is always wrong to choose, because their choice entails a disorder of the will, i.e., a moral evil. One may not do evil so that good may result from it.”⁵ These actions are *incapable of being ordered to God*, because they contradict the good of the person made in his image. These are acts (i.e., moral objects) that the Church calls “intrinsically evil” (*intrinsice malum*); they are such *always and per se* on account of their very object, without considering the intentions of the doer or the circumstances.⁶

Therefore, *the essential and primary morality of a human act stems from its moral object*, and is called objective or substantial morality.

The object of a human act may be good (praying), bad (lying), or indifferent (taking a walk). Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that,

besides considering the object in itself, we could also consider it in a subjective or formal way, as perceived by the subject. Thus, there is no offense to God when someone does something bad without realizing that it is bad. As we saw in connection with ignorance, it would not be a formal sin, but a merely material one, and therefore not imputable.⁷

The Intention of the Agent

The end intended by the agent (or *intention*) is the second most important source of morality. As we saw earlier, this end is always subordinated to the last end, whether or not the agent is aware of it. If the last end of the agent does not coincide, implicitly at least, with the objective last end (the glory of God, or from a subjective point of view, the attainment of one's integral human fulfillment—everlasting happiness—in Jesus Christ), the action is vitiated and immoral. Every real action is carried out by an agent, and the agent always acts for a last end, either the objective last end or a different one. Therefore, although their *objects* may be indifferent, properly speaking there are no indifferent *actions*; all human actions are either good or bad.

Besides this ordination to the last end, if the action is really human, the agent gives it a conscious ordination to a more immediate end. The action is thus a means for that immediate end. For example, someone may lie in order to give a good impression, to save another person's life, or to close a good business deal. This immediate end is what we call the *end of the agent*.

Intention is not limited to directing individual actions, but can guide several actions toward one and the same purpose. It can orient one's whole life toward its ultimate end. For example, a service done with the intention of helping one's neighbor can at the same time be inspired by the love of God as the ultimate end of all our actions.

The Fundamental Option

In a person's life, there may be a fundamental choice that determines his moral life and engages his freedom on a radical level before God. This "fundamental option" is a result of the decision of faith—of the *obedience of faith* (cf. Rom 16:26)—by which man makes a total and free self-commitment to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God.⁸ This decision of faith—faith works through love (cf. Gal 5:6)—comes from the core of man, from his heart (cf. Rom 10:10), whence it is called to bear fruit in works (cf. Mt 12:33–35; Lk 6:43–45; Rom 8:5–10; Gal 5:22).

This option, which responds to Jesus' call to "come, follow me," marks the greatest possible exaltation of human freedom. We find a similar exaltation of human freedom in the words of St. Paul: "You were called to freedom, brethren" (Gal 5:13). But the Apostle immediately adds a grave warning: "Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh." Thus, Scripture sees the "fundamental option" as a genuine choice of man's freedom and profoundly links that choice to particular acts and particular choices of specific actions, through which man deliberately conforms himself to God's will, wisdom, and law.

The "fundamental option" is revoked when man engages his freedom in a conscious decision to the contrary, in a morally grave matter. Even if his general orientation or "fundamental option" remains unchanged, man offends God with every freely committed mortal sin and, as a result, becomes guilty of the entire law (cf. Jas 2:8–11). Even if he perseveres in faith, he loses sanctifying grace, charity, and eternal happiness.⁹

It is, therefore, an error to reserve the moral assessment of a person to his "fundamental option" exclusively, thinking that his choice of particular actions—the everyday choices—are not to be considered *good* or *evil*.¹⁰

Object and Intention in the Morality of the Action

The morality of the object and the end (or intention) may not be the same. For example, someone could cheat a client (bad object) in order to pay his employees' salaries (good intention), or send a gift (good object) in order to bribe an official (bad intention).

For a better understanding of how the morality of the object and the intention affect the morality of the action, we should keep in mind that, in every action, the agent chooses both the end and the means leading to it (object) in the same act of the will. In this single act of the will, we can distinguish two aspects: the volition of intention (the end sought), and the volition of choice (the means chosen to attain that end). The means chosen will determine the objective goodness or evil of the action, but the goodness of the action as a whole depends essentially on the intention *and* the means.

Therefore, there is a real distinction between the goodness coming from the object chosen by the will, insofar as it has been *chosen*, and that coming from *the will's intention toward the end*. This explains why a good object can be wanted with an evil intention, or with different kinds of good intention. Thus, one may want to give alms out of charity, or out of merely human compassion, or out of vainglory. At the same time, we can see that the actions of the agent have only one moral goodness or evil, which depends both on the intention and on the means. The act of the will is only one, and is always either good or bad. Specifically, for that act of the will to be good, both the intention and the means must be good. If either of these two is bad, the act of the will is also bad.

The object chosen is the first condition for the morality of an act, and what essentially manifests it. The end is first in the intention, but last in the execution. Thus, what first manifests the intention of the agent and, therefore, the morality of the action, is the object chosen. It follows that:

- when the object chosen is in itself seemingly indifferent, a good or bad intention makes the action good or bad, respectively. Therefore, although, abstractly considered, the moral object may be indifferent, *there are no indifferent actions for the individual*;
- a good intention makes a good object better. If the object is bad, the action becomes less bad, but never completely good. Thus, it is never

licit to do something bad for a good end. “The end does not justify the means”;

- a grievously evil intention makes a good object result in a bad action. A bad object becomes a worse action.

Multiple Effect Actions

Quite often, a single action produces several proximate effects, with different degrees of concatenation. Some may be good, some bad. We will study these actions in the light of the principles on the two primary sources of morality established above. For the sake of simplicity, we will limit the analysis to the case of one action with two effects, one good and one bad.

Three conditions are needed to make this action good. The first two refer, as in any action, to the goodness of the object and of the end, but with the complexity caused by the double effect.

i) The first and fundamental condition is that the *object* of the action considered in itself (*finis operis*) *must be morally good or indifferent*. This is often the most difficult point to ascertain, since the action has two effects. The agent has to determine whether the proper object of the action is the good effect or the bad one. *The object is good if the good effect is what follows necessarily and by itself from the action*. The bad effect, on the other hand, should follow only accidentally (*per accidens*)—although at times it may be sure to follow—because of some circumstance that the agent cannot avoid.

In other words, the immediate effect of the action must be the good one. This is certainly not the case when the good effect is a consequence of the bad one. This would be akin to doing something bad for a good end, and we know that the end does not justify the means.

We should not forget that we are referring to the moral object, not to the physical object. Thus, to stab somebody is not “to push a knife” or “to introduce a foreign object into the organism.” It is “to kill” or “to wound.” In the same way, amputating a gangrenous leg in order to save the patient is not just “to amputate a limb,” but “to amputate a sick limb that threatens life.” Otherwise, the immediate effect of the operation—amputation—would be bad, and the good effect—health—would come later as a consequence. As we can see, the application of this principle is not always easy. We cannot apply it indiscriminately to any case without taking all factors into consideration.

ii) Second, the end (or intention) of the agent must also be good. Therefore, the agent must exclusively seek the good effect.

iii) Third, *there must be a proportionately serious cause* for doing that action and allowing the bad effect to happen. The seriousness of the cause is measured in relation to the importance of the good effect. It should be all the more serious:

- the more serious the indirectly caused evil,
- the closer the influence of the action in the bad effect,
- the more probable the bad effect,
- the greater the obligation, by reason of one's office, to prevent the evil effect.

The opinion of prudent people and their behavior in similar cases are usually good guides to gauge whether there is a proportionate cause.

The following examples are illustrations of the application of these principles:

- A patient without hope of survival can be given a strong sedative to alleviate his pain, even if it will shorten his life. But he cannot be given a stronger, lethal dose of the same drug in order to cause his death and cut short his agony.
- One can undergo a necessary surgical operation even if sterility may result. But one cannot be sterilized to avoid serious complications or even death arising from a possible future pregnancy.
- One can enter into a risky investment in order to save a fledgling company, even if there is danger of sinking it deeper. But one cannot fraudulently declare bankruptcy, even if it is sure to save the company.

The Circumstances

Circumstances are *the accidental moral conditions that contribute to increase or diminish the moral goodness or evil of an already existing action*. They may also increase or decrease the responsibility of the person acting (as in the case of one acting out of fear of death).¹¹

Not every physical circumstance is a moral circumstance. Thus, the malice of a blasphemy is the same whether it is said standing or sitting down. But being alone or with other persons would change it, because the others might be scandalized. The merit of alms does not change whether it is given by day or by night, but it will change depending on the effort required.

Moral circumstances are traditionally listed as follows:

- *Who*: a special quality of the agent; thus, a certain action would become worse if the agent has a special social responsibility
- *What*: the quality or quantity of the object; stealing a bar of soap is not the same as stealing a ton of soap
- *Where*: the quality of the place; for example, stealing inside a church
- *With what means*: for example, robbing by means of threats
- *Why*: not to be confused with the end of the agent—it refers to additional motives
- *How*: for example, robbery with personal injury
- *When*: the timing or duration; for example, hating somebody for a long or a short time

The circumstances influence the morality of the action, increasing (aggravating circumstances) or diminishing (mitigating circumstances) the goodness or evil of the action.

External Execution and its Effects

We will now study the influence of the external implementation and the effects following from it on the morality of the action. The actual implementation of an action decided by the will does not add anything to that decision, either good or bad. The external act does not have a volition of its own, separate from the decision of the will (cf. Gn 22:16; Mt 5:38; Mk 7:21ff).

Nevertheless, the external implementation can *accidentally* increase the goodness or evil of the action decided by the will—which does not mean that it is unimportant. This is due to the following reasons:

- The actual implementation manifests that the act of the will is intense.
- The duration of the decision increases, since it lasts until the action is completed.
- The implementation may require repeated acts of the will.

The effects of the action, whether necessary or accidental, affect the morality of the act insofar as they have been foreseen or willed. Their acceptance or volition indicate the quality of the inclination of the will.

Supernatural Human Acts

Habitual or *sanctifying grace*, already mentioned in connection with the supernatural last end, is a supernatural quality freely given by God, which inheres in the soul and truly makes us adopted children of God and partakers of the divine nature.

Good acts performed by those who have sanctifying grace—and hence the supernatural virtues that always accompany it—are supernatural acts.

One can perform good actions without grace, but these are not supernatural acts. Nor can man obtain grace through his own means alone, as we saw when we discussed the elevation of man to the supernatural order.¹²

Supernatural Merit of Human Acts

Merit is the quality of a good act by which it deserves a reward. Supernatural merit is the quality by which a supernatural act deserves a supernatural reward. A non-supernatural good action does not deserve this reward, but divine mercy may decide to grant it in some cases. Evil acts, on the other hand, warrant demerit and punishment.

In the case of *perfect merit (de condigno)*, there is an equivalence between the value of the act and the reward. In this case, we can say that the reward is nearly a duty of justice, at least by virtue of the promise made. Thus, we can merit an increase of grace and eternal salvation by virtue of the Redemption achieved by Christ.

If merit is not due to that strict equivalence, but to a certain fittingness or to the liberality of the one who rewards, we have *imperfect merit (de congruo)*. Thus, in the supernatural order, the graces one may win for another person are merited *de congruo*. There is a certain analogy between non-supernatural good actions and this type of merit.

For an act to have merit—assuming always the promise of God—the following conditions must be met:

- The act must be good and voluntary—otherwise it would not be a human act.
- The will must be informed by the supernatural habit of charity or, in other words, the soul must be informed by sanctifying grace. This is evident from what was said above. Actually, if man is in the state of grace, all good actions are supernatural and meritorious; if they are good, they are always informed by charity, at least in an implicit way.
- One can merit only during this life (*in statu viatoris*).

The degree of merit of an action depends on the greater or lesser charity possessed by the agent. It also depends on the intensity of the act of the will orienting the action to the supernatural end.

1. Cf. CCC, 1749–1761.
2. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 72.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, 75.
4. Cf. CCC, 1750.
5. *Ibid.*, 1761.
6. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 78–83.
7. Cf. CCC, 1735.
8. Cf. *DV*, 5.

9. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 65–70; Ap. Ex. *Reconciliatio et Poenitentia*, 218–223.
10. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 65.
11. Cf. CCC, 1754.
12. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 109, aa. 2, 3, 5, 6.

5

Conscience

WE ARE FREE to choose what we are to do, but we are not free to make what we have chosen good or evil, right or wrong. Our choices are good or bad insofar they conform to God's divine and eternal law and its "imperatives," which are made known to us through the mediation of the conscience. Thus, it is necessary for us to understand the role of the conscience in our moral lives and how, through its mediation, we participate in God's divine and eternal law.¹

37. The Notion of Conscience

The Old Testament affirms that God searches man's conscience (cf. Sir 42:18). Denouncing the corruption of the pagans, St. Paul declares that their consciences are bearing witness against them (cf. Rom 2:15). The New Testament uses the term *conscience* 30 times. In these texts, man appeals to "conscience" to behave correctly.

In moral theology, the term *conscience* has a very precise meaning, which does not always coincide with the common understanding. *Conscience is the judgment of the intellect on the goodness or evil of an act performed or about to be performed.*² This definition should be kept in mind in order to properly understand the expressions used in moral theology.

Therefore, conscience is not a separate faculty from intellect, because intellect is man's only spiritual faculty for knowing. Neither is it an inclination or habit of the intellect (this is precisely a widespread meaning of the term *conscience*). It is an act, a *judgment* or *dictate*, the result of applying general knowledge to a specific action.

Conscience is a *practical judgment*, bearing on something that one has done or intends to do. It is not a speculative assessment, opinion, or judgment on general principles, like the validity of the sacraments or the advisability of being good. It is not, furthermore, a decision about the usefulness or practicality of an action but, rather, a judgment about its *goodness or evil*. Therefore, it includes a moral assessment of the action intended, or a moral approval or disapproval of the action performed.

St. Thomas opposes the widespread misconception that conscience is a faculty or capacity, or at least a habit. He insists that it is only an act,³ and concretely "a dictate of reason ... an application of knowledge to action."⁴ Nevertheless, the term *conscience* has been applied, in a loose way, to the habit of the first principles or *synderesis*, which "is said to incite to good, and to murmur at evil."⁵ Through *synderesis*, we know that we must do good and avoid evil.

In order to avoid this ambivalence, we will deliberately use the terms *dictate* or *judgment* instead of *conscience*, although the latter is much more common. The ordinary, broad meaning of the word could obscure the

theological one. However, we should keep in mind that, in moral theology, the usual and proper term is *conscience*, and not *dictate*.

37a) Conscience and Law

Conscience, being a judgment, is the result of applying general laws to a specific case—just as an umpire applies the rules of the game to a concrete situation. Since it is a judgment, the laws to be applied are not established by that judgment; the umpire does not create but merely applies the rules. Thus the expression “freedom of conscience” is false if understood as meaning that the so-called conscience is free to create its own laws about good and evil. There are two erroneous concepts of conscience:

- i) The *heteronomous* conscience tied to normative ethics, focusing solely on laws and obligations, commands and prohibitions, in such a way that there is hardly any place for the conscience to evaluate and decide
- ii) The *autonomous* conscience, totally subjective, which ignores the law and determines by itself what is right and wrong

Against these positions, Pope John Paul II maintains:

The judgment of conscience has an imperative character; man must act in accordance with it... it is the *proximate norm of personal morality*... The authority of its voice and judgments derive from the *truth* about moral good and evil, which is called to listen to and to express. This truth is indicated by the “divine law,” *the universal and objective norm of morality*. The judgment of conscience does not establish the law; rather it bears witness to the authority of the natural law and of the practical reason with reference to the supreme good, whose attractiveness the human person perceives and whose commandment he accepts.⁶

38. Objectivity and Certitude of the Judgment

Like an umpire's decision, the intellect's dictate on the goodness or evil of an intended or performed action may coincide with the (objective) truth (true or right conscience) or not (erroneous conscience).

The intellect may issue that dictate with the certainty of being correct (certain conscience), or may have doubts on what side to take (doubtful conscience).

39. Right Conscience and Erroneous Conscience

Right conscience is the judgment of a person who—on the basis of true principles—decides, in conformity with the truth, that a particular action is licit or illicit.

Erroneous conscience is the judgment of a person who—on the basis of false principles that are thought to be true—mistakenly determines that a particular action is licit or illicit.

39a) Conscience and Truth

Some look upon the moral teachings of the Church as a set of legalistic and arbitrary norms, imposed on persons from without. This is totally erroneous. The Catholic accepts the moral teachings of the Church because he realizes that Christ speaks to him through the authoritative teaching of the Church, which is the bride and body of Christ; she is indeed the pillar of truth.⁷ Catholics regard the moral teachings of the Church as *truths* intended to remind us of our dignity as beings made in the image and likeness of God and called to inwardly shape our choices and actions in accordance with the truth.⁸

Conscience depends on truth. There is *the truth* about man, about law, about what is really good or bad. Truth precedes conscience; thus, conscience must respect truth. When the truth about the reality of things is not respected, the subsequent practical judgment of conscience is false.

39b) Formation of Conscience

The dignity of the human person implies and demands the rectitude of the moral conscience, that is, its being based on truth. One must seriously seek a right conscience or, in other words, one must try to make sure that one's moral judgment is *right*. This can be achieved by:

- diligently learning the laws of the moral life (through spiritual formation), just as the referee must be interested in knowing well the rules of the game,
- seeking expert advice in difficult cases (spiritual direction), just as doctors hold consultations when the diagnosis of a serious illness is not clear,
- asking God for light (prayer),
- removing the obstacles to right judgment, such as habitual moral disorder, or bad habits (ascetical struggle),
- personal examination of conscience.

The expression *formation of one's conscience* precisely refers to the careful preparation of that judgment.⁹ A person is called prudent when he chooses according to that judgment. Among the above-listed conditions for reaching a right judgment, two can especially benefit from a careful preparation: the intellect's knowledge of moral laws, and the will's removal of obstacles. Thus, the formation of one's conscience is a long and comprehensive process that will later facilitate an immediate and right judgment in any concrete situation.

40. Certain Conscience

Certain conscience is the judgment about the goodness or evil of a particular action that is made without fear of being mistaken.

When the intellect judges the morality of a specific action with certitude, that judgment should always be followed. Hence the traditional principle that *certain conscience must always be followed*. This is a direct consequence of the first moral principle (one must do good and avoid evil), and is likewise self-evident. When the intellect concludes with certitude that something must be done, one must do it, and when it decides with certitude that something cannot be done, one must not do it.

Only certain conscience is a right rule for action, but it need not be based on absolute certitude, which is seldom found in human actions. Certitude in the broad sense is enough. This means that the judgment is based on serious reasons, although there is still the possibility of being wrong, and even some minor reason against it.

As a logical consequence of what was said previously, we can understand that:

Besides being certain, conscience must be right or at least invincibly erroneous in order to be a rule of morality. Since the rule of morality [within natural ethics] is natural law, only that conscience which correctly applies natural law to a particular case (right conscience) can be held as a legitimate rule of morality in the strict sense. Because of human imperfection, however, man can sometimes innocently conclude, after serious and careful consideration, that something is right when in reality it is not. Because of this, invincibly erroneous conscience is also a rule of morality. St. Thomas clarifies that it is a rule only in a relative way (*secundum quid*), since it only binds for as long as the error lasts, and in an accidental manner (*per accidens*), since it does not bind because of its being wrong, but because man considers it as true.¹⁰

Sins that are committed with a conscience that is both certain and erroneous are merely *material* sins. This would be the case of a person who does something wrong, but is convinced that it is right. There is no *formal* sin here, since there is no voluntary separation from God. The sin would be real and imputable, however, if the conscience is erroneous because of a previous fault: for example, because of a previous negligence in acquiring the necessary moral formation. We saw this when we studied the actions that are voluntary *in causa*. On the other hand, material sins, though not offensive to God, are always harmful. God commands or forbids something precisely on account of its being beneficial or harmful for man.

41. Doubtful Conscience

A *doubtful conscience* is the suspension of judgment on the moral goodness or evil of an action because the intellect cannot see clearly whether it is good or bad. Actually, the expression “doubtful conscience” is contradictory in that it signifies a non-existent judgment. *Moral doubt* would be more appropriate.¹¹

It is not licit to perform an action when one does not know whether it is good or bad. A *doubtful conscience* cannot be followed if it entails the possibility of doing something bad; the doubt must be resolved first. The doubt may refer:

- to the *law itself*, its contents (like a referee who doubts about the interpretation of some obscure rule of the game), or
- to the *action* (like the referee who doubts whether a player actually committed a foul or not).

In either case, if there are reasonable grounds for doubt, one may not act until it is resolved. (If one doubts whether there is obligation or not of doing something good, like going to Mass, it can always be done without need to resolve the doubt; there is no risk of sinning in doing it.)

Doubts can be resolved in two ways. If there is time, they can be resolved in a *direct* way, by consulting a book or an expert, or by checking the facts. If there is no time, they can be resolved in an *indirect* way, by applying some maxims called *reflex principles*. These are general rules that help reach a solution based on what is most common and probable, which can be safely presumed to be the truth. Thus, all reflex principles can be summed up as follows: “In case of doubt, what is presumed stands.” The most important reflex principles are the following:

- A doubtful law does not bind.
- In case of doubt, the possessor has a better right.
- A person is presumed innocent until proven guilty.
- In case of doubt, the defendant is to be favored.
- In case of doubt, the superior is presumed to be right.
- In case of doubt, one has to judge according to what ordinarily happens.
- An act is to be presumed valid until proven invalid.

- In case of doubt, what is odious should be restricted and what is favorable should be expanded.

However, if the judgment could cause a serious damage, the principle to be followed is:

- In case of doubt, one has to follow the safest solution.

If, after all these efforts, the doubt remains unsolved, and one fears that both the action and its omission could be sinful (*perplexed conscience*), one may choose any of the two. Neither would be a sin. One cannot offend God necessarily.

42. Scrupulous and Lax Conscience

The intellect could get used to issuing defective, biased judgments on the goodness or evil of actions. We can distinguish two types of biased conscience. (We are not now using the term *conscience* in the sense of “judgment,” but rather as a “habit of the intellect that inclines it to a certain type of judgment.”) These two types of conscience are:

- i) the *scrupulous conscience*, which tends to see sins when there are none, and
- ii) the *lax conscience*, which fails to see a sin when actually there is one, or tends to minimize its seriousness.

42a) Scrupulous Conscience

The scrupulous conscience—or rather the intellect with a tendency to scruples—decides that an action is sinful based on weak or insufficient reasons. The symptoms of a scrupulous conscience are:

- an excessive anxiety over the sufficiency of good actions and, especially, over the validity of past confessions,
- fastidious scrutinizing of unnecessary circumstances, especially as regards internal sins (thoughts, desires),
- obstinacy in one's opinion, which leads to mistrust one's confessor and to go from one confessor to another.

The *causes* of a scrupulous conscience could sometimes be supernatural, like a trial sent by God. Generally, however, it is due to natural causes, whether physical (sickness) or moral (self-centeredness, dealing with excessively strict persons, or even hidden pride).

The *remedies* of a scrupulous conscience are:

- removal of its causes,
- strict obedience to one's confessor,
- orderly work and suitable recreation,
- prayer, which increases light,
- trust in God, who is our Father.

A scrupulous conscience is not the same as a *delicate conscience*. Nor does a scrupulous conscience rule out committing objectively serious sins. Nevertheless, because of their special situation, scrupulous persons may be excused from the material integrity of Confession. Sometimes, in order to help them, it may be good to ask them whether they are willing to swear that what is troubling them is an objectively sinful action, committed with full knowledge and consent.

42b) Lax Conscience

The lax conscience—or rather the intellect with a tendency to laxity—judges without sufficient reason that a certain action is not, or is only slightly, sinful.

If laxity becomes excessive because of repeated sins, we can speak of a *hardened conscience*. This does not mean that the intellect is no longer able to distinguish between good and evil. Properly speaking, *subjective amorality* cannot really exist. The first principle, “Do good and avoid evil,” will always be present.

The so-called *pharisaic conscience* is characterized by great punctiliousness (stiff correctness) in some things, especially external and often unimportant ones, together with great laxity in matters of far greater importance (cf. Mt 23:24).

The usual causes of a lax conscience are: poor moral education, dealing with depraved people, strong disorderly passions, and living for a long time immersed in vice. Sometimes, it may be due to a reaction against a previous, unresolved situation of scrupulous conscience. Since everything seems to be a sin, one does not care any more whether something is actually right or not.

The *effects* of a lax conscience are especially harmful. When the awareness of doing something wrong is lost, the possibility of reacting and repenting is minimal.

The *remedies* of a lax conscience are removing its causes, frequent sacramental confession, and asking light from God.

1. Cf. William E. May, *An Introduction to Moral Theology*, 25.

2. Cf. CCC, 1776–1802.

3. Cf. ST, I, q. 79, a. 13.

4. *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 19, a. 5.

5. *Ibid.*, I, q. 79, a. 12.

6. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 60.

7.

“In forming their consciences the faithful must pay careful attention to the sacred and certain teaching of the Church. For the Catholic Church is by the will of Christ the teacher of truth. It is her duty to proclaim and teach with authority the truth which is Christ and, at the same time, to declare and confirm by her authority the principles of the moral order which spring from human nature itself” (*DH*, 14).

8. Cf. William E. May, *An Introduction to Moral Theology*, 32–33.

9. Cf. CCC, 1783–1785.
10. A. Rodríguez Luño, *Etica* (Pamplona, Spain: EUNSA, 1982), 102–103.
11. Cf. M. Prümmer, *Manuale Theologiae Moralis* (Barcelona: Herder, 1961), 1:304:3.

6

Good Acts and Virtues

MAN PERFORMS HUMAN ACTS through his potencies. As we have seen, all acts proceed from the intellect and the will. When these potencies act repeatedly in a certain way, they acquire inclinations that will substantially influence successive acts. These inclinations are called *habits*. Habits caused by morally good actions are also good and are called *virtues*. Habits caused by bad actions are called *vices*. Supernatural good acts are also related to their corresponding habits, the *supernatural virtues*. But this relation is different and narrower, up to the point that, without supernatural habits, it would not be possible to perform supernatural acts.

In this chapter, we will study first the natural virtues, passing later to the more complex supernatural virtues.

43. Habits

A habit, in the sense used in our study, is a stable quality of a human faculty that enables man to act easily, promptly, and pleasantly. This stable quality modifies the faculty, giving it a disposition, inclination, or tendency to act in a certain way.

A pianist, for example, has a habitual disposition to read a musical score and translate it into nimble movements of his fingers on the keyboard. Obviously, this disposition is something real; only pianists have it, and it cannot be acquired or lost in a moment. In fact, its acquisition requires a long, persevering, painstaking, and intent repetition of suitable acts on the part of the pianist.

A faculty can acquire habits only when it is naturally oriented to produce different effects or the same effect in different ways. If a faculty is in itself directed to a single effect, it is already fully and exclusively inclined to that effect. We cannot talk about habits in this case; it would not make any sense. The intellect and the imagination, on the other hand, can acquire habits in the interpretation of eyesight input. They can concentrate on and give more weight to some details perceived by the eyes than to others.

Therefore, there are no habits in the vegetative faculties or the external senses. The faculties that can be modified by habits are, among others, the intellect, the will, the concupiscible appetite, and the irascible appetite.

44. Kinds of Habits

Some habits are inherent to our nature (habits *a natura*), like the natural inclination of the intellect to immediately accept the speculative general principles (“The whole is greater than any of its parts” and a few others), and the natural inclination of the will to want the good. These habits are *natural* in an especially strict sense. They are also called *innate* habits, since they accompany nature from its origin.

The other natural habits are *acquired*. These habits are acquired and perfected through the repetition of acts, and specifically of internal acts. These habits can, however, also diminish and be lost:

- by performing contrary acts, especially if these are intense and repeated,
- by halting the performance of the acts proper to the habit,
- accidentally, through the corruption of the organ executing them (for example, a hand injury or a brain tumor in the pianist).

Generally speaking (we will clarify the terms later), habits that improve the operation of a faculty are called *virtues* (from the Latin *virtus*, “strength”). Those preventing the improvement or actually impairing the operation are called *vices* (from the Latin *vitium*, “lack” or “fault”) or *defects* (from the Latin *deficere*, “to be deficient” or “not to achieve what one ought to be”). Vices will be studied, when necessary, under the virtues to which they are opposed.

We have been talking so far about *operative habits*, which inhere in a faculty. There are also *entitative habits*, stable qualities inhering not in a faculty, but in the nature itself, such as health or beauty in man. As we will see later, sanctifying grace is an entitative supernatural habit.

As a summary, the different habits can be classified as follows:

- According to their **origin**:
 - *Innate* habits
 - *Acquired* habits
 - *Infused* habits (This is an advance of what will be studied in connection with the supernatural virtues; these habits are directly infused by God in man.)
- According to their **goodness**:
 - *Good* habits

- *Bad* habits
- According to the **subject** in which they inhere:
 - *Operative* habits, which inhere in a faculty
 - *Entitative* habits, which inhere in the nature itself

45. Natural Virtues

A person is determined by his choices. A life full of morally good choices makes one an integrally good person, a person with a good character. The different aspects of such a person's good character are called virtues.

A *natural virtue* can be defined as “a good habit of the mind which always inclines to do well.”¹ Natural virtues are classified into *intellectual virtues* and *moral virtues*.

45a) Intellectual Virtues

Intellectual virtues produce specific inclinations in the human intellect in relation to the knowledge of the truth. Following Aristotle, St. Thomas distinguishes five of them:²

- i) *Understanding*: the inclination to know the first intellectual principles clearly and intimately
- ii) *Science*: the inclination to relate effects to causes and to deduce logical conclusions from known principles
- iii) *Wisdom*: the inclination to consider every object known in relation to its deepest cause
- iv) *Prudence*: the inclination to pronounce the right judgment on the proper human behavior (*recta ratio agibilium*)
- v) *Art or technique*: the inclination to find the best way of actually performing specific human actions (*recta ratio factibilium*), like playing the piano, carving a statue, pruning a tree, tuning up a car, or making a logical conclusion

These virtues incline the intellect to act properly, without errors, but they do not have direct moral implications. In themselves, they are not morally good but indifferent. Art and science can be used for good or evil. The same applies to the other intellectual virtues, with the exception of prudence in its most proper sense, which will be studied in the next section.

45b) Moral Virtues

Moral virtues refer to human behavior and are in themselves morally good. The moral virtues are the inclinations of the human faculties that tend toward the right behavior in what refers to the means to reach the objective last end.

In classical times, some pagan philosophers had already reduced them to four main virtues: *prudence*, *justice*, *fortitude*, and *temperance*. St Ambrose called them *cardinal* (fundamental) virtues, from *cardo*, “hinge.”³

These virtues refer to the most important moral subjects: the rule of reason (prudence), relations with others (justice), the control of irascible passions (fortitude), and of concupiscible passions (temperance). They respectively perfect the intellect, the will, the irascible appetite, and the concupiscible appetite. Prudence as a moral virtue adds to intellectual prudence the ordination to the objective last end, which implies an involvement of the will.

VIRTUE:	CONTROLS:	REFERS TO:	CURES THE WOUND OF:
prudence	intellect	rule of reason	ignorance
justice	will	relations with others	malice
fortitude	irascible appetite	irascible passions	weakness
temperance	concupiscible appetite	concupiscible passions	concupiscence

All the other moral virtues are related to these four in one way or another.

(1) *Integral parts*

The *integral parts* of a cardinal virtue (in the sense of “constitutive”) are those acts or inclinations that are required for a perfect act of that virtue. Thus, the ability to recall similar situations (experience) and the careful consideration of all circumstances (circumspection) are integral parts of the virtue of prudence.⁴

(2) *Essential or subjective parts*

The *essential* or *subjective parts* are the different species into which a cardinal virtue is subdivided according to the material division of its object. For example, the essential or subjective parts of prudence are prudence with regard to oneself (personal prudence) and prudence in the government of the community (political prudence).

Political prudence may be further subdivided into military, economic, and legislative prudence, etc.⁵

(3) *Potential parts*

Potential parts of a cardinal virtue are annexed (derived) virtues that are concerned with secondary acts or secondary matters. Thus, good sense (*synesis*), which inclines to the right judgment about what is possible in practice, is a potential part of prudence; it resembles prudence, but still lacks something to be properly considered as prudence. Likewise, *eubulia* is a kind of derived prudence, the habit of seeking right counsel.⁶

It is important to keep this terminology in mind, because it is quite common in treatises of moral theology.

46. Properties of the Moral Virtues

We will concentrate on three properties that are common to all moral virtues.

46a) The Mean of Virtue

Virtue is found in the mean between two extremes; “In medio virtus.”

This well-known maxim is not very useful, though, since virtue is not a matter of finding a physical mean. If a man’s maximum intake of wine in a meal is four liters and the minimum is zero (extremes), virtue would not lie in drinking two liters (mean), but perhaps two glasses, or one, or none at all. Nevertheless, some people misunderstand the mean of virtue in this way, and stretch the extremes until they think they have justified their own position.

The mean we are referring to is a mean of reason, what reason considers as the right ordination to the end. Aristotle defined the mean of reason as what prudent persons consider, in a specific set of circumstances, as virtuous. Thus, the mean may at times be very close to one of the extremes, or even coincide with it.

There is no danger of exaggeration within a virtue. Strictly speaking, one cannot be too brave, or too steadfast. We can say, however, that virtue lies in the mean, between vices by excess and by defect. A courageous act is opposed both to a cowardly act (by defect in the action) and to a foolhardy act (by excess in the action). Steadfastness, similarly, is opposed both to stubbornness and to fickleness.

It should also be noted that, at times, deviations from a virtue in one direction are more common or dangerous than in the other. It is thus proper to stress one of these corruptions of virtue more than the other. Disobedience, for example, is much more common than servility; both are deviations of obedience but in opposite directions. In some countries, working too little is more common than working too much, both being habits opposed to the virtue of industriousness.

46b) The Moral Virtues are Interrelated

All moral virtues are interrelated. Their intimate connection is their union with the virtue of prudence, which governs them all, hence it is often called the “guide of the virtues” (*auriga virtutum*).

Therefore, if one virtue is perfectly possessed, all the others are perfectly possessed as well. And if one is not perfectly developed, the others cannot be perfectly developed either. A person cannot be perfectly just, for example, if he has the vice of lust.

46c) Some Virtues are More Important than Others

The cardinal virtues are the most important among moral virtues. Their order of importance is the same as the order in which they are usually listed: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Thus, prudence is the principal virtue because it governs the others. Although not included among the cardinal virtues, humility is also a main virtue, insofar as it is opposed to the main obstacle of moral life: pride.

According to their object, however, the most important of all moral virtues, cardinal or not, is religion, which is connected with justice. The object of religion is giving due worship to God.

47. Moral Virtues and Merit

When a person has acquired a virtue, good acts become easier, more pleasant, and more perfect.

Nevertheless, they are morally better, precisely because they are the result of a habitual inclination to good, which has been acquired with effort. It is not true that isolated acts, done without the help of the corresponding virtue, are more authentic and better because they are more spontaneous. They have only the will of the moment and lack the *accumulated voluntariness* of the efforts that went into acquiring the virtue.

48. Supernatural Virtues

In principle, what we have said so far applies to natural habits and virtues. Natural law morality and Christian morality involve the same principles: *Pursuing authentic human goods through one's human acts to reach the ideal of integral human fulfillment.*

Immorality is an arbitrary selectivity in loving human goods and human persons. In contrast, moral goodness, rooted in the ideal of integral human fulfillment, means loving every possible instance of every basic human good in every person, just as God does.

As we already know, man has been elevated to the supernatural order. However, one cannot be a good Christian without being a decent human being. Thus, these natural principles and the norms derived from them are as relevant for Christians as for anyone else. Christian morality does not permit Christians to act contrary to the ideal of integral human fulfillment, to our responsibilities as humans (which are parallel to each one of the beatitudes and the corresponding virtues), or to the norms of natural law. Nevertheless, there are specifically Christian norms. As a result of faith, it occurs to Christians to do things that do not occur to people who lack faith: Christians are called, first, *to cooperate in the redemptive act of Christ*, and second, *to accept their personal vocations.*

God elevates man to the supernatural order through the infusion of sanctifying grace. Sanctifying grace makes us children of God. It is a supernatural entitative habit, a supernatural manner of being, which inheres in our nature. It is therefore called habitual grace as well.

This supernatural entitative habit brings along operative habits that are also supernatural and inhere in the natural human powers. These are the *supernatural* or *infused virtues*, which are infused by God together with sanctifying grace (cf. Rom 5:5; 2 Tm 1:7). This is the only way for man to acquire them, for they, being supernatural, cannot be obtained through merely human efforts.

Supernatural virtues also differ from natural operative habits in another important aspect. Natural habits incline a natural power to perform with ease and perfection an act that the power could do on its own, but with more difficulty and less perfection. Supernatural virtues, on the other hand, *radically enable* the power to perform the corresponding supernatural act. Thus, faith enables the natural intellect to supernaturally assent to a truth.

Without faith, the intellect could not give a supernatural assent, since it is a natural power that, by itself, can perform only natural acts.

Infused virtues do not make their corresponding acts easier or pleasant. This ease can be acquired extrinsically, as we will see later. But they do give an inclination or disposition, similar to the intellect's inclination to the act of knowing.

As to the development of the infused virtues, Sacred Scripture attests that they can grow (cf. Rom 15:13; 2 Cor 10:14–15; Phil 1:9). They grow with sanctifying grace, to the extent that grace takes possession of the soul. In itself, repetition of acts, even of supernatural acts, cannot increase one's infused virtues. Their growth, their greater or lesser insertion in the soul, is given by God.⁷ Indirectly, however, they can be promoted by the repetition of acts, whether natural or supernatural. This is due to the following reasons:

- The acts are meritorious. By meriting an increase of supernatural grace, they also merit an increase of the accompanying infused virtues.
- The acts facilitate the removal of the natural obstacles to the exercise of the infused virtues.

Infused virtues cannot diminish like the acquired virtues, since they are not acquired in the same way. Their natural capacity to remove obstacles may diminish, though. Infused virtues can be lost only through the loss of sanctifying grace, and then they are absolutely lost (with the exception of faith and hope). This happens when a mortal sin is committed (cf. 1 Cor 13:2; Jas 2:14).

It is thus important to realize that the term *virtue* is not univocally but analogically applied to natural and infused virtues.

49. Kinds of Supernatural Virtues

Supernatural virtues are classified into *theological* and *moral virtues*.

49a) Theological Virtues

Theological virtues have God himself for their direct object. There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity.

- i) *Faith* elevates the natural intellect in its speculative function, so that man can assent to the truths that are supernaturally revealed by God.⁸
- ii) *Hope* elevates the natural will so that man can be confident that he will reach—with the help of God—his supernatural end, and that God will give him the necessary means to do so.
- iii) *Charity* elevates the natural will so that man can love God above all things and his neighbor as himself, with a supernatural love.

Of these three, the most important is charity. Without it, the other two, if present at all, are formless or dead and are insufficient to reach the supernatural end (cf. 1 Cor 13:1–13).

The principle “*In medio virtus*” does not apply to the theological virtues, since it is not possible to properly sin against them by excess. They have God as their direct object, and one can never love God too much, believe in God too much, or hope in God too much. However, we also talk about sins *by excess* against these virtues, although here excess is taken in a specially improper sense. Thus, presumption (hoping to be saved without effort) and superstition are said to be vices opposed respectively to hope and faith by excess. It is clear, however, that these are not properly excesses of hope or faith.

49b) Supernatural Moral Virtues

The supernatural moral virtues incline man toward the means for reaching God supernaturally. Their objects are the same as those of the corresponding natural virtues. These virtues do not make acts easier, but do provide a radical capacity to perform the corresponding supernatural acts. The extrinsic facility to exercise a specific supernatural moral virtue comes from the corresponding natural virtue, insofar as it removes the natural obstacles for the exercise of the supernatural moral virtue.

Therefore, natural and supernatural moral virtues will be studied together. The only difference is that the acts of the natural virtues are directed by reason, while those of the supernatural virtues are directed by reason enlightened by faith (that is, right reason with all its natural knowledge, plus the truths revealed by God). We can thus say that, if the acts of natural virtues (also of the so-called human virtues) are done with a supernatural outlook, they are already acts of the corresponding supernatural virtue.

50. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are supernatural habits that God infuses in the soul together with sanctifying grace. They dispose the faculties of the soul to receive well the enlightenments (in the case of the intellect) and motions (in the case of the will) of the Holy Spirit.⁹

The gifts of the Holy Spirit differ from the infused virtues in the following points:

- The gifts dispose the subject to be moved by God, while the virtues dispose the faculties to be moved by reason enlightened by faith.
- The gifts move the subject more efficiently than the virtues do. Although not adopting a merely passive attitude, the subject can be said to be acted upon rather than to act.
- The virtues incline man to do what is necessary for salvation. The gifts dispose man to do not only what is necessary, but also what is merely advisable, and even heroic.

Virtues and gifts have the same object: the human acts that they direct. But the gifts are superior because of their motive or directive cause, which is the Holy Spirit himself through an actual grace. This actual grace is a supernatural motion coming from God. In the supernatural virtues, on the other hand, the moving cause is man through his will, although also aided by actual grace.

Authors of spiritual books sometimes compare the supernatural virtues to the oars of a boat, and the gifts to the sail. One can move the boat at will with the oars, but it goes slowly and requires effort. Under sail, the boat moves faster and without effort, but the wind must be blowing.

Sacred Scripture lists seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (cf. Is 11:2–3). Of these, three act on the will (fortitude, piety, and fear of the Lord), while the other four (wisdom, understanding, counsel, and knowledge) act on the intellect.¹⁰ The gifts are the following:

- i) The gift of *wisdom*, which is the most important of the seven (cf. Ps 118:100).¹¹ Through wisdom, the intellect is disposed to be easily moved by the Holy Spirit to the contemplation of divine truths, and to judge both divine and human affairs according to supernatural

reasons. It is especially related to a supernatural outlook, and is based on charity.

- ii) The gift of *understanding*, through which the intellect is disposed to probe deeply, under the action of the Holy Spirit, the theoretical and practical truths that are revealed by God. It reinforces the virtue of faith.
- iii) The gift of *counsel*, by which the intellect is disposed, under the action of the Holy Spirit, to decide rightly on the specific acts to be done. It helps and perfects the virtue of prudence.
- iv) The gift of *fortitude*, through which the will is disposed to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit with a special confidence that it will not succumb to any temporal evil, and thus be victorious at the end of the fight. It corresponds to the virtue of fortitude.
- v) The gift of *knowledge*, through which the intellect, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, is disposed to (1) distinguish clearly what must be believed and what should not, (2) hold firmly that revelation does not contradict sound reason, and (3) in general, judge rightly about divine and human matters in relation to the supernatural end. It also perfects the virtue of faith.
- vi) The gift of *piety*, through which the will is disposed to receive the motions of the Holy Spirit, to revere God as Father, and to love men as children of God. It corresponds to the virtue of justice.
- vii) The gift of *fear of the Lord*, by which the will is prepared to receive the motions of the Holy Spirit so as to show due reverence for the majesty of God. This is not a servile fear, but a filial and reverential fear of the majesty of God, before whom the angels fall on their faces (cf. Rv 7:11). It corresponds to the virtue of temperance, because, like this virtue, it restrains the disorderly desire for pleasure and one's own excellence.

Humility and docility to the inspirations of the Paraclete are virtues that are indispensable to develop the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

50a) The Fruits of the Holy Spirit

The *fruits* of the Holy Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit produces in those receptive to his presence. They are the outward fruits of the interior life, the external product of the indwelling Spirit. They are also pledges and harbingers of the eternal glory. They are charity, joy, peace, patience, long-suffering, goodness, kindness, mildness, fidelity, modesty, continence, and chastity (cf. Gal 5:22–23).¹²

51. Unity of Life

Human conduct is not a discordant accumulation of virtues and gifts. Christian life should be an open road for the person who—under the influence of grace—becomes increasingly united to God. This life is animated by charity (love of God) that gives life to all the other virtues. Thus, the Christian is “divinized” by committing to God all his actions and capabilities (hence the multiplicity of virtues and gifts), but all of these are united in that most fundamental operation that a person performs, which is to love God. The Christian seeks to please God in everything he does.

Moreover, there is a close connection between the practice of the supernatural virtues and ordinary work, between interior life and the perfection with which one must perform one’s own social and professional obligations. In sum, no one can say that he acts correctly and that he is good if he does not fulfill his professional duties; and no one fulfills them with perfection if he does not practice the virtues.¹³

1. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 55, a. 4; cf. *CCC*, 1804.
2. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 57, aa. 2–4.
3. Cf. St. Ambrose, *Expos. evang. sec. Luc.*, 1. 62; *CCC*, 1805–1811.
4. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 49, aa. 1, 7.
5. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 50.
6. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 51, a. 3.
7. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 24, a. 5, ad 3.
8. Cf. DS 3008; *CCC*, 1812–1828.
9. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 68, aa. 1–3; *CCC*, 1830–1832.
10. Cf. D.M. Prümmer, *Manuale Theologiae Moralis*, 446–453.
11. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 68, a. 7.
12. Cf. *CCC*, 1832.
13. Cf. R. García de Haro, et al., *La Vita Cristiana* (Milan: Pontificia Università Lateranense, Ares, 1995), 511–513.

7

Evil Acts: Sin

THE MYSTERY OF sin reveals itself as often as man forgets divine love. Personal experience tells us—ahead of revelation—about our impotence to accomplish the good to which we aspire and are called, according to God's plan. Man is free; thus, he can sin. But by committing sin, he places himself in a situation of helplessness from which he cannot escape unless Christ—the Redeemer—frees him. The need of redemption is a universal experience.

52. False Ideas of Sin

Nonbelievers are aware of most of the phenomena that Christians regard as sin. The evidence for sin can hardly be denied. But some do not believe in free choice; they deny that there is such a thing as self-determination. So they offer *deterministic* accounts of moral evil, in an attempt to argue that sin is not *moral evil*.

Some treat sin as a kind of immaturity (“We are not well adjusted,” they say), or as a sickness (“We cannot control our abnormally strong drives”), or as an imperfect stage in the evolutionary process (“We are not so far removed from our subhuman ancestors”), or as ignorance (“We need more education about the consequences of our behavior”). Some others (Nietzsche and Heidegger, for instance) see immorality as a lack of creativity (“We are stodgy”). All these ways of interpreting sin assume that people cannot choose freely.¹

53. The Notion of Sin

In order to understand what sin is, one must first recognize the profound relation of man to God. It is only in this relationship that the evil of sin is revealed in its true identity as humanity's rejection of God and opposition to him, which weighs heavy on human life and history. Only the light of divine revelation clarifies the reality of sin, particularly the sin committed at mankind's origin: the *original sin*. Only in the knowledge of God's plan for man can we grasp that sin is an abuse of the freedom that God gives to created persons so that they might be capable of loving him and loving one another.² Thus, Sacred Scripture describes sin as an abuse of free choice. For example:

Do not say, "Because of the Lord I left the right way";
for he will not do what he hates.
Do not say, "It was he who led me astray";
for he has no need of a sinful man.
If you will, you can keep the commandments,
and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice (Sir 15:11–12, 15).

Sins are wrong choices; thus, Sacred Scripture adds that sin is primarily in the heart, not in external behavior: "What comes out of a man is what defiles a man.... All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man" (Mk 7:20, 23).

To sin is to do something that one knows one ought not to do, and to do it willingly. It follows that sin is not irrational or compulsive. In order to do anything willingly, one must have an attractive good in view, something that one cares about and deems worth pursuing. A sin is thus an act directed to some real or apparent good. Yet, the sinner's will is not in line with *integral human fulfillment*—that is, fulfillment in respect to *all* the goods in an ideal human community. Instead, the sinner settles for some more limited good; he makes do with what is less, and that is not fully reasonable.

Sin lies in choosing something humanly good in a way that is *detrimental* to other goods or other persons, instead of in a way that is open to one's integral human fulfillment. Feelings, not reasons, lead a person to sinfully prefer this good or that, to his real good or ours. Instead of choosing in accord with his knowledge and truth, he chooses against them. He violates conscience. Violation of conscience opens a gap—a lack of

correspondence—between choice and the moral truth that is presented by conscience.

It is primarily this privation that is sin's evil. The privation lies in the lack of agreement between the sinner's awareness of moral truth and his choice. It is the absence of something that ought to be present. Since the privation is evil, the choice is likewise mutilated and evil.

Because sin is privation, it cannot be overcome by an act of destruction, nor by ignoring it or wishing it away. It can be overcome only by God's act of re-creation. God must bring something into being—new hearts in those who were sinners and new life in those who were spiritually dead. This is not work that we can do. Yet God makes us cooperators in this work by allowing us to help prepare the ground for it and follow up on it.

Faith is a commitment to cooperate with God in redeeming us. God involves us in our redemption, because he is trying to foster a personal relationship with us, a two-sided relationship that is real communion. That is why he made us free and why he does not simply wipe out our sin without repentance on our part. If our freedom was not engaged, we would be mere objects.

God is not like a foolish, indulgent father who spoils his children by constantly intervening to shield them from the natural consequences of their wrongdoing. On the contrary, respecting our dignity, he lets us bear the consequences of our sins. But because he loves us, he offers us redemption and the chance to cooperate with him in bringing it about. In order to be redeemed from sin, moreover, we must freely accept this opportunity to cooperate with God in his saving work. This requirement is not an imposition by God; it, too, is for the sake of our dignity as free and intelligent beings.

Being a voluntary act, sin can be committed only when one is aware of the evil of the action (at least indirectly), and consents to it (at least indirectly). If a person is not in the least aware that the action is bad, no sin is committed. But there would be sin if the ignorance were due to culpable negligence, as we saw when we studied human acts.

St. Augustine provides two definitions of sin. The first is that *sin is a voluntary act contrary to the law of God*. Sin implies an infraction of the order that was established by God.³ This infraction harms the sinner first of all, and also harms others. By freely choosing (willing) what one knows to

be contrary to God's loving plan, *the person gives to himself the identity of one opposed to this plan*, i.e., that of a sinner.

St. Augustine's second definition of sin is that it is a "turning away from God and veering toward a creature." Sin implies (at least indirectly) a *voluntary separation from God (aversio a Deo)*, which can be considered as its formal element, and a *disorderly conversion to creatures (conversio ad creaturas)*, which would be the material element. In the case of mortal sin, the first element is punished in hell with the *pain of loss*, which is the compulsory continuation of that separation, while the second is punished with the *pain of sense*.

53a) Sin: An Offense Against God

One can sin against other people, but every sin is also against God: “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight” (Ps 51:4). Even so, sinners do not harm God. They harm themselves, and they are fools to do so: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prv 1:7).

God offers us a covenant of salvation, for our good, and for the sake of our human well-being. Thus, sin offends God because, by committing sin, man rejects this salvation and destroys himself. When we do moral evil, we act *against God's good plan for us*. In that sense, sin is contrary to his wisdom, his love, and his will.

Even apart from the covenant, one who sins sets aside reason and so implicitly sets aside God, the source of meaning and value. Sinners, as it were, *declare their independence* of anything beyond themselves, including God. In that sense, too, sin is an offense against God.⁴

Some suppose that, in order to sin, one must *really* choose a limited human good over the infinite goodness of God. No one does that—it seldom happens—and so it is easy for some sinning Christians to suppose that they never commit sin. But that is an illusion; it is rationalization and self-deception. Man can choose only among possibilities for human fulfillment. Sin lies in choosing some human good in a way that is detrimental to other goods or persons instead of in a way that is open to true integral human fulfillment.

Very often, when Christians sin, they do not really choose between God and a human good. Rather, they choose here and now to be unfaithful to their covenant *relationship* with God by choosing a created good in a disorderly manner. When tempted, Christians do not say, “I must either give up what I want or give up God.” Instead they say in effect, “This is what I want right now. Excuse me, God—I’ll be back later.” They experience temptation as an incitement not to reject God entirely but to set aside their relationship with him temporarily. And in a situation of temptation, not even this relationship seems unqualifiedly good.

Like the first sin, every sin is disobedience, a rebellion against God. Sin is thus love of oneself even if it always entails contempt of God. St. Augustine says that this “love of oneself” is a *false* self-love; true self-love is not in conflict with love of God. If one loves oneself properly, one loves

God more, and one who loves God above everything loves himself more than those who love only themselves.

Sin is also a fault against reason, truth, and right conscience. It is a lack of true love of God and love for our neighbor resulting from a perverse attachment to some goods.⁵

54. Losing the Sense of Sin

Recent popes have denounced the decline or darkening of the sense of sin in some sectors of Christian culture. The causes can be summarized thus:

- Cultural and ethical relativism
- False accusations from a sector of contemporary psychology (the awareness of sin traumatizes people, they say)
- Confusion between morality and legality
- Secularism or lack of religious sense
- Certain trends in the Church, such as the reaction against the unreasonable rigorism of the past and the unwarranted emphasis on eternal damnation, which has encouraged some people to not see sin anywhere or to ignore the punishment for sin⁶

55. Kinds of Sins

Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that the whole of human history is marked by the original fault that was freely committed by our first parents. Thus, *original sin* is that privation of original justice inherited at birth. Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command. In that sin, man preferred himself to God. He chose himself over and against God, against the requirements of his status as creature and, therefore, *against his own good*. As a result, Adam and Eve immediately lost the grace of original holiness. The whole human race is in Adam as one body of one man. All men are implicated in Adam's sin because of the unity of the human race. "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned" (Rom 5:12). Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affected *the human nature* that they would then transmit *in a fallen state*. Original sin is transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature that is deprived of original holiness and justice. That is why original sin is called "sin" only in an analogical sense. It is a sin "contracted" and not "committed"—a *state* and not an act.⁷

All subsequent sin is personal disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness. *Personal sin* is an offense against God that is committed by the deliberate will of the individual.

The Old Testament—for example, Leviticus in many places—distinguishes between *faults*, for which expiation is possible, and *crimes* against the covenant community and its God, which cannot be expiated. The New Testament does not use the words *mortal* and *venial* either, but it makes the same distinction even more clearly. Jesus tells his disciples to ask the Father's forgiveness for their daily trespasses (cf. Mt 6:12; Lk 11:4), but he warns that other transgressions lead to everlasting punishment (cf. Mt 23:33) and seems to speak of some sins as unforgivable (cf. Mt 12:31).⁸

Sin can be *mortal* (also called *serious* or *grave*) if it destroys sanctifying grace in the soul, taking away its supernatural life. Sin is *venial* (or *light*) when it does not destroy sanctifying grace. Thus, it can be forgiven through good actions, which are still possible because the soul is still in the state of grace.⁹

Sin may be committed *against God, against one's neighbor, or against oneself*; although any sin ultimately goes against God and, as a consequence, also against one's neighbor and self.

There are sins of *thought, word, deed, and omission*. It can be committed out of (culpable) *ignorance*, out of *weakness* (under the influence of a passion that diminishes voluntariness), or out of *malice* (sheer evil intention, without ignorance or passion: the desire to cause harm).

Sin may be *formal* (sin proper) or *material* (done out of invincible ignorance, or under such violence that internal consent is destroyed; in these cases the act is not voluntary and, therefore, not imputable).

Some *special sins* are grouped under the following names:

- *Sins against the Holy Spirit*: These sins imply the refusal to accept the salvation that God offers to man through the Holy Spirit, or the radical refusal to accept God's forgiveness. It is the sin that is committed by the person who claims to have a "right" to persist in evil.¹⁰ They include the presumption of being saved without merits, desperation, opposition to Catholic truths known as such, obstinacy in sin, and final impenitence.
- *Sins crying to heaven*: Their deleterious effects on the social order demand vengeance from above. Included under this heading are homicide (cf. Gn 4:10), sodomy (cf. Gn 18:20; 19:13), the oppression of the weak (cf. Ex 3:7–10; 22:20–22), and withholding of workers' wages (cf. Dt 24:14–15; Jgs 5:4).¹¹
- *Capital sins*: These sins are so called because the other sins stem from them, and they are like the heads (*capita*) of all the other sins.¹² The classical enumeration, with very few variations, lists seven capital sins: pride (or vainglory), avarice (or greed), envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth (or *acedia*).¹³

56. Mortal Sin

Sacred Scripture clearly states that there really are mortal sins, and that they can be committed without special malice, that is, without explicitly wanting to offend God (cf. Mt 5:22; Rom 6:23; 8:13; 1 Cor 6:9ff; Jas 1:15). The Magisterium of the Church has often referred to them as well.¹⁴

Mortal sin (or grievous sin) is the act through which the soul gives itself to creatures to the point of separating completely from its objective last end (God). Man separates himself from God, his ultimate happiness, preferring an inferior good.

The offense that is made to God is grave, the inclination toward the creatures is gravely culpable, and the harm caused to the social order and to oneself is also grave. The consequences are likewise grave: The sinner deserves eternal damnation. Mortal sin destroys charity, a vital principle in us. It needs a new initiative of God's compassion and a conversion of the heart; this is normally done within the Sacrament of Reconciliation.¹⁵ "God created us without us; but he did not will to save us without us."¹⁶ To receive his mercy, we must admit our faults.

Every mortal sin is extremely serious, but not all mortal sins are equally grave. Those opposing the most important goods or virtues are more serious (for example, sins against the love of God and of neighbor). Sins of malice are more serious than sins of weakness. The moral circumstances of the sinner may also affect the gravity of the sin.

For a sin to be mortal, the matter of the transgression must be grave and the act must be fully human. Thus, the following three conditions must be simultaneously met:

- i) *Serious matter*: If the matter is not serious, there is no radical separation from God as last end. For some sins, the matter is always light in itself. For other sins, the matter is serious, but can become light when it is small (for example, the theft of a small amount). For other sins, like lust or blasphemy, the matter is always serious (*ex toto genere suo*). These sins can be venial only when one of the other two conditions is not present. The Church declares some kinds of acts grave matter; we learn to discern what acts are at odds with faith by listening to the Church.

- ii) *Full knowledge and advertence:* The agent must be fully aware of both the act and its seriously sinful nature. If the ignorance or actual inadvertence is voluntary in its cause, and therefore culpable (because of negligence, a passion willingly followed, or a sinful habit that is not recanted), it does not excuse from mortal sin. A confused advertence is enough for the sin to be mortal; that is, there is no need to clearly foresee all the implications or evil consequences of the act.
- iii) *Full consent:* Full consent exists whenever there is full knowledge and advertence, and one is not subject to violence.

57. Venial Sin

The existence of venial sins is attested in Sacred Scripture (cf. Mt 23:24; Lk 6:41; Jas 3:2; 1 Jn 1:8). The Magisterium of the Church has often referred to venial sin as well.¹⁷

Venial sin is essentially a disorder that does not bring man to a total separation from the objective last end.¹⁸ It is thus so different from mortal sin that the term *sin* can be applied to both only in an analogical way. A mortal sin is not a big venial sin; neither can many venial sins add up to a mortal sin.

An action that would be a venial sin in itself can become mortal in the following cases:

- One thinks that it is a mortal sin and still does it, as we saw when we explained the erroneous conscience.
- A seriously evil purpose is sought.
- There is a repetition of venial sins whose matter accumulates (such as when one commits many small thefts, the total amount stolen becomes serious and the sin becomes mortal).
- There is formal contempt.
- It is foreseen that serious harm will arise from the venial sin.

An action that would be a mortal sin in itself can become venial in the following cases:

- The agent acts with an inculpable erroneous conscience.
- The matter is light in itself (like a lie to avoid embarrassment in a trivial situation).
- The matter is light because of its quantity (like a small theft).
- The act is not perfectly human (either full consent or advertence is lacking).

58. Specific Distinction of Sins

Aside from their gravity, sins can be classified according to their kind (*species*). Sins offend God by breaking different precepts, and are opposed to different aspects of human behavior. Sins are classified into different species in the following cases:

- They are opposed to different virtues or different kinds of obligations. At times, one action is opposed to several virtues and constitutes several sins. Thus, adulterers sin against chastity and justice.
- They are opposed to the same virtue in different ways. Theft and calumny, for example, are opposed to justice in very different ways, and fall into different species.
- They go against formally different commandments, that is, commandments given for different reasons. Thus, a parish priest who fails to say Mass on Sunday would commit a sin against the Sunday precept and another against the commandment to say Mass for his parishioners.

59. Numerical Distinction of Sins

Sins of different species are also numerically different. Thus, robbery with murder would be two sins even if committed at the same time.

The distinction between sins of the same species is not so easy, especially in the case of complex sinful actions. If a thief steals a truck, breaks a store open, and carts away some TV sets, does he commit one sin or three? There are three distinct actions, all with a sinful purpose. If he steals ten sets, does he commit one sin or ten? And if he goes back ten times, stealing one set each night before the robbery is discovered, does he commit one sin or ten?

Since *the decision of the will is what constitutes the sin*, in principle there will be as many sins as distinct sinful decisions. The following rules can be used to determine the number of decisions:

- *There are as many sins as morally distinct objects*, even if these correspond to the same decision and are performed in the same action. If a terrorist kills three persons with the same bomb, there are three sins.
- *There are as many sins as morally interrupted acts of the will*. The act of the will is interrupted when the decision is revoked. If our TV thief repents while on his way to the store, and returns home or goes somewhere else, the act of the will is interrupted. If, later on, he decides to go ahead with the robbery anyway, these are already two different decisions. Voluntarily discontinuing an action is equivalent to a revocation. The act of the will is also considered as morally interrupted if a long time is allowed to elapse before carrying out the action.

In any case, some of these distinctions are not really that useful. At times, it is difficult to analyze actions in this way, especially internal acts. In some cases, these distinctions do not offer an accurate picture of the situation. A typical example would be that of consented bad thoughts repeatedly interrupted by acts of repentance. The repetition of bad thoughts can be interpreted as contempt for the actual graces moving to repentance, and thus it would be more serious than if the bad thoughts had not been interrupted at all. But the moments of repentance can also be considered as

showing a certain spirit of struggle, albeit weak, and thus the total gravity would be lesser than for a long uninterrupted bad thought.

Therefore, *in practice*, these criteria are to be followed:

- At any moment during the performance of the action, one must realize that going ahead would only make things worse.
- During confession, it is better to simply describe things as they happened, and avoid detailed analysis of the actions, which could lead to more temptations—this is the best way to say the exact number.

60. Causes of Sin

The only cause of the sin is the will of the sinner, since a sin is a voluntary act.¹⁹ Since the will, by definition, cannot be moved from the outside, the devil can never be the real cause of sin.²⁰ God could certainly move the will of man, but it would be completely impossible for God, who directs everything to himself as to its last end, to cause somebody to deviate from that end.²¹

The sinful action, insofar as it *is* something, is caused by God just as any other being. But a sinful action is always a deficient action (the choice of a partial or apparent good); it lacks ordination toward God. Sin is precisely that lack, and it is caused by man. Therefore, God is the cause of the defective action, but not of the sin.²²

61. Temptations to Sin

Temptation, in the original sense of *test*, can be produced by God, as when he tested the obedience of Abraham (cf. Gn 22:1 ff).

In the sense of *enticement to sin*, temptation can never come from God. It always comes from any of the following three causes: *the world, the devil, and the flesh*.

The *world* refers here to men and society in general, insofar as they are organized or act without regard for God.

The *flesh* refers to the internal disorder in man, caused by original sin and aggravated by personal sins. Its main manifestations, as described by St. John, are: “the lust of the flesh,” which encourages man to impurity, intemperance, etc.; “the lust of the eyes,” which encourages him to greed; and the “pride of life,” which is the beginning of all sins (cf. 1 Jn 2:16).

The *devil* encourages us to sin with strength and skill. We should neither ignore nor be surprised at his action (cf. 1 Pt 5:8; Jas 4:7).

Feeling a temptation is not a sin. *Consenting*, that is, giving the assent of our will, is.

It is not lawful to arouse a temptation willfully. Putting oneself in danger of committing a mortal sin without serious cause—for example—will already be a serious sin, even if the sin is eventually not committed. It shows that one does not mind seriously offending God, and this is a serious sin in itself.

62. The Effects of Sin

Generally speaking, sin renews and aggravates the four wounds left by original sin: ignorance in the intellect, malice in the will, weakness in the irascible appetite, and disorderly desires in the concupiscible appetite.

Venial sin diminishes the beauty of the soul, makes the practice of charity and the other virtues more difficult, prevents the reception of many actual graces, predisposes man to mortal sin, and brings upon him temporal punishments to be endured in this life or in purgatory.

Mortal sin causes the loss of sanctifying grace. As a consequence, it causes the loss of the infused virtues (faith and hope may remain, but formless and dead), the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and all previously acquired merits (which, however, are recovered with grace when the sin is forgiven). Sin spreads not just within the psyche, but through the whole self. It produces a certain deformity of the soul and remorse of conscience. In addition, man is condemned to eternal punishment. Sin also has an impact on human products—art, technology, even language. It runs through the whole person and, eventually, through society and culture. Sin cannot be kept isolated.

Especially in St. Paul's and St. John's writings, sin is often treated not just as a particular act but as an ongoing condition of alienation from God.

Sin is not a passing event. It lasts. Sin is primarily a choice, and choices are spiritual acts that determine the persons who make them. Our choices cause us to be, in moral terms, the kind of persons we are. Thus, sins persist—not just in external consequences but in us.²³ The state of sin in which the soul remains after a mortal sin is sometimes called *habitual sin*.

Guilt is the persistence of sin, not a matter of feelings. It persists until sinners change their minds and hearts—themselves—by repenting. Repenting means a great deal more than simply not repeating sinful behavior.

Sinful choices have further consequences. People who have chosen to do what is wrong find it harder to see what is right. They fail to foresee things that they might and should have anticipated. Their duties are less clear to them. Since the truth is not flattering, they begin to make up stories in its place. The more that intelligent individuals systematically engage in

this pastime, the more elaborate their stories become. Ordinary people produce fairly simple-minded rationalizations, but subtle and reflective people living sinful lives have been known to spin out a whole metaphysics or theology to keep the truth at bay.²⁴

62a) Social Sin

Sin turns people into accomplices of one another's sins. It makes concupiscence, violence, and injustice prevail among men. Sins induce social situations and institutions to run contrary to divine goodness. These *structures of sin* are the expressions and effects of personal sins; they induce their victims to commit more sins. In an analogical sense, these structures constitute a *social sin*. Ultimately, social sin is the result of the accumulation and concentration of many *personal sins*.²⁵

Thus, "social sin" is a reality. It is a mistake, however, to think of social evil, any more than evil on the individual level, as a positive reality to be destroyed by the violent overthrow of the institutions that embody it. Evil as such is privation, which has to be overcome by repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation—emerging from redemptive suffering.

It is also a mistake to displace individual responsibility onto society, and do nothing about it. To deal with this sin rightly, we must repent of our own sins and also do what we can to change the structures and institutions in society that extend sin beyond our individual lives. It is not an either/or situation, as if individual conversion and social reform were alternative options. Christians should have both: the attitude of a devout person who examines his conscience and that of the socially conscious person who tries to make a better world. There is more to Christian life than either "individualistic devotionism" or one-dimensional "social activism."²⁶

63. Internal Sins

Internal sins are those sins that do not show externally, except for some effect that accidentally follows from it.

Internal sins are really sins (cf. Mt 5:28). They are not merely spontaneous feelings or ideas that, once rejected, remain simply as temptations, but imply the choice of lingering on these feelings or thoughts. They could be even more dangerous than external sins, because they are more easily committed, are more difficult to avoid, and receive less attention. It is thus interesting to study them more in depth.²⁷

There are three kinds of internal sins: deliberate pleasure (*delectatio morosa*), sinful joy (*gaudium peccaminosum*), and evil desire (*desiderium pravum*).

i) *Deliberate pleasure* (or “bad thought”) is the complacency in an evil object presented by the imagination without any desire for the object (it is often referred to as “consented bad thoughts” or “imagination”). The Latin adjective *morosa*, “lingering,” does not refer to the duration of the complacency, but to the voluntary delay in rejecting the sinful representation.

If the pleasure of “lingering” is produced by the skillful way in which a bad action is done, the delight is about something good, and there is no sin. This is the case of an ingenious robbery or of a “perfect crime” in a detective novel. In some especially slippery or sticky matters, like impurity, this pleasure, though not a sin, is especially dangerous. This is the case of certain off-color jokes.

Deliberate pleasure in a seriously evil action that is represented by the imagination is a mortal sin of the same species as the represented act (even including the circumstances). In confession, however, there is often no need to go into specifics; it may be enough to say that one consented to bad thoughts against charity or chastity.

ii) *Sinful joy* is the deliberate complacency in some evil action that is *really performed* by oneself or by others (often referred to as “willfully recalling sinful actions”). It is much more serious than deliberate pleasure, since it implies approving an actual sin. In other respects, the same considerations can be applied to both.

Nevertheless, it is licit to rejoice in the good that may have resulted from a bad action. Thus, one may rejoice in the triumph of a martyr, even if it is a consequence of the bad action of the persecutor, but one cannot rejoice in the evil act itself.

iii) *Evil desire* is the deliberate complacency in an evil act one intends to do. If the desire is effective or absolute, that is, if there is a real and firm desire to perform the act, it is a sin of the same species and gravity as the sin intended. If the desire is ineffective, that is, without a firm resolve or subject to a condition:

- it is always unwarranted and sometimes dangerous;
- it is not a sin if the condition removes the malice of the act: “I would take this if it were not somebody else’s”;
- it is a sin—venial or mortal depending on its object—if in spite of the condition the desire is still unlawful: “I would steal this if I had not been expressly forbidden to do so.”

64. The Danger of Internal Sins

Internal sins are especially dangerous. As we said before, they are easier to commit and more difficult to avoid. Furthermore, it is easier to conceal them from oneself and from others.

Because of that, a person who refuses to take notice of his internal sins will easily end by deforming his intellect's moral appreciation. A soul who gives in to critical judgments, lack of charity, reactions of pride, sensuality, envy, or vanity without starting a resolute struggle becomes used to insincerity. Little by little, the soul refuses to acknowledge that these internal sins are the cause of his external reactions of self-centeredness, touchiness, disproportionate fits of anger, indifference for others, or lack of spirit of sacrifice. This path may even lead to committing serious sins, which are not clearly acknowledged because of a habitual lack of sincerity.

65. The Capital Sins

A capital sin (or capital vice) is one that is the source of other sins and vices. These sins—except lust—can be mortal sins but admit of slight matter.²⁸

65a) Pride

Pride (or vainglory) is *an inordinate desire for one's own excellence*. The proud person evaluates himself excessively; he demands from others the recognition of his alleged superiority. The pride of a person who admits no subjection to God is called complete pride; it is a mortal sin. In other cases, this sin admits of slight matter.

Pride leads to other vices: presumption, ambition, boasting, hypocrisy, and disobedience.

The remedy for pride is *humility*. The means to be humble are:

- consideration of our divine filiation,
- meditation on Jesus' humility,
- contrition,
- sincerity in Confession and spiritual direction,
- self knowledge.

65b) Avarice

Avarice (greed or covetousness) is the *inordinate desire of having possessions or riches*. There is avarice when the person covets to have more possessions for dishonest purposes or using unlawful means, has an excessive worry to conserve riches, or becomes stingy.

Greed produces the ensuing vices: hardness of heart; disordered anxiety; and use of violence, fraud, and deceit.

The remedies for greed are:

- detachment from earthly goods,
- generosity,
- temperance,
- love for poverty acquired by meditating on Jesus' poverty,
- considering ourselves the administrators of the goods that God gives us.

65c) Lust

Lust is the *inordinate desire for sexual pleasure*. God has linked—in human persons—the use of sex and the transmission of life in matrimony. There, man and woman cooperate with the creative love of God in bringing new life to the world. Inordinate use of sex results in loss of the capacity to love. Lust is a mortal sin that admits of no slight matter.

The vices that follow lust are mental blindness, precipitance (acting too rashly), inconstancy, too much attachment to present life and fear of the future, and hatred for God.

The remedies for lust are:

- humble and frequent prayer (having a life of piety),
- frequent reception of the sacraments,
- sincerity in Confession and spiritual direction,
- devotion to our Lady,
- living well the details of temperance and modesty,
- being busy, and working with the right intention,
- avoiding occasions of sin,
- fighting with humility and promptness at the moment of temptation,
- not being scandalized at seeing one's own miseries.

65d) Envy

Envy is *sadness on account of the goods possessed by another, which are regarded as harmful since they diminish one's own excellence or glory*. It is opposed to charity.

The ensuing vices are hatred, slander, detraction, gossiping, reluctance to praise someone when it is due, material discrimination (for instance, in granting a position), and sadness.

The remedies for envy are:

- fraternal charity,
- humility,
- consideration of the evils that result from envy.

65e) Gluttony

Gluttony is an *inordinate desire for food and drink*. It is usually a venial sin, but may become mortal if the person places himself in grave corporal danger.

The ensuing vices are laziness, mental dullness, excessive talking, and uncleanness of every kind.

The remedies for gluttony are:

- practicing mortification in eating and drinking (temperance),
- presence of God,
- concern for the others,
- avoiding the occasions of sin.

65f) Anger

Anger (or wrath) is that *lack of moderation in rejecting things we consider bad that moves us to the inordinate desire for revenge.*

The ensuing vices are revenge, malicious thoughts and indignation, abusive speech and quarrels, and even blasphemy.

The remedies for anger are:

- patience, especially considering our Lord's example,
- having the right intention,
- charity.

65g) Sloth

Sloth (also called *acedia*) is *sadness or sorrow in the face of the effort that is needed to do good*. As a consequence of this sin, man tends to evade the demands of work and his duties toward men and God. It is called *tepidity* or lukewarmness when referred to the effort needed in the ascetical struggle.

Sloth consists in the lack of interest for doing good and regret for having received spiritual gifts (faith, or vocation) because of the effort they entail.²⁹ In a broader and less accurate sense, sloth can be, and is at times, identified with laziness or procrastination.

The ensuing vices are tepidity, negligence in the fulfillment of one's duties, faint-heartedness when facing a good that is difficult to obtain (like that of the servant who buried the talent [cf. Mt 25:18ff]), despair of salvation, and seeking unlawful compensations.

The remedies against tepidity are:

- intensifying the love of God, and of our Lady,
- a joyful struggle to practice all virtues,
- meditation on man's eternal reward.

The remedies against laziness are:

- diligence and industriousness (living well the demands of one's work and practicing good deeds),
- mortification (taking care of the "little things" and setting the "last stones").

1. Cf. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*, 159.
2. Cf. CCC, 385–387.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1846–1876.
4. Cf. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*, 154.
5. Cf. CCC, 1849–1850.
6. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 53, 55, 88, 98.
7. Cf. CCC, 1852–1853.
8. Cf. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*, 176.
9. Cf. CCC, 385–409.
10. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 46; CCC, 1864.
11. Cf. CCC, 1867.

12. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1866.
13. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 84, a. 4; *CCC*, 1866.
14. Cf. DS 780, 1544.
15. Cf. *CCC*, 1854–1861.
16. St. Augustine, *Sermo* 169, 11, 13.
17. Cf. DS 228–229, 1536–39, 1573.
18. Cf. *CCC*, 1862–1863.
19. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 80, a. 1.
20. Cf. *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 80, a. 1.
21. Cf. *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 79, a. 1.
22. Cf. *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 79, a. 2.
23. Cf. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*, 152–153.
24. Cf. *Ibid.*, 153.
25. Cf. John Paul II, Ex. *Reconciliatio et Poenitentia*, 16; *CCC*, 1869.
26. Cf. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*, 159.
27. Cf. *CCC*, 1456.
28. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1866.
29. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 35, a. 1.

Divine Law

MAN, CALLED TO beatitude, was wounded by sin; thus he is in need of God's salvation. God's help comes to man in Christ by means of the *law*, which directs man, and *grace*, which sustains man. While this process is effected, man is living within a community, and is saved as part of it.

The Human Community

The vocation of every human being is to show forth the image of God and to be transformed into the image of the Father's only Son. This vocation takes a personal form, since each of us is called to enter into eternal happiness—the divine beatitude. It also concerns the human community as a whole.

All humans are called to the same end: God himself. There is a certain resemblance between the union of the divine persons and the fraternity that men are to establish among themselves in truth and love. Love of neighbor is inseparable from love for God.

The human person needs to live in society. Society is not for him an extraneous addition but a requirement of his nature. Through interaction, mutual service, and dialogue with his brethren, man develops his potentials and responds to his vocation.¹

Authority and Obedience

Every organized society needs a principle of authority to achieve its end. The existence of authority, geared toward the common good, is a demand of nature.

The word *authority* has two different meanings:

- i) The competence to make judgments that reasonable persons of lesser competence accept as true. This is the authority of an expert in some field like physics, astronomy, or good wine vintage. It is known as *auctoritas*.
- ii) The competence to give directions, which those who are directed have a duty to obey. We obey a policeman not because he is an expert in traffic but because he has the “authority” of the law. It is known as *potestas*.

God’s laws and norms are not arbitrary decrees, but elements of God’s wise plan in whose observance lies our full and authentic well-being and development. We should obey divine precepts because God possesses both of the above-mentioned kinds of authority. As a result of divine revelation, we need not spend time in an interminable quest to learn God’s plan. God discloses the truth, and the wise person sees it.

God's Covenant with Man

Man is not alone in choosing to obey God's will and norms. God reveals himself to us as a person who invites us into community. Once God so reveals himself, man can accomplish the human good of religion by a covenant relationship with God that is analogous to a human friendship. One who accepts this friendship by an act of faith enters into a mutual commitment with God, very much like a person entering into a marriage.

In this covenant, God is uniquely situated to make certain decisions for the shaping and development of the relationship. *We* are surely in no position to say how the covenant should be set up and, in general, carried out. Since our relationship with God is one of friendship, and since we are not qualified to make solid decisions, we have an obligation, grounded in our commitment, to obey his decisions. To refuse would mean that, although we desired the relationship, we supposed ourselves more knowledgeable than God about how to conduct it.

For example, God prescribes that there be a visible human community that is "the Church" and that it be organized hierarchically rather than democratically or in some other way; God prescribes that efficacious signs that we call "the sacraments" be his channels for bestowing grace on human beings. God might do differently, but this is what he chooses to do, and we must accept his will and cooperate in his redemptive work by carrying out his directions.²

Law: Definition and Classification

St. Thomas Aquinas defines law as “an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated.”³

Some aspects of this definition deserve further study:

- The law is *an ordinance of reason*, not of the will. Knowing the means that are required to attain an end properly belongs to the intellect. But after reason has formulated the norm, the legislator must make it obligatory by an act of his will. This binding character is part of the essence of the law, and distinguishes it from mere advice.
- It is made *for the common good*. Thus, a law that causes evil rather than the common good is not a real law. Laws can cause the common good in a direct or an indirect way. The former are those that directly benefit the community and indirectly the individual. Thus, tax laws supply the means for public works, which indirectly benefit the individuals. The latter are those that directly benefit some individuals, and as a consequence benefit the community. For instance, laws that benefit mailmen or journalists by helping them fulfill their respective tasks in a more efficient way indirectly benefit the whole of society. These laws were called privileges in the ancient legal terminology, without the present negative connotations.
- It is made *by him who has care of the community*. The author of the law, the legislator, must be the legitimate authority.
- It is *promulgated*. The legislator must publicly announce the law to the subjects.

According to their author, laws can be classified as follows:

- Divine law:
 - Eternal law
 - Natural law
 - Divine positive law
- Human law:
 - Civil law (promulgated by the civil authority)
 - Ecclesiastical law (promulgated by the ecclesiastical authority)

Aquinas's well-known definition of law applies primarily to human laws. This definition of law can also be applied to the divine laws but only in an analogical way. Its applicability decreases as we get further from human laws. Thus, the definition can still be applied to eternal law—which is the most remote from human law—but it fails to convey its most essential aspect.

Obviously, our first point of reference is human law. We tend to see all laws by analogy with it. This is true, however, only at the level of knowledge. In the order of reality, the first point of reference is eternal law. If we do not keep this in mind, we may unconsciously apply to natural law our notions of human law. To a great extent, this accounts for common misconceptions: that natural law can be reformed, or that it admits exceptions or dispensations.

Eternal Law

God follows a certain order in the work of creation. Each creature's being has an internal harmony, and its operation corresponds to that being. There is also harmony among the different creatures: Inferior beings are ordained to superior ones. All beings are ultimately ordained to God, but according to that internal order in and among them.

God's work of conservation—which is like the continuation of creation—is also carried out in agreement with the same divine plan. According to St. Thomas, that *plan* (*ratio* in Latin, “type,” “plan,” “model”) *of divine wisdom, as directing all actions and movements, is called eternal law.*⁴ It is called *eternal* because it is prior to creation, and *law* because it is a normative ordination made by the divine wisdom for the proper being and operation of all creatures. The actual implementation of this plan in each creature is called *providence* or government.⁵

The Scope and Application of Eternal Law

Unlike human laws, which apply extrinsically and sometimes with error, eternal law applies intrinsically and with absolute perfection to every act of the creatures.

Eternal law is an intrinsic and radical measure of our being. Only by observing it can our actions be in agreement with our being and lead us to perfection.⁶ If we disregard this measure, it is impossible to find happiness.

Eternal law is not just an intrinsic norm. Together with it, God gives us the strength to fulfill it. Eternal law is the deepest inclination of the creatures' being.⁷ Whatever order there may be in our acts is contained in eternal law and comes from it. For the same reason, *all laws are derived from eternal law*. Eternal law is the *model* of all laws; no law is just if it does not conform to eternal law.⁸ It is also their *efficient cause*; the human power of giving laws proceeds from God, who has given it to man.

Eternal law applies to each and every action of all creatures. It is an error to think that God does not ordain singular actions and beings. God's law extends as far as his power, and he is the first cause of all things, both in their most universal and in their most singular and particular traits.

Human laws may fail to foresee some particular case, or respond to someone's specific needs, but this is never the case with eternal law. Its fulfillment always makes every person happy, even when circumstances are or seem difficult, because God always gives the strength that is needed to fulfill his precepts.

Eternal Law and Creatures

Beings may be subject to eternal law in two ways: through an *internal moving principle*, or through *knowledge*. Irrational creatures follow the eternal law in the first way. They passively and necessarily obey eternal law through a blind and unavoidable inclination toward their acts.

Rational creatures follow eternal law in both ways. As the animals, they also have a *natural inclination* (natural law) toward what is in agreement with eternal law. They can also *know* eternal law, thus actively and willingly obeying it, and participating in the divine government.⁹

Man can know what is good or bad, but cannot decide what should be good or bad. Revelation teaches that the power to decide what is good and what is evil does not belong to man, but to God alone.¹⁰

The Existence of Eternal Law and Natural Law

Eternal law and natural law are consequences of the created nature of man and the rest of the universe, which have been created by God according to specific plans.

The existence of natural law is clearly attested by St. Paul. He states that the Gentiles, being ignorant of the revelation that God made to Moses, knew and practiced some precepts of natural law, and that God would judge them on the last day according to these precepts (cf. Rom 2:14–16).

Obviously, those who explicitly or implicitly deny the existence of God, or have a sufficiently mistaken idea of him, also deny the existence of both eternal and natural law.

Errors

In our times, the most common error is denying the real existence of natural law. It is wrongly considered an illusion, or an attempt to give formal recognition to a mere collection of precepts that are imposed by custom. These precepts, some argue, originate in circumstances or beliefs of the past, often difficult or impossible to ascertain. Ultimately, these people reduce natural law to social customs or conventions, which can, of course, be modified.

In that context, the expression “Adapting laws to social reality”—perfectly valid in itself—is understood as meaning that whatever people want is moral, and the legislator must adapt the laws to the popular will. Some theories hold that moral norms are not truths:

- *Emotivism* maintains that moral norms are expressions of feelings. To say, “That is wrong” amounts to saying, “I don’t like that.”
- *Divine command theory* argues that moral norms are arbitrary rules of behavior set by God. God could have laid down different rules.
- *Prescriptivism* holds that moral norms come into force for people only if they choose to adopt them.

Some other theories recognize moral norms as truths, but nevertheless are inadequate:

- *Inspirationism* claims that moral norms do not proceed from principles, but are isolated truths, intuitive insights, or messages from God.
- *Cultural relativism* asserts that moral norms are nothing more than attempts by members of each particular society to prescribe what behavior is necessary if their society is to survive and flourish.

The Notion of Natural Law

All creatures participate in eternal law, because the inclinations leading them to their own acts and ends stem from it. But the participation of rational creatures is greater, because, by knowing the plan of God—embodied in eternal law—they intellectually participate in that ordination as well. Thus, the participation of eternal law in irrational creatures is called law only improperly and by analogy, as in the case of the laws of physics or biology. The participation of eternal law in man, on the other hand, is properly called law.¹¹ Thus, we say that natural moral law (or simply natural law) is the part of eternal law that makes reference to human behavior.

Therefore, *natural law is the participation of eternal law in the rational creature.*¹² It is called law because it is a binding norm that is obeyed after being known. It is called natural because it prescribes the specific way of acting that corresponds to human nature. It is sometimes called *divine natural law* in order to stress that it comes from God.

Natural law is a norm that is *extrinsic* to man, because its ultimate foundation lies not in man, but in God as Creator. “It has the force of law because it is the voice and the interpreter of some higher reason [God’s] to which our spirit and our freedom must be subject.”¹³

Natural law, however, is *intrinsic* to man in two aspects. First, it consists in the right ordering of human behavior so that it may be in agreement with man’s nature and lead him to his objective last end—which coincides with his real happiness. In this sense, natural law is impressed on human nature just as iron’s physical and chemical properties are inseparable from its nature. The divine natural law shows man the way to follow so as to practice the good and attain his end. Nevertheless, natural law is free in its dynamic observance; i.e., man can choose not to look at its guidance. Yet by not observing it, man accomplishes his self-destruction. This explains why natural law is intensified and blossoms in virtuous conduct but is dimmed in a sinful person.

Second, it is intrinsic to man because the intellect, which naturally tends to discover the truth in everything, also tends to discover the truth in the field of human behavior, which is precisely natural law. Likewise, the will is naturally inclined to the practice of what is in agreement with, and

benefits, one's own nature. This is no other than the good proposed by the intellect. As St. Thomas says, natural law is but the imprint of divine light in us.¹⁴ This should not be understood as referring to an explicit revelation, or an infusion of ideas, whether innate or received later on. What it really means is that man's knowledge, intellect, and inclination to the truth are a natural participation in the divine knowledge.

The rightful autonomy of human intellect or reason means that man possesses in himself his own law, received from the Creator. Nevertheless, *this autonomy does not mean that reason itself can create its own values and moral norms.*¹⁵

Properties of Natural Law

The properties of natural law are *universality* and *immutability*. Both are a consequence of what natural law is. Because natural law flows from human nature, it applies to all who share that nature (universality) for as long as their nature continues to be human (immutability).

The *universality* of natural law implies that the rights and duties that it establishes apply to all humans by the mere fact of being human.¹⁶ Its obligation is independent of culture, beliefs, environment, or circumstances. It stems from human nature, which all people possess equally because they are people.

A consequence of this is that those who, through no fault of their own, are not Christians can be saved only if they strive to know and follow the natural law.¹⁷

Thus, properly speaking, natural law does not admit any dispensation (suspension of the law in a particular case) or *epikeia* (softened interpretation of the law in the assumption that the legislator did not mean it to apply in cases where, due to specific circumstances, the enforcement would result in an injustice). Any of these exceptions would imply an imperfection of the divine intellect in planning human nature, or of divine power in implementing it.

The *immutability* of natural law flows from the immutability of human nature, which remains substantially the same at all times.¹⁸

Obviously, the passage of time has led to new forms of human organization, changes in human relations, and, in general, different cultural orientations. However, these changes never touch what is essential—natural law does not admit dispensation from its first principles.¹⁹ Thus, the respect for human life is always necessary, but the death penalty for some crimes may have been licit in some historical period, and illicit in others. The right to private property is a requirement of human nature, even if its concrete regulation may change with time. Modesty in dress is a requirement of human nature, although what is considered as modest may have changed with time.

The way of fulfilling a specific precept may change with time, but, in every period, it has to be fulfilled in the way that is required at that time.

Logically, those who challenge the immutability of human nature also reject the immutability of natural law. This, aside from being a serious philosophical error, is also in opposition to the findings of the positive sciences that study the history and prehistory of man. Certainly, some precepts of natural law may be ignored in a specific society, but then that society will be defective in the areas where the ignored precepts apply. Both the society and its members will drift away from happiness and endanger their salvation.

The Contents and Knowledge of Natural Law

The obligation to love God above all creatures—together with the character that is proper to each creature—determines the right way to love all other goods, that is, the content of natural law. Any use of created goods that leads man to know and love God is naturally right; any use that impedes that knowledge and love is bad.

The “divine and natural” law shows man the way to follow so as to practice the good and attain his end. The natural law states the first and essential precepts which govern the moral life. It hinges upon the desire for God and submission to him, who is the source and judge of all that is good, as well as upon the sense that the other is one’s equal. Its principal precepts are expressed in the Decalogue.²⁰

Natural law includes *all the norms of conduct, and only those that necessarily derive from human nature*. It is specified in rights and duties, which together constitute the *contents of natural law*.²¹ St. Thomas, among others, distinguishes three levels or groups of propositions:

- i) First principles, or primary precepts
- ii) Secondary principles or immediate conclusions
- iii) Specific moral norms or remote conclusions

Our manner of knowing is based on human intelligence, which is inclined to truth by itself. That inclination enables the intelligence to immediately grasp, as evident, some first truths, which we call first principles. With the light of this evident knowledge, man discovers particular precepts of moral law. These are goods that perfect man.

Man discerns which are the human goods that lead to integral human perfection by experience and reflection on the inclinations that are proper to human nature. This is done not only through personal reflection, but accumulated consideration on history, and through information that he receives from education, environment, etc. We should keep in mind that first principles are not general truths from which particular norms are derived, but rather *a light that illumines* our experience and reflection on the goods that perfect man.²²

First Principles

St. Thomas includes two kinds of precepts among these first principles or primary precepts, which are non-demonstrable and do not require divine revelation. We may call them: (a) the first principles of practical reasoning and (b) the first principles of moral choice.

The First Principles of Practical Reasoning

In morals, before thinking of what we *should* do, we should think of what we *could* do. In other words, we should ask ourselves, “What are the options?” We therefore need guidance from principles of practical reasoning before we can even take up the moral question. The very first principle or starting point of practical reasoning is that *good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided*. This principle directs human persons to the goods that fulfill them.

To be good is for something to be fully, to be all it should be—no lacks, no privations. A good thing has everything it needs to be, all it is meant to be. There is more to goodness than conforming to nature. Thus, the good also has to do with unfolding a thing’s possibilities.

Badness, on the other hand, is real, not illusory. It is the real absence in things of what ought to be there. This deficiency is an objective condition, something real, but precisely as a lack, it is not a positive reality that is contrary to the good. Death, for instance, is real, yet it is not another way of being, alongside living. It is the absence of life in something that once was alive.

The Basic Human Goods

The specifications of the first principle of practical reasoning are called “basic human goods.” They give content to this first principle by identifying the goods that are to be done, pursued, protected, and promoted. Each serves as a starting point to find what is to be done. Practical reason “naturally” apprehends them as good in a direct, non-discursive experience. These human goods do not have a moral value as such; one can choose to establish them in immoral ways. They are incommensurable, not homogenous, not comparable with one another, and thus impossible to arrange by rank or importance. None of these goods is the highest good. God alone is the absolute good. They are alike in that each is a good *of* persons, not a good *for* persons.

St. Thomas distinguishes various sorts of basic human goods, corresponding to “natural inclinations” of the human person without being exhaustive but rather illustrative. He classifies them into three groups corresponding to basic inclinations:

- i) *Self-preservation*, which is common to all beings

- ii) What he calls *animal inclinations*, such as mating and raising offspring
- iii) *Goods according to the nature of reason*, which are specifically human inclinations, such as knowing the truth about God and living in society²³

Contemporary authors have tried to identify *all* the basic goods of human persons and explain them in an orderly way.²⁴ They establish three categories:

- i) The *reflexive* or *existential* human goods fulfill persons insofar as they are able to make choices and are thus capable of moral good and evil. There are four of these goods; all have *harmony* as their common theme:
 - a. Self-integration or *inner peace*, which consists in harmony among one's judgments, feelings, and choices
 - b. *Authenticity*, which is sincerity or harmony and consistency between one's judgments, feelings and choices and one's behavior
 - c. *Interpersonal harmony*, which is fraternity, friendship, justice and so on
 - d. *Harmony with God*, which is religion
- ii) There are three *substantive* human goods in whose definition choice is not included:
 - a. *Bodily well-being*, including health, bodily integrity, a good that fulfills human persons as physical beings
 - b. *Knowledge of the truth and appreciation of beauty*, goods that fulfill human persons as intelligent beings
 - c. *Work*, or skillful performance and activity; the person expands in the world, interacts with it, transforms it, and finds fulfillment in so doing
- iii) The *marriage and family life* human good is a *complex* human good that is both substantive and reflexive.

The First Principles of Moral Choice

In a specific instance, several of these basic human goods may appear overlapped as objects of one's choice. Which good should one choose to prevail over the others? What should one's priorities be?

To solve this quandary, there is an analogous first principle of moral choice (or first principle of morality), which concerns our *way* of pursuing the basic human goods. It provides a way of distinguishing between alternatives that are morally good and others that are bad.²⁵

Sacred Scripture marks the first principle of morality in these terms: *Love God above all things, and love one's neighbor as oneself* (cf. Mk 12:29–31). A choice in accord with love of God and neighbor is morally good; a choice contrary to love of God and neighbor is morally bad. Love means fulfilling one's responsibilities toward God and neighbor. Thus, moral norms and truths should guide us to act in ways that fulfill us both as individuals and as persons living together in community.

The precept *to love God above all things* encompasses all the others—including the Decalogue—and helps us to know and fulfill them. The purpose of eternal law is to direct every creature to God in its proper way. For man, the proper way to be united to God is through knowledge and love. This precept determines the contents of natural law; whatever leads man to know and love God above all things is naturally right; whatever prevents it is naturally wrong. Therefore, to the extent that man strives to fulfill the first precept of natural law, the knowledge and fulfillment of the rest becomes easier.

The Second Vatican Council gives us another version of the same first principle of morality:

Here then is the norm for human activity—to harmonize with the authentic interests of the human race, in accordance with God's will and design, and to enable men as individuals and as members of society to pursue and fulfil their total vocation.²⁶

In this way, human beings fulfill the command of love, for, by doing so, they manifest their love of God—who is the author of the “goods of human race”—and their love of neighbor, in whom these God-given gifts are meant to flourish.²⁷

Contemporary authors claim that the twofold command to love can be more precisely formulated for philosophical and theological purposes as

follows: *In voluntarily acting for human goods and avoiding what is opposed to them, one ought to choose only those possibilities that are compatible with integral human fulfillment.*²⁸ The will of a person who is committed to choosing and acting in accord with the requirements of integral human fulfillment is the will of a person who is inwardly disposed to choose well, to choose in accord with unfettered or “right” reason. Morally good human acts not only affect the individual, but also are consistent with the real good of the human family.

Moral truths are related to this human good and human flourishing. We must understand human flourishing and fulfillment not simply as consistent conformity to what we already are, but as self-constitution, a form of cooperation with God in carrying out his plan—a plan that calls on us to imitate and cooperate with his creative wisdom by free acts of love.

We see in this principle that the fundamental reality of moral action is self-determination, *making oneself to be a certain sort of person by the choices one makes.*²⁹

The Immediate Conclusions

The *secondary principles* or *immediate conclusions* of natural law are those normative precepts that are easily deduced from the first principles. Their purpose is to further specify the first moral principles by excluding as immoral those actions that are incompatible with a true integral human fulfillment.

St. Thomas includes the Ten Commandments among these immediate conclusions (cf. Ex 20:1–17; Dt 5:6–21). The primary precepts are “contained” in the Decalogue, but only *as principles*; the remote conclusions are “contained” in the Decalogue only *as conclusions*. He also referred to the Golden Rule (“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”) and the principle that we are to do injury to no one as specifications of the first moral principle. (These are also included among the “modes of responsibility.”)

The Modes of Responsibility

Some contemporary moralists tried to identify with more precision the immediate conclusions of the first principle of morality. They call them the *modes of responsibility*, which specify further the first moral principles and enable us to move from the first principles of morality to specific moral norms, such as the Decalogue.³⁰ The modes of responsibility are attitudes that are consistent with basic virtues.

The Modes of Christian Response

Transformed by faith and charity, these modes of responsibility become “modes of Christian response” (the virtues that we contemplate in Jesus), which fulfill and specify the requirements of the law of Christian love that was promulgated in the Gospel. In their originality and profundity, the Beatitudes are, to a great extent, a *self-portrait of Christ*, and, for this reason, are *invitations to discipleship and to communion of life with Christ*. A Christian is aware that integral human fulfillment can indeed be accomplished in union with Jesus. Moreover, reflection on the Beatitudes directs one to think that they are, in fact, the modes of Christian response, that is, internal Christian dispositions or virtues, linked traditionally—as in the thought of St. Augustine and St. Thomas—to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. From the Beatitudes, there also indirectly flow *normative indications* for the moral life.³¹

Specific Moral Norms

The third set of natural law propositions is made up of more specific moral norms, which identify specific human action that ought to be done or not done. These are *remote conclusions* of natural law that can be reached only through a diligent effort of the intellect. Such are the indissolubility of marriage and the unlawfulness of polygamy.

This classification of the precepts of natural law is based on their degree of evidence for human knowledge.

Knowledge of the Precepts of Natural Law

Man can know the precepts of natural law with his natural intellect. Just as he can discover the structure of the cell or of its nucleus, he can discover the structure of human behavior. And just as he can study what is beneficial and what is harmful for the cell, he can study what is beneficial and what is harmful in human behavior.

There are some differences, though. Morality deals with realities that are more immediate and important, and it imposes demands on one's behavior. Thus, the precepts of natural law are much easier to know than other natural subjects. But it is also true that this knowledge is more easily affected by the good will, or rectitude of intention, of the person seeking it.

We should not forget that these precepts are discovered by human intellect; the intellect is the only faculty that man possesses for intellectual knowledge. We do not know natural law through a sort of sixth sense. Neither should we understand the expression "Natural law is impressed in our hearts" as referring to some kind of innate ideas.

Given a basic willingness to obey the precepts of natural law, the ease with which man can discover them is directly proportional to how radically they affect human behavior.³² We can, therefore, make the following statements:

- The *first and most universal principles* are necessarily and immediately known to all. This is so not because the intellect has been conditioned to think that way, but because it is radically open to reality and it cannot ignore what is evident.³³
- The *secondary principles or immediate conclusions* are extremely easy to know for any person who uses his intellect. Their main demands cannot possibly be ignored by adults with the use of reason. In special circumstances, however, some people may be inculpably ignorant of them, at least for some time.
- The *remote conclusions* are more difficult to know, and a person may remain invincibly ignorant of them.

The Usual Way of Knowing Natural Law

Until now, we have discussed the discovery of the precepts of natural law by human intellect. But, as with other natural knowledge, there is obviously no need for every person to discover them anew. Their knowledge is normally transmitted from person to person and to posterity through teaching.

God has also revealed natural law to ensure that it is known and to increase its binding force. Natural law is most perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus was the “perfect man” not only in relation to the essential human calling to discern, embrace, and live out one’s vocation as a child of God, but also in fidelity to the will of the Father, and in communion with other human persons. In his words, in his attitudes, and deeds, we learn what natural law is and how a Christian should live.

God also revealed the basic precepts of natural law with the Ten Commandments, just as he has also revealed other important natural truths.³⁴

The revelation of natural law leads to further considerations. We know that God has entrusted the deposit of revelation to the Church. Therefore, the authentic interpretation of natural law has also been entrusted to the Church. This gives Catholics a great assurance in all that refers to the error-free knowledge of the precepts of natural law, which is certainly a privileged position.

Furthermore, the declarations of the Church on the precepts of natural law apply to all people, because all people are subject to natural law. Knowing and observing these precepts is good for all, but ignoring or disobeying them is harmful for all. Catholics, therefore, must try—by all legitimate means—to make these precepts known and foster their observance. The happiness of society and its members, believers or not, is at stake.

But our assurance should not lead us to prove the precepts of natural law with dogmatic arguments. Despite the solid reasons upon which the Magisterium of the Church is founded, quoting its pronouncements about natural law will convince few non-Catholics, because they will probably not accept or understand its authority. Even worse, it may give the impression

that the precept in question is not natural but religious in nature, since we use religious reasons to prove it instead of natural ones.

Thus, faith tells us that marriage is indissoluble in itself. We know it with certainty because of the teaching of the Church. The Church also teaches that this is a natural truth; it is therefore demonstrable through natural reasoning. Being a remote conclusion, the arguments will not be as evident as in other cases, but, taken together, the arguments in favor of the indissolubility of marriage will always be stronger than those against it. The only way to show the great natural benefits of the indissolubility of marriage is to seek these arguments and present them in an attractive manner. We know, of course, that our certainty ultimately comes from another source, but there are also valid human reasons. On the other hand, if we were to close our reasoning with an “after all, this is true because the Church says so,” we would defeat our purpose: It is an indirect endorsement of those who claim that the indissolubility of marriage is not a natural truth.

Divine Positive Law

Divine positive law is the *law expressly revealed by God*. It includes:

- *Precepts from natural law*, which thus become clearer and indisputable for all. This is the case of the Ten Commandments. These are found both in the Old and the New Testament.
- *Supernatural precepts*, since man is destined for a supernatural end. These are also found in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Old Testament Law is holy (cf. Rom 7:12), spiritual (cf. Rom 7:14) and good (cf. Rom 7:16), but still imperfect. The Law was given to us to lead us to Christ (cf. Gal 3:24). It shows what we must do, but it does not give the power—the grace of the Holy Spirit—to fulfill it. According to St. Paul, the Old Law served to denounce and manifest sin (cf. Rom 7) as a preparation for the Gospel.³⁵ Some precepts of the Old Testament are usually classified into ceremonial and judicial precepts. The former refer to the worship of God, the latter to the social organization of the Jews: marriage and family laws, or administration of justice. Both were abolished after the death of Christ and lost their binding force. However, they were not formally forbidden until much later, perhaps after the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The ceremonial precepts were abolished, because their role was to announce and prepare the Christian worship. The judicial precepts were abolished because the people of Israel was to give way to the “New Israel,” the Church.

The supernatural precepts of the New Testament refer to the reception of faith and the other supernatural virtues, their practice, and the worship due to God, especially the holy sacrifice of the Mass and the sacraments.

The New Law

A baptized person is “a new creature,” because baptism gives man a divine resemblance, a participation in divine nature (cf. 2 Pt 1:4). A Christian is called to accommodate his conduct to the life of Jesus Christ with the help of God’s grace.

The New Law *primarily consists in grace itself*, which is infused by the Holy Spirit. This grace regenerates man and re-ordains him to his supernatural end. Hence the superiority of the New Law over the Old Law and human laws.³⁶

The New Law leads to the fullness of God’s commandments; it is summarized in the “new commandment” of Jesus (Jn 13:34): to love one another as he loved us (cf. Jn 15:12). It is expressed primarily by the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, to which may be added the moral teachings of the apostles, such as Romans 12–15, 1 Corinthians 12–13, Colossians 3–4, and Ephesians 4–5. The New Law communicates God’s grace to us through the sacraments. It practices the acts of religion: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting; its prayer is the Lord’s Prayer (cf. Mt 6:9–13).

Law is always a guide to our freedom. The New Law, however, unlike the Old Law and human laws, is an intrinsic guide of freedom. It does not perfect freedom from the outside, but from the inside of our own being, since, “poured out in our soul by God, charity transforms from within our mind and will.”³⁷ With the New Law, God does not only indicate what we must do and encourage us to do it, but he also gives us the strength and the inclination to do it.

The Law of Charity

The New Law is the *law of charity*, which is the bond of perfection. There is an exact correspondence between the New Law's perfect way of moving through charity and the perfection of the goal intended. It is not just a matter of loving God above all things; this was already required by natural law and the Old Testament law. What is now required is to love God in his intimate life, which is possible only through the supernatural strength of charity.

Thus the New Law, by perfecting the first principle of natural law—the root of all other precepts—gives a new dimension to all human acts. It compels us to be daring in our love, since “a selfish or partial love is not enough—we have to love others with the love of God.”³⁸ Thus, by the law of grace, Christians possess the inner strength and light that is needed to be an effective leaven in all human activities.

The Law of Perfect Freedom

Since the New Law is the law of charity, it is also the *law of perfect freedom* (cf. Jas 1:25; 2:12); it moves by means of love and demands only what love requires.

Freedom is a tendency toward the good. But, because of sin, the will and intellect are now enslaved to false goods that distract them away from the true good. In a certain way, they also remain enslaved when they do good things only out of servile fear. The grace of God delivers us from both servitudes, uniting us to him and moving us to fulfill his law out of love. The New Law inclines us to deal with Christ, not as slaves, but as friends, and even as sons of God and heirs of his glory (cf. Gal 4:1–7, 21–31; Rom 8:15).

On the other hand, this maximum freedom of the New Law does not mean a lesser demand or absence of difficulties; it is rather a perfection of the strength that the law itself gives for the fulfillment of its commands. Charity is not the abolition of the law, but its fulfillment.

Grace, Justification, and Sanctity

The grace of the Holy Spirit has the power to justify us, that is, to cleanse us from our sins and to communicate to us “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ,” through baptism (Rom 3:22; cf. Rom 6:3–4).

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we take part in Christ’s Passion by dying to sin, and in his Resurrection by being born to a new life. We are members of his body, which is the Church, and branches grafted onto the vine, which is Jesus Christ.

From then on, Christian life is a continuous conversion, also called “sanctification.” “Christian sanctity does not consist in being *impeccable*, but in fighting against and not yielding to temptation, in getting up again after a fall. It does not result so much from man’s will power, but rather from the effort of not setting obstacles to the action of grace in one’s soul. It consists in being humble cooperators of God’s grace.”³⁹ This process of gradual growth in holiness culminates in everlasting life.

Someone may ask what these words of St. Paul mean: “For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved” (Rom 10:10). Do the good works that are required of us come down to no more than confessing with the mouth? Just say, “Jesus is my Lord and my Savior,” and one is saved? That is to misunderstand what St. Paul has in mind. To be sincere, confession with the lips must be carried out consistently; it must be lived. “Let us not grow weary in well-doing,” Paul urges, “for in due season we shall reap” (Gal 6:9). Confession with the lips means bearing witness, which leads to salvation because it involves a complete Christian life.⁴⁰

Charity is, thus, the completion of faith. It should grow through living one’s personal vocation and through deeds to share God’s love with others.

1. Cf. CCC, 1877–1948.
2. Cf. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*.
3. *ST*, I-II, q. 90, a. 4.
4. Cf. *Ibid.*, q. 93, a. 1; CCC, 1949–1986.
5. Cf. *ST*, I, q. 22, a. 3; CCC, 1949–1953.
6. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 93, a. 6.
7. Cf. *Ibid.*
8. Cf. *Ibid.*, a. 3.
9. Cf. *Ibid.*, a. 6.
10. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 35.

11. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 91, a. 2; *CCC*, 1954–1960.
12. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 91, a. 2.
13. Leo XIII, Enc. *Libertas Praestantissimum*, 8; cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 44.
14. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 91, a. 2.
15. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 40; cf. R. García de Haro, *La Vita Cristiana*, p. 5.
16. Cf. *CCC*, 1956.
17. Cf. *LG*, 16.
18. Cf. *CCC*, 1958–1960.
19. Cf. *DH*, 3; Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 4.
20. *CCC*, 1955.
21. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1959.
22. Cf. R. García de Haro, *La Vita Cristiana*, p. 5.
23. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.
24. Germain Grisez, John Finnis, and Joseph Boyle among others.
25. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 100, a. 3 ad 1.; a. 11.
26. *GS*, 35.
27. Cf. W. E. May, *An Introduction to Moral Theology*, p. 57.
28. Cf. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*; W. E. May, *An Introduction to Moral Theology*, p. 63ff.
29. Cf. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*, pp. 48–51.
30. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 81ff.
31. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 16; *CCC*, 1716–1724. The beatitudes have their corresponding “modes of Christian response” and related virtues:
 - *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Christian energy and ambition must be rooted in humility and trust in God. Expect and accept all good, including the good fruits of your own work, as God’s gift. Do not be lazy about doing good. The related virtue is humility to cooperate with God.
 - *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.* Accept God’s will; be a team player on God’s team. Accept your limited role in the body of Christ and fulfill it. Do not be moved merely by enthusiasm or impatience. The related virtue is meekness to accept and embrace one’s mission in life or vocation.
 - *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.* Put aside or avoid whatever is not necessary or useful in the fulfillment of your vocation. One who puts aside “mourns.” Do not choose merely to satisfy an emotional desire except as part of the pursuit of an intelligible good. The related virtue is detachment.
 - *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.* Endure fearlessly whatever is necessary or useful in the fulfillment of your vocation. Do not act in accord with an emotional aversion, except when this is done to avoid some intelligible evil. Do not let fear of suffering rule your life. The related virtues are endurance in the struggle, faithfulness, and courage.
 - *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.* Be merciful according to the perfect measure of mercy, which God has revealed in Jesus. Do not judge persons according to your feelings. The related virtues are fairness and forgiveness.
 - *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* Strive to conform your whole self to a living faith, and recognize and purge anything that does not meet this standard. The related virtue is purity of heart.
 - *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.* Respond to evil with good, not with resistance, much less with destructive action. The related virtue is that of the peacemakers and rebuilders of damaged relationships.

- *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.* Do no evil that good might come of it, but suffer evil together with Jesus in cooperation with God's redeeming love. The related virtue is doing good even though it may produce hatred and accepting the suffering that results (cf. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*, 305ff).
- 32. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 94, a. 6; *CCC*, 1960.
- 33. Cf. *ST*, I, q. 79, a. 12.
- 34. Cf. *Ibid.*, q. 1, a. 1.
- 35. Cf. *CCC*, 1961–1964.
- 36. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1965–1974.
- 37. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 71.
- 38. *Ibid.*, 97.
- 39. John Paul II, *Alloc.*, March 23, 1983.
- 40. Cf. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*, p. 329.

9

Human Law

NATURAL LAW AND the New Law are immediate participations in the eternal law. Human laws are mediate participations of eternal law. Parts of the divine plan of government reach us and are partially concretized through the human legislator.

84. The Church: Mother and Teacher

The Christian fulfills his vocation in the Church, in communion with all the baptized. From the Church, he receives the word of God containing the teachings of the “law of Christ.” From the Church, he receives the grace of the sacraments that sustains him on the way. From the Church, he learns the *example of holiness* and recognizes his model in the all-holy Virgin Mary. He discerns in the Church the authentic witness of those who live it, and he discovers in her the spiritual tradition and long history of the saints who have gone before him and whom the liturgy celebrates in the rhythms of the cycle of the saints.¹

85. The Laws of the Church

The Church's teaching authority comes from God's self-revelation; thus, she teaches the truth. For this reason, the Church cannot "change" her teachings, not even when they are difficult and may be unpopular.

The teaching authority of the Church has competence to make judgments that others, lacking the same competence, should admit. The Church's teaching authority is grounded in God's self-revelation rather than in human efforts and attainments. Thus, the obligation to obey the Church's law is also more serious than the obligation to obey other law.

The obligation to obey the Church's law binds only her members. Non-Catholics do nothing wrong in not observing this law. But in disregarding the Church's moral teaching, non-Catholics are, whether they know it or not, violating moral truth. Even so, they may be less guilty than Catholics because, not accepting the Church and her teachings, they know less clearly what the truth is.

86. The Ecclesiastical Legislator

The supreme legislative power over the whole Church is vested in the *Roman pontiff*. He usually exercises it through the Roman Curia, or with the advice of diverse legislative bodies, either permanent or appointed *ad hoc*.

The *college of bishops* with its head, the pope, also has supreme power over the universal Church. It exercises its power in solemn form in an *ecumenical council*. The bishops act in it as true legislators, not as mere advisers of the pope. Councils, however, have legitimate legislative powers only when properly convoked, celebrated, and confirmed. Thus, the Council decrees are not true laws until they are confirmed by the pope.

Bishops have legislative powers in their dioceses. They can exercise them directly, through provincial councils, or with the advice of diocesan councils.

87. The Object of Human Law

The object or content of human law is what the law prescribes. The legislator can decree whatever is beneficial for the community that is under his care. We can say, using the traditional formula of St. Isidore of Seville, that the content of the law must be honest, just, possible, useful for the community, and adequate to the place and time.

It is a matter of discussion whether human law can prescribe internal acts and heroic acts. It can certainly prescribe external acts that are, by their very nature, united to internal acts, as in the case of an oath. Civil law cannot prescribe internal acts, because they have no direct influence on the common good. On the other hand, the Church can prescribe them. For example, the Church requires parish priests to offer Mass for the people on some days.

Ordinarily, human law cannot prescribe heroic acts, since they are very difficult and therefore impossible for most people. But they can be prescribed when the common good requires it, or when someone has voluntarily committed himself to perform them.

88. The Subject of Human Law

The subjects of the law are those who are bound to obey it. Merely ecclesiastical laws—as opposed to ecclesiastical laws that are also precepts of natural law—apply to all persons who have been baptized or received in the Catholic Church who have attained the use of reason and are at least seven years old (unless a different age is specified in the law). However, the Church often does not intend to bind heretics and schismatics, especially those who are brought up in their sects.

Thus, children below the age of seven are not bound to observe ecclesiastical laws, even if they have sufficient use of reason (unless some specific law expressly says otherwise). For example, they are not bound to attend Mass on Sundays.

Ordinarily, ecclesiastical laws bind only *residents* and *temporary residents* of a certain territory. Residents are those with a *domicile* in that territory, that is, those living there with the intention of staying indefinitely, or having stayed for at least five years, even if they plan to move in the future. Temporary residents are those with a *quasi-domicile* in the territory, that is, having lived there for at least three months, or planning to do so.

A person who is out of his domicile or quasi-domicile is called *traveler* (*peregrinus*) in canon law. A person without fixed abode, that is, without domicile or quasi-domicile, is called *transient* (*vagus*).

Transients are bound by all universal laws and by the particular laws of the place where they are present. Travelers, however, are bound only by universal laws that are in force in the place where they are present. Thus, as the new *Code of Canon Law* establishes, travelers are not bound by the particular laws of their own territory—with very few exceptions. Neither are they bound by the particular laws of the place where they are present, unless these refer to public order or to unmovable property that is located in that territory.

89. Promulgation and Acceptance of the Law

Promulgation is the authentic manifestation of the law by its author. Universal ecclesiastical laws are promulgated by publication in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (“Records of the Apostolic See”) or AAS, unless, in some particular case, a different way of promulgation is prescribed. Promulgation is not the same as broadcasting, which can be done through other means.

Church laws do not bind until they come into force. This is usually three months after the date of the AAS issue in which they appear (this is the *vacatio legis*), unless the law itself expressly specifies a different term. They may also apply immediately, because of the nature of their object.

Particular laws are promulgated in the manner that is established by the legislator, and come into force one month after promulgation—unless a different term is expressly prescribed.

The *acceptance* of the law is not necessary for it to come into force. Thus, neither the acceptance of Church laws by the people, nor that of the laws of the Roman pontiff by the bishops, nor that of Church laws by civil authority are necessary.

90. The Binding Force of Human Law

Just human laws, whether ecclesiastical or civil, *bind in conscience*. In some cases, the obligation is strict.

Man can be bound in conscience by God and by those who—knowingly or unknowingly—rightly exercise the authority that is given to them by God. Any just human law is an application of natural law, as understood by the reason of the legislator (cf. Rom 13:1; Prv 8:15; Wis 6:4).

The binding force of human law does not arise from the coercive power of the legislator, but from the participation of human law in eternal law through natural law. This participation enables human law to show the way that man must take in order to attain his last end.

Therefore, human laws are just insofar as they are in agreement with eternal law. They certainly do so when they prescribe only what natural law prescribes—although this does not add anything to the binding force of natural law precepts. Human laws also agree with eternal law when they specify the way to fulfill natural law in certain circumstances (for example, the legal requirements for a commercial contract, or for the incorporation of a society).²

For a law to be just, it must fulfill the following conditions:

- It must be really ordained to the common good. As we have just said, a law that opposes natural or divine positive law can never achieve the common good.
- If it concerns distributive justice, it must distribute burdens in an equitable way.
- It should not exceed the authority of the legislator—otherwise it would not be a law.³

Thus, *unjust human laws* are not properly laws, since they are not an “ordinance of reason for the common good.”⁴ Therefore, they do not bind in conscience. If an unjust “law” prescribes something against an aspect of the common good protected by divine law, aside from not binding in conscience, there is a positive obligation of *not* obeying it (cf. Acts 5:29). If it goes against only human common good, there may be an accidental

obligation of obeying it when disobedience would cause a greater harm to the common good.

The *gravity of the obligation* cannot be determined in a general way, since it depends on the matter of the law, its purpose, and the intention of the legislator. It is commonly held that the legislator may set a light obligation for laws concerning serious matters, and, at times, it is fitting to do so. But he cannot command with strict obligation matters that are light in themselves, since this would impose a disproportionate burden on his subjects.

In practice, the seriousness of the obligation can be measured through:

- the wording of the law itself,
- the gravity of the penalties that are established for the transgressors,
- the interpretation of experts and the customs of the community, tacitly accepted by the legislator.

A transgression of the law, no matter how small, is always serious when implying a *formal contempt* of the law. Formal contempt means that the law is violated not out of aversion to the thing prescribed, but out of aversion to the legitimate authority as such (not to the specific person exercising it). It is precisely this serious rebellion that constitutes a mortal sin.⁵

91. The Binding Force of Some Special Laws

An *invalidating law* establishes that an act that is valid in itself is invalid, or at least rescindable, if specific formalities are not fulfilled. This is not the same as a *prohibiting law*, which makes an act illicit but not necessarily invalid.

Invalidating laws usually apply to contracts. The act may become directly invalid (like a marriage without two witnesses) or rescindable by a court sentence (like a last will that lacks some requirement).

Incapacitating laws are similar to invalidating laws, but they apply to persons rather than things or actions. Thus, a lawyer may be incapacitated for the practice of law.

The effects of invalidating and incapacitating laws are independent from the good faith of the subject. Thus, if a priest or deacon assisting has no jurisdiction, a marriage is null, even though all participants may be convinced of its validity.

Merely penal laws are those that impose no moral obligation, but bind only by means of a penalty. Many authors deny the existence of such laws, since it seems that binding in conscience belongs to the nature of the law. Those admitting their existence reduce the obligation of fulfilling them to the acceptance of the penalty imposed.

92. The Binding Force of Civil Law

Civil authorities have a true power to issue civil laws, which are necessary for the right ordering of civil society. Without laws, society could not fulfill its proper end, which is helping its members achieve their temporal good.

The object of civil law comprises those external human acts that lead to the attainment of society's temporal good. Just civil laws bind in conscience. Here the term *just* is really superfluous since, as we have seen, unjust laws are not laws at all.

We may add further clarifications on the obligation of some civil laws:

- Civil laws that regulate the transfer of ownership or establish rights bind in conscience according to commutative justice (which governs relations between physical or juridical persons) and not just legal justice (which governs obedience to authority). Thus, their transgression implies an obligation to make restitution, as we shall see when we study the virtue of justice.
- Invalidating civil laws bind in conscience after a court sentence. Thus, a commercial contract that is rescinded by a judge must also be held as invalid in conscience.

Specific obligations of some civil laws, like tax laws, will be studied in connection with the virtue of justice.

93. The Fulfillment of the Law

The proper way of fulfilling the law can be sufficiently clarified with the following principles:

- The fulfillment of the law does not require that the act be done out of virtue or justice. Thus, a person who goes to Mass on Sunday because otherwise he would have to go to Confession still fulfills the precept.
- The fulfillment of the law does not require the intention to obey the law; it is enough to intend the prescribed action. Thus, a person who goes to Mass unaware that it is a Sunday or holy day of obligation does fulfill the precept. Someone who is going to a Saturday afternoon Mass out of devotion, intending to attend also Sunday Mass, would fulfill the precept even if he fails to attend again on Sunday.
- When a law establishes a period of time *to complete* an act, the obligation ceases when the term expires. Thus, a person who misses Sunday Mass is not bound to go on Monday. But if the term is established *to encourage* an act, the obligation remains after its expiration. Thus, someone who fails to fulfill the Easter precept is still bound to receive Communion as soon as possible.

94. Interpretation of the Law

Simple interpretation is the genuine explanation of the law, either through a clarification of the intention of the legislator, or through an exposition of the legal obligation. By itself, it does not add anything to the law; it just explains its contents.

Authentic interpretation is that done by the legislator himself, his successors, or those whom he has empowered to do so. *Customary interpretation* is that proceeding from legitimately introduced customs. It is similar to jurisprudence or judicial interpretation. *Doctrinal interpretation* is that done by law experts.

From these definitions, we can easily deduce the following principles:

- Authentic interpretation has the force of the law, and binds as strictly as the law itself.
- Customary and doctrinal interpretations that are applied with the silence of the legislator—who could easily object—are to be admitted and followed.

Epikeia or *equity* is a benign and equitable interpretation, not of the law itself, but of the intention of the legislator. It is assumed that, in an extraordinary particular case, the legislator would not want to enforce the law if its application would cause a great harm or burden. Thus, when a traffic light is out of order and with the red light on, it would be very burdensome for drivers to comply with the law; it is assumed that the legislator does not want them to remain there for hours or days until the light is repaired.

The use of *epikeia* requires common sense and love for justice. Some rules must be observed:

- *Epikeia* can be used whenever a law becomes harmful, burdensome, and difficult to observe.
- *Epikeia* cannot be applied in the following cases:
 - A legitimate dispensation can be easily obtained. Thus, in the previous example, if a policeman is directing traffic, one cannot cross until he gives the signal.
 - It is clearly a matter of natural law. Unlike human legislators, God can foresee all particular cases. Thus, one can never use *epikeia* to tell a lie.

95. Suspension of the Law

Either the law or its binding force can be suspended.

95a) Suspension of the Law's Binding Force

The binding force of the law ceases, while the law itself remains, in the following cases:

- *Ignorance* of the subject. This has been discussed in the chapter devoted to human acts.
- *Impossibility*. We can distinguish between the following:
 - *Absolute or physical impossibility*. When there is no possible way of fulfilling a law, there is no obligation to do it. Thus, a ship's passenger is not bound to hear Mass on Sundays if there is no Mass in the ship.
 - *Moral impossibility*. Great difficulty excuses a person from the fulfillment of human and divine positive law, but not of natural law. Bad weather can excuse an elderly person from going to Mass, but nothing—not even saving one's life—excuses from a precept of natural law, such as not blaspheming.
- *Dispensation*. This is the suspension of the law or of its obligation in a particular case, granted by the competent authority for a special and proportionate reason. Canon law forbids marriage of two first cousins but, in special cases, if there is a sufficient reason, a dispensation may be granted.
- *Privilege*. It may also suspend the obligation of the law. Privilege is a favorable private law that overrules or extends the common law. Since it has the character of a law, it must be permanent and stable, useful for the community, and established by the authority who is in charge of the community.

95b) Suspension of the Law Itself

The law itself may be suspended in the following cases:

- *Abrogation.* The same authority who has power to establish the law can abrogate it.
- *Cessation of its purpose.* When the purpose for which it was created disappears, the law is suspended. Thus, when prayers are prescribed for the fruits of an ecclesiastical congress, the law ceases when the congress is over.
- *Custom.* This is a certain right introduced by usage that, in the absence of a law, is accepted as law. This “absence of law” may refer to ambiguity in the law, and then custom fills the gap *according to the law*, by clarifying it. It may also refer to lack of universality or of extension, and then custom acts *beyond the law (praeter legem)*, extending its application. It may also refer to the uselessness of the law, in which case custom makes up for it *against the law*. For a custom to be legitimate, it must be reasonable and have the consent of the competent authority.

1. Cf. CCC, 894–896.
2. Cf. ST, I-II, q. 91, a. 3; CCC, 1902.
3. Cf. ST, I-II, q. 96, a. 4.
4. Cf. CCC, 1903.
5. Cf. D.M. Prümmer, *Manuale Theologiae Moralis*, 1:20.

The Commandments of the Law of God and of the Church: The Theological and Moral Virtues

by Enrique Moliné

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The Commandments of the Law of God and of the Church

The Theological and Moral Virtues

by Enrique Moliné

Introduction

After having studied the Fundamentals of Moral Theology, that is, the general principles that direct human behavior, we are now going to examine the *specific moral obligations* in the different fields of human conduct.

We will study both the natural and the supernatural obligations. We have studied the supernatural obligations directly related to the *sacraments* in the first volume, together with the dogmatic considerations (treatise **K, The Sacraments**). The natural obligations arising from marriage—a natural contract as well as a sacrament—have been also included in the first volume.

These natural and supernatural obligations can be approached following the *Commandments* of the Decalogue. The Decalogue is a compendium of all the natural obligations. Thus the supernatural obligations that pertain to faith, hope, and charity, as well as some of the Commandments of the Church, are usually studied under the First Commandment.

The second approach consists in studying first the acts to which the three *theological virtues* tend. The resulting obligations are strictly supernatural, although the natural obligation of loving God above all things is also included. The acts to which the four cardinal virtues tend are studied next.

Both approaches have their own advantages. The second is followed by St Ambrose of Milan in his *De Officiis* (“Treatise on Duties”), following the example of Aristotle and Cicero; St Thomas used it too.

We will use this approach. In either method, the topics studied are the same. We can establish the following correspondence:

- The **first three commandments** of the Decalogue and some Commandments of the Church are studied under the virtue of *religion*, which is a part of the virtue of justice, and the acts of the theological virtues referring directly to God; nos **1-13** and **61-68**.
- The **Fourth Commandment** is covered by the virtues of *piety, reverence, and obedience*, which are also parts of justice; nos. **69-77**.
- The **Fifth Commandment** is studied under the virtue of justice proper, as the *right to life*; nos. **14-18** and **33-34**.
- The **Sixth and Ninth Commandments** are studied under the virtue of *chastity*, which is a part of the virtue of temperance; no. **84a**) and **b**).
- The **Seventh and Tenth Commandments** correspond to the virtue of justice as the *right to property and work*; nos. **24-32** and **42-60**.
- The **Eighth Commandment** is considered under the virtue of *truthfulness*, also a part of justice; nos. **35-41**.

Part I

THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

10

The Virtues of Faith and Hope (Related to the First Three Commandments)

FAITH

MORAL LIFE BEGINS with faith in God. St. Paul talks of the “obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5; 16:26) as a basic obligation. He shows that ignorance of God is the source and explanation for many moral aberrations (cf. Rom 1:18–32). The first commandment asks us to take good care of our faith.¹

1. The Nature of Faith

In common language, *faith* has several meanings, ranging from opinion to conviction. Here, faith is a firm belief in what we are told based on the authority and honesty of the person who is affirming it. When the one affirming is God, we speak of faith in God, or supernatural faith.

The special relation between supernatural faith and hope is highlighted by a passage of the epistle to the Hebrews, which defines supernatural faith as “the assurance of things to be hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1).

Since virtues are known through their acts, before any further study of supernatural faith, we will briefly examine what the act of faith is.

2. The Act of Faith

*The act of faith is a firm, voluntary, and supernatural assent to the truths revealed by God, based on the authority of God himself.*²

The act of faith is an *assent*. The power by which man is able to assent to a truth is the speculative intellect.³ Since the intellect, however, does not see as evident what it believes, the will must move it to assent. Being a supernatural act, this requires a special divine motion. In short, the principal role belongs to the will.⁴

Basically, the *object* of faith, or what is believed, is God specifically considered as God—God in his deity and not merely as cause of creatures. Also included within the *object* of faith are the rest of the things that God has revealed to us, such as the humanity of Christ, the efficacy of the sacraments, and eternal reward or punishment. All this is believed insofar as it has been truly and formally revealed by God.⁵

The internal *motive* of faith is the authority of God who reveals (cf. Rom 10:17; Mt 11:25; 1 Thes 2:13).⁶

2a) Properties of the Act of Faith

The *properties* of the act of faith are as follows:

- The act of faith is *supernatural* in its object and its motive, as we have just seen. It is also supernatural because of its principle: supernatural grace, which moves the will to want and enlightens the intellect so that it may assent to the object of faith (cf. Jn 6:29; Eph 2:8).⁷
- The act of faith is *voluntary*, since the will commands the intellect to assent. In order to issue that command, though, the will needs the help of divine grace. We can thus say that faith is free (cf. Mk 16:14, 16ff; Jn 3:18).⁸
- The act of faith is *infallible*, since it is based on the authority of God as author of revelation. He can neither deceive nor be deceived.⁹
- The act of faith must be *firm*, that is, it must exclude any doubt (cf. Eph 4:14).¹⁰

3. The Virtue of Faith

The virtue of faith is that *supernatural habit* that makes the act of faith possible. It must be remembered that the supernatural virtues are like the powers of the supernatural organism and are infused together with grace.

Repeating the concepts used for the act of faith, we can define faith as “*a supernatural virtue*” by which, “*with the inspiration and help of God’s grace, we believe that what he has revealed is true, not because its intrinsic truth is seen with the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God who reveals it, of God who can neither deceive nor be deceived.*”¹¹

The virtue of faith is *infused by God in the soul* together with sanctifying grace.¹² Faith *increases* in the measure that sanctifying grace increases.

By itself, faith does not increase by repetition of acts. Nevertheless, through repeated acts of faith:

- one acquires a natural habit of removing the obstacles to the growth of faith;
- in the state of grace, one merits an increase in sanctifying grace and, on this account, an increase in the accompanying virtue of faith.

The same applies to the virtues of hope and of charity, which will be studied later. Among the *means* to make faith grow, we can mention:

- asking God to increase it, as the apostles begged the Lord: “Increase our faith!” (Lk 17:5),
- reading the Sacred Scriptures,
- receiving instruction on the truths of faith,
- practicing it in one’s words and life,
- doing apostolate.

The *weakening* of the above-mentioned natural habit can, in a manner of speaking, diminish faith. Strictly speaking, however, the supernatural virtues cannot diminish, just as our participation in the divine nature through sanctifying grace (which these virtues accompany) cannot diminish.

Though they cannot diminish, they can disappear: *Faith is lost* through an act of infidelity, or formal heresy, which is always a mortal

sin.¹³ It is only in this manner that faith can be lost. It is not possible to lose it “accidentally,” without one’s own guilt, or with only a slight guilt.

Faith is not lost when the loss of grace is caused by mortal sins against other virtues. Faith inheres in the intellect, which is not necessarily separated from God by mortal sin. But the will does break away from God, and thus charity is always lost with grace. Nevertheless, when grace is lost, faith becomes devoid of its end, since it no longer leads to the love of God. It is then called “formless faith” or “deformed faith,” because faith, which “arouses hope and works through love,”¹⁴ is now deprived of its proper function.

3a) Christian Attitude

Whoever consciously denies any one of the truths of faith, though still believing in the others, no longer believes with supernatural faith. Denying even one truth destroys the foundation of the faith; it implies denying that God cannot deceive nor be deceived or that the Church infallibly transmits these truths. Therefore, the other truths are believed merely as a matter of human opinion.¹⁵ Thus, among other doctrinal errors:

- a *fundamentalist* holds that what the Bible asserts is true, identifies the propositions that he personally considers to be asserted, and accepts them as true;
- a Christian *liberal* holds that some less important things that are asserted in the Bible are not true, establishes personally acceptable criteria for distinguishing important propositions from unimportant ones, and believes some things that the Bible says while disbelieving others.

A *Catholic*, however, believing that everything that is asserted in the Bible is true and that the whole Church cannot err in identifying divine truth, tries to share in the Church's understanding of Scripture and the Church's faith in the divine revealed truths found there.

Theology is "faith seeking understanding." After a person has accepted God's revelation, human reason should intervene to understand and justify the truths of faith. Thus, two fundamental attitudes follow:

- i) Man receives divine revelation with humility.
- ii) Man tries to cultivate and illuminate his faith.

And two obligations result:

- i) One must preserve one's faith, and avoid sins against it.
- ii) One must propagate the true faith.

4. The Necessity of Faith

Before studying how faith is necessary for salvation, we should distinguish two types of necessity.

There is *necessity as a means* when something is absolutely needed as an indispensable means to attain a certain end. For example, the eye is absolutely necessary for seeing, and sanctifying grace is absolutely necessary for eternal life.

There is *necessity by precept* when something is required because of a command of the legitimate authority. The reception of the Eucharist, for example, is necessary by precept to attain eternal life. Ignorance or moral impossibility usually excuses from this necessity, but there is no excuse for something that is necessary as a means.

4a) Faith is Necessary as a Means

The *virtue of faith* (habitual faith) is necessary as a means for all men: “Without faith, it is impossible to please God” (Heb 11:6).¹⁶

The *act of faith* (actual and explicit faith) is necessary as a means for all adults with the use of reason.

This act of faith must implicitly extend to all revealed truths, even if the believer does not actually know all of them. Besides, one must explicitly believe with supernatural faith that God exists and that he rewards good deeds and punishes evil ones (cf. Heb 11:6). It is held as probable opinion that explicit faith in Christ the Redeemer and in the Blessed Trinity is also necessary.

4b) Faith is Necessary by Precept

(1) *The internal act of faith*

There is a divine precept that requires an internal act of faith about all the chief articles of faith. This is done, for example, in praying the usual prayers.

Therefore, one must know and believe the truths contained in the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the sacraments that are necessary for all (Baptism, Penance, and Holy Eucharist).

These acts of faith must be done:

- when one comes to know these truths for the first time;
- when the Church proposes a new dogmatic definition;
- several times during one's life;
- probably, when death is imminent.

Besides, one must make an act of faith when it is required for the fulfillment of a certain obligation (as in the reception of the sacraments) and also when one suffers a serious temptation against faith that can be overcome only by an act of faith.

However, what we have been discussing is the bare and strictly necessary minimum. Besides, each Christian should endeavor to acquire a good knowledge of his faith, both of dogma and morals. It should be as complete as possible, and in keeping with the knowledge acquired in other fields as time passes. Moreover, there is an obligation to manifest and defend it.¹⁷

(2) *The external profession of faith*

There is a *divine precept* of externally professing one's faith, since the Church founded by Christ is visible, and its worship is also visible (cf. Mt 10:32–33). On the other hand, it would be irreverent toward God to conceal the faith for a trivial reason. The external manifestation of faith, moreover, also helps to strengthen it internally.

As to the extent of the external act of faith, this precept has positive and negative aspects. *It is never licit to deny the faith*, either directly—through formal heresy or apostasy—or indirectly—through some external action that, in the circumstances of that moment, is understood as a denial of the faith (cf. Mt 10:32–33; 2 Mc 6:18–31).

The positive aspect obliges us to manifest our faith:

- when it is required by the honor due to God, such as when the public authority questions us about our faith, or when somebody attempts to force us to deny the faith by words or by deeds;
- when the spiritual welfare of our neighbor requires it; for example, if keeping silent would cause scandal (cf. Rom 10:9ff; Mt 10:32ff).¹⁸

Ecclesiastical law demands an act of faith also on some occasions, as in Baptism or in receiving a heretic or a schismatic into the Church, in the induction of some ecclesiastical offices, and for theology professors.

Concealing the faith can be lawful in some circumstances, and sometimes it can even be necessary (cf. Mt 7:6).¹⁹

5. Sins Against Faith

One sins against faith *by omission* by failing to make an act of faith when it is necessary, or by neglecting the obligation of knowing the truths of faith.

There are two types of sins against faith *by commission*: by excess and by defect.

i) *Sins of excess* against faith are the following:

- *Rash credulity*, by which one believes as revealed by God things that are not (cf. 1 Jn 4:1)
- *Superstition*, which will be studied under the virtue of religion, to which it is also opposed

ii) *Sins of defect*²⁰ against faith are the following:

- *Infidelity* is the culpable lack of faith in an unbaptized person due to his rejection or contempt of it (cf. Mk 16:16). It is not sinful to be a pagan if one has not received a sufficient explanation of the faith. But we should keep in mind that all people are bound to seek the faith inasmuch as they have the obligation of seeking the truth and of embracing it once they have found it.²¹
- *Heresy* is the sin of a Christian who rejects the faith by stubbornly denying some revealed truth.
- *Apostasy*, an extreme form of heresy, is the complete rejection of Christian belief after having accepted it freely. Equivalent to apostasy is the position of Catholics who have fallen into indifferentism (“all religions are equally good”), pantheism, skepticism, agnosticism, Marxist or non-Marxist materialism, and any form of atheism.²²
- *Schism* is the voluntary separation from the Church by stubborn disobedience to the hierarchy. In itself, it is a sin against charity, not against faith, but it usually involves a sin of heresy as well.
- *Doubting the faith* consists in voluntarily admitting or entertaining doubts against some aspect of the content of the faith. This can be done either by positively questioning the faith or by failing to reject the doubts that may come to one’s mind.

5a) Moral Evil of these Sins

Heresy is a mortal sin *ex toto genere suo*, that is, it does not admit slight matter.²³ Heretics incur ecclesiastical penalties ranging from excommunication to refusal of Church burial.²⁴

Material heresy, that is, an involuntary error in the faith, is not a sin. This can easily be the case of people who are brought up in a heretical sect.

Any person who positively *doubts the faith*—by doubting some truth that is known to be taught by the Church—commits a sin of heresy; such doubt destroys the formal reason of faith. A person who has negative doubts—that is, who suspends his assent to some article of faith—is not a heretic, since there is no obstinacy or stubbornness. However, that person has to strive to overcome the temptations; otherwise, a sin would be committed. The sin would be venial or mortal depending on how proximate the danger of losing one's faith is.

6. Dangers for the Faith

6a) Dealings with Infidels and Heretics

Three general norms can be established for dealings with infidels and heretics (cf. Ti 3:10). The first applies to ordinary dealings; the other two apply to *communicatio in sacris*, the participation in sacred things, especially the sacraments:

- i) Generally speaking, dealing with infidels and heretics in ordinary life is lawful. It would be illicit in cases that entail a danger for the faith, such as if, for example, there is a danger of falling into indifferentism. On the other hand, such dealings are highly advisable when there is no danger and there is the possibility of drawing them closer to the faith. This apostolate is called *ad fidem propagandam*, “for the propagation of the faith.”
- ii) It is generally licit (and, at times, even advisable) to deal with non-Catholics in the religious sphere, and welcome them to Catholic rites. However, they cannot take an active part in the worship, and even less receive the sacraments. Among other reasons, they lack the dispositions that are needed to receive them fruitfully. This would be possible only in very exceptional cases, when there is good faith and the required dispositions are present. The Church has specified these cases in the *Code of Canon Law*.²⁵
- iii) Generally speaking, it is not licit for Catholics to participate in non-Catholic religious ceremonies. It is never licit to participate in their sacraments. One of the very few exceptions would be, under some circumstances, the Eastern Orthodox Churches.²⁶ On the other hand, material or passive participation may be licit with sufficient cause, as in attending a wedding of non-Catholics that is contracted before a non-Catholic minister.

6b) Non-Catholic Schools

Parents have the duty of sending their children to schools that will best help them in their task of giving Christian education to their children.²⁷ Attending non-Catholic schools can be a serious danger for the faith. It is never lawful if there is no way of counteracting the danger. This would be relatively easy if the school is truly nonsectarian, that is, has a respectful attitude toward the religious beliefs of its students, or whose instruction is even oriented toward natural religion. It would be much more difficult, on the other hand, if it is positively anti-Catholic or anti-religious.

The means to counteract these dangers are:

- vigilance over the influence of books, classmates, and professors on the students,
- education in the faith outside the school,
- frequent reception of the sacraments.

But, as always, the best defense is to “overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21). Whenever possible, parents should promote schools where they have control over the education of their children, both in the faith and in other matters. We should keep in mind that parents have the duty of bringing up and educating their children, and the right of being respected and assisted in the fulfillment of that duty. Parents delegate part of this task in the school, and are entitled to receive help from the state for its proper fulfillment.

6c) Dangerous Readings

It is not lawful to read publications that pose a danger for the faith. The closer the danger, the more illicit it is. In judging the danger in a concrete case, one must keep in mind that people usually tend to underestimate it. Therefore, especial care and vigilance must be exercised.²⁸

6d) Mixed Marriages

Marrying a non-Catholic usually constitutes a danger to the faith. For this reason, the Church has always discouraged mixed marriages, even to the extent of putting obstacles to their celebration.²⁹ Nevertheless, she tolerates them when some specific conditions are met. These are basically the obligation assumed by the Catholic party to have the children baptized and brought up in the Catholic religion, and that the non-Catholic spouse will not object to the other's practicing the Catholic religion.³⁰

6e) Man's Internal Dangers

Aside from the above-mentioned external dangers, there are other internal dangers. These are, basically, *pride* and *immorality*.

HOPE

MAN CANNOT RESPOND to the call of God's love by his own strength alone. Man must hope that God will give him the capacity to love him in return and fulfill the commandments of love. Through the virtue of hope, man confidently awaits the divine blessing and the beatific vision of God. It also entails fear of offending God's love and of provoking God's punishment.³¹

7. The Nature of Hope

Whereas, by faith, we accept the covenant of God's love and seek fulfillment in divine life, by hope, we live for the kingdom, relying on God's promise to bring us to that fulfillment. To believe God's self-revelation also means acting on it, expecting him to keep his promises. That is hope.

The theological virtue of hope can be defined as *a virtue infused by God in our will, by which we are assured that, with the help of God, we will receive both eternal happiness and the means to attain it*. Hope springs from faith and looks forward to the attainment of the Beatitudes.³²

The *object* of hope is God, whose possession will make us happy. It also includes that happiness and the means to reach it (cf. Ti 3:7; Tb 2:18).³³ However, the fact that this virtue also looks forward to personal happiness does not in the least diminish the merit of good works (cf. 1 Cor 9:25; Phil 3:14; 2 Tm 4:8; Rv 2:10; Ps 118:112).³⁴

The *reason* for hope is the omnipotence and goodness of God.

As to its *subject*, all the faithful possess the virtue of hope, even those in the state of sin. The souls in purgatory also have the virtue of hope. The only exceptions are formal heretics (because they have destroyed faith, which is the foundation of hope) and those having committed a mortal sin against hope and who are not yet forgiven.

But, as in the case of faith, those who have hope but have lost sanctifying grace are said to have formless hope.

The *properties* of hope are as follows:

- It is a *supernatural virtue*, like faith.
- It is *effective*; through it we not only hope, but also courageously strive to reach the object of our hope.
- It is *firm*, insofar as it rests on God, but it is not firm as regards the certitude of our cooperation. Thus, in this life, hope is always mixed with a certain degree of mistrust for ourselves. This helps us to be humble.

8. The Necessity of Hope

The *virtue of hope* (habitual hope) is necessary as a means for salvation.³⁵

Some *acts of hope* (actual hope) are necessary as a means for salvation for adults with the use of reason.

Acts of hope are also necessary by divine positive law (necessity from precept) in the following cases:

- At the beginning of moral life
- Some other times during one's life
- When death is imminent

Acts of hope are also accidentally necessary when there is a serious temptation against hope, or when an action that requires an act of hope must be performed (the Sacrament of Confession, for example).

9. Sins Against Hope

Sins against hope can be classified into three types:

- i) *Omission* is the failure to perform a necessary act of hope.
- ii) *Despair* consists in deliberately giving up any hope of eternal salvation.³⁶ Sometimes it is a mere faintheartedness. This is usually just a temptation that must be rejected. A different thing is *positive despair*, which leads to giving up all efforts to reach salvation, because the latter is deemed impossible. Positive despair is always a mortal sin (*ex toto genere suo*), since it implies mistrusting God, and leads away from him.³⁷
- iii) *Presumption* is a reckless confidence of reaching salvation by means other than those that are established by God.³⁸ It may have different manifestations:
 - Hoping to reach salvation by one's own means, without the help of God, as the Pelagian heresy held
 - Hoping to be saved by God's help alone, without one's own cooperation, as Luther claimed
 - Expecting God's help for evil deeds
 - Hoping to receive an extraordinary help of God without sufficient cause (tempting God)
 - Trusting God's mercy in such a way that one is led to sin more easily

1. Cf. CCC 1814–1816; 2087–2089.
2. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 2, a. 9.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 4, a. 2.
4. Cf. DS 2119; ST, I-II, q. 15, a. 6.
5. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 1, a. 1.
6. Cf. DS 3032.
7. Cf. DS 3008, 3010; DV, 5.
8. Cf. DS 1526, 3010; DV, 5; DH, 10.
9. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 4, a. 8.
10. Cf. DS 1333ff.
11. DS 3008; cf. CCC, 143.

12. Cf. DS 1530ff.
13. Cf. DS 1544.
14. *LG*, 41.
15. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 5, a. 3.
16. Cf. DS 3012.
17. Cf. *DH*, 14.
18. Cf. DS 2118.
19. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 3, a. 2 ad 3.
20. Cf. *CCC*, 2088, 2089; *CIC*, 751.
21. Cf. *DH*, 2.
22. Cf. *CCC*, 2123–2128; *CIC*, 1374.
23. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 10, aa. 3, 6; q. 20, a. 3.
24. Cf. *CIC*, 1364, 1184.
25. Cf. *Ibid.*, 844.
26. Cf. *CCC*, 1400.
27. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2229.
28. Cf. *CIC*, 823.
29. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1086, 1124.
30. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1125–26; *CCC*, 1635.
31. Cf. *CCC*, 1817–1821; 2090–2092.
32. Cf. *LG*, 48.
33. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 17, a. 2.
34. Cf. DS 1539, 1581.
35. Cf. DS 1530.
36. Cf. *CCC*, 2091.
37. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 40, a. 4 ad 3; II-II, q. 20, a. 4.
38. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 21, aa. 1–2; *CCC*, 2092.

The Virtue of Charity

FAITH IN GOD entails the obligation to correspond to divine love. The first commandment orders us to love God above all things and to love creatures for the love of God.¹

CHARITY IN GENERAL

10. The Bond of Perfection

Charity is the first and most important of all commandments, the summary of them all. The whole Law and the prophets depend on charity (cf. Mt 22:38; 1 Cor 13:1–13; Mt 22:40). Charity is the bond of perfection (cf. 1 Cor 3:14; Rom 3:10).²

Charity is a certain friendship with God. It can be defined as *a supernatural virtue infused by God, by which we love God for his own sake as the Supreme Good, and ourselves and our neighbor for God's sake.*

The *primary object* of charity is God in himself. Its *secondary object* are creatures insofar as they are related to God and are loved by him (cf. Mt 22:37–40). Thus, we also love ourselves with the love of charity, since we must want for ourselves what God wants, that is, our well-being.

The *reason* that moves us to love of God and his creatures is the very goodness of God, who is worthy of being loved in and for himself.

Charity is a “love of benevolence” in the sense that we love God for his own sake and not for the benefits that his love may bring us. It is also a “love of friendship” because, besides being disinterested, it is mutual and there is a communication of goods between both parties.

The more charity a person has, the holier he is. Furthermore, charity and faith are closely related. Faith is the act by which charity is accepted; thus, charity transforms faith itself. To believe in God out of love for him is living faith, and if one's entire life is integrated with faith, then one loves God with one's whole mind, heart, soul, and strength. That complete integration is sanctity.³

The definition of charity shows to what extent the love of God and the love of his creatures are related. They are inseparable in such a way that one cannot exist without the other. Moreover, both are acts of the same virtue, not of two similar virtues, but the love of creatures is subordinated to the love of God (cf. 1 Jn 4:12:21).

We will study separately the acts of charity toward God, ourselves, and our neighbor. Charity toward God belongs to the first commandment of the Law; the last two are to be considered in the context of the fifth commandment. All Christians are called to the fullness of Christian life, that is, sanctity. And this means exercising these acts in their highest perfection—sanctity is precisely the perfection of charity.⁴

CHARITY TOWARD GOD
(RELATED TO THE FIRST THREE
COMMANDMENTS)

11. Acts of Charity toward God

The *properties* of the act of charity toward God are the following:

- It is *supernatural*, as follows from the above.
- It is *effective*, since it is manifested in external deeds (cf. Jn 3:18ff; Jn 14:21).
- It is a love *above all things*. We must love God in such a way that we are willing to lose anything rather than his friendship, but this does not mean that we must feel his love more than any other (cf. Mt 10:37; 22:37).

Since charity is true friendship with God, it is incompatible with mortal sin, which is a separation from God and hence enmity with him. Thus, the act of charity—the resolution not to lose the friendship of God for any creature—destroys mortal sin and *justifies* (“makes just”) the sinner. After Christ instituted Baptism and Penance for the sinner’s justification, however, the act of charity—made with God’s help—must be united to the resolution in order to receive Baptism or Penance.

Charity is said to be the *form* of all virtues (cf. 1 Cor 13:4ff), meaning that all virtues must tend toward the proper object of charity: union with God. It also means that charity commands and marshals the other virtues. The acts of the other virtues are meritorious because of charity’s influence. That is why virtues are said to be *formless* when they are separated from charity.

12. The Necessity of Charity toward God

The *virtue of charity* (habitual charity) is necessary as a means of salvation for all people (cf. 1 Jn 4:16).

The *act of charity* (actual charity) is necessary as a means for adults with the use of reason in the following occasions:

- At the beginning of moral life
- Some times during one's life
- When, being in mortal sin, it is not possible for someone to receive the Sacraments of Baptism or Penance
- When death is imminent

This refers to the necessity of the act of charity *in itself*. Acts of charity are also *accidentally* necessary (*per accidens*) when required by another necessary action, such as:

- when one has to reject a temptation,
- when one has to recover sanctifying grace (for example, in order to receive a sacrament of the living) and there is no confessor available. The act of perfect contrition that is required in this case includes an act of charity.

13. Sins Against Charity toward God

The sins of *omission* against charity toward God are easily deduced from the previous section: omitting any of the necessary acts of charity.⁵ Among them, *indifference*, *ingratitude*, and *lukewarmness* can be included.

There are two sins of *commission*:

- *Hatred for God* is always a mortal sin (*ex toto genere suo*), whether he is hated because he can punish or because he commands something unpleasant, or—even worse—he is hated in himself.
- *Sloth*, or *acedia*, is a disgust for the spiritual goods because they are difficult to obtain and exercise, which leads to spiritual stagnation. It is opposed to charity, which delights in them.

CHARITY TOWARD OURSELVES (RELATED TO THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT)

14. To Love Oneself

Charity leads us to love ourselves insofar as we are creatures and children of God, destined for eternal salvation. The commandment of loving ourselves is implicitly contained in that of loving our neighbor as ourselves (cf. Mt 22:39).

We must love ourselves, body and soul, because we belong to God. The true and perfect love for oneself consists in following Christ, perfect man, who invited us to imitate him.

The moral evil of the damages man can inflict upon himself will be studied in the chapter that is devoted to justice, by analogy with those caused to other persons.

CHARITY TOWARD OUR NEIGHBOR (RELATED TO THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT)

15. The New Commandment

Jesus summed up the Decalogue in two commandments, the second of which is “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39; cf. Lv 19:18; Tb 4:16). It can be properly called the New Commandment, since Jesus set a new and much higher standard: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12).

16. Properties of Fraternal Charity

Fraternal charity, or charity toward our neighbor, should have the following properties:

- Charity must be *affective*—carried out with internal acts of love—and *effective*—manifested in external works of charity.
- It must be *universal*, extending to all creatures that are capable of eternal happiness. It excludes only the devils and the damned.
- Charity has to be *orderly*, both as regards the persons loved and the goods wanted for them.

The last two properties will be studied more in detail.

16a) The Universality of Charity

The commandment of love extends to *enemies* as well: those who have offended us and have not done any reparation yet, those who hate us, and those whom we simply dislike through no fault of theirs or ours (cf. Prv 25:21ff; Mt 5:43ff; 1 Jn 3:14ff).

We must love our enemies not simply because they are our enemies, but because they are human beings and children of God. They must be loved in spite of being enemies, we could say. This has several specific consequences:

- One has to put aside all ill will (hatred, or desiring evil for the enemy) and thirst of revenge. One cannot curse an enemy.
- The enemy has to be shown all common signs of good will. There is no need to show extraordinary appreciation, as we do with friends.
- One has to seek reconciliation. The offender is bound to take the initiative in this regard, but since it often happens that parties blame each other, it is advisable that both take the first step toward reconciliation.

16b) Order as regards Persons

Charity should be orderly as regards the persons loved. Provided that the necessity and the quality of the goods are the same, the order of preference is as follows:

- Love of self comes before love of others, since this is the standard to imitate: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39). It would not be reasonable to risk one’s own eternal salvation in order to save another. For example, one should not attempt to convert a heretic if there is danger losing one’s own faith instead.
- Other persons must be loved according to their closeness to God and ourselves. As regards the latter, the usual order of precedence is: spouse, children, parents, brothers and sisters, other close relatives, friends, benefactors.

16c) Order as regards the Goods

There is also an order in the benefits that we must wish for our neighbor: first, *supernatural spiritual goods*, such as grace and salvation; second, *corporal goods*, such as life, health, bodily integrity; and third, *external goods*, such as good reputation, honor, and wealth. Some principles can be established:

- A person in extreme spiritual need must be helped even at the risk of one's life, provided that there is reasonable hope of succeeding and it does not conflict with the common good (cf. 1 Jn 3:16).
- If the spiritual need is not extreme, there is no obligation to risk one's life or even some great personal damage in order to help, unless it is required by the common good or by the special obligations of one's position.
- When a neighbor is in serious spiritual or corporal need, one is bound to help only if it can be done without great inconvenience (*cum mediocri incommodo*), unless justice, mercy, or one's position demand a greater effort.
- A person in ordinary or slight need must be helped if it causes only a small inconvenience (*cum levi incommodo*).

17. External Acts of Fraternal Charity

17a) Works of Mercy

Mercy is the moral virtue that inclines the will to feel due compassion for our neighbor's distress and to alleviate it.

The traditional, non-exhaustive listing includes seven spiritual and seven corporal works of mercy (cf. Mt 25:31–46).⁶ The *spiritual works of mercy* are:

- to admonish the sinner,
- to instruct the ignorant,
- to counsel the doubtful,
- to comfort the sorrowful,
- to bear wrongs patiently,
- to forgive all injuries, and
- to pray for the living and the dead.

The *corporal works of mercy* are:

- to feed the hungry,
- to give drink to the thirsty,
- to clothe the naked,
- to visit the imprisoned,
- to shelter the homeless,
- to care for the sick, and
- to bury the dead.

The works of mercy have not lost their relevance. They cannot be considered as a cheap substitutive or a lesser and imperfect form of justice.⁷ As we shall see later, justice requires giving to each one what is his due, what he is strictly entitled to. Mercy stems from charity and goes further, leading us to love others with the love of God. There is often a strict obligation to perform a work of mercy, but it stems from God's commandment, not from the right of the beneficiary.

All the works of mercy are necessary, but the spiritual works are more important than the corporal ones; the gift is more important, since it is spiritual; the act of giving is more noble, since it is also spiritual; and the recipient—the spirit—is also more noble.⁸ Thus, *apostolate* is the best

work of mercy, since it tries to communicate the highest possible good: being close to God.⁹

Many of these works of mercy can be reduced to two: fraternal correction and almsgiving, which we will study separately.

17b) Fraternal Correction

Fraternal correction is an admonition made out of charity, by which one attempts to free another person from sin or from danger of sin (cf. Mt 18:15–17).¹⁰

Generally speaking, fraternal correction is a requirement of natural law and of divine positive law. It is a serious obligation. In practice, however, the obligation to make fraternal correction is serious only in the following cases:

- One knows that another person is in a serious spiritual need that can be solved through a fraternal correction.
- It does not cause great inconvenience (*sine magno incommodo*).

However, if the subject is known to be receptive and take fraternal correction well, or if there is a mutual agreement to make fraternal correction, both the advisability and the obligation would extend to many other cases.

17c) Almsgiving

Almsgiving is an act of the virtue of mercy that is demanded by the virtue of charity.¹¹ Its object is relieving our neighbor's material needs through a donation (cf. Dt 15:11; Sir 4:1; Tb 4:7; Is 58:7).

Generally speaking, both natural and divine positive law require us to give alms to the poor. In practical cases, the obligation to give alms depends on the capacity of the donor and the need of the beneficiary. The following rules can serve as an orientation:

- The mere obligation of charity does not bind anyone to give to others what is necessary for one's own life.
- We are bound to help those in *extreme need* with our superfluous goods and also with those that are only relatively necessary (cf. 1 Jn 3:17). The latter include, for example, those goods that are needed to keep one's station in life. They are exempted, however, if giving them out would cause serious inconvenience (*cum magno incommodo*).
- We are obliged to help those who are in *serious need* with our superfluous goods.
- In case of *slight need*, occasional almsgiving out of our superfluous goods is a serious obligation (cf. Ps 40:2–4), but we are not bound to give to any specific person.

Sometimes, we hear about spiritual almsgiving referred to giving advice, instruction, or fraternal correction.

18. Sins against Fraternal Charity

Some of the sins against charity toward our neighbor are:

- *Hatred, enmity, or ill will*, which are desiring evil for our neighbor,
- *Envy*,¹² or bitter resentment for another's good fortune, which is seen as bad for us because it lessens our own excellence or glory,
- *Discord* ("separation of hearts") or dissent of wills, which is not to be confused with disagreement or dissent of opinions,
- *Quarrels* or unruly verbal disputes,
- *Fights* or physical altercations among persons, which are licit only in case of self-defense.

The moral evil of all these sins is plain and evident. But there are two other sins that can pose more difficult moral problems: *scandal* and *cooperation in evil*. Actually, these are not two different sins, but two different degrees of the same sin. We will study them separately.

18a) Scandal

The term *scandal* originally meant “stumbling-block,” something that can make one trip and fall. It can be defined as *any evil saying, deed, or omission that constitutes an occasion for others to fall into sin* (cf. Mt 18:6ff).¹³

There are different types of scandal. *Direct scandal* includes the intention to make others sin. *Formal* or *diabolic scandal* is a direct scandal that is aimed at corrupting and harming, rather than at the benefit that one may get from another’s sin. *Indirect scandal* is that in which the other person’s sin is foreseen but not directly intended.

If the scandal is suffered because of the victim’s ignorance, without any objective reason, we have the *scandal of the weak* or *scandalum pusillorum* (“scandal of little ones”). Such is the case of someone who is scandalized because a “mature” person likes modern music.

If the scandal is due to the victim’s own evil intention, without any objective reason, we have a *pharisaic scandal*. This was the case of the Pharisees, who thought Jesus sinned by curing on the Sabbath (cf. Mt 15:12–14).

Direct scandal is a mortal sin *ex genere suo*, and thus admits slight matter. It is a double sin against charity and the specific virtue that is violated by the other person’s sin. The seriousness of the scandal is proportional to its intentionality, its influence over the other person’s sin, and the seriousness of that sin.

Indirect scandal is a sin against charity, but not against the virtue that is violated by the other person’s sin.

The *scandal of the weak* must be avoided whenever possible without great inconvenience (*sine gravi incommodo*) (cf. Rom 14:13–23). There is no obligation of avoiding a *pharisaic scandal* if there is a reasonable cause for the action.

A mere occasion of sin is not a scandal. But one must consider whether an action that involves a potential occasion of sin for others is lawful or not. The situation must be studied in the light of the norms for indirectly voluntary actions.

A scandal demands *reparation* since it violates fraternal charity and, at times, even justice and the common good. Public scandal must be

repaired in public. The reparation of private scandal need extend only to the victims.

18b) Cooperation in Evil

(1) *Definition and types*

Cooperation in evil usually means—among other meanings that we will not study here—any assistance or collaboration in another person’s evil deed. This covers a wide range of actions, from the different types of complicity and incitation to material cooperation. The latter would be the case, for example, of those who sell the instrument used to commit a sin.

We can further narrow this concept by distinguishing it from scandal, or inciting another to commit a sin. In cooperation in evil, there is no direct influence over the evil intention of the other; one’s cooperation just makes the other’s action possible or easier. Thus, any kind of cooperation influencing another’s decision to sin is morally equivalent to scandal—an extremely serious sin severely condemned by our Lord (cf. Mt 18:6–9). This would be the case of those who teach others how to do evil deeds, sin so that others may imitate them, or advise others to sin.

In order to judge the morality of cooperation in evil in specific cases, we must distinguish the different types of cooperation. The main distinction is between formal and material cooperation. In *formal cooperation*, one wants or consents to the other’s sin, with or without external manifestation. In *material cooperation*, the other’s evil act is neither wanted nor consented to. There is collaboration as to the performance of the physical action, but the will neither wants to offend God nor wants the other to offend him.

Depending on how close the collaboration in the evil deed is, we can speak of mediate or immediate cooperation. *Immediate* or *direct cooperation* assists in the performance of the sinful act itself, as the anesthetist in an unlawful surgical operation. *Mediate* or *indirect cooperation* involves only supplying the instrument to be used in another’s sin. It does not have any direct connection with the sin. For example, selling a drug or a weapon that the buyer will later use for a crime.

We can still make another distinction between *proximate* and *remote cooperation*, based on the degree of physical or moral closeness between the help that is given and the sin itself. This division is related to the preceding one, since direct cooperation is always proximate; indirect cooperation, however, may be proximate or remote. If a bank finances an abortion campaign, for example, its directors cooperate in a proximate and

mediate way. The depositors and stockholders, on the other hand, cooperate in a remote and mediate way by making it possible with their money.

(2) *Morality of cooperation in evil*

The following criteria allow us to judge the morality of cooperation in evil in specific cases.

Formal cooperation is always illicit. It implies wanting or consenting to another's sin, which is in itself a sin. St. Paul decries it after listing the sins of those who reject God: "Those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but they approve those who practice them" (Rom 1:32).

Generally speaking, mere material cooperation is also illicit. Charity binds us to prevent inasmuch as possible our neighbor's sins—cooperation is, of course, out of the question.

In some particular circumstances, *material cooperation may be lawful in order to obtain a necessary good or avoid a great damage.* Charity does not bind us to avoid another person's sin when this would cause us a great inconvenience or require a disproportionate effort. Obviously, cooperation is not lawful if there are other ways to obtain the good or avoid the damage.

Nevertheless, the above condition is not sufficient to make material cooperation lawful. The rules that govern the morality of double effect (or indirectly voluntary) acts also must be followed. These rules can be summarized as follows:

- The action of the collaborator must be in itself good or indifferent.
- The intention of the collaborator must be good: All formal cooperation and illicit intention must be excluded.
- There must be a proportionate cause to justify the cooperation. This is the most delicate factor to evaluate, at times posing great difficulties. The good to be obtained—or evil to be avoided—must be carefully balanced against the evil that is caused by one's cooperation.
- The good effect that is sought should not be a consequence of the evil action with which one cooperates.

Rectitude of intention is needed in applying these principles to a possible cooperation in evil. As regards the intention of the collaborator, the fact that, if one does not help, someone else will does not make cooperation lawful. Neither is the moral certitude that the sin will be committed just the same without our help enough to make it lawful.

In assessing the proportionate or reasonable cause mentioned, one must consider the seriousness of the sin involved, the certainty that it will actually be committed, the closeness of the cooperation that is sought, and the consequences for third parties. Great rectitude is required to decide whether the cause is proportionate to the evil results of one's cooperation.

Even when all the above conditions have been met, there are still two other requirements:

- i) Scandal must be avoided. Others—especially persons with poor formation—may think that one is consenting to the sin committed.
- ii) Proximate occasions of sin must be avoided. Cooperating in another's sins through good or indifferent actions often entails the danger of eventually consenting to those sins. Therefore, one must apply the proper means to remove the occasion of sin.

Cases that raise the possibility of cooperation in evil pose complex moral problems. These must be studied in the presence of God. One must be humble enough to ask for advice. In addition, a good Christian should have a positive spiritual outlook: cooperation in good, seeking and spreading the good, helping others to find Christ.

1. Cf. *CCC*, 1822–1832; 2093–2094.
2. Cf. *LG*, 42.
3. Cf. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*, 330.
4. Cf. *LG*, 41; St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 291.
5. Cf. *CCC*, 2094.
6. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2447–2449.
7. Cf. *AA*, 8.
8. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 32, a. 3.
9. Cf. *GS*, 28.
10. Cf. *CCC*, 1435, 1829.
11. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2447, 2462.
12. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2538.
13. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2284–2287.

Part II

THE MORAL VIRTUES

12

The Virtue of Prudence

19. Prudence as a Natural Virtue

Generally speaking, *prudence* can be defined as the *right judgment on actions* (*recta ratio agibilium*). This refers only to moral acts. Physical actions belong to the non-moral virtue of art, or technique (*recta ratio factibilium*).¹

Prudence is thus defined as an intellectual virtue, since deliberating on the best way of doing something pertains to the practical function of the intellect. But the same definition also applies to prudence in its most proper sense, that is, as a moral virtue: *the right judgment that ordains human acts to the last end of human life*. We could also define it as the habit of properly choosing the means for a morally good end, or the knowledge of which things to seek and which to reject.

Prudence perfects practical moral reason. Its acts—consulting, judging, and advising—are proper to reason. The act of prudence, however, cannot be identified with this practical judgment alone. There must also be a command of the will so that the action is carried out. A person who knows what to do but does not do it cannot be called prudent.

Therefore, complete prudence includes the uprightness of the appetites, that is, the concurrence of the other moral virtues. In other words, prudence needs the other moral virtues, which in turn need prudence in order to know the just mean in their respective objects—as we saw when we studied moral virtues in general.

20. Prudence as a Supernatural Virtue

We have just seen the human or natural virtue of prudence, which is an acquired virtue. Its supernatural counterpart, however, is an infused virtue. It could be defined as the *infused supernatural virtue through which the intellect, illumined by faith, informed by charity, and moved by the Holy Spirit, determines what is to be done as befitting the supernatural end, and what is to be avoided as unbecoming of it.*

Like all supernatural virtues with a natural counterpart, supernatural and natural prudence differ in the following points:

- *Efficient cause* of its acquisition: God through grace is the efficient cause of supernatural prudence, whereas the efficient cause of natural prudence is the repetition of acts.
- *End*: Supernatural prudence corresponds to a supernatural end, whereas natural prudence is ordered merely toward a natural end.
- *Principles*: The principles of natural prudence are: (1) understanding the first moral principles (do good and avoid evil), (2) understanding the other moral principles that are accessible to natural reason (natural law and its consequences), and (3) the orientation toward the natural good. Those of supernatural prudence are: (1) understanding the same moral principles, but with the enlightenment of faith (that is, with the additional knowledge of revealed truths), and (2) the orientation toward the supernatural good through charity.²

Supernatural prudence essentially presupposes faith informed by charity.³ The *gift of counsel*, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, helps supernatural prudence achieve its end in the most perfect possible way.

We will study now the way in which supernatural prudence acts. The deepest principles of prudence are the theological virtues, especially informed faith. These principles are studied and explained by moral and dogmatic theology. Prudence draws conclusions from these premises, applies them to practical cases, and issues a judgment on what should be done or avoided. This judgment, as we already know, is called *conscience*.

Prudence directs the intellect to determine the golden mean, the right mean of the other virtues. This is the reason of its great importance. It also explains why prudence has traditionally been called *auriga virtutum*, “the guide of the virtues” (cf. Prv 3:13–17; 16:16; Wis 7:7; Mt 10:16).

21. The Acts of Prudence

The acts of prudence⁴ are three:

- i) *Deliberation*: to take counsel carefully, to ask, to gather information, to seek advice, to study the means that are needed to perform an action in a virtuous way
- ii) *Judgment*: to sift through the facts and data and come to a conclusion, to reach the conclusion after deliberation
- iii) *Command*: to apply those counsels and judgments to action, to direct the order issued to the faculties so that the action is performed according to the judgment; this is the chief and most characteristic act of prudence

22. The Parts of Prudence

The prerequisites for prudence's proper operation are called *integral parts of prudence*. There are eight of them: Five refer to the intellectual deliberation, and three to the implementation of the decision that is reached:

- i) Recalling past events; this is *experience*
- ii) *Clear knowledge of the present*, understanding the situation and the moral principles that are to be applied; this is a sharpness of mind to have a true picture of the facts
- iii) *Docility*, eagerness to learn from others
- iv) Shrewdness, a quick conjecture about the means to be used to reach an end; this is *facility in connecting ideas*, and promptness to decide on urgent matters
- v) Reason, a *readiness to infer* one thing from another
- vi) *Providence*, a consideration and forecasting of future events; this is the ability to anticipate and the *foresight* to prepare for the future
- vii) *Circumspection*, a careful consideration of the circumstances
- viii) *Caution* in avoiding the obstacles and evils that could occur

In any case, nothing is more useful for practicing prudence than considering things according to their value for eternity.

Subjective parts of prudence are the specific kinds of prudence that apply to specific human actions. These are *personal prudence* and *political prudence*. The latter is sometimes subdivided into military, legislative, and economic prudence.

Potential parts are annexed virtues that are concerned with secondary acts or matters. The three potential parts of prudence are:

- i) *Eubulia*: the habit of seeking right counsel,
- ii) *Synesis*, or good sense: the virtue of judging aright according to ordinary rules,
- iii) *Gnome*: the virtue of judging aright from the higher principles, the unbiased judgment or the sense of making proper exception, being able to distinguish those cases that go out of common norms; *epikeia* is a virtue intimately related to this.

23. Sins Against Prudence

The sin that is opposed to prudence by defect is *imprudence*. There are four kinds of imprudence:

- i) Precipitation
- ii) Thoughtlessness, or lack of consideration of all circumstances, which always follows the former
- iii) Inconstancy
- iv) Negligence.

All these arise from lust, which darkens the judgment of reason, due to excessive attachment to material things. Envy and anger may also be factors.

The sins that are opposed to prudence *by excess* are:

- *prudence of the flesh*, or ignoring supernatural considerations,
- *cunning*, which leads to *deceit* and *fraud*,
- *anxiety for temporal things* and for the future.

All these take their origin from avarice, which makes one put his heart in the things of this world: money, and the like.

1. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 54, a. 4; *CCC*, 1806, 1835.
2. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 65, a. 2.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 47, aa. 13–14.
4. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 47, a. 8.

13

The Virtue of Justice
(Related to the Seventh and Tenth
Commandments)

GENERAL OUTLOOK OF JUSTICE

24. Definition of Justice

In Sacred Scripture, the term *justice* often means the whole array of virtues: full and complete moral goodness (cf. Mt 5:6, 20). In other passages, it means the state of sanctifying grace (cf. Rom 4:3). In other occasions, it also means the *cardinal virtue of justice* proper, which can be defined as *the perpetual and constant will to render to each one his right*.¹

The three essential properties of justice directly follow from the definition:

- i) Justice always refers *to another person*. Strictly speaking, there are no obligations of justice toward oneself.
- ii) The object of justice is not a free gift, but something that is *strictly due*.
- iii) Justice does not demand an approximate compensation, but only what is *exactly due*, neither more nor less.

The differences between fraternal charity and justice are worth noting. Justice is based on the distinction between persons, while charity is based on their union through love. Out of justice, we give our neighbor what is his; out of charity, we give what is ours. Charity is superior to justice, but the duties of justice are stricter than those of charity.

A peculiar trait of justice is that it does not only aim at the right mean dictated by reason, as the other virtues do, but that it also aims at the mean of what is due, or *objective mean*, which is often quantifiable.

SUBJECTIVE PARTS OF JUSTICE

25. Division of the Subjective Parts of Justice

Modern authors usually distinguish three kinds of justice: *legal justice* (duties of the individual toward the community), *distributive justice* (duties of the community toward the individual), and *commutative justice* (duties of an individual toward other individuals).²

This division, however, has not gone unchallenged, with objections arising as early as the sixteenth century. The proper way to classify virtues is according to their primary end, not according to the persons to whom they are directed. Therefore, the traditional division of Aristotle and St. Thomas³ seems to be more appropriate:

- *Legal, general, or social justice* is directly and primarily aimed at the *common good*. These terms are taken here as equivalent.
- *Particular justice* is directed to the *private good*. It can be further divided into:
 - commutative justice,
 - distributive justice.

26. General Justice

General justice is the *stable determination to render to civil or ecclesiastical society what is its due.*⁴

Man has a social nature. Since he needs the company (*societas*) of others, he has duties toward this society. The virtue that inclines the will to fulfill these social duties is called general justice, because it aims at the general, social, or *common good*, and also because it directs man's actions to that good in a general way. This virtue moves citizens to pay their taxes and obey the law, civil servants to fulfill their duties, legislators to make just laws, judges to apply them properly, etc. It is also called legal justice because its main function is establishing and obeying laws.

General justice is especially necessary for the common good. When it is not practiced, peace is disturbed and citizens are sorely harmed, especially if the rulers are the ones breaking it by issuing unjust laws.

26a) Taxes

Citizens violate general justice by breaking civil laws and, specifically, by not paying their taxes.

From the moral point of view, just taxes must be paid, since they are indispensable for society (cf. Mt 17:26–27; 22:21).⁵ This is a serious obligation of conscience (cf. Rom 13:5–7). Restitution must be made for tax evasion. It is not only violations of commutative justice that require restitution. In some occasions, legal and distributive justice also impose an obligation to make restitution, because they are required by justice as well. In this case, the recipient of the restitution can be society itself or the persons whom society should help—the poor. But the amount to be returned is often difficult to assess.⁶

Like all laws, tax laws should, in principle, be held as just, unless there is evidence to the contrary. Tax laws, however, should be carried out with some lenience, since at times, because of widespread tax evasion, tax rates are higher than it would otherwise be necessary. In these cases, strict observance would penalize honest taxpayers. The extent of that tolerance, though, is difficult to determine; it depends on the time and place, and sometimes, there should be none.

In theory, if there is evidence that public funds are used for illicit purposes—for example, financing pornographic movies, sterilization programs, or abortion—one may deduct a proportional amount from one's taxes. Nobody is obliged to pay unjust taxes, but the evidence must be solid. An upright conscience is thus needed, and all possible scandal must be avoided.

There is no objection, of course, to using every available legal means to reduce one's taxes. This is not a breach of the law, but rather a strict fulfillment of all its terms and provisions.

26b) Cooperation in Public Affairs

Citizens must feel concern for the affairs of their community.⁷ Everyone must cooperate in his own position so that society at large, and all the natural or voluntary associations within it, may enjoy harmony, peace, justice, and efficiency.

The primary cooperation consists in fulfilling one's patent duties: respecting natural morals in dealing with other citizens, obeying just laws, paying taxes.

They should also be willing to vote in elections for public office and for other associations to which they may belong (unions, professional associations, committees, cultural or leisure associations). In casting their vote, citizens must consider in conscience the governmental programs (morality, effectiveness, convenience, and feasibility) and the candidates (rectitude, competence). After careful consideration, the voters should elect the most trustworthy candidate—or, if worse comes to worst, the one they mistrust less. Neglecting this duty without just cause may easily be an objectively serious transgression.

Aside from this, their sense of solidarity must move citizens to actively participate in the smooth running of these societies. They should be willing to devote time and effort to tasks that will benefit the community, each according to his position and abilities. Some could take care of organizing the town festival, while others could enter politics in a professional way. In any case, they should be moved by a desire to serve all the members of their respective communities. Thus, in a most natural and spontaneous way, citizens directly contribute to the common good through their goodwill, honesty, experience, and dedication.

The citizen is obliged in conscience not to follow the directives of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order, to the fundamental rights of persons or the teachings of the Gospel. Refusing obedience to civil authorities, when their demands are contrary to those of an upright conscience, finds its justification in the distinction between serving God and serving the political community....

Armed resistance to oppression by political authority is not legitimate, unless all the following conditions are met: 1) there is certain, grave, and prolonged violation of fundamental rights; 2) all other means of redress have been exhausted; 3) such resistance will not provoke worse disorders; 4) there is well-founded hope of success; and 5) it is impossible reasonably to foresee any better solution.⁸

27. Particular Justice

Particular justice is the stable determination to give to each physical or juridical person what is his due. Its two main species are commutative justice and distributive justice.⁹

27a) Commutative Justice

Commutative justice is a private person's stable determination to give another private person what is strictly his due. There must be an absolute equality between what is given and what is received.

The term *commutative* refers to the commutations or exchanges that it primarily covers, like buying and selling. It also applies to other subjects, like the matter of the last six commandments of the Decalogue.¹⁰

Commutative justice is not stricter than legal justice or distributive justice. Just like these, it requires restitution when transgressed. Here, however, the object or amount of the restitution is much easier to determine, and thus the obligation is more pressing.

27b) Distributive Justice

Distributive justice is the stable determination that inclines the ruler of a community to equitably distribute burdens and honors among its members according to their capacities and merits. Unlike commutative justice, it does not require absolute equality, but rather proportional equality.¹¹

The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin.¹²

27c) Vindictive Justice

We can still distinguish a third kind of particular justice, vindictive justice, which inclines the ruler of a community to punish crime with the right penalties. It can be considered as part of distributive justice if we focus on the determination of the appropriate penalty. It will also be a part of legal justice if we consider its impact on the common good; or of commutative justice, since the judge is obliged to punish crime, and would not fulfill the duties of his office if he fails to do so.

POTENTIAL PARTS OF JUSTICE

28. Division of the Potential Parts of Justice

The potential parts of justice are virtues with the same general object as justice, but lacking the perfection of justice in some aspect.

- Virtues that lack the *perfect equality* of justice:
 - *Religion* is the virtue that inclines man to give to God his due. But we will never be able to give God what he deserves, or even something equivalent to what we have received from him.
 - *Piety* inclines man to give to his parents what is their due. Again, children cannot give to their parents something that is equivalent to what they have received from them—life.
 - *Reverence* inclines one to give due honor to persons of great virtue and dignity. But virtue can never be properly rewarded in this life.
- Virtues that lack the *strict obligation* of justice—what is received is not strictly due:
 - *Sincerity* inclines one to say the truth and always avoid lies.
 - *Gratitude* inclines one to reward in some way the benefits that have been received.
 - *Vindication* moves one to seek restitution for the sins of others. It should not be confused with revenge, which is a sin.
 - *Generosity* inclines one to moderate love for earthly goods and use them properly for one's own and others' benefit, and for honoring God.
 - *Politeness* inclines one to be pleasant in dealing with others.
 - *Equity* or *epikeia* inclines one to ignore the letter of the law when there is a just cause, in order to better follow the presumed intention of the legislator.

RIGHTS OF THE PERSON

29. Rights of the Person

We have defined justice as the permanent determination to give each one what is strictly his due. We will examine now what is due to a person, that is, the rights of the person or subjective rights.

Right of the person, or subjective right, is the *capacity to do, own, demand, or omit something*. We further distinguish the active right (that is, the capacity or moral faculty that we have just defined) from the *passive* right (which is the object or action that one is entitled to do, own, demand, or omit. Here, the term *subjective* literally means “of the subject,” bearing no relation at all to the subjective appreciation of the right.

We should also clarify that it is a moral faculty, not a physical capacity. This faculty must be respected by others, creating a corresponding obligation of not infringing on it. Thus, every subjective right corresponds to a duty for others.

30. Kinds of Rights of the Person

Subjective rights can be classified according to their origin and according to their strictness. If we look at their origin, subjective rights stem from *objective laws*. We have already seen that objective laws include eternal law, natural law, divine positive law, and human laws. Accordingly, subjective rights can be divided as follows:

- *Natural rights* are subjective rights belonging to man by virtue of the very principles of human nature. These are, for example, the rights to self-defense and private property.
 - The more common expression *human rights* usually refers to natural rights and their necessary protection by positive law.¹³ However, their connection with eternal law is often neglected, thus depriving them of their deepest foundation.
 - Rights that are possessed by the very fact of being born or, rather, of coming into existence, are called *innate rights*. Examples of innate rights include the right to life and to being nourished by one's parents. *Acquired rights* are those that are possessed because of a contingent act, such as ownership of something that one has bought.
 - *Jus gentium* ("law of peoples") is a series of natural rights that are not immediately known, but are necessarily deduced from natural rights. For this reason, they are common to different peoples or nations. It is somehow in between natural law proper and civil law. Not all authors agree on this, however, and it is often understood in a different but related sense—that of international law, whether written or not.
- *Divine positive rights* are those rights that are conferred upon man by a special divine decision, such as the right to receive the sacraments or to hear the preaching of the Gospel.
- *Civil or ecclesiastical rights* are those that stem from civil or ecclesiastical law. Thus, the faithful have the right to receive the sacraments from their parish priest, and the citizens are entitled to have their life and property protected by the civil authorities.

On the other hand, rights can be strict or non-strict. *Non-strict rights*, or rights in the broader sense, are those whose violation is not an injustice,

but simply a lack of equity. For example, a person who has rendered valuable services has the “right” to be commended. *Strict rights*, however, are so closely united to the person that they cannot be taken away without injuring the person.

Strict rights can be further divided into *real rights (ius in re)* and *personal rights (ius ad rem)*. The former refers to what is actually possessed; the latter refers to what is not yet in one’s possession. Thus, we have a real right to the money that we have, and a personal right to the money that is owed us. In principle, the latter does not entitle to take the money at will, but only to demand its repayment. Thus, personal right is said to lead to real right. Strict real right, or ownership, will be studied more in detail.

31. Ownership

Strict and real right is also called *ownership*,¹⁴ which can be defined as the legal right to dispose of something as one's own. It is legal because the disposition must comply with both natural and positive law. Ownership is different from the rights of administrators, who can dispose of things, but not as their own.

This discussion is limited to *human* ownership, as opposed to the absolute and universal *dominion* of God. Human ownership can be *absolute* or *partial*. Absolute ownership or *dominion* extends to the object and its fruits; partial ownership extends only to the object or its fruits.

Partial ownership can in turn be divided into three types. *Direct*, radical, or naked ownership enjoys the possession of the object, but cannot freely dispose of it or its fruits. *Indirect* or useful ownership does not possess the object, but enjoys its use and its fruits. The fruits may be disposed of (*usufruct*) or not (*mere use*). Indirect ownership stems from different types of contracts that will be studied later on.

The ownership that we have just described is called low or *private ownership*, as distinct from the higher right of the legitimate civil authority, which is called *eminent domain*. For serious reasons, the authorities can dispose of the properties of individuals for the benefit of the community. This is the case of compulsory expropriation for public works like highways and streets. For the expropriation to be morally licit, the common good must indeed require it, and society, which will benefit from it, must adequately compensate the owners.

31a) The Object of Ownership

Man has useful ownership—not absolute ownership—over what is intrinsic to him, that is, his soul and his body. Thus, he cannot take his own life (cf. Wis 16:13) or freely dispose of his body—mutilation, sterilization, debauchery, drug addiction, or unnecessarily risking serious sickness.

Man has strict but limited ownership of his reputation. It is limited because he needs a good reputation to act properly, and cannot destroy or risk it without serious cause (cf. Sir 41:14–18).

Man owns the fruits of his work and intelligence, such as publications, inventions, and artifacts, according to the dispositions of civil laws.

Man has a strict ownership of the external goods that he legally possesses.

No one can have absolute ownership of another person.

31b) The Subject of Ownership

Only *rational creatures* can own things, or be subject of the right to property. Only rational creatures can exercise that right, since it requires understanding and will. It is not that irrational creatures are denied that right, or that it is not convenient to grant it to them; it is simply that they cannot possibly exercise any right, because they lack the necessary faculties, that is, understanding and will.

Moral or juridical persons—constituted by the moral union of several physical persons, that is, human beings—also are subjects of ownership. Canon law establishes the conditions that are required for an ecclesiastical juridical person (diocese, parish, or confraternity) to enjoy ownership. Civil law does the same for civil juridical persons (corporations, sport clubs, or city councils).

On the other hand, the subjects of ownership can have their right limited by civil or ecclesiastical laws. These laws, if they are just, bind in conscience.

INJUSTICE

32. The Act of Injustice

Injustice is any action that is contrary to the cardinal virtue of justice. It is also called wrong or injury (from *in-iuria*, “violation of a right”).

Injustice is a mortal sin *ex genere suo*, that is, admitting slight matter (cf. 1 Cor 6:10). It is not easy to determine what constitutes a slight or a serious matter. As a general rule, there is serious matter when a considerable harm is done to another person or to the common good,¹⁵ or, in other words, when the victim or the rulers of the community strongly and reasonably oppose the injury.

Not all injustices belong to the same kind, although all violate the virtue of justice. Robbery and slander, for example, are different types of injustice.

One who inadvertently or unintentionally violates another’s rights commits only a material injustice, not a formal one. As we shall see later, he is not always bound to make restitution.

No one can suffer an injustice if he does not oppose it. If he knowingly, willingly, and lawfully suffers an injury, that action is no longer an injustice. Thus, no injustice is committed by taking away something with the knowledge and free consent of the owner.¹⁶

The two main categories of injustice are the unjust appropriation of another’s property and unjust damage. Both will be studied in depth, but we will advance something about the latter.

Unjust damage is an action by which *harm is inflicted on another without taking away any property of his*. The second clause distinguishes it from unjust appropriation.

The harm may refer to natural goods, either spiritual or corporal, or to supernatural goods. The latter is more vicious, and has already been studied as scandal.

Unjust damage is *formal* when deliberate and voluntary, which entails a formal sin against justice. It involves not only a juridical fault, but also “theological guilt.” If these two conditions are not met, the damage is involuntary and is called *material* damage.

Formal unjust damage is a mortal sin *ex genere suo*, that is, admitting slight matter. Material damage, by definition, is not a sin.

1. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 58, a. 1; *CCC*, 1807.
2. Cf. *CCC*, 2236, 2411.
3. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 58, a. 7.
4. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 58, a. 5.
5. Cf. *CCC*, 2240.
6. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 62, a. 2 ad 4.
7. Cf. *CCC*, 2238–2243.
8. *Ibid.*, 2242–2243.
9. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 61, a. 1.
10. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 61, a. 3.
11. Cf. *CCC*, 2236.
12. *CCC*, 2241.
13. Cf. *GS*, 26. Some of the most important human rights, universally recognized, are:
 - the right to life, liberty and security of person,
 - the right to food, clothing, and housing,
 - the right to sufficient health care,
 - the right to rest and leisure,
 - the right to freedom of expression,
 - the right to education and culture,
 - the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; and the right to manifest one's religion either individually or in community, in public or in private,
 - the right to choose a state in life, found a family, and enjoy all conditions that are necessary for family life,
 - the right to property and work, adequate working conditions, and a just wage,
 - the right of assembly and association,
 - the right to freedom of movement, to internal and external migration,
 - the right to nationality and residence,
 - the right to political participation and the right to participate in the choice of the political system of the people to which one belongs. (Cf. John Paul II, Address to the UN General Assembly, 2 October 1979, 13, in *John Paul II: The Pope's Challenge* [New York: Scepter, 1979], 32).
14. Cf. *CCC*, 2402–2406.
15. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 73, a. 3.
16. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 59, a. 3.

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The Rights to Life, Truth, and Work

Duties toward One's Own Body

Man has a useful or indirect ownership of his own body, but not absolute ownership. In other words, he owns his body under the Law of God (cf. Rom 14:7–8; Wis 16:13).¹

Suicide is the voluntary taking of one's life. *Direct suicide*, that is, directly wanted suicide caused by a free and deliberate action, *is always a most grievous sin*. Usually, there is no time to repent and ask forgiveness from God. It violates charity toward oneself and justice toward God and society.²

Suicide, when not caused by temporal or permanent mental derangement, is mainly due to lack of faith. Otherwise, the certitude of going to hell would surely check the suicidal impulse.

Euthanasia is an action or omission that of itself and by intention causes death with the purpose of eliminating suffering. It is equated to suicide when the individual concerned freely requests it.

Indirect suicide is not directly wanted, but is foreseen as a possible or certain consequence of a dangerous action. *It is lawful only for a proportionately serious cause*, as in a risky but necessary operation or in a legitimate war.

Organ transplants conform to the moral law and can be meritorious if the physical and psychological dangers and risks that are incurred by the donor are proportionate to the good that is sought for the recipient. Insofar as limbs and organs are parts of the whole body, they can be removed when the life or health of the whole body requires it.³ It cannot be done, however, for other immoral purposes, such as contraception.⁴ The moral qualification of *mutilation* is similar to that of suicide.

The Right to Life and Bodily Integrity

The right to life and bodily integrity is especially protected by the fifth commandment. It has many implications, which can be summed up in two principles:

- i) The life of the innocent is inviolable. Thus, homicide, abortion, and euthanasia are illicit.
- ii) The life of a guilty person can be taken only in case of legitimate self-defense, just war, or death penalty imposed by the legitimate authority.

We will study each of these cases separately.

Homicide

Homicide is the *direct killing of an innocent person*. It is called *parricide* when the victim is a close relative; this circumstance aggravates the crime.

It is never licit for anybody to directly kill an innocent person (cf. Ex 23:7; Gn 4:10).⁵

Nevertheless, an action or omission that is in itself indifferent, from which the unwanted death of an innocent may follow, can be justified for a proportionately serious cause. This is another instance of indirectly voluntary actions. For example, bombing a military target in time of war, which may cause innocent deaths, could be classified as such.

Abortion

Abortion is the *expulsion from the womb of an immature, non-viable fetus*.⁶ This immaturity determines the essential trait of abortion: the death of the fetus. Basically, there are two kinds of abortion:

- i) *Miscarriage*, or spontaneous abortion, is due to causes that are beyond human control. We will not discuss it here since, being involuntary, it has no moral qualification.
- ii) *Induced abortion* is due to voluntary and effective human intervention. It is sought as an end or as a means. In the first case, the main purpose is getting rid of the baby. The second seeks other effects, such as—in the so-called therapeutic abortion—the health of the mother.

The right to life does not come from the parents, society, nor any human authority; it comes directly from God. Therefore, nobody may dispose of another's life, neither as an end nor as a means. Induced abortion is thus intrinsically evil, and must be qualified as homicide.

The direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral, even when it is performed as a means to a good end.⁷

In order to highlight its moral evil, ecclesiastical law expressly punishes abortion. All the participants, including the mother, automatically incur *excommunication*. The Magisterium of the Church has consistently condemned abortion throughout history, even when the exact moment of the fetus's animation was being disputed.⁸

Respect for human life and radical condemnation of abortion as intrinsically evil is not an exclusive position of Catholics. All people of upright judgment share this view, which is based on what a person is and should be. In some persons, however, this moral stance has been obscured by the alleged negative consequences of rejecting abortion (medical, eugenic, economic, or social evils). All these false reasons violate the basic principle of human life: Life is sacred from the very first moment of conception. Moreover, life is a good of a higher nature than those alleged in defense of abortion.

An entirely different thing is *indirect abortion*, or indirectly provoked abortion. This is an unwanted and unavoidable consequence of a good action. It is foreseen, but not wanted—just tolerated. The good action must be necessary for reasons that are serious enough to balance the evil effect of abortion. The latter, we must insist, is never wanted and would be avoided if it were possible. Indirect abortion is another case of double effect, or indirectly voluntary, actions. It is lawful when all the conditions required in these cases are fulfilled.

Dueling

A duel is a fight between two or several persons in which the time, place, and weapons have been previously agreed upon. The latter are lethal or at least able to inflict serious wounds.

Duels are always illicit. In the past, duels were so common that the Church had to impose special penalties in order to curb them.⁹ Nowadays, dueling as a social custom is practically unheard of.

Respect for the Person and Scientific Research

Research or experimentation on the human being cannot legitimize acts that are in themselves contrary to the dignity of persons and to the moral law.¹⁰ The subject's potential consent does not justify such acts. Organ transplants are not morally acceptable if the donor or those who legitimately speak for him have not given their informed consent. It is morally inadmissible to directly bring about the disabling mutilation or death of a human being, even in order to delay the death of other persons.

Respect for Health

Life and physical health are precious gifts that are entrusted to us by God.¹¹ We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good.

Concern for the health of its members requires that society help with the attainment of living conditions that allow them to grow and reach maturity: food and clothing, housing, health care, basic education, employment, and social assistance.

Though morality requires respect for the life of the body, it does not make it an absolute value. It rejects a neo-pagan notion that promotes the *cult of the body*.

As we shall see in the study of the virtue of temperance, one must avoid every kind of excess: the abuse of food, alcohol, tobacco, or medicine. The use of drugs, and endangering one's own and others' safety on the road, sea, or air by drunkenness or a love of speed are also grave offenses.

Respect for Bodily Integrity

Kidnapping and *hostage taking* are morally wrong. *Terrorism* is gravely against justice and charity. *Torture* is contrary to respect for the person and human dignity. Except when performed for strictly therapeutic medical reasons, directly intended *amputations, mutilations, and sterilizations* that are performed on innocent persons are against the moral law.¹²

Sexual Offenses

As far as justice is concerned, sexually assaulting somebody against his will is morally wrong. The author of the violence is bound to make restitution for any resulting damage, as will be studied later under the virtue of temperance.

Homicide in Self-Defense

Self-defense is a natural right that can go as far as killing an unjust aggressor. One has the right and duty to protect oneself.¹³ However, it must be exercised with extreme caution, fulfilling all the conditions that are demanded by moral law. A violent and unjust aggressor who is attempting to inflict serious harm on others loses his right to life. The sad outcome of the death of the aggressor is attributable to the aggressor, because it is his action that brought it about. However, his death is still an evil and must be avoided by all possible and just means.

Among the conditions that are required for the lawful use of self-defense, the most important are the following:

- There must be an actual unjust aggression in the present. Suspicions or even threats of a future attack are not enough. Violence for a past aggression is not self-defense, but plain vengeance.
- There must be some proportion between the good to be protected and the damage that is caused to the aggressor.
- The damage that is caused must be limited to what is needed to avert the unjust attack.

War

Given the destructive power of modern arsenals, it is extremely difficult to justify the starting of a war. It is no longer a matter of military and civilian casualties in the belligerent countries; the whole of humanity could eventually be wiped out.¹⁴ The conditions for the legitimate authority to lawfully declare war (what the scholars call “*ius ad bellum*” or “war-decision law”) are as follows:

- There must be an extremely serious and just cause. In today’s international context, “just cause” includes the defense of freedom (especially religious freedom), and the defense of a minimum of order in international affairs.
- The contemplated action must be “*proportionate*” to the goal (or just cause) pursued; thus, the good to be accomplished must be greater than the evil that would be suffered if nothing were done. There should be a reasonable chance of success. All peaceful solutions must have been exhausted.¹⁵
- There must be rectitude of intention, that is, the avowed cause must not be a pretext for other hidden motives. This, among other things, precludes acts of vengeance or reprisal.¹⁶

Once started, war must be waged according to the established international agreements (i.e., the Geneva Convention) and the *ius gentium*. Generally speaking, the following criteria (what scholars call “*ius in bello*” or “war-conduct law”) must be followed:

- War is not waged against private persons, but against a state or similar organization (like a terrorist network) as a public person; this is the “*non-combatant immunity*.”
- No more force than necessary should be used to vindicate the just cause; thus, there should be certain “*proportionality*” also in the means used. It is lawful to use all the means that are needed to crush the strength of the enemy, as long as these are not intrinsically evil.

“It is one thing,” says the Second Vatican Council, “to wage a war of self-defense; it is quite another to seek to impose domination on another nation. The possession of war potential does not justify the use of force for political or military objectives. Nor does the mere fact that war has

unfortunately broken out mean that all is fair between the warring parties.”¹⁷

Capital Punishment

Catholic doctrine recognizes the right of the legitimate civil authorities to take the life of a criminal. This is part of their ordinary attributions, but it must be exercised only for very serious reasons and with due judicial process (cf. Rom 13:4).¹⁸ Thus, Sacred Scripture records that God established capital punishment among the people of Israel for certain crimes (cf. Ex 21:12–17; 22:18).

The Magisterium of the Church declares that capital punishment does not go against natural law, but is not a direct consequence of it either. It is rather a matter of convenience, which depends on the circumstances. Thus, in particular cases, Catholics may stand for or against the death penalty; it depends on their assessment of the particular cultural and social circumstances.

Nevertheless, if, in a certain society, the good effects of the death penalty—prevention of grievous crimes and preservation of peace and order—could be achieved by lesser penalties, capital punishment would become difficult to justify. This is the case in most countries of the world in the present age.

In any case, death penalty is lawful only when it is demanded by the common good and applied by the legitimate authority after a fair trial.

Euthanasia

Human life is sacred “up to the last moment of its natural existence in time.”¹⁹ The dignity with which God has invested life demands that all ordinary means be used to protect it in case of sickness or old age. No effort should be spared for fear of inconvenience or sacrifice.

Euthanasia—directly killing the aged, the terminally ill, or the crippled in order to end their sufferings or even to avoid expenses and inconveniences—is as illicit as any other homicide. It is murder when it is imposed on an unwilling or unconscious person by physicians, relatives, or legislators. Even voluntary omission of the logical and available means of protecting human life is illicit. Narcotics, analgesics, and other drugs that alleviate pain, however, are perfectly lawful, even if they indirectly shorten life. Furthermore, there is no obligation to use *extraordinary artificial means* to maintain vegetative life when there is no hope of recovery.

Respect for the Dead

The dying should be given *attention and care* to help them live their last moments in dignity and peace. They will be helped by the prayers of their relatives, who must see to it that the sick receive at the proper time the sacraments, which prepare them to meet the living God.

The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and hope of the Resurrection. The *burial* of the dead is a corporal work of mercy (cf. Tb 1:16–18); it honors the children of God, who are temples of the Holy Spirit.

Autopsies can be morally permitted for legal inquests or scientific research. The free gift of organs after death is legitimate.

The Church permits *cremation* provided that it does not demonstrate a denial of faith in the resurrection of the body.²⁰

The Virtue of Sincerity

The Old Testament attests that God is the source of all truth; his word is truth; his Law is truth. Since God is “true,” the members of his people are called to live in the truth.

Sincerity, or truthfulness, *is a virtue that inclines man to appear in his life and words as he really is.*²¹ This definition highlights the necessary correspondence between what man is inside and what is externally shown. “The Christian must show himself to be genuine, truthful, sincere in all that he undertakes.”²² “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil” (Mt 5:37). Sincerity thus appears as a basic condition of all human and Christian actions.

Sincerity can also be described as *the virtue that inclines man to say the truth in the right place, at the right time, and in the right way.* This second definition is especially useful for determining which actions are sincere and which are not.

Sincerity resembles justice in its being directed toward another and in establishing a certain equality. But there is a difference in the reason for their acts, which, in justice, stem from a strict right, while in sincerity, there is only a moral right, based on honesty. Thus, lack of sincerity in itself does not violate a strict right of one’s neighbor, and does not require restitution. Sincerity is therefore said to be a potential part of justice.²³

The virtue of *simplicity* could be reduced to sincerity. It inclines man to conform his external actions to his internal reality.²⁴ Its contrary vice is *duplicity*, by which one manifests something different from what is being thought.

In a certain way, the virtue of *fidelity* also can be reduced to sincerity. Fidelity inclines one to fulfill what was pledged, in such a way that what is done corresponds to what was freely promised. One should not work out of enthusiasm, but love, duty, and self-denial. Sincerity, therefore, has the following manifestations:

- Love for the truth in words and in deeds
- Conformity of words and external actions with the internal thoughts, insofar as possible, according to the circumstances

(Sincerity does not require revealing one's thoughts always and in all places—at times, justice even requires their concealment)

- Faithful fulfillment of promises

Generally speaking, all the vices forbidden by the eighth commandment are opposed to sincerity. Lies and broken promises violate sincerity by *defect*; revealing secrets does so by *excess*. We will study some of these sins more in detail.

Lies

A lie can be defined as *saying the opposite of what is being thought (locutio contra mentem)*.²⁵ This definition also extends to writing and other external manifestations that convey thought (e.g., facial expressions and gestures).

Authors still dispute whether the intention of deceiving is an essential part of a lie. The different positions can be harmonized and summarized as follows: Lies always carry an implicit intention of deceiving. When the intention is explicit, the lie simply becomes more grievous.

Two other vices are associated with lies: *simulation*, which is showing with gestures and deeds something that is different from the reality, and *hypocrisy*, which is feigning good actions in order to be well thought of.

There are several kinds of lies. They can be classified according to the intention of the author and the effect of the lie:

- *Jocular* lies are those that are told merely to give amusement or pleasure, as a tall tale. There is no lie at all when the fiction is plain and patent. Thus, actors on the stage, novels, or fairy tales do not commit a sin.
- *Profitable* lies are said in order to gain some benefit. These should not be confused with the *polite expressions* that are used to avoid frictions in daily conversation, whether conventional or not. Everybody knows that, “He is busy at the moment,” may mean, “He doesn’t want to talk to you;” “I don’t know,” may also mean, “I don’t want to tell you,” “It’s none of your business,” or “I’m not at liberty to tell,” and so on.
- *Harmful lies* cause damage to the listener, such as giving the wrong time so that the other will miss the train. This term *harmful lies* is sometimes reserved for malicious lies that are meant only to harm another, without seeking any profit from it. In this case, the lie is more grievous.

Regarding the *moral evil of lies*, the following principles can be established:

- Every real lie is intrinsically evil, and no circumstance may make it licit (cf. Ex 23:1; Lv 19:11; Col 3:9; Prv 12:22; Sir 20:23–25). Lying is contrary to the natural purpose of language, natural human

relationships, the good of the listener, and also the good of the liar himself, who may end up living in an unreal world of lies. Properly speaking, there is no such a thing as a “white lie.”

- Lying, as opposed to the virtue of sincerity, is a venial sin. But it is a mortal sin *ex genere suo* (admitting slight matter) if it also violates justice by causing injury, or religion by lying under oath, or other virtues by causing scandal.²⁶

Secrets

We will consider here *secret* in the sense of *knowing a hidden fact with the obligation of not revealing it*.²⁷ Secrets are usually classified into three groups:

- i) A *natural secret* is a fact whose publication would be reasonably opposed by the concerned person.
- ii) A *promised secret* is a fact that a person has promised to keep hidden but was already known before making the promise.
- iii) An *entrusted secret* is a fact that was known only after having promised not to reveal it, and with that explicit condition. The promise may be *explicit* and private (“If you promise not to tell anybody, I’ll tell you a secret”), or *implicit*, because of one’s position. The latter is called silence of office, and applies to lawyers and doctors. In the case of confessors, it is called sacramental secret or seal of confession, and cannot be revealed under any circumstances.

Society has a right to information based on truth, freedom, and justice. One should practice moderation and discipline in the use of the *social communications media*. 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 not stoop to defamation. Civil authorities should defend the rights of the individuals to their reputation and privacy. On the other hand, nothing can justify recourse to *disinformation* for manipulating public opinion through the media.²⁸

Violation of Secrets

These are the principles governing the revelation of secrets:

- Generally speaking, prying into another's secrets or private life is not lawful. It is licit when there is a just cause, provided that the means that are used are also just. Everyone should observe an appropriate reserve concerning people's private lives. Those who are in charge of communications should maintain a fair balance between the requirements of the common good and respect for individual rights.
- In itself, a natural secret binds under grave sin.
- A promised secret binds under venial sin (unless it is also a natural secret). There is, however, a serious obligation if its revelation would cause serious harm.
- In itself, an entrusted secret binds under grave sin. The obligation is stricter than for natural secrets.
- As a general rule, we can say that the obligation to keep a secret is proportional to the damage its revelation would cause to common or private good.

Lawful Revelation of Secrets

A secret may be rightfully revealed in the following cases:

- It is urgently necessary for the common good.²⁹ Thus, a doctor is bound to report a sickness that may cause an epidemic.
- The keeper of the secret needs it, provided that the evil to be avoided is considerable and greater than the harm that the revelation would cause to the concerned person. It must not jeopardize common good.³⁰
- It is necessary for the welfare of a third party, who could otherwise suffer great harm. “The car this fellow is trying to sell you is a stolen car,” would be an example.
- It is necessary for the welfare of the person who told the secret, and whom it concerns. In this case, it is presumed that his opposition to the revelation is not reasonable. For example, if a person who told us that he is already married attempts to marry again, we can reveal it in order to prevent the bigamy.

Honor and its Violation

Here, we understand honor as the *external recognition of someone's excellence*, which may be manifested in words, deeds, or other external signs.

The violation of honor is called *contumely*, which may be defined as *unjustly dishonoring somebody in his presence*. It is similar to what, in common language, is called insult or affront.

Contumely is in itself a mortal sin. It may be—and often is—venial because of imperfection of the act or the intention. The act is frequently imperfect because the offense is done in a fit of anger or passion. And there is often no real intention to offend, because the insult is not that serious or is said half-jokingly.

Contumely requires reparation, which must be public if the affront was public.

Reputation and its Violation

We can define reputation as the *common opinion about the goodness of somebody*.

Defamation means unjustly tarnishing another's reputation. It is also called *denigration*, from *denigrare*, "to blacken." Thus, any action that unjustly sullies or detracts from the reputation that somebody has enjoyed until then is defamation. If the defamation is done in the presence of the victim, there is a contumely as well.

The definition includes the term *unjust*, referring to the lack of just reasons that would make that action necessary. Thus, there is no defamation in revealing a hidden crime so that the culprit may be prosecuted.

Types of Defamation

When the defamation consists in revealing hidden but true defects, we have a *simple defamation* or *detractio* (from *detrahere*, “to withdraw from”).

If defamation involves a lie, by telling false defects or sins, we have a *slander* or *calumny*. Contrary to what the definitions might suggest, these two sins are quite similar, as we shall see.

The terms *gossip* and *rumor-mongering* are sometimes applied to one of these types of defamation and sometimes to both.

The Moral Evil of Defamation

Both kinds of defamation are mortal sins *ex genere suo* (admitting slight matter) against justice and charity. All persons are entitled to a good reputation, without which life becomes extremely difficult (cf. Prv 22:1; Sir 41:15).

It is plain that slander violates justice, but simple defamation is also contrary to justice. By definition, defamation implies that there is no just cause to reveal the neighbor's defects, and without just cause, the detractor has no right at all to tarnish another's good reputation, even if such is not deserved. The detractor infringes on the rights of God, who alone can judge. The hatred, grudges, and disputes that are caused by defamation also disturb the social order. Every offense committed against justice and truth entails the duty of reparation, even if its author has been forgiven.³¹

It is also plain that both kinds of defamation are contrary to charity. Even simple defamation causes an unnecessary damage.

Slander and simple defamation have the same effect: tarnishing another's reputation. Therefore, their moral qualification is the same, at least when they are serious. The additional lie that is associated to slander is in itself a mere venial sin. The falsehood of the imputations, however, must be mentioned in Confession, since it greatly affects the manner of reparation.

The similarity of these sins does not mean that slander is unimportant. On the contrary, even the more minor of them, simple defamation, is seriously evil.

The kind of vice that is imputed—laziness, dishonesty—does not change the moral evil of defamation. The seriousness of the imputation, however, may change it: Charges of laziness are not the same as charges of adultery. Additional listeners do not mean additional sins; it is still one sin, but more serious.

Defamation is a mortal sin that can become venial if the act is not perfect or the matter is slight, that is, the damage caused is small. The seriousness of the sin depends on the following elements:

- The *defamator*: Imputations by a highly regarded person—like a cabinet minister—cause more harm than those of a superficial busybody whom no one takes seriously.

- The *victim*: A prominent person may receive more harm than an ordinary citizen.
- The *audience*: Whether there are many or few listeners and whether they are discreet or gossipers are important considerations.
- The *motive of the defamation*: In the case of a slander, the motive can never be good.

Revealing hidden faults may be lawful—and even obligatory—when demanded by the common good, the good of others, or the good of the offender. It is also lawful when the speaker needs it in order to defend himself.

Public crimes—those that are known to many people—should not be further spread without serious cause. Doing so is always an imperfection, serves no useful purpose, and often causes many evils. It is, besides, a sin against charity.

Cooperation in Defamation

The following people cooperate in defamation:

- Those who *induce* another to commit defamation (for example, by asking questions) commit a sin. If others are present, the one who induces is jointly liable to make reparation.
- Those who *approvingly listen* sin against charity and, in a certain way, against justice; they approve and rejoice in an injustice. Their sin is often venial, though, since they usually act out of curiosity rather than hatred of their neighbor.
- The *superior* who allows his subordinates to defame others is also guilty.
- Any private person *who fails to prevent* it without just cause commits a sin. Usually, the sin is only venial.

Rash Judgment

Rash judgment is the *firm assent of the mind to the guilt of another without sufficient reason*. Rash doubts, rash suspicions, and rash opinions belong to the same species, but are less grievous insofar as they are not so firm. Lacking any external effect, this sin does not require external reparation.

The rash judgment does not stem from the objective consideration of reality, but from ill will that moves the intellect to assent without sufficient evidence (cf. Eccl 10:3).³² Therein lies the evil of this sin. All rash judgments deserve the same moral qualification, since they all violate the same good: the right to good reputation (cf. Lk 6:37; Mt 7:1ff; Rom 2:1; Jas 2:4).

Strictly speaking, rash judgment is a mortal sin *ex genere suo* (admitting slight matter). It is a mortal sin when it is (1) perfectly deliberate, (2) without solid basis, and (3) about a serious sin. If the rash judgment is not externally manifested, it is seldom a mortal sin, since, in that case, the three conditions are difficult to meet.

Rash judgments and suspicions are not licit. But this does not imply that we are bound to hold others as positively good. We may foresee the damage that somebody could cause, and take measures to prevent it (e.g., lock the doors, install window bars).

Other Offenses against Truth

False witness and *perjury* are offenses against truth. When it is made publicly, a statement that is contrary to the truth takes on a particular gravity. In court, it becomes false witness. When it is under oath, it is perjury.

Flattery, *adulation*, or *complaisance* consists of words or attitudes that encourage and confirm another in malicious acts and perverse conduct. Adulation is a grave fault if it makes one an accomplice in another's vices or grave sins. Neither the desire to be of service nor friendship justifies duplicitous speech. Adulation is a venial sin when it seeks only to be agreeable, avoid evil, meet a need, or obtain legitimate advantages.

Boasting or *bragging* can be an offense against truth if what is claimed is false. Another such sin is *irony* that is aimed at disparaging someone by maliciously caricaturing an aspect of his behavior or character.³³

The Natural Meaning of Work

In the narrative of the creation of man, Sacred Scripture states that God said to himself: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth” (Gn 1:26). It goes on saying that God created man to his image and likeness, and gave him the explicit command to increase and multiply, filling the earth, subduing it and exercising his dominion over the rest of creation (cf. Gn 1:27–28).

From the very beginning, therefore, man appears as an image of God, both in his being and in his operation. Man is naturally similar to God in his spiritual intellect and will—the faculties that enable him to be lord and master of the creatures that God has placed at his service.

The second chapter of Genesis also describes the creation of man. The earth is said to be barren because “there was no man to till the ground” (Gn 2:5). God then shaped man out of the clay of the earth, breathed life into him, and placed him in a fertile paradise, which God had purposely prepared. Man was destined to enjoy the paradise, but not in a passive way: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (Gn 2:15). Man would enjoy the garden by working in it.

Man would till paradise with his hands, his intellect indicating what should be done, and his will commanding it. In other words, man would master and enjoy creation through the constant exercise of his physical powers under the direction of his mental powers.

The whole man, matter and spirit, thus cooperates with God in the government of the universe. Man humanizes material things by mastering them and using them for the purposes that are intended by God. Through his work, man participates in the power of God to the limited extent that is allowed by his created nature. He transforms what God created out of nothing and destined for him to enjoy through work. God’s government of the creatures is partially exercised through man’s action. This shows the greater perfection with which God endowed man: God acted as “a master who not only imparts knowledge to his pupils, but gives also the faculty of teaching others.”³⁴

Work is a magnificent reality, and it has been imposed on us as an inexorable law that, one way or another, binds everyone, even though some

may try to seek exemption from it. Man's duty to work is not a consequence of original sin, nor is it just a discovery of modern times. It is an indispensable means that God has entrusted to us here on earth. It is meant to fill out our days and make us sharers of God's creative power. It enables us to earn our living and, at the same time, reap "the fruits of eternal life," for "man is born to work as the birds are born to fly."³⁵

Man's work has *several functions* that blend with the characteristic harmony of God's plans. These functions can be summarized as follows:

- *Humanizing the universe.* Man projects his being in what he does; he leaves in his works the seal of his spirit. This humanization must respect the nature of the creatures; it consists in keeping and tilling, not in exploiting and destroying.
- *Reaping a personal profit.* This is twofold:
 - i) *Personal support* in its widest sense (food, clothing, and housing). This is included in Genesis's simplified reference to food (cf. Gn 2:15ff).
 - ii) *Development of one's personality.* Man has been created to master the earth. In so doing, he uses his energies according to the divine plan for creation and, consequently, according to the deepest aspirations that are engraved in his being.
- *Helping others.* This applies to material transformation and intellectual work (teaching, and other activities). The social aspect of work—its contribution to the common good—becomes all the more patent as society grows in complexity.

The Supernatural Meaning of Work

Grace does not destroy nature; it assumes, perfects, and elevates it. The same applies to work, a natural reality: The supernatural order assumes, perfects, and elevates all the natural functions of work. The last end of natural work, as of any human act, is the glory of God. This is assumed into its supernatural last end, and thus work becomes a means for supernaturally knowing, loving, and serving God.³⁶

In this regard, the words of St. Josemaría Escrivá are especially enlightening. Men and women, he declares, “must sanctify themselves with their work, must sanctify their work and sanctify others through their work.”³⁷ The correspondence between the natural and the supernatural ends is due to the elevation to the supernatural order, which conserves and uplifts the former. We can thus list the supernatural ends of work in parallel with the natural ones:

- *Sanctifying the creatures*—the temporal realities—through one’s work. While respecting their nature, these must be directed to God in the light of the supernatural last end.
- *Sanctifying oneself* through work.
- *Sanctifying others*. “As we work at our job, side by side with our colleagues, friends, and relatives, and sharing their interests, we can help them come closer to Christ.”³⁸

Through revelation, we get to know about two capital events that have left their imprint on man’s work. The first is *original sin*. As part of the punishment for that sin, God cursed the earth: “Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (Gn 3:17–19). The sin-provoked curse on the earth makes work inefficient, arduous, and partly sterile, to the extent that things that are difficult and unpleasant are often called work.

The second great event is the *redemption*. Before his public life and his Passion and death, Christ wanted to devote many years to ordinary manual work, thus making it a redeeming activity (cf. Mt 13:54–55; Mk 6:3). God associated people to his work of redemption, making them co-redeemers. Human work, then, if done well and offered up to God, acquires

a co-redeeming value. In addition, the strenuous effort that it often implies is suitable for being offered as expiation for sin.

Work as a Right and Duty

Work is a natural necessity for man.³⁹ He needs it to support his life—material and spiritual, natural and supernatural—and to develop his personality. Consequently, man has a *natural right to work*. On the other hand, the duties of self-support, personality development, and contribution to the common good imply the *duty of working*.

The *duty of contributing to the common good* also requires a just reciprocation for the benefits that are received from others. Man receives spiritual and material benefits from his fellow men throughout childhood and even in adult life, since nobody is completely self-reliant. This debt must be repaid by contributing with his work to the common pool of goods, giving to his fellow men something equivalent to what he received and continues to receive from them (cf. 1 Thes 4:11; 2 Thes 3:6–14).

Because of all this, *work is a universal duty*. But, of course, this cannot be applied to any specific type of work, or only to manual work.

It follows from the above that everybody is bound to be competent in his own professional work. Any kind of work requires some technical skills that must be responsibly acquired and continually improved and updated. This obligation is easily forgotten during remote preparation, whose connection with the future work is less obvious.

Aside from technical preparation and dedication, the fulfillment of professional duties requires moral formation. Any professional must have the moral criteria that are needed to solve the specific problems that arise in his field. Doctors, druggists, lawyers, politicians, civil servants, businessmen, traders, judges, supervisors, taxicab drivers—all professionals have to face problems that are specific to their job. These are studied by the corresponding branch of deontology or *professional ethics*.

The Virtue of Industriousness

Industriousness can be defined as the *virtue that inclines man to apply himself dutifully to work according to the dictates of right reason* (human virtue) *or of right reason enlightened by faith* (supernatural virtue).

Since virtues are defined by their acts, the definition and its precise contents can be easily grasped from what has already been said about work.

Moral Problems of Work Organization

The primary function of work—though not the only or the most important one—is to provide for one’s support and other basic needs. This is achieved by ordering and transforming the material universe. This profitable activity is not carried out in isolation, but in society. Even the most rudimentary societies acquire a certain degree of internal differentiation, which ensures that the diverse tasks that are needed to obtain goods are distributed among their members. This gives rise to specialization and division of work. This phenomenon grows more evident as society becomes more complex. It has been present from the most remote antiquity, and is acquiring special characteristics in our own times.

A certain pattern of work division and organization may be more or less fortunate, from the point of view of efficiency and technical perfection. It may also be more or less satisfactory from the moral point of view. That these patterns often are technically and morally objectionable is attested by the extensive literature on the subject.

Profitable work is carried out by people in order to obtain goods for themselves and others. Any just work organization must first and foremost respect the rights of these persons. We cannot enter a detailed discussion, which would require a whole treatise. In a very succinct way we will try to outline the conditions for this organization to be just:

- The organizers—from the highest level down to individual enterprises—must respect the rights of both the workers and the beneficiaries of that work.
- Those who carry out the work—at all levels: businessmen, managers, technicians, supervisors, skilled and unskilled workers—must respect the rights of those who collaborate with them and of those who will benefit from their work.

The problems that stem from the division of labor became more pressing—or at least more widely known—at the onset of the industrial revolution. The Church reacted, issuing guidelines so that solutions could be found to eradicate the glaring socio-economic injustices stemming from industrialization.⁴⁰ The Second Vatican Council has also treated this subject.⁴¹

Generally speaking, these Church documents focus on the problems that are caused by a division of labor that ignores the worker's rights. More recently, John Paul II issued another document on this topic. He first studies the meaning of work in itself, going on afterwards with the consideration of its organization.⁴²

Slavery

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 blatant 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 reproductive value or to a source of profit.⁴³

1. Cf. CCC, 2259–2283; John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 66.
2. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 64, a. 5; CCC, 2280–2283.
3. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 65, a. 1; CCC, 2292–2298; John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 15.
4. Cf. DS 3722–23.
5. Cf. CCC, 2268–2269; John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 9, 57; *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 3.5.8.
6. Cf. CCC, 2270–2275; 57ff.
7. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 57.
8. Cf. CIC, 1398; DS 2134.
9. Cf. DS 1830.
10. Cf. CCC, 2292–2296; John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 63.
11. Cf. CCC, 2288–2291; John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 46, 47.
12. Cf. CCC, 2297–2298.
13. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2263–2267; John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 56.
14. Cf. GS, 79, 80; CCC, 2266, 2307–2317; John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 10, 12, 17.
15. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 40, a. 1.
16. Cf. *Ibid.*
17. GS, 79.
18. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 64, a. 3; DS 795; CCC, 2266; John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 56.
19. Paul VI, Address of Dec. 8, 1976; cf. CCC, 2276–2279; John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 64.
20. Cf. CCC, 2299–2301.
21. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 109, a. 3 ad 3; CCC, 2464–2513.
22. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 141.
23. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 109, a. 3.
24. Cf. *Ibid.*, a. 2 ad 4.
25. Cf. CCC, 2482–2486.
26. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 110, a. 4.
27. Cf. CCC, 2488–2492.
28. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2493–2499.
29. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 68, a. 1 ad 3.
30. Cf. *Ibid.*, q. 70, a. 1 ad 2.
31. Cf. CCC, 2487.
32. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 60, a. 3.
33. Cf. CCC, 2476, 2480, 2481.
34. ST, I, q. 103, a. 6.
35. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 57.
36. Cf. CCC, 2427.

37. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer* (Shannon, Ireland: Ecclesia Press, 1968), 70.
38. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 264.
39. Cf. CCC, 2429–2433.
40. Cf. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*; Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*; John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*; Paul VI, Enc. *Populorum Progressio*.
41. Cf. GS, 33.
42. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*.
43. Cf. CCC, 2414.

15

Property and Reparation
(Related to the Seventh and Tenth
Commandments)

THE RIGHT TO PRIVATE PROPERTY

47. Origin and Lawfulness of Private Property

In the beginning, God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them, master them by labor, and enjoy their fruits (cf. Gn 1:26–29). The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race. However, the earth is divided up among men to assure the security of their lives, endangered by poverty and threatened by violence. 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.¹

Some maintain that the origin of private property is to be found in the social contract, others claim that it was established by civil laws, and still some others argue that it started by mere violent seizure. These general theories are impossible to prove on historical grounds. The different schools of thought merely cite them in support of their respective positions on the value of private property.

Leaving aside the question of its historical origin, we can affirm that private property is justified as a consequence of natural rights. This does not mean that public or communal ownership is against natural law, but rather that private property—with due order and within its proper limits—is in many aspects more in accord with the natural rights of the person. It is evident, though, that, in many other aspects, public property is more in agreement with natural rights.

St. Thomas gives some reasons for the greater convenience of private property:²

- People are usually more willing to work for their own benefit than for that of a group or society.
- There is more order in society if each person is in charge of obtaining some things, rather than if all try to get all things indiscriminately.
- Experience shows that shared properties often cause greater disagreements.

The right to private property is closely linked to the dignity of the person, who is thus enabled to implement personal decisions and to keep the fruits of his work.³ Within the proper limits, private property is needed

to ensure an external sphere of personal freedom. It is no coincidence that social systems that are averse to freedom are also averse to private property, and that those that deny freedom altogether also try to completely suppress private property.

48. Titles to Ownership

The way of acquiring ownership, or the title to ownership, is the reason on which the acquisition of an object or right is based. Those that are based on natural or positive laws are called *legal titles*. Those that are founded on free agreement are called *conventional titles* or *contracts*.

48a) Legal Titles

Four legal titles to property are usually listed: occupancy, finding lost property, accession, and prescription.

i) *Occupancy* is the act of taking possession of some unowned thing in order to make it one's own. Few things have no owner, and even these are subject to laws that limit the right to occupancy. This is the case of hunting and fishing laws, mining claims, and treasure-trove laws.

ii) *Finding lost property* refers to cases in which there is an owner, albeit unknown. The following principles apply:

- There is no obligation of justice to pick up lost property and take care of it for its owner. There may be a slight obligation of charity.
- If anyone does pick it up, though, he must take care of it and diligently look for its owner. This is an obligation of justice that requires restitution.
- If, after diligent search, the owner is not found, the finder may keep the property.
- In order to acquire a real right of ownership, however, a title of prescription is also needed. This is determined by the laws of the place, and basically requires a certain period of time to elapse.

iii) *Accession* is the lawful title to the fruit or accretion of one's existing property. Thus, the trees belong to the owner of the land, and the calf to the owner of the cow. Accession is also regulated by civil law, which binds in conscience.

iv) *Prescription* is the acquisition of something (property or rights) through its uninterrupted possession for a time that is specified by positive law. Because of prescription, owners take care of justifying and publicizing their rights or properties. It also avoids endless litigations, since it is often difficult to show the original titles as proof.

In each country, civil law usually specifies the conditions that are needed for a lawful prescription. Generally speaking, these are as follows:

- The object must be *capable of prescription*, that is, naturally capable of being owned by its alleged possessor. Goods that are public in nature—roads, bridges—and Church property can never become private properties by prescription. Rights and duties of

natural or divine law are not subject to prescription either. Thus, a marriage is not dissolved by a long separation, and a long concubinage does not become a true marriage.

- It must be *possessed in good faith*, that is, with the prudent conviction that the property is one's own. This is required for the duration of the possession, and not just at the beginning.
- There must be a *title*, a reason why the possessor is convinced that the object is his own.
- There must be *actual possession* of the property or exercise of the right, which is the main reason of the prescription. For lawful prescription, the possession must be: (1) as owner, not as administrator or tenant; (2) continuous; (3) public, so that any rightful owner may claim it—if it is concealed, it is reputed in bad faith; (4) peaceful, that is, without violent seizure or litigation; and (5) certain.
- The possession must be enjoyed for a *certain period of time*, specified by positive law.

48b) Contracts

A contract is *the agreement of two or more parties to the same resolution, manifested by a sensible sign, and entailing obligations for at least one of the parties.*⁴

Contracts stem from the social nature of man, who needs the help of his fellow men. He often gets it through an agreement in exchange for his own help. This is also the principal means of acquiring properties or rights.

Contracts can be classified in many ways. We are interested only in the following:

- A *solemn contract* fulfills all the formal requirements of positive law. A simple contract does not.
- An *innominate contract* is an exchange of goods and services without any fixed structure. It is extremely flexible and is usually divided into four types: (1) goods for goods—*do ut des*; (2) goods for services—*do ut facias*; (3) services for goods—*facio ut des*; and (4) services for services—*facio ut facias*.
- A *nominate contract*, on the other hand, has a fixed structure and also a fixed name, like the lease or insurance contracts. There are many kinds of nominate contracts, and their characteristics are established in great detail by the civil laws, which, as we know, bind in conscience when they are just. Some of these contracts are sale, lease, employment, partnership, deposit, donation, guaranty, mortgage, loan, and last will. Generally speaking, they can be classified into *onerous contracts*, which entail obligations for both parties, and *gratuitous contracts*, in which only one of the parties is obliged.

We cannot go into a detailed study of these types of contracts. This study should necessarily be brief and, therefore, not very explicit. Of greater interest, though, is the exposition of the general properties of contracts.

48c) Conditions for the Existence of a Contract

Four requisites are needed for the existence of a contract:

i) *Suitable matter:*

Any contract is a transfer of property or rights. All objects of ownership are thus suitable matter of a contract. The actual conditions for a matter to be suitable are the following:

- It must be *possible*, both physically and morally. The obligation of the contract disappears if its matter becomes impossible (for example, if what was pledged is lost).
- It must *exist*, either actually or potentially.
- It must *belong* to the contracting party.
- It must be *morally good* and *lawful*. Nobody can pledge something evil, and if someone has already done so, he is obliged to not fulfill it. In this case, the contract does not bind, or—to be precise—it is not a contract.

If the evil has already been done, however, the other party is bound to fulfill its part as long as it is something that is in itself lawful, like paying money. But civil laws often do not compel to fulfill this second part, and they may lawfully be followed in conscience.

ii) *Qualified persons:*

Any person who has the use of reason and is not prevented by law can validly make a contract.

iii) *Legitimate consent:*

In a contract, the consent must have the following properties:

- *True*, that is, internal. Whoever feigns consent is not bound in conscience to fulfill the contract, but is obliged to make reparation for the fraud. Nevertheless, in the external forum, what matters is the external manifestations, and he is bound to fulfill his obligations, unless he can prove that his consent was faked.
- *Free and deliberate*. It must have the freedom and deliberation that is generally required for an act to be properly human.
- *Externally manifested*. It is an act between persons or parties, and it can be known only if it is externally manifested.
- *Mutual*. Both parties must agree to the contract, but there is no need to do it simultaneously; it can be done by mail, for instance.

The *consent* may be *vitiated* in the following circumstances:

- *Error* or *fraud*. If referring to the substance of the contract, error or fraud make it invalid. If referring to an accidental aspect only, the contract is still valid, but the party suffering error or fraud is often entitled to rescind it.
- *Violence*. If it completely takes away freedom, the act is not human, and the contract is not valid. If freedom is not completely taken away, what is said below about fear applies.
- *Fear*. If it is strong enough to disturb the use of reason, the act is not free and the contract is not valid. If it is strong and due only to natural causes or just causes—that is, the one who is causing fear has the right to cause it—the contract is valid. If fear is strong and unjustly caused to compel the consent, the contract is valid in principle, but it can always be unilaterally rescinded. We say *in principle* because positive law often declares it radically invalid.

iv) *Proper external form*:

Ecclesiastical and civil positive laws often require certain formalities for contract, and those that do not fulfill them are declared invalid. This is the case of the ecclesiastical law on marriages, which requires the presence of the local ordinary or parish priest for the validity of the contract.⁵ These laws must be followed for the validity of the contract.

48d) Effects of the Contract

Every valid contract creates a true moral obligation to fulfill it. If the contract is made under oath, the latter does not add anything to the obligation of the contract in itself, but its non-fulfillment implies an additional sin against religion by violating the oath.

49. Unjust Appropriation

Theft can be defined as taking for oneself another's property.⁶ This same sin is called *robbery* when committed in the presence of the owner and with violence or serious fear.

Robbery involves two injustices: a real injustice (as regards the property) and a personal one. It is thus much more grievous than theft, and its moral evil is of a different nature. The obligation to make restitution, however, is the same in both cases, as we shall see later on.

49a) The Nature of Theft

Theft is the secret taking away of property against the owner's reasonable will.⁷ This definition includes the unjust retention of property: not paying debts, not returning borrowed property, keeping something out of fraud, and not returning what has been found to its owner.⁸

There is no theft if the owner consents to the taking away of his goods or objects only to the way in which it is done. Some parents, for example, are not bothered if their child takes some things from their possession, as long as it is not done by stealth.

In order for theft to occur, the opposition must be reasonable. Thus, a husband cannot reasonably object to his wife's secretly taking what is needed for the support of the house. Neither can the owner object if some superfluous property of his is taken by someone in extreme necessity.

49b) Moral Evil of Theft

Theft is a mortal sin *ex genere suo*, that is, admitting slight matter (cf. Mt 19:18). Determining what constitutes a serious matter is no easy question. In principle, we could apply the same rule as for injustice in general. There is serious matter if a serious damage is inflicted, capable of causing grave and reasonable offense and indignation, or if society is seriously damaged by introducing a grave disorder.

In the first case, we speak of *relative serious matter*, since it depends on the wealth of the victim. Generally speaking, the amount that is needed to support the victim's family for one day is considered a serious matter. In the second case, we have an *absolute serious matter*, which is even more difficult to determine.

Petty thefts are in themselves venial sins, but can become mortal by accumulation. This can happen from the very beginning, if the intention of the thief is to gradually gather a big sum. In that case, every petty theft is a mortal sin, since that intention is implicitly renewed. In confession, however, it is enough to say that one intended to steal a large sum through small repeated thefts. Actually, all these acts constitute a single moral act. There is also accumulation if several petty thefts happen within a relatively short time, adding up to a large amount.

Usually, petty thefts at home—and concretely those of small children—are not serious. Parents may resent their stealth, but they cannot oppose these misappropriations as much as they would in the case of strangers. In some cases, however, they may be a serious sin.

50. Extreme Need

In case of extreme necessity, one may lawfully take from another's property what is necessary, and only what is necessary to relieve that need. This does not apply to merely grave need, and even less to ordinary need. It is not lawful, moreover, if it leaves the owner of the goods in an extreme need similar to that of the taker.

This case cannot be considered as a theft that the particular circumstances make tolerable. Properly speaking, there is no theft but mere appropriation; the owner of the goods cannot *reasonably* object.

51. Occult Compensation

If, because of fear or some other moral impediment, someone cannot openly claim what is strictly his, he may lawfully take it by stealth. This is not a theft, since whoever keeps the property cannot *reasonably* oppose its being recovered by the rightful owner. This action is called *occult compensation*. It is occult because it is done in a secret way, and it is compensation because, if the property cannot be recovered, one is entitled to recover something equivalent.

These are the conditions for the lawfulness of occult compensation:

- The debt must be *strict*, that is, it does not arise from mere congruence of convenience, but from strict justice. The title or act that caused it must be *certain*.
- There must be *no other way* to recover the debt without great inconvenience.
- *Any possible harm to the debtor or to third parties must be avoided* (for example, if somebody else may be suspected of theft).

These conditions would be met, for example, if employees are forced to perform tasks that are not included in the contract without being paid for it, or if they are forced to accept manifestly unjust wages.

Nevertheless, occult compensation should very seldom be availed of, and even less advised. There is a clear danger of not being objective in the appreciation of the exact amount and the strict right to the debt. It may, furthermore, bring many complications if it is discovered.

52. Games of Chance

Games of chance (card games, etc.) or wagers are not in themselves contrary to justice. They become morally unacceptable, however, when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of his family and others. The passion for gambling risks becoming an enslavement. Cheating at games constitutes grave matter, unless the damage inflicted is very slight.⁹

THE REPARATION OF INJUSTICE

53. Restitution in General

We have already alluded several times to the reparation of injustice. We will now study this subject in a more general way.

Restitution consists in returning something to its rightful owner.¹⁰ At times, this is not possible because of the nature of the object or because it has been lost. In these cases, we speak of *compensation* or *reparation* for the damage.

Generally speaking, therefore, *restitution* consists in *returning the object or making good for the damage*. From the point of view of morals, restitution is not the same as *satisfaction*; the latter refers to the person (apologizing), while restitution focuses on the object.

The duty of restitution arises especially from violations of commutative justice, in which there is a perfect equality between thing and thing, between what is given and what is received, between the damage and its reparation.¹¹

Sometimes, violations of distributive or legal justice also entail the obligation of restitution, even if there is no real equality but only proportionality. This is especially the case when the infraction also violates commutative justice. For example, tax evasion may cause damage to others if they have to pay more taxes in consequence.

If there is no way to restore something that is equivalent to what was lost (health, for example), the damage must be repaired through other means, insofar it is possible.¹²

Restitution—returning the unjustly taken or retained property, repairing the unjust damage—or the desire and the firm resolution of doing it as soon as possible are absolutely necessary for the forgiveness of the corresponding sin (cf. Ex 22:5; Ez 33:14–15).¹³ If, due to the importance of the damage, the sin is mortal, restitution—or the effective desire of doing it—is therefore absolutely necessary as a means for salvation.

The obligation of restitution arises from two causes: unjust damage and possession of another's property. Sometimes, the problems that are posed by this obligation are rather complex. We will give only some general guidelines. If doubts arise in practical cases, the best solution is to seek qualified advice and study the situation in detail.

54. Unjust Appropriation and Restitution

Restitution, whenever possible, is absolutely necessary for the forgiveness of the sin of theft, whether it be mortal or venial. Any person who, being able to repair the injustice that was committed, refuses to do so, shows lack of repentance, and repentance is an essential condition for the forgiveness of sin. If the theft is a venial sin, it simply remains unforgiven. If it is mortal, however, the confession would be invalid, and all other sins remain unforgiven.

Some cases of unjust retention are much more complex than simple theft. In most instances, the following juridical axiom can be used as a rule of thumb: *The property calls for its owner, and fructifies or perishes for him; besides, no one can enrich himself at the expense of another.*

However, this applies differently depending on the good or bad faith of the possessor. Somebody may hold another's property *in good faith*, when he honestly thinks that it is his; *in bad faith*, when he knows that it is not; or *in doubt*, when he is not certain about it.

If the possessor *in good faith* realizes that the property is not his own, he must return it to its rightful owner. He is not bound to make restitution if the property was lost or consumed. According to the most common opinion, he may keep the fruits. Possession in good faith, moreover, may eventually lead to real ownership. This is called prescription, as we saw earlier.

The possessor *in bad faith* must make restitution for all the damages that were caused. He must return the property or, if it has been lost, its equivalent value. He may keep only the fruits that proceed from his own work, for which the retained property was merely an instrument. Besides making restitution for the actual damages that were caused, he is bound to compensate for the lost income. The latter, however, requires only restitution to the extent that it is certain and was at least vaguely foreseen. The possessor *in doubt* has the following obligations:

- If the doubt arises *after* taking possession, he must try to solve the doubt. If he is not able to dispel it, he may keep the property. But he is bound to return it if the rightful owner appears later on.
- If the doubt already existed when he took possession and he cannot dispel it later, he is probably bound to make a proportional compensation. If he took the property away from somebody else

while still in doubt, he certainly committed an injustice and is bound to return it, even if the doubt still persists.

55. Unjust Damages and their Reparation

Unjust damage implies the obligation of restitution if it is *formal*—that is, if it is known and wanted as such—if it is really unjust, and if it effectively causes damage.

In order to be formal, the damage must be truly *unjust*. It must violate commutative justice or the strict right of another, either real or personal. Some actions may be grievously sinful and cause serious damage without violating justice; these do not require restitution.

It must also *really cause the damage*, that is, it must be by itself the efficient cause of the damage, and not just the occasion, an accidental cause, or a necessary condition.

If both the damage and the guilt are serious, the obligation of restitution is also serious.

If the damage is slight, the guilt is always slight, and the obligation of restitution is also slight. But, just as with petty theft, this venial sin is not forgiven as long as restitution, whenever possible, is not done.

If the guilt is slight but the damage is serious, the question is difficult to answer. The common opinion among theologians is that partial restitution is required, or none in some cases. Nevertheless, this case is rather uncommon: If the damage is serious, the guilt will presumably be serious as well.

No obligation of restitution arises from a *material* or involuntary damage—an involuntary action does not entail responsibility. In other words, if there is no sin in the infliction of the damage, there is no obligation of restitution.

However, one is obliged to make restitution if a judge orders it. Civil laws can reasonably require restitution. This fosters the common good and makes people more careful in their actions. Obligation to make restitution also arises from a free agreement, as is the case in the insurance contracts.

56. Restitution of Damaged Good Reputation

In the case of *defamation*, the defamer is obliged to make restitution in order to *restore the good reputation*.¹⁴ This falls under the general rules for unjust damages. Thus, he has to repair the damage as soon as possible. The damages resulting from defamation include the loss of good esteem and the resulting material damages insofar as they were foreseen in at least a vague manner.

In the case of *calumny*, the restitution of good esteem requires a public and effective rectification. Thus, if the calumny was published by the media, the rectification has to be published as well.

In the case of a *simple detraction*, rectification is evidently impossible, since what was said is the truth. The detractor must use all lawful means to excuse the unjustly revealed fault, praise the good qualities of the injured party, or do whatever else he can.

In both cases, the practical difficulty of restoring lost reputation underscores the malice of defamation. Stolen goods are easily returned in full; lost reputation is hardly so. Reasons that *excuse from the need to make restitution* are:

- no damage ensued from the defamation because, for example, nobody believed it;
- the defamation has been forgotten through passing of time;
- the defamed has condoned reparation either expressly or tacitly;
- restitution is morally or physically impossible.

57. Restitution of Some Special Damages

If a child is born of a sexual assault, the offender is bound to shoulder the child's support and education. If the other party was a willing partner, both accomplices share the obligation. If one refuses, the other is bound to meet in full the expenses.

A man who seduces a woman under promise of marriage, whether feigned or real, is usually obliged to marry her. This obligation, however, may disappear in many cases, such as if, for example, it can be reasonably presumed that the marriage would cause serious evils.

58. Cooperation in Unjust Damage and its Reparation

Unjust damage is often caused by an action in which several persons cooperated. This can take place in different ways:

- *Positive cooperation* may be given by doing something: command, counsel, consent, flattery, cover up, or participation.
- *Negative cooperation* implies a failure to do one's duty: silence, failure to prevent the harm, or concealment.

As in the case of unjust damage in general, those who cooperate to inflict damage are bound to repair the harm if their cooperation is *formal*. This means that it is truly unjust and actually causes damage.¹⁵ In the case of *material* cooperation, there is no obligation unless a judge's sentence or a voluntary agreement calls for restitution.

The following principles apply to the restitution of damages that are caused by several agents:

- The main agent of all damages, whom all the others merely assisted, is bound to repair the whole damage.¹⁶
- Whoever cooperates with others to cause the whole damage may count on their help for the reparation. If they refuse, however, he himself is bound to repair all the damage.
- If a person—acting with others but without previous conspiracy—causes part of the damage, he must make restitution in proportion to his participation in the total damage.
- If all the participants cooperated in the damage in the same way and degree, each is bound to make restitution for an equal share, regardless of what the others do. Thus, if five persons steal five million dollars, each has to return one million even if the others do not.
- If the participants cooperated in different ways and degrees, they are bound to make restitution in the following order: (1) whoever keeps the stolen property; (2) the person who ordered the deed and, in some cases, the inducer or adviser; (3) the person who executed it; (4) the other participants who positively cooperated; and (5) those who negatively cooperated by not opposing the action.

59. The Manner and Circumstances of Restitution

In making restitution, three principles must be followed:

- i) *Restitution has to be made to the victim of the injustice or to his heirs.* If the victim is unknown, inquiries must be made. If the victim is not discovered thereby, the person who is keeping something in bad faith must give it to the poor.
- ii) *Restitution is to be made as soon as possible.* Certainly, it cannot be postponed until the moment of death.
- iii) *Reparation of the injustice is enough for restitution.* There is no need to let oneself be known as the author.

60. Causes Excusing from Restitution

(1) *Causes postponing restitution*

- Temporary impossibility to make restitution
- Surrender of the debtor's property, by order of the court or in an out-of-court settlement, to be distributed to the creditors in proportion to their debts—such cases are usually regulated by civil law, which may be followed in conscience

(2) *Causes absolving from restitution*

- *Condonation* by the creditor, either expressed or reasonably presumed
- *Prescription*, in the case of a possessor in good faith, if and when it takes place

1. Cf. CCC, 2402–2406.
2. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 66, a. 2.
3. Cf. GS, 71.
4. Cf. CCC, 2410–2412.
5. Cf. CIC 1108ff.
6. Cf. CCC, 2408–2409.
7. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 66, a. 3.
8. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 66, a. 3 ad 2.
9. Cf. CCC, 2413.
10. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1459, 2412.
11. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 61, a. 2.
12. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 62, a. 2 ad 1.
13. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 62, a. 2.
14. Cf. CCC, 2487.
15. Cf. DS 2139.
16. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 62, a. 7 ad 2.

16

The Virtue of Religion
(Related to the First Three
Commandments)

61. Religion in General

Religion is the virtue that regulates man's relationship with God.¹ It is a potential part of justice. Its object (giving to God what is his due) is similar to that of justice (giving to everyone what is his due). However, it does not fulfill the perfect equality that is demanded by justice, since it does not give what is strictly due; no creature can return to God the equivalent of what it has received from him.

The object of the virtue of religion—the worship due to God—is covered by the first three commandments of the Decalogue.

Aside from this specific virtue, the term *religion* has several other meanings: (1) a certain way of worshipping God, as when we speak of the pagan or Islamic religion; (2) the entire moral life of man, and thus we say that a person is very religious; or (3) a particular state of man in which evangelical perfection is professed, as when we speak of the religious, entering religion, or religious orders like the Dominicans or the Augustinians.

62. Definition of Religion

We are here concerned with religion as a distinct moral virtue. It can be defined as *the moral virtue that inclines us to give due worship to God as our Creator and Lord,*² that is, as our Supreme Principle.

Religion is a moral virtue, not a theological one. The latter have God for their direct object, like faith (we believe in God by the authority of God himself) or charity (we love God for his infinite goodness). The object of religion is a created thing: the worship that is due to God.

63. Object and Subject of Religion

The *material object* of religion is the actions whereby we worship God: genuflections, prayers, etc. The *formal object* is the imperfect equality with which man tries to return to God something that is equivalent to what God gave him: all that he is and has. Thus, it is naturally right for the creature to revere God and show his subjection to him. This he does through worship, according to his capacity.³

This also highlights the difference between justice and charity; the latter is the love for God in himself, not as Creator.

Religion inclines man to worship God *through his will*. Thus, the will is the immediate principle of the two main acts of this virtue: to revere God for his excellence, and to submit to his authority.

64. Necessity of Religion

The necessity of the virtue of religion is founded on natural law itself.⁴ Since man can naturally know God, he can also see the need to acknowledge his dominion.

Through the Old Testament's ceremonial precepts, divine positive law established the way to worship God and acknowledge his dominion.

A mere figure and preparation of what Christ was to bring, these ceremonial precepts were abolished by the New Testament. Instead, the holy sacrifice of the Mass was established as the principal way of worshipping God, and the other sacraments as secondary ways.

64a) The Organizing Role of Personal Vocation

One should seek and live a harmonious unity among the several aspects of one's life and activity. Religion, however, should not be just one more aspect of one's character, but the central pivot upon which all other activities turn.

There are people who live what are, in many respects, decent lives but whose growth toward perfection appears to be stunted, stalled at a level where uprightness and sinfulness coexist. What accounts for this? Sometimes it is because large areas of their lives are ruled by impulses, goals, and even commitments that are unrelated to faith. Of course, everyone's life includes some elements of faith, but total integration itself has come to a halt, leaving much outside the sphere of faith.

One sees people who have been decently brought up and for whom religion occupies a compartment in their lives. That is the problem: Religion is in a *compartment*, and they have many interests, objectives, and commitments that are unrelated to it. For them, religion signifies a few positive responsibilities, along with the need to avoid mortal sin. The rest of life goes forward, uninfluenced by faith. In young people, this would be a sign that they are still working at integrating their lives. In older persons, however, this compartmentalization would be a sign of moral immaturity.

The way out is to discover one's personal vocation. Personal vocation is not a single commitment—the decision to be a priest or religious or a married person or whatever it may be—but a set of interlocking, integrated commitments that organizes one's whole life under the light of faith. Discerning a vocation means considering the sum total of one's abilities and opportunities, weighing the needs of the Church and the world, and then making a harmonious set of commitments, which constitute one's life of faith.

Still, there may be other principles and elements left over, as it were, which do not fit into the pattern of the life thus organized. For example, a married man who is serious about his family, obligations, work, religious practices, and other duties may still retain from earlier days certain interests—friendships, hobbies, recreational pursuits—which, although innocent in themselves, do not fit the life of personal vocation that he is now trying to lead. Soon enough, conflicts arise. Then, if he is consistent and honest with

himself, he will either find ways to integrate these carry-overs from the past with the rest of his life or he will eliminate them.⁵

65. Characteristics of the Worship of God

The worship that is due to God must be *internal*, since it is through his soul that man acknowledges, reveres, and submits himself to God (cf. Jn 4:24).

Worship should also be *external*; that is, the internal worship should be externally manifested at times. Thus, the whole man—body and soul—recognizes his dependence on God, since the whole man is a creature of God.⁶

Finally, worship should also be *public*, that is, it should be offered at times in the name of the Church by its legitimate ministers. The Church is God's family. In the worship of this family, "the Father is acknowledged and adored as the source and the end of all the blessings of creation and salvation. In his Word who became incarnate, died, and rose for us, he fills us with his blessings. Through his Word, he pours into our hearts the Gift that contains all gifts, the Holy Spirit."⁷ The Church, as a visible society, is also a creature of God. It was founded by Christ with the public worship of God as one of its main purposes. Thus, the duty to offer God authentic worship concerns man both as an individual and as a social being.

66. The Right to Religious Freedom

The social duty of Christians is to respect and awaken in each man the love of the true and the good. It requires them to make known the worship of the one true religion, which subsists in the Catholic and apostolic Church. Christians are called to be the light of the world.

However, nobody may be forced to act against his convictions. The right to religious liberty is neither a moral license to adhere to error, nor a supposed right to error, but rather a natural right of the human person to civil liberty, i.e., immunity, within just limits, from external constraint in religious matters by political authorities.⁸

67. Acts of the Virtue of Religion

The Holy Mass is the principal act of religion, the best and most complete way of worshipping God. In it, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross becomes sacramentally present. Through Christ's cross, all things can be offered to God as acceptable sacrifices. The Mass includes all the aspects of the virtue of religion:

- Man, acknowledging God's greatness, takes action with an act of worship (adoration).
- Man, admitting that he has fallen short of what God wants from him, asks for forgiveness (atonement).
- Man, recognizing his powerlessness and the need for God's help, asks for his assistance (petition).
- Man, realizing the greatness of God and his will to forgive, reacts with gratitude (thanksgiving).

In a certain way, religion directs the acts of all the other virtues to the due worship of God.

Other acts of religion are devotion, prayer, adoration, sacrifice, the use of the sacraments, vows, oaths, adjuration, and the keeping of certain holy days. These are more directly regulated by the second and the third commandments.

67a) Devotion

The term *devotion* sometimes refers to certain pious exercises, such as the devotion of the Rosary or the Way of the Cross. It also means the attention or spiritual consolation with which an act of religion is performed, as when one prays with great devotion.

We use it here as meaning the primary act of the virtue of religion. We can thus define devotion as *the resolution to dedicate oneself to the things that pertain to the service of God.*⁹ It is thus an act of the will.

When we say that somebody is a devout person, we refer to a stable attitude, a habit that inclines to the act of devotion. This habit is identical to the virtue of religion.

Devotion, the resolution to readily worship God, exercises a decisive influence in all the other acts of religion; hence it is said that it is the first act of this virtue. It informs and enlivens all other manifestations of reverence and subjection to God.¹⁰ Acts of worship are imperfect insofar as devotion is lacking, and, as such, they can even become mere external and empty gestures.

The *principal extrinsic cause* of devotion is the grace of God, which moves us to exercise the virtue of religion. The *intrinsic cause* of devotion is meditation and contemplation of God, his greatness and goodness, Christ's humanity (cf. Ps 72:28), and human dependence on God the Creator and Lord (cf. Ps 120:1–2).

The *effects* of devotion are spiritual joy, accidental or affective devotion (the second meaning given above), facility and readiness in performing other acts of religion, and a certain influence in human external behavior and gestures.

67b) Prayer

(1) *Definition and types*

God tirelessly calls each person to a mysterious encounter with himself. This conversation is called prayer. Prayer unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation as a reciprocal call between God and man. Jesus teaches us how to pray, and his prayer accomplished the victory of salvation (cf. Heb 5:7–9). Jesus' filial prayer involves a loving adherence to the divine will of the Father—even to the cross—and an absolute confidence in being heard.

Prayer is *the raising of the mind to God* with the purpose of piously conversing with him.¹¹ *Prayer of petition* or deprecatory prayer (from *deprecare*, “to ask”) is a request for God's help.

Prayer of petition does not pretend to inform God about our needs, since he is fully aware of them; its purpose is to remove from within us the obstacles that prevent the fulfillment of our desires. Thus, prayer that is devoid of good dispositions and resolutions is ineffective. God, who knows our needs and wants to grant them, also wants us to ask him insistently (cf. Lk 11:5–10; 18:1–8).

It follows from the definition that man prays through his practical intelligence and not through his will. Nevertheless, the act of prayer is directed to its end by the virtue of religion, which resides in the will.

Prayer can be *mental* if it is performed exclusively by the mind, or *vocal* if, in addition to the mental activity, thoughts are manifested in words, often through established formulas. It can also be *public* if it is made in the name of the Church, or *private*. According to its purpose, we can distinguish the prayer of *adoration* (prayer of praise), *thanksgiving*, *atonement* (conversion of heart), and *petition*.

Life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of God and *in communion with him*. This communion of life is always possible because, through Baptism, we have already been united to Christ and made children of God. Prayer is Christian insofar as it is communion with Christ and extends throughout the Church, which is his body.¹²

(2) *What to pray for*

The first movement of prayer of petition is *asking forgiveness* (cf. Lk 18:13). In our prayer, we also desire and *search for the Kingdom to come* (cf. Mt 6:10; Lk 11:2, 13).

As to the object of prayer, we can say with St. Augustine that we can ask whatever it is lawful to desire.¹³ Thus, we can ask for general and particular goods. Goods that are needed for eternal salvation (grace, perseverance, etc.) can be asked for in an absolute way. Other spiritual goods can be requested conditionally, that is, subject to the will of God. Temporal goods can be asked for conditionally.¹⁴ Physical evil, for oneself or for others, can be asked for if a spiritual or important good is thus intended.

Moral evil, however, can never be asked (for example, that a crime is successfully achieved). Wanting to have God as accomplice in an evil deed, no matter how slight, would be a grievous offense to him.

(3) *For whom we can pray*

Intercession is a prayer of petition that leads us to pray as Jesus did. He is the principal intercessor with the Father on behalf of all men. Christian intercession participates in Christ's, as an expression of the communion of saints. We can pray for ourselves and for every creature that is capable of sharing in eternal glory. We can thus pray for sinners (cf. Lk 23:34), excommunicated persons, the souls in purgatory,¹⁵ and even the blessed, that their accidental glory may be increased.

We are not permitted to pray for the damned. In the first place, we do not know who they are. Second, we must not pray for the reduction of their punishments. Aside from being useless, it would imply wishing that God fail to be just.

(4) *To whom we can pray*

Petitions can be addressed only to God, who alone has the power to grant them. He is three Persons in One God. Thus, prayer is primarily addressed to the *Father*; it can also be directed toward *Jesus*, invoking his holy name (cf. Mk 10:46–52; Lk 18:13; Phil 2:6–11). However, every time we begin to pray to Jesus, it is the *Holy Spirit* who draws us on the way of prayer by his grace. That is why the Church invites us to invoke the Holy Spirit as the interior teacher of Christian prayer.

Because of the Virgin Mary's singular cooperation with the action of the Holy Spirit, the Church loves to pray in communion with the her; she "shows the way" (*hodigitria*). After "magnifying" the Lord for the great things he did for her, we entrust our supplications and praises to her.

It is also licit to invoke the *saints and the angels* in order to ask their intercession before God on our behalf, as the Church often does.¹⁶

Private invocation of the souls in purgatory is permissible. Public prayer is not allowed, since we do not know for sure whether their intercession is effective, or whether our prayers reach them at all.

(5) *Necessity of prayer*

For those who have reached the age of reason, prayer is not only useful, but also *necessary by divine precept* (cf. Mt 26:41; 7:7–8; Lk 18:1; 1 Thes 5:17; 1 Pt 4:7). The most common and probable opinion holds that prayer is also *a necessary means of salvation*. Without prayer, it would be impossible to fulfill the obligation to worship God, or to dispose our heart to do the will of God.¹⁷

In *itself*, this precept obliges one to pray at the beginning of moral life, during one's lifetime, and when one is in danger of death.

In an *indirect way*, this precept obliges us to pray in some circumstances: when another precept requires it (like that of hearing Mass on Sundays), when prayer is needed to reject a temptation, or when it is prescribed in cases of public calamities.

No precept orders morning and evening prayers, or saying grace at meals, although they are most advisable. Their omission is not of itself a sin, not even venial, and is not sufficient matter for confession. But in practice, that omission, without enough reason, can be a venial sin, since it can demonstrate a lack of concern for God.

(6) *Effects of prayer*

The main effects of prayer are: *merit*,¹⁸ *satisfaction*,¹⁹ and *granting of the petition*.

Prayer has many important *secondary effects*: It enlightens the intellect (cf. Ps 33:6), increases faith, confirms hope and confidence, inflames charity, increases humility, facilitates the exercise of all virtues, and provides consolation.

By divine promise (cf. Mt 7:7–11; Jn 14:13), prayer that fulfills the required conditions is *infallibly heard* by God. These conditions are the following:

- i) The *object* requested should lead to eternal life. If one unknowingly asks for something detrimental to his eternal salvation, granting it would do him harm, and God would not allow that.
- ii) The *beneficiary* of the prayer should be well disposed to receive the grace requested. If it were not so, he would despise the grace, and it would be worse for him. God would not grant it.
- iii) The *subject* who prays must be in the state of grace (cf. Jn 15:7). He must also pray with humility (cf. Jas 4:6), confidence (cf. Heb 4:16), perseverance (cf. Lk 6:12; 22:43), and attention.

67c) Adoration

The word *adoration* seems to come from the Latin expression *adorare*, “to speak to” or “to ask [God] for.” Originally, adoration was performed by kissing the feet or the fringe of the cloak of the adored person. It was used in the East as a sign of utmost respect.

Generally speaking, “adoration” means *the honor paid to another because of his superior excellence and as a sign of submission.*²⁰ The excellence of the person can be divine, created-supernatural, and created-natural.

Adoration corresponds to the uncreated and supreme excellence of God. We reserve the term *adoration* (or *latria*) for the worship of God exclusively.

Latria includes an *internal act* and an *external act*. The former arises both from the intellect (which acknowledges the excellence of God and our subjection to him) and from the will (which accepts that excellence and subjection). The second is the external manifestation of the internal act. *Internal and external worship of latria (adoration) is due to God alone.* This is established both by natural and divine-positive law (cf. Mt 4:10; Jn 4:23).

Created-supernatural excellence is found in the angels and saints. We pay respect to them by an act of *veneration* (*dulia* in Greek). We do not adore the saints; we venerate them.

A special form of the latter corresponds to the exalted excellence of the Blessed Virgin: *hyperdulia* or special veneration. This is much more than a higher degree of respect or veneration, just as the relation of our Lady to Christ and his mystical body is very different from that of the angels and saints.

Moreover, we can distinguish *absolute worship*, which is offered to the person, and *relative worship*, which is offered to things that are closely related to the person, like images, mementos, or relics. Actually, relative worship is not offered to the thing as such, but to the person who is thereby represented or commemorated.²¹

i) *Absolute latria* is the cult of adoration that is due to God, and to Jesus Christ (and also to his humanity, his body, and his blood, since this worship is directed to the person; and to Christ present in the

Holy Eucharist). *Relative latria* is due to the cross and other instruments of the Passion, to the images of Christ, and to other symbols of God. The particles of the true cross of Jesus Christ (each piece is called *lignum crucis*) receive a higher worship than these images of Christ, as established by the law of the Church.

ii) *Absolute hyperdulia* is due to the Most Blessed Virgin, and *relative hyperdulia* to her images.²²

iii) *Absolute dulia* is the veneration that is due to the angels and saints, and *relative dulia* to their images or relics. Our communion with these in heaven, provided that it is understood in the full light of faith, in no way diminishes the worship of adoration that is given to God the Father, through Christ, in the Spirit. The veneration of images and relics is regulated by canon law, both to ensure its dignity and to prevent abuses and misunderstandings with regard to relics.²³

God, invisible and incomprehensible, cannot be adequately represented by an *image*. Thus,

In olden times, God, who did not have body or face, could not be represented by an image [cf. Dt 4:15–16]. But now he has appeared in the flesh, and has lived among men; thus, I can make an image of what I have seen of God ... with unveiled face we contemplate the glory of God.²⁴

The Incarnation of the Son of God, however, has inaugurated a new “economy” of images, and this is not contrary to the first commandment.²⁵

67d) Sacrifice

Sacrifice is a sacred offering that is directed to God alone to acknowledge that he is Lord of all. Outward sacrifice, to be genuine, must be an expression of spiritual sacrifice. In the New Covenant, the only perfect sacrifice is the one that Christ offered on the cross as a total offering to the Father's love and for our salvation. The Holy Mass makes present the one sacrifice of Christ and includes the Church's offering. By uniting ourselves with his sacrifice, we can make our lives a sacrifice to God (cf. Heb 9:13–14).²⁶

67e) Vows

(1) *Definition*

A vow is a *free and deliberate promise that is made to God that concerns something possible, good, and better than its opposite.*²⁷

- It is a *promise* that is made with the intention of binding oneself to it. A mere resolution is not a vow (cf. Eccl 5:3).
- The promise is *made to God*, since it is an act of latria. If a vow is made to a saint, it is really addressed to God. One binds himself in the presence of God to do something, although it is also done in honor of the saint.²⁸ If the promise is made exclusively to the saint, without wanting to be bound before God, the vow would be void.
- *Something good* must be promised, since pledging to do evil would be an offense to God, and pledging to do something vain or indifferent would be an irreverence.
- It must be *possible*; otherwise, the vow would be absurd.
- It must also be *better than its opposite*; otherwise, the vow would be an obstacle to do good. For example, a person who vows to go to Mass *only* once on weekdays, as opposed to going *at least* once, would not be able to go more often.

Vows are good and useful (cf. Gn 28:20; Dt 23:22; Acts 18:18; 21:23ff).²⁹ Since it is a way of worshipping God, good actions are more meritorious when they are done under a vow.

Vows may be *temporary* if they bind only for a time, or *perpetual*. They may be *absolute* if no condition is attached, or *conditional* if they bind only when a stated condition is verified. A vow may also be *public* or *private*. The essential vows that are taken by religious (chastity, poverty, and obedience) are considered public. Depending on their juridical consideration, the latter can also be *simple* or *solemn*.

(2) *Subject of the vow*

Generally speaking, the conditions that are needed to make a vow are the same as for any fully human act, but with some qualifications. Concretely, these requirements are the following:

- A vow must be made with the perfect use of reason.

- The intention to make a vow must be present.
- A vow must be made with sufficient deliberation. A substantial error about the contents of the vow invalidates it.
- A vow must be made freely. Fear invalidates the vow if it is strong enough to disturb the use of reason. It also invalidates the vow if, without reaching that point, it is serious and unjustly inflicted in order to compel the vow. Serious but just fear and slight fear do not make the vow void.
- A vow can be made only by a person who is not forbidden by law from doing so. Certain persons are barred by canon law from taking public vows, and professed religious are not allowed to take private vows.

(3) *Obligation of vows*

In a certain way, a vow can be compared to a self-imposed law. Therefore, the rules for the obligation of laws in general can be analogically applied to vows. The following principles can be laid down:

- Under the virtue of religion, vows bind only those who take them. Thus, a father cannot make a vow to be fulfilled by his son. Neither is the son obliged by the virtue of religion to fulfill a vow that was made by his father (there might, however, be an obligation of justice or filial piety).
- The obligation is serious if the matter is serious and the vow was taken with the serious intention of binding oneself.

(4) *The fulfillment of the obligation*

A vow must be fulfilled in the way and time specified when making it. In case of doubt, the rules for the interpretation of laws must be followed.

(5) *Cessation of vows*

A vow may cease by itself (*ab intrinseco*), or by extrinsic reasons like annulment, dispensation, or commutation. We will give just a succinct description, since this matter is the object of very extensive legislation and complex casuistry.

A private vow ceases *by itself* when either the object that was promised or the person who made it undergoes such a change that, if known

beforehand, would have prevented the vow. A public vow never ceases by itself.

A vow can be *annulled (irritatio)* by a person with jurisdiction over the maker or the matter of the vow. This is the case, for example, of a father over his son or a religious superior over his subjects.

It can also cease by *dispensation*, which is the extinction of the vow's obligation that is made in the name of God by someone having the necessary jurisdiction.

Finally, a vow may cease by *commutation*, which is the transfer of the obligation from one matter to another. If the new matter is better than the original one, no special cause is needed. If both are equal, at least a slight cause is required. In both cases, and if the vow is not reserved to a higher authority, the person who took the vow can commute it on his own. If the second matter is easier or less good, only the lawful authority can commute the vow, and a serious cause is needed.

67f) Oaths

(1) *Definition*

An oath is *the invocation of God's name to bear witness to the truth of what is said*.³⁰ It is, therefore, an act of the virtue of religion, an act of worship, and specifically of adoration (*latria*), since it is directed to God and explicitly acknowledges his absolute truthfulness. If there is no invocation of God's name, either implicit or explicit, then there is no true oath as defined here.³¹ Thus a person "swearing" something false would sin against veracity, but not against religion.

In an *assertory* oath, God is invoked as witness to the truth of a past or present event. In a *promissory* oath, God is invoked to bear witness both to a future act and to the swearer's present intention of performing it.

An *invocatory* oath simply calls God as witness of the truth. An *imprecatory* oath invokes him as witness and as avenger of falsehood: "May God punish me if what I say is not true."

(2) *Conditions for validity and lawfulness*

Oaths that fulfill the proper conditions are perfectly lawful (cf. Dt 6:13). Many heretics have condemned oaths, citing the words of the Lord: "But I say to you, Do not to swear at all" (Mt 5:34).³² These words are to be understood as a strong admonition to sincerity, since oaths would not be needed if there were no lies and mistrust.

Their lawfulness is evident from the example of St. Paul, who, certainly knowing this statement of the Lord, took oaths (cf. Rom 1:9; 2 Cor 1:23; Phil 1:8), and from the practice of the Church since her beginning. The conditions for the *validity* of an oath are as follows:

- An internal *intention* to take the oath must be present (as in any truly human act). Thus, common expressions like, "By God I tell you ..." or, "As God exists that ..." are not oaths if they are carelessly used in order to stress the truth of an assertion, but without the intention of taking God as witness. These must be avoided, however, since they could be taken for real oaths.
- A *specific formula* must be used that, with an explicit or implicit mention of God, really invokes him as witness.

According to the classical formula, three conditions are required for an oath to be *lawful*: truth, justice, and right judgment (cf. Jer 4:2).

- *Truth*: What is sworn in an assertory oath must be known to be true with at least moral certainty. In a promissory oath, there should be a real intention to fulfill the promise. When there is lack of truth, that is, when one swears something that is known to be false, or to do something that one does not really intend to do, a sin of perjury is committed. *Perjury* is always a grievous sin (*ex toto genere suo*), since calling God as witness to a lie, no matter how small, is a serious offense to his sanctity and his honor.
- *Justice*: In an assertory oath, justice requires that nothing of what is said violates this virtue. One could not, therefore, take an oath in order to unnecessarily reveal the crimes of others or to boast about one's own. In a promissory oath, what is promised must be lawful. An unjust oath is a serious sin (*ex genere suo*), but it can be venial if the injustice is small. The reasons are the same as in the previous condition.
- *Right judgment*: The oath must be made for a just reason, and with due reverence. An oath without judgment is usually a venial sin (*ex genere suo*).

(3) *Obligation of promissory oaths*

Under the virtue of religion, a promissory oath that meets the due conditions binds the person who made it—and only that person—to fulfill his promise (cf. Mt 5:33; Nm 30:3). The obligation can be serious or slight depending on the matter. These conditions are the following:

- On the part of the *matter*, the action that is promised must be lawful and possible.
- On the part of the *person* taking the oath, the act must be really human: The intention to swear, freedom, deliberation, and the absence of substantial error are all required. Serious fear and coercion, if they can still be resisted, do not invalidate the oath.

(4) *Interpretation and cessation*

The rules that govern the interpretation of promissory oaths are analogous to those of vows, which we will not repeat. The same applies to the cessation of their obligation.

67g) Adjuration

Adjuration consists in *making use of the reverence, fear, or love that another person has for the name of God or a holy thing in order to induce him to do or omit something.*³³ Common expressions show traces of this custom: “For the love of God, help me!” or “For God’s sake, don’t do that!” Adjuration is an act of religion—of *latria* if addressed to God and of *hyperdulia* or *dulia* if to the Blessed Virgin or the saints. It is lawful and good if it fulfills the proper conditions, which are the same as those for oaths.

67h) Exorcism

Strictly speaking, exorcism is the expulsion of the devil from a possessed person. In the broader sense, it means the nullifying of the devil's influence over any creature. For the public performance of the former, the directions of the Roman Ritual should be strictly followed. The permission of the bishop is needed, since it is his function to decide whether there is a real diabolical possession and whether a public exorcism is convenient. No permission is needed for a private and secret exorcism. Anybody can do it, for instance, by saying, "In the name of Jesus Christ, unclean spirit, I command you to leave this creature of God."

67i) Sanctification of Sundays and Feasts

Natural law directs man to devote some time to divine worship, not only privately but also publicly.³⁴

Divine positive law established in the Old Testament that a fixed day of the week, Saturday, be devoted to God (cf. Ex 20:8–11). Sabbath was a reminder of creation, a memorial of Israel’s liberation from bondage in Egypt, and a sign of the irrevocable covenant between God and mankind. After the abolition of the ceremonial precepts of the Old Testament, *human ecclesiastical law* appointed Sunday instead of Saturday (in Latin, *dies dominica*, “the Lord’s Day”). Our Lord resurrected on a Sunday, and the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles also on a Sunday. Being the “eighth day,” Sunday symbolizes the new creation that was inaugurated by Christ’s Resurrection. In Christ’s Passover, it fulfills the spiritual truth of the Jewish Sabbath and announces man’s eternal rest in God.

The precept of Sunday worship applies to all baptized persons who have reached the age of seven and have the use of reason. It extends to Sundays and also to holy days of obligation, which have changed substantially through history and, within certain limits, also change from place to place. The precept comprises two obligations: participating in the Mass and abstaining from certain works and activities.

The sanctification of holy days has several useful effects:

- Natural forces are restored by rest.
- Spiritual life is conserved and developed.
- Family life is encouraged.
- Social worship is fostered, which helps in spreading the Church through the attraction that this worship may exert.

(1) *The Sunday obligation*

The precept of participating in the Mass obliges under penalty of serious sin. The following conditions are required for its fulfillment:

- One must be *physically present*. A moral presence is enough; a person who is unable to enter an overcrowded temple fulfills the precept, even if he is outside and cannot see anything, provided that he has the attitude of attending Mass—but not if he is reading a

newspaper. The precept is not fulfilled by watching a Mass on television.

- *The entire Mass* must be heard, from the beginning up to the blessing and dismissal. Missing an essential part of the Mass through one's fault is a serious sin, but venial if the part is not essential. Missing either all that precedes the Preparation of the Gifts (formerly called Offertory) or all that follows the Communion is held to be a slight omission. Missing both is a serious omission, as well as missing from the beginning to after the Preparation of the Gifts, or from before Communion to the end.
- A *devout* and not merely physical attendance is required. This implies the *intention* of participating in the Mass. Mere curiosity about what the priest may say would not be enough by itself. *Attention* is also needed. It is habitually held that in order to meet this requirement, the absolute minimum is following the movements.
- As for the proper *time*, the precept can be fulfilled either the same day or on the evening of the previous day.

(2) *Causes excusing from the precept of participating in the Mass*

Physical or moral impossibility, charity, and duty excuse from this precept. Those who are excused by *physical or moral impossibility* are:

- the elderly, the sick, and those who are recovering from sickness, if there is a well-grounded fear that their attending Mass might cause some danger to their health;
- those living at a great distance from a church, so that their attending Mass would mean a substantial effort or expense. It is not possible to give a universal definition of "great distance;" it depends on the age and health of the person, the weather, the condition of the roads, and the available means of transportation;
- Those risking the wrath of their spouse or parents, provided that this anger is not caused by hatred of religion exclusively, in which case they are obliged to resist with all their might.

Those who are excused by *charity and duty* are:

- those who are taking care of the sick during the time of the Mass,
- mothers who cannot leave their children unattended and cannot bring them along,

- those who cannot leave their posts (soldiers, doctors on duty, watchmen),
- generally speaking, those who would suffer serious material loss, like waiters and bakers, who are especially busy on Sundays.

Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that the excusing reason should be all the more serious the more often it prevents the fulfillment of the precept. Besides, even when fully justified—in exceptional cases, a powerful reason completely excuses from the precept—habitually missing Mass greatly harms faith and Christian life. In these circumstances, it is advisable to regularly go to Mass some other day of the week. This would not fulfill the precept—they are excused anyway—but would prevent their being deprived of the benefits of attending the sacrifice of Christ.

(3) *A day of grace and rest from work*

The Church has established that on Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are to abstain from such work or activities that would prevent:

- the worship to be given to God,
- the joy that is proper to the Lord's Day,
- the due relaxation of mind and body.³⁵

The main purpose of this precept is devoting holy days to God in a special way. It is then necessary *to stop ordinary work and devote the time thus freed to God, one's family, charitable activities, and rest.*

In the past, different types of work were distinguished attending to the physical or intellectual effort that is required. With the norms now in force, the Church wants to make sure that work of any kind will not prevent Christians from sanctifying holy days in a special way. Ordinary work days should also be sanctified, but on Sundays and holy days, Christians can devote more time to God, their families, and the recreation of mind and body.

The required rest is thus compatible with some work, paid or not, which, if possible, should be different from one's ordinary occupation. Doing the same work as any other day, out of contempt for the norm, however, would certainly offend God.

There are lawful dispensations from this precept. In practice, there are many sufficient reasons that can justify work:

- *Other's or one's own need:* some urgent work, the need to earn some extra income, usual house chores that cannot be postponed (cooking, washing dishes), harvesting, jobs that are subject to shifts (hospitals, hotels), or public services (trains, buses, firemen)
- *Custom:* some trades like florists, restaurants, and bakeries

67j) Providing for the Needs of the Church

Providing for the material needs of the Church is one of the acts of the virtue of religion. Essentially, these needs are:

- the support of divine worship (construction and maintenance of churches, acquisition and replacement of sacred vessels and vestments, supplies like candles and wine, electricity, and heating),
- the support of the ministers,
- other expenses like the formation of priests, and apostolic and charitable activities.

This obligation is laid down in the present legislation.³⁶ It is thus an ecclesiastical law, but based on natural and divine positive law. All the faithful must be aware of this obligation and contribute according to their real capacity.

68. Sins against the Virtue of Religion

The omission of any of the acts of religion implies a *sin of omission* against the virtue of religion.

There are two types of *sins of commission*³⁷ against the virtue of religion:

- i) *By excess*: These sins are not a matter of worshipping God too much, but of worshipping him in the wrong way. They include superstition proper and its variants: idolatry, divination, vain observance, and magic.
- ii) *By defect*: These sins imply ill treatment of God or sacred things. They include irreverence proper and its variants: tempting God, blasphemy, sacrilege, and simony.

68a) Superstition in General

The sin of superstition consists in *rendering divine worship in an improper way or to a creature that is not entitled to it.*³⁸ The *improper worship of the true God* can be done in two ways:

- i) By giving God a *false worship*, based on something false. This would be the case of a layman pretending to say Mass, or a Christian trying to worship God according to the Jewish religion, as if Christ had not come. It also includes faking miracles, revelations, or relics, even if the intention is good. This is a serious sin *ex genere suo*; it thus admits slight matter, like exaggerations in describing a true miracle.
- ii) By giving God a *superfluous worship*, that is, not according to the purpose of religion (to honor God and submit to him), for example: requiring unreasonable conditions for prayer, like a specific place, having taken no food, or by chain letter. This is usually a slight sin, unless it is done in contempt of the Church, with serious scandal, or with other aggravating circumstances.

The other form of superstition consists in *offering divine worship to anyone or anything other than God*—especially the devil. It comprises idolatry, divination, and vain observance. Magic and sorcery are forms of the latter. We will study each of them.

68b) Idolatry

The first commandment condemns *polytheism*. Idolatry is the *adoration (latria) of an idol*, that is, of an image of something that is different from God, or, more generally, *the adoration of something that is different from God*, with or without use of images.³⁹

Idolatry is *formal or internal* if there is a real intention of adoring the idol. If it is done to escape some danger, without real intention of adoring, it is *material, external or simulated*.

The former is more grievous, but the second is a very serious sin as well, because it grievously violates the virtue of religion. In addition to being a lie, material idolatry is also usually accompanied by grave scandal, and violates the strictest commandment of confessing our faith (cf. Ex 20:3–6; 32:8–35).

Idolatry refers not only to false pagan worship, but also consists in divinizing what is not God. Man commits idolatry whenever he honors a creature in place of God, whether this be gods or demons (for example, Satanism), power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money, etc. Honor that is rendered to the national flag and other symbols are not really forms of idolatry because these are not adored as gods.

68c) Divination

Divination is the *prediction of future events through unlawful or improper methods*.⁴⁰

Future necessary events can be predicted naturally and with certitude if their causes are perfectly known. This is the case of eclipses, for instance. When, due to their complexity, causes are not perfectly known, the prediction is probable. This would be the case of weather forecast.⁴¹

Future events that depend on human free will, however, cannot be predicted with certitude. Experience of similar cases may provide grounds for conjectures.

Divination precisely presumes to know both types of events with certainty and without studying their causes.

Divination, if not fraudulent, is done with the help of the devil. The devil, of course, does not know the secret thoughts of men, and even less free future events, but his intelligence and experience far surpass that of man. If God allows it, the devil can incite—but not force—people to act in a certain way. Thus, the devil is in a position to predict the future through natural causes much more accurately than man.⁴²

Divination can be performed with an *explicit invocation* of the devil, who can appear in a sensible form, speak through a possessed medium, or cause the apparition of a dead person. *Spiritism* is the invocation of the spirits of the dead. It is equivalent to divination, if knowledge is sought.

Divination can also happen with an *implicit invocation* of the devil, for example, through the interpretation of the positions of the stars (astrology), consulting horoscopes, through arbitrary signs in cards, dice, or hands (palm reading).

When the devil is explicitly invoked, divination is always and essentially a mortal sin (*ex toto genere suo*). If the invocation is only implicit, it is still a mortal sin (*ex genere suo*), but can become venial when done out of ignorance and foolishness, for fun or pleasure, or without real conviction.

68d) Vain Observance

Vain observance is a form of superstition that *pretends to infallibly obtain a certain effect through means that are not fitted to that purpose*, by either nature or the prescription of God or the Church. It differs from divination only in pursuing an action instead of knowledge. Its most common use is healing. Prescriptions of the Chinese *feng-shui* that are not based on scientific data should also be included among the vain observances.

Vain observance has the same moral evil as divination.

Magic is equivalent to vain observance. It is called *sorcery* when the result that is sought is evil in itself.⁴³

Spiritism is also equivalent to vain observance, if an effect is sought.

68e) Tempting God

Tempting God is *any action or word whereby a person tries to discover whether God has or exercises a certain perfection*, such as whether he is good, almighty, knows everything, acts in favor of men, or even exists (cf. Ex 17:7; Ps 77:18–19).⁴⁴

Formal, express, or explicit tempting of God is always and essentially a mortal sin (*ex toto genere suo*) (cf. Mt 4:7).

Virtual or implicit tempting of God, not intended as a test, but imprudently expecting him to work a miracle, is a mortal sin *ex genere suo*, which admits slight matter.

68f) Blasphemy

Blasphemy is one of the sins by defect against religion, that is, irreverence. *Blasphemy is an injurious expression against God* or, by extension, sacred persons or things. It is usually verbal, but it can be conveyed through gestures or actions, or remain in the heart as an injurious thought, which would be an internal sin.

Blasphemy is, of its own nature, a mortal sin (*ex toto genere suo*).⁴⁵ It does not admit slight matter, but it can become venial when the act is not perfect; people often utter injurious words without really meaning what the words convey.

In order to discern the gravity of the sin, three points must be considered: the intention of the speaker, the natural meaning of the words, and the common interpretation that they receive in that place.

Taking the name of God in vain means using it without due reverence. It is normally a venial sin.

68g) Sacrilege

Sacrilege is *the violation of something sacred*.⁴⁶ It can be *personal*, *real*, or *local*, depending on whether a sacred person, object, or place is violated.

Sacrilege is a serious sin *ex genere suo* against religion; this transgression is severely punished in Sacred Scripture (cf. Lv 10:1; 1 Kgs 2:17; 4:11; Dn 5:2ff; Jn 2:14). It admits slight matter, such as unnecessarily talking inside a church or telling a slightly irreverent joke. However, the term *sacrilege* is usually reserved for the more grievous sins (like profanation of the Holy Eucharist) and is not used for slight sins.

Real sacrilege, that is, the violation of sacred objects, comprises:

- the abuse of the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist—receiving them without the necessary conditions or without reverence,⁴⁷
- profane use of sacred vessels and ornaments without grave necessity,
- seizure of sacred objects or ecclesiastical property.

Personal sacrilege is the violation of a person who is sacred because of the Sacrament of Orders or because of his religious state. It can be committed in two ways:

- Inflicting bodily harm
- Committing acts of impurity with them

Local sacrilege is the violation or profanation of a sacred place: a church, blessed burial grounds, or a convent.

68h) Simony

Simony is *the express will to buy or sell for a material price what is spiritual or inseparably annexed to something spiritual*.⁴⁸ It is named after Simon the Magician, who attempted to buy the power of communicating spiritual gifts that the apostles exercised through the imposition of their hands (cf. Acts 8:18–24).

The material price includes money and anything that can be valued in money, like services, loans, or endorsement.

Not to be confused with simony are the alms that are given for the honest support of the minister on the occasion of a sacrament, like marriage, baptism, or the offering of a Mass. These cannot be demanded as a condition for the administration of the sacrament, and the amount must be subject to the pertinent ecclesiastical dispositions. The needy are not to be deprived of the help of the sacraments because of their poverty.

Simony is a mortal sin *ex toto genere suo* against religion. It is a serious offense to God, since it implies such a low appreciation of spiritual things, no matter how small, that they are deemed to be equivalent in value to material things.⁴⁹

1. Cf. CCC, 2095–2132.
2. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 81, a. 3.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 81, a. 5.
4. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 81, a. 2 ad 3.
5. Cf. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*, 332.
6. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 81, a. 7.
7. CCC, 1082.
8. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2104–2109.
9. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 82, a. 1.
10. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 82, a. 1 ad 2.
11. Cf. St. John Damascene, *De Fide Orth.*, 1.3.24; CCC, 2098, 2559.
12. Cf. CCC, 2565.
13. Cf. St. Augustine, Ep. 130.12.
14. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 83, a. 6.
15. Cf. DS 1743, 1753, 1820.
16. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 83, a. 4.
17. Cf. CCC, 2611, 2628; *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 4.1.3–4.
18. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 83, a. 15.

19. Cf. DS 1713.
20. Cf. CCC, 2096–2097.
21. Cf. DS 1822ff, 1867.
22. Cf. *LG*, 67.
23. Cf. DS 1744, 1755, 1867; *LG*, 50–51; *CIC*, 1186–1190.
24. St. John Damascene, *De Sacris Imaginibus Orationes*, 1.16.
25. Cf. *CIC*, 1186–1190; *CCC*, 1159–1162, 2129–2132.
26. Cf. *CCC*, 2099–2100, 1330.
27. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2101–2103.
28. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 88, a. 5 ad 3.
29. Cf. DS 1622.
30. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 89, a. 1; *CCC*, 2149–2155.
31. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 89, a. 1.
32. Cf. DS 795, 913, 1193, 1252–54.
33. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 90, a. 1.
34. Cf. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 3.3.6; *CCC*, 2168–2188.
35. Cf. *CIC*, 1247; *CCC*, 2187.
36. Cf. *CCC*, 2043; *CIC*, 222.
37. Cf. *CCC*, 2110–2132.
38. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 92, a. 1; *CCC*, 2111.
39. Cf. *CCC*, 2112–2114.
40. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2115–2117.
41. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 95, a. 1.
42. Cf. *Ibid.*, I, q. 57, aa. 3–4.
43. Cf. *CCC*, 2117.
44. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2119.
45. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2148; *ST*, II-II, q. 13, aa. 2–3.
46. Cf. *CCC*, 2120; *ST*, II-II, q. 99.
47. In order to be properly disposed to receive Communion the following conditions must be met:
 - Catholics should receive Communion in fulfillment of Christ’s command to eat his body and drink his blood. Thus, they should approach the Sacrament with the right intentions and dispositions: love for God, and charity and love for their neighbors.
 - Communicants should not be conscious of grave sin. Persons who are conscious of grave sin must first be reconciled with God and the Church through the Sacrament of Penance.
 - They should have fasted for at least one hour.
 - Out of respect for the Sacrament, it is advisable to be clean and properly dressed when going to Communion (cf. *CCC*, 1384–1389, 1415; *CIC*, 912–923).
48. Cf. *CCC*, 2121–2122; *ST*, II-II, q. 100, a. 1.
49. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 100, a. 1.

Other Virtues Related to Justice (Related to the Fourth Commandment)

THREE OF THE virtues that are related to justice correspond to the matter of the fourth commandment: piety, reverence, and obedience.¹ These will be studied first. Five other virtues complete the potential parts of justice: gratitude, vindication, politeness, equity, and generosity. These will be considered briefly, except the last, which deserves a more detailed study.

69. Piety

The term *piety* (from the Latin *pietas*) has two meanings: (1) religion, devotion or dedication to divine worship; (2) kindness and mercy. As a moral virtue, piety is *the stable disposition to offer to parents and fatherland the honor and service that is due to them as principles of our existence.*²

Piety is addressed primarily to our parents as proximate principle of our existence, and secondarily to other relatives and one's country.

Piety lacks the strict equality that is proper to justice, since restitution of the equivalent of what was received (life, education) is impossible.³

Piety is based on the relationship between members of a common stock. Charity, on the other hand, is based on divine filiation, which is common to all people. Piety is also distinct from legal justice, which is due to the country in which one lives. Piety is due only to the country where one has been born and raised.⁴

Piety toward parents is the proper object of the fourth commandment of the Decalogue: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land" (Ex 20:12; cf. Dt 5:16; Eph 6:2–3).

Piety toward one's fatherland is usually called *patriotism*. The fatherland is so named by analogy with *father*, and refers to the society in which one is born and raised, from which a great part of one's education is received. It comprises both material aspects and culture in its broadest meaning. The term *nation*—which comes from *nascere*, "to be born"—originally had the same meaning. At present, however, it has come to mean a politically organized and more or less unified territory, together with the society living in it.

One may sin against patriotism by defect, that is, by lack of love. Sins by excess may lead to despising other countries; this is one of the meanings of the term *nationalism*.⁵

70. Reverence

Reverence is the moral virtue that inclines man *to offer due honor to persons who are constituted in dignity.*⁶

There are three forms of reverence, depending on the type of dignity enjoyed: civil (civil authorities), religious (priests, bishops, pope), and supernatural (the saints). In common language, the term *respect* has a very similar meaning.

71. Obedience

71a) Definition

Obedience is the moral virtue that inclines the will *to eagerly comply with the will of the superior.*⁷

Obedience is naturally based on the very order of creation. Man has to obey God, and God usually governs creatures through other creatures. Furthermore, the internal order of any society also requires obedience.

Superiors can command anything within their competence by reason of the formal cause of their authority. For example, civil authorities cannot ask anybody to do an examination of conscience; neither can the ecclesiastical authority order that a traffic light be installed at an intersection.

We must obey God in everything; it is impossible to find any justified reason for disobeying him. On the other hand, human authority is limited by the law of God, both natural and positive; it is unlawful to obey in anything that is contrary to divine law.

One may sin against obedience *by excess*. This is called *servility*, and it leads to obeying even illicit commands. The sin *by defect* is *disobedience*. Its gravity depends on the importance of the authority and the seriousness of the command.

71b) Obedience and Freedom

Only those who are able to make free decisions can obey; obedience is based on freedom.

Many reasons can lead to obedience: fear of natural or supernatural punishment, understanding the natural or supernatural reasons of a certain command and agreeing to them, realizing that obedience is convenient for the good of society and the people, even if the reason for the command is, at times, not understood.

These reasons can be simultaneously present in different proportions. Evidently, the greater the identification with the one in command and with the command, the freer the act of obedience—and, if the obedience is supernatural, the more meritorious.

Since the superior represents God, obeying him is like obeying God. Besides, the real motive for obeying God should be love, not fear. Therefore, obedience ultimately derives from love, being one of its most characteristic manifestations. Because of that, obedience always implies an eminent exercise of freedom.

Obedience is especially valuable on account of efficacy. In any society, there must necessarily be obedience. Otherwise, the result would be abandonment of work, ineffectiveness, anarchy, and chaos. On the other hand, even in this merely natural order, obedience is not in itself opposed to freedom; one may freely want to obey.

All Christian virtues must be considered in the superior light of faith. Otherwise, we would miss their real meaning and value. Thus, supernatural obedience far outreaches its human counterpart (cf. 1 Kgs 15:22). Its efficacy is especially great. Its main value, however, lies in its bringing us in close contact with the mystery of the Redemption. There, we can see Christian obedience at its best, as a manifestation of the fullest freedom (cf. Phil 2:6–8; Jn 10:17–18). The Christian must imitate Christ, and Christ's life can be summarized in his perfect obedience to the Father (cf. Phil 2:8).

71c) Errors

Some claim that obedience is incompatible with freedom, and that only human limitations make it acceptable. When disobedience is not possible, they say, only a critical obedience could be considered as virtue.

This is disproved by what was said in the previous section. Besides, obedience, internal docility, and self-surrender for the sake of others are not opposed to human maturity, understood as responsible freedom. On the contrary, they cannot exist without it. In the same way, the spiritual childhood that God demands in order to enter heaven (cf. Mt 18:3) is not contrary to human maturity.

72. Practice of Piety, Reverence, and Obedience

The obligations that are imposed by these virtues depend on one's circumstances in life. We will study some specific cases.

72a) Obligations of Children toward their Parents

Children are bound to show their parents.⁸

- *Love*, which must be *affective*—loving them and wishing them good—and *effective*—praying for them and supporting them in their material and spiritual needs,
- *Reverence*, in words, gestures, and actions (cf. Ex 20:12),
- *Obedience*, which changes with the child's age and degree of dependence (cf. Eph 6:1; Col 3:20).

There is no obligation to obey one's parents *in the choice of profession and state of life*, but, generally speaking, it is prudent to seek their advice.

Nevertheless, when the choice of a state of total dedication to God and celibacy is considered, parents are usually not the best advisors. A good spiritual director is better qualified to give sound advice, since the parents, having chosen a different life themselves, do not have a personal experience of that state. On the other hand, as St. Thomas remarked:

It is impossible that religion and piety mutually hinder one another, so that the act of one be excluded from the act of the other. Now, as stated above, the act of every virtue is limited by the circumstances due thereto, and if it oversteps them it will be an act no longer of virtue, but of vice. Hence it belongs to piety to pay duty and homage to one's parents according to the due mode. But it is not the due mode that man should tend to worship his father rather than God... Accordingly, if the worship of one's parents take one away from the worship of God it would no longer be an act of piety to pay worship to one's parents to the prejudice of God... If, however, by paying the services due to our parents, we are not withdrawn from the service of God, then will it be an act of piety, and there will be no need to set piety aside for the sake of religion.⁹

72b) Duties of Parents toward their Children

Parents have to love and raise their children,¹⁰ both physically and spiritually.

- *Love* excludes hatred of their children, insults, unnecessarily pointing out their defects, excessive or harsh punishments, unjust unequal treatment of some children, and excessive indulgence that fails to demand and correct.
- *Physically raising* their children implies providing for their corporal needs, before and after they are born, and providing for their future by professional training.
- *Spiritual education* implies teaching them the faith and training them to live the human and supernatural virtues (cf. Tb 4:1–23). An important part of this obligation is the careful choice of a proper school, the effort to know the orientation and attitude of their teachers, and the monitoring of their school and home readings. Parents should also try to know what type of friends their children have.

Parents can and should help their children *in their choice of profession and state of life*. This help is priceless, since the future happiness of their children is at stake. Sometimes, parents will offer their personal advice; on other occasions, they will direct their children to ask the advice of a more qualified mentor.

However, that help should not overstep the freedom of their children. The choice of state of life is a personal right that cannot be waived. “Parents have to be on guard against the temptation of wanting to project themselves unduly in their children or of molding them according to their own preferences. They should respect their individual God-given inclinations and aptitudes.”¹¹

After giving the proper advice and comment, parents “should step tactfully into the background so that nothing can stand in the way of the great gift of freedom that makes man capable of loving and serving God.”¹²

These criteria are to be applied all the more when children decide to devote themselves to the service of the Church. Parents should show an extreme delicacy in these cases. On the other hand, the vocation to total

dedication to God sprouts in Christian families as a consequence of the supernatural environment that is found in them. It is usually received with joy and gratitude, not as a sacrifice.

72c) Duties of Spouses

Aside from the duties concerning the administration of property and the conjugal debt—which will be studied under the Sacrament of Marriage—spouses have the following duties:

- *Mutual obligations*: loving each other (cf. Eph 5:25; Ti 2:4; Col 3:18–19; 1 Tm 2:15), and living together (cf. Mt 19:5)
- *Obligations of the husband*: governing the family and family property—this excludes tyranny, since the wife is not a servant, but a companion¹³
- *Obligations of the wife*: those directed toward the good of the family through her specific dedication

Women have a special role in the family. Contrary to widespread opinions, the roles of husband and wife in the education of children are different, just as they are different during pregnancy.

There is a period during which children require a special material attention. This is precisely the decisive stage in the formation of their emotions, character, and moral values. Only through a close contact can this be successfully achieved. It follows that, during these years, mothers must devote their best time and effort to their children.

If they fail to do so, they would leave their main obligation unfulfilled. This is a pleasant—though costly—task; no wonder that some try to avoid it. The trend is not new. In the past, when it was financially feasible, many children were entrusted to nursemaids. Their place is now taken, to a larger scale, by day care centers.

It may happen that, in order to increase their income, mothers must temporarily work outside the home, but this employment must not be undertaken at the expense of the mother's responsibilities toward her children. Pope Pius XI declared such a situation to be a serious evil:

That the rest of the family should also contribute to the common support, according to the capacity of each, is certainly right, as can be observed especially in the families of farmers, but also in the families of many craftsmen and small shopkeepers.... Mothers, concentrating on household duties, should work primarily at home or in its immediate vicinity. It is an intolerable abuse, and to be abolished at all costs, for mothers on account of the father's low wage to be forced to engage in gainful occupations outside the home to the neglect of their proper cares and duties, especially the training of children.¹⁴

Pope John Paul II elaborated this argument:

There is no doubt that the equal dignity and responsibility of men and women fully justifies women's access to public functions. On the other hand the true advancement of women requires that clear recognition be given to the value of their maternal and family role, by comparison with all other public roles and all other professions.... Therefore the Church can and should help modern society by tirelessly insisting that the work of women in the house be recognized and respected by all in its irreplaceable value.... While it must be recognized that women have the same right as men to perform various public functions, society must be structured in such a way that wives and mothers are not in practice compelled to work outside the home, and that their families can live and prosper in a dignified way even when they themselves devote their full time to their own family. Furthermore, the mentality which honors women more for their work outside the home than for their work within the family must be overcome.¹⁵

72d) Duties of Teachers and Students

There is a certain analogy between the duties of teachers and students and those of parents and children. As far as education is concerned, teachers are in the place of parents.

- *Teachers* occupy the place of parents in relation to a great part of the spiritual education of children, and, therefore, have the same obligations as parents in this regard.
- *Students* owe reverence and obedience to their teachers. As part of that obedience, and also in correspondence to the efforts of the teacher, they must be attentive to their teachings and study hard. Besides, study is the work that is proper to them.

73. Gratitude

Gratitude is a moral virtue that *inclines man to internally and externally acknowledge the benefits that are received and reciprocate in some way.*¹⁶ By *benefit*, we understand something done disinterestedly and out of good will. Gratitude must be prompt, internal, humble, and disinterested. Its contrary vice is ingratitude (cf. Jer 18:20).

74. Vindication

The object of vindication is *the just punishment of an evildoer*.¹⁷ The contrary vices are cruelty (by excess) and laxity (by defect). *Penance* is a related virtue that inclines us to atone to God for the offenses that are caused by sin.

75. Politeness

Politeness (courteousness, affability, or friendliness) is a moral virtue that inclines one *to show a pleasant behavior toward others in words and deeds*.¹⁸ Flattery is the contrary vice by excess, and rudeness is the contrary vice by defect.

76. Equity

Equity or *epikeia* is *a reasonable moderation in the interpretation of a strict law*, in accordance with the higher dictates of justice, in cases in which the literal application would be unjust. It corrects the imperfections of legal justice, bringing it into agreement with natural justice.

77. Generosity

God blesses those who come to the aid of the poor and rebukes those who turn away from them (cf. Mt 5:42; 10:8). Love for the poor is even one of the reasons for working so as to be able to give to those in need. It extends not only to material poverty, but also to the many forms of cultural and religious poverty. Love for the poor is incompatible with immoderate love of riches or their selfish use.

Poverty or detachment is a virtue that inclines people *to reasonably use material goods and avoid attachment to them*.¹⁹ It thus coincides with the virtue of *generosity* or liberality, which inclines people *to a proper use of material goods for their own benefit and that of others*.²⁰ It also moderates love for money and fear of losing it.²¹ Generosity is usually restricted to the proper use of goods that are already possessed, leaving aside their acquisition.²²

Vices that are opposed to generosity *by excess* are prodigality and negligence in procuring the necessary goods.

The main vice that is opposed to generosity *by defect* is *avarice*. It is one of the capital sins, identified with the concupiscence of the eyes mentioned by St. John (cf. 1 Jn 2:16).

The heart's attachment to riches is an obstacle to union with God. It can be fought by doing without superfluous things and not being downcast with the occasional lack of necessary things. One must also be watchful to not call necessities what are only superfluous things:

We have to make demands on ourselves in our daily lives. In this way we will not go about inventing false problems and ingenious needs, which, in the last analysis, are prompted by conceit, capriciousness, and a comfort-loving and lazy approach to life. We ought to be striding towards God at a fast pace, carrying no deadweight or impediments which might hinder our progress. Since poverty of the spirit does not consist in not having things but rather in being truly detached from what we have, we need to be vigilant so as not to be deceived by our imagination into thinking we can't survive unless we have certain things. As St. Augustine puts it: "Seek what suffices, seek what is enough, and don't desire more. Whatever goes beyond that, produces anxiety not relief: it will weight you down, instead of lifting you up."²³

In this way, as we use the material goods that are needed in our earthly condition, we will avoid the danger of becoming slaves instead of masters. This happens when we allow what is merely a means to gradually

become an end. We must not have any other end than the glory of God and the salvation of souls:

If you want to be your own masters at all times, I advise you to make a very real effort to be detached from everything, and to do so without fear or hesitation. Then, when you go about your various duties, whether personal, family, or otherwise, make honest use of upright human means with a view to serving God, his Church, your family, your profession, your country, and the whole of mankind. Remember that what really matters is not whether you have this or lack that, but whether you are living according to the truth taught us by our Christian faith, which tells us that created goods are only a means, nothing more. So, do not be beguiled into imagining that they are in any way definitive: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where there is rust and moth to consume it, and where there are thieves to break in and steal it. Lay up treasures for yourselves in Heaven, where there is no moth or rust to consume it, no thieves to break in, and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart is too (Mt 6:19–21).²⁴

1. Cf. CCC, 2197–2257.
2. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 101, a. 1; a. 3 ad 1; CCC, 2214–2246.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 57, a. 4; q. 58, a. 7.
4. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 101, a. 3 ad 3.
5. Cf. GS, 75; St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 525.
6. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 102, a. 1.
7. Cf. CCC, 2216–2217; ST, II-II, q. 104, a. 2 ad 3.
8. Cf. CCC, 2214–2220.
9. ST, II-II, q. 101, a. 4.
10. Cf. CCC, 2221–2231.
11. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer*, 104.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 25.
14. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 71.
15. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 23.
16. Cf. CCC, 2215.
17. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 108.
18. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 114, a. 1.
19. Cf. LG, 42; CCC, 2443–2449.
20. Cf. ST, II-II, q. 117, a. 1.
21. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 123, a. 4 ad 2.
22. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 117, aa. 3–4.
23. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 125; cf. St Augustine, *Sermo* 85.
24. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 118.

18

Fortitude and Temperance

FORTITUDE AND ITS RELATED VIRTUES

78. The Virtue of Fortitude

Fortitude is *the cardinal virtue that strengthens the will so that it does not give up in its pursuit of a good that is seen as difficult by natural reason (human virtue) or by reason enlightened by faith (supernatural virtue).*¹

A further qualification is usually added to this definition: The will does not give up even in the face of the greatest danger for corporeal life. This stresses the force (hence *fortitude*) that this virtue lends to the will when it is complete or perfect.

This virtue controls the influence that feelings (*passions*) of fear and audacity have on the will. The acts of fortitude tend to suppress both excessive fear and recklessness.

Since Christian life is a continuous struggle to better fulfill the divine will, fortitude and its related virtues are extremely important. Their concrete manifestations are manifold: constancy in work, perseverance in the face of temptations and difficulties, measuring up to costly duties and difficult environments, speaking about God without human respects, correcting evildoers, and boldly undertaking risky or heavy tasks.

The ultimate though exceptional act of fortitude is *martyrdom*: the endurance of death in witness to the truth of Christianity.²

Strictly speaking, martyrdom requires three conditions: (1) actual death; (2) a death that is inflicted out of hatred for Christian truth; (3) voluntary acceptance of death.

Martyrdom completely justifies the sinner, whether baptized or not, adult or infant. Being the ultimate act of charity, all venial sins and all temporal punishments are remitted. Martyrs go straight to heaven. They also merit a great increase in glory.

79. The Potential Parts of Fortitude

There are four virtues that are related to fortitude: magnanimity, munificence, patience, and perseverance. These are usually called potential parts of fortitude, that is, virtues that are similar to fortitude, but not completely identical.

79a) Magnanimity

Magnanimity (from *magnus animus*, “great soul”) is *the virtue that inclines man to undertake great deeds in every virtue.*

According to Aristotle and St. Thomas, the magnanimous man does not delight excessively in receiving honors, no matter how great; neither is he greatly affected by prosperity or adversity. He is happy to help others. He is great among the great, that is, he does not flatter them and he does not allow them to curtail his freedom. With ordinary people, he is unassuming. He is not ambitious nor a social climber. Neither fearing others nor seeking their praise, he openly speaks what he has in his mind when necessary. He forgets offenses. He is not rash but takes his actions deliberately.³

79b) Munificence

Munificence (from *munus facere*, “to make presents”) is the moral virtue that inclines man *to undertake great and costly works in spite of the effort or expenses that are required.*⁴

79c) Patience

Patience (from *pati*, “to suffer”) is the moral virtue that inclines people *to suffer present evils without excessive sorrow*, especially those that are inflicted by others.⁵

Patience has several successive degrees: to suffer evils without backbiting, to suffer evils without groaning or complaining to others, to suffer evils with joy.

These degrees apply to both the human and the supernatural virtue. The apostles reacted with this highest degree of patience when they rejoiced over being scourged for the sake of Christ’s name (cf. Acts 5:40–42).

79d) Perseverance

Perseverance is the moral virtue that inclines man *to continue in the exercise of virtue* according to the dictates of right reason (or reason enlightened by faith) in spite of the wear and tear and the monotony of repetition.⁶

80. Vices Contrary to these Virtues

80a) Opposed to Fortitude

- *Cowardice* or *timidity* is an inordinate fear of temporal ills.
- *Fearlessness* or *impassibility* is a lack or disregard of fear when fear is reasonable.
- *Recklessness* or *temerity* consists in risking danger without a proportionate cause.

80b) Opposed to Magnanimity

- *Presumption* inclines to undertake works that exceed the capacity of the subject.
- *Ambition* is an inordinate longing for honors.
- *Vainglory* is an inordinate desire for personal glory.
- *Pusillanimity* (from *pusillus animus*, “small soul”) inclines man to shy away from works that he deems to exceed his strength, when in fact they do not.

80c) Opposed to Munificence

- *Prodigality* inclines to unnecessary and unreasonable great expenses.
- *Stinginess* leads to niggardly and unreasonably restricting necessary expenses.

80d) Opposed to Patience

- *Insensibility*, or lack of feeling, inclines man to be unmoved by any difficulty, as if he could not notice it.
- *Impatience* leads to yielding easily to obstacles, often reacting with complaints or anger.

80e) **Opposed to Perseverance**

- *Pertinacity* or *stubbornness* inclines man not to yield when it would be reasonable to do so.
- *Inconstancy* consists in easily giving up the practice of virtue as soon as difficulties arise.

TEMPERANCE AND ITS PARTS

81. The Virtue of Temperance

Temperance is the *cardinal virtue that regulates the pursuit of pleasure* according to right reason (human virtue) or reason enlightened by faith (supernatural virtue).⁷

Faith may move reason to decide quite differently than it would with merely natural considerations. Thus, in the pleasures of food, natural reason would consider only the demands of bodily health and its effect on the intellectual and volitive life of man. With the light of revelation, reason must also consider the supernatural good and the consequent need for mortification and penance, and may decide to fast. Generally speaking, we can say that supernatural temperance adds to the acts of its natural counterpart the need for mortification for supernatural reasons.

In a broad sense, temperance moderates the enjoyment of all pleasures, both corporeal and spiritual. It may, thus, lead to not paying excessive attention to feelings and consolations in mental prayer.

For practical reasons, however, temperance is usually understood in its stricter sense, as *the virtue that moderates the pursuit of pleasure in food, drink, and sex*.⁸ The very term *temperance* refers to the object of this restraint: avoiding unreasonable excesses in the pursuit of these pleasures.

82. Integral Parts of Temperance

The integral parts of temperance are habits that facilitate the exercise of temperance.

The first integral part of temperance is the *sense of shame*. It is not properly a virtue, since, at times, it does not incline to good; one may feel ashamed to perform certain good actions. It is a worthy feeling that makes people shy away from base and lewd things. This shame (or modesty) is a useful help in avoiding any debasing behavior, for example, in the field of chastity.⁹

The second integral part of temperance is *honesty* (or decorum), which, in the stricter and now uncommon sense, is love of propriety and of anything clean, beautiful, and well-done.¹⁰

83. Potential Parts of Temperance

As we saw with the other virtues, potential parts are those virtues that closely resemble but are not completely identical with the main virtue. Although not all authors agree on this, the potential parts of the virtue of temperance are the following:

- *Continence* is the virtue that inclines the will to resist passions, especially those concerned with touch.
- *Meekness* is the moral virtue that moves the will to resist the passion of anger.
- *Clemency* is the virtue that inclines to reducing or even remitting due punishment insofar as this is reasonable.
- *Modesty* regulates external physical movements and appearance, and moderation regulates the use of external things, so that both are in line with one's state and situation in life.
- *Humility* is a part of temperance,¹¹ but it has a special importance in moral life. In a certain way, humility is the foundation of all other virtues, just as its contrary vice—pride—is the root of all sins. On account of this, we will consider humility in more detail.

*Humility is the virtue that inclines man to curb his inordinate desire for personal excellence, and recognize his own insignificance in the face of God and his right standing in relation to others.*¹²

Humility leads one to be realistic about one's situation and consider one's own defects in order to avoid undue self-exaltation. It also leads one to acknowledge the gifts that are received from God and act accordingly.¹³

The preeminent example of humility was set by Jesus Christ, who “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:6–8).¹⁴

In order to avoid and vanquish pride, constant vigilance and positive acts of humility are absolutely necessary: “When pride takes hold of a soul, it is no surprise to find it bringing along with it a whole string of other vices: greed, self-indulgence, envy, injustice. The proud man is always vainly striving to dethrone God, who is merciful to all his creatures, so as to make room for himself and his ever cruel ways.”¹⁵

It should be noted that pride is not an exclusive vice of the great and the mighty. “We have to fight against other forms of pride that are more subtle, and more frequent: against the pride of preferring our own excellence to that of our neighbor; against vanity in our conversations, thoughts and gestures; against an almost sickly touchiness that takes offense at words and actions that are in no way meant to be insulting.”¹⁶

84. Subjective Parts of Temperance

Four subjective parts or aspects of temperance are distinguished, according to the objects that they govern:

- i) *Abstinence* controls the use of food.
- ii) *Sobriety* regulates the use of intoxicating drinks.
- iii) *Chastity* moderates the use of the reproductive power.
- iv) *Modesty*, in its stricter sense of propriety, governs other acts that are connected in some way with the sexual act.¹⁷

84a) The Virtue of Chastity (Related to the Sixth and Ninth Commandments)

The virtue of chastity is the part of temperance that *moderates the desire for sexual pleasure* according to the dictates of right reason (natural virtue) or reason enlightened by faith (supernatural virtue).¹⁸ This definition also includes the virtue of modesty. We will study both together.

Right reason discovers that the use of the reproductive power is intrinsically linked to the transmission of life. In the human species, the transmission of life cannot be separated from the education of children, both natural (corporal and spiritual) and supernatural.

Therefore, the use of sex according to right reason means that it be (1) within monogamous and indissoluble marriage, which is the only way of assuring comprehensive education, and (2) open to procreation, that is, without positively and voluntarily excluding it.

Right reason also points out that the acts that are related to the reproductive power—which is a gift of God and therefore good—are ordained to reproduction and are good insofar as they are united to the right use of that power.

Chastity renders the use of the body upright and noble, keeping man from inordinately pursuing the pleasure that God has attached to reproduction.¹⁹

(1) *A joyful affirmation*

Chastity has been referred to as a “joyful affirmation” to stress its positive value²⁰: “When you decide firmly to lead a clean life, chastity will not be a burden on you: it will be a crown of triumph.”²¹

Indeed, chastity keeps body and heart unsullied and ready for human and divine love by controlling sensuality, which reduces the capacity to love. Chastity gives man fortitude and self-command, the ability to work and harbor great ideals: “It is a virtue that keeps love young in any state in life.”²²

It is a battle, but not a renunciation. We respond with a joyful affirmation and give ourselves to him freely and cheerfully. Your conduct should not be limited to simply

evading falls and occasions of sin. In no way should you let it come down to a cold and calculating negation.²³

(2) *Necessity and excellence of chastity*

Though not the most important of virtues, chastity has a great relevance: “We know full well that theological charity is the highest virtue. But chastity is a means *sine qua non* (‘an indispensable condition’), if we are to establish an intimate dialogue with God. When people do not keep it, when they give up the fight, they end up becoming blind.”²⁴ Actually, “it is precisely among the chaste where the most clean-cut men from every point of view are found. And among the impure abound the timid, the selfish, the hypocritical and the cruel—all characters of little manliness.”²⁵

Aside from the benefits that it procures, the importance of chastity can be seen from the evils that are caused by its contrary vice, lust. Besides the damage to one’s character, lust causes many other evils: discord, injustices, neglect of duty, and loss of moral sense.

(3) *Training in chastity*

Spiritual and moral formation is extremely important in order to practice chastity. It implies both acquiring the right criteria and exerting effort to accommodate one’s behavior to these criteria.

The main purpose of training in chastity is “to refine our conscience. We must go sufficiently deep, until we can be sure our conscience is well formed and we can distinguish between a delicate conscience, which is a true grace from God, and a scrupulous conscience, which is not the same.”²⁶

One of the points to clarify is that *natural* is what agrees with nature as created and ordained by God, and that *normal* is what follows the divine norm. People must also be taught to recognize sin as such, firmly rejecting any attempt to rationalize it. Unnecessary occasions of sin must be avoided, all the more if they become habitual.

The importance of small details of modesty must also be properly appreciated. People must be taught to be delicately on guard, “taking the battle to areas that are far removed from the main walls of the fortress. We cannot go about doing balancing acts on the very frontiers of evil.”²⁷

The struggle against carnal lust involves purifying the heart and practicing temperance.²⁸ A point to stress is that the traditional means of acquiring and upgrading this virtue are perfectly valid today. As in the past, these are:

- controlling one's senses,
- avoiding dangerous occasions,
- corporal mortification,
- absolute sincerity in spiritual direction,
- receiving the sacraments frequently,
- serious and responsible work,
- a tender love for our Lady.²⁹

Besides, one must be quick to react against temptations: "You know very well that a fight which is kept up from the beginning is a fight already won. Get away from danger as soon as you are aware of the first sparks of passion, and even before."³⁰

This training must be imparted and received in a positive way,³¹ cleanly, avoiding even the appearance of being obsessed by the subject: "I have never talked about impurity," St. Josemaría Escrivá once remarked, "and I have always avoided falling into a distasteful and meaningless casuistry. But I have very often spoken, and will continue to speak about chastity, purity, and the joyful affirmation of love."³²

(4) *Excellence of virginity and celibacy*

Christ is the center of all Christian life. The bond with him takes precedence over all other bonds, familial or social.

Strictly speaking, *virginity* is the firm resolution to abstain from sexual pleasure by a person who has never experienced it. It is related to the virtue of chastity, but, as the definition shows, is not identical with it. *Celibacy* is the resolution to give up marriage for the love of the Kingdom of heaven. Christ himself has invited certain persons to follow him in this way of life, of which he remains the model.³³

Both the Sacrament of Matrimony and virginity for the Kingdom of God come from the Lord himself. With the grace of God, those who are called to marriage find in this state all that is needed to reach sanctity, to

grow more identified with Christ each day, and to bring the persons living with them closer to God.

Celibacy for supernatural reasons, however, is a gift from God that inclines man to surrender body and soul to the Lord, to offer him an undivided heart, not shared by any creature. As such, it is a more excellent state than marriage, as Holy Scripture (cf. Mt 19:11; 1 Cor 7:25–40; Rv 14:4) and the teaching of the Church declare.³⁴

In any case, even though celibacy as a state is superior to marriage, married people are also called to the fullness of sanctity and can achieve it. What really matters is each person's correspondence to his own vocation; the most perfect path for everyone is, always and exclusively, doing what God expects of him.

84b) Impurity

The vice contrary to chastity is lust or impurity. Impurity is a *disorderly desire for sexual pleasure*.³⁵

Impurity can be consummated or unconsummated, depending on whether the sexual pleasure that accompanies the reproductive act is produced. Consummated sins of impurity are natural if they can result in procreation, unnatural if they cannot. Unconsummated impurity can be external or internal (imagination, memories, or desires). The following principles can be laid down:

- Directly willed sexual pleasure outside marriage is always and essentially a mortal sin (*ex toto genere suo*); it does not admit slight matter (cf. Gal 5:19ff). In this field, no matter can be small enough to be considered a venial sin, because of the very strict divine commandment. This severity is due to the slippery nature of this vice; it is extremely easy to drift toward the most serious infractions (impurity is also called lubricity, from *lubricus*, “slippery”).
- Indirectly willed sexual pleasure may not be a sin. This happens when one performs an action that is good or indifferent in itself, but may cause sexual pleasure. One may not seek that pleasure, however, nor consent in it if it does happen, in which case it would become directly voluntary.³⁶

Those actions would be licit only if there is a proportionately serious cause, as we saw for the morality of double effect actions. In this regard, one must be extremely sincere with himself and with his spiritual director so as not to consider as proportionate a cause that really is not, such as curiosity, or not wanting to be singled out in a pagan environment. When a proportionate cause does exist—as in the case of doctors and movie censors—one is bound to use all the ascetical means to avoid arousal and, if it does happen, to fend off the danger of yielding.

(1) *Internal sins of impurity*

As with internal sins in general, there are three types of internal sins of impurity:

- i) *Impure imagination*, or deliberate pleasure (*delectatio morosa*), is taking pleasure in imaginative representations; the complacency in

the impure action that is present in the imagination is without any desire for the action.

- ii) *Impure memory*, or sinful delectation (*gaudium peccaminosum*), is the deliberate complacency in a previous sin of impurity, either one's own or another's.
- iii) *Impure desire* (*desiderium pravum*), is the deliberate complacency in an impure act that one wishes or intends to do.

In all cases, the existence of sin requires deliberate complacency. Merely feeling the inclination to commit any of them without actual consent is not a sin.

(2) *Unconsummated external sins of impurity*

Spontaneous sexual arousal is not a sin as long as the will rejects it (there is no consent). If its cause was voluntary (*voluntary in causa*), the morality of the case must be judged according to the rules for indirectly voluntary actions that were discussed above.

Immodest actions (looks, embraces, or kisses) are evil insofar as they cause sexual pleasure, which, as we have seen, does not admit small matter (cf. Mt 5:28). If that pleasure is not sought and there is a reasonable cause—proportionate to the danger involved—then there is no sin. This may be true for some of these actions, but for others, there can never be a reasonable cause. If the cause is not proportionate to the danger, the sin that is incurred may be mortal or venial depending on how serious the lack of proportion is.

The same criteria on deliberately sought sexual pleasure apply to judging immodest conversations, plus the possible danger of scandal. If the intention is deliberately impure, there is a mortal sin no matter how slight the matter. Otherwise, they can be mortal sins or not, just like immodest actions.

The same criteria are applicable to movies, readings, shows, dances, and Internet browsing.

(3) *Natural consummated sins of impurity*

Six sins are usually listed under this heading:

- i) *Fornication* is the sexual intercourse between unmarried persons with mutual consent. Aggravating circumstances are *concubinage*, when the sin is habitual, and *prostitution*.
- ii) *Rape* implies violence and the opposition of one of the parties.

- iii) *Abduction* is fornication with a kidnapped person.
- iv) *Incest* is sexual intercourse between persons so related by consanguinity or affinity that natural or ecclesiastical law forbids them to marry each other.³⁷
- v) *Adultery* is sexual intercourse between two persons, at least one of whom is married to a third person.³⁸
- vi) *Carnal sacrilege* is committed when one of the partners is a sacred person.

In all cases, the sin of impurity is the same. In all except the first, however, there is also a sin against justice and, in the last case, against religion as well.

(4) *Unnatural consummated sins of impurity*

These are voluntary pollution or *masturbation*,³⁹ *sodomy*, *bestiality*, and *homosexuality*.⁴⁰

Both the Magisterium of the Church, in the course of a constant tradition, and the moral sense of the faithful have been in no doubt and have firmly maintained that masturbation is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action.... The deliberate use of the sexual faculty, for whatever reason, outside marriage is essentially contrary to its purpose. For here sexual pleasure is sought outside of the sexual relationship that is demanded by the moral order. In the context of true love, the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation is achieved only within that morally upright sexual relationship.⁴¹

Sacred Scripture presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity (cf. Gn 19:1–29; Rom 1:24–27; 1 Cor 6:10; 1 Tm 1:10). Thus, the Church has always declared that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered. They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual compatibility.⁴²

Nevertheless, homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtue of self-mastery (which will give them inner freedom), prayer, and sacramental grace (received in the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist), they can and should gradually and resolutely grow in Christian perfection. As persons, they must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity.

84c) The Virtue of Sobriety

The virtue of temperance is called sobriety when it *regulates the desire and use of intoxicating drinks*.⁴³

When the abuse of such drinks leads to losing one's use of reason (drunkenness), a mortal sin is committed (cf. 1 Cor 6:10; Is 5:11; Gal 5:21), unless this result is unforeseen and unexpected, as in the case of Noah (cf. Gn 9:20–22).

Imperfect drunkenness in itself is a venial sin. Nevertheless, it can easily become mortal because of its consequences, if these could or should have been foreseen, even dimly. This is the case, for instance, of drinking before driving.

(1) Drug abuse

The abuse of drugs⁴⁴ can be studied here by analogy. By *drugs*, we understand any substance—with or without medical applications—that is self-administered for non-medical purposes, causing a physiological or psychological alteration. The resultant condition may be pleasant or unpleasant. In the first case, drugs are usually addicting, that is, they gradually lead to the need for larger doses, creating a state of dependence on the part of the consumer.

Addiction is a more or less irresistible urge to habitually consume a certain drug. Its nature can be physiological, psychological, or both. Sudden interruption of supply causes a typical and violent reaction called *withdrawal syndrome*. Its actual symptoms vary widely with age, degree of tolerance, and type of drug. However, in all cases, it produces serious or even very serious psychopathic alterations. In some cases, the dependence may be so strong that the subject feels the compulsion to use any licit or illicit means to satisfy his craving.

The term *soft drugs* is commonly applied to marijuana, hashish, amphetamines, and some sedatives and analgesics.

(2) Stages of drug abuse

In order to properly assess the morality of soft drugs, we must distinguish between occasional use, habitual use, and intoxication.

- *Occasional use* is the administration of one single dose only once or in a sporadic way. If the dose is small, this does not usually cause

predisposition or dependence. The effects are within the self-control capacity of a normal person, although exceptional reactions are also possible. However, very seldom can the consumer be called a normal person; drug use is ordinarily related to personality conflicts, difficulties, and moral problems. It is unusual for a well-balanced person, settled in life and with healthy habits, to fall into the curiosity of “trying” what can easily lead to disastrous results. In any case, there is a real need to warn the public about the *danger of getting addicted* to these products out of curiosity and misinformation, mistakenly thinking that “soft” drugs are safe.

- *Habitual use* is the use of drugs in a chronic way. It is not easy to say when periodic use becomes habitual use (or rather abuse) of drugs. It depends on the person, frequency of use, dosage level, and chemical purity of the drug—the latter is practically impossible to ascertain, given the clandestine nature of drug traffic.

Since the organism gets used to the drug, in order to obtain the same gratification, one has to keep increasing the dosage and frequency. This is the phenomenon of *tolerance*. As the habituation of the organism increases, a larger and larger dose is needed for the subject to experience the same feelings. The user thus gradually loses control of himself, and the drug increases its tyranny over him. He is already on the way to dependence, and in close danger of intoxication. Those who have reached continuous usage feel deeply unable to understand whoever warns them of the immorality of their conduct. This breach of communication must be bridged in time with appropriate clarifications based on ethical and medical grounds. Medicine shows that marijuana causes very serious harm, in spite of its being falsely publicized as harmless and even safer than alcohol and tobacco.

- *Intoxication* is the state or condition that results from the abuse of drugs. It has serious effects on the organism, even death in some cases. It should be kept in mind that drugs used in combination with alcohol, sedatives, and other drugs have an enhanced effect.

(3) *Moral evil of drug abuse*

We will see now the moral character of each type of drug abuse:

- *Morality of occasional use.* Although the occasional use of soft drugs does not cause serious alterations in the organism, it should be

considered in principle as a serious sin. It means risking the danger of a potentially serious sin. It endangers psychological health, increases propensity to impurity, may cause scandal, and constitutes a proximate danger of slipping down the path of vice. Besides, it constitutes an infraction of civil laws with direct moral roots and implications. Their transgression is usually considered a serious crime.

Some moralists take a rather abstract approach, thinking that occasional use of soft drugs should be judged just as alcohol consumption. Their use, these moralists argue, could be licit if there is a just and proportionate reason and it is taken in small doses that would neither harm one's health, diminish the use of reason, nor have negative side effects like raw-nerve irascibility and sexual excitability. This means that a responsible and mature person who, avoiding any danger of scandal, occasionally consumes a so-called soft drug—out of curiosity or for any other reason—would not commit a sin or, at least, not a serious sin.

But this is not the case of those who start using soft drugs from time to time. The first thing to question is their very name. "Soft" seems to mean that their moderate use is harmless, but this is not really true; recent research shows that they are indeed dangerous.

In short, occasional use of soft drugs may be a venial sin in some theoretical, exceptional case. In fact, though, it is doubtless a serious sin. Some circumstances may make it even more serious: age (teenagers, youths), purpose (escaping reality, making sins of impurity easier), environments in which drugs are consumed, or moral danger of getting involved in the underworld of narcotics traffic and of cooperating even remotely with it. The problem gets even worse in the case of teenagers who start taking drugs at parties, or within their groups of friends. Aside from the guilt of their own consumption, they initiate others by peer pressure, which implies a sin of scandal and cooperation in evil.

- *Morality of habitual use.* After some time, there is a clear and proximate danger—even moral certitude—of becoming a drug addict. This implies a misuse of one's life and faculties.

As was said before, this abuse "is a grave offense."⁴⁵ It is no longer a matter of losing one's health and rational control over one's acts;

there is even a more or less proximate danger of morally serious effects for oneself and others.

- *Morality of intoxication.* After what has been said about habitual use and knowing its harmful effects, it is clear that intoxication is a serious sin.
- Clandestine *production of and trafficking in* drugs are scandalous practices. They constitute direct cooperation in evil, since they encourage people to engage in practices that are gravely contrary to the moral law.

84d) The Virtue of Abstinence

Abstinence is the moral virtue that inclines man to *moderate the use of food* according to the dictates of right reason (natural virtue) or reason enlightened by faith (supernatural virtue) for his moral good. Drinks whose main purpose is nutritional are also included.

Fasting means taking less food than what natural abstinence would recommend, for ascetical reasons and according to certain positive laws. It does not mean totally abstaining from food for a given time.

Fasting as a penitential practice is an ancient tradition and has always been recommended by the Church (cf. 2 Cor 6:5; Jl 2:12).

The seasons and days of penance (Lent, and each Friday of the year) are particularly appropriate for voluntary self-denial such as *fasting*. The *ecclesiastical laws* that are now in force prescribe compulsory fasting⁴⁷ only on two days: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. All the members of the Church over 18 and under 60 are bound to fast. The law of fast does not apply in cases in which fasting would cause a serious harm (heavy work, sickness). The prescribed fast consists in taking only one full meal on that day, although small amounts of food are allowed in two other moments: a very frugal breakfast and supper, for example.

Present ecclesiastical law on compulsory *abstinence* forbids the eating of meat on all Fridays of the year (except on holy days of obligation) and on Ash Wednesday. On Fridays outside Lent, this practice can be commuted for works of penance, charity, or devotion. All the members of the Church above 14 years are bound to observe abstinence, with the same exceptions as fasting.

There is a *serious obligation* to observe fast and abstinence laws. Deliberate substantial disobedience is a serious sin. Not observing abstinence one day is not a serious sin, since it is not a substantial transgression.

Moral impossibility exempts from both laws; one is not bound to abstain if meat is the only food available; the poor who regularly lack sufficient food are not bound to fast. *Dispensation* on just grounds also exempts from both laws.

The vice contrary to abstinence is *gluttony*. It can be defined as *an inordinate inclination to food*.⁴⁷ Manifestations of this vice are eating

continuously, eating outside mealtimes, choosiness, eating to excess, greedily gulping food, and eating excessively expensive food. This shows that good table manners have a deeper value than is commonly realized.

Gluttony is in itself a venial sin. It can become mortal if it causes serious danger to health or grave scandal.

1. Cf. CCC, 1808, 1837, 2848.
2. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2473–2474; *ST*, II-II, q. 124, a. 5.
3. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 129, a. 3 ad 3; ad 5; a. 4 ad 2.
4. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 134, a. 3.
5. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 136, a. 4 ad 2.
6. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 137, a. 3.
7. Cf. CCC, 1809, 2514–2533.
8. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 141, a. 4.
9. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 141, a. 4 ad 4; CCC, 2521–2524.
10. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 145, a. 4.
11. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 161, a. 4 ad 3.
12. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 160, a. 2.
13. Cf. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 35, a. 1 ad 3.
14. Cf. *Ibid.*, III, q. 49, a. 6; q. 53, a. 1; q. 54, a. 2.
15. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 100.
16. *Ibid.*, 101.
17. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 143.
18. Cf. CCC, 2337–2391.
19. Cf. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 25.
20. Cf. *Ibid.*, 5; *Friends of God*, 177, 182.
21. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 123.
22. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 25.
23. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 182.
24. *Ibid.*, 175.
25. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 124.
26. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 185.
27. *Ibid.*, 186.
28. Cf. CCC, 2517–2533.
29. Cf. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 185.
30. *Ibid.*, 182.
31. Cf. *Ibid.*, 178.
32. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 25.
33. Cf. CCC, 1618–1620.
34. Cf. DS 1810; *PO*, 16.
35. Cf. CCC, 2351–2356.
36. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 154, a. 4.
37. Cf. CCC, 2388.
38. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2380–2386.

39. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2352.
40. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2357–2359.
41. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Decl. *Persona Humana*, 9; cf. *CCC*, 2352.
42. Cf. *CCC*, 2357–2359.
43. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2290.
44. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2291.
45. *Ibid.*, 2291.
46. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1438, 2043; *CIC*, 1249–53.
47. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 148, a. 1.

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by Urbano Ferrer

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The Social Doctrine of the Church

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The Social Doctrine of the Church

1. Concept and Content

1a) Part of the Doctrine of the Church

The Christian message has a social dimension, and the Church encourages its diffusion and implementation as an integral part of the Christian conception of life. The main task of the Church is the salvation of souls. Man, however, can reach salvation only if he strives to establish in his society the order of justice and charity that is desired by God. During his earthly life, Christ—while stressing that his mission was the eternal salvation of man—showed concern for solving material needs.¹ Moreover, Christian revelation leads us to a deeper understanding of the laws of social life.² The Church receives from the Gospel the full revelation of the truth about man. She fulfills her mission of announcing the Gospel and teaches man his own dignity and his vocation to form a communion of persons. She unveils the demands of justice and peace, according to divine wisdom.

Natural philosophy shows the substantial unity of man, which implies that a real concern for him must address all the needs of his nature. Following the example of her Master, the Church takes up the cause of man. She demands that the rights that arise from man's dignity be respected, and that social and political conditions allow the legitimate exercise of these rights. "It is certainly asked of us to examine the social question with real commitment. For the Church has to protect the dignity of man. If she neglected to do so, she would fail in her duty and lose her credibility in the proclamation of the Gospel and care for eternal salvation."³

This should not lead us to forget that the ultimate satisfaction of human desires lies beyond this earthly condition. Moreover, God's plan for man unfolds amid the inescapable limitations that are imposed by the first sin and by succeeding sins: pain, death, deficiencies, and injustices. Also, through these miseries, the glory of God can shine in man (cf. Jn 9:3).

There is a deep, internal, and organic relationship between the Church and the world—understood as the whole of human history, with its advances and declines. This relationship is not due to some merely external coordination; the two need one another. In the final analysis, it is the Catholic—a member of the Church and a citizen of civil society in his own right—who has to carry out this task:

God is calling you to serve him *in and from* the ordinary, material and secular activities of human life. He waits for us everyday, in the laboratory, in the operating

theater, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home, and in the immense panorama of work.⁴

Whatever is truly human has a place in the heart of the Church, which feels identified with the history and fate of mankind. As a consequence, the Church addresses her message to all people, who share the same aspirations and together make up society and history.⁵ “As far as Catholics are concerned, we must not forget that the fulfillment of the mission that Christ entrusted to his Church has immediate social repercussions.... Cooperating toward the attainment of the social function of human activities is not the exclusive prerogative of Catholics; it is the responsibility of all men.”⁶

The social doctrine of the Church is not taught as an addendum to Catholic faith and morals, but as a consequence of them. Therefore, far from setting social progress as its goal, it shows that the goods of this world are transitory and relative—their value stems from their transcendent origin and purpose.

1b) Faith and Social Doctrine

Faith is the supreme criterion of the social doctrine of the Church. Concern for social matters stems from faith. Revelation shows man as an image of God, and as the center and peak of visible creation. He is destined to multiply and rule over it. Therefore, any subservience of man to inferior creatures or his own products is incompatible with the divine plan, since it debases the dignity that God has granted him.

On the other hand, since this dignity is based on the spiritual soul, all men possess it in the same degree. This excludes any unconditional subservience to other men. Both questions—human dignity and its implications for human relations—are the decisive principles of the social doctrine of the Church. “Man is no longer seen merely as a being with material needs, but as God’s image, called to continue God’s creation in work; chosen to put himself, until the return of Christ, in the service of the making of the new heaven and the new earth.”⁷

Faith enlightens the relations among men, endowing them with a fraternal character: All are children of the same Father. “Faith throws a new light on all things and makes known the full ideal which God has set for man, thus guiding the mind towards solutions that are fully human.”⁸

The hinge of social questions is Christian love for one’s neighbor. The measure of that love is the theological virtues, whose peak is love. “To love like God is not to set limits to it. Happy are those who make room for a child who arrives unexpectedly and who is rejected by others.... This same openness of heart calls you to take heed of everything that can improve the lot of humanity.”⁹

1c) Legitimate Autonomy of Temporal Institutions

The doctrine of the Church acknowledges the legitimate autonomy of earthly institutions and realities. This autonomy means that, “by the very nature of creation, material being is endowed with its own stability, truth and excellence, its own order and laws. These man must respect as he recognizes the methods proper to every science and technique.”¹⁰

On the other hand, the values that are intrinsic to created nature stem from the Creator. Therefore, any attempt to make them independent from the Creator will make them void. The Church absolutely rejects that sort of autonomy: “If by the term ‘the autonomy of earthy affairs’ is meant that material being does not depend on God and that man can use it as if it had no relation to its creator, then the falsity of such a claim will be obvious to anyone who believes in God.”¹¹

Sin taints the goodness of created beings. The believer must restore them to their original condition. He must discover their ordination to the human person, which God has given them. And he must reject the false ordination that people sometimes give to created goods by becoming subject to them.

Human beings, as members of society, have rights and duties. Moreover, the faithful should fulfill their duties and exercise their rights under the light and guidance of faith. They should apply the Law of God to the earthly city by being consistent in their beliefs.

Laymen ought to take on themselves as their distinctive task this renewal of the temporal order. Guided by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church, prompted by Christian love, they should act in this domain in a direct way and in their own specific manner. As citizens among citizens they must bring to their cooperation with others their own special competence, and act on their own responsibility; everywhere and always they have to seek the justice of the kingdom of God.¹²

No temporal occupation or human institution—including the wide field of culture—should be built without regard for the Law of God.

The laity should learn to distinguish carefully between the rights and the duties which they have as belonging to the Church and those which fall to them as members of the

human society. They will strive to unite the two harmoniously, remembering that in every temporal affair they are to be guided by a Christian conscience, since not even in temporal business may any human activity be withdrawn from God's dominion.¹³

1d) Catholic Doctrine and Private Interpretation

A clear distinction should be made between the doctrine of the Church and its interpretation by Catholic authors. The social doctrine of the Church consists of philosophical and theological knowledge about the essence and order of human society, and the norms derived from them. The contribution of social philosophy is based on the social condition that is rooted in the nature of man. Social theology also contributes, insofar as the social situation is relevant for the pursuit of eternal salvation.¹⁴

The social doctrine of the Church proposes principles for reflection, extends criteria for judgment, and gives orientations for action. Besides the immutable moral principles of the social order, the Church also provides specific judgments, which are the application of the principles to the changeable situations that follow the free development of history. The principles are deduced from natural reason and the spirit of the Gospel, which includes and surpasses them.¹⁵ Evaluative teachings or judgments, on the other hand, will depend on the needs of the different historical periods.¹⁶

If the Social Doctrine of the Church does not intervene to authenticate a given structure or to propose a ready-made model, it does not thereby limit itself to recalling general principles. It develops through reflection applied to the changing situations of this world, under the driving force of the Gospel as the source of renewal when its message is accepted in its totality and with all its demands.¹⁷

The social doctrine of the Church extends to the different natural social orders, which are the field where human activity takes place. These are the family, the state, the economy, civil institutions, intermediate associations, labor organizations, international relations, property, education, and culture. These realities are studied in light of the corresponding philosophical principles, like the relationship between person and society, the content and demands of the common good, and the principle of subsidiarity.

What the Church is ultimately interested in, however, is man's orientation to his last end through earthly realities; it is through them that man reaches his eternal destiny. Therefore, the sources that enlighten and confirming the philosophical principles are Sacred Scripture, Tradition, and

the Church's own Magisterium—taken and understood as inseparably united.¹⁸ If the Church also passes judgment on temporal actuations, it is because no human activity can be built independently of the Law of God.¹⁹ Besides, it is man's responsibility to restore to created beings their true condition, now obscured by sin.

The Church requires *assent to general social principles* and to the exhortations that are based on these principles that she may issue regarding some specific circumstances. The Church, however, leaves the *application* of these teachings to the responsibility of the faithful. *The Church will not get involved in technical aspects, and will admit a legitimate diversity of solutions.*²⁰ Laymen who are committed to action must keep the perennial moral principles and be guided by a prudent assessment of each specific situation. This is their way of assuming their personal responsibility.²¹

Pius XI coined the expression “*Doctrina de re sociali et oeconomica*” in order to distinguish the social doctrine of the Church from the personal opinions of Catholic authors.²² This is not meant to disavow these opinions, but to distinguish doctrine from personal interpretations. *Doctrine* is binding for all Catholics in the field of social action. *Personal interpretations* are left to the responsibility of their proponents, and are compatible with other lines of action. Whatever force personal interpretations may have comes from the three sources cited above: Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium.

2. Purpose of the Social Doctrine of the Church

2a) Fulfilling the Commandment of Christ

In her social doctrine and action, the Church is faithful to the commandment that Jesus Christ gave her before his Ascension for the benefit of all peoples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). As we have seen, the pursuit of salvation for all people implies the defense of all the demands of human dignity.²³

Christian revelation contains the total truth about man. The Incarnation sheds a universal light on human existence. Therefore, neither man’s being nor any of his temporal activities is indifferent to the message that was preached by Christ.

Called as they are to bear witness to truth, the pastors of the Church have from Christ himself the mission and the authority to tell man the whole truth about man and the requirements of this truth. These requirements, since they spring from the perennial identity of the human person, transcend all historical situations, and precisely for this reason they are capable of guiding in every place and time the commitment of the Christian, who is called to “impress the divine law on the affairs of the earthly city.”²⁴

2b) Establishing the Kingdom of Christ

The social doctrine of the Church aims at establishing the kingdom of the justice and love of Christ. Moral law extends to the different fields of human activity—economic, social, or political—insofar as these fields are not governed exclusively by the technical norms stemming from their specific objects.

But it is only the moral law that, just as it commands us to seek our supreme and last end in the whole scheme of our activity, so likewise commands us to seek directly in each kind of activity those purposes which we know that nature, or rather God the Author of nature, established for that kind of action, and in orderly relationship to subordinate such immediate purposes to our supreme and last end.²⁵

The Church desires that the laws of justice and charity rule supreme over the social order.²⁶

2c) Christian Principles as the Foundation of Justice

The social doctrine of the Church tries to show that justice is based on Christian principles. The same revealed principles that inspire the Christian's behavior also inspire justice. "Social justice is true only if it is based on the rights of the individual. And these rights will be really recognized only if we recognize the transcendent dimension of man, created in the image and likeness of God, called to be his son and the brother of other men, and destined to eternal life."²⁷

2d) The Way to the Reconstruction of Society

One of the objectives sought by the Church in proclaiming her social doctrine is the establishment of a social order that is based on the truth about man and society. In the process, the root of the disorders that are plaguing the present situation of society is discovered.²⁸

We are aware of our responsibility to take up this torch that our great predecessors lighted, and hand it on with undiminished flame. It is a torch to lighten the pathways of all who would seek appropriate solutions to the many social problems of our times.²⁹

This reconstruction can be achieved only by applying the social doctrine of the Church. It cannot be achieved by mere technical improvements or by raising the standards of living: “But all will come out well if the social teaching of the Catholic Church is applied, as it should be, to the problem.”³⁰ This implies the acceptance of the basic principle of the social doctrine of the Church: “Individual human beings are the foundation, the cause and the end of every social institution. That is necessarily so, for men are by nature social beings.”³¹

3. Sources of the Social Doctrine: Revelation and Natural Law

The Church bases her social Magisterium on two sources: revelation and natural law. “The new order of the world ... must rest on the unshakable foundation, on the solid rock of natural law and of Divine Revelation.”³² These two sources are not alien to each other. The moral precepts that were preached by Jesus Christ—the peak of revelation—include and surpass the natural law. Man can know the natural law with the unaided power of his natural reason. However, this knowledge is liable to error, due to the disordered inclinations that are left by original sin and personal sins. Believers, on the other hand, enjoy a guarantee of infallibility thanks to revelation as taught by the Magisterium, which confirms natural precepts.

The sources of the social doctrine of the Church are the Old and New Testaments. Especially relevant are the Book of Genesis and, above all, the Gospels and the apostolic writings. These teachings provide the light that illumines the social needs of every historical period to solve what has been called “the social question.”³³

4. The Church's Right to Issue her Social Doctrine

4a) The Religious Mission of the Church

As a consequence of her religious mission, the Church is responsible for directing temporal realities to God. This is affirmed in several documents of the Magisterium:

Christ did not bequeath to the Church a mission in the political, economic, or social order: the purpose he assigned to it was a religious one. But this religious mission can be the source of commitment, direction, and vigor to establish and consolidate the community of men according to the law of God.³⁴

The Church makes a moral judgment 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. She strives to inspire right attitudes with respect to earthly goods and in socio-economic relationships.³⁵

4b) Judging the Social Order

The Church must judge whether or not the bases of the social order are in agreement with divine law. The diverse ordinations of the temporal realities are not unimportant for the attainment of man's supernatural destiny—human life is inscribed in that ordination. Therefore, the Church has the right and the competence to pass judgment on that social ordination, in the light of moral principles and revelation. This undeniable right of the Church is based on objective reality.

It is unquestionable competence of the Church, in that aspect of the social order in which this comes close to, or even touches upon the moral sphere, to judge whether the foundations of a given social set-up are in conformity with the immutable order manifested by God the Creator in the natural law, and by God the Redeemer in Revelation.³⁶

4c) The Teaching Mission

It is the role of the Church to draw out and put forward the teachings that are contained in the Gospel, which are the only starting point for a solution to social conflicts.³⁷ The Church's social teaching finds its source in Sacred Scripture. From the beginning, it was the basis of the Church's teaching, her concept of man and life in society, and, especially, the social morality that she worked out according to the needs of the different ages.³⁸

The solutions that are proposed by the Church are not—and should not be—mere theories. However, *the Church does not espouse a specific technical solution to social and political problems*. “By its nature and mission the Church is universal in that it is not committed to any one culture or to any political, economic or social system.”³⁹ There is room, therefore, for a legitimate pluralism.

4d) Solving Social Problems

The Church has the right and the duty to contribute to the solution of social problems. Her contribution is centered on questions related to morals.

The deposit of truth that God committed to Us and the grave duty of disseminating and interpreting the whole moral law, and of urging it in season and out of season, bring and subject to Our supreme jurisdiction not only social order but economic activities themselves.⁴⁰

The purpose of the Church's contribution is to make sure that the solutions to social problems respect the immutable moral laws. This helps to engrave the law of God in the earthly city, whose order should be a reflection—albeit imperfect—of divine perfection.

5. Duties of the Faithful

5a) Diffusion

All the members of the people of God must know the social doctrine of the Church. Its study should not be undertaken for a merely theoretical or informative purpose. It is part of the knowledge that Christians must have of their social duties and the specific way to fulfill them. “Consequently, a purely theoretical instruction in man’s social and economic obligations is inadequate. People must also be shown ways in which they can properly fulfill these obligations.”⁴¹

5b) Implementation

The social doctrine of the Church must be practiced. The believers' assent to such doctrine would not be sincere if their works were to deny it.

It is vitally important, therefore, that Our sons learn to understand this doctrine. They must be educated to it. No Christian education can be considered complete unless it covers every kind of obligation. It must therefore aim at implanting and fostering among the faithful an awareness of their duty to carry on their economic and social activities in a Christian manner.⁴²

6. Development of Social Doctrine

6a) A Doctrine for All Times

The principles on which the social doctrine of the Church is based have a permanent validity: They are based on the nature of man and the spirit of the Gospel.⁴³ The nucleus of God's will for human relations is to be found in the New Testament. These principles must serve as the basis for interpreting the complex evolution that has taken place in the last decades. The maintenance of these principles accounts for the internal connections and consistency of all the teachings of the Church.⁴⁴

A consequence of such principles is the commitment to peace and justice, which has been a constant feature of the development of the social doctrine of the Church. One key to its understanding is the concept of work, seen from the point of view of the good of man.⁴⁵

The encyclical *Rerum Novarum* appeared in 1891 at a time of deep social and economic transformations. New ideologies opposed to Christian principles—liberalism and socialism—had appeared to solve the new problems. Against liberalism's reduction of work to a mere commodity, Leo XIII defended the human value of work and the rights of labor, which the state must protect. Against socialism, the Pope defended the priority of man—endowed with dignity and rights—and of the family over the state.

In his encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, John XXIII enumerated the great changes that have taken place in the scientific, technical, social and political fields since the publication of *Rerum Novarum*.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, he said:

Our purpose is not merely to commemorate in a fitting manner the Leonine encyclical, but also to confirm and make more specific the teaching of Our predecessors, and to determine clearly the mind of the Church on the new and important problems of the day.⁴⁷

Until the publication of Pius XI's encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931, the social doctrine of the Church had focused on a just solution to the problem of labor. Later on, its scope progressively increased to accommodate the problems of the development of peoples and the just distribution of wealth.

6b) The Social Question and Universal Solidarity

More recent encyclicals, like *Mater et Magistra* (1961), *Pacem in Terris* (1963), *Populorum Progressio* (1967), *Laborem Exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), and *Centesimus Annus* (1991) tackled the problem of universal solidarity within the frame of the social question.

At present, the social question has acquired universal dimensions. It demands attention, at the same time, to the solidarity among all peoples and to the individual needs of each one. In this regard, developed countries have a special responsibility to help the development of the less fortunate ones. Only solidarity among all peoples and nations, and the concern of each member of each social group and nation for the common good will make possible the urgently needed reforms.

Let everyone consider it his sacred duty to count social obligations among man's chief duties today and observe them as such. For the more closely the world comes together, the more widely do men's obligations transcend particular groups and gradually extend to the whole world.⁴⁸

To be especially avoided is the excessive concentration of political and economic power, which has already been denounced by Pius XI.⁴⁹ Its avoidance will allow a greater participation of all affected parties in the common responsibilities and decisions, thus making solidarity effective.

Although limits are sometimes called for, these obstacles must not slow down the giving of wider participation in working out decisions, making choices and putting them into practice.... Thus human groups will gradually begin to share and to live as communities. Thus freedom, which too often asserts itself as a claim for autonomy by opposing the freedom of others, will develop in its deepest human reality: to involve itself and to spend itself in building up active and lived solidarity.⁵⁰

1. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 4.
2. Cf. *GS*, 1; *CCC*, 2419–2425.
3. John Paul II, Address to Workers in Commemoration of *Rerum Novarum*, May 15, 1981.
4. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá*, 114.
5. Cf. *GS*, 1–3.

6. Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, *Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y el Opus Dei* (Pamplona, Spain: EUNSA, 1982), 41.
7. John Paul II, Address to Workers in Commemoration of *Rerum Novarum*, May 15, 1981.
8. *GS*, 11.
9. John Paul II, Address to the Youth in Lourdes, Aug. 15, 1983.
10. *GS*, 36.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *AA*, 7; cf. *CCC*, 2420.
13. *LG*, 36.
14. Cf. Joseph Hoeffner, *Fundamentals of Christian Sociology* (Cork, Ireland: Mercier Press), 14.
15. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 15; *CCC*, 2423.
16. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 3.
17. Paul VI, Ap. Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 42.
18. Cf. John Paul II, Address to the Youth in Lourdes, Aug. 15, 1983; *CCC*, 2422.
19. Cf. *LG*, 36; *GS*, 43.
20. Cf. Paul VI, Ap. Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 49–50.
21. Cf. *Ibid.*, 48–50; St. Josemaría Escrivá, “Passionately Loving the World,” in *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá*.
22. Cf. Antonio Millán-Puelles, “Doctrina Social de la Iglesia,” in *Sobre el Hombre y la Sociedad* (Madrid: Rialp, 1974).
23. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 1–6.
24. John Paul II, Address to the Meeting on the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* sponsored by the Italian Episcopal Conference, Oct. 31, 1981; cf. *GS*, 43.
25. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 43.
26. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 39.
27. John Paul II, Homily in the Mass for the Youth in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, July 1, 1980.
28. Cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 15.
29. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 50.
30. John XXIII, Enc. *Ad Petri Cathedram*, 13.
31. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 219.
32. Pius XII, Enc. *Summi Pontificatus*, 29; cf. *CCC*, 2422.
33. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 3.
34. *GS*, 42.
35. *CCC*, 2420; cf. *GS*, 76.
36. Pius XII, Address, June 1, 1941.
37. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 2.
38. Cf. *Ibid.*, 3.
39. *GS*, 42.
40. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 41.
41. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 230.
42. *Ibid.*, 227–28.
43. Cf. *Ibid.*, 15.
44. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 2.
45. Cf. *Ibid.*, 3; *CCC*, 2421.
46. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 47–49.
47. *Ibid.*, 50.
48. *GS*, 30.
49. Cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 107–108.
50. Paul VI, Ap. Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 47.

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The Nature of Man and of Society

7. The Christian Concept of Man

7a) Man: An Image of God

Among all the creatures of the visible universe, man is the only being who was created in the image and likeness of God. His spiritual soul—with its higher faculties: the intellect and the will—makes him an image of God. Through these faculties, man can govern the rest of visible creation, and reach the knowledge of and worship his Creator.

Sacred Scripture teaches that man was created “to the image of God,” as able to know and love his creator, and as set by him over all earthly creatures that he might rule them, and make use of them, while glorifying God.¹

By governing the universe through work and the administration of natural resources, man cooperates and is associated with God’s activity. This shows man’s great natural dignity.

The ultimate goal in the exercise of his natural powers is the knowledge of God and the joy that ensues from this knowledge:

To contemplate God, and to tend to Him, is the supreme law of the life of man. For we were created in the divine image and likeness, and are impelled, by our very nature, to the enjoyment of our Creator. But not by bodily motion or effort do we make advance toward God, but through acts of the soul, that is, through knowledge and love. For, indeed, God is the first and supreme truth, and the mind alone feeds on truth. God is perfect holiness and the sovereign good, to which only the will can desire and attain, when virtue is its guide.²

Man was also endowed, over and above his own nature, with supernatural gifts, which elevated his natural prerogatives and made him share in the divine life itself. Man lost these gifts as a consequence of original sin. However, thanks to the merits of Christ and the saving mission that he entrusted to his Church, man can recover the supernatural gifts. This is done through the Church’s dispensation of the deposit of truth and the administration of the sacraments. The ultimate destiny of man—the contemplation of God as he is—will be possible only in eternal glory. However, even in this life, man can recover the dignity of being a child of God, in the way instituted by Christ.

As he hung upon the Cross, Christ Jesus not only appeased the justice of the Eternal Father, which had been violated, but he also won for us, his brethren, an ineffable

flow of graces. It was possible for him to impart these graces of himself to mankind directly; but he willed to do so only through a visible Church.³

7b) The Center and Peak of Visible Creation

We cannot measure the greatness of man in purely biological terms, as if he were just the most evolved of animals. The Book of Genesis attests that Adam, by naming the other creatures, manifested his God-given dominion over them. At the same time, he acquired knowledge of himself as a singular being and his differences from the other creatures. It is not possible, therefore, to describe the singularity of man in terms of some inferior creature. Even less can we define him through his products. Pope John Paul II asserted that “it is not enough to define man according to all the bio-physiological criteria, and that it is necessary to believe in man, from the beginning.”⁴

As we have just seen, it is in his higher powers—the intellect and the will—that man’s activity resembles God’s. Therefore, these powers establish man as the center and peak of visible, material creation:

Two gifts, which raise him very high between the world of celestial spirits and the world of bodies, make man great, even since his downfall: the *intellect*, whose view surveys the created universe and crosses the skies, yearning to contemplate God; and *will*, endowed with the power to choose freely, servant and master of the intellect, which makes us, in different degrees, masters of our own thoughts and of our actions before ourselves, before others, and before God.⁵

7c) A Transcendent Destiny

Man's vocation can attain its total fulfillment only beyond this world.

The form of this world, distorted by sin, is passing away and we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, whose happiness will fill and surpass all the desires of peace arising in the hearts of men.⁶

The Christian is no expatriate. He is a citizen of the city of men, and his soul longs for God. While still on earth he has glimpses of God's love and comes to recognize it as the goal to which all men on earth are called.⁷

7d) Dignity of the Human Person

(1) *As a child of God*

The dignity of the human person is founded on the adoption as children of God that Christ has won for mankind. If this origin is forgotten, human dignity and the due order of human dealings are threatened.

Separated from God a man is but a monster, in himself and toward others; for the right ordering of human society presupposes the right ordering of man's conscience with God, who is Himself the source of all justice, truth and love.⁸

(2) *As a spiritual being*

Because of his spiritual soul, each individual is endowed with an intrinsic dignity. This implies that his nature cannot be treated as a mere means. The reason is that, as a spiritual being, man has the power to direct himself to his own end. God has given man this power, and he himself respects it. "The mind [*l'esprit*] is the original element that fundamentally distinguishes man from the animal world and that gives him the power to master the universe."⁹

Man is in himself a whole, a microcosm. He cannot be explained by merely natural mechanisms, as if he were just another segment of the universe. The Second Vatican Council gives a list of offenses that violate man's spiritual condition insofar as they attempt to manipulate man for purposes alien to him:

The varieties of crime are numerous: all offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures; all offenses against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where men are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons: all these and the like are criminal: they poison civilization; and they debase the perpetrators more than the victims and militate against the honor of the creator.¹⁰

7e) The Natural Equality of All Human Beings

All human beings have the same free nature created by God. Therefore, they are all endowed with the same dignity in their mutual relations. “For the Church, all men are equal in dignity before God; they must, therefore, be so also in the relations, whether free or necessary, which unite them.”¹¹

This equality does not extend, of course, to their physical capacity or their moral and intellectual qualities, but only to their identical condition as human beings. This identical condition and dignity is opposed to any sort of discrimination in their fundamental rights:

Forms of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language or religion, must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God’s design.¹²

To this we must add men’s dignity as children of God, a dignity won by Christ for *all people* through the means that he instituted and entrusted to his Church.

It is important to keep reminding ourselves that Jesus did not address himself to a privileged set of people; he came to reveal the *universal* love of God to us. God loves all men, and he wants all to love him—everyone, whatever his personal situation, his social position, his work.¹³

8. Society

8a) The Intrinsically Social Nature of Man

(1) *Man needs society to develop himself*

Man is naturally ordained to live in society, so that he may reach his full development. Society is rooted in the singular reality of each human being, who needs the help of other people to develop his natural potentialities.

By his innermost nature man is a social being; and if he does not enter into relations with others he can neither live nor develop his gifts.¹⁴

(2) *Man is sociable by nature*

The sociability of man is a demand of the nature of his being. This trait can be seen in the different expressions of social life. Some belong to the natural order: family and political society geared to the common good.¹⁵ Others arise from free initiative, as a result of the natural right of association; their juridical configuration is thus historical and changeable.¹⁶ These free associations should not be seen as incompatible with natural ones; both are rooted in natural law.

To enter into a “society” of this kind is the natural right of man; and the state has the duty to protect natural rights, not destroy them. If the state forbids its citizens to form associations, it contradicts the very principle of its own existence; for both they and it exist in virtue of the same principle, namely, the natural tendency of man to dwell in society.¹⁷

The human person is not subordinated to society in all his being. It is society that is ordained to facilitating the attainment of man’s proper end.

God has related man and civil society according to the dictates of man’s very nature. In the plan of the Creator, society is a natural means that man can and must use to reach his destined end.¹⁸

These two aspects of society—its necessity for the human person and its derived nature—are summarized by the Second Vatican Council: “Insofar as man by his very nature stands completely in need of life in society, he is and he ought to be the beginning, the subject and the object of every social organization.”¹⁹

(3) *Social rights and duties*

The sociability of man demands that mutual rights and duties be recognized and respected. As a member of civil society, each citizen has rights and obligations toward his fellow citizens. They, in turn, must recognize such rights and duties insofar as they are in the same situation.

It is imperative to a well-ordered society that men should recognize and perform their respective rights and duties. But the result will be that each individual will make his whole-hearted contribution to the creation of a civic order in which rights and duties are ever more diligently and more effectively observed.²⁰

8b) The Nature of Society

(1) *Divine origin*

Human society has been constituted by God, the Author of nature. It is not the result of a compact or contract among citizens. Society derives from God, who is the source of any social authority.

God has made man for society, and has placed him in the company of others like himself, so that what was wanting to his nature, and beyond his attainment if left to his own resources, he might obtain by association with others. Wherefore, civil society must acknowledge God as its Founder and Parent, and must obey and reverence His power and authority.²¹

(2) *Founded on human nature itself*

Society is not something added to the nature of man; it is a demand of his natural sociability. Only with the help of others can a person provide for his needs, both material and spiritual. On the other hand, the individual fulfills his personal vocation by putting his talents and qualities at others' disposal.²²

(3) *Family as the basis of society*

The family is the first natural institution. Its rights and duties take precedence over any other social institution. The state must protect, not absorb, these rights and duties. Some concrete examples of these rights are the right to form a family, the right to not have contraception forced on them, and the right to assistance for large families. Another essential right that must be acknowledged is the education of children; parents are the original and primary holders of the right to educate their children.

The Church has often defended the rights of the family, which are untouchable and prevail over those of the state:

Since the domestic household is antecedent, in idea as well as in fact, to the gathering of men into a community, the family must necessarily have rights and duties that are prior to those of the community, and founded more immediately in nature.... Paternal authority can be neither abolished nor absorbed by the State; for it has the same source as human life itself.²³

8c) Society Is Meant for the Person

The foundation of society is the person, who naturally lives in a family. It follows that the vitality of society will depend on the vitality of its primary cell.

From this superior dignity derives the consequence that the social body and its organization do not have complete authority over man, as St. Thomas pointed out precisely: “Man is not ordained to the political community according to the whole of himself or according to all his affairs.”²⁴

9. Human Solidarity and Charity

9a) Solidarity among Individuals

(1) *Solidarity based on nature*

Solidarity among individuals is imposed and dictated by the basic equality of all people, who share the same rational nature.²⁵ Society is not a mere aggregate of individuals; it is strengthened by organic links among all its members, who are called to form a single family. The interests and concerns of each member cannot be alien to the rest.

All, in fact, are destined to the very same end, namely God himself, since they have been created in the likeness of God who “made from one every nation of men who live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26)... It follows, then, that if man is the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake, man can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself.²⁶

(2) *Solidarity and the supernatural end*

Solidarity is also required by the supernatural end to which all human beings are called. God wants humans to reach salvation as members of a society. Therefore, he has established the Church, in which all cooperate for the common welfare. This form of solidarity is expressed in the dogma of the communion of saints. The common supernatural end is the strongest unifying force binding together all people.

As the firstborn of many brethren, and by the gift of his Spirit, he [Jesus Christ] established, after his death and resurrection, a new brotherly communion among all who received him in faith and love; this is the communion of his own body, the Church, in which everyone as members one of the other would render mutual service in the measure of the different gifts bestowed on each.²⁷

(3) *Solidarity and the common good*

All men are bound to work together for the common good. This coordination of efforts, overcoming partisan positions that divide and cause confrontations, is precisely what we call solidarity.

Such solidarity, open, dynamic, and universal by nature, will never be negative. It will not be a “solidarity against” but a positive and constructive one, a “solidarity for,” for work, for justice, for peace, for well-being and for truth in social life.²⁸

(4) *Solidarity and mutual rights*

Another reason for solidarity is the acknowledgment of mutual rights and duties. This leads to an active solidarity, created by people themselves through the network of their mutual relations.

In his association with his fellow-men, there is every reason why man's recognition of rights, observance of duties, and many-sided collaboration with other men, should be primarily a matter of his own personal decision. Each man should act on his own initiative, conviction, and sense of responsibility, not under the constant pressure of external coercion or enticement.²⁹

9b) Solidarity between Individuals and Society

Solidarity with society demands that individuals cooperate in civic tasks and facilitate the access of the underprivileged to material and cultural goods.

It is necessary then to foster among all the will to play a role in common undertakings. One must pay tribute to those nations whose systems permit the largest possible number of the citizens to take part in public life in a climate of genuine freedom.³⁰

9c) Solidarity among Nations

(1) *Unity of origin and destiny*

Solidarity among nations is rooted in their unity of origin and common destiny. The Church, while respecting the peculiarities of each people, teaches that there is a deep bond among people of different cultures, which is rooted in their common vocation as children of God. Therefore, all nations—especially the wealthier ones—must show solidarity with the other nations.³¹

(2) *Universality of Christian charity*

The charity that was preached and practiced by Christ is not limited to a cultural group or circle; it has no frontiers and extends to all:

Justice has to be completed and sustained by Christian *charity*. This means that love of neighbor, and of one's country, should not withdraw into oneself, in a form of closed egoism suspicious of the good of others, but must wax and expand so as to embrace all nations and establish vital relations with them, in a spontaneous movement towards solidarity.³²

(3) *Absolute equality of all peoples*

All peoples are equal, their legitimate natural and cultural differences notwithstanding. To make this equality effective, however, wealthier nations must provide for the needs of the underdeveloped ones.

The effects of international solidarity, even in its most perfect degree, will hardly be able to achieve perfect equality among all peoples. Still, it is urgent to practice it, at least to such an extent that the present conditions—which are far from representing a harmonious distribution—be significantly modified. In other words, solidarity among peoples demands the end of the huge unbalances in standards of living, as well as in investments and in the productivity of human work.³³

1. GS, 12.
2. Leo XIII, Enc. *Sapientiae Christianae*, 1; cf. CCC, 1929–1933.
3. Pius XII, Enc. *Mystici Corporis*, 6.
4. John Paul II, Homily at Saint-Dennis, May 31, 1980.
5. Pius XII, Address, Nov. 30, 1941.
6. GS, 39.

7. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 99.
8. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 215.
9. John Paul II, Message to the young people of France, June 1, 1980.
10. *GS*, 27.
11. Pius XII, Address, Feb. 4, 1956.
12. *GS*, 29.
13. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 110.
14. *GS*, 12; cf. *CCC*, 1878–1885.
15. Cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Divini Redemptoris*, 27–29.
16. Cf. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 40.
17. Cf. *Ibid.*
18. Pius XI, Enc. *Divini Redemptoris*, 29.
19. *GS*, 25.
20. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 31.
21. Leo XIII, Enc. *Libertas*, 21.
22. Cf. *GS*, 25.
23. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 9–10.
24. *ST*, II-II, q. 21, a. 4, ad 3; cf. *CCC*, 1881.
25. Cf. *CCC*, 360–361.
26. *GS*, 24.
27. *Ibid.*, 32.
28. John Paul II, Address to workers and businessmen in Barcelona, Nov. 7, 1982.
29. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 34.
30. *GS*, 31.
31. Cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Populorum Progressio*, 62.
32. John XXIII, Christmas Message, 1959.
33. Pius XII, Christmas Message, Dec. 24, 1952; cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Populorum Progressio*, 43–76.

21

The Common Good

10. The Purpose of Society: The Common Good

The unity of society is shown through the concerted effort of all its members to attain the common good. “The common good embraces the sum total of all those conditions of social life which enable individuals, families, and organizations to achieve complete and efficacious fulfilment.”¹ These conditions can be summed up in the rights and duties of each person and social group. These rights and duties are natural, and therefore prior to any particular juridical ordination. They do not stem from human will. “We must however, reject the view that the will of the individual or the group is the primary and only source of a citizen’s rights and duties, and of the binding force of political constitutions and the government’s authority.”² Public authority, citizens, and each intermediate association must all contribute to the common good in their own ways. The aspects of the common good range from external goods—material possessions that are necessary for health and welfare—to spiritual goods in which man has the right to participate—peace, culture, education, social order, and the different aspects of freedom.

The ultimate and full expression of the common good is God—common good by causality of all the beings of the universe. This Supreme Good is the source of authority, wanted by God in order to guarantee the temporal common good of citizens. It is thus in the common good that all the reasons for the legitimacy of the state lie. The teaching of the Church rejects the unconditional subordination of all private initiatives to state authority.

To consider the State as something ultimate, to which everything else should be subordinated and directed, cannot fail to harm the true and lasting prosperity of nations. This can happen either when unrestricted dominion comes to be conferred on the State as having a mandate from the nation, people, or even a social order, or when the State arrogates such dominion to itself as absolute master, despotically, without any mandate whatsoever.³

11. Common Good: The Good of All Men

11a) A Common Undertaking

All citizens must contribute to the common good, though not all in the same way. Social justice, which extends to all citizens, covers both the participation in the common good and the contribution to its maintenance by sharing the resulting burdens.

Besides commutative justice, there is also social justice with its own set of obligations, from which neither employers nor workingmen can escape. Now it is of the very essence of social justice to demand from each individual all that is necessary for the common good.⁴

11b) Essential Elements of the Common Good

The common good embraces three essential elements⁵:

- i) *Respect for the person*: Society must allow each person to accomplish his vocation. Particularly, the common good consists of the conditions that facilitate the exercise of natural freedom, which are indispensable for the development of human vocation: “the right to act according to the dictates of conscience and to safeguard his privacy, and rightful freedom even in matters of religion.”⁶
- ii) *Social welfare and development*: The authority should facilitate what each needs to live a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, adequate information, the right to found one’s family, etc.
- iii) *Peace*: The authority should provide safety for society and its members. The common good is the basis of the right to individual and collective legitimate defense.

11c) Attainment of the Common Good

These conditions must be met for the attainment of the common good:

(1) *All citizens should enjoy a sphere of freedom.*

Only persons who are autonomous in their social activity and who can freely exercise their rights and fulfill their social duties can devote their energies to the common good.

To protect the inviolable sphere of human rights and facilitate the fulfillment of human duties is the essential business of all public authority. Does not, indeed, in this consist the genuine meaning of the common good that the State is called upon to promote? From this ensues that the care for that “common good” does not require so extensive a power over the members of the community that in virtue of it the public authority would be entitled to restrict the development of the individual activity.⁷

Coercion on the part of the state is justified only under the principle of subsidiarity. This means that such coercion must be an answer to a previous violation of the common good by a citizen. “Whenever the general interest of any particular class suffers, or is threatened with harm, that can in no other way be met or prevented, the public authority must step in to deal with it.”⁸

(2) *The basic rights of the person must be protected.*

The legitimate authority must safeguard the legitimate rights of man that are grounded on his nature. “The State cannot violate the just freedoms of the human person without undermining its own authority.”⁹ Only in exceptional circumstances can the exercise of some secondary rights be postponed.¹⁰ The role of the state is to foster individual and social initiatives. Only in cases of need can the state supplant these initiatives, and only for as long as the circumstances that justify that intervention last.

These freedoms would not be respected, either in the letter or in the spirit, if the tendency prevailed to attribute to the state and to the other territorial expressions of the public authority a centralizing and exclusive function of organization and direct management of the services or of rigid control, which would end up by distorting their own legitimate function of promotion, propulsion, integration and even—if necessary—of substitution of the initiative of the free social formations according to the principle of subsidiarity.¹¹

(3) *Each individual must be promoted.*

The exercise of civil liberties by all citizens must be fostered. In this regard, no group of citizens may be discriminated against by reason of their race, financial means, or political power. All have the same fundamental rights. Any discrimination as regards the demands of human dignity is therefore unjust.

(4) *Social authority is necessary.*

The existence of a social authority that is geared toward the common good is a demand of nature. The reason for its existence is the common good. It is not for the social authority to establish the common good, but to safeguard it with solicitude. To this end, it must have the prerogative of supreme sovereignty within its sphere. This order, however, is not absolute; social authority cannot go beyond the reason for its legitimacy, the common good. “A ruling authority is indispensable to civil society. This is a fact that follows from the moral order itself. Such authority, therefore, cannot be misdirected against the moral order. It would immediately cease to exist, being deprived of its whole *raison d’être*.”¹² Thus understood, authority proceeds from God, given its natural character. “But, as no society can hold together unless some one be over all, directing all to strive earnestly for the common good, every political body must have a ruling authority, and this authority, no less than society itself, has its source in nature, and has, consequently, God for its Author.”¹³

12. Erroneous Doctrines on the Common Good

12a) Liberalism

The Church has condemned the manner in which liberalism understands the relationship between the individual good and the common good. For liberalism, free individuals need not care for the common good, but only for their personal profit. The common good is thus reduced to a more or less automatic consequence of the creation and increase of capital. Liberalism presents itself under two aspects. One is a generic attitude, an exaltation of freedom in human actions to the point of claiming *emancipation from any divine law*. This view is equivalent to laicism in social life, according to the terminology introduced by Leo XIII. “At the very root of philosophical liberalism is an erroneous affirmation of the autonomy of the individual in his activity, his motivation and the exercise of his liberty.”¹⁴ Liberalism confuses liberty with libertinism, that is, individual wantonness as rule of behavior. Besides, it is ultimately rooted in a hidden rebellion of man against God.¹⁵

The other aspect, more restricted in scope, is *economic liberalism*. This doctrine rejects any ethical limitation of the free play of market forces.

Contractual processes which seek to determine the amount of just prices cannot simply be left to the play of the market forces—which in fact are never natural but always constructed by people—nor to the dominant influence of small groups or to that of numbers. Every contract is a human matter, conducted by people and directed towards serving people.¹⁶

Liberalism also leads to *economic reductionism*. This is patent in the exclusive pursuit of individual welfare, leaving no room for an effective solidarity.

Nor can the Christian adhere to liberal ideology which believes it exalts individual freedom by withdrawing it from every limitation, by stimulating it through exclusive seeking of interest and power, and by considering social solidarity as more or less automatic consequence of individual initiatives, not as an aim and a major criterion of the value of social organization.¹⁷

Leo XIII distinguishes three degrees of liberalism:

- i) The first degree denies any divine authority over man and claims that human reason is the sole source of truth.

- ii) The second degree does not deny the existence of God, and even affirms that man should submit to natural law, but never to revealed divine law.
- iii) The third degree admits man's subjection to natural and revealed divine laws, but only in private life. Public life, it argues, is outside the jurisdiction of divine law, whether natural or revealed.¹⁸

In view of this, we can easily understand the critical assessment of each degree of liberalism. The first is the greatest perversion of freedom. The second supports a mistaken view of Church-state separation, which leads to the practical denial of the social existence of the Church, and subjects her to political power. The third, likewise, merits criticism, because it seeks to confine faith to the sphere of private life, generating the different forms of laicism.

Liberalism has evolved since it first appeared in the nineteenth century, tending to support private initiative against state control. Nevertheless, given its erroneous philosophical roots, it "calls for careful discernment on the part of the Christians."¹⁹

12b) Socialism

Socialist ideology is likewise incompatible with Christian doctrine, because of:

- its wrong concept of the relationship between individual and society,
- its historical materialism,
- its rejection of transcendence.²⁰

These traits are common to all forms of socialism. The production of material goods is taken as the purpose of the social organization, overlooking the true scope of the notions of freedom and social authority.²¹ Being a form of materialism, the supreme finality of human society—and, consequently, of the state—is laid in the production and enjoyment of material goods in this life. This is linked to an *immanentistic* world view, that is, the denial of any practical or theoretical dependence of society on transcendental realities, such as God and eternal law. Hence the fundamental postulate of its programs of social or political action: total *independence* from an *order* established by God, the Creator of nature.

As a consequence of these basic tenets, socialism shows the following traits:

- *Absolute juridical positivism:* What human law allows is lawful; what it prescribes is obligatory; what it forbids is unlawful. And this is so just because it is the law, whether it be divorce, abortion, or any other action.
- *Economic reductionism:* All problems are reduced almost exclusively to economic problems: price, short-term or long-term earnings, etc. Human needs are reduced to material needs. The common good of society is often depicted as a salary distribution that would keep the majority satisfied.
- *Antireligious character:* The socialist world view is clearly incompatible with the acknowledgment of the relative value of material goods, which necessarily follows from a religious, transcendent view of the world, man, and society. This antireligious nature has had different manifestations, from communism's bloody persecutions to merely declaring religion a "private affair."

In a certain way, the errors of socialism and liberalism are similar. By tracing the origin of all laws to the explicit will of the majority, both liberalism and socialism implicitly *reject an obligatory natural order*, which is an expression of the will of God and is prior to any human juridical ordination. Both also lead to economic reductionism.

Finally, liberalism and socialism coincide in *banishing the whole order of transcendence* as unnecessary for the progress of society or even as an obstacle to be overcome.

Nevertheless, what is most characteristic of socialism, setting it apart from other errors that share this materialistic reductionism, is *collectivism*. It implies an inversion of the relationship between the individual and society. In all forms of socialism, the primary and basic human reality is society, represented by the state. The latter can be understood as a stage of “transition” toward a society without state (communism) or as a stable institution (state socialism).

According to collectivism, *individual persons* and natural societies—especially the family—are *subordinated to society* as a whole, which is the primary subject of rights. Therefore, personal rights and freedoms always have a secondary, derived nature. In every historical period, they are subordinated to the progress of society. There is no room in this conception for personal or family rights with precedence over any social interest.

Collectivism has a great variety of practical consequences. Its concrete applications are also very different, since they depend on what is perceived in each occasion as advantageous for the social development program that is established by the state.

The intrinsic evil of socialist principles becomes particularly grievous when applied to the *family*. Sometimes, because of circumstantial interests, the state may “grant” ample freedoms. Still, it often does not recognize the right to get married, the indissolubility of the marriage bond, parental authority within the family, etc.

Another evil consequence of the socialist view of the person-state relationship is its *educational policy*. It denies the priority of the family over the state in educational matters.

Finally, what is usually considered as the identifying trait of socialism is the *rejection of private ownership of the means of production*. In some

forms of socialism, *socialization*—the concentration of all means of production in the hands of the state—is considered the perfect state of socialist economy. Communism, on the other hand, considers socialization as an intermediate stage for the ideal situation, which is the abolition of all ownership, including consumer goods, housing, etc.

The Church rejects *dialectical materialism*, which is the theoretical root of most forms of socialism. Dialectical materialism denies the primacy of the person over material objects, since both are inscribed in the same process, ruled by necessary laws.

Materialism, including its dialectical form, is incapable of providing sufficient and definitive bases for thinking about human work, in order that the primacy of man over the capital instrument, the primacy of the person over things, may find in it adequate and irrefutable *confirmation and support*. In dialectical materialism too man is not first and foremost the subject of work and the efficient cause of the production process, but continues to be understood and treated, in dependence on what is material, as a kind of “resultant” of the economic or production relations prevailing at a given period.²²

We should not confuse socialism with any group or political program that, moved by general ideas of social justice, takes up the defense of workers’ rights, and the right to equal opportunities for all citizens. These ideals cannot be considered exclusive of any political orientation. “Such just demands and desire have nothing in them now that is inconsistent with Christian truth, and much less are they special to socialism. Those who work solely toward such ends have, therefore, no reason to become socialists.”²³ The terms *socialist* and *Christian* are mutually exclusive:

Religious socialism, Christian socialism, are contradictory terms; no one can be at the same time a good Catholic and a true socialist.²⁴

The condemnation of Marxism is not based on circumstantial reasons, but on the intrinsic traits of this philosophy:

It is urgent to repeat (and here I am not speaking politics, I am simply pointing out the Church’s teaching) that Marxism is incompatible with the Christian faith.²⁵

The Magisterium of the Church is quite explicit:

The Christian cannot adhere to the Marxist ideology, to its atheistic materialism, to its dialectic of violence and to the way it absorbs individual freedom in the collectivity, at the same time denying all transcendence to man and his personal and collective history.²⁶

Let us recall the fact that atheism and the denial of the human person, his liberty and his rights, are at the core of the Marxist theory. This theory, then, contains errors that

directly threaten the truths of the faith regarding the eternal destiny of individual persons.²⁷

As in the case of liberalism, we must distinguish in socialism the erroneous doctrine—cast in terms that are irreconcilable with Christian dogma and morals—from the historical movements that embodied it. The latter developed at different times for specific economic, social, cultural, or political purposes, and have evolved with time. We cannot forget, though, that they originated from that erroneous ideology. Catholics must always respect, in their practical application, the Christian principles of responsible freedom and openness to the person's spiritual values, which are the foundation of a person's dignity. Depending on the specific circumstances, Catholics must discern how far they can assume some concrete solutions, while rejecting the principles on which they are based:

Distinctions must be made to guide concrete choices between the various levels of expression of socialism: a generous aspiration and a seeking for a more just society, historical movements with a political organization and aim, and an ideology which claims to give a complete and self-sufficient picture of man. Nevertheless, these distinctions must not lead one to consider such levels as completely separate and independent. The concrete link that, according to circumstances, exists between them must be clearly marked out. This insight will enable Christians to see the degree of commitment possible along these lines, while safeguarding the values, especially those of liberty, responsibility and openness to the spiritual, which guarantee the integral development of man.²⁸

12c) Communism

The Church condemns communism on account of its explicit profession of atheism, which attempts to undermine any transcendent dimension of the human person. This atheism is manifested in its materialistic concept of history that is based on the dialectics of violence and class struggle, in its collectivization of the means of production, in the totalitarian claims of the communist state, and in the suppression of legitimate liberties:

For these reasons We are driven to repudiate such ideologies that deny God and oppress the Church... These ideologies are often identified with economic, social and political regimes; atheistic communism is a glaring instance of this. Yet is it really so much we who condemn them? One may say that it is rather they and their politicians who are clearly repudiating us, and for doctrinaire reasons subjecting us to violent oppression. Truth to tell, the voice we raise against them is more the complaint of a victim than the sentence of a judge.²⁹

13. The Universal Common Good

13a) Concept of the Universal Common Good

The growing interdependence of peoples in the contemporary world highlights the universal dimension of the common good; the whole human family is called to participate in it. Solidarity is not restricted to a single social group; it must extend to all the inhabitants of the planet. “Every group must take into account the needs and legitimate aspirations of every other group, and still more of the human family as a whole.”³⁰

The concept of common good extends to the whole person, including the demands of the body and spirit.³¹ The material goods that are required by man, however, are included in the common good only when they are ordained to the goods of the spirit. “The pre-eminence of the values of the spirit defines the proper sense of earthly material goods and the way to use them. This pre-eminence is therefore at the basis of a just peace.”³²

The common good is not fixed or determined in all its concrete demands. It is a changing reality, a continuous task depending on the historical circumstances of the moment:

While the common good of mankind ultimately derives from the eternal law, it depends in the concrete upon circumstances which change as time goes on; consequently, peace will never be achieved once and for all, but must be built up continually.³³

13b) Contents of the Common Good

(1) *The purpose of public powers*

The common good is the very reason for the existence of public powers. It is also the only valid criterion for justifying the state as an institution and the actuation of public authorities.

All power finds its justification solely in the common good, in the realization of a just social order. Consequently, power must never be used to protect the interests of one group to the detriment of the others.³⁴

(2) *The purpose of human authority*

The common good is also the reason for the existence of human authority and laws. The moral justification of civil laws does not lie only in the legitimacy of the promulgating authority.

The law, in fact, takes its binding value from the function it carries out—in faithfulness to divine law—in the service of the common good; and this, in its turn, is such to the extent to which it promotes the well-being of the person.³⁵

The reason why human laws must be obeyed is not to be found in the laws themselves, but in the divine eternal law. Human laws participate in the divine law when they apply natural precepts to specific contingent circumstances. Thus, the effect of positive law exceeds its own positive reach—and constitutes a moral obligation—only when it fulfills the moral function that legitimizes it. Conversely, when a positive law claims absolute value and is severed from the natural moral order, it must be rejected in conscience.

The attainment of the common good is the sole reason for the existence of civil authorities. In working for the common good, therefore, the authorities must obviously respect its nature, and at the same time adjust their legislation to meet the requirements of the given situation.³⁶

(3) *Mutual relations*

The common good requires the existence of exchanges between individuals and intermediate societies or associations. The universality of the common good is against the compartmentalization or isolation of the different groups that coexist in each nation. This diversity fosters mutual enrichment through the necessary interchanges.

There are many parts of the world where we find groupings of people of more or less different ethnic origin. Nothing must be allowed to prevent reciprocal relations between them.³⁷

(4) *The right to material goods*

All people have the right to find on earth all that they need. The common good demands that the goods of the earth be placed at the service of all. The legitimate right of private ownership is tied to a social function: service to the common interest. The Christian concept of private property opposes any absolute and unconditional right over material goods.

The very right of ownership, legitimate in itself, must, in a Christian view of the world, carry out its function and observe its social purpose. Thus, in the use of the goods possessed, the general purpose that God assigned to them and the requirements of the common good prevail over the advantages, the comforts, and sometimes even the secondary necessities of private origin.³⁸

No one may appropriate surplus goods solely for his own private use when others lack the bare necessities of life.³⁹

Responsibility for the common good should move everyone—especially Christians—to use one's resources and talents for the benefit of all mankind. Thus, one should not create new needs for oneself while others lack even what is indispensable. One should lead a moderate life, and be ready to help others in material or spiritual need with one's work and property. This help can also be channeled through public or private institutions.

13c) Common Good and Moral Order

The fundamental principle of the common good is to acknowledge and respect the moral order. The common good includes the integral good of the person. Since the person can reach his proper end only through the objective moral order, any violation of the latter frustrates the common good:

One of the principal imperatives of the common good is the recognition of the moral order and the unfailing observance of its precepts.⁴⁰

Citizens must see to it that morality is protected in all areas of civic life:

There exists for the Catholic a responsibility of a public and social order. In fact, it is well known that the decline of morality carries with it the decline of society, since it undermines its very foundation as well as that minimum of juridical order, which cannot prescind from ethics....

In this regard, Catholics and all other men of good will must show enlightened courage, demanding from those in charge of public affairs a greater sensitivity, a more energetic defense and a more exacting evaluation of that inalienable common good, the honesty of public morals. The decadence of morals is the decadence of civilization, since there exists a causal connection between the yielding, often willed, to public license and the spread of abnormal phenomena such as violence, delinquency, lack of confidence in the law and the lack of control of the most irrational impulses. More than any other form of political system, democracy demands an informed sense of responsibility, self-discipline, righteousness and moderation in every social expression and relationship.⁴¹

14. National Sovereignty and Universal Common Good

14a) Worldwide Cooperation

Worldwide cooperation is a duty that is based on the universal destination of created goods. This demands that material and spiritual wealth be given a social function for the common good, even in relations between poor and rich nations.

Therefore, the demands of solidarity that are raised by the common good extend to international relations as well. Wealthy nations thus have an obligation toward underprivileged ones.

The more powerful a nation is, the greater becomes its international responsibility; the greater also must be its commitment to the betterment of the lot of those whose very humanity is constantly being threatened by want and need. It is my fervent hope that all the powerful nations in the world will deepen their awareness of the principle of human solidarity within the one great human family.⁴²

Just like personal relations, international relations must be guided by justice and charity.

Probably the most difficult problem today concerns the relationships between political communities that are economically advanced and those in the process of development. Whereas the standard of living is high in the former, the latter are subject to extreme poverty. The solidarity that binds all men together as members of a common family makes it impossible for wealthy nations to look with indifference upon the hunger, misery, and poverty of other nations whose citizens are unable to enjoy even elementary human rights.... Mutual trust among rulers of States cannot begin nor increase except by recognition of, and respect for, the moral order.⁴⁴

14b) Relations between Political Communities

(1) *Rights and duties*

Nations also have reciprocal rights and duties. All nations are basically equal in dignity, although each one has its peculiar cultural tradition. Respect for cultural differences must go hand in hand with the search for a common purpose, which will lead to unity of action.

(2) *Basic principles of international relations*

- *Truth:* The rights of every nation are based on the truth—what each nation actually is. This truth does not proceed from political power, but from each nation’s cultural identity, reaffirmed in the course of its history. Hence the importance of preserving native cultures.

Truth also requires that the mass media respect the reputation of each people and report without bias. “Truth must never be distorted, justice neglected, love forgotten, if one is to observe ethical standards. To forget or lose sight of these is to produce bias, scandal, submission to the powerful, compliance with ‘reasons of state.’”⁴⁴

- *Justice:* Some of the rights that must be respected as a matter of justice are the rights to existence, to progress, to the exploitation of natural resources for national development, and to the protection of national reputation. The duty to improve the lot of ethnic minorities is especially important. This should not lead us to forget, however, universal values—common to all—which help different ethnic groups live together in the same territory:

Emigration is a massive phenomenon of our time, a permanent phenomenon, which is even assuming new forms, and which concerns all continents, and nearly all countries. It raises serious human and spiritual problems.... But it also implies a chance of human and spiritual enrichment, opening, welcoming of foreigners, and mutual renewal thanks to this contact.⁴⁵

- *Christian solidarity and fraternity:* Universal cooperation, through the different forms of association, will facilitate the attainment of common objectives. This solidarity, however, will be precarious unless it is founded on the fraternity of all people:

This duty concerns first and foremost the wealthier nations. Their obligations stem from the human and supernatural brotherhood of man, and present a three-fold

obligation:

- i) mutual solidarity—the aid that the richer nations must give to developing nations;
- ii) social justice—the rectification of trade relations between strong and weak nations;
- iii) universal charity—the effort to build a more humane world community, where all can give and receive, and the progress of some is not bought at the expense of others.⁴⁶

- *Freedom:* Each nation has its own sphere of initiative and development, which other nations must not invade:

Furthermore, relations between States must be regulated by the principle of freedom. This means that no country has the right to take any action that would constitute an unjust oppression of other countries, or an unwarranted interference in their affairs. On the contrary, all should help to develop in others an increasing awareness of their duties, an adventurous and enterprising spirit, and the resolution to take the initiative for their own advancement in every field of endeavor.⁴⁷

(3) *Justice and aid*

Justice also places demands on the relationship between developed and underdeveloped nations. The laws of supply and demand are not enough to satisfy the requirements of justice, and neither is free market competition. It is on the observance of just principles that the construction of a stable and lasting peace depends:

All of humanity must think of the parable of the rich man and the beggar. Humanity must translate it into contemporary terms of economy and politics, in terms of all human rights, in terms of relations between the First, Second and Third Worlds. We cannot stand idly by when thousands of human beings are dying of hunger. Nor can we remain indifferent when the rights of the human spirit are trampled upon, when violence is done to the human conscience in matters of truth, religion and cultural creativity.⁴⁸

1. GS, 74; cf. CCC, 1905–1912.
2. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 78; cf. DH, 6.
3. Pius XII, Enc. *Summi Pontificatus*, 24.
4. Pius XI, Enc. *Divini Redemptoris*, 51.
5. Cf. CCC, 1906–1909.
6. Cf. GS, 26.
7. Pius XII, Address, June 1, 1941.

8. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 28.
9. Pius XII, Enc. *En Ouvrant*, 8.
10. Cf. *DH*, 7.
11. John Paul II, Address to the Italian Catholic Jurists, Nov. 25, 1978.
12. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 83.
13. Leo XIII, Enc. *Immortale Dei*, 2.
14. Paul VI, Ap. Letter *Octogesima Adveniensi*, 35.
15. Cf. Leo XIII, Enc. *Libertas*, 14.
16. John Paul II, Message to the UN Conference on Trade and Development, April 26, 1979.
17. Paul VI, Ap. Letter *Octogesima Adveniensi*, 26.
18. Cf. Leo XIII, Enc. *Libertas*, 15ff.
19. Paul VI, Ap. Letter *Octogesima Adveniensi*, 35.
20. Cf. *Ibid.*, 33.
21. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 34.
22. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 13.
23. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 115.
24. *Ibid.*, 120.
25. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 171.
26. Paul VI, Ap. Letter *Octogesima Adveniensi*, 26.
27. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation,"* Aug. 6, 1984, 7.9.
28. Paul VI, Ap. Letter *Octogesima Adveniensi*, 31.
29. Paul VI, Enc. *Ecclesiam Suam*, 101.
30. *GS*, 26.
31. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 57–59.
32. John Paul II, Address to the UN General Assembly, Oct. 2, 1979.
33. *GS*, 78.
34. John Paul II, Address to Workers at Morumbi Stadium, Sao Paulo, Brazil, July 3, 1980.
35. John Paul II, Address to a Meeting of Midwives, Jan. 26, 1980, no. 3.
36. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 54.
37. *Ibid.*, 100.
38. John Paul II, Homily for Farmers in Recife, Brazil, July 7, 1980.
39. Paul VI, Enc. *Populorum Progressio*, 23.
40. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 85.
41. John Paul II, Address to Convention on Public Morality, Nov. 29, 1982.
42. John Paul II, Address to President Carter, Oct. 6, 1979; cf. *CCC*, 1939–1942, 2437–2442.
43. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 157, 207.
44. John Paul II, Message to the 15th World Day of Social Communications, May 10, 1981.
45. John Paul II, Address to the World Congress on the Problems of Migration, Mar. 15, 1979.
46. Paul VI, Enc. *Populorum Progressio*, 44.
47. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 120.
48. John Paul II, Homily of the Mass at Yankee Stadium, New York, Oct. 2, 1979.

22

Family and Society

15. Christian Concept of the Family

The conjugal community is established on the consent of the spouses. Marriage and family are ordained to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children. The love of the spouses and the procreation of children establish among the members of the family personal relationships and primary responsibilities.

A man and a woman united in marriage, with their children, form a family. This disposition is prior to any acknowledgment by the public authority.

When God created man and woman, he instituted the human family and gave it its fundamental constitution. Its members are persons who are equal in dignity. There is a diversity of responsibilities, duties, and rights within the family, for the common good of its members and society.¹

15a) Divine Origin of the Family

The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of the ecclesial communion, and for this reason, it can and should be called “the domestic Church.”²

A Christian family is a communion of persons, and a reflection and image of the communion of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The family’s procreative and educational activities are a reflection of God’s creative work.³

God has wanted to establish the family as the basic cell of the social organism. The value and permanence of this institution are thus beyond the reach of human laws and decisions. The latter must facilitate the fulfillment of the task that God has entrusted to the family.

Let it be repeated as an immutable and inviolable fundamental doctrine that matrimony was not instituted or restored by man but by God; not by man were the laws made to strengthen and confirm and elevate it but by God, the Author of nature, and by Christ Our Lord by Whom nature was redeemed, and hence these laws cannot be subject to any human decrees or to any contrary pact even of the spouses themselves.⁴

For a Christian marriage is not just a social institution, much less a mere remedy for human weakness. It is a real supernatural calling.⁵

Among the properties that God assigned to marriage since its origin, the most important are unity, indissolubility, and openness to fertility.

Christian doctrine thus opposes any attempt to reduce the family institution to a mere remedy for concupiscence, which is a result of original sin.⁶ That would imply a false spiritualism of human nature as it came out of the hands of God. For even before the first fall, God had wanted to cut short man’s original solitude and give him a mate: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gn 2:18). This shows that the family is the natural environment in which the spouses build up their Christian life and practice the virtues. Through the Sacrament of Marriage, God grants the spouses the graces they need to become saints in their union and in the cares and chores of family life. Christ himself wanted

to be born and to spend most of his earthly life in the family of Nazareth, giving us an ever-valid example.

15b) The Most Natural and Necessary Community

It follows from the above that the family is the “primary vital cell of society.”⁷

Hence, civil progress must take into account the needs of the family; what is more, laws and public policies must protect and perfect it more and more.⁸ The family is the linchpin that builds up and consolidates the common good itself. Civic virtues are acquired in the family. Life within the family is the initiation to life in society. The family’s vitality is the vitality of the whole society.

The family cannot be replaced in this task of bringing up children to be truly human. Everything must be done in order that the family should not be replaced. That is necessary not only for the “private” good of every person, but also for the common good of every society, nation, and State of any continent. The family is placed at the very center of the common good in its various dimensions, precisely because man is conceived and born in it.⁹

15c) The Family Is Prior to the State

Since no institution takes precedence over the family, the state cannot claim rights over it either. On the contrary, the state is bound to respect and protect the rights and duties of the family, which are the original and primary rights. The dispositions of state authorities should never interfere with the life and responsibility of family members for the fulfillment of their own ends. In this field, too, the principle of *subsidiarity* must be applied. Society, and more specifically the state, must acknowledge that “every family ... is a society with its own basic rights.”¹⁰ Thus, the state has the serious obligation of observing the principle of subsidiarity in its relationship with the family:

By virtue of this principle, the State cannot and must not take away from families the functions that they can just as well perform on their own or in free associations; instead it must positively favor and encourage as far as possible responsible initiative by families. In the conviction that the good of the family is an indispensable and essential value of the civil community, the public authorities must do everything possible to ensure that families have all those aids—economic, social, educational, political and cultural assistance—that they need in order to face all their responsibilities in a human way.¹¹

15d) The Essential Element of the Human Community

The true dimension of social welfare and progress is reached when social virtues are fostered in the family. The Second Vatican Council could thus say that the family is a “school for human enrichment.”¹²

The relationships between the members of the family community are inspired and guided by the law of “free giving.” By respecting and fostering personal dignity in each and every one as the only basis for value, this free giving takes the form of heartfelt acceptance, encounter and dialogue, disinterested availability, generous service and deep solidarity. Thus, the fostering of authentic and mature communion between persons within the family is the first and irreplaceable school of social life, an example and stimulus for the broader community relationships marked by respect, justice, dialogue and love.¹³

The different kinds of attacks against the ends of the family, besides opposing the plan of God, seriously harm the whole of society. Nevertheless, by themselves, they cannot undermine the solid position of the family as the basic institution of society, in spite of the difficulties that are brought by changes in the world.

However, this happy picture of the dignity of these partnerships is not reflected everywhere, but is overshadowed by polygamy, the plague of divorce, so-called free love, and similar blemishes; furthermore, married love is too often dishonored by selfishness, hedonism, and unlawful contraceptive practices. Besides, the economic, social, psychological, and civil climate of today has a severely disturbing effect on family life... And yet the strength and vigor of the institution of marriage and family shines forth time and again: for despite the hardships flowing from the profoundly changing conditions of society today, the true nature of marriage and of the family is revealed in one way or another.¹⁴

16. Basic and Inalienable Rights of the Family

16a) The Right to Subsistence and Life

The family is entitled to its own subsistence and life. This implies that the state has the duty to help the family attain the basic resources it needs to carry out its proper tasks. Besides material help, the family needs a non-hostile moral environment.

Everyone, therefore, who exercises an influence in the community and in social groups should devote himself effectively to the welfare of marriage and the family. Civil authority should consider it a sacred duty to acknowledge the true nature of marriage and of the family, to protect and foster them, to safeguard public morality and promote domestic prosperity.¹⁵

16b) The Right to Fulfill its Mission

(1) *Procreation*

Every family has the primary and inviolable right of procreating new lives. No reason—eugenic or demographic—can justify attacking unborn life or preventing conception through sterilization and similar practices.

Every human being—and also the child in his mother's womb—has a right to life, which comes directly from God, not from his parents, nor from any sort of human society or authority. Therefore, no man, no human authority, no science, no medical, eugenic, social, economic, or moral indication can claim or show any valid title to take a deliberate direct measure for its destruction, whether it be sought as an end or as a means to some other end—which perhaps, in itself, is not in any way unlawful.¹⁶

It is the parents, and not the public authorities, who are responsible for the transmission of life and the education of children. Parents have the right to demand from public authorities the legal dispositions that will facilitate the exercise of such responsibilities. The Church is well aware of the frequent violations of this right, which plague our world:

Thus the Church condemns as a grave offense against human dignity and justice all those activities of governments or other public authorities that attempt to limit in any way the freedom of couples in deciding about children. Consequently, any violence applied by such authorities in favor of contraception or, still worse, of sterilization and procured abortion, must be altogether condemned and forcefully rejected. Likewise to be denounced as gravely unjust are cases where, in international relations, economic help given for the advancement of peoples is made conditional on programs of contraception, sterilization, and procured abortion.¹⁷

Besides natural life, the newborn child should receive supernatural life as soon as possible. This is all the more urgent if his life is in danger. In that case, Baptism should be administered even before birth; otherwise, the life of grace cannot take root in his soul.

If we consider that charity towards our neighbor demands that we assist him in case of need; and that this obligation is all the more serious and urgent the greater the good to be obtained or the evil to be avoided, and the less able the person in need is to save or help himself; then, we will easily understand the great importance of seeing to the Baptism of a child deprived of any use of reason, who is in great danger or facing imminent death.... What a great mercy, what a beautiful mercy, is that of securing for the soul of the child—between the threshold of life he has just crossed and the threshold of death he is about to cross—the entrance to glorious, beatifying eternity!¹⁸

This right to life applies equally—particularly, we could even say—to handicapped and retarded persons. Their spiritual souls have been created directly by God to enjoy him, as any other soul.

(2) *The education of children*

The upbringing of children is the natural continuation of procreation, since children need material and spiritual care until they reach maturity. Parents are the first and main educators of their children. This mission must be recognized, and parents must receive the necessary assistance. Pope John Paul II has stressed the irreplaceable catechesis that Christian families are called to provide. Parents may delegate to schools the cultural instruction and the religious and moral formation of their children, but this does not relieve them of their mission and responsibility.¹⁹ It follows that parents have the primary right to choose the type of education that is imparted in schools.

Since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring.

The right and duty of parents to give education is *essential*, since it is connected with the transmission of human life; it is *original and primary* with regard to the educational role of others on account of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children; and it is *irreplaceable and inalienable* and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others.²⁰

16c) The Right to Adequate Financial Support

Salaries must correspond to family needs. Large families should receive a proportionate retribution, so that the weaker members—or even the breadwinners—are not overworked in order to support the family.

In the first place, the worker must be paid a wage sufficient to support him and his family.... It is an intolerable abuse, and to be abolished at all cost, for mothers on account of the father's low wage to be forced to engage in gainful occupations outside the home to the neglect of their proper cares and duties, especially the training of children. Every effort must therefore be made [so] that fathers of families receive a wage large enough to meet ordinary family needs adequately.²¹

16d) The Right to Protection and Assistance

The possibility of having a family property that children can inherit is very advantageous for the stability of the family. This property is acquired by economizing and saving. The state must thus adopt policies that foster family initiative.

It is a most sacred law of nature that a father should provide food and all necessities for those whom he has begotten; and similarly, it is natural that he should wish that his children, who carry on, so to speak, and continue his personality, should be provided by him with all that is needful to enable them to keep themselves decently from want and misery amid the uncertainties of this mortal life. Now, in no other way can a father effect this except by the ownership of productive property, which he can transmit to his children by inheritance.²²

Nevertheless, it is spiritual goods that best unite the family: faith and all the human and supernatural virtues that are practiced in the home. Thus, the family becomes a focus of evangelization, a “domestic Church.” This mission must be fostered, not suppressed. “The family is thus, as the Synodal Fathers recalled, the place of origin and the most effective means for humanizing and personalizing society: it makes an original contribution in depth to building up the world, by making possible a life that is properly speaking human, in particular by guarding and transmitting virtues and values.”²³

The Church encourages all forms of assistance to the family: from housing development, subsidies, and allowances, to fostering family values through the media.

The duties of the political community toward the family can be summarized thus:

- To assure individuals of the freedom to found a home, have children, and educate them according to their own religious and morals convictions
- To protect the stability of the conjugal bond and the family institution
- To assure freedom to profess one’s faith, transmit it, and educate the children in it with the necessary means and institutions
- To recognize the rights to private property, freedom of initiative, work, housing, and emigration

- To assure the right to medical care, assistance for the aged, and family subsidies, according to the laws of the country
- To protect public security and hygiene, especially regarding the dangers of drugs, pornography, and alcohol abuse
- To recognize the family's right to form associations together with other families and to be thus represented before the civil authorities²⁴

17. Duties of the Family

17a) Transmitting Life

Conjugal union is by nature ordained to procreation. Man must not separate the two ends of marriage, which are naturally bound together. In the use of his procreative power, man is not the supreme master, but a mere collaborator of God, the Creator and absolute master of all life. Man must, thus, obey the objective norms that the Author of nature has built into it.

When it is a question of harmonizing married love with the responsible transmission of life, it is not enough to take only the good intention and the evaluation of motives into account; the objective criteria must be used, criteria drawn from the nature of the human person and human action, criteria which respect the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love; all this is possible only if the virtue of married chastity is seriously practiced.²⁵

This does not mean that the mutual help and companionship—the secondary aspect of the purpose of marriage—is reduced to a mere instrumental means. Although still ordained to procreation, which is the primordial aspect of the purpose of marriage, it retains its intrinsic value. This can be appreciated more in the case of childless couples. The conjugal union is a form of interpersonal communion that is instituted by God:

But marriage is not merely for the procreation of children: its nature as an indissoluble compact between two people and the good of the children demand that the mutual love of the partners be properly shown, that it should grow and mature. Even in cases where despite the intense desire of the spouses there are no children, marriage still retains its character of being a whole manner and communion of life and preserves its value and indissolubility.²⁶

Because of the indissoluble union of the two aspects of the purpose of marriage, the Church opposes artificial insemination and artificial contraception. Both subvert the natural order.

(1) *Artificial insemination*

God has established that procreation be the fruit of the love of the spouses within legitimate marriage.

Every use of the faculty given by God for the procreation of new life is the right and the privilege of the married state alone, by the law of God and of nature, and must be confined absolutely within the sacred limits of that state.²⁷

In view of the genetic experiments that have been performed in recent years, test-tube fertilization (fertilization *in vitro* with embryo transfer, FIVET) must be declared ethically unlawful because:

- it implies a high risk of abortion;
- the practice of freezing and storing an embryo as if it were an object, interrupting the natural development of life, violates the dignity that is enjoyed by a human being from the very moment of conception;
- in all cases, it dissociates the two aspects of the human act, union and procreation, since procreation is sought separately from the conjugal relation.

In what concerns artificial fecundation there is not merely room for extreme caution, but it must absolutely be avoided. By speaking this way, we do not necessarily forbid the use of artificial means whose sole purpose is either to facilitate the natural act or to assist the natural act, placed normally, in attaining its purpose.... Artificial fertilization oversteps the limits of the right acquired by the parents through the marriage contract, to wit: the right to fully exercise their natural sexual power by naturally performing the conjugal act.... We must likewise say that artificial fertilization violates natural law, and is against the law and morals.²⁸

These *techniques of artificial reproduction*, which would seem to be at the service of life and which are frequently used with this intention, actually open the door to new threats against life. Apart from the fact that they are morally unacceptable, since *they separate procreation from the fully human context of the conjugal act*, these techniques have a high rate of failure: not just failure in relation to fertilization but with regard to the subsequent development of the embryo, which is exposed to the risk of death, generally within a very short space of time. Furthermore, the number of embryos produced is often greater than that needed for implantation in the woman's womb, and these so-called "spare embryos" are then destroyed or used for research which, under the pretext of scientific or medical progress, in fact reduces human life to the level of simple "biological material" to be freely disposed of.²⁹

"On the subject of the experiments in artificial human fecundation *in vitro*, let it suffice for us to observe that they must be rejected as immoral and absolutely illicit."³⁰ The same doctrine has been repeated by later popes, including John Paul II, and, among others, by the episcopal conferences of England, Australia, and Canada.

(2) *Contraception*

In the opposite sense, that is, excluding the generative process, the Church rejects any artificial intervention. "Equally to be condemned, as the Magisterium of the Church has affirmed on various occasions, is direct

sterilization, whether of the man or of the woman, whether permanent or temporary. Similarly excluded is any action, which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means.”³¹

Any conjugal act must be open to the transmission of life. Contraception is thus always illicit, even when it is used as a means for some good purpose:

Though it is true that sometimes it is lawful to tolerate a lesser moral evil in order to avoid a greater one or in order to promote a greater good, it is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil so that good may come from it—in other words, to intend positively something that intrinsically contradicts the moral order, and that must therefore be judged unworthy of man, even though the intention is to protect or promote the welfare of an individual, of a family or of society in general. Consequently, it is a serious error to think that a whole married life of otherwise normal relations can justify sexual intercourse that is deliberately contraceptive and so intrinsically wrong.³²

The use of the woman’s infertile period, however, can be admitted as a lawful option for birth control. This is acceptable only within the framework of responsible parenthood—that is, when there are “serious reasons” for spacing pregnancies. In such cases, responsible parenthood is exercised through the control of instinctive tendencies by reason and will.

But if we attend to relevant physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, those are considered to exercise responsible parenthood who prudently and generously decide to have a large family, or who, for serious reasons and with due respect to the moral law, choose to have no more children for the time being or even for an indeterminate period.³³

The Church commends parents who are willing to bring up a large family with sacrifice and generosity:

Among the married couples who thus fulfill their God-given mission, special mention should be made of those who after prudent reflection and common decision courageously undertake the proper upbringing of a large number of children.³⁴

17b) The Education of Children

The transmission of life is not limited to the physical sphere; it continues through education. Taking as a model the mutual self-surrender of the spouses, education should aim at developing self-giving in the relations between the members of the family. All the virtues acquired in the family environment have repercussion on the diverse social spheres.

The family is the first and fundamental school of social living; as a community of love, it finds in self-giving the law that guides it and makes it grow. The self-giving that inspires the love of husband and wife for each other is the model and norm for the self-giving that must be practiced in the relationships between brothers and sisters and the different generations living together in the family. And the communion and sharing that are part of everyday life in the home at times of joy and at times of difficulty are the most concrete and effective pedagogy for the active, responsible and fruitful inclusion of the children in the wider horizon of society.³⁵

There is no need to repeat that parents should guide the instruction that is received at school. Education is not a spontaneous growth, nor is it a one-sided task of feeding knowledge into the mind of the child. It is an active process of helping the whole person—intellect, will, and feelings—mature through the responsible exercise of freedom. Being a process of integral formation, education must include the fundamental aspect of religious development.

By virtue of their ministry of educating, parents are, through the witness of their lives, the first heralds of the Gospel for their children. Furthermore, by praying with their children, by reading the word of God with them and by introducing them deeply through Christian initiation into the Body of Christ—both the Eucharistic and the ecclesial Body—they become fully parents, in that they are begetters not only of bodily life but also of the life that through the Spirit's renewal flows from the Cross and Resurrection of Christ.³⁶

17c) Indivisible Conjugal Community

Love is the foundation of the conjugal society, and love dictates the characteristics of that society as a *total* and *exclusive* community. The spouses do not give each other something external to themselves, or only a parcel of their activity; they share all that they are and have. It is, strictly, an interpersonal community (i.e., person-to-person, not body-to-body) that admits of no restrictions in what is shared with the other party. Neither is a conjugal community of more than two persons possible. This explains its characteristics of totality and exclusivity.

This conjugal communion sinks its roots in the natural complementarity that exists between man and woman, and is nurtured through the personal willingness of the spouses to share their entire life-project, what they have and what they are; for this reason such communion is the fruit and the sign of a profoundly human need.³⁷

The Sacrament of Marriage is not an extrinsic addition to the natural bond; it is the same bond, but assumed and purified by the order of grace, and transformed into an image of the indivisible union between Christ and his Church.

17d) Care for Children and the Aged

As in other social spheres, concern for the most needy is accorded a special place. The family should live in such a manner that its members learn to care for and take responsibility toward the young ones and the aged, the sick, the handicapped, and the poor.³⁸ The Church sets her Master as model of how to welcome children:

Acceptance, love, esteem, many-sided and united material, emotional, educational and spiritual concern for every child that comes into this world should always constitute a distinctive, essential characteristic of all Christians, in particular of the Christian family; thus children, while they are able to grow “in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man” (Lk 2:52), offer their own precious contribution to building up the family community and even to the sanctification of their parents.³⁹

Old people, on the other hand, should not be left out of the family. They are in a privileged position to transmit wisdom and to bridge the generational gap:

To proclaim the mission of the elderly and thereby to promote their special role in the human family is a task of great importance.... Old age is able to enrich the world through prayer and counsel, its presence enriches the home; its immense capacity for evangelization by word and example, and by activities eminently adapted to the talents of the elderly is a force for the Church of God yet to be thoroughly understood or adequately utilized.⁴⁰

17e) Duties of the Children

Divine paternity is the source of human paternity, and thus the foundation of the honor that is due to parents.⁴¹ The respect of children, both the young and old, for their parents (cf. Prv 1:8; Tb 4:3–4) is fostered by the natural affection that is born of the family bond that unites them. This respect (*filial piety*) is demanded by divine precept (cf. Ex 20:12) and is based on *gratitude* toward those who have given us the gift of life and care for us with love and effort.

Filial respect is expressed by true docility and *obedience* (cf. Prv 6:20–22; 13:1). As long as a child lives at home with his parents, the child should obey his parents in all that they ask of him when it is for his good or that of the family (cf. Col 3:20; Eph 6:1). Children should also obey the reasonable directions of their teachers and all to whom their parents have entrusted them. But if a child is convinced in conscience that it would be morally wrong to obey a particular order, he must not do so.

As they grow up, children should continue to respect their parents. Obedience toward parents ceases with the emancipation of the children, but not so respect, which is always owed to them.

The fourth commandment reminds grown children of their *responsibilities toward their parents*. As much as they can, they must give them material and moral support in old age and in times of illness, loneliness, or distress (cf. Mk 7:10–12; Sir 3:2–6; 3:12–13, 16).

Filial respect promotes harmony in all of family life, including *relationships between brothers and sisters*.

For Christians, a special gratitude is due to those from whom they have received the gift of faith, the grace of Baptism, and life in the Church. These may include parents, grandparents, other members of the family, pastors, catechists, and other teachers or friends (cf. 2 Tm 1:5).

18. Marriage and Civil Law

18a) Duties of the State toward Marriage

First of all, the state must recognize the citizen's right to form a family, and protect it through appropriate laws and assistance. It must also recognize and protect the right to attain the natural purposes that define the family. "The rights of parents to procreate and educate children in the family must be safeguarded."⁴² In this regard, the Church advises that the families themselves, through the appropriate public action, secure from the state the laws and institutions that will protect their rights and duties.⁴³ The duties of the state in this field can be summarized in the principle of subsidiarity, as was explained above.

The Church has brought to the consideration of public authorities—and of the families themselves—the inalienable rights of the family. We must point out, besides the fundamental rights mentioned above, others that are necessary consequences of these:

- The right to decent housing
- The right to free speech and to representation before the different public authorities, both as individual families and through free associations
- The right to have minors protected from alcoholism, drug addiction, pornography, or harmful medicines
- The right to leisure and privacy
- The right to migrate as a family to seek better living conditions⁴⁴

18b) Divorce

Indissolubility is a property of every true marriage. It corresponds to God's original plan for man: "What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Mt 19:6; cf. Lk 16:18). It is not a demand of the sacrament alone. It follows from the very nature of the conjugal bond, exclusive and unconditional for as long as the spouses are alive.

These words of Christ refer to every kind of marriage, even that which is natural and legitimate only; for, as has already been observed, that indissolubility by which the loosening of the bond is once and for all removed from the whim of the parties and from every secular power, is a property of every true marriage.⁴⁵

Indissolubility is required both for the mutual self-giving of the spouses and for the welfare of the children. These two principles are the foundation of another requirement of marriage: fidelity. No civil law has the power to break the bond, which God has established as indissoluble by its own nature.

Being rooted in the personal and total self-giving of the couple, and being required by the good of children, the indissolubility of marriage finds its ultimate truth in the plan that God has manifested in his Revelation; He wills and He communicates the indissolubility of marriage as a fruit, a sign and a requirement of the absolutely faithful love that God has for man and that the Lord Jesus has for the Church.⁴⁶

18c) Women and Housekeeping

Like any other work, the work of housewives in their homes must be duly recognized and protected by law. The equal dignity of both spouses requires that the complementary tasks performed by breadwinner and housekeeper be granted the same recognition. Women have the same right as men to occupy professional and public positions. But they also have the right to seek that the typically feminine work they carry out in their homes be recognized as professional work. This means that wives should not be forced to seek work outside the house to support their families.

There is no doubt that the equal dignity and responsibility of men and women fully justifies women's access to public functions. On the other hand the true advancement of women requires that clear recognition be given to the value of their maternal and family role, by comparison with all other public roles and all other professions. Furthermore, these roles and professions should be harmoniously combined, if we wish the evolution of society and culture to be truly and fully human.⁴⁷

The proper appreciation of women's role in the home will result in measures like the family wage, which takes into account the needs of the whole family, or direct subsidies to mothers:

Just remuneration for the work of an adult who is responsible for a family means remuneration that will suffice for establishing and properly maintaining a family and for providing security for its future. Such remuneration can be given either through what is called a *family wage*—that is, a single salary given to the head of the family for his work, sufficient for the needs of the family without the other spouse having to take up gainful employment outside the home—or through *other social measures* such as family allowances or grants to mothers devoting themselves exclusively to their families. These grants should correspond to the actual needs, that is, to the number of dependents for as long as they are not in a position to assume proper responsibility for their own lives.⁴⁸

St. Josemaría Escrivá tirelessly preached that the time that is devoted to one's family is extremely pleasing to God, as well as an inexcusable obligation. He stressed the typically feminine values that women can contribute to the family and to society at large:

The attention she gives to her family will always be a woman's greatest dignity. In the care she takes of her husband and children or, to put it in more general terms, in her work of creating a warm and formative atmosphere around her, a woman fulfills the most indispensable part of her mission. And so it follows that she can achieve her personal perfection there.... What I have just said does not go against her participating in other aspects of social life including politics. In these spheres, too, women can offer a valuable personal contribution, without neglecting their special

feminine qualities. They will do this to the extent in which they are humanly and professionally equipped.⁴⁹

1. Cf. CCC, 2201–2233.
2. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 21; *LG*, 11.
3. Cf. CCC, 2204–2206.
4. Pius XI, Enc. *Casti Connubii*, 3.
5. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 23.
6. Cf. Joseph Hoeffner, *Fundamentals of Christian Sociology*, 57.
7. *AA*, 11.
8. Cf. Pius XII, Address, June 1, 1941; *GS*, 48.
9. John Paul II, General Audience, Jan. 3, 1979.
10. *DH*, 5.
11. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 45.
12. *GS*, 52.
13. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 43.
14. *GS*, 47.
15. *Ibid.*, 52.
16. Pius XII, Address, Nov. 27, 1951.
17. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 30.
18. Pius XII, Address, Nov. 27, 1951.
19. Cf. Teodoro López, ed., *Juan Pablo II a las Familias* (Pamplona, Spain: EUNSA, 1980), 33ff.
20. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 36.
21. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 71.
22. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 9.
23. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 43; cf. CCC, 2209–2211.
24. Cf. CCC, 2211; John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 46.
25. *GS*, 51.
26. *Ibid.*, 50.
27. Pius XI, Enc. *Casti Connubii*, 7; cf. CCC, 2376–2379.
28. Pius XII, Address to the Fourth International Congress of Catholic Doctors, Sep. 29, 1949.
29. John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 14.
30. Pius XII, Address to the World Congress on Sterility and Fecundity, May 19, 1956; cf. Thomas J. O’Donnell, S.J., *Medicine and Christian Morality* (New York: Society of St. Paul), 263–270.
31. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 14; cf. CCC, 2370.
32. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 14.
33. *Ibid.*, 10.
34. *GS*, 50.
35. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 37.
36. *Ibid.*, 39.
37. *Ibid.*, 19.
38. Cf. CCC, 2208.
39. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 26.

40. John Paul II, Address to the International Forum on Active Aging, Sep. 5, 1980.
41. Cf. CCC, 2214–2220.
42. GS, 52.
43. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 44.
44. Cf. John Paul II, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, Oct. 22, 1983; Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 46; CCC, 2207–2211.
45. Pius XI, Enc. *Casti Connubii*, 33.
46. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 20.
47. *Ibid.*, 23; cf. CCC, 2384–2386.
48. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 19.
49. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá*, 87.

23

State and Society

19. The Origin of the State

19a) The Need for Authority

We have already seen that the common good cannot be secured without the efficient direction provided by authority. Authority is “the natural and necessary link for ensuring the cohesion of the social body.”¹ The obligation to submit to it is thus based on the moral force that defines it, not on its coercive power—although the use of coercive means within the limits of the common good is legitimate. Authority cannot treat free persons as mere robots, since it is precisely meant for their service.

Lest the political community be ruined while everyone follows his own opinion, an authority is needed to guide the energies of all towards the common good—not mechanically or despotically, but by acting above all as a moral force based on freedom and a sense of responsibility.²

19b) All Authority Proceeds from God

The study of the common good showed that authority, as a natural institution, proceeds from God. Sacred Scripture and Tradition attest to the same truth. In the Old Testament, we read: “By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just” (Prv 8:15) St. Paul affirms: “There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Rom 13:1). St. Augustine repeats the same doctrine: “We do not attribute the power of giving governments and empires to any but the true God.”³ St. Gregory the Great affirms the same: “We confess that power is given from above to emperors and kings.”⁴ Finally, the recent Magisterium has declared: “Governmental authority, therefore, is a postulate of the moral order and derives from God.”⁵

We can conclude that the dispositions of human authority are right and binding only insofar as they somehow partake of the Supreme Authority. No authority can be independent of that Supreme Authority.

19c) Authority and Moral Order

The observance of the moral law is necessary for the proper exercise of authority.

Political authority, either within the political community as such or through organizations representing the state, must be exercised within the limits of the moral order and directed toward the common good.⁶

Every man has the natural moral law engraved in his heart, and knows its contents from the moment he reaches the age of reason. It consists of all the ends that fulfill the nature of man, and that can be known by human reason. These ends constitute the minimum basic moral code that every man must follow. This code includes the Ten Commandments and many of their concrete applications. Any positive legislation must therefore be inspired by natural moral law.

Within its own scope, human authority can extend the moral law in those aspects connected with civil life that the latter has not specified:

The patronage of the moral order that we attribute to St. Stanislaus is principally linked with the universal recognition of the authority of the moral law, that is to say, of the law of God. This law places an obligation upon everyone, both subjects and rulers. It constitutes the moral norm, and is an essential criterion of man's value. Only when we begin from this law, namely the moral law, can the dignity of the human person be respected and universally recognized. Therefore, morality and law are the fundamental conditions for social order. Upon the law are built States and nations, and without it they perish.⁷

19d) No Authority without God

The dictates of civil authority can bind in conscience only when they are in agreement with the Law of God. No authority that ignores the Law of God can demand obedience. If there is a conflict between human and divine law, a Christian must always obey God rather than men (cf. Acts 5:29).

Consequently, laws and decrees passed in contravention of the moral order, and hence of the divine will, can have no binding force in conscience, since “it is right to obey God rather than men.” Indeed, the passing of such laws undermines the very nature of authority and results in shameful abuse.⁸

19e) Authority and the People

Authority does not come from the people. But the people have the right to choose the persons who will exercise it, and the way in which they will do it:

The fact that authority comes from God does not mean that men have no power to choose those who are to rule the State, or to decide upon the type of government they want, and determine the procedure and limitations of rulers in the exercise of their authority.⁹

The investiture of political power—that is, the act of entrusting authority to a specific person or persons—*does not come from God*. Otherwise, God would see to the appointment of leaders in an explicit way, without human intervention. If that were the case, leaders would be answerable only to God or to themselves. Therefore, the divine origin of authority is not an obstacle for the defense of *freedom* and *political pluralism*; subjects have the right and duty to take part in public life and determine the regime, political system, parties, and persons who will govern the political community.

It is clear that the political community and public authority are based on human nature, and therefore that they need belong to an order established by God; nevertheless, the choice of the political regime and the appointment of rulers are left to the free decision of the citizens.¹⁰

20. The Purpose of the State

20a) A Service to Society

The state must regulate social life and serve society. Rulers must avoid disorders in the exercise of civic rights. They must ensure that the private interests of some individuals do not prevail over the rest, and that there is due harmony between the reciprocal rights and duties of each person.

One of the principal duties of any government, moreover, is the suitable and adequate supervision and co-ordination of men's respective rights in society. This must be done in such a way,

- that the exercise of their rights by certain citizens does not obstruct other citizens in the exercise of theirs;
- that the individual, standing upon his own rights, does not impede others in the performance of their duties;
- that the rights of all be effectively safeguarded, and completely restored if they have been violated.¹¹

20b) State and Person

(1) *Respect for the person*

The state must respect human persons and human activity, since only the person is entitled to respect on his own account. State ordinances and institutions must be placed at the service of each person:

The intelligence, with which man is endowed, puts him above all creatures of the visible world, and is the foundation of his peculiar dignity, making him a being “naturally free and existing for his own sake”—*naturaliter liber et propter seipsum existens*. It is precisely from this superior dignity that there is derived also the consequence that the social body and its organization do not have complete authority over man, as the Angelic Doctor pointed out precisely: “Man is not ordained to the political community according to the whole of himself or according to all his affairs.”¹²

(2) *Protection of personal rights*

The state must protect the rights of all persons, especially the most destitute ones, who cannot stand for their own rights.

Rights must be religiously respected wherever they exist, and it is the duty of the public authority to prevent and to punish injury, and to protect every one in the possession of his own. Still, when there is question of defending the rights of individuals, the poor and badly off have a claim to special consideration.¹³

Laws and ordinances that trample upon or ignore human rights do not bind at all.¹⁴

(3) *Facilitating the fulfillment of duties*

The state must take into account the rights of the citizens in its norms and regulations. But it must also consider them as subjects of duties, and supply them the means and opportunities that are needed for the fulfillment of those duties.¹⁵

(4) *Facilitating personal fulfillment*

The state must help persons develop themselves. Human persons reach their perfection by integrally fulfilling the demands of their being, and this fulfillment should not be subject to the state.

However, while such difficulties and experiences can at times call for exceptional measures ... they never, never justify any attack on the inviolable dignity of the human person and on the authentic rights that protect that dignity. If certain ideologies and certain ways of interpreting legitimate concerns for national security

were to result in subjugating to the State man and his rights and dignity, they would to that extent cease to be human and would be unable to claim without gross deception any Christian reference.¹⁶

20c) State and Common Good

(1) *The attainment of the common good*

All the authority of the state is directed to the attainment of the common good. The state cannot ignore the requirements of justice that are necessary for the common good. As we have seen, these requirements can be summarized in the respect of personal rights and the equitable distribution of the burdens and benefits of the common good. John Paul II mentions some of the specific tasks of the state:

The State, the justification of which is the sovereignty of society, and to which is entrusted the safeguarding of independence, must never lose sight of its first objective, which is the *common good* of all its citizens—all its citizens without distinction, and not just the welfare of one particular group or category. The State must reject anything unworthy of the freedom and of the human rights of its people, thus banishing all elements such as abuse of authority, corruption, domination of the weak, the denial to the people of their right share in political life and decisions, tyranny or the use of violence and terrorism.¹⁷

(2) *Respect for the supernatural order*

The achievement of the common good must respect the demands of the eternal and supernatural order, since the natural common good is in harmony with the supernatural good of the souls. Both the dignity of the human person and the pursuit of justice and peace are goals common to the state and to the Church.

In their own proper spheres, the political community and the Church are mutually independent and self-governing. Yet, by a different title, each serves the personal and social vocation of the same human beings.¹⁸

21. Duties of the State Mentioned by the Magisterium

21a) To Help and Respect the Church

The state must help the Church and respect her freedom. If the due independence of the Church in the fulfillment of her supernatural mission is not respected, the State would fail to protect the dignity of man, since the religious dimension is what measures the true greatness of man.

To violate religious freedom, oppress it, limit it, and stifle it, is the greatest affront to man, for the spiritual and religious dimension is the one on the basis of which every other human greatness is measured.¹⁹

21b) To Safeguard Morals

As an image and likeness of God, man requires above all the supernatural goods. Human dignity demands that the state respect the moral dignity of the person, which has been granted by God himself. The state must thus strive to build a healthy moral environment, which will encourage citizens to practice virtue. It is obvious that seeing to the production and equitable distribution of material goods does not exhaust the responsibilities of the state.

Man indeed can be wounded in his inner relationship with truth, in his conscience, in his most personal belief, in his view of the world, in his religious faith, and in the sphere of what are known as civil liberties.... Structures of social life often exist in which the practical exercise of these freedoms condemns man, in fact if not formally, to become a second-class or third-class citizen, to see compromised his chances of social advancement, his professional career or his access to certain posts of responsibility, and to lose even the possibility of educating his children freely.²⁰

21c) To Defend Freedom

The state must protect the liberties of individuals and of the different social groups and classes. Ordinarily, state authorities must encourage personal and social initiatives, rather than take their place. The state must coordinate and direct them according to the interests of the common good. In this field, the function of the state must be directed by the *principle of subsidiarity*, which we will study in more detail later.

However extensive and far-reaching the influence of the State on the economy may be, it must never be exerted to the extent of depriving the individual citizen of his freedom of action. It must rather augment his freedom while effectively guaranteeing the protection of his essential personal rights.²¹

Public authority must not invade the rights and freedoms of citizens; it can only demand their cooperation for the attainment of the common good.²²

The common good requires *peace*, that is, the stability and *security* of a just order. It presupposes that authority should ensure by morally acceptable means the security of society and its members. It is the basis of the right to legitimate personal and collective defense.²³

21d) To Promote Social Justice

The state must implement a policy of social justice and security. Social justice demands that working conditions may not be left to particular contracts exclusively, since, in that case, workers could easily be at a disadvantage. The state cannot ignore basic rights like having a dignified and healthy working environment, or receiving a salary that will sufficiently cover unavoidable personal and family needs.

Among the several purposes of a society [association of workers], one should be to try to arrange for a continuous supply of work at all times and seasons; as well as to create a fund out of which the members may be effectively helped in their needs, not only in the cases of accident, but also in sickness, old age, and distress.²⁴

In many countries, the first priority nowadays is creating jobs for everyone. This task corresponds primarily to the state, which should implement global policies in order to exploit the great reserves of unused resources, and thus promote full employment.²⁵

Another responsibility of the state is social security. This includes measures ranging from life insurance, medical care, accident prevention, disability and old age pensions, safety and good moral conditions in the workplace, as well as the protection of the rights to rest and leisure. These measures should benefit both the worker and his family.

21e) To Observe Distributive Justice

Every human being must have access to a certain quantity of goods that are absolutely necessary for life; this condition is inseparable from human dignity. Aside from this, citizens are entitled to an equitable distribution of social benefits and burdens. In this regard, the state must favor especially the underprivileged, whose only resource is their work:

The richer class have many ways of shielding themselves, and stand less in need of help from the State; whereas the mass of the poor have no resources of their own to fall back upon, and must chiefly depend upon the assistance of the State. And it is for this reason that wage-earners, since they mostly belong in the mass of the needy, should be specially cared for and protected by the government.²⁶

On the other hand, justice demands that all citizens contribute to the support of common social services. This contribution must be made in an equitable and solidaristic manner, in spite of the practical difficulties of assigning to each person and group the amount that exactly corresponds to them:

Citizens, who must be defended in their rights, must at the same time be educated to take their just share of public charges, in the form of taxes or dues, for it is also a form of justice when one benefits from public services and the multiple conditions of a peaceful life in common; and it is also an equitable form of solidarity with other members of the national or international community or with other generations.²⁷

21f) To Foster Economic and Social Development

The improvement of social services is one of the signs of economic and social development, and social progress should not lag behind economic development. Pope John XXIII lists some of the basic social services: “Such services include road building, transportation, communications, drinking water, housing, medical care, ample facilities for the practice of religion, and aids to recreation.”²⁸

True development, moreover, should start by affirming the spiritual values in each human being, and putting social and economic progress at their service:

The construction of a new social order presupposes, over and above the essential technological skills, a lofty inspiration, a courageous motivation, belief in man’s future, in his dignity, in his destiny.... All those who desire the defense and progress of man must therefore love man for his own sake; and for this it is essential to count upon the values of the spirit, which are alone capable of transforming hearts and deeply-rooted attitudes.²⁹

21g) To Protect Private Property

The state must seek to extend the right to private property to as many individuals as possible. This will be made easier by policies favoring savings and investment:

The law, therefore, should favor ownership, and its policy should be to induce as many as possible of the people to become owners. Many excellent results will follow from this; and, first of all, property will certainly become more equitably divided.³⁰

Likewise, reforms must be undertaken to ensure that farmers enjoy appropriate living standards, that private ownership is not abused to the detriment of others, and that productive properties are not left idle.³¹

21h) To Be a Prudent Administrator

It is difficult to lay down general criteria for the priorities in the administration of public funds. A basic and always valid principle is that of covering the fundamental needs—both material and cultural—of all citizens. Another goal is to avoid unnecessary military build ups:

It is an increasing outlay of means that are socially unproductive, which causes fatal psychological consequences in relations among States and in the internal life of the States themselves.³²

21i) To Intervene in Certain Cases

When private associations harm the common good, the state has to step in to amend or dissolve them. When the right to private property is exercised without regard for the common interest, the state must ensure that these properties—especially land—are exploited for the benefit of all. “But every precaution should be taken not to violate the rights of individuals and not to impose unreasonable regulations under pretense of public benefit. For laws only bind when they are in accordance with right reason, and, hence, with the eternal law of God.”³³ “The transfer of goods from private to public ownership may be undertaken only by competent authority, in accordance with the demands and within the limits of the common good, and it must be accompanied by adequate compensation.”³⁴

22. The Principle of Subsidiarity

Based on the previous Magisterium, Pius XI gave a general formulation of the principle of the subsidiary role of the state:

As history abundantly proves, it is true that on account of changed conditions many things that were done by small associations in former times cannot be done now save by large associations. Still, a most weighty principle, which cannot be set aside or changed, remains fixed and unshaken in social philosophy: Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a great evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the social body, and never destroy and absorb them.

The supreme authority of the State ought, therefore, to let subordinate groups handle matters and concerns of lesser importance, which would otherwise dissipate its efforts greatly. Thereby the State will more freely, powerfully, and effectively do all those things that belong to it alone because it alone can do them: directing, watching, urging, and restraining, as occasion requires and necessity demands. Therefore, those in power should be sure that the more perfectly a graduated order is kept among the various associations, in observance of the principle of “subsidiary function,” the stronger social authority and effectiveness will be, the happier and more prosperous the condition of the State.³⁵

The principle of subsidiarity defines, focuses, and exhausts the essential role of the state and the authorities as the governing element of society.

The term *subsidiarity* is the functional definition of the state; the functional definition of the citizen is *participation*. To participate is to take an active part, that is, not to be a merely passive subject. The convergence of these two functions creates the proper environment for the common good to appear, develop, and expand.

When these basic principles—subsidiarity and participation—are applied to economic life, they give birth to two complementary derived principles: on the part of the state, the principle of *intervention*; on the part of the individual, the principle of *primacy of private initiative*. When state intervention is not based on the principle of subsidiarity, excessive interventionism arises. On the other hand, if the exercise of private initiative is separated from its intrinsic function of service and participation in the common good, “might is right” becomes the order of the day and general disorder and injustice sets in.

22a) State Intervention in Labor

One of the applications of the principle of subsidiarity is in the field of labor. Work is both a duty and a right of man. The right to choose a job and to negotiate the conditions is prior to the state, whose role in this field is only to protect and assist. The first step in this task of protection is to create enough jobs for all:

The first and fundamental concern of one and all, rulers, politicians, trade-union leaders and owners of enterprises, must be this: to give work to everyone. To expect the solution of the problem as the more or less automatic result of an economic order and development, of whatever kind, in which employment appears as a secondary consequence, is not realistic and therefore is not admissible.³⁶

It is also the competence of the state to ordain the division and distribution of work to the common good, and to urge that work conditions are such that man can fulfill his personal vocation: “In any case, any legitimate and beneficial state intervention in the field of work must be such as to preserve and respect its personal character, both in principle and, within the limits of possibility, as regards execution.”³⁷

22b) Personal Initiative and State Intervention in the Economy

Regarding state intervention in economic affairs, the doctrine of the Church rejects both extremes: total abstention, and takeover of all economic decisions. The role of the state in the economy, as in other fields, is to foster and assist personal initiative, and to seek the common good, with a special interest for the underprivileged:

As for the State, its whole *raison d'être* is the realization of the common good in the temporal order. It cannot, therefore, hold aloof from economic matters. On the contrary, it must do all in its power to promote the production of a sufficient supply of material goods, “the use of which is necessary for the practice of virtue.” It has also the duty to protect the rights of all its people, and particularly of its weaker members, the workers, women, and children.³⁸

Direct state intervention is justified only as a temporary substitution. It must be inspired not merely by technical criteria—planning, organization—but by higher ethical principles: justice, social charity. These principles must inform the whole economy.³⁹

22c) Subsidiarity in the Field of Education

Parents are the first and primordial educators. Theirs is the ultimate responsibility for the education of their children. As a consequence, they have the right to delegate part of that education to appropriate educational institutions that are in agreement with their moral and religious convictions. This is no right of the state, whose role is to facilitate the exercise of this primary and inalienable parental right, instead of encroaching upon it.

Public authority has a subsidiary role in this area, and it is not abdicating of its rights when it places itself at the service of the parents; on the contrary, this is precisely its greatness: to defend and promote the free exercise of educational rights.⁴⁰

22d) General Consequences of the Principle of Subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity establishes that the state must not take over tasks that can be done by a smaller community. On the contrary, these communities have the right to demand from the state the proper conditions for their performance: assistance, general coordination. The latter is needed because the end of these smaller communities is more limited than that of the state, and must be inserted in the wider frame of the common good of the nation.

Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them.⁴¹

22e) Subsidiarity in International Relations

The principle of subsidiarity also can be applied to international relations. In this field, there is a need for a supranational authority, with the capacity to solve conflicts that exceed the competence of individual nations. The exercise of such authority, however, must always be at the service of national communities, without invading their proper and independent spheres of authority:

The special function of this universal authority must be to evaluate and find a solution to economic, social, political and cultural problems that affect the universal common good. These are problems that, because of their extreme gravity, vastness, and urgency, must be considered too difficult for the rulers of individual States to solve with any degree of success. But it is no part of the duty of universal authority to limit the sphere of action of the public authority of individual States, or to arrogate any of their functions to itself.⁴²

23. Socialization

23a) Notion of Socialization

The concept of *socialization* can easily lead to confusion. Leo XIII understood it—without explicitly using that term—as the complete transfer of private property to the state. On the other hand, he also referred to the natural right of association.⁴³ Pius XI used the verb *to socialize* and the adjective *socialized*, but he referred exclusively to socialist ideology.⁴⁴ The term *socialization* was first used in its current meaning in the encyclical *Mater et Magistra*: the multiplication of social relations in daily life that prevent human depersonalization.⁴⁵

Modern life has brought many forms of association and interdependence for all sorts of purposes: economic, social, cultural, recreational, professional, political. This development has greatly reduced distances between persons and peoples. “Nowadays for various reasons mutual relationships and interdependence increase from day to day and give rise to a variety of associations and organizations, both public and private.”⁴⁶

Private intermediate associations are a direct product of socialization.⁴⁷ Some of the advantages of these associations are greater closeness and solidarity among men (which is a sign of their spiritual union), advances of urbanization and industrialization, and an increased speed of social communications.⁴⁸ Their disadvantages are most obvious in periods of rapid change, when these changes are not wholly assimilated by the affected population. They may excessively program and suffocate the interpersonal environment in which human relations must take place, as we will see below.

23b) The Present Acceleration of Socialization

The process of socialization is accelerated by the increasing sophistication of the means of communication, urban civilization, mass media, tourism, and greater facility of migration. Still, socialization alone does not bring about a moral improvement in the persons affected.

On the whole, the bonds uniting man to his fellows multiply without ceasing, and “socialization” creates yet other bonds, without, however, a corresponding personal development, and truly personal relationships.⁴⁹

23c) Causes of Socialization

The encyclical *Mater et Magistra* cites, among the factors that foster socialization, scientific and technical progress, the increase of economic productivity, and higher standards of living. Its root, however, is to be sought in “a natural, well-nigh irresistible urge in man to combine with his fellow-men for the attainment of aims and objectives that are beyond the means or the capabilities of single individuals.”⁵⁰

23d) The Morality of Socialization

(1) *Nationalization*

In the first sense cited above—that of nationalization—socialization may be carried out only when it is necessary for the common good. It has a positive value only insofar as it brings about a progress toward the attainment of the common good. We must not forget that the subject of the common good is the human person and the intermediate associations, which stand between the individual and the state. It is not the role of the state to absorb private initiatives, but to foster them.⁵¹

Having the state displace the individual in the ownership and administration of the means of production is the wrong way of understanding socialization. “We can speak of socializing only when ... on the basis of his work each person is fully entitled to consider himself a part-owner of the great workbench at which he is working with every one else.”⁵²

(2) *Social relations*

The Church accepts socialization—in its second, wider meaning—as morally good, provided that the sphere of freedom of individual initiative is respected.

The process of socialization is also positive insofar as it promotes greater unity and draws people together. “The Church, moreover, acknowledges the good to be found in the social dynamism of today, particularly progress towards unity, healthy socialization, and civil and economic cooperation.”⁵³ Socialization is no longer healthy when it degenerates into a one-track programming of human activities, leaving no room for free individual initiative.⁵⁴

(3) *Advantages of socialization*

Still referring to the second meaning of the term *socialization*, we should mention the following advantages in the social and economic field: easier access to health care and to professional formation, greater organization of labor, and the greater availability of recreational facilities.

Besides, the new means of communication facilitate solidarity with far-away peoples.⁵⁵

(4) *Disadvantages of socialization*

The main danger of socialization is that, in the pursuit of social and economic development, it may be forgotten that the only proper subject of that development is the human person. The fulfillment of the person would thus be subordinated to technical criteria that, by themselves, cannot bring man more freedom. Socialization is taken here in the second sense discussed above.

Socialization swells the bureaucratic apparatus beyond measure; establishes more and more meticulous juridical regulations of human relations in every aspect of social life; and uses methods that involve a great danger; what is now known as "dehumanization." Modern man sees how, in many cases, excessive restrictions are applied to the sphere where he is allowed to think by himself, act by his own initiative, exercise his responsibilities, affirm and enrich his personality.⁵⁶

24. Culture in Personal and Social Life

If we focus on its origin, culture is an expression of personal subjectivity in its two aspects, material and spiritual. It is not the echo or reflection of conditions that are external to man, as is the case with the means of production. Culture stands in relation to what man is, to his essence; and therefore is not properly an object of possession. “A culture without human subjectivity and without human causality is inconceivable; in the cultural field, *man is always the first fact; man is the prime and fundamental fact* of culture.”⁵⁷

If we focus on its end, culture is a right of every man, according to each one’s conditions and capacity. “It is one of the properties of the human person that he can achieve true and full humanity only by means of culture, that is, through the cultivation of the goods and values of nature. Whenever, therefore, there is a question of human life, nature and culture are intimately linked together.”⁵⁸

In our times, growing specialization has brought the danger of cultural compartmentalization. The different fields of knowledge face the prospect of becoming isolated from each other, losing the fundamental unifying principles of every true wisdom. Besides, this compartmentalization affects the interior unity of man as well; knowledge should not represent for man an external partial good, independent from the rest of his life; it should be something connatural to him, influencing the different spheres of his behavior. Every true knowledge ultimately leads to God, who is the ultimate source both of human reason and of revelation.

Some people try to resurrect a supposed incompatibility between faith and science, between human knowledge and divine revelation. But such incompatibility could only arise—and then only apparently—from a misunderstanding of the elements of the problem...

We can never be afraid of developing human knowledge, because all intellectual effort, if it is serious, is aimed at truth. And Christ has said: “I am the truth.”⁵⁹

Culture is a source of unity in social life, offering citizens a common history and heritage. By holding fast to her culture, noted Pope John Paul II, Poland has affirmed her identity through the centuries, being able to face great external pressures. This shows the importance of preserving the native cultures of different peoples.

The scope of public authority extends, not to determining the proper nature of cultural forms, but to building up the environment and the provision of assistance favorable to the development of culture, without overlooking minority groups in the nation. This is the reason why one must avoid at all costs distorting culture from its proper purposes and its exploitation by political or economical forces.⁶⁰

25. Culture and Morals

As a free expression of man, culture belongs to the moral order. Morality reverts from free acts to the person, creating habits and modes of expression. “The moral order is at the basis of all human culture.”⁶¹ Culture reflects moral values. To acquire and cultivate these values, one must resist the materialist temptations of our society, which seek to inhibit them. Among such values we can cite inner joy, respect for life, respect for the laws of the family, giving primacy to truth in one’s behavior, and all the human virtues. Such principles give birth to true culture. “There is no doubt that the first and fundamental dimension of culture is healthy morality: *moral culture*.”⁶²

Besides, Christianity fosters culture in personal and social life. In personal life, Christianity considers man as he truly is, as a subject open to transcendent values, able to consider them and give them a creative expression. In social life, Christian values inspire their own model of society, where technical progress is at the service of the true human dignity. The blossoming of culture will bring about the rejection of idols like immediate success, consumerism, and other forms of practical and ideological materialism. Conversely, the Christian message and a moral life as the measure of man are, by themselves, creators of culture.

The good news of Christ continuously renews the life and culture of fallen man.... It never ceases to purify and elevate the morality of peoples. It takes the spiritual qualities and endowments of every age and nation, and with supernatural riches it causes them to blossom, as it were, from within; it fortifies, completes and restores them in Christ. In this way the Church carries out its mission and in that very act it stimulates and advances human and civil culture, as well as contributing by its activity, including liturgical activity, to man’s interior freedom.⁶³

26. The State and Human Rights and Duties

26a) Rights and Duties

The objective rights of man, because of their universality, must be respected by every legal system. Some of these rights refer to the material component of man, some to his spiritual dimension. Nevertheless, it is the spiritual nature of man—a nature that is endowed with intelligence and free will—that makes both possible.

Among the rights that refer to the material aspect of man are the rights to life and physical integrity, to a decent standard of living, to private property, and the different economic and labor rights. Among those that refer to man's spiritual aspect are freedom of conscience (or absence of coercion in the sphere of one's intimate decisions), the freedom to profess one's religion in public and in private, and the freedom to participate in the different expressions of the common good—familial, professional, cultural, and political.

Rights can also be divided into passive or static rights, like the right to life and to public order, and active rights, whose exercise may even be a duty. The latter include being active in certain social spheres, and accepting religious truth.

Still another way of classifying rights is to consider their origin. Some rights stem from human nature, others from the national or cultural community, and others are acquired through personal effort. Nevertheless, even the second and third kinds ultimately proceed from natural inclinations that human nature itself does not specify in all their details.

The exercise of these rights implies certain duties, without which rights would lose all their force as true rights:

These rights, however, must be conceived in their correct meaning. The right to freedom, for example, does not, of course, include the right to moral evil, as if it were possible to claim, among other things, the right to suppress human life, as in abortion, or the right to use things harmful to oneself or to others. Likewise one should not deal with the rights of man without envisaging also his correlative duties, which express precisely his own responsibility and his respect of the rights of others and of the community.⁶⁴

26b) Respect for Human Rights

The Church denounces all the violations of human rights perpetrated in the modern world. Under certain circumstances, the state may suspend the exercise of some secondary or derived rights, if it is required by higher considerations of the common good. Nevertheless, civic liberties must be restored as soon as these circumstances have changed. As for the more personal and inalienable rights, since they are an intrinsic part of common good itself, they can never be subordinated to other considerations. Such are the rights to physical security, to the choice of state in life, to not receiving offenses to one's dignity, to true information, to freedom in the education of one's children, to freedom of conscience, and to religious freedom.

If restrictions are imposed temporarily for the common good on the exercise of human rights, these restrictions are to be lifted as soon as possible after the situation has changed. In any case it is inhuman for public authority to fall back on totalitarian methods or dictatorship which violate the rights of persons or social groups.⁶⁵

Whenever violated human rights must be restored, as demanded by justice, the Church warns against the use of violent or revolutionary methods, inspired by class struggle. Every injustice must be blamed not on structures, but on the heart of men, on individuals—on their sins, which are always personal.

The truth of mankind requires that this battle be fought in ways consistent with human dignity. That is why the systematic and deliberate recourse to blind violence, no matter from which side it comes, must be condemned. To put one's trust in violent means in the hope of restoring more justice is to become the victim of a fatal illusion; violence begets violence and degrades man.... Therefore, it is only by making an appeal to the *moral potential* of the person and to the constant need for interior conversion, that social change will be brought about that will truly be in the service of man.⁶⁶

1. Paul VI, Ap. Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 46; cf. CCC, 1897–1904.
2. GS, 74.
3. St. Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 5.21.
4. St. Gregory the Great, *In Epist. Lib.* 2.61.
5. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 51; cf. CCC, 1884.
6. GS, 74.
7. John Paul II, Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Polish Episcopal Conference, June 5, 1979, in *Pilgrim to Poland: John Paul II* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1979), 147.
8. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 51.

9. *Ibid.*, 52.
10. *GS*, 74.
11. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 62.
12. John Paul II, Address to the Italian Union of Catholic Jurists, Dec. 7, 1979; cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 64, a. 3; I-II, q. 21, a. 4 ad 3; *CCC*, 1907.
13. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 27.
14. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 61.
15. Cf. *Ibid.*, 60.
16. John Paul II, Address to the Organization of American States (OEA), Washington, Oct. 6, 1979, in *John Paul II: The Pope's Challenge*, 165.
17. John Paul II, Address to the Diplomatic Corps, Nairobi, Kenya, May 6, 1980; cf. *CCC*, 1905–1912.
18. John Paul II, Address to President Carter, Oct. 6, 1979, in *John Paul II: The Pope's Challenge*, 163.
19. John Paul II, Address to the Diplomatic Corps, Jan. 12, 1981; cf. *GS*, 76.
20. John Paul II, Address to the UN General Assembly, Oct. 2, 1979, in *John Paul II: The Pope's Challenge*, 39.
21. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 55.
22. Cf. *GS*, 75.
23. Cf. *CCC*, 1909.
24. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 40.
25. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 17–18.
26. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 27.
27. John Paul II, Address to a Group of Tax Experts, Nov. 7, 1980.
28. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 64; cf. *CCC*, 1908.
29. John Paul II, Address to Scientists and UN University Students in Hiroshima, Japan, Feb. 25, 1981.
30. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 33.
31. Cf. *GS*, 71.
32. John Paul II, Address to the Sacred College of Cardinals, Dec. 22, 1979.
33. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 35.
34. *GS*, 71.
35. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 79–80; cf. *CCC*, 1883–1885.
36. John Paul II, Address to Workers at Morumbi Stadium, Sao Paulo, Brazil, July 3, 1980.
37. Pius XII, Pentecost Radio Message, June 1, 1941.
38. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 20; cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Regimine Principum*, 1.15.
39. Cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 88.
40. John Paul II, Homily at the Mass for Families, Madrid, Nov. 2, 1982.
41. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 79.
42. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 140–141; cf. *CCC*, 1911.
43. Cf. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 11, 34.
44. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 119.
45. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 59, 65; cf. *CCC*, 1882–1885.
46. *GS*, 25.
47. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 59–60.
48. Cf. *GS*, 6, 42.
49. *Ibid.*, 6.
50. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 60.
51. Cf. *Ibid.*, 64–67.

52. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 14.
53. *GS*, 42.
54. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 62.
55. Cf. John XXIII, Address to the Social Week of France, July 1960; Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 61.
56. John XXIII, Address to the Social Week of France, July 1960.
57. John Paul II, Address to UNESCO, June 2, 1980.
58. *GS*, 53.
59. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 10.
60. *GS*, 59.
61. John Paul II, Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Polish Episcopal Conference, June 5, 1979, in *Pilgrim to Poland: John Paul II*, 148.
62. John Paul II, Address to UNESCO, June 2, 1980.
63. *GS*, 58.
64. John Paul II, Address to the Diplomatic Corps, Jan. 14, 1980; cf. *CCC*, 2237.
65. *GS*, 75.
66. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation,"* 11.7–8.

24

Intermediate Societies and Associations

27. Intermediate Societies

27a) Legitimate and Useful Societies

Intermediate societies are legitimate and useful. The state must respect them. Membership in the natural societies that are intermediate between the individual and the state, and the constitution of free associations for the pursuit of legitimate purposes are both natural rights. Therefore, the state is bound to respect these rights.

Private societies, then, although they exist within the political body, and are severally part of the commonwealth, cannot nevertheless be absolutely, as such, prohibited by public authority. For, to enter into a “society” of this kind is the natural right of man; and the State has for its office to protect natural rights, not to destroy them; and, if it forbid its citizens to form associations, it contradicts the very principle of its own existence, for both they and it exist in virtue of the like principle, namely, the natural tendency of man to dwell in society.¹

Besides, the constitution and strengthening of these intermediate organizations is very advantageous for society, and could even be indispensable. Without them, individuals would lack support for the attainment of their just aspirations:

As We insisted in Our encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, the founding of a great many such intermediate groups or societies for the pursuit of aims that the lone individual cannot achieve efficiently, is a matter of great urgency. Such groups and societies must be considered absolutely essential for the safeguarding of man’s personal freedom and dignity, while leaving intact a sense of responsibility.²

27b) Organizations Recognized by the Magisterium

(1) *Local governments*

The city council is one of the many natural institutions explicitly recognized by the Magisterium of the Church:

And, in truth, whatever in the State is of chief avail for the common welfare; whatever has been usefully established to curb the license of rulers who are opposed to the interests of the people, or to keep in check the leading authorities from unwarrantably interfering in municipal or family affairs; whatever tends to uphold the honor, manhood, and equal rights of individual citizens—of all these things, as the monuments of past ages bear witness, the Catholic Church has always been the originator, the promoter, or the guardian.³

(2) *Ethnic minorities*

In some cases, ethnic minorities are not fully integrated with the people among whom they live. Groups that are forced to migrate for labor-related reasons may be in a similar condition. These situations should not be exploited to maintain discriminatory practices, which would be blatantly unjust if they affect fundamental rights that are common to all.

In the field of a new order founded on moral principles, there is no place for open nor camouflaged oppression of the cultural and linguistic peculiarities of national minorities, for hindering or curtailing their economic capacity, for limiting or abolishing their natural fecundity. The more conscientiously the competent authorities of the State respect the rights of the minority, the more surely and effectively can it demand of its members that they carry out loyally the civic duties, which are shared with other citizens.⁴

(3) *Other natural associations*

The right of association extends to the different fields of human activity. “Governments should take care not to put obstacles in the way of family, cultural or social groups, or of organizations and intermediate institutions, nor to hinder their lawful and constructive activity; rather, they should eagerly seek to promote such orderly activity.”⁵

The right of association also applies to the field of labor, with the objective of “defending the vital interests of those employed in the various

professions.”⁶ This is the role of labor or trade unions, which protect the labor rights of farmers, industrial workers, employers, and intellectuals.

28. Associations

28a) The Right of Association

The right of association is based on the social nature of man, which moves him to undertake projects in cooperation with other men and in an organized way.⁷ Isolated, a man would hardly be able to supply his basic needs. Associations are therefore useful in the different sectors of life for the effective protection of the rights and liberties of their members.⁸ This primary right of association is one of the pillars of the principle of subsidiarity.⁹

28b) Private Associations

(1) *Advisability*

Private associations provide a forum for the collective voice of those who share the same interests and goals. They make a specific contribution to the common good. Their presence—not only in the field of labor, but in all aspects of public life—must be properly fostered through a climate of favorable public opinion.¹⁰ This is clearly seen in the case of labor associations:

In modern times we have seen an extensive increase in the number of workers' associations, and their general recognition in the juridical codes of single States and on the international level. Members are no longer recruited in order to agitate, but rather to co-operate, principally by the method of collective bargaining. But it is worthwhile stressing here how timely and imperative it is that workers be given the opportunity to exert their influence throughout the State, and not just within the limits of their own spheres of employment.¹¹

(2) *Internal autonomy*

Private associations must enjoy the autonomy in their activity and management that is necessary to achieve a greater physical and spiritual benefit for their members. Their activities and operations should not be regulated from the outside. “All such societies, being free to exist, have the further right to adopt such rules and organization as may best conduce to the attainment of their respective objects.”¹²

An internal unity of purpose is thus needed. Besides, the good of the souls must be given top priority, so that the pursuit of material benefits will take the place that is assigned by Christ: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Mt 6:33).

(3) *Role of private associations*

Private associations are an effective channel of participation in the achievement of the common good in all fields of human activity.¹³ For this, it is necessary that the members, in their mutual relations, be considered responsible persons who are endowed with initiative.¹⁴ It will then be evident that the management of the enterprise in question is a human affair, conducted by humans and based on human relations, and not just a purely

impersonal application of economic laws, with people as mere executors. Referring specifically to labor associations, John Paul II has declared:

For this reason it is very important that all protagonists of economic life should have the real possibility of taking part freely and actively in the elaboration and control of decisions that concern them at all levels. Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum* had already clearly affirmed the right of the workers to unite in free associations for the purpose of making their voice heard, defending their interests and contributing in a responsible way to the common good, the requirements and the discipline of which are imposed on everyone in the sphere of laws and contracts that can always be perfected.¹⁵

28c) Political Associations

(1) *Legitimate and useful*

Decisions that affect public life must not be taken without the participation of the people concerned. The Church urges the faithful to participate, together with their fellow men, in the temporal progress of their city and country. They must claim and exercise their rights, which are exactly the same as those of any other citizen. And, within their possibilities, they must actively seek to have moral and Christian values inspire the legislation and life of their communities. This participation in political life and organization, in their capacity as believers, is an obligation for Christians.¹⁶

And yet, if they are to imbue civilization with right ideals and Christian principles, it is not enough for Our sons to be illumined by the heavenly light of faith and to be fired with enthusiasm for a cause; they must involve themselves in the work of these institutions, and strive to influence them effectively from within.¹⁷

(2) *The Church and political parties*

Pluralism in temporal activity, notably politics, is perfectly lawful. It is also permissible to propose different solutions to all the questions left by God to the free decisions of men. The Church will not make value judgments on the party system in force in modern democracies—i.e., whether it is better or worse than other present or historical systems.

It is useless to expect that the Church should favor one tendency rather than another among the different systems, which vary with the times and depend on them. Within the scope of the universal value of the divine law, whose authority extends not only to individuals but also to peoples, there is plenty of room and freedom of movement for the most varied forms of political systems. At the same time, the practical adherence to one political system or another depends, to a very large extent and sometimes decisively so, on circumstances and causes that, considered in themselves, are foreign to the aim and activity of the Church.¹⁸

However, the Church does demand that the activity of the parties be not directed by partisan interests. On the contrary, only the safeguarding of the common good justifies the different options. Their diversity appears in the field of the concrete solutions offered, which will depend on contingent, changeable historical circumstances. If one of these solutions were founded on an ideology that does not respect the true nature of the common good, it would no longer be a valid option. “Political parties, for their part, must

support whatever in their opinion is conducive to the common good, but must never put their own interests before the common good.”¹⁹

(3) *The purpose of political associations*

The purpose of political associations is the common good. It must be stressed, though, that it is highly advisable to promote all forms of civic association, which reflect the diverse expressions of the common good. This approach will preempt the totalitarian temptations of political parties. Such associations will help restore and spread, in a practical way, the fundamental convictions about the nature and requirements of the civic common good, which the political power must respect and serve.

It is not for the State or even for political parties, which would be closed unto themselves, to try to impose an ideology by means that would lead to a dictatorship over minds, the worst kind of all. It is for cultural and religious groupings, in the freedom of acceptance that they presume, to develop in the social body, disinterestedly and in their own ways, those ultimate convictions on the nature, origin and end of man and society.²⁰

(4) *Political parties and labor unions*

The concern of the political parties for the common good is shown in their meeting the legitimate demands of the different social groups. This must be done without curtailing their spontaneity—that is, without conditioning the decisions of these groups to party programs or directives. John Paul II stresses the respective ends of political parties and labor unions, partly different—general versus particular—and partly common—the dignity of the person and the common good.

Unions do not have the character of political parties struggling for power; they should not be subjected to the decision of political parties or have too close links with them. In fact, in such a situation they easily lose contact with their specific role, which is to secure the just rights of workers within the framework of the common good of the whole of society; instead they become *an instrument used for other purposes*.²¹

1. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 35; cf. CCC, 1882–1883.
2. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 24.
3. Leo XIII, Enc. *Immortale Dei*, 50.
4. Pius XII, Christmas Address, 1941.

5. *GS*, 75; cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 87; Enc. *Divini Redemptoris*, 68.
6. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 20.
7. Cf. *DH*, 4.
8. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 24.
9. Cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 79.
10. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 24.
11. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 97.
12. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 39.
13. Cf. *GS*, 75.
14. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 65.
15. John Paul II, Address to Workers at Morumbi Stadium, Sao Paulo, Brazil, July 3, 1980.
16. Cf. Paul VI, Ap. Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 24; *CCC*, 1913–1917.
17. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 147.
18. Pius XII, Christmas Radio Message, 1940; cf. *CCC*, 2245.
19. *GS*, 75.
20. Paul VI, Ap. Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 25.
21. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 20; cf. *CCC*, 2430.

25

Work and Society

29. Human Nature of Work

29a) Work and Human Dignity

Work is closely linked with human dignity. As a human activity that involves the use of the higher faculties, work is for man a title of dignity. Before original sin, man received from God the task of ruling over the whole of creation, thus cooperating in the work of creation and being associated with the divine work.

All labor, as an indispensable means to the mastery of the earth, by which God wills to be glorified, has an inalienable dignity and at the same time an intimate connection with the development of the human person; nor does this noble dignity and prerogative of labor suffer any diminution from the burden of fatigue, which, in consequence of original sin, must be endured in obedient submission to the will of God.¹

Our Lord used several parables and examples—the talents, the minas, the barren fig tree—to stress man’s obligation to make good use of the talents and qualities with which he has been endowed. He will have to account for their yield at the end of his life on earth. The worker has to use his intelligence, proposing initiatives, organizing, and planning the execution of his work. At the same time, he strengthens his will and practices many human virtues: industriousness, order, constancy, responsibility, and concern for others.

A complete range of virtues is called into play when we set about our work with the purpose of sanctifying it: fortitude, to persevere in our work despite the difficulties that naturally arise and to ensure that we never let ourselves be overwhelmed by anxiety; temperance, in order to spend ourselves unsparingly and to overcome our love of comfort and our selfishness; justice, so as to fulfill our duties towards God, society, our family, and our fellow workers; prudence, to know in each case what course to take, and then to set about it without hesitation ... And all this, I emphasize, is for the sake of Love, with a keen and immediate sense of responsibility for the results of our work and its apostolic impact.²

It is thus consistent with the dignity of work that the worker know the purpose of his efforts. Restoring this ethical requirement, declared Pope John Paul II, is a primordial task in our world. “Never has man been so rich in things, means, and techniques, and never so poor in indications about their purpose. To restore to man awareness of the ends for which he lives and works, is the task to which we are called in this end of the century, which concludes the second millennium of the Christian era.”³ Besides,

work should be carried out in such conditions that the workers would not suffer physical or moral harm. The special circumstances of women and minors must be respected as well.⁴

The ultimate reason for the dignity of work is to be found in God, whose presence must fill all professional activities.

Make sure that God is among you... If, on the contrary, God were to be considered as a stranger, or perhaps as an intruder and even as an enemy, there would be disorder in your work. Then work would not ennoble, but rather degrade. Work performed for God and with God is a human activity that becomes divine; it is prayer.⁵

Work is part of the divine plan for man. What gives dignity to work is not human valuation, which divides jobs into different categories; it is rather its ethical value and, on a higher plane, its cooperation in the redemptive mission of Christ. Both perspectives imply, of course, the primacy of love and contemplation as fitting motivations for man, who exercises in his work his best energies.

The farmer who ploughs his field while constantly raising his heart to God, just as much as the carpenter, the blacksmith, the office worker, the academic—all Christians in fact—have to be an example for their colleagues at work. And this without conceit... Therefore, everyone, in his job, in whatever place he has in society, must feel obliged to make his work God's work, sowing everywhere the peace and joy of the Lord.⁶

The dignity of *every* kind of work flows from man's dignity:

It is time for us Christians to shout from the rooftops that work is a gift from God and that it makes no sense to classify men differently, according to their occupation, as if some jobs were nobler than others. Work, all work, bears witness to the dignity of man, to his dominion over creation. It is an opportunity to develop one's personality. It is a bond of union with others, the way to support one's family, a means of aiding in the improvement of the society in which we live and in the progress of all humanity.⁷

29b) Work Perfects Man

Work is an expression and a means that is wanted by God for the spiritual perfection of man. The Christian concept of work is opposed to the tenets of dialectical materialism, which considers work a means for the dialectical mediation with nature. Such mediation would give occasion for both terms—*man* and *nature*—to influence each other and become interchangeable, denying the individual intimacy of each human being. According to the doctrine of the Church, work transforms nature, but does not end in nature; it is oriented to the perfection of the person who works. “Human activity proceeds from man: it is also ordered to him. When he works, not only does he transform matter and society, but he fulfils himself.”⁸

Even though work fulfills an organic social function, it is not an obligation that is imposed by society; it is a natural activity, organized around goals that are consciously assumed by the person. “Human work, whether exercised independently or in subordination to another, proceeds from the human person, who as it were impresses his seal on the things of nature and reduces them to his will.”⁹

This “proceeding from the person”—with emphasis on “person”—allows us to understand how work is the means of elevation that God wanted for man. As the supreme creature of the visible universe, man humanizes the other creatures with his work, extending the divine work of creation and redemption. “Work must be the means in order that the whole of creation may be subjected to the dignity of the human being, a child of God.”¹⁰

This truth opens unexpected horizons for man. Through work, man becomes a co-redeemer; the hardships of work, its dimension as a punishment imposed by God, can become a participation in the redemptive Cross of Christ:

They [the faithful] are thus called to share in Christ’s own divine life; and since they are united in mind and spirit with the divine Redeemer even when they are engaged in the affairs of the world, their work becomes a continuation of His work, penetrated with redemptive power. “He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit” (Jn. 15:5). Thus is man’s work exalted and ennobled—so highly exalted that it leads to his own personal perfection of soul, and helps to extend to others the fruits of Redemption, all over the world.¹¹

For work to occupy its proper place in the divine economy of salvation, priority must be given to prayer and contemplation. This priority does not imply separation, as if prayer and work were two parallel areas of human life. On the contrary, it is dialogue with God that gives meaning to work. Work then becomes the motive and occasion of this dialogue, and the matter to be offered to God.

There is no other way for man to find himself and confirm who he is except by seeking God in prayer. By seeking God, by meeting Him in prayer, man is bound to find himself, since he is like God. He cannot find himself except in his Prototype. He cannot confirm his “dominion” over the earth by work except by praying at the same time.¹²

Work, as St. Josemaría Escrivá reminded us, cannot be dissociated from the plan of God for each person:

Be convinced that our professional vocation is an essential and inseparable part of our condition as Christians. Our Lord wants you to be holy in the place where you are, in the job you have chosen for whatever reason. To me, every job that is not opposed to the divine law is good and noble, and capable of being raised to the supernatural plane, that is, inserted into the constant flow of Love which defines the life of a child of God.¹³

Moreover, work is not only the external occasion of prayer; workers should find in the very matter of their work a means of raising their souls to God. John Paul II explained this idea in an address to a group of miners, who were digging a tunnel, together with farmers and shepherds from the neighborhood:

Yet, to both of you—here is an element in common—it is always nature that appears in its reality as God’s creature. Working on the earth, outside or inside, you have always before you a work that can, and certainly does, offer you a whole series of reasons to reflect, to meditate, to worship.¹⁴

This teaching, which is now common doctrine of the Church, had earlier been stressed and preached by St. Josemaría Escrivá. Here is one of the many passages he wrote about the union between prayer and work:

We see the hand of God, not only in the wonders of nature, but also in our experience of work and effort. Work thus becomes prayer and thanksgiving, because we know we are placed on earth by God, that we are loved by him and made heirs to his promises. We have been rightly told, “In eating, in drinking, in all that you do, do everything for God’s glory” (1 Cor 10:31).¹⁵

29c) Self-Support and Advancement

Work is a natural means for self-support and social improvement. The intrinsic dignity of work, as an expression of the higher powers of man, should not obscure the fact that it is a means. It is ordained to other purposes, also human, but more important than work itself. We have just seen it in the case of prayer and contemplation. We will consider it now as man's instrument for supporting his own life, and for contributing to the improvement of the external conditions of life in the society to which he belongs and in his own family.¹⁶

It should be noted that the goods that man needs to support himself and to lead an honorable life are not immediately available. He must produce them. And if his produce is not for his personal consumption, or if he is engaged in a service or intellectual work, not directly producing subsistence goods, he is entitled to an equitable salary.

The key problem of social ethics in this case is that of *just remuneration* for work done. In the context of the present there is no more important way for securing a just relationship between the worker and the employer than that constituted by remuneration for work.¹⁷

Such salary should sufficiently cover the material and spiritual needs of the family:

Remuneration for work should guarantee man the opportunity to provide a dignified livelihood for himself and his family on the material, social, cultural and spiritual level to correspond to the role and the productivity of each, the relevant economic factors in his employment, and the common good.¹⁸

Through work, man also receives and increases the cultural heritage of the national and universal society to which he belongs, identifying himself with the cause of the common good. While working for the common good, the worker also benefits himself, since workers "should have the opportunity to develop their talents and their personalities in the very exercise of their work."¹⁹ Thus, they are able to improve their skills and occupy positions of greater importance and responsibility.

30. The Personal and Necessary Character of Work

Paradoxically, work is at the same time free—insofar as it is personal—and necessary. Denying one's freedom in his work would be tantamount to dehumanizing him. Dehumanization occurs when work lacks a motivation, a reason worthy of man. But work is also necessary, since man must work, whether he likes it or not; he must support himself and his family, he must develop and improve his capabilities, and he must fulfill the divine command. This distinguishes work from leisurely activities, which do not need to be ordained to other activities in order to be meaningful.

Hence, a man's labor necessarily bears two notes or characters. First of all, it is *personal*, inasmuch as the force that acts is bound up with the personality and is the exclusive property of him who acts, and, further, was given to him for his advantage. Secondly, man's labor is *necessary*; for without the result of labor a man cannot live, and self-preservation is a law of nature, which it is wrong to disobey.²⁰

Justice requires that the two aspects—freedom and necessity—be properly balanced. Furthermore, necessity should not force a person to accept a job that, for whatever reason, will be degrading for his personality. “If through necessity or fear of a worse evil the workman accepts harder conditions because an employer or contractor will afford him no better, he is made the victim of force and injustice.”²¹

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.²²

On the other hand, freedom in work should not mean the absence of discipline of the will and subordination to social and ethical norms. These make work a serious activity, rather than a game with certain rules.

It is obvious that, as in the case of ownership, so in the case of work, especially of work hired out to others, there is a social aspect also to be considered in addition to the personal or individual aspect. For man's productive effort cannot yield its fruits unless a truly social and organic body exists, unless a social and juridical order watches over the exercise of work, unless the various occupations, being interdependent, cooperate with and mutually complete one another, and—what is still more important—unless mind, material things, and work combine and form as it were a single whole.²³

Work thus combines several sets of apparently contradictory properties: freedom and necessity, social and personal character, intrinsic dignity and instrumental nature (work being ordained to other activities), immanent perfection of the agent and the transformation of external matter, application to an existing matter (or cultural reality) and creative improvement—impressing new forms on the existing matter. These different dimensions of the same reality of work must be properly balanced. One way to destroy the equilibrium is to take work in just one dimension as the last end of man. This would mean losing sight of its true meaning, which cannot be reduced to the mere performance of a task. Another way to destroy the balance is to try to dodge the element of imposition and toil, which, as a result of original sin, accompanies the performance of work.

31. Social Function of Work

31a) A Source of Unity

Work is a bond that unifies people when they pool their efforts in a spirit of solidarity, each from his own position, for the achievement of the common good. Each person has a specific role in his workplace, which is part of a network of mutual exchanges and services. This reciprocity of services contributes to the edification of the common good of all citizens. Work becomes then a unifying force among all members of society:

This unifying force is present not only in the production of goods or the rendering of services—in which the employers and employees of an identical industry or profession collaborate jointly—but also in the achievement of the common good, in which all industries and professions together must cooperate amicably, each to the best of its ability. And this unity will be the stronger and more effective, the more faithfully individuals and the industries and professions themselves strive to do their work and excel in it.²⁴

Therefore, through the diversity of each worker's contribution, “all parties co-operate actively and loyally in the common enterprise.”²⁵

31b) A Service to Society

Work supplies the goods and services needed by society. Through work, people gain access to goods that are not directly available from nature. This implies going beyond one's needs—in line with what was said earlier—and becoming both an agent and a beneficiary of the good of one's society. It is therefore an ethical obligation for workers to cooperate sincerely “in the common enterprise, not so much for what they can get out of it for themselves, but as discharging a duty and rendering a service to their fellow men.”²⁶

31c) Creation and Distribution of Wealth

Work is a means for the creation of wealth and for its equitable distribution. The quantitative increase of wealth alone will not serve the common interest; it is also necessary to improve and equalize its distribution, in proportion to the effort and responsibility of each contributor. The equitable distribution of wealth is not a stable situation to be reached once and for all, but rather a continuous task of correction and adjustment. The *active exercise of work*, moreover, gives a person the right to own the goods he needs for a decent life.

To each, therefore, must be given his own share of goods. Therefore, the distribution of created goods—which, as every discerning person knows, is laboring today under the gravest evils due to the huge disparity between the few exceedingly rich and the unnumbered property-less—must be effectively called back to and brought into conformity with the norms of the common good, that is, social justice.²⁷

As we will see later, the social doctrine of the Church considers work the linchpin of the “social question.” It is, therefore, the yardstick with which the value of goods that are produced and accumulated is to be measured.

32. Labor Rights

32a) Foundation of the Right to Work

Work is a primary right and a primary duty. It is founded on nature itself, which imposes it for the support of the worker and his family. It is also natural for the worker to choose the job that best fits his abilities and where he can best develop his free initiative.

In the economic sphere, it is evident that a man has the inherent right not only to be given the opportunity to work, but also to be allowed the exercise of personal initiative in the work he does.²⁸

Therefore, the exercise of work is in itself a right, since every person has the right to fulfill his duties. Rulers must facilitate the exercise of this right through a policy that favors the creation of jobs.

The State must not resign itself to having to tolerate chronic high unemployment. The creation of new jobs must constitute for it a priority as much economic as political.²⁹

Nevertheless, the problem of unemployment is primarily a responsibility of the members of society. It is usually a result of the lack of solidarity, insofar as resources are wasted, sources of wealth are left unexploited, or people unnecessarily occupy several positions. Clearly, these attitudes go against the Christian concept of work.³⁰

32b) Scope of Labor Rights

Besides the right to work, there are other rights that are related to the execution of work. Some refer to working conditions, like the rights to a healthy and safe workplace, and to being allowed to maintain one's moral uprightness. Others derive from the work performed, like the rights to a sufficient salary, and to a well-deserved time for rest and family life—which should not be understood in a negative sense, as the time needed to recover one's energies and return to work. There are also social security rights, like accident, retirement, and unemployment insurance.

The Church also recommends that channels be opened for the participation of workers in the management of the company where they work, so that they can consider it “their own.”

Experience suggests many ways in which the demands of justice can be satisfied. Not to mention other ways, it is especially desirable today that workers gradually come to share in the ownership of their company, by ways and in the manner that seems most suitable.³¹

32c) Strikes

Strikes and boycotts are extraordinary ways of claiming workers' rights, since they obstruct functions that are necessary for social life. Neither can we admit that every labor demand is in principle lawful just because it is formulated in a legal way. For a strike to be licit, all possible channels for settling labor claims through negotiation must have been exhausted. Besides, its implementation should not go beyond what is needed to obtain the benefits sought. When strikes paralyze basic services, laws should protect the fundamental rights of the citizens who are affected.

While admitting that it is a legitimate means, we must at the same time emphasize that a strike remains, in a sense, an extreme means. *It must not be abused*; it must not be abused especially for political purposes. Furthermore it must never be forgotten that, when essential community services are in question, these must in every case be ensured, if necessary by means of appropriate legislation. Abuse of the strike weapon can lead to the paralysis of the whole socioeconomic life, and this is contrary to the requirements of the common good of society, which also corresponds to the properly understood nature of work itself.³²

33. Domestic Work

The reaffirmation of the value of women's role in the family, linked to maternity, should be manifested by considering housework as a paid job. Thus, mothers should be spared from having to seek employment outside the home by force of circumstances. The role of the mother in the family is irreplaceable. "It is, therefore, a real professional work, which deserves to be recognized as such by society; it calls, moreover, for courage, responsibility, ingenuity and holiness."³³

If all types of honest work enjoy the same dignity, domestic work should also receive the appreciation that it deserves, given the effort and dedication it requires and its clear social relevance:

Certainly, this work must be seen not as an implacable and inexorable imposition, a form of slavery, but as a free choice, responsible and willed, which completely fulfills woman in her personality and requirements. Domestic work, in fact, is an essential part in the smooth running of society and has an enormous influence upon the community. It calls for continual and complete dedication, and therefore is a daily ascetical exercise, which calls for patience, self-control, far-sightedness, creativity, spirit of adaptation, courage in unexpected occurrences.... This gives rise also to the dignity of your work as family collaborators; your commitment is not a humiliation, but a consecration!³⁴

The Pope mentions some of the conditions of this work: its educational role, the competence and ingenuity that is employed in housework, the rationalization of household chores, and the understanding of family psychology.

34. The Dignity of Agricultural Work

Farming is especially conducive to fostering human values, because of its direct contact with and cultivation of nature. Of course, the necessary technical advances must be adopted. The dehumanization and depersonalization that is brought about by the “rigid automatism of the machine” seldom reach farm work. If this work were properly recognized and protected by laws, the rural exodus that is occurring in many parts of the world would stop.

Farm workers have the right to take part in the determination of their working conditions. They are also free to form associations to foster their legitimate interests. Since all people have the right to benefit from the fruits of the earth, there is a corresponding duty to make it yield fruit. Landlord absenteeism is a serious violation of both the right and the duty. The excessive concentration of landed property in the hands of a few owners introduces a new imbalance in capital-labor relations (which will be studied later).

With conditions as they are within the individual countries, one foresees a land reform involving a reorganization of land holdings and the stable and direct assigning of productive areas to the agricultural workers, together with the elimination of forms and structures that are unproductive and damaging to the community.... Agrarian reform and rural development also demand that consideration be given to reforms aimed at reducing the gap between the prosperity of the rich and the anxiety and need of the poor.³⁵

The encyclical *Mater et Magistra* gives some general criteria to restore agriculture to the leading position it deserves in the production process. These criteria include the development of public services in rural areas: transportation, housing, and vocational training by agricultural experts. Tax laws should take into account the slow rate of return and the natural risks of agricultural income. Soft loans and subsidies should be available to improve farming techniques. A suitable system of price support is also advisable. Social insurance—health and accident—and crop insurance are likewise needed. Finally, it is important to develop industries and services related to farm crops—food processing, distribution—as well as cooperatives, and associations.³⁶

35. Primacy of Work over Capital

The two fundamental factors of the process of production are capital and labor. They must be valued equitably, in proportion to their respective contributions.

It is wholly false to ascribe to property alone or to labor alone whatever has been obtained through the combined effort of both, and it is wholly unjust for either, denying the efficacy of the other, to arrogate to itself whatever has been produced.³⁷

For the distribution of the produce to be just, however, the previous distribution of capital must have been just as well.

The riches that economic-social developments constantly increase ought to be so distributed among individual persons and classes that the common advantage of all, which Leo XIII had praised, will be kept inviolate. By this law of justice, one class is forbidden to exclude the other from sharing in the benefits.³⁸

A fundamental consideration of axiology [the study of intrinsic values] is that work takes precedence over capital because it proceeds immediately from the human person. The means of production—which in our times have expanded more and more thanks to technical progress—are obtained through human work. But capital is neither an end external to work, nor a value in itself. Its ethical justification lies in its being the fruit of work, while at the same time contributing to the creation of jobs. It is thus wrong to oppose work against capital. At bottom, this would be just a form of materialism, which ignores the subordination of matter to spirit. Capital can here be identified with matter, while work is clearly a spiritual reality, as the activity of a subject endowed with a spirit.

In view of this situation we must first of all recall a principle that has always been taught by the Church: *the principle of the priority of labor over capital*. This principle directly concerns the process of production; in this process labor is always a primary *efficient cause*, while capital, the whole collection of means of production, remains a mere *instrument* or instrumental cause.³⁹

Both economic liberalism and dialectical materialism have, from their respective positions, fallen into this inversion of values. They overlook the personal reality of the subject of work, and want to make him dependent on the material conditions of economic activity. Economic liberalism errs by regarding work as just another commodity. Dialectical materialism explains work exclusively in terms of the evolution of technical and organizational forces, in whose historical framework it would be inscribed.

In dialectic materialism too man is not first and foremost the subject of work and the efficient cause of the production process, but continues to be understood and treated, in dependence on what is material, as a kind of “resultant” of the economic or production relations prevailing at a given period.⁴⁰

We must reject the false opposition of human work against “capital”—that is, the supposed great conflict between “the world of capital” and “the world of labor”—as an ideological conflict leading to an inevitable “class struggle.” The solution is to be found in the principle of *solidarity in work*. This implies accepting the principle of the priority of man over the means of production, of the person who works over the demands of production or purely economic laws.

The human person is the primary and ultimate criterion for manpower and job planning. *Solidarity in work* should be the major consideration in all solutions that are proposed by technological progress—robotics, for example. It will open a *new field* to human ingenuity and industriousness. The necessary and appropriate changes to be introduced, both in theory and in practice, must always be a consequence of a solid conviction: the primacy of the person over objects, of human work over the means of production.⁴¹

1. Pius XII, Christmas Address, 1942; cf. CCC, 307, 378.
2. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 72.
3. John Paul II, Address to the National Federation of the Cavalieri del Lavoro, May 11, 1979.
4. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 19.
5. Pius XII, Address, Feb. 27, 1949.
6. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 70.
7. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 47; cf. CCC, 2426.
8. *GS*, 35.
9. *Ibid.*, 67.
10. John Paul II, Address to Workers and their Families at Jalisco Stadium, Guadalajara, Mexico, Jan. 30, 1979, in *Puebla: A Pilgrimage of Faith* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1979), 157–158.
11. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 259; cf. CCC, 2427.
12. John Paul II, Homily for Silesian Workers at Jasna Gora, Poland, June 6, 1979, in *Pilgrim to Poland: John Paul II*, 185.
13. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 60.
14. John Paul II, Address to Workers and Farmers Assembled at the Gran Sasso Tunnel, Aug. 30, 1980.
15. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 48.
16. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 10.
17. *Ibid.*, 19; cf. CCC, 2434.
18. *GS*, 67.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 32.

21. *Ibid.*
22. CCC, 2433; cf. 2436.
23. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 69.
24. *Ibid.*, 84.
25. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 92.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 58.
28. John XXIII, Enc. *Pacem in Terris*, 18; cf. CCC, 2429.
29. John Paul II, Address to Workers and Entrepreneurs at Nou Camp, Barcelona, Nov. 7, 1982.
30. Cf. *Ibid.*
31. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 77.
32. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 20; cf. CCC, 2435.
33. John Paul II, Address to the 5th International Congress of the Family, Nov. 8, 1980.
34. John Paul II, Address to the 10th Assembly of the Italian Professional Association of Family Collaborators, Apr. 29, 1979.
35. John Paul II, Address to the FAO World Conference on Agrarian Reform, July 14, 1979.
36. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 123–143.
37. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 53.
38. *Ibid.*, 57.
39. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 12.
40. *Ibid.*, 13.
41. Cf. *Ibid.*, 11–15.

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Associations in the Field of Labor

36. The Business Enterprise

36a) Nature and Economic Role

The business enterprise is the result of the union of three elements:

- i) *Management*, which coordinates the different activities toward a common objective
- ii) *Capital*, in the form of financial resources, raw materials, facilities, machinery, and technology
- iii) *Work*, which is becoming more and more specialized and segmented

Under the conditions that prevail after the Industrial Revolution, these three factors cannot be supplied by one person alone, save in very small workshops. The business enterprise is thus the basic cell of economic production, just as the family is the basic cell of civil society (and a consumer unit at the same time).

The fundamental characteristics of the business enterprise are the following:

- It is a *human community*, born of man's need to unite with others to produce goods and services: "Employers and workers are not irreconcilable antagonists, but cooperators in a common endeavor."¹
- An enterprise combines *diverse activities*, which are coordinated for a common purpose. As in the human body, each member has a specific role, but all the functions are combined in the perfect final unity of the body.
- It is a community of *interests*, represented by the production of goods and services in order to obtain benefits. "To ignore this mutual bond and strive to break it is a sure sign of being driven by a blind and irrational despotism."²
- It is a community of *life*, since the employees spend many hours of their life together, weathering crises and difficulties in solidarity, and rejoicing together in the firm's success, which affects their future and their families.

The business enterprise is something more than a mere means of earning one's living and keeping the legitimate dignity of one's state in life, of securing one's independence and that of one's family. It is something more than a technical and

practical collaboration of thought, of capital and of the many forms of labor for the benefit of production and progress. It is something more than an important factor in economic life, more than a simple, however praiseworthy, help to the development of social justice. If it were no more than this, it would still be insufficient to establish and promote the complete order, because order is not such if it does not affect the whole of life, and of material, economic, social and, above all, Christian activity, outside of which man remains always incomplete.³

The Church acknowledges that technical and industrial development, which characterizes our world, requires the creation of new companies and the expansion of existing ones.⁴ But we must clarify the scope of this living and working environment.

First of all, business enterprises or companies are institutions of private law, since individuals by their own nature have the entrepreneurial ability to form and manage them. Government should not intervene in the sphere of private enterprise, except in circumstances when such intervention is required by the common good. The role of the state is to provide the conditions that will allow individuals to exercise their initiative and promote business enterprises.⁵

In any case, companies cannot act as independent and unrelated fragments of the economic and social fabric of a people. “By its own end, each individual enterprise is closely linked to the whole national economy.”⁶ Therefore, every enterprise must comply with the general economic norms, which apply to each country. This general economic framework, within which enterprises operate and develop, is the responsibility of the government.

Nevertheless, to decide what is more helpful to the over-all economic situation is not the prerogative of individual productive enterprises, but pertains to the public authorities and to those institutions that, established either nationally or among a number of countries, function in various sectors of economic life.⁷

The doctrine of the primacy of the human factor of work over the instrumental means of production applies to the enterprise as well. Businessmen have their own role: to create new sources of wealth and jobs. This is their specific contribution to the common good of the nation. At the same time, they must strive to give work a human face and make the enterprise a community of life.⁸ Besides, they should not forget that “a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Lk 12:15). This will prevent the temptation of greed, of forgetting that matter is

subordinated to the spiritual nature of man. Greed is a form of slavery that is incompatible with human dignity: “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Lk 16:13).

36b) Human Relations in the Enterprise

The relationship between employers and workers should be that of mutual support in an undertaking whose success would benefit all the members of the enterprise. Workers will consider the company as their own to the extent that they participate in its benefits and in the decision-making process.

We, no less than Our predecessors, are convinced that employees are justified in wishing to participate in the activity of the industrial concern for which they work. It is not, of course, possible to lay down hard and fast rules regarding the manner of such participation.... But We have no doubt as to the need for giving workers an active part in the business of the company for which they work—be it a private or a public one.⁹

As the Pope says, it is not possible to give hard and fast rules for labor involvement in management decisions. At the same time, the unity of administration that is needed for effective management must be safeguarded.¹⁰ In general, the concrete channels of labor's participation will depend on the situation of the company.¹¹

A human conception of the enterprise should respect the authority and necessary effectiveness of the “unity of administration,” without debasing workers to mere silent and passive executioners of orders from above. For this, the sense of responsibility of the workers must be heightened. Besides, their human and technical formation must be upgraded, so that they can have access to new technologies and participate in the management of the enterprise. Thus, by reducing physical strain and reaching positions of higher responsibility, citizens will progressively increase their participation in the common good.

Therefore, reciprocal cooperation and differentiation of functions characterize human relations within the enterprise. This requires dialogue and concern for the personal situation of each one. That is the only way for the worker to find the personal value of his work:

It is only in this perspective that man ... can find again his own deep meaning, thus being enabled to express his talents, collaborate, participate and cooperate in the smooth operation of the enterprise, of which all are, together, collaborators and architects.¹²

On the other hand, the role of management is not limited to applying dehumanized administration techniques. Managers must have, as something

inherent in their function, the gift to understand, communicate, and get along well with others, so that they can give a personalized character to the common work environment:

So many conflicts and antagonisms between workers and employers often have their roots in the unproductive soil of the refusal to listen, rejection of dialogue or undue postponement of it. Time spent meeting your employees personally, making your relations with them more human and giving your firms a dimension more fit for men, is not time wasted.¹³

Pope John XXIII had earlier expressed the same ideas about the humanization of the workplace:

This demands that the relations between management and employees reflect understanding, appreciation, and good will on both sides. It demands, too, that all parties co-operate actively and loyally in the common enterprise, not so much for what they can get out of it for themselves, but as discharging a duty and rendering a service to their fellow men.¹⁴

36c) The Employment Contract

(1) *Salary and its determination*

Salaries are just in themselves, provided they are understood not as the valuation of work—which as such is not an appraisable merchandise—but as the means provided to the worker for his sustenance. The salary is the most common way of fulfilling the elementary demands of justice in the employer-worker relationship.

Whether the work is done in a system of private ownership of the means of production or in a system where ownership has undergone a certain “socialization,” the relationship between the employer (first and foremost the direct employer) and the worker is resolved on the basis of the wage, that is, through just remuneration for work done.¹⁵

As regards the criteria for the determination of the just salary, the human factor has priority. Thus, justice demands that “the worker must be paid a wage sufficient to support him and his family.”¹⁶ The circumstances of the company and the demands of the common good should also be taken into account for the determination of the proper wage.¹⁷

The employer must determine the salary in proportion to the worker’s contribution within the company,¹⁸ and depending on the means and situation of the latter.¹⁹ The common good that we are referring to here is that of the nation and, from a higher perspective, that which concerns the resources of the international community to which the nation belongs.²⁰ Such common good follows the socio-ethical principle of the “common use of goods.”²¹

(2) *Family salary*

The worker’s salary must cover not only his personal needs, but his family’s as well.²²

Just remuneration for the work of an adult who is responsible for a family means remuneration that will suffice for establishing and properly maintaining a family and for providing security for its future. Such remuneration can be given either through what is called a *family wage*—that is, a single salary given to the head of the family for his work, sufficient for the needs of the family without the other spouse having to take up gainful employment outside the home—or through *other social measures* such as family allowances or grants to mothers devoting themselves exclusively to their families. These grants should correspond to the actual needs, that is, to the

number of dependents for as long as they are not in a position to assume proper responsibility for their own lives.²³

36d) Other Benefits

The different systems of social security and insurance complement the salary in order to cover all the personal and family needs of workers. Insurance should cover cases of accident, sickness, old age, marriage and birth of more children, forced unemployment, etc. These benefits should be extended to farmers as well.²⁴

Within the sphere of these principal rights, there develops a whole system of particular rights that, together with remuneration for work, determine the correct relationship between worker and employer. Among these rights there should never be overlooked the right to a working environment and to manufacturing processes that are not harmful to the workers' physical health or to their moral integrity.²⁵

36e) Partnership and Profit-Sharing

Unlike the employment contract, the partnership contract establishes that the ownership, profits, and management of the firm belong to all the partners. If applied to all the members of the enterprise in its full extension and up to the last consequences, this contract is practically unfeasible. Still, it is advisable to implement a wise hybrid of both, combining their respective advantages and avoiding their drawbacks.

The popes have mentioned three new elements to be introduced in the salary system: *participation in profits*, *participation in management*, and *participation in ownership*. This is sometimes called *reform of the structures*. Current Christian sociologists have pointed out the following advantages of this combination of measures.²⁶

- It puts an end to the supremacy of capital over work, of private interest over common interest. It ensures that labor has its share in the management of the economy, and contributes to the humanization of capital-labor relations.
- The other methods that have been tried to modify labor-capital relations are insufficient (employers' paternalism, workers' militant syndicalism, state intervention, cooperatives). These methods, far from eliminating the proletariat, have consolidated it.
- The juridical structure of the enterprise, especially big stock corporations, no longer corresponds to the social reality. The ownership of these companies belongs to the stockholders, who delegate their authority to a board of directors, who in turn delegate the day-to-day management to hired managers. These managers are the ones running the company *de facto*, but not *de jure*.
- The partnership contract stresses the close cooperation between capital and labor.
- The partnership contract suits better the working class's heightened consciousness of its own dignity and responsibility, of its culture and progress.

Combining the partnership contract with the employment contract would alleviate some of the deficiencies of the latter. The former gives workers a greater share in the management and profits of their company.

We consider it more advisable, however, in the present condition of human society that, so far as is possible, the work-contract be somewhat modified by a partnership-contract, as is already being done in various ways and with no small advantage to workers and owners. Workers and other employees thus become sharers in ownership or management or participate in some fashion in the profits received.²⁷

The expression *partnership contract* is no longer used to refer to ownership-sharing and profit-sharing arrangements between workers and employers. Still, the basic principle of labor's priority over capital remains valid. At present, different ways can be tried to give workers an effective participation in the administration of the company: co-ownership of the means of production, participation in management, profit-sharing, *intrapreneurship*, stock options, etc.²⁸

36f) Participation in Management

A positive aspect of workers' participation in the management of their company is that work becomes more personalized. Strictly speaking, workers are not entitled to such participation, but they have the right to take an active part in the determination of the agreements that affect them. Also, management should take into account their experience and aptitudes, which can provide valuable insights.

Obviously, any firm that is concerned for the human dignity of its workers must also maintain a necessary and efficient unity of direction. But it must not treat those employees who spend their days in service with the firm as though they were mere cogs in the machinery, denying them any opportunity of expressing their wishes or bringing their experience to bear on the work in hand, and keeping them entirely passive in regard to decisions that regulate their activity.²⁹

Unlike participation in management, collectivization—the transfer to the state of the ownership of the means of production—would not bring any improvement for the worker as regards the personalization of work.

Thus merely converting the means of production into State property in the collectivist system is by no means equivalent to “socializing” that property. We can speak of socializing only when the subject[ive] character of society is ensured, that is to say, when on the basis of his work each person is fully entitled to consider himself a part-owner of the great workbench at which he is working with every one else.³⁰

Pope John Paul II talks about being *part-owners*, not about *self-management*, or the takeover of management functions by the labor force. He urges the participation of workers in the management and/or in the profits of the enterprise. He does not set concrete guidelines, but he stresses that “recognition of the proper position of labor and the worker in the production process demands various adaptations in the sphere of the right to ownership of the means of production.”³¹

Therefore, the tenets of what we could call “strict” capitalism must be subject to continuous revision. A reform is needed that will respect human rights in their wider sense, especially labor rights. Nevertheless, the Pontiff warns that “these many deeply desired reforms cannot be achieved by an *a priori* elimination of private ownership of the means of production.”³²

36g) Work and Rest

We have seen in the previous chapter that some activities, by their own essence, take precedence over work. Man is not meant for work, but work for man. *Laboramus ut non laboremus*, “we work so that we do not have to work,” as the classics put it. Hence the need for rest, which will allow time for the fulfillment of family, social, and religious duties. Rest is not to be understood as only a means for greater productivity. It is work itself that has to be understood as a means for the integral development of the personality of the worker.

While devoting their time and energy to the performance of their work with a due sense of responsibility, they should nevertheless be allowed sufficient rest and leisure to cultivate their family, cultural, social and religious life. And they should be given the opportunity to develop those energies and talents, which perhaps are not catered for in their professional work.³³

The Church commands Christians, as a precept, to observe Sunday rest and to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.

37. Labor Unions

37a) A Natural Right

Trade or labor unions are the associations that are constituted by workers of the same sector in order to defend their professional interests. They are a concrete application of the natural right of association. This right is based on the unifying force that work exerts on those who work together.³⁴ And this is also the origin of their essential functions: “Their object is the representation of the various categories of workers, their lawful collaboration in the economic advance of society, and the development of the sense of their responsibility for the realization of the common good.”³⁵

Now, the essential purpose of labor unions also constitutes their limit: their activities should not be employed or manipulated for political decisions that are taken outside of them. “Unions do not have the character of political parties struggling for power; they should not be subjected to the decision of political parties or have too close links with them.”³⁶

On the contrary, labor unions must contribute to the common good of the country through their specific function. They should not close themselves to dialogue or act as an obstacle for other forces. They must pursue their just demands, but they must be realistic and take into account the actual social and economic possibilities. It is the *struggle for social justice* that legitimizes labor unions:

Catholic social teaching does not hold that unions are no more than a reflection of the “class” structure of society and that they are a mouthpiece for a class struggle that inevitably governs social life. They are indeed *a mouthpiece for the struggle for social justice*, for the just rights of working people in accordance with their individual professions.³⁷

Pope John Paul II clarifies that this “struggle” should be a stand *for* a just benefit, never *against* the others; work is, above all, a bond of unity among men, and there lies its social strength: *the strength to build a community*.

Salaries, collective bargaining, and work conditions are the essential issues included today under the heading *social justice* and, as a consequence, the main items in the agenda of labor unions.

37b) Freedom of Labor Unions

The Magisterium of the Church warns against one of the dangers of trade unionism: the depersonalization of the individual members of the union. In that case, unions would be drifting from their proper end.

If the labor union as such, by virtue of the political and economic evolution, were ever to assume a sort of patronage over the worker, or the right to dispose at will of the worker, of his strength, or of his property, as happens in other places, the very concept of labor union—an association for mutual help and defense—would have been altered and destroyed.³⁸

To safeguard the proper ends of the labor unions, the internal and external freedoms of the workers must be assured. There is external freedom when it is possible to create different associations, without being forced to join a sole, official union. There is internal freedom when there is freedom within the association, so that no one is forced to adopt resolutions that are incompatible with faith or morals, or with one's convictions.

Pope Leo XIII also defended the worker's natural right to enter into associations with his fellow-workers. Such associations may consist either of workers alone or of workers and employers, and should be structured in a way best calculated to safeguard the worker's legitimate professional interest. And it is the natural right of the workers to work without hindrance, freely, and on their own initiative within these associations for the achievements of these ends.³⁹

There is need to foster a spirit of loyal cooperation among the different associations, putting the common good above private interests. On the other hand, each member should be encouraged to take a personal and active role in the union.⁴⁰

37c) Nature and Activities of Labor Unions

It is the responsibility of labor unions not only to defend the economic welfare of workers, but also *to care for their human and moral uplifting*. The exclusive pursuit of material welfare would serve only to widen the rift and strife between the different social groups and between workers and employers. Peace is in itself a spiritual good, and requires that spiritual values be given priority. Humans can enjoy material goods only by dividing them, and one's possession excludes everybody else's. Peace, on the other hand, as a common good and by its own nature, tends to spread, to be shared with others. And it is possible only in the sphere of the spirit, the meeting ground of all people.

A very unfortunate way of helping workers, therefore, would be that of people who, while attempting to improve their living conditions, would only succeed in helping them attain the ephemeral and fragile goods of this world, while neglecting to prepare their spirits for moderation by recalling the Christian goods.⁴¹

“Class struggle” is one of the principles that Christians must avoid in their involvement in labor unions. In general, any attempt to transform the protection of legitimate labor interests into an instrument to oppose those who are playing a different role in economic life must be eschewed. A better solution would be for labor unions and employers' associations to establish joint committees, which serve as channels for negotiation and mutual understanding.⁴² It should not be forgotten that, beyond their different roles in production, labor and capital are united by a stronger bond: *their cooperation in the enterprise and their service to the whole community*.

Also, it would be unacceptable for a labor union to flex its muscle as a pressure group in disregard of the common good and, more concretely, of public order. This would be a corruption of the intrinsic nature of the labor union, which is ordained to the good of all citizens, transforming it into a sort of “group or class egoism.”⁴³

Their activity, however, is not without its difficulties. Here and there the temptation can arise of profiting from a position of force to impose, particularly by strikes—the right to which as a final means of defense remains certainly recognized—conditions that are too burdensome for the overall economy and for the social body, or to desire to obtain in this way demands of a directly political nature. When it is a question of public service, required for the life of an entire nation, it is necessary to be able to assess the limit beyond which the harm caused to society becomes inadmissible.⁴⁴

State intervention in labor issues should have a subsidiary nature; it is justified only when the efforts of labor and capital, through their legitimate representatives, are insufficient. The rights of the men involved in work precede those of the state. Any attempt to interfere with the activity of unions under the pretext of “reasons of state” is completely unwarranted.

It is likewise important *to promote vocational training* and skill improvement and development courses for all professionals.⁴⁵

Cooperation with socialist unions may be lawful in certain specific cases, provided the following conditions are met: “The cause to be defended must be just; it must be a temporal agreement; and the necessary precautions must be taken to avoid the dangers that could follow from such an agreement.”⁴⁶ The Church urges the establishment of unions that are inspired by Christian principles. In any case, Catholics cannot leave aside their faith and convictions when they participate in union activities.⁴⁷

38. Professional Corporations

38a) Usefulness, Nature, and Functions

The social doctrine of the Church recommends the formation of autonomous organizations, which occupy an intermediate position between the individual and the state. They are not imposed from above, but are freely constituted through the diverse functions and professions whereby human activity is naturally channeled. The Church praises them as builders of the moral order in the economic world.⁴⁸ These organizations or bodies enable workers to participate in the fashioning of the social fabric.

The reign of mutual collaboration between justice and charity in social-economic relations can only be achieved by a body of professional and interprofessional organizations, built on solidly Christian foundations, working together to effect, under forms adapted to different places and circumstances, what has been called the Corporation.⁴⁹

These corporations already appeared in the guilds of the Middle Ages, and are the ancestors of our labor unions. Being different for each profession or trade, guilds became a source of solidarity for all those exercising the same profession. To this aspect of mutual protection, modern labor unions have added a militant attitude against the liberal sociopolitical system, which places capital over labor. Guilds and the professional corporations or associations that preceded labor unions were more interested in fostering professional training and a more effective output among their members. Their bond was precisely their common professional dedication, in the same way that the bond of living in the same place leads to the municipal corporation.

One of the main functions of these professional corporations is to prevent class struggle; they include both workers' and employers' associations, allowing them to cooperate for the common good. Work and capital are united while respecting each other's rights.

It is easily deduced from what has been said that the interests common to the whole industry or profession should hold first place in these guilds. The most important among these interests is to promote the cooperation in the highest degree of each industry and profession for the sake of the common good of the country. Concerning matters, however, in which particular points, involving advantage or detriment to employers or workers, may require special care and protection, the two parties, when

these cases arise, can deliberate separately or as the situation requires reach a decision separately.⁵⁰

Corporations, like labor unions, by their own nature take precedence over the state. They offer workers a channel for their responsible participation in their companies, and a platform for voicing their demands and positions on general political measures that affect the national economy.

38b) Guilds

In ancient times, artisans' guilds embodied the functions of the professional corporations. In modern times, we can still learn from one of their main characteristics: the personalizing nature of professional relations within the guild, which can be incorporated in our business enterprises.

39. Cooperatives: Usefulness, Nature, and Functions

The cooperative is another way of promoting professional interests. Several enterprises or units of production of the same sector can group together to improve the technology of their means of production, to improve the standards of living and the professional qualifications of their members, etc. The attention and assistance they receive from the state is justified by their contribution to national progress and by the human values they foster.

Cooperatives are especially advantageous for farmers.⁵¹ Among the functions they perform in this sector are the following:

- Higher earnings
- The improvement of working conditions
- Greater job stability
- A greater stimulus for initiative in work
- The achievement of economies of scale
- The availability of professional formation and education⁵²

1. Pius XII, Address, May 7, 1949.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Pius XII, Address to the Catholic Union of Industrialists, Jan. 31, 1952.
4. Cf. *GS*, 64.
5. Cf. *CCC*, 2431.
6. Pius XII, Address, Jan. 31, 1952; cf. *CCC*, 2432.
7. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 99.
8. Cf. John Paul II, Address to Workers and Entrepreneurs at Nou Camp, Barcelona, Nov. 7, 1982.
9. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 91.
10. Cf. *Ibid.*, 92.
11. Cf. *Ibid.*, 93.
12. John Paul II, Address to Christian Entrepreneurs and Managers, Nov. 24, 1979.
13. *Ibid.*
14. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 92.
15. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 19.
16. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 71; cf. *CCC*, 2434.
17. Cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 68.

18. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 71.
19. Cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 72.
20. Cf. *Ibid.*, 71.
21. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 19.
22. Cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 71.
23. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 19.
24. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 135.
25. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 19; cf. CCC, 2432.
26. Cf. Van Gestel, *La Doctrina Social de la Iglesia* (Barcelona: Herder, 1964), 259–262.
27. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 65.
28. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 14.
29. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 92.
30. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 14.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *GS*, 67.
34. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 20.
35. Paul VI, Ap. Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 14.
36. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 20.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Pius XII, Address to Italian Christian Labor Association, Mar. 11, 1945.
39. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 22.
40. Cf. *Ibid.*, 65.
41. Benedict XV, Letter to the Bishop of Bergamo, Mar. 11, 1920.
42. Cf. Pius XII, Address, Feb. 2, 1945.
43. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 20.
44. Paul VI, Ap. Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 14.
45. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 20.
46. Pius XI, Sacred Congregation Statement, June 5, 1929.
47. Cf. *Ibid.*
48. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 37.
49. Pius XI, Enc. *Divini Redemptoris*, 54. The term *corporation* is not taken here in the sense of business enterprise, but as a professional association.
50. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 85.
51. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 143.
52. Cf. *GS*, 71.

27

Private Property and Society

40. Created Goods and Society

40a) The Universal Destination of Material Goods

Every human being has the natural right to use created goods, since God has meant them for all. Since, in general, these goods are not directly available in a usable form, man has to obtain and use them through his work. Work thus becomes the way to acquire property and the means of production. At the same time, the Church considers the right of ownership not as something absolute and unconditional, but as a right that is subordinated to the common use or universal destination of material goods.¹

Every man, as a being endowed with reason, has from nature the basic right to use the material goods of the earth; however, it is left to the human will and to the juridical forms of peoples to regulate more particularly its practical achievement... All this, nevertheless, is subordinated to the natural purpose of material goods and could not make itself independent of the first and fundamental right, which grants their use to all; rather, it should serve to make its achievement possible in accordance with its aim.²

The exercise of this original right to the use of material goods offers an occasion and a greater facility for the fulfillment of moral duties, as well as for the practice of virtue.

40b) Private Property

As we have just seen, private property is not only the fruit of human work; it is also *ordained to work*. Using private property for work fulfills the purpose of material goods, which is that they be used by all people. Possession for the sake of possession is unthinkable within the social doctrine of the Church; properties must be made to yield fruit for the benefit and service of all.³

In his use of things man should regard the external goods he legitimately owns not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as himself.⁴

41. The Scope of the Right to Property

41a) A Right of All Persons

All people should have *equal access to property* through work and savings. Any sort of restriction on the possibility of acquiring some private property is a violation of distributive justice.

Therefore, the dignity of the human person normally demands the right to the use of earthly goods as the natural foundation for a livelihood; and to that right corresponds the fundamental obligation to grant private property, as far as possible, to all.⁵

The universal right to private property is parallel to the universal right to work. Any worker has the natural tendency “to know that in his work, even on something that is owned in common, he is working ‘for himself.’”⁶

This is not a condemnation of the system of salaried work—that is, of working for others in exchange for a salary. In so many cases, this is precisely the means to start acquiring some property. It is opposed, though, to a depersonalized work:

This awareness is extinguished within him in a system of excessive bureaucratic centralization, which makes the worker feel that he is just a cog in a huge machine moved from above, that he is for more reasons than one a mere production instrument rather than a true subject of work with an initiative of his own.⁷

41b) A Right to Own All Kinds of Goods

Insofar as God has destined all the goods of the earth for men's use,⁸ the right to private ownership extends to all created goods, including production goods.⁹ It is limited only by the demands of justice and charity, which would not allow an unfair distribution.

If such a fair distribution of goods is not accomplished or is only imperfectly achieved, the genuine aim of national economy had not been reached; since, however great the abundance of available goods, the people not participating in them would not be economically rich, but poor. Instead, let such a fair distribution be actually effected in a durable manner, and you will see a people, even with a smaller quantity of goods at its disposal, become economically healthy.¹⁰

Property extends to immaterial goods as well, like professional skills. These goods can be shared, but not transferred.¹¹

42. The Right to Private Ownership

42a) A Natural Right

The right to property is *based on human nature* itself, and precisely on account of its higher powers.¹² Thanks to his intellect, man can foresee his needs and provide for them in advance. But this would not be possible without the stability that is allowed by the ownership and availability of material goods. The exercise of freedom, understood as mastery over one's own acts, would be curtailed if that mastery could not be extended over material goods, which could be considered, with good reason, one's own.¹³ Pope Leo XIII clearly explains this point:

For man, fathoming with his reason innumerable matters, linking the future with the present, and being master of his own acts, guides his ways under the eternal law and the power of God, whose providence governs all things. Wherefore, it is in his power to exercise his choice not only over matters that regard his present welfare, but also over those that he deems may be for his advantage in time yet to come. Hence, man not only should possess the fruits of the earth, but also the very soil, because from the produce of the earth he has to lay by provision for the future.¹⁴

The other foundations of the right to ownership are the family and the nation. It is natural—especially in rural societies—for a father to wish to leave some property to his children, and for the latter to maintain and increase it.¹⁵ The national economy also benefits when citizens apply their ingenuity and natural capacities to what they consider and manage as their own. Moreover, the lack of private property eliminates the psychological stimulus to improve and increase productive goods. This has a negative effect on the wealth of the whole nation.¹⁶

42b) A Guarantee of Personal Freedom

Owning some property guarantees the essential freedom of the human person. Without stable ownership, personal and family autonomy would be in jeopardy, since they would not have anything to fall back on in case of adversity.¹⁷ This is another foundation of the natural right to property.

42c) The Fruit of One's Work

People often save part of the fruits of their work and invest it in land or some other property. If this right were to be denied, people's effort to earn extra income that they can save would be frustrated. They would no longer be enticed to increase their output.¹⁸ This stimulus is precisely one of the conditions for civil liberties.¹⁹

43. The Social Function of Private Property

43a) A Natural Consequence of Ownership

The social function of private ownership stems from the very nature of this right. This social service has three aspects: juridical, economic, and political. Still, the key issue here is one's concept of economic goods and of the nature of private rights.

It is obvious that any good that juridically belongs to a private individual was previously part of the common heritage of mankind. All people were equally entitled to use it. For social reasons—the demands of social peace and of a diligent and orderly administration, as well as the consequences of the spiritual nature of man—it has now become subject to private ownership. But this does not mean that the right of private ownership makes the previous right of all people null and void. Individualistic capitalism, however, claims that it does. The owner would be entitled to use the goods that he has acquired without any limitation or condition. The fallacy of this view becomes clear when we consider two basic principles: first, the instrumental nature of the right to private property, which is meant for the peaceful and fruitful possession of wealth; second, the primary right of all people to use created goods in support of their basic right to life.²⁰

Although the social function of private property may have received special attention in our times, it has always been a valid demand. St. Thomas had already proclaimed it as such: “The second thing that is competent to man with regard to external things is their use. In this respect man ought to possess external things, not as his own, but as common, so that, to wit, he is ready to communicate them to others in need.”²¹ This was already practiced in the early Christian communities, following the teachings of Christ: Man is the administrator of the goods and talents that he has received.

The owner has a real right over his property. It is a right *erga omnes*—that is, it can be exercised against all those who try to violate it to the detriment of social order. However, such right must be enjoyed for one's benefit and, at the same time, for the benefit of society. Holding one's properties “in common” is the characteristic trait of the social function of

ownership. Pope John Paul II defines it as a “social mortgage” on private property.²²

Since not all owners would spontaneously respect the social purpose that is inherent to their fundamental right of ownership, *a proper juridical ordination is needed in order to guarantee the social equilibrium.*

Nevertheless, the exercise of property rights in common—for one’s own and the community’s benefit at the same time—*is not exclusively governed by the provisions of the juridical ordination.*

Such ordination binds in conscience when it is just, in the same way as tax laws do. But it is not the only requirement that the owner must obey in the community-oriented exercise of his right. *He is also bound in conscience by moral norms.* These demand that, once his own needs and his family’s have been satisfied—including a prudent provision for the future—he must take into account the common interest. This means helping others, especially the poor, and not just with one’s superfluous goods.²³

To determine what is necessary and what is superfluous, each Christian has the imperative obligation of gauging what is superfluous for him in the light of the needs of others. He should also be vigilant to ensure that the administration and distribution of created goods benefits the whole community.²⁴

Pope John XXIII, showing the huge scope that is open to the social function of private property, affirms:

The State, with all its machinery, is unable to remedy or assist the tragic situations and urgent problems of an intimate and personal nature that are continually arising. There will always remain, therefore, a vast field for the exercise of human sympathy and the Christian charity of individuals. We would observe, finally, that the efforts of individuals, or of groups of private citizens, are definitely more effective in promoting spiritual values than is the activity of public authority.²⁵

In summary, we can say that the social doctrine of the Church, while defending the right to private ownership, demands a deep transformation of the present economic structures, based on the social function of property. It proclaims the universality of the *right to life* and of the *right to private property*, which belong to every single human being. This universality demands the imposition of all the limitations that will be necessary and sufficient to ensure that the right to property itself is not made void.

Commutative justice demands respect for the division of goods, and not invading other’s rights by overstepping the limits of one’s own property.

The proper, community-minded usage of one's goods does not belong to this justice, however, but to social justice.²⁶ The fulfillment of the duties of social justice can be demanded by law. Public authority has the responsibility of preventing abuses of private property to the detriment of the common good.²⁷

We can thus conclude that social function is not something extrinsic or added to private property, but inherent to it,²⁸ insofar as the goods of the earth are meant for the legitimate support of all human beings. This social function is not the result of a special intervention of the state. It is inherent to the owner's proper exercise of his right. The social function includes both compliance with the norms of justice—without which the law itself loses its force—and concern for the needs of others. These needs are discovered by private individuals who exercise Christian mercy and charity.²⁹

The very right of ownership, legitimate in itself, must, in a Christian view of the world, carry out its function and observe its social purpose. Thus, in the use of the goods possessed, the general purpose that God assigned to them and the requirements of the common good prevail over the advantages, the comforts, and sometimes even the secondary necessities of private origin.³⁰

The social doctrine of the Church teaches that “all private property involves a social obligation.”³¹

43b) A Contribution to the Common Good

Private property, as we have seen, has two inseparable aspects: individual and social.³² There is no possible opposition between the two. As an individual property, it is owned and administered by the individual; as a social property, its use and enjoyment must be geared toward the needs of the common good. There is incompatibility, though, when the individual right to property is unjustly abolished, or when the use of that right is not subordinated to the common good. The latter may be due to an unjust distribution that prevents the extension of the right of ownership to all people, or to mismanagement, as in the case of idle agricultural lands. Since public authority is in charge of protecting and supervising the common good, it has the responsibility of laying down specific norms in this matter.

It follows from what We have termed the individual and at the same time social character of ownership, that men must consider in this matter not only their own advantage but also the common good. To define these duties in detail when necessity requires and the natural law has not done so, is the function of those in charge of the State. Therefore, public authority, under the guiding light always of the natural and divine law, can determine more accurately upon consideration of the true requirements of the common good, what is permitted and what is not permitted to owners in the use of their property.³³

44. State Intervention in Private Property

44a) Equitable Distribution

The state must foster an equitable distribution of private property among all citizens. The Church is aware of the historical and social changes that may make one form of distribution more advisable than others. She does not espouse, therefore, an immutable and perpetually valid form of property. God has not imposed any fixed system in this area: “The limits of private possession have been left to be fixed by man’s own industry, and by the laws of individual races.”³⁴

If a conflict were to appear between a specific distribution of property and the universal destination of material goods, the state must step in.³⁵ Among the possible reforms that could help solve this problem, the Magisterium suggests that “estates insufficiently cultivated must even be divided up and given to those who will be able to make them productive.”³⁶

The new nations that have emerged from former colonies that have gained their independence, and the problems affecting the Third World, call for urgent reforms and adaptations in the field of the ownership of the means of production.³⁷ The Church denounces any violation of the right to exercise the basic freedoms, whether within a country or between countries.

The scandal of the shocking inequality between the rich and poor—whether between rich and poor countries, or between social classes in a single nation—is no longer tolerated. On one hand, people have attained such an unheard of abundance that is given to waste, while on the other hand so many live in such poverty, deprived of the basic necessities, that one is hardly able even to count the victims of malnutrition.³⁸

Nevertheless, the fact that private property is a natural right of all people does not mean that all have the same titles to property. It rather means that all are entitled to use their natural abilities and professional skills to attain the actual exercise of that right. And since individuals and families are naturally different from each other, and each carries out his work under different circumstances and with different degrees of dedication, it follows that the distribution of property must reflect such differences—insofar as these are natural and just. An egalitarian division of property among all citizens would not solve the problem of unequal

distribution. This would mean a separation of property and work, since the criteria for such a distribution would ignore work, effort, and natural talents.

44b) Laws Must Protect the Right of Ownership

The state has no power to grant or abolish the right to private property. Its role is thus to recognize and protect this right in its laws. The state should not impose such heavy taxes and social security contributions that the viability of the right to private property is jeopardized.³⁹

44c) Private Property and Public Property

The right to private ownership does not preclude the existence of public property. Nevertheless, public property must be restricted to what is really necessary:

The State and other agencies of public law must not extend their ownership beyond what is clearly required by considerations of the common good properly understood, and even then there must be safeguards. Otherwise private ownership could be reduced beyond measure, or, even worse, completely destroyed.⁴⁰

Besides, there must be a proper control of state-owned enterprises to make sure that they are managed with due professional competence, with honesty, and with a spirit of justice. Mismanagement and abuses are especially likely when economic power is excessively concentrated.⁴¹

44d) Expropriation

Expropriation is an emergency measure. It is the last resort that can be taken when all other means have failed to remove an obstacle to the prosperity of the country (for example, properties that are left idle or under-utilized).⁴² Other measures must be tried first whenever the individual's exercise of property rights could harm the common good. Some of these measures are: "Incomes must be raised, working conditions improved, security in employment assured, and personal incentives to work encouraged."⁴³

Abuse or mere lack of use of property does not automatically void the right of ownership. While the respect for private property is a demand of commutative justice, the proper way of using it belongs to other aspects of justice—legal justice—and to other virtues.⁴⁴ The state is thus bound to indemnify the owner of the expropriated asset. "Compensation must be made and is to be calculated according to equity, with all circumstances taken into account."⁴⁵

1. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 14; CCC, 2402–2406.
2. Pius XII, Address, June 1, 1941.
3. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 14.
4. *GS*, 69.
5. Pius XII, Christmas Address, 1942; cf. *GS*, 69.
6. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 15.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Cf. *GS*, 69.
9. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 109.
10. Pius XII, Address, 1 June 1941, no. 10.
11. Cf. *GS*, 71.
12. Cf. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 5; CCC, 2403.
13. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 109; *GS*, 71.
14. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 5.
15. Cf. *Ibid.*, 9.
16. Cf. *Ibid.*, 11.
17. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 109; *GS*, 71.
18. Cf. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 3; Pius XII, Address, Sep. 1, 1944.
19. Cf. *GS*, 71.
20. Cf. *Ibid.*

21. *ST*, II-II, q. 66, a. 2.
22. Cf. John Paul II, Opening Address to the 3rd General Conference of CELAM, Jan. 28, 1979, in *Puebla: A Pilgrimage of Faith*, 116–117.
23. Cf. *GS*, 69.
24. Cf. John XXIII, Address, Sep. 11, 1962.
25. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 120.
26. Cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 47.
27. Cf. *GS*, 71.
28. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 119.
29. Cf. *Ibid.*, 120.
30. John Paul II, Homily for Farmers in Recife, Brazil, July 7, 1980.
31. John Paul II, Opening Address to the 3rd General Conference of CELAM, Jan. 28, 1979, in *Puebla: A Pilgrimage of Faith*, 116–117.
32. Cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 45.
33. *Ibid.*, 49.
34. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 6.
35. Cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Populorum Progressio*, 23; *CCC*, 2406.
36. *GS*, 71.
37. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 14.
38. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation,"* 1.6.
39. Cf. Leo XIII, Enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 6.
40. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 117.
41. Cf. *Ibid.*, 118.
42. Cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Populorum Progressio*, 24.
43. *GS*, 71.
44. Cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 47.
45. *GS*, 71.

28

Education and Society

45. Nature and Purpose of Education

“Education consists essentially in preparing man for what he must be and for what he must do here below, in order to attain the sublime end for which he was created.”¹ Through education, humans acquire the habits that are needed to competently fulfill their proper operations and ends. Education thus extends to the different aspects of human activity: physical, intellectual, and moral. However, these aspects are not addressed separately, but integrated in the harmonious whole of the personality.

The last end to which all human acts are remotely ordained is God. Education, therefore, if properly understood, should lead to God. Every educational activity should lead to knowing and loving God more, and to the proper appreciation of moral values.² Hence the fallacy of naturalist approaches, which see education as the mere spontaneous development of nature, and reject any need to comply with objective moral ends, which man would naturally discover through his reason and obey through his will.

Education is precisely respect for human values; it takes shape gradually, but can also be deformed if it is not properly protected. This education, according to the ancient and always valid Socratic concept, means drawing out the intimacy of the human spirit in order to bring it to the light, to life, to perfection. Consequently, it should not mean injecting poison into it, consciously fostering evil passions, contributing to the clouding or, even worse, to the oppression, to the debasement of human dignity.³

Besides this general content, each person will have to receive a specific education, in agreement with his individual abilities and with the culture and traditions of his local and national community. In this sense, education is not only a right, but also a serious duty for every person upon reaching the age of reason. “We must do everything possible to make all persons aware of their right to culture and their duty to develop themselves culturally and to help their fellows.”⁴

The betterment of society—made up of free and responsible persons—thus depends on the well-directed education of each individual. Education begins and ends in the recipient, and is possible only when his freedom is taken into account. It is the recipient who directs the immediate preparation of his powers for the stability and continuity of the acts that are involved in learning, and who guides

their implementation. The educator has a merely auxiliary or cooperating role, as we will see later. The education of a society is the education of each of its members in all virtues: family, professional, social, civic, etc.

46. The Universal Right to Education

Education is an inalienable right of every person. It must be imparted in different ways, depending on the age, sex, culture, and professional level of the subject. At the same time, it should instill a respect for legitimate differences, and seek through them the underlying, deeper roots of the unity of mankind.

47. Roles of Family, State, and Church

The education of the person takes shape in the triple setting of the family, the state, and the Church. Each makes a specific contribution: the family and the state in the natural order, the Church in the supernatural order of grace. Man is born in a family, which is not a whole society (in the sense that it is not self-sufficient within its own order). The family thus needs the help of the state, which is a whole society (insofar as it has the means to fulfill its purpose: the temporal common good of its citizens). It is thus the role of the state to make it easier for the family to fulfill its primary educational mission. The Church, on the other hand, is also a whole society because it has all the means needed for her mission: the eternal salvation of people.

From such priority of rights on the part of the Church and of the family in the field of education, most important advantages, as we have seen, accrue to the whole of society. Moreover, in accordance with the divinely established order of things, no damage can follow from it to the true and just rights of the State in regard to the education of its citizens. These rights have been conferred upon civil society by the Author of nature Himself, not by title of fatherhood, as in the case of the Church and the family, but in virtue of the authority that the civil society possesses to promote the common temporal welfare, which is precisely the purpose of its existence. Consequently education cannot pertain to civil society in the same way in which it pertains to the Church and to the family, but in a different way corresponding to its own particular end and object...

It is the right, or to speak more correctly, it is the duty of the State to protect in its legislation the prior rights ... of the family as regards the Christian education of its offspring, and consequently also to respect the supernatural rights of the Church in this same realm of Christian education.⁵

47a) Family and Education

For as long as children cannot fend for themselves, the task and responsibility of their education falls on their parents.⁶ This is an original and fundamental right, and is prior to the state. The imposition of a state school for all children is therefore unjust, as is the failure of the state to offer parents the means to exercise their right to choose schools. This right is so sacred that even the Church, in spite of her being painfully aware of the necessity of Baptism for salvation, cannot violate it.

So jealous is she of the family's inviolable natural right to educate the children, that she never consents, save under peculiar circumstances and with special cautions, to baptize the children of non-Christians, or provide for their education against the will of the parents, till such time as the children can choose for themselves and freely embrace the Faith.⁷

Parents exercise their educational role through example and instruction. Both means must go together. This family education is a preparation for the practice of virtues in the wider sphere of society, which children join as they grow up.

The self-giving that inspires the love of husband and wife for each other is the model and norm for the self-giving that must be practiced in the relationships between brothers and sisters and the different generations living together in the family. And the communion and sharing that are part of everyday life in the home at times of joy and at times of difficulty are the most concrete and effective pedagogy for the active, responsible and fruitful inclusion of the children in the wider horizon of society.⁸

Parents are especially suited for education, since nature has built in them a special concern and solicitude for their children. This will lead them to cherish their children, not for their external success or for any other particular dimension of their activity, but in themselves, for their own sake. Still, it is, above all, the sacramental grace of marriage that transforms parents into cooperators of the authority and love of God the Father and of Christ the Shepherd, as well as of the motherly love of the Church. At the same time, it enriches them with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as wisdom, counsel, and fortitude, which greatly help in their educational task.⁹

Parents must also make sure that the doctrinal formation that their children receive is sound. They must actually exercise their right—and obligation—to participate in the direction of their education.

47b) Church and Education

Besides the administration of the sacraments, the educational work of the Church is carried out through schools and charitable undertakings. These are humanizing channels that facilitate the transmission of the evangelical message. The Church has been instituted by Christ to propagate and continue his mission. On account of the divine origin of her power, she is independent of any earthly authority, both in her end and in the means that are necessary or appropriate for its fulfillment.¹⁰

The Church also has the right and duty to issue clarifying judgments on the teachings and educational policies of civil institutions, based on the doctrine and morals that she has received in trust. “Nor should the exercise of this right be considered undue interference, but rather maternal care on the part of the Church.”¹¹

The mission of the Church extends to all people, not just to the faithful, since Christ wants that all be saved and that all congregate in the sole ecclesial community. The universality of the educational mission of the Church is based both on the moral aspect of the content of her teaching and on its application to all people. It is made possible because the supernatural order, far from opposing the intellectual and moral nature of man, is built upon it. Grace does not destroy nature, but elevates it.

A consequence of this is the advisability of cooperation between the three institutions that are involved in education—the family, the state, and the Church—insofar as the moral and theological virtues are practiced and developed in the family and at school as well. The respect that is due to all consciences does not imply that a Christian should refrain from energetically professing his faith whenever necessary. Neither should he give up his effort to practice in all spheres of his life the demands of Christian life, as taught by the Church.

True ecumenical activity means openness, drawing closer, availability for dialogue, and a shared investigation of the truth in the full evangelical and Christian sense; but in no way does it or can it mean giving up or in any way diminishing the treasures of divine truth that the Catholic Church has constantly confessed and taught.¹²

47c) State and Education

In the field of education, the state has a subsidiary role of protection and promotion. The application of the principle of subsidiarity to this area has two consequences. On the one hand, the state must promote and foster private initiative. On the other hand, it must take over the tasks that exceed the possibilities of private initiative,¹³ always respecting, however, the free choice of school by families.¹⁴ It must pay a special attention to the education of the underprivileged.

It is the duty of the state to ensure that all its citizens have access to an adequate education and are prepared for the proper exercise of their civic rights and duties. The state itself, therefore, should safeguard the rights of children to an adequate education in schools. It should be vigilant about the ability of the teachers and the standard of teaching. It should watch over the health of the pupils and in general promote the work of the schools in its entirety. In this, however, the principle of subsidiarity must be borne in mind.¹⁵

In general, it is the right and duty of the State to protect, according to the rules of right reason and faith, the moral and religious education of youth.... It pertains to the State, in view of the common good, to promote in various ways the education and instruction of youth. It should begin by encouraging and assisting, of its own accord, the initiative and activity of the Church and the family, whose successes in this field have been clearly demonstrated by history and experience. It should moreover supplement their work whenever this falls short of what is necessary, even by means of its own schools and institutions.... Over and above this, the State can exact, and take measures to secure that all its citizens have the necessary knowledge of their civic and political duties, and a certain degree of physical, intellectual and moral culture, which, considering the conditions of our times, is really necessary for the common good.¹⁶

47d) State Monopoly is Unjust

One of the demands of the principle of subsidiarity is that the state must not assume a monopoly of education.

Therefore there must be no monopoly of schools which would be prejudicial to the natural rights of the human person and would militate against the progress and extension of education, and the peaceful coexistence of citizens. It would, moreover, be inconsistent with the pluralism which exists today in many societies.¹⁷

If ideologies opposed to the Christian faith are taught in the schools, the family must join with other families, if possible through family associations, and with all its strength and with wisdom help the young not to depart from the faith.¹⁸

The freedom to choose a school is based on the natural primary right of parents to educate their children according to the values that are inspired by their faith. Pope John Paul II has affirmed “the right that belongs to all families to educate their children in schools that correspond to their view of the world, and in particular, the strict right of believing fathers not to see their children subject in the schools to programs inspired by atheism.”¹⁹

1. Pius XI, Enc. *Divini Illius Magistri*, 5.
2. Cf. *GE*, 1.
3. John XXIII, Enc. *Siamo Particolarmente*, 13–14.
4. *GS*, 60.
5. Pius XI, Enc. *Divini Illius Magistri*, 22–23.
6. Cf. *CCC*, 2221–2231.
7. Pius XI, Enc. *Divini Illius Magistri*, 20.
8. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 37.
9. Cf. *Ibid.*, 38.
10. Cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Divini Illius Magistri*, 10.
11. *Ibid.*, 13.
12. John Paul II, Enc. *Redemptor Hominis*, 6.
13. Cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Divini Illius Magistri*, 24.
14. Cf. *GE*, 6.
15. *Ibid.*; cf. *CCC*, 2211.
16. Pius XI, Enc. *Divini Illius Magistri*, 46–47.
17. *GE*, 6; cf. *CCC*, 1883, 2209.
18. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 40.
19. John Paul II, Address to UNESCO, June 2, 1980.

Marriage and the Family

by Charles Belmonte

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Marriage and the Family

by Charles Belmonte

Part I

THE PLAN OF GOD FOR MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

29

Marriage, the Origin of the Family

IN THE FIRST volume of this work, in the treatise on the sacraments, we have studied marriage as a natural institution and as a sacrament. That study should be a preparation for this treatise. In this chapter we shall study marriage as the origin of the family, its characteristics, and requirements. We will see that marriage is:

- a *person-affirming* reality,
- a *love-enabling* reality,
- a *life-giving* reality, and
- a *sanctifying* reality.¹

1. God, the Creator of Man

Divine revelation begins with the self-manifestation of God as the Creator of all things, both spiritual and material: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gn 1:1).

In a special way, God created the rational creatures with body and soul. He endowed them with spirit, so that they may share his infinite happiness. God created spiritual beings—angels and humans—capable of spiritual knowledge and free volition. Thus, “God created man in his own image” (Gn 1:27). In this passage, God is revealing to us the individual and spiritual aspect of human nature: rational intelligence and free will. A human being is a person.

A complete reading of the passage reveals additional truths about humanity: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gn 1:27). There is a certain parallel between the mysterious divine *plurality* of Persons within the transcendental *unity* of God, and the *plurality* of human beings—male and female—destined to the astonishing *unity* of the human family, which contains all persons.

Because man, like all creatures, is limited and always in need of complementing his own limitations, God wanted that another human being—a woman—should complement, enrich, and help him. God decreed that man and woman would live a life of love and knowledge in a *natural unity*, in a *communion*. Thus, God established *matrimony as a natural institution*. He also determined its essential characteristics and laws.

The intimate partnership of life and the love which constitutes the married state has been established by the creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws.... God himself is the author of marriage.²

There are some who think that matrimony is not a *natural* reality, but a changeable *cultural* trend. They try to manipulate it according to their own interest, or introduce what they call “alternative lifestyles.”

Among the most difficult challenges facing the Church today is that of a pervasive individualism, which tends to limit and restrict marriage and the family to the private sphere.

Many misunderstandings have beset the very idea of “nature.”... There is a tendency to reduce what is specifically human to the cultural sphere, claiming a completely autonomous creativity and efficacy for the person at both the individual and social

levels. From this viewpoint, what is natural becomes merely a physical, biological, and sociological datum to be technologically manipulated according to one's own interest. This opposition between culture and nature deprives culture of any objective foundation, leaving it at the mercy of will and power. This can be seen very clearly in the current attempts to present *de facto* unions, including those of homosexuals, as comparable to marriage, whose natural character is precisely denied.³

“Have not you read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one’? So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder” (Mt 19:4–6). Jesus said that husband and wife are to be one. In these passages, we discover one of the properties of this kind of human love, and, therefore, of marriage: its *exclusivity* (one man with one woman), which is the same as its *unity* or monogamy.

2. Marriage is a *Person-Affirming Reality*

Marriage comes into existence when a man and a woman, forswearing all others, through an act of irrevocable personal consent, freely give themselves to one another. It is based on a definitive decision, *the consent*. At the heart of the act that establishes marriage, there is a free, self-determining choice on the part of the man and the woman, through which they give themselves *a new and lasting identity*. This man becomes this woman's *husband*, and she becomes his *wife*, and together they become *spouses*.

This man and this woman are not, for each other, replaceable and substitutable individuals but are rather irreplaceable and non-substitutable persons (with the emphasis on "persons").

Through their own free and self-determining choices, they have given to themselves and to one another a new kind of identity, and nothing they subsequently do can change this identity. They simply cannot unspouse themselves. They cannot make themselves to be ex-husbands and ex-wives any more than I can make myself to be an ex-father to the children whom I have begotten. I may be a bad father, a terrible father, but I am still my children's father. I may be a bad husband, a terrible husband, but I am still my wife's husband, and she is my wife.⁴

Marriage is established in and through the free, self-determining *personal choice* of the spouses, and thus, it is a *person-affirming reality*.⁵

3. Marriage is a *Love-Enabling Reality*

Marriage, a person-affirming reality, enables husband and wife to give to each other the love that is unique and proper to them: conjugal love. Marriage enables them to give this kind of love because:

- only spouses can give love of this kind;
- what makes a man and a woman spouses is their marriage.

Thus, marriage is a *love-enabling reality*. Other kinds of love—love of neighbor, love of one's children, love of one's enemies—do not imply the marriage institution because these are inclusive, not exclusive kinds of love.

3a) What Love is Not

One of the dominant ideas to which the world is subjected today is the wrong notion of love. Motion pictures frequently portray love as a *feeling* that is so important to achieve happiness.

At other times, love is portrayed as *pleasure*, a philosophy (called *hedonism*) characterized by the belief that maximization of pleasure, accompanied by the minimization of pain, is the fundamental moral principle of human life.

Nowadays, for some, love has come to mean having sexual intercourse. This reduction leaves out values such as fidelity, exclusiveness, dependability, stability, childbearing, founding of a family, and love of children.

3b) Progress of Genuine Love

Pope John Paul II analyzes the stages of love:

- i) The first element in the general analysis of love is *attraction*, a natural force that operates *in persons*.
- ii) *Desire* follows. It becomes a *longing* for the person, and not a mere sensual desire (*concupiscentia*). Human love, however, cannot be reduced to desire itself: “I want you because you are a good for me.” If desire is predominant, it can deform love between man and woman and rob them both of it. Thus, desire should be placed under the control of reason.
- iii) When love is perfected, the subject also longs for the other person’s good; it becomes *love as good will*, also called “love of benevolence” (*amor benevolentiae* or *benevolentia* for short).⁶

Furthermore, love finds its full realization not in an individual subject, but in a relationship between persons; there must be *reciprocity*. Love should be something that exists *between* man and woman. The structure of love is an *interpersonal communion*.

Genuine reciprocity cannot arise from egoism. Each person is called to *love as friendship and self-giving*, to the surrender of the “I” to form the “we”—a communion. This personal surrender is not in the natural order, or in the physical sense (a person cannot be another’s property). A person can give himself to another (whether to a human person or to God) at the level of love, and in a moral sense. This is something different from—and more than—attraction, desire, or even goodwill.

Moreover, *sacrifice* has always been the touchstone of authentic human love. People who love with sacrifice send a message about the nature of real love and thereby help to strengthen the marriage bond of other people. Genuine love is, therefore, the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.⁷

3c) Communion of Persons, Not of Bodies

We should not be deceived by the biblical expression “one flesh,” as if the union of husband and wife were purely physical. The expression *one flesh* refers to the complete *human person*. By creating the human race in his own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in man and woman the vocation—and thus the responsibility—of love and communion. Man is called to *love in his unified totality*, as a person: body and soul. The body is made a sharer in spiritual love.⁸

Bodily life is not merely an instrumental good *for* the person, but is itself integral to the person and thus a good *of* the person. In this personalistic interpretation, human love embraces the body and soul, and the body also expresses spiritual love.⁹

Since the body, male or female, is the expression of the human person, a man and a woman, in giving their bodies to one another, give their *persons* to one another. The bodily gift of a man and a woman to each other is the outward sign—the sacrament—of the *communion of persons* existing between them. And this sacrament, in turn, is an image of the communion of persons in the Trinity.... Pope John Paul II calls this capacity of the body to express the communion of persons the *nuptial meaning of the body*.¹⁰

Summing up, we can say that genuine love must be eminently human, directed from one person to the other person by an affection rooted in the will, and embracing the good of the whole person.¹¹

Jesus, besides, explains the original divine design. “For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (Mt 19:8). The sexual act is truly human only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another *until death*. The physical aspect of the sexual act would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a *total self-giving*, in which the whole person is present, everything one is, everything one will be. If anyone were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, he or she would not be giving totally.¹² This total self-giving points toward the second property of real married love: it is *permanent*. If it were temporary, it would not be total. Real marriage is indissoluble. Thus, the properties of marriage are as follows:

- Exclusivity (unity)

- Permanence (indissolubility)

3d) Complementarity of the Two Sexes

“Sexuality is a fundamental component of personality, one of its modes of being, of manifestation, of communicating with others, of feeling, of expressing and of living human love.”¹³ Femininity and masculinity are complementary gifts, through which human sexuality becomes an integral part of the concrete capacity for the love that God has inscribed in man and woman.

Sexuality characterizes man and woman not only on the physical level, but also on the psychological and spiritual, making its mark on each of their expressions. Such diversity, linked to the complementarity of the two sexes, allows thorough response to the design of God according to the vocation to which each one is called.¹⁴

3e) Virginal Love

Revelation clarifies that man's vocation to love is authentically fulfilled in its integrity only in marriage and in virginity—in virginity by means of a direct giving of oneself to God, in marriage by means of a unique form of self-giving between a man and a woman that is truly human, one quite different from other kinds of human love. Thus, virginity and marriage are *love-enabling* and *person-affirming* realities.

4. Conjugal Love

Love drives a man and a woman to establish the intimate and permanent partnership of life, which is *marriage*. What specifies the community of marriage—in addition to its destination to the generation and education of children—is *conjugal love*. Conjugal love is the faithful and exclusive love that unites the spouses according to their truth as images of God. It is characterized by the unity and indissoluble fidelity of the spouses.

Conjugal love is an act of the total person, and not an instinctive impulse. It embraces the totality of body and soul in the human person.

This love can generate the stable community of life by means of a conjugal covenant of love and life, marriage,¹⁵ which is the initial nucleus of a family. The family is the necessary “place” where the children—fruit of the spouses’ mutual love—are born and formed.

Marriage is established by the *consent*. Independently of their prior love as fiancés, the spouses bind themselves with mutual love, which from then on will be owed as a commandment. Love, with its unity and exclusivity, is an *intrinsic requirement* of this conjugal community. But it could be lacking, being a good that is entrusted to human freedom.

In Christian marriage, this love is assumed by Christ, who purifies it and elevates it, leading it to perfection through the sacrament of marriage in order to establish “a new communion of love that is the living and real image of that unique unity which makes of the Church the indivisible Mystical Body of the Lord Jesus.”¹⁶

5. The Marital Consent Generates a Permanent Bond

By its nature, marriage is ordered toward the good of the spouses, and the procreation and education of offspring.¹⁷

To fill up the Kingdom of heaven, divine providence wanted to use the free cooperation of human beings. God created *matrimony as a natural institution* to protect that cooperation from the possible vagaries of impulses and caprice, and to make it permanent.

As we have seen, the essence of marriage *in fieri* (in its making) is the legitimate manifestation of mutual *consent*, that is, the marriage covenant or contract. Love is the object of the consent. The consent generates a permanent *bond*, which is the essence of marriage *in facto esse* (already done). Thus, *love* results in the *matrimonial institution*. It then becomes *conjugal love*, which is destined to grow by its generous exercise.¹⁸

[Insert diagram here]

The result of the spouses' total self-giving is the child, a human person who is not only a biological organism, but also a spiritual entity with a series of personal values. For the harmonious growth of these values, a persevering and unified contribution by both parents is necessary. Marriage is the only "place" in which this total self-giving in its whole truth is possible. To be genuine, human love and marriage must be exclusive (one man with one woman), permanent, and open to life. Or, in equivalent terms, it demands:

- unity and indissoluble faithfulness,
- openness to fertility.¹⁹

5a) Characteristics of Married Love

The encyclical *Humanae Vitae* lists the marks and demands of conjugal love:

- It is *human* love (physical and spiritual).
- It is *total*.
- It is *faithful*.
- It is *fruitful*.²⁰

The first three correspond to unity and indissoluble fidelity. All these goods of conjugal love are also goods of marriage.

(1) *It is human.*

Conjugal love is described as fully human, encompassing the entire person, the senses and the spirit. It is not a simple instinct and sentiment. It is an act of the will, intended to endure and grow by means of the joys and sorrows of daily life. It is saying “yes” to someone else, and “no” to oneself. By it, husband and wife become one heart and one soul, and together attain their human perfection.

The phenomena of “free love” and rejecting marriage are nothing else than a degradation of true human love: the denial of its truth. It is worth noting that the concept of conjugal love must be seen in a *personalist* perspective, related to human persons, not in the abstract. Therefore, it is inseparable from the truth about the human person. From this perspective, it is easy to understand the requirement that the conjugal covenant must be indissoluble and public.²¹

(2) *It is total.*

This love is also *total*. A married person loves generously and shares everything without undue reservation or selfish calculations.

(3) *It is faithful and exclusive.*

Authentic love—as well as the good of the children—demands faithfulness and rectitude in all marital relations. It requires the indissoluble unity of the spouses.²²

The adjective *committed* describes how true married love involves a pledging of oneself to another. Married love is not self-centered but looks to

the other partner. To be able to *give* oneself, one must *possess* oneself; this involves some control of the passions on the part of the persons concerned.

(4) *It is fruitful.*

Matrimonial consent has two essential elements: conjugal love, and the ordination to children. Once the covenant has been established by the consent, both become *obligations*, moral and juridical. They can, however, be missing because of the human will. In such cases, they are absent as disorders, faults, or injustices, while remaining in their condition as duties. All authentic conjugal love between a man and a woman, when it is not egoistic love, tends toward the creation of another being issuing from that love. It is, therefore, open to life.²³

6. Marriage is a *Life-Giving Reality*

In every marriage, the mutual love of husband and wife is both an institution and a mandate from the Creator *for the increase of his family* on earth. God planned the family to be the environment where he will create new life. God told Adam and Eve, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gn 1:28). That *love* with knowledge—that union of “male and female” (an image of God’s love)—was destined to bring forth other human beings like themselves. Marriage is *a life-giving reality*.

The marital act is the direct cause of the formation of a human *body*. The Magisterium of the Church teaches us that every *soul* comes into being through an act of divine creation.²⁴

The total gift of self, which is required by conjugal love, also corresponds to the demands of the offspring. Thus, the third characteristic of genuine conjugal love and of marriage is their *openness to new life*.

7. The Causes of Marriage

In any action, one should distinguish the *object* of the action (i.e., what the chosen action by its own nature tends to, independently of the intention of the agent) and the *purpose* that is intended, or intention of the agent. Here, we may ask ourselves, “What is the purpose of marriage?” or rather, “For the sake of what do husband and wife come together?” and also, “What brings them together?” To answer these questions, we must first distinguish:

- The intrinsic purpose of the action (*finis operis*),
- The purpose of the agent (*finis operantis*), i.e., what he has in mind.

Obviously, these two purposes do not always coincide. One thing is the actual intention of the spouses, and the other is the purpose or end of the institution of marriage itself. The *finis operis* or normal and natural end of marriage—irrespective of the actual intentions of husband and wife for coming together—is the begetting (procreation) and upbringing (education) of their children.

We can now enumerate the causes of marriage, thus showing the depth of its being (its metaphysical roots) and thereby its ultimate ethical structure:

- i) *Final* cause (purpose of the institution): *primordially*, the begetting and upbringing of the children; *secondarily* (i.e., not less important than, but subordinate to the primary purpose), the mutual help and companionship with all its implications
- ii) *Efficient* cause (the agent who brings it about): the spouses motivated by a free decision to love each other for life, issuing into a *formal* and *public* declaration (man lives naturally in society) of remaining together until one of them dies
- iii) *Formal* or constitutive cause (what makes it a marriage): the mutual self-giving (or matrimonial consent) thus expressed and never withdrawn (neither of the two has the right to do so if what they have entered into is a marriage union and not just animal mating)
- iv) *Material* cause: the living bodies of the spouses, over which they acquire mutual rights (not over the souls, strictly speaking, since the

sphere of conscience remains inviolable, although a closely knit spiritual and psychological mutual adjustment is highly desirable)²⁵

8. The Elements of the Conjugal Community

Marriage (or conjugal community) has two integrative elements: conjugal love and the marriage institution. Conjugal love constitutes the personal reality that the institution confirms, protects, and sanctions before God and men.²⁶ *Conjugal love* has need of the institution in order to be conjugal; the institution of marriage needs love to be enlivened. The *unitive aspect* of this community of persons is the conjugal love; the institution helps and protects it.

INTEGRATIVE ELEMENTS OF THE CONJUGAL COMMUNITY:

[Insert diagram here]

In marriage, *conjugal love* and the *institution* of marriage are both ordained to the procreation and education of children.²⁷ Begetting and educating children, helping each other, enjoying mutual company, and walking together along the path that leads to heaven are just different aspects of one and the same superb reality: the family.

8a) Marriage Cannot be Identified with Love

One cannot identify marriage and love. Marriage is an objective point that assures security and duration. Being truly in love is a pre-condition for marriage, but is not absolutely necessary as a norm. If one does not experience it at the beginning, one can still be happily married.

9. Human Nature was Damaged by Sin and Restored by Grace

Conjugal love is realized in persons, wounded by original sin, and, many times, they tend toward selfishness. Therefore, even if this love—being a love of friendship—is already inclined to the generous gift of self, in order for it to develop fully, it has need of the healing action of grace. This grace is conferred on the Christian spouses because of the institution of marriage, which is a sacrament. With this grace, conjugal love becomes fully human and then divine.²⁸

9a) God Restored Marriage to its Former Dignity

Jesus announced the new law on marriage: “They said to him, ‘Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?’ He said to them, ‘For your hardness of heart.... but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife away, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries a divorced woman, commits adultery’” (Mt 19:7–9). By restoring humanity, Jesus also restored marriage to its former dignity. Even more, the natural matrimonial institution was *elevated to the dignity of a sacrament*.²⁹

From a valid marriage there arises between the spouses a bond which of its own nature is perpetual and exclusive. Moreover, in Christian marriage the spouses are by a special sacrament strengthened and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and the dignity of their state.³⁰

The *effects* of a Christian marriage are:

- the marriage bond,
- the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

We are told how Jesus answered those who were astonished at his proclamation of the indissolubility of the *marriage bond*: “Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given” (Mt 19:11). The divine commandment is categorical. “To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband)—and that the husband should not divorce his wife” (1 Cor 7:10–11). This kind of commitment is possible, because when God commands something, he always gives the necessary graces to execute his command.

10. Christian Marriage is a *Sanctifying Reality*

St. Paul explains, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25). Love is also necessary for Christian marriage.

This conjugal love makes one look always for the good of the other. In fact, since love makes them *be one*—“one flesh” to a certain extent—to love the other is to love oneself. “He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church” (Eph 5:28–29).

“By means of Baptism, man and woman are definitively placed within the new and eternal covenant, in the spousal covenant of Christ with the Church.”³¹ Consequently, “because of this indestructible insertion [of Christian man and woman into that spousal covenant] ... the intimate community of conjugal life and love, founded by the Creator, is elevated and assumed into the spousal charity of Christ, sustained and enriched by His redeeming power.”³² The love of the spouses in Christian marriage becomes not only an image of, but also a *participation* (the sacrament) in, the mutual love of Christ and his bride, the Church. Thus, we may call the Christian family a miniature Church (*Ecclesia domestica*). This identity is grounded in the reality of Christian marriage as a true sacrament. Every true (natural) marriage *signifies* the union of Christ with his bride, the Church. Christian marriage *inwardly participates* in this union. Jesus is the bridegroom, Savior of mankind, who loves and gives himself to his people, uniting them to himself as his body.³³ Thus, the sacramental condition of marriage is a *requirement for every baptized person, inseparable from the baptismal character*. Christ makes Christian marriage the efficacious (life-giving, love-giving, grace-giving) sign of his redemptive love for humankind, just as the baptismal water both symbolizes life-giving power and actually gives grace. Christian marriage is a *sanctifying reality*.

As a result, when Christians unite sexually with others, they do so not as isolated individuals, but as members of Christ’s living body, the Church. Should they do so outside of marriage, they do not only act immorally but desecrate the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 6:15–17).³⁴

Furthermore, conjugal love entails a totality; it leads the couple to be of one heart and of one soul. Thus, it requires indissolubility and fidelity in the reciprocal and definitive gift of self, and it must be open to fertility.

10a) Christian Marriage, a Way to Holiness

All are called to sanctity, each one, however, *according to one's own gifts and duties*.³⁵ Christian marriage is a situation in which many are called to concretize the universal call to sanctity. Thus:

The gift of the sacrament is at the same time a vocation and commandment for the Christian spouses, that they may remain faithful to each other forever, beyond every trial and difficulty, in generous obedience to the holy will of the Lord: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder (Mt 19:6)."³⁶

All the characteristics of natural conjugal love are kept in Christian marriage, but with a new significance. These elements of natural conjugal love are purified, strengthened, and made an expression of specifically Christian values. The married state becomes a vocation and a way to sanctity.³⁷

The supernatural vocation to holiness of the spouses is the principle of a specific apostolic mission.

Furthermore, we must notice that there is a relationship between the vocation of marriage and the vocation to virginity. These two gifts complement each other, because "marriage and virginity or celibacy are two ways of expressing and living the one mystery of the covenant of God with His people. Where marriage is not esteemed, neither can consecrated virginity or celibacy thrive; when human sexuality is not regarded as a great value given by the Creator, the renunciation of it for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven loses its meaning."³⁸ There is a complementarity between marriage and virginity because each is, in its own way, ordained to fertility. In fact, virginity is the root of a new form of fatherhood and motherhood.

11. The Blessings of Marriage

In getting married, a man and a woman not only give to themselves the irrevocable identity of husband and wife, but also pledge to one another that they will honor and foster the “goods” or “blessings” of marriage. Thus, the conjugal act—precisely as *conjugal* (as distinct from a mere *genital* act)—is an act that respects the “goods” or “blessings” of marriage, namely, the procreation and education of children and a steadfast, faithful, conjugal love.

Both conjugal love and the institution of marriage have the same properties. These properties are perfected and elevated by the grace of the sacrament.³⁹ Thus, the matrimonial institution is built upon three purposes—which are also three *requirements* of conjugal love:

- The good of the children (its openness to fertility)
- Mutual fidelity (its unity and indissolubility)
- The good of the sacrament, which makes it a path to sanctity⁴⁰

(1) *Openness to fertility*

The good of the children refers to the *openness of marriage to fertility*, a service to life. (Conjugal love is also open to fertility, as we have seen.) Christian spouses, moreover, receive the help of the Church in guiding their consciences. They also receive a new sense of generosity and trust in providence in order to fulfill their mission of procreating and educating children.

Spouses would render their sexual union *non-marital* if, in choosing to unite sexually, they deliberately repudiate its life-giving or procreative meaning.⁴¹

(2) *The unity and indissoluble fidelity of marriage*

The fidelity of conjugal love refers to the indestructible bond that is created by the spouses’ mutual consent in marriage (its *unity* and *indissolubility*).

(3) *The good of the sacrament*

The mutual and definitive self-giving of the natural marriage is perfected *in Christian marriage* by the transformation of conjugal love into

the participation in the covenanted love of Christ (the bridegroom) for the Church (the bride). For Christians, the *sacrament* is not a simple adjunct to natural marriage, but its true transformation by grace. Permeated by faith, hope, and charity, Christian spouses come to their own perfection and mutual sanctification through their conjugal and family duties. Because of its sacramental character, Christian marriage confers a specific grace on the spouses to overcome the difficulties that may come up, to sanctify themselves in marriage and to sanctify others through it.⁴² The good of the sacrament is also seen in an enlarged perspective as the Christian perfection of marriage, as a way of holiness and a way of participating in the mission of the Church.

By virtue of the sacramentality of their marriage, Christian spouses are bound to one another in the most profoundly indissoluble manner. Their belonging to each other is the real representation and participation, by means of the sacramental sign, of the very relationship of Christ with the Church. The difference between Christian marriage and that of non-Christians is that the latter is an *image* but not a *participation* in the covenant of Christ's union with the Church.

These goods and requirements of conjugal love derive from the very nature of marriage and benefit the whole human community; it is the spouses' participation in the development of society. Summarizing, we can see Christian marriage as:

- a community of persons,
- brought to life by love,
- at the service of life,
- established by Christ as a sacrament and way of holiness.

The first three elements concern the essence of marriage; the last concerns its dynamism. There is an intimate unity between the former items and the latter, since there is a correlation between being and acting.⁴³

12. Can Marriage Go Wrong?

There are at least three major points where man's approach to marriage is faulty and can cause marriage to go wrong:

- i) The tendency to "divinize" human love, expecting from human love what any believer knows only God can give
- ii) The tendency to confuse the end of marriage with the motives that lead individuals to marry, i.e., the tendency to think that marriage is primarily for the expression and enjoyment of love, and secondarily (if at all) for having children
- iii) The tendency to see opposition between these two factors, instead of seeing them as complementary to one another

Happiness can be found in marriage, but not unlimited happiness. This can be found only in heaven.

1. Cf. W. May, *Marriage, the Rock on which the Family is Built* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 16.
2. *GS*, 48.
3. John Paul II, Address to the Roman Rota, Feb. 1, 2001.
4. W. May, *Marriage, the Rock on which the Family is Built*, 21.
5. Cf. *Ibid.*, 22.
6. Cf. Bishop Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II), *Love and Responsibility*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993).
7. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 11.
8. Cf. *Ibid.*
9. Cf. *Ibid.*
10. W. May, *Marriage, the Rock on which the Family is Built*, 46.
11. Cf. *GS*, 49.
12. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 11; CCC, 1601–1605.
13. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love*, 4.
14. *Ibid.*, 5; cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, *Guidelines for Education within the Family*, 13.
15. Cf. *GS*, 48.
16. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 19; cf. Ramón García de Haro, *Marriage and the Family in the Documents of the Magisterium*, 343; *GS*, 48.
17. Cf. CCC, 1601; CIC, 1055; *GS* 48.
18. Cf. *GS*, 49.
19. Cf. CCC, 1643.
20. Cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 9.

21. Cf. Ramón García de Haro, *Marriage and the Family in the Documents of the Magisterium*, 349.
22. Cf. *GS*, 48.
23. Cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 9; *CCC*, 1652–1653, 2366–2372.
24. Cf. Pope Pius XII, Enc. *Humani Generis*, 64.
25. Cf. J.M. de Torre, *Person, Family and State* (Manila: Southeast Asian Science Foundation, 1991), 81.
26. Cf. *GS*, 48, 50; John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 14.
27. Cf. *GS*, 48, 50.
28. Cf. *Ibid.*, 49.
29. Cf. *CCC*, 1609–1617; *CIC*, 1055.
30. *CIC*, 1134.
31. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 13.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Cf. *Ibid.*
34. Cf. W. May, *Marriage, the Rock on which the Family is Built*, 32.
35. Cf. *LG*, 41.
36. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 20.
37. Cf. *Ibid.*, 13, 34, 56.
38. Cf. *Ibid.*, 16.
39. Cf. *GS*, 48, 49.
40. Cf. *CCC*, 1643; John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 13. In a classification that dates back to St. Augustine, this threefold purpose of marriage was listed as *bonum prolis*, *bonum fidei*, and *bonum sacramenti*. Here, we will follow the vision of Pope John Paul II of the threefold purpose of marriage in *Familiaris Consortio*.
41. Cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 13.
42. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 13; *GS*, 48, 50; *CCC*, 1644–1645.
43. Cf. Ramón García de Haro, *Marriage and the Family in the Documents of the Magisterium*, 342, 348, 351.

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The Family, a Community of Life and
Love

13. Marriage Results in the Family

In the preceding chapter, we have seen that *matrimony*, established by an act of love, arises from the *consent* of the spouses. Conjugal consent is the mutual decision to get married, the foundational act of marriage. Conjugal love is the object of the consent. The consent, an act of the will, comes to be by reason of the contract or *conjugal covenant*. The consent of the spouses establishes a conjugal communion.

The term *communion* describes the personal relationship between the “I” and the “thou.” In contrast, the word *community* has a wider scope; it describes relationships among several persons. The birth of a child naturally turns the conjugal communion into a small community, which is the *family*. This, however, does not mean that marriage is only a means to an end, for, although marriage leads to the establishment of a family in the natural course of things, marriage itself is not absorbed by and lost in the family. It retains its distinct existence as an institution whose inner structure is different from that of the family.

Marriage and the family are ordered to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of the children.¹ This implies a task and a challenge. The *task* involves the spouses in living out their original covenant. Moreover, the children should consolidate the conjugal covenant, enriching and deepening the love of the spouses. This is the *challenge*.

14. Human Beings Need to Grow in Families

Animals do not have families. Generally speaking, animals derive information through the most direct sensorial impacts. This is part of the divine design. Humans not only mate, but they also live in families and possess spirit. Furthermore, people need to grow in a specific environment to develop:

- *privacy*, which fosters individual autonomy and responsibility),
- *affection*, which fosters sociability, and is conducive to the development of the social virtues of a good citizen.

And this can be done only within the family. The family is a natural society; it is natural for man to form a family. The family is also called a “domestic society” (from Latin *domus*, “household”), “conjugal society” (from Latin *con-iux*, “fellow yoke-bearer”), and “matrimonial society” (from Latin *matri munium*, “defense for the source of life”). The mother (i.e., the source of life) is the stable element of the family.

15. Trinitarian Origin of the Family

By giving life within the family, parents share in God's creative power, and, by raising their children, they become sharers in God's paternal—and at the same time maternal—way of teaching. Through Christ, all education, within the family and outside of it, becomes part of God's own pedagogy of salvation, which is addressed to individuals and families and culminates in the paschal mystery of the Lord's death and Resurrection.²

15a) The Imprints of God's Intra-Trinitarian Life

Because God is Father by essence, he has wanted that we, who share his image and likeness, could also be parents. Even more, as the three divine Persons are co-eternal and co-equal, in an analogous manner, all the family members are persons of equal dignity.

God is *love*. There is an infinite love and total self-giving among the three divine Persons. The mutual love of Father and Son—subsistent love—is the Holy Spirit. This divine love is reproduced in man. *Man finds his fulfillment only through the sincere gift of self*, i.e., in the truth of the noble love, worthy of a human person. Thus, the Holy Spirit is also the foundation of the mutual help between the spouses. He is a consoler, the root of the joy and the fecundity that is brought about by married love.

We were told: “You shall receive the *gift* of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). The Holy Spirit is the mutual gift of Father and Son. Likewise, in the human family, the child is a divine *gift* that results from the mutual donation of the spouses.

15b) God and the Family

Men sinned against God and forgot about his plans. God then decided to punish them with the Deluge. But, in advance, *God chose a family*, Noah's, to assure the continuity of human life on earth and carry on his covenant. "I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you" (Gn 6:18). The will of God to count on the family for his plan of salvation is confirmed with the promises that are given to the patriarchs. God told Abraham: "By you *all the families* of the earth shall bless themselves" (Gn 12:3). Similar blessings reached Isaac and Jacob. Later, God promised David that the Redeemer would sprout from his *family*. Every family must remember these facts, and must go back to the "beginning" of God's creative act if it is to attain self-knowledge and self-realization in accordance with the inner truth of what it is and does in history.³

16. Two False Conceptions of the Family

Two ideologies, due to their wrong conception of the common good, envision society in a manner that is detrimental to the well-being of the family.

- i) *Liberalism* (individualism) regards society as nothing but the sum-total of the individuals who compose it. This ideology is solely concerned with the “rights” of the individual, which it places above those of the family. Consequently, it will tend to advocate the “right” to divorce, abortion, sterilization, and contraception, even though those alleged rights are in conflict with the *rights of the family* to life, stability, and procreation.
- ii) *Socialism* (collectivism) regards society as something higher than the individuals who compose it, and subordinates their rights and those of the family to the rights of society, incarnated in the state. The state will thus dictate to families, in accordance with “national policy,” what is the best line to follow. Since, in a socialist system, this “national policy” is determined exclusively in relation to economic or material welfare, it tends to introduce population control policies, regardless of the *rights of the family*.

In both systems, the family is crushed between the claims of the individual and the claims of the state. This is a failure to realize that families are the natural units or constituents of society.⁴

17. The Family, Open to Life

As we have seen in the previous chapter, love is, essentially, a gift. Conjugal love, which makes the spouses “one flesh,” does not end with the couple, but makes them capable of the greatest possible gift: the gift of becoming cooperators with God in giving life to a new human person. Thus, in a family that is open to life, children are the precious gift of marriage.

Just as the common good of the spouses is fulfilled in conjugal love, which is open to new life, so too the common good of the family is fulfilled through that same spousal love in the newborn child. Ordination to life is a requirement not only of the institution of marriage, but also of conjugal love itself. It is a sign of the authenticity of that love.⁵

Parenting—the generation of a human being—does not end in begetting children. It surpasses the purely biological level and demands the investment of a series of personal values in the child. For the harmonious growth of these values, a persevering and unified contribution by both parents is necessary.⁶ The love of the spouses and the begetting of children create personal relationships and primordial responsibilities among the members of the same family. Since new life that is born into the world brings along a right to love and education, spouses receive with each child the gift of a new responsibility from God: educating the children in human values and the love of God and neighbor. The love of God for man has so disposed things that human life is born and grows under the protection of the community of love that is the family; this fact alone should motivate the parents to welcome life. Parental love is, for the children, the visible sign of the very love of God, “from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named” (Eph 3:15), and is, for the parents, the enlargement of their conjugal vocation with that of parenthood.

The inclination of love to serve life is not only biological but spiritual. Thus, when procreation is not possible, it takes other forms, but conjugal life does not lose its value for this reason. Physical sterility can be for spouses the occasion for other important services to the life of the human person, for example, adoption, various forms of educational work, and assistance to other families and poor and handicapped children.⁷

Similarly, those who are called to give themselves to God alone with undivided heart know that their apostolic celibacy is a singular source of

spiritual fertility in the world.⁸

18. The Family, a Community

A *community* is a stable group, freely established or accepted, where many valuable things are shared and possessed in common. We refer to communities when the goods that are possessed in common are spiritual goods. When the shared goods are purely material or peripheral, then we prefer to talk of *societies*. In the first case, the bonds that link together the members of the group are mostly spiritual, in the second, the bonds are juridical.

There could be in the community material and spiritual legal bonds among the members, a clear manifestation of our nature. But the unity and strength of the community is founded on the spirit, the most important links being *knowledge* and *love*, that is to say, friendship.

Material goods are finite, and thus they can be shared only by a limited number of people. The more people who possess a material good, the smaller each person's share becomes. Not so with the spiritual goods. Knowledge and love can be possessed by many without getting diminished, and the mere fact of sharing these goods enriches all.

Anything that opposes one of the elements of marriage (the *matrimonial institution* itself and *conjugal love*) opposes marriage and the family. Thus, polygamy, divorce, and "free love" obscure the dignity of the institution of marriage. Selfishness, hedonism, and all illicit practices against conception are opposed to conjugal love and, therefore, to the good of marriage and the family.

These considerations help us to better understand the family as a community of life and love, founded in the conjugal union.⁹

18a) To Form a Christian Family, a Divine Vocation

Even if Christian marriage, in the making, appears as giving consent to a contract, a single act, it has a transcendental dimension as a result of a divine initiative. Grace establishes Christian marriage as a sacrament. The sacrament of marriage is the result of a joint realization of having received *a vocation to form a Christian family*. The Christian family becomes a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son, in the Holy Spirit. The state of marriage becomes a permanent *divine vocation* to become that divine sign and image (holiness) and to manifest the love of God to the world (apostolate).¹⁰

1. Cf. CCC, 2201–2233; Bishop Karol Wojtyla (John Paul II), *Love and Responsibility*, 217–218.
2. Cf. John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, Feb. 2, 1994.
3. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 17.
4. Cf. J.M. de Torre, *Person, Family and State* (Manila: Southeast Asian Foundation, 1991), 73.
5. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 14, 28.
6. Cf. *Ibid.*, 11.
7. Cf. *Ibid.*, 14.
8. Cf. *LG*, 42; CCC, 2349.
9. Cf. John XXIII, Enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 51; Paul VI, Enc. *Populorum Progressio*, 36.
10. Cf. CCC, 2204–2206; *GS*, 49.

Part II

THE MISSION OF THE FAMILY: FORMING A COMMUNITY OF PERSONS

19. The Role of the Family

In the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II emphasizes that the family must become *what it is*:

The family finds in the plan of God, the Creator and Redeemer, not only its *identity*, what it *is*, but also its *mission*, what it can and should *do*. The role that God calls the family to perform in history derives from what the family is; its role represents the dynamic and existential development of what it is. Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored, and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility: Family, *become what you are!*¹

The Christian family accomplishes its specific and original ecclesial mission by realizing itself as such, and not by any task that is superimposed on it. Accordingly, the family must go back to the “beginning” of God’s creative act if it is to attain self-knowledge and self-realization. God created the family as an intimate community of life and love. Thus, the family’s mission is to become more and more what it is: a community of life and love, which will be brought to perfection only in the Kingdom of God. In the final analysis, the role of the family is specified by love.

The family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love. This is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God’s love for humanity and the love of Christ for the Church, his bride.

Every task of the family is an expression and concrete actuation of that fundamental mission....

With love as its point of departure and making constant reference to it, we can enumerate the four general tasks of the family:

- i) forming a community of persons
- ii) serving life
- iii) participating in the development of society
- iv) sharing in the life and mission of the Church.²

We will study each of these tasks of the family in the successive chapters.

Forming a Community of Persons

WE HAVE SEEN that the family *is* a community of persons. We shall see now that one of the aspects of its mission is to form, consolidate, and expand that community.

20. Love, the Principle and Strength of the Family

In its purer form, love is a stable determination of self-giving for the good of the beloved. It is a genuine and permanent disposition of benevolence, stronger than age, and beauty, impregnable to changes of fortune. Love accepts, hopes, and forgives. It fills the human heart with the inexplicable joy of giving: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

We have seen how the person is an image of the God of love. The family, which is founded and given life by love, is a community of persons: husband and wife, parents and children, relatives. Without love, the family is not a community of persons and cannot live, grow, and perfect itself as such. This is so because man cannot live without love. Man’s life remains senseless, incomprehensible to himself, until love is revealed to him. To find himself, he needs to encounter love, experience it, make it his own, and share it with others.

The love between a husband and a wife and between the other members of the family is given life and sustenance by an increasing inner dynamism leading the family to an ever deeper and more intense communion, which is the foundation and soul of the community of marriage and the family.³

The mission to guard, reveal, and communicate love is entrusted to every human family, whether Christian or not. This is the plan of God—the creator of the family. He uses the marriage of man and woman, and the family based on this union, as an image of his loving union with his people (cf. Hos 1–3). Thus, marriage is a fitting sign of the covenant of life and love that God wills to exist between himself and his people. Marriage is a reality that points to something beyond itself—the love-giving union of God and humankind.⁴

But even *a greater mission has been entrusted to the Christian family*, according to the plan of God the Redeemer. We must remember that we are sinners in need of Redemption. “Man finds that he is unable of himself to overcome the assaults of evil successfully.... But the Lord himself came to free and strengthen man, renewing him inwardly and casting out the ‘prince of this world’ (Jn 12:31), who held him in the bondage of sin.”⁵ Christ the Redeemer not only re-creates human persons and reveals to them their

fullest identity; he also re-creates marriage and family. In doing so, he reveals their full identity.

The *Christian family* finds its origin, inner identity, and vocation in Christ and his bride, the Church. For it is the Church, as John Paul II declares, that both gives birth to the Christian family and, by proclaiming the word of God, reveals to the Christian family its true identity: what it is and what it should be according to the Lord's plan.⁶ Since the reality of the Christian family comes from its being generated by the Church, the identity of the Christian family is that of a miniature Church, summoned to imitate and relive the same self-giving and sacrificial love that the Lord Jesus has for the entire human race.⁷

In forming a community of persons, Christian husbands and wives bring into existence a miniature Church. Thus, the Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and, for this reason, the family can and should be called a *domestic Church*.⁸

21. Conjugal Love Expands into Family Love

Conjugal love results in family love, but it does not disappear when new members come to the family. On the contrary, as their mission, husband and wife are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total and mutual self-giving. Conjugal love must increase by means of its generous exercise. Grace heals and perfects conjugal love. With it, the spouses are able to practice the spirit of sacrifice, magnanimity, and steadfastness in love.⁹

Moreover, this love between the spouses reaches its culmination in the giving of life to children, and extends itself as the exemplary principle of the whole family community. Therefore, the first task of the family, demanded by its very end, is a constant effort to develop an authentic community of persons.¹⁰ The love between parents and children, brothers and sisters, and relatives and household (*family love*) derives from the love that is specific to husband and wife, that is, *from conjugal love*. Thus, conjugal love is the inner dynamic principle giving to marriage and the family the capacity to carry out rightly its specific and original ecclesial role.

This sacred work can be brought to perfection only when the spouses have made the mutual, exclusive, and lasting transfer of the right to their bodies, not only to a conjugal act, or to a series of them. As love grows, so will the family grow. Anything that hinders this love also hinders and affects the family.

22. Conditions for the Development of the Community

The community of marriage cannot grow, save by respecting God's plan, which is inscribed by the Creator in the heart of man and woman and perfected by Christ in the Sacrament of Marriage. Since the family begins with marriage, the goods of marriage are related to the goods of the family. Conjugal love, that power and inspiring dynamism of the conjugal communion, has, as its first task, the development of the family community, and it accomplishes this task in its concrete characteristics of unity and indissolubility.

22a) Unity

The nucleus of the family community is the conjugal communion, born from the covenant of conjugal love. Conjugal love results in the union—communion—of two persons: husband and wife. And they are called to grow continually in their communion through fidelity and total self-giving.

Love of friendship, which is the root of marriage, consists in equality. There is a complete equality among the spouses, and a marvelous complementarity of roles. Man gives what he has as specifically his own (his masculinity) and woman gives herself (her femininity). If they communicate all they have, they cannot share anything with a third party. If they love each other fully, they will be opposed to sharing themselves with another person.

So, since, according to natural law, it is not lawful for the wife to have several husbands—since this is contrary to the certainty of the paternity of the offspring—it would not be lawful, on the other hand, for a man to have several wives, for the friendship between wife and husband would not be free and equal, but somewhat servile. This natural law argument is corroborated by experience, for among husbands having plural wives, the wives are relegated to the status of servants.

Polygamy contradicts the marital communion because it is contrary to the equal personal dignity of husband and wife.¹¹

Unity, a requirement of marriage, is also a requirement for the good of the family. Therefore, unity is a profoundly human demand, which Christ assumes and perfects with the Sacrament of Marriage.

22b) Indissolubility

Conjugal love—and hence the marital communion—is also characterized by its indissolubility. Indissolubility is rooted in the personal and total self-giving of the couple, and it is required by the good of the children, and, therefore, by the good of the family.

Since sex is naturally ordained to the generation and education of offspring, and this requires a very long time, we must come to the conclusion that matrimony should endure throughout an entire life.¹² St. Thomas Aquinas gives reasons that are based on natural law (and, therefore, valid for *all* people of *all* times, religions and cultures) in favor of indissolubility. They can be summarized thus:

- There are harmful consequences of a broken home for the upbringing of the children.
- The equality of sexes is shattered; if divorce is allowed, women are at a disadvantage, since it is harder for them to remarry.
- The security and welfare of the family suffers; if spouses know that they may get divorced at any time, they will not take care to secure the future by saving, for example.
- Public order is threatened; *divorce* easily creates tensions.¹³

Indissolubility is a fruit, a sign, and a requirement of the absolute faithful love that God has for man and that the Lord Jesus Christ has for the Church. The spouse who, abandoned by the other partner, remains faithful to his obligations gives special witness to this fidelity, a witness of which the world today has much need.¹⁴

23. The School of Deeper Humanity

It is impossible to reach one's perfection without helping others to reach perfection. One's happiness is inseparable from one's contribution to the happiness of others. Nowhere is this truer than within the family. St. Thomas Aquinas explains that, when we talk about the common good, we refer to two realities: the good itself, and the way to its achievement. The *good* that is provided by the family is ultimately everlasting life in God, and the *means* are the children and the mutual help of the spouses. The fulfillment of one's parental duties with perfection, the eagerness of children to learn and be educated, the care of husband and wife for each other, and their generosity toward God are necessary for each one's integral human fulfillment. Beginning from the parents, an atmosphere of love at home bears fruits:

The self-giving that inspires the love of husband and wife for each other is the model and norm for the self-giving that must be practiced in the relationships between brothers and sisters and the different generations living together in the family.¹⁵

Furthermore:

All the members of the family, each according to his or her own gift, have the grace and responsibility of building, day by day the communion of persons, making the family a *school of deeper humanity*. This happens where there is care and love for the little ones, the sick, the aged; where there is mutual service every day; where there is a sharing of goods of joys and of sorrows.¹⁶

Unfortunately, like in any human society, there might be selfishness, tension, discord, or conflict among the members of a family that wound the spirit of communion. "Family communion can only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice."¹⁷ In spite of the frustrations and divisions, "every family is called by the God of peace to have the joyous and renewing experience of *reconciliation*, that is, communion re-established, unity restored."¹⁸

But in order to carry out its role, the family must count, first of all, on the *strength of love*. Love is naturally present in the relationships among the different members of the family. It must also become the interior strength that shapes and animates the family communion and community. Moreover, the role of the *sacraments* in family life should not be underestimated:

Participation in the sacrament of reconciliation and in the banquet of the one body of Christ offers to the Christian family the grace and responsibility of overcoming every division and of moving towards the fullness of communion willed by God, responding in this way to the ardent desire of the Lord: “That they be one.”¹⁹

In what follows, we shall describe the mission of the different members of the family, who should find in love the “source and the constant impetus for welcoming, respecting, and promoting each one of its members in his or her lofty dignity as a person; that is, as a living image of God.”²⁰

24. The Role of the Woman

The apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* describes the task of the woman as mother, spouse, and daughter. The point of departure is her equal dignity and responsibility with men. The defense of this dignity has been a true title of honor for the Church throughout the centuries, always faithful to the revealed teaching that, in Christ, “there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3: 28). Within this perspective, John Paul II shows, in confronting a crude but very widespread error, that the promotion of the dignity of women would be false were it to compromise her specific role within the family. The true advancement of women requires the clear recognition of the value of their maternal and family role, by comparison with all other public roles and all other professions.²¹

In particular, this means that wives and mothers should not, in practice, be compelled to work outside the home, and that their families should be able to live and prosper in a dignified manner, even when they themselves devote their full time to their own family.

In overcoming the modern misconception that has arisen over this truth, there are two pillars on which to build:

- i) There is need to *build a renewed theology of work*, which will illuminate the meaning and radical dignity of every kind of human work, and therefore of that of the woman in the domestic hearth. Many discriminations and current prejudices arise from a failure to understand the authentic meaning of the dignity of work.

It is well to remember that the dignity of work is based on Love. Man’s great privilege is to be able to love and to transcend what is fleeting and ephemeral. He can love other creatures, pronounce an “I” and a “you” which are full of meaning. And he can love God, who opens heaven’s gates to us, makes us members of his family and allows us also to talk to him in friendship, face to face.

That is why a man ought not to limit himself to material production. Work is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed toward love. We see the hand of God, not only in the wonders of nature, but also in our experience of work and effort. Work thus becomes prayer and thanksgiving, because we know we are placed on earth by God, that we are loved by him and made heirs to his promises.²²

- ii) The other pillar is *overcoming preconceived ideas about the dignity of women* that would take away all her proper characteristics, gifts of the Creator. Dignity “does not mean for women a renunciation of

their femininity or an imitation of the male role, but the fullness of true feminine humanity, which should be expressed in their activity, whether in the family or outside it.”²³

25. Men as Husbands and Fathers

Husbands must love their wives. “Husbands should not forget that they belong to their wives, and that as long as they live they have the obligation to show the same affection as a young man who has just fallen in love.”²⁴

“Efforts must be made to restore socially the conviction that the place and task of the father in and for the family is of unique and irreplaceable importance.”²⁵ The love for his wife and his love and devotion to his children are the normal way to understand and fulfill his own duties. The community of the family is lacking something if either the mother’s or the father’s presence is missing.

26. The Rights and Duties of Parents

The right and duty of parents to give *education* has three properties:²⁶

- i) It is *essential* in that it is connected with the transmission of human life.
- ii) It is *original and primary* with regard to the educational role of others, on account of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children.
- iii) It is *irreplaceable and inalienable*, and therefore, incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others, except in the case of physical or psychological impossibility.

Since they have conferred life on their children, parents have the original, primary and inalienable right to educate them; hence they ... have the right to educate their children in conformity with their moral and religious convictions, taking into account the cultural traditions of the family that favor the good and the dignity of the child; they should also receive from society the necessary aid and assistance to perform their educational role properly.²⁷

The rights and duties of parents flow from the nature and purpose of marriage and the family:

- Right to the subsistence and life of the family
- Right to the fulfillment of their own mission:
 - Right to *procreation*, which no state policy of population control should interfere with
 - Right to *bring up the children*—to *choose the school* when the time comes (the role of the school, both private and public, is *subsidiary* to that of the family)
- Right to adequate *financial support*, or a just salary, taking into account the needs of the entire family
- Right to *protection and help*, such as social security.

The rights of the parents, however, are not absolute rights, since they cannot command their children to do anything against the natural law, such as stealing, or marrying against their will, for example. These rights are binding for as long as the children are under their parents' authority.

Sex education, which is a basic right and duty of parents, must always be carried out under their attentive guidance, whether at home or in educational centers chosen and controlled by them. In this regard, the Church reaffirms the law of *subsidiarity*,

which the school is bound to observe when it cooperates in sex education, by entering into the same spirit that animates the parents.²⁸

This education must bring the children to a knowledge of and respect for the moral norms as the necessary and highly valuable guarantee for responsible personal growth in human sexuality. No one is capable of giving moral education in this delicate area better than duly prepared parents.²⁹

27. Attacks against the Rights of the Parents

The rights of the parents are denied by the following false ideologies:

- The various forms of socialism, such as fascism, Nazism, and communism, which view children as the property of the state or of society, and which absorb all individual rights
- Educational liberalism (of Rousseau and John Dewey), which rejects all authority in the educational field, whether religious, parental, or even intellectual
- Anarchism, which rejects all political and social authority³⁰

28. The Rights of Children

The rights and duties of children are even more urgent because they are weaker. The smaller the child is, the more is he in need of everything, particularly when he is sick, suffering, or handicapped. Specifically, the child has a right to “acceptance, love, esteem, many-sided and concerted material, emotional, educational, and spiritual concern.”³¹ Attention to this matter is a sign of possessing the correct Christian concept of the family. “Concern for the child, even before birth, from the first moment of conception and then throughout the years of infancy and youth, is the primary and fundamental test of the relationship of one human being to another.”³²

The children have a right to be trained and guided for independent life. They should be equipped in such a way that they can eventually be self-reliant, with freedom and personal responsibility. For the attainment of this goal, they need:

- *Affection*, i.e., the feeling of being loved, which is primarily, though not exclusively, provided by the gentle and tender hand of the mother,
- *Firm authority*, i.e., the clear and orderly guidance that is primarily, though not exclusively, provided by the father.

Without the first, children grow up bashful, inhibited, scrupulous, and fearful. Without the latter, they grow up selfish, ruthless, and spoiled individualists.³³

Like all members of the family, children also have *duties*: the responsibility to participate actively in the family community. “By means of love, respect and obedience toward their parents, children offer their specific and irreplaceable contribution to the construction of an authentically human and Christian family.”³⁴

29. The Elderly in the Family

The elderly carry out the important mission of being witnesses to the past and a source of wisdom for the young for the future. Setting them aside causes acute suffering to them and spiritually impoverishes the family. “The pastoral activity of the Church helps everyone to discover and to make good use of the role of the elderly within the civil and ecclesial community, in particular within the family.”³⁵ The elderly bring *continuity in the transmission of values*, together with the charisma of *wisdom and understanding*.

1. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 17.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, 18.
4. Cf. CCC, 2205.
5. GS, 13.
6. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 49.
7. Cf. W. May, *Marriage, the Rock on Which the Family is Built*; CCC, 2204.
8. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 21; LG, 11.
9. Cf. GS, 49; Pius XI, Enc. *Casti Connubii*, 287.
10. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 18.
11. Cf. *Ibid.*, 19.
12. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.123.
13. Cf. J.M. de Torre, *Person, Family and State*, 91; CCC, 2382–2386.
14. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 20.
15. *Ibid.*, 37.
16. *Ibid.*, 21.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, 22.
21. Cf. *Ibid.*, 23.
22. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 48.
23. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 23; cf. Ramón García de Haro, *Marriage and the Family in the Documents of the Magisterium*, 353.
24. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 26.
25. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 25.
26. Cf. *Ibid.*, 36; CCC, 2221–2231.
27. John Paul II, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, Oct. 22, 1983.
28. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 37.
29. Cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, *Guidelines for Education within the Family*, 42–47.

30. Cf. J.M. de Torre, *Person, Family and State*, 118.
31. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 26.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Cf. J.M. de Torre, *Person, Family and State*, 117.
34. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 21.
35. Cf. *Ibid.*, 27.

Part III

MISSION OF THE FAMILY: SERVING LIFE

DIVINE LOVE—ALWAYS a gift—is the reason of our existence as persons. Conjugal love—an echo of divine love—is the reason of the family’s openness to new life. Parents are co-workers and interpreters of God’s own love when they transmit life and raise a child according to God’s fatherly plan. Human life is a gift that is received in order to be given as a gift. In giving origin to a new life, parents recognize that the child, as the fruit of their mutual gift of love, is, in turn, a gift for both of them, a gift that flows from them.¹

The second role of the Christian family, according to *Familiaris Consortio*, is “serving life.” This mission should be studied in its two aspects:

- i) Transmission of life
- ii) Education

We will develop the “transmission of life” from the following viewpoints:

- Human procreation
- Responsible parenthood
- Contraception and abortion
- Natural regulation of fertility
- Artificial fertilization

30. The Dignity of Human Procreation

Man is “the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake.”¹ Man’s coming into being does not conform to the laws of biology alone, but also, and directly, to God’s creative will. By divine design, the generation of the human body, to which every act of sexuality is ordained by nature, is necessarily united to the creation by God of an immortal soul, destined to enjoy the glory of the children of God. God “willed” man from the very beginning, and God “wills” him in every act of conception and every human birth. God “wills” man as a being similar to himself, *as a person*. Like his parents, the new human being is also called to live as a person; he is called to a life “in truth and love.” This call is not only open to what exists in time, but is also open to eternity. Thus, the conjugal act is sacred. In it, the spouses give not only themselves but also the reality of children. Children are a living image of the couple’s love, a permanent sign of their conjugal unity, and a manifestation of their being father and mother. Inscribed in the personal constitution of every child is the will of God, who wills that man should *share his own divine life*.²

30a) Love and Human Sexuality

Occupying a central part in the dignity of the person is the dignity of his human sexuality, a reflection of the love of God.

Human sexuality is a good, part of that created gift that God saw as being “very good” (Gn 1:31) when “male and female he created them” (Gn 1:27) in his image and likeness.³

Man is called to love and to self-giving in the unity of body and spirit. Sexuality is a fundamental component of personality, one of its modes of being, of manifestation, of communicating with others, of feeling, of expressing and of living human love. The human body, with its sex, and its masculinity and femininity, is not only a source of fruitfulness and procreation but includes right “from the beginning” the “nuptial” attribute, that is, the *capacity of expressing love: that love precisely in which the man-person becomes a gift* and—by means of this gift—fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence.⁴

The marital act expresses and builds the spouses’ married love, their mutual and total gift of self, and their selfless love, as a faithful image of God’s creative love, which brought about man’s existence. Man’s greatness lies precisely in his being an image of God. Physically, the spouses will use the natural expressions of human affection—kisses, caresses, and embraces—while seeking the union of their bodies, as an expression of the union of intentions in their project of building a family. Emotionally, they will try to express the desire of loving each other, with the deep joys that come with the raising of a family. The marital act will make their love grow stronger as they renew in their will the determination to support one another in the difficulties and challenges that come to all people in this life.

During the marital act, they are collaborating with God by sharing in his love and power as Father and Creator of life. Children are conceived as a result of the father’s mediation of God’s love and the mother’s receptivity to God’s love. Just as God’s love resulted in creation, conjugal love results in new life. Man discovers—within the family—his dignity as a “co-creator” with God as new life is brought into the world.

Marriage is the wise institution of the Creator to accomplish in mankind His design of love. By means of the reciprocal personal gift of self, proper and exclusive to them, husband and wife tend toward the communion of their beings in view of

mutual personal perfection, to collaborate with God in the generation and education of new lives.⁵

Thus, the *fundamental task of the family is to serve life*, to actualize in history the original blessing of the Creator—that of transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person.⁶

30b) Life, a Gift of God

We see that life is a good, *a gift* that God has given us. Here, we refer to the gift that God has given us in calling us to life, to exist as man or woman in an unrepeatable existence, full of endless possibilities for growing spiritually and morally: “Human life is a gift received in order then to be given as a gift.”⁷

Why is life a good? Why is it always a good? The answer is simple and clear: *Because the human person is an image of God.* Human life comes from God and is destined to God. While sin darkens life by threatening it with death and throwing into doubt its nature as a gift, Redemption frees human life, lifting it up in the expectation of the gift of eternal life. Gratuitously, the Father calls each individual, in and through his Son, to partake of the fullness of divine life, by becoming “sons and daughters in the Son.” The sublime dignity of human life thus shines forth not only because of its origin but even more so because of its destiny.⁸

31. Attacks on the Dignity of Human Procreation

When the life of the conceived human being is not respected, it no longer makes sense to speak of human dignity. Some might have difficulty understanding the doctrine of the Church on the mission of marriage and the family with relation to the transmission of life, but this only makes it “more urgent and irreplaceable”⁹ to proclaim it, in order to promote “the true good of men and women.”¹⁰ The main theological point is not about birth or conception; it is about the nature of human sexuality. Human sexuality cannot be true to itself unless its openness to life and its connection to human love are both preserved.

The encyclical *Humanae Vitae* states that there are aspects of human sexuality that are not merely instrumental, subject to human whim or human choice. Since the 1960s, however, the notion of human *sexuality as instrumental* has been prominent. This notion claims that sexuality can be used for the particular benefit of a given individual, or some others, or society. Following this line, the acceptance of birth control logically leads to the acceptance of homosexuality, divorce, and even abortion.

The source of the problem about human sexuality today is often *a flawed concept of man*. Man is precisely *a person* because he is master of himself and can exercise self-control. He is not a helpless victim of his passions or society’s manipulation, yet many people view man as powerlessly subject to forces outside of himself and, accordingly, discount his ability to master himself.

32. The Church Stands for Life

Since service to life is the fundamental task of the family, openness to life becomes the condition of true conjugal love and a sign of its authenticity. “Love between husband and wife must be fully human, exclusive, and open to new life.... Fecundity is the fruit and sign of conjugal love, the living testimony of the full reciprocal self-giving of the spouses.”¹¹ This is the Church’s teaching and norm, always old yet always new.

Pope John Paul II describes some aspects of the modern situation and mentality that lead to a misunderstanding of the doctrine of the Church and give rise to contemporary difficulties:

- Technological knowledge and progress, which arouse in some an anxiousness about the future
- A consumer mentality, which makes some incapable of understanding the spiritual rightness of a new life
- A certain panic that is derived from some ecological and futuristic studies on population growth, which sometimes exaggerate the danger of demographic increase to the quality of life, to the point that they create an anti-life mentality

At their root “is the absence in people’s hearts of God, whose love alone is stronger than all the world’s fears and can conquer them.”¹²

To counteract this misunderstanding, it is necessary to build a doctrinal and formative work that is based on the following pivotal truths:

- There can be no true contradiction between the divine law on transmitting life and that on fostering authentic married love.
- The Church must act as teacher and mother for couples in difficulty.
- All spouses are called to live the fullness of the divine law.

33. Harmony between Transmission of Life and Married Love

The sign of authentic married love is *openness to life*. This is the doctrine that is established by the Second Vatican Council, and the papal documents *Humanae Vitae* and *Familiaris Consortio*.

To understand this point, one must begin from an *integral vision of man*. The two elements of morality (the *object* of the chosen act, and the *intention* of the agent) are mentioned in *Familiaris Consortio*. But this exhortation is, above all, attentive to the *object* of the moral act, to the question of its *intrinsic evil*.

Some authors erroneously claim a moral equivalence between contraception and recourse to infertile periods. They focus solely on the intentions or motives of the persons involved, without considering that some actions are evil *by their nature*.

On the other hand, the *Catechism* affirms that contraception (as a moral object) is intrinsically evil.¹³ This is so because man cannot, on his own initiative, break “the inseparable connection, willed by God ... between the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning of the conjugal act.”¹⁴ From all this, one can understand the radical “*difference, both anthropological and moral, between contraception and recourse to the rhythm of the cycle.*”¹⁵ *Familiaris Consortio* affirms that, in contraception, spouses act as *arbiters* of the divine plan; in having just recourse to the infertile periods, on the other hand, they act as its *ministers*.

34. The Procreative and Unitive Aspects

34a) The Two Aspects of the Conjugal Act

Conjugal love joins husband and wife not merely at the level of bodies but also at the level of persons. Thus, there are two aspects to the conjugal act: (a) the *unitive* aspect, by which the spouses express their love by the gift of self in their union, and (b) the *procreative* aspect, whereby this union is open to life. These two aspects are inseparable. “By safeguarding both these essential aspects ... the conjugal act preserves in its fullness the essence of true mutual love and its ordination towards man’s most high calling to parenthood.”¹⁶ The two aspects of the marital act are intimately related: The life-giving aspect of the marital act is part of its love-giving aspect. The two are inseparable because *no whole can be without its essential parts*.¹⁷ There are not two acts but two aspects of the same act.

34b) Inseparability

The conjugal act is a *life-giving love experience*. If one deliberately destroys the power of the conjugal act to give life (procreative aspect), one necessarily destroys its power to signify love. Contraceptive spouses may love each other, but it is not a true conjugal love, because their intentions are diverted from the good of the other *person* and directed to *mere egoistic enjoyment*. The person as co-creator of love disappears, and there remains only the partner in an erotic experience. They refuse to found their relationship on a co-creativity that is capable of opening them out to one another and the whole of creation. In contraception, the spouses will not let the word—which their sexuality longs to utter—take on flesh. Contraceptive intercourse is not really an example of human sexual act; it is an intercourse of sensation but with no *real human* sexual knowledge or love. Contraceptive sex separates not only the unitive from the procreative, but also sex from love.¹⁸

Humanae Vitae speaks of the blessings that will come from preserving the inseparability of the unitive and procreative aspects of the conjugal act. It claims that spouses will especially develop the spiritual dimensions of their personalities. It speaks of the serenity and peace that come with discipline, a discipline that flows over to the other areas of one's life. Perhaps most important, spouses will become unselfish as they begin to be concerned more about the well-being of their spouse rather than of themselves.

35. The Role of the Church as Teacher and Mother

The Church as a mother gives birth, so to speak, to the Christian family. To understand this, we need to consider the relationship between Baptism and marriage.¹⁹ The Church must also act as teacher and mother for couples in difficulty. She speaks the truth about love by adhering to these fundamental issues and giving full meaning to the norms that are established by God.

As Teacher, she never tires of proclaiming the moral norm that must guide the responsible transmission of life.... As Mother, the Church is close to the many married couples who find themselves in difficulty over this important point of the moral life....

Specifically, she calls to mind the necessity of stirring up the virtues of persistence and patience, humility and strength of mind, filial trust in God and in His grace, and frequent recourse to prayer and to the sacraments of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation.

Also necessary as a condition for achieving this goal are knowledge of the bodily aspect and body's rhythms of fertility and, above all, the absolute necessity for the virtue of chastity and for permanent education in it.²⁰

Only the truth saves. The Church acts with eminent charity toward souls by spreading the saving teaching of Christ; she struggles to create all the conditions necessary to let it be understood and lived. The truth about man cannot be understood unless one is aware of the proper relationship of man to God, and, therefore, of his own eternal destiny.

36. The Virtue of Chastity

Sacred Scripture explicitly teaches that the complete exercise of the generative faculty outside of legitimate matrimony (adultery, fornication, etc.) is a mortal sin, since it excludes from the Kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt 5:28; 19:18; Mk 10:19; Rom 1:21–29; 1 Cor 6:9–10; Gal 5:19–21). The virtue of chastity is the *joyous affirmation* of someone who knows how to live self-giving. It is not to be understood as a repressive attitude, but rather as part of temperance—a cardinal virtue that is elevated and enriched by grace in Baptism.

The *Catechism* describes and, in a sense, defines chastity in this way: “Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being.”²¹

When the person understands chastity correctly, he is rendered capable of a higher kind of love than concupiscence, which sees persons only as objects, as means to satisfy one’s appetites. The person is capable of friendship and self-giving, with the capacity to recognize and love persons for themselves.

36a) Chastity in Marriage

“Married people are called to live conjugal chastity; others practice chastity in continence.”²² Parents are well aware that living conjugal chastity themselves is the most valid premise for educating their children in chaste love and in holiness of life.

The acts in marriage by which the intimate and chaste union of the spouses takes place are noble and honorable; the truly human performance of these acts fosters the self-giving they signify and enriches the spouses in joy and gratitude.²³

This means that parents should be aware that God’s love is present in their love, and hence that their sexual giving should also be lived out in respect for God and for his plan of love, with fidelity, honor, and generosity toward one’s spouse and the life that can arise from their act of love. Only in this way can their love be an expression of charity.

Therefore, in marriage, Christians are called to live this self-giving in a right personal relationship with God. Only in this way do they respond to the love of God and fulfill his will. There is no legitimate love, at its highest level, that is not also love for God. To love the Lord implies responding positively to his commandments: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15).

In the Christian view, chastity in marriage by no means signifies rejection of human sexuality. Rather, it signifies spiritual energy that is capable of defending love from the perils of selfishness and aggressiveness.²⁴

To live chastity well, the Church insists on the need of the spouses to acquire a deep spiritual life, rooted in prayer and the frequent reception of the sacraments. Only in this environment can conjugal love (and its attendant, generosity in the transmission of life) develop. The results of conjugal chastity are an inner serenity and peace, a good understanding between the spouses, an increased sense of responsibility, and a greater efficiency in the educational thrust within the family.²⁵

36b) Offenses against Chastity

(1) *Masturbation*

Sexuality is naturally geared to another; thus, masturbation, or self-abuse, is contrary to nature. But masturbation is also contrary to the social nature of man, not only because it reflects self-centeredness, but also because a person who is unwilling to control his vital urges is not adjusted to society, and so may easily injure justice in any of its forms. On masturbation, the *Catechism* has the following to say:

By masturbation is to be understood the deliberate stimulation of the genital organs in order to derive sexual pleasure. “Both the Magisterium of the Church, in the course of a constant tradition, and the moral sense of the faithful have been in no doubt and have firmly maintained that masturbation is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action.” “The deliberate use of the sexual faculty, for whatever reason, outside of marriage is essentially contrary to its purpose.” For here sexual pleasure is sought outside of “the sexual relationship which is demanded by the moral order and in which the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love is achieved.”²⁶

To form an equitable judgment and guide pastoral action fairly, pastors must take into account the affective immaturity, force of acquired habit, conditions of anxiety of the subject, and other psychological or social factors that can lessen—if not even reduce to a minimum—moral culpability.

Moreover, marriage is not the solution for the problem of masturbation, since marriage also demands a great deal of capacity for self-control against the temptations of infidelity and for those periods when it would be imprudent or even unjust to have sexual relations (in case of the infectious disease of one of the two, for example), or when it is impossible to do so (enforced absence, for example).²⁷

(2) *Fornication*

Fornication (sexual relations between a man and a woman, both of them unmarried) is a grievous sin that is contrary to the rational nature of man, since it does not express the mutual self-giving of the life-long union. It is an intrinsically evil act but not contrary to nature. (It is, however, if they are homosexual relations.)

(3) *Adultery*

Adultery (sexual relations between a man and a woman, at least one of whom is married) shares the malice of fornication and is also contrary to justice, because it damages the rights of a third or even fourth person. It is a known fact that in the first centuries, adultery—along with murder and apostasy—was put among the three most serious sins and required a particularly heavy and lengthy public penance before the repentant sinner could be granted forgiveness and readmission to the ecclesial community.²⁸

(4) *Other sins of impurity*

Pornography is a grave offense that consists in removing real or imaginary sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners in order to deliberately display them to third parties.

Prostitution is a grave sin that does injury to the dignity of the person who engages in it, reducing the person to an instrument of sexual pleasure.

Rape is a grave sin against chastity, justice, and charity. Graver still is the rape of children that is committed by parents (incest) or by those who are responsible for the education of the children who are entrusted to them.

In addition to these sins, the unnatural consummated sins of impurity are onanism (or withdrawal, *coitus interruptus*), sodomy, and bestiality.

1. GS, 24.
2. Cf. John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, Feb. 2, 1994.
3. Cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, *Guidelines for Education within the Family*, 11.
4. *Ibid.*, 10.
5. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 8; cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 28.
6. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 28.
7. John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 92.
8. Cf. *Ibid.*, 34–46.
9. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 30.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, 28–29.
12. *Ibid.*, 30.
13. Cf. CCC, 2370.
14. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 12.
15. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 32.
16. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 12.
17. Cf. W. May, *Marriage, the Rock on which the Family is Built*, 74.
18. Cf. C. Burke, *Marriage and Contraception*, in “Position Papers,” (Osaka, Japan), 160 (Series A).

19. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 13.
20. *Ibid.*, 33.
21. CCC, 2337.
22. *Ibid.*, 2349.
23. GS, 49.
24. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 33; R. García de Haro, *Marriage and Family in the Documents of the Magisterium*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 360.
25. Cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 21.
26. CCC, 2352; cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Decl. *Persona Humana*, 9.
27. Cf. J.M. de Torre, *Person, Family and State*, 82.
28. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 54; CCC, 2351–2356.

33

Transmission of Life:
Responsible Parenthood

37. Meaning of Responsible Parenthood

When a man and a woman freely choose to marry, they choose, at the same time, the possibility of procreation, and choose to *participate in creation* (for that is the proper meaning of the word *procreation*). Only then, within the framework of marriage, do they put their sexual relationship on a truly personal level. The simple natural fact of becoming a father or a mother has a deep significance, not merely a biological, but also a person-affirming significance. Inevitably, it has profound effects upon the “interior” of the person, which are summarized in the concept of parenthood.

The concept of “responsible parenthood” appeared for the first time in *Gaudium et Spes*. Later, Paul VI explained it in depth in the *Humanae Vitae*.¹ Responsible parenthood is an attitude toward parenthood—not separated from the practice of virtue—that encompasses God’s plan for marriage and the family. It also involves the recognition of duties of the spouses toward themselves, the family, and society, while, at the same time, recognizing that they are not free to proceed completely at will, as if they could determine in a wholly autonomous manner the honest path to follow. It is the same as *family planning*. The idea of family planning, however, often has some negative connotations for life and the family, and the Church, therefore, prefers the expression *responsible parenthood*.

Responsible parenthood is a manifestation of genuine respect for life; it requires the exercise of a deep love and the virtue of continence. The concept of responsible parenthood does not mean limited parenthood, or “not having children,” because if there are no children, there is no parenthood. Moreover, if one wants to avoid the responsibilities of one’s acts, he cannot be called responsible. Couples have a mission of *responsible parenthood*; this is a requirement of their conjugal love. This mission involves two things:

- i) The knowledge and respect of their biological functions
- ii) The necessary dominion that reason and will must exercise over these functions²

A particular aspect of this responsibility concerns the *regulation of procreation*. For just reasons, spouses may wish to space the births of their children. It is their duty to make certain that their desire is not motivated by selfishness but is in conformity

with the generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood. Moreover, they should conform their behavior to the objective criteria of morality.³

When it is question of harmonizing married love with the responsible transmission of life, it is not enough to take only the good intention and the evaluation of motives into account; the objective criteria must be used, criteria drawn from the nature of the human person and human action, criteria which respect the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love; all this is possible only if the virtue of married chastity is seriously practiced.⁴

37a) How Responsible Parenthood is Exercised

The conjugal duty is part of married people's vocation to holiness: "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband" (1 Cor 7:3). The marital act can be offered to God and be a means of sanctification. These acts foster mutual love and devotion:

The acts in marriage by which the intimate and chaste union of the spouses takes place are noble and honorable, the truly human performance of these acts fosters the self-giving they signify and enriches the spouses in joy and gratitude.⁵

Marriage and love are, by nature, ordained to the procreation and education of the children.⁶ The sexual act, properly exercised within marriage only, is ordained primarily to the propagation of life. But it is known that not all marital acts result in new life because there are fertile and infertile periods within the female sexual cycle. The Magisterium therefore teaches: "Responsible parenthood is exercised either by the mature and generous decision to raise a large family, or by the decision, made for grave motives and with respect for the moral law, to avoid a new birth for the time being, or even for an indeterminate period."⁷

The so-called problem of "regulation of birth" or "birth control" is thereby presented. To form a correct judgment, the spouses need to evaluate the circumstances, but moreover, they must cultivate the proper internal dispositions and consider:

- the greatness of the gift of life,
- the joy of raising up new human lives,
- the goodness and generosity of the divine plan,
- the need to love the cross,
- the humility that helps one recognize and drive out selfishness,
- the practice of chastity,
- the need to frequent the sacraments.⁸

37b) The Decision to Raise a Large Family

Christian couples are called to be heroic. The witness of authentic faith that God asks of those to whom he gives the vocation to matrimony is that they have as many children as they can. Responsible parenthood means having more children if God sends them. Without a supernatural outlook, it is difficult to grasp this concept. “The husband and wife must recognize fully their own duties towards God, towards themselves, towards the family, towards society, in a correct hierarchy of values.”⁹ Apostolate in this area starts with helping couples to improve their interior life.

Does this mean that every couple has to keep on having children? No. Each couple has to see before God how many children he wants them to have and be open to his will. “They must conform their activity to the creative intention of God. In the task of transmitting life, therefore, they are not free to proceed completely at will.”¹⁰ They have to bear in mind that God has brought them together for the purpose of having children. On the other hand, infertile couples can find, in their infertility, manifestations of the will of God for them and can dedicate themselves to other aspects of the apostolate of the family.

37c) Grave Reasons to Avoid a New Birth

If, alternatively, the couple decides that they should avoid a new birth for the time being, they must have *grave reasons* for choosing so. Ultimately, the discernment of the existence of a grave reason remains the responsibility of the couple. They should keep in mind that, one day, they will have to render an account before God of the children they did or did not have. Graver reasons are required for having no more children than for not having any for the next six months. Rather than say clearly what constitutes a grave reason (the Church herself does not specify but leaves it up to couples), it is easier to say what may not necessarily constitute a grave reason. A loan that has to be paid on the house, the desire to get a second car or have a vacation do not constitute grave reasons. The matter has to be weighed with a Christian conscience, bearing in mind the main purpose of marriage. A mother of four with a serious heart problem could be considered to have a grave reason for postponing or avoiding completely a new birth.

The couple should decide on this after forming their conscience well by getting sound advice from a priest who is faithful to the doctrine of the Church.

37d) Respect for the Moral Law

Responsible parenthood is linked to the real good of human persons and to what corresponds to the true dignity of the person. Thus, every choice must conform to *objective moral law*. The moral order is not something that harms man. On the contrary, it places itself at the service of the person's full humanity, guiding every creature toward its happiness. However, man must not forget that, without the cross, he cannot reach the Resurrection. Responsible parenthood is connected with a continual effort and commitment, and it is put into effect by self-denial. Self-denial needs to be sustained by an intense spirituality. Prayer, penance, and the Eucharist are the principal sources of spirituality for married couples.¹¹

According to Christian moral teaching, there are illicit and licit methods of regulating birth.¹² The artificial methods are illicit; in them, the spouses act as arbiters of the divine plan, and they manipulate and degrade human sexuality. The natural methods are licit.¹³

It is licit to have marital relations at a time when conception cannot take place.¹⁴

38. The Judgment of Conscience of the Spouses

All spouses are called to live the fullness of the divine law, and to it they must be led. *Humanae Vitae* insists that the spouses make a judgment—not arbitrarily but as ministers of God’s will—whether to have many children or to postpone for a time, or even indefinitely, a new birth.

Responsible parenthood also and above all implies a more profound relationship to the objective moral order, of which a right conscience is the faithful interpreter.¹⁵

Responsible parenthood is linked to moral maturity. To make a correct judgment, couples need to form their conscience well, and seek good advice. They need to be wary of the fact that conscience, if not well-formed, can tell us only what we want to hear. We are free to follow only our well-formed conscience.

Sincerity of conscience can also make a strong case, but no matter how strongly we “feel” or think something to be morally right (*subjectively*), our feelings, thoughts, or beliefs do not guarantee that our actions are *objectively* in conformity with the moral law.

Unfortunately, some of the most erroneous and damaging exercises in responsible parenthood have been carried out under the banner of “following one’s conscience.”

In giving advice, pastors and counselors are enjoined to help the faithful avoid anxiety and the deformation of conscience. They should do so in unity with the moral and pastoral judgment of the Magisterium.¹⁶

The encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* makes reference to some of these points about conscience, freedom, and the moral law:

- Objective truth prevails over subjective judgment.
- Human freedom is meaningful only within God’s law.
- Human freedom does not create the law.
- Conscience must be based on the objective norm.
- A mature conscience searches and is guided by the objective truth.
- An erroneous conscience might not be guilty but is never a rule of morality.
- Conscience is never “independent” from truth.

- Mortal sin cannot be excluded by the “fundamental option.” It exists when a person knowingly and willingly, for whatever reason, chooses something that is gravely disordered.¹⁷

39. Demographic Regulation

Demographic regulation may be carried out in a great variety of ways: encouraging the migration of individuals to less populated areas, developing the countryside to avoid concentration of population in the city, passing laws that limit the number of residents in certain areas. Unfortunately, due to a widespread campaign, the promotion of the use of contraceptives has been considered the standard solution to such problems.

There may be demographic problems in some countries (many call these “population problems”) but the solution is not—simply—to force the reduction of population growth. The identification of the problem is not the moral issue here. The moral issue lies in the choice of solutions to the problem. The *Catechism* clearly states that the use of contraceptive methods is an immoral solution to such a problem. The state, therefore, cannot favor illicit methods of demographic regulation, and Catholic citizens act rightly when they oppose any pressure from the state in this respect.¹⁸

1. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 32; Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 13, 88; CCC, 2368–2370.
2. Cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 10.
3. CCC, 2368.
4. *GS*, 51.
5. *Ibid.*, 49.
6. Cf. *Ibid.*, 50.
7. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 10; cf. *GS*, 50.
8. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 6, 14, 28, 30, 33, 34, 57ff.
9. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 10.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Cf. *Ibid.*, 21.
12. Cf. *Ibid.*, 14, 15.
13. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 32.
14. Cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 11.
15. Cf. *Ibid.*, 10.
16. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 31, 34.
17. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 32, 35, 60, 63, 64, 70.
18. Cf. CCC, 2366, 2372, 2373, 2370.

Transmission and Preservation of Life: Contraception and Abortion

THERE IS A close connection in the mentality of contraception and that of abortion. Even if they are sins that are opposed to different virtues, both are products of the same negative values inherent in the “contraceptive mentality.”

40. Contraception

A couple that has economic or health difficulties may see their family increase excessively if they do not refrain from sexual intercourse during certain periods of time. Several physical, moral, and economic factors can sometimes combine to create a crisis situation. These circumstances are often put forward as strong arguments for the limitation of births.

Such demands are linked with the name of Thomas Malthus, an Anglican clergyman, author of *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798). According to Malthusian doctrine, the limitation of births is an economic necessity, since—it maintains—the means of subsistence, which increase by arithmetic progression, cannot keep up with population, which naturally increases by geometric progression. Utilitarians regard the principle of maximization of pleasure accompanied by the minimization of pain as the primary rule of human morality. Since sexual intercourse gives men and women so much pleasure—they conclude—means must be found to spare them the need to refrain from it, even when they do not want offspring.

However, man is endowed with reason not so that he may calculate the maximum of pleasure that is obtainable in this life, but that he may seek knowledge of objective truth, as a basis for absolute principles (norms) to live by. Human morality cannot be grounded in utility alone; it must sink its roots in justice. In sexual matters, it is not enough to affirm that a particular mode of behavior is expedient. We must be able to show that it is just.

“Contraception is every action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act [or indeed any genital act], or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, either as end or as means, to impede procreation.”¹ These actions normally impede the union of egg and sperm before, during, or after sexual intercourse. Some contraceptive mechanisms work by interfering with the purpose of the act of intercourse by placing an artificial barrier between the sperm and the ovum, as in the use of an external device, such as a condom. Some work by destroying the viability of the sperm, as in the case of spermicidal jellies or douches. Long-term contraception is achieved by means of ligation or

vasectomy; both are forms of physical castration. Chemical contraception is achieved with the birth control pill.

The marriage act has two functions: a biological or procreative function, and a spiritual-union function. Some erroneously claim that contraception suspends the procreative aspect, leaving intact its union aspect, and thus, it is lawful. However, the marriage act is a human act (therefore with a material aspect and a spiritual aspect). The union and procreative aspects are not two separated acts. If one of these fundamental aspects is artificially removed, the resultant act is no longer a marriage act but a “genital act.” Thus, the two aspects of the marriage act cannot be separated. If one deliberately nullifies the life-oriented process of the conjugal act, *one destroys its essential power to signify union.*

Birth control is not a merely biological question, but primarily an ethical one. By depriving the marital act of its procreative capacity (by contraception), it becomes a moral disorder against the virtue of chastity. From being an act of mutual self-giving, it becomes an act of mutual masturbation. And by doing so, married couples make their sexual act to be not an act of true marital union, but one that mocks and simulates their one-flesh unity.² If they choose to do this, their sexual union is no longer truly a *conjugal act*, because they do not truly give themselves unreservedly to one another. Their (loosely speaking) genital act is not only anti-life but also *anti-love*.

Contraception is a falsification of love:

The innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality.³

Many are the means towards this end that need to be developed with skill and serious commitment. At the first stage of life, centers for natural methods of regulating fertility should be promoted as a valuable help to responsible parenthood, in which all individuals, and in the first place the child, are recognized and respected in their own right, and where every decision is guided by the ideal of the sincere gift of self.⁴

The state attacks the family if it uses its power to:

- encourage small families through taxation or housing policies,
- disseminate and distribute contraceptives,
- provide incentives for sterilization, or even enforce it.⁵

The slogan that is voiced by champions of “free love,” utilitarianism, and individualism is that “no unwanted child ought ever to be born.” Opposed to it is a truth that is rooted in the reality and dignity of human existence, namely that “no person, including children, ought to be unwanted.”⁶

41. Morality of Contraception

The *Catechism* states: “Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes.”⁷

Love and sexuality cannot be identified or separated. To identify love with sexuality is to destroy the human meaning of both. The unitive and procreative aspects of the marriage act cannot be separated. Any act of contraception, be it by pills, condoms, withdrawal, or ligation is always wrong, and if this is done with full knowledge and full consent, it is always a mortal sin. Every marriage act must be open to the transmission of human life.⁸

To use the divine gift of the marriage act to destroy its meaning and purpose—even if only partially—is to contradict the nature of both man and woman and their most intimate relationship and, therefore, also the plan of God and his will.⁹

“Every action which, whether in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible” is *intrinsically evil*.¹⁰ This is a very strong term for the Church to use.

Some may pose the question, “Can a marriage be open to life in general but not in particular?” Pope Paul VI answers:

It is a serious error to think that a whole married life of otherwise normal relations can justify sexual intercourse that is deliberately contraceptive in a specific instance and so intrinsically wrong.¹¹

All forms of contraception are immoral for all people, not just for Catholics.

42. Abortion

Both the Christian Tradition and the teachings of the Church, all based on the teaching of the Scriptures on the sacredness of life, are unanimous in condemning abortion. Abortion willed either as an end or a means is gravely contrary to the moral law. Formal cooperation in an abortion constitutes a grave offense. The Church attaches the canonical penalty of excommunication to this crime against human life.¹² *Evangelium Vitae* declared:

It is frequently asserted that contraception, if made safe and available to all, is the most effective remedy against abortion. The Catholic Church is then accused of actually promoting abortion, because she obstinately continues to teach the moral unlawfulness of contraception. When looked at carefully, this objection is clearly unfounded. It may be that many people use contraception with a view to excluding the subsequent temptation of abortion. But the negative values inherent in the “contraceptive mentality”—which is very different from responsible parenthood, lived in respect for the full truth of the conjugal act—are such that they in fact strengthen this temptation when an unwanted life is conceived. Indeed, the pro-abortion culture is especially strong precisely where the Church’s teaching on contraception is rejected. Certainly, from the moral point of view contraception and abortion are specifically different evils: the former contradicts the full truth of the sexual act as the proper expression of conjugal love, while the latter destroys the life of a human being; the former is opposed to the virtue of chastity in marriage, the latter is opposed to the virtue of justice and directly violates the divine commandment “You shall not kill.”¹³

With regard to things, but even more with regard to life, man is not the absolute master and final judge, but rather—and this is where his incomparable greatness lies—he is the “minister of God’s plan.”¹⁴ Life is entrusted to man as a *treasure* and a *talent* that must be used well. Man must render an account of it to his Master (cf. Mt 25:14–30; Lk 19:12–27). Thus, man is answerable to God for the way he uses creation, and especially for the way he treats life. God himself is the promoter and defender of life; he provides life directly, and forbids its destruction. Thus, John Paul II solemnly declared:

By the authority that Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors, and in communion with the Bishops of the Catholic Church, I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral...

The deliberate decision to deprive an innocent human being of his life is always morally evil and can never be licit either as an end in itself or as a means to a good end. It is in fact a grave act of disobedience to the moral law, and indeed to God

himself, the author and guarantor of that law; it contradicts the fundamental virtues of justice and charity. Nothing and no one can in any way permit the killing of an innocent human being, whether a fetus or an embryo, an infant or an adult, an old person, or one suffering from an incurable disease, or a person who is dying. Furthermore, no one is permitted to ask for this act of killing, either for himself or herself or for another person entrusted to his or her care, nor can he or she consent to it, either explicitly or implicitly. Nor can any authority legitimately recommend or permit such an action.¹⁵

From the declaration that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral, even when it is performed as a means to a good end, the application of this moral principle to abortion is natural and inevitable, for there is no more innocent, weak, and defenseless human being than a baby in the womb. The unborn child is totally entrusted by nature (hence, by God) to the protection and care of the woman carrying him in the womb.

Today, in many people's consciences, the perception of the gravity of abortion has become progressively obscured. The acceptance of abortion in the popular mind, in behavior and even in law itself, is a telling sign of an extremely dangerous crisis of the moral sense, which is becoming more and more incapable of distinguishing between good and evil, even when the fundamental right to life is at stake. Given such a grave situation, we need now more than ever to have the courage to look the truth in the eye and to call things by their proper name, without yielding to convenient compromises or to the temptation of self-deception.

Especially in the case of abortion there is a widespread use of ambiguous terminology, such as "interruption of pregnancy," which tends to hide abortion's true nature and to attenuate its seriousness in public opinion. Perhaps this linguistic phenomenon is itself a symptom of an uneasiness of conscience. But no word has the power to change the reality of things: *procured abortion is the deliberate and direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out, of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth.*

The moral gravity of procured abortion is apparent in all its truth if we recognize that we are dealing with murder and, in particular, when we consider the specific elements involved. The one eliminated is a human being at the very beginning of life. No one more absolutely innocent could be imagined. In no way could this human being ever be considered an aggressor, much less an unjust aggressor! He or she is weak, defenseless, even to the point of lacking that minimal form of defense consisting in the poignant power of a newborn baby's cries and tears. The unborn child is totally entrusted to the protection and care of the woman carrying him or her in the womb. And yet sometimes it is precisely the mother herself who makes the decision and asks for the child to be eliminated, and who then goes about having it done.¹⁶

Evangelium Vitae concedes that there may be emotional, social, economic, and eugenic pressures on the parents of the unborn child that

seemingly favor abortion, but, nevertheless, “these reasons ... *can never justify the killing of an innocent human being.*”¹⁷

There are persons and institutions that are responsible for abortion, among them the parents, doctors, legislators, those who encourage sexual permissiveness, and international institutions that campaign (or pay) for the legalization of abortion.

The Church well knows that it is difficult to mount an effective legal defense of life in pluralistic democracies, because of the presence of strong cultural currents with differing outlooks. At the same time, certain that moral truth cannot fail to make its presence deeply felt in every conscience, the Church encourages political leaders, starting with those who are Christians, not to give in, but to make those choices which, taking into account what is realistically attainable, will lead to the re-establishment of a just order in the defense and promotion of the value of life. Here it must be noted that it is not enough to remove unjust laws. The underlying causes of attacks on life have to be eliminated, especially by ensuring proper support for families and motherhood. A family policy must be the basis and driving force of all social policies. For this reason there need to be set in place social and political initiatives capable of guaranteeing conditions of true freedom of choice in matters of parenthood. It is also necessary to rethink labor, urban, residential and social service policies so as to harmonize working schedules with time available for the family, so that it becomes effectively possible to take care of children and the elderly.¹⁸

The condemnation of abortion applies also to the experimentation on human embryos and to euthanasia.

43. Mechanism of Contraceptives and Abortifacient Pills

There is a close connection in mentality between the practice of contraception and that of abortion. It is being demonstrated in an alarming way by the development of chemical products, intrauterine devices, and vaccines that, distributed with the same ease as contraceptives, really act as abortifacients in the very early stages of the development of the life of the new human being. The so-called *pill* is one of these widespread chemical products. The pill has three mechanisms of action:

- i) Inhibition of ovulation
- ii) Prevention of fertilization (union of sperm and ovum)
- iii) Obstruction of the implantation of zygote in the uterine wall (nidation)

The first and second mechanisms are contraceptive, while the third is abortive. The abortive mechanism is becoming increasingly used in place of the contraceptive mechanism of inhibiting ovulation, which is now viewed as disruptive of the woman's normal cycles. The abortifacient mechanism works by preventing nidation, the process by which the fertilized ovum (a new baby) is implanted in the wall of the uterus, which is necessary for its growth and development. Having prevented nidation, the abortive mechanism then expels the baby from the uterus.

The pill is composed of two synthetic hormones called estrogen and progesterone. The early versions of the pill consisted of high doses of both hormones. This, it was found, led to a high incidence of complications. Companies in the US have now decided to push low-dose combinations and have withdrawn the high dose pills. The low-dose pills permit more ovulation and more conception, and hence rely more heavily on chemical abortion. Chemical abortion can occur in 2%–10% of female cycles (i.e., one cycle per year).¹⁹

Nevertheless, from the ethical point of view, there is no objection to a therapeutic use of pills in some purely gynecological disorders, provided that its contraceptive effect is not directly intended for any motive whatsoever, and the possibility of its abortifacient effect is absolutely eliminated.²⁰ It is never licit to use these drugs for contraceptive purposes,

i.e., to avoid a pregnancy that could aggravate a medical condition, like grave cardiopathy, tuberculosis, or physical exhaustion.

43a) Direct Abortifacients

(1) *Depoprovera*

Depoprovera has been labeled a long-term contraceptive but is in fact an abortifacient. It comes in the form of an injection. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has deemed this drug unsafe for American women but has not discouraged its producers (Upjohn) from promoting and distributing it to third world countries.²¹

(2) *RU 486*

RU 486 (produced by Roussel-Uclaf) prevents the uptake of progesterone, a necessary hormone in the early stages of pregnancy. Expulsion of the baby occurs in about 86% of women within 24 hours.²² It causes severe bleeding, at times lasting up to 42 days.

(3) *IUD (Intra-uterine device)*

The IUD (Intra-uterine device) is a plastic device of various shapes that is placed inside the uterus. It alters the lining of the uterus by producing local irritation. It seems to produce inflammation of the uterine mucosa that impedes the implantation of the ovum. Likewise, it alters the mechanism of transport of the spermatozoa. The developing child (fertilized ovum) who has come from the fallopian tube cannot implant and thus dies. The IUD has anti-implantation and abortive effects.

The morning after pill works in the same way as the IUD.

(4) *Norplant*

Norplant is a series of six non-biodegradable rubber-like rods or capsules that are surgically implanted under the skin in the inside portion of the arm. It can continue its abortifacient activity for up to six years. Its side effects are similar to those of the IUD.

Manufacturers are working at present on an abortifacient vaccine.

(5) *The “morning after pill”*

The “morning after pill” or “emergency contraceptive pill” (ECP) is a chemical product of hormonal nature. It is increasingly presented and marketed as a contraceptive (i.e., preventing conception) that could be used in emergency situations after sexual intercourse in order to avoid an

unwanted pregnancy. In reality, it is an abortive product. It prevents the fertilized egg from implanting in the uterus by altering the internal wall of this organ, and provokes its expulsion from the uterus. Only when the ECP is taken before ovulation can it prevent the production of the egg, and therefore work as a contraceptive. Otherwise, the ECP works as an anti-nidatory drug.²³

43b) Truth and the Pill

One of the injustices that are suffered by women today is the lies to which they are subjected by the contraceptive industry. Contraceptives are not clearly labeled and their mechanism of action is obscured. Potent abortifacients are commercially sold as medication for hyperacidity (under the generic name, Misoprostol). The side effects of these preparations, which are sometimes lethal, are not stated or explained.

43c) Regulation of Periods

Some of the hormonal preparations can be used in a legitimately moral way to regulate the period in a woman with irregular menses. These should be administered only by a doctor who is faithful to the teachings of the Church. The drug prescribed should not be an abortifacient.

The Church in no way regards as unlawful therapeutic means that are truly necessary to cure organic diseases, even though they have a foreseen contraceptive effect, provided that this contraceptive effect is not directly intended for any motive whatsoever.²⁴

44. Sterilization

Equally to be condemned, as the Magisterium of the Church has affirmed on various occasions, is direct sterilization, whether of the man or of the woman, whether permanent or temporary.²⁵ The more commonly used methods are as follows:

- Tubal sterilization (salpingectomy) consists in the ligation or electrocoagulation of both fallopian tubes. It is a highly effective contraceptive method. It is usually irreversible, although there are techniques of recanalization.
- Vasectomy in males consists in bilateral ligation of the vas deferens, which impedes the passage of the spermatozoa.²⁶

A *hysterectomy* (removal of the womb) that results in the woman being sterile (indirect sterilization) is morally licit if it is performed for valid medical reasons (non-contraceptive). The resultant sterility is an unintended side effect of the procedure.

45. Use of Condoms

In many countries, civil authorities have been encouraging the use of prophylactics (condoms) to avoid the spreading of AIDS.

We believe this approach is simplistic and evasive. It leads to a false sense of complacency on the part of the State, creating an impression that an adequate solution has been arrived at. On the contrary, it simply evades and neglects the heart of the solution, namely, the formation of authentic sexual values.

We strongly reprobate media advertisements that lure people with the idea of so-called safe sex, through condom use. As in contraception, so also in preventing HIV-AIDS infection condom use is not a fail-safe approach.

When one lives by faith, as all followers of Christ must, one is convinced that chastity and the refusal to engage in extra-marital activity are the best protection against HIV-AIDS.²⁷

The use of condoms to prevent pregnancy has also been condemned by the Church.

46. Other Sins against Life

The Second Vatican Council gave a number of examples of sins against life:

All offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and wilful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures; all offenses against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where men are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons: all these and the like are criminal: they poison civilization; and they debase the perpetrators more than the victims and militate against the honor of the creator.²⁸

Euthanasia (or mercy killing) is an action or omission that intentionally causes death in order to eliminate suffering. It is a grave violation of God's law and can be equated to suicide (when it is freely requested by the individual concerned) or murder (when it is imposed on an unwilling or unconscious person by relatives, physicians, or legislators). Recourse to euthanasia is a case of either "false mercy" or arrogance on the part of those who seize for themselves the power to decide who ought to live and who ought to die. Discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, or disproportionate to the expected outcome (that is, very extraordinary procedures) can be legitimate. However, the ordinary care that is owed to a sick person cannot be legitimately interrupted. Painkillers can be used to alleviate the sufferings.²⁹

Civil laws that justify or legalize abortion and euthanasia are the fruit of ethical relativism. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead, *there is a grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection*. These laws deny the existence of an objective moral law, and derive the concepts of good and evil from the changing perceptions of the majority. Hence the need to rediscover the essential and innate human and moral values, which flow from the truth of the human being, values that no individual, majority, or state can ever create, modify, or destroy, but must only acknowledge, respect, and promote.

1. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 14.
2. Cf. R. García de Haro, *Marriage and the Family in the Documents of the Magisterium*, 360.
3. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 32.
4. John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 88.
5. Cf. J.M. de Torre, *Informal Talks on the Family and Society*, 107–121.
6. W. May, *Marriage, the Rock on which the Family is Built*, 38.
7. CCC, 2351.
8. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2362, 2363, 2366.
9. Cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 13.
10. *Ibid.*, 14.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Cf. CCC, 2270–2275.
13. John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 13.
14. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 13.
15. John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 57.
16. *Ibid.*, 58.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, 90.
19. Cf. B.M. Kuhar, “Pharmaceutical Companies, The New Abortionists,” *Human Life International Reprint*, 16.
20. Cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 15.
21. Cf. *Project Abortifacients*, Human Life International, June 1991.
22. Cf. H. Barber, “RU-486: Boon or Bane?” P&T, Jan. 1991.
23. Cf. Uganda Catholic Bishops’ Conference, Letter *The “Emergency Contraceptive Pill—ECP”: An Appeal to Reason and Sincerity*, Mar. 23, 2001.
24. Cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 15.
25. Cf. *Ibid.*, 14; CCC, 2297.
26. Cf. M. Monge, *Ethical Practices in Health and Disease*, 140.
27. Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, Letter *In the Compassion of Jesus*, Jan. 1993.
28. *GS*, 27; cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 80.
29. Cf. John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 64–77; CCC, 2276–2279.

35

Transmission of Life:
Natural Regulation of Fertility

47. The Transmission of Human Life

47a) Man's Role in Reproduction

Sperm cells are the life creating cells of the man. Each time a man ejaculates, millions of sperm cells are released. Once they are deposited in the wife's vagina, sperm cells can fertilize the female egg. Sperm cells can survive for three days or more. Most men are always fertile because sperm cells are continuously being made.

47b) Woman's Role in Reproduction: Ovulation and Menstruation

When a girl matures into a woman, she is able to have children. She begins to have cycles of ovulation and menstruation.

Ovulation: Once every month or so, a ripe egg is released from one of the ovaries. It travels into one of the fallopian tubes, where it may be united with a sperm cell, if any have reached the fallopian tube, and a baby is conceived.

Menstruation: If conception does not happen, the egg dies within 24 hours. Later, a part of the internal lining of the woman's womb leaves her body, causing some bleeding.

47c) The Fertility Cycle

A woman's menstrual cycle is also called her fertility cycle. Its length varies from woman to woman and from cycle to cycle. Most cycles last 25–35 days. The phases of the fertility cycle are the following:

- *The days before ovulation* (the early days). As the ovulation phase gets nearer, pregnancy becomes more likely.
- *The ovulation phase*. This is the fertile part of the cycle. The marital act during this phase may result in pregnancy, especially if it takes place:
 - on the days just before ovulation,
 - at the time of ovulation,
 - any time during the lifetime of the released egg.
- *The days after ovulation* (the late days). This is an infertile time. This phase usually lasts 11–16 days.

48. Natural Family Planning

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is a way to regulate conception by timing the marital act. By using NFP, couples learn to recognize the times in a woman's menstrual cycle during which she can become pregnant. They can then plan their sexual relations depending on whether or not they want to have a baby at a particular time. NFP is *not* the same as the rhythm (calendar) method. Whereas the rhythm method is based on past menstrual cycles only, NFP depends on the changes of fertility as they happen.

If there are reasonable grounds for spacing births, arising from the physical or psychological condition of the husband and wife or from external circumstances, the Church teaches that then married people may take advantage of the natural cycles immanent in the reproductive system and use their marriage precisely at the times that are infertile, and in this way control birth, a way which does not in the least offend the moral principles which we have just explained.¹

The so-called natural methods are concerned with a scientific question; they *are methods of determining fertility*. Here, precisely, is where the meeting of ethics, theology, and science must take place. Philosophical ethics and moral theology take up *scientific knowledge* and make it *the path* whereby the human person—using his freedom—achieves responsible procreation. Nevertheless, this knowledge and the methods connected with it could be used for purposes that are morally illicit. In fact, one cannot forget “that truth known through science can be *used* by human freedom for purposes that are opposed to man's good—the good that *ethics* knows.”² Therefore, it is necessary to contrast contraception with conjugal chastity rather than to contrast natural with artificial methods, for one of the manifestations of conjugal chastity is precisely periodic continence for just reasons.

The Church recognizes that there can be objective motives to have recourse to periodic continence. It insists, though, that couples must have *serious reasons* to lawfully refrain from the use of marriage during fertile days, while still making use of it during infertile periods, so that the spouses can express their love and safeguard their mutual fidelity.³

49. Moral Difference between NFP and Contraception

The difference between contraception and NFP is much wider and deeper than is usually thought. It is one that involves two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and human sexuality.

The upright use of the natural regulation is radically different from contraceptive practice. It is not simply a difference of technique but a different ethical behavior. The natural methods are means to determine the fertile periods of the wife. They open the possibility of abstaining from sexual relations whenever, due to just reasons of responsibility, the spouses desire to avoid a conception. In this case they modify their sexual behavior through continence while the *dynamics and the structure of the conjugal act do not suffer any falsification*. That is never the case when they choose contraception; they do not change their sexual behavior, and they falsify the intrinsic meaning of the gift of self, proper to the conjugal act, by arbitrarily closing it to the dynamics of the transmission of life.⁴

In contraception, the spouses attribute to themselves the indiscriminate right to be arbitrators of life, while in periodic continence, they renounce, by a mutual, intelligent, and responsible agreement, the use of matrimony during the fertile periods. Therefore, there is a twofold difference between periodic continence and contraception:

- i) The object of the act
- ii) The intention of the spouses

These are the two elements by which the morality of an action is judged.

The innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid through contraception by an objectively contradictory language, namely that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality....

The choice of natural rhythms involves accepting the cycle of the person, that is the woman and thereby accepting dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility, and self-control. To accept the cycle and to enter into dialogue means to recognize both the spiritual and corporal character of conjugal communion, and to live personal love with its requirement of fidelity.⁵

John Paul II warned us against the danger of teaching about natural methods without accompanying it with adequate formation of conscience.⁶

1. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 16; cf. CCC, 2370.
2. John Paul II, Address, Nov. 14, 1984.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*
4. John Paul II, Address, Jan. 10, 1992; cf. CCC, 2370.
5. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 32.
6. Cf. John Paul II, Address, Mar. 14, 1988.

36

Transmission of Life:
Artificial Fertilization

50. Concept of Artificial Fertilization

Marriage is an institution that exists for the sake of love, not merely for the purpose of biological reproduction. The intentions and the attention of each partner should be fixed upon the other, upon his or her good. Marital intercourse is—and should be—*an interpersonal act*, the result of reciprocal betrothed love between the spouses. Intercourse is necessary to marital love, not just to procreation. The marital act is not an act of “making,” either babies or love. Love is not a product that one makes; it is a gift that one gives—the gift of self. It must be an act of unification of persons, and not merely the instrument or means of procreation.

As we have studied, human life comes as a gift, crowning the marital act itself. This act perfects the spouses, and, from that gift, a baby is born, equal in dignity to its parents.

A human being is something precious and good, a person, a being of incalculable value, worthy of respect, a bearer of inviolable rights, a being who *ought to be loved*.¹

Children, who are persons equal in dignity to their mothers and fathers, are to be begotten in the loving embrace of husband and wife, and not through acts of fornication and adultery, nor are they to be “made” in the laboratory and treated as products inferior to their producers.²

Artificial fertilization is any process by which fertilization of an ovum takes place not as a result of the act of sexual intercourse, but as a result of the sperm being introduced into the woman by means of an artificial process.

These *techniques of artificial reproduction*, which would seem to be at the service of life and which are frequently used with this intention, actually open the door to new threats against life. Apart from the fact that they are morally unacceptable, since *they separate procreation from the fully human context of the conjugal act*, these techniques have a high rate of failure: not just failure in relation to fertilization but with regard to the subsequent development of the embryo, which is exposed to the risk of death, generally within a very short space of time. Furthermore, the number of embryos produced is often greater than that needed for implantation in the woman’s womb, and these so-called “spare embryos” are then destroyed or used for research which, under the pretext of scientific or medical progress, in fact reduces human life to the level of simple “biological material” to be freely disposed of.³

The very term *artificial fertilization* raises many questions about the protection of the dignity of human sexuality and procreation. This technique is sometimes sought by infertile couples who desire to have a baby. While

this desire is noble and legitimate and even to be encouraged, it must be remembered that a baby is a gift from God. Couples do not have a right to have a baby and much less the right to go against the laws of morality in having one. Every act (that is, the chosen course of action, or *object*) has its own morality, and a good intention does not justify an intrinsically evil act. Greater good comes to the infertile couple themselves and to the whole of society by the respect that is given to God's law for marriage and the family. The Lord of creation is the only one who has dominion over human procreation. It is his will that some couples give Christian witness in marriage without children of their own and thus fulfill their mission in society. He will bless them in this mission in countless ways.

51. Artificial Insemination

There are two types of artificial insemination:

- i) Homologous artificial insemination (AIH), from the husband
- ii) Heterologous artificial insemination (AID), from a donor other than the husband

Artificial insemination as well as *in vitro* fertilization involve manipulative, artificial techniques that threaten to convert procreation (a human act) into a mere technique that is devoid of interpersonal relations. The offspring ought to be the fruit of an act of love of the parents, the conjugal act. This act is the only dignified way of engendering new life. The child is the fruit of the conjugal union. John Paul II teaches that man originates from an act of procreation that is not exclusively biological, but also spiritual. This is so because the parents are united by the “bond of matrimony.”⁴

51a) Artificial Insemination by the Husband (AIH)

The process of artificial insemination by the husband (AIH) involves getting a specimen of sperm from the husband and implanting it into the fallopian tubes or other part of the woman's reproductive organs. The conjugal act does not take place. To obtain the specimen by masturbation is against the moral law. The implantation of the sperm by a mechanical instrument replaces the marriage act with a laboratory procedure and converts something sacred into something mechanical.

By this procedure, the unitive aspect of the conjugal act is separated from the procreative aspect. This is the main reason for the moral objections to this method.

Each child must be the fruit of an act of love that is the expression of total self-giving in the language of the body. AIH is, therefore, not a morally acceptable means of achieving fertilization.

On the other hand, it is lawful to help the natural conjugal act attain its purpose. After the conjugal act, the sperm may be collected from the female organ and deposited in the fallopian tubes so as "to facilitate and help" procreation. This case may be morally acceptable because the union between the unitive and procreative aspects of the act is maintained. As yet, the Church has not spoken definitively on this, but seems to allow this possibility.⁵

51b) Artificial Insemination by a Donor (AID)

In the process of artificial insemination by a donor (AID), the sperm is obtained from a third party. Therefore, it contravenes the property of unity of the natural institution of marriage and is gravely immoral. It is as though the wife had conjugal relations with a man other than her husband. The process also contravenes the rights of the child, because it deprives him of a proper filial relationship with his parents and, thus, can hinder the maturation of his personal identity.

The origin of a human person is the result of an act of giving. The one conceived must be the fruit of his parents' love. He cannot be desired or conceived as the product of an intervention of medical or biological techniques; that would be equivalent to reducing him to an object of scientific technology.⁶

52. *In Vitro* Fertilization (Test Tube Babies)

In vitro means, “in a test tube,” that is, outside the human body as opposed to *in vivo*, which means inside it. The process of *in vitro* fertilization involves fertilizing a number of ova in test tubes with sperm that is usually obtained through masturbation. The embryos (babies) that are useful are implanted into the mother’s womb; those that are not useful are discarded.

This process, therefore, always involves abortion, which is always murder. The procedure is against the sacredness of human life and the dignity of the human being.

In vitro fertilization the technician does not simply assist the marital act, but *substitutes* for that act.... The technician has thus become the principal cause of generation, acting through the instrumental forces of sperm and ovum.

Moreover, the claim that *in vitro* fertilization is an “extension” of the marital act, and not a substitution for it, is simply contrary to the fact. What is extended is not the act of intercourse, but the intention; from an intention to beget a child naturally to getting it by IVF, by artificial insemination, or by help of a surrogate mother.⁷

Sometimes, the embryos are frozen for future use (cryo-preservation). This technique unnecessarily exposes human life to risk of death and degradation.

Fertilization achieved outside the bodies of the couple remains by this very fact deprived of the meaning and the values that are expressed in the language of the body, and in the union of human persons.

The transmission of human life is entrusted by nature to a personal and conscious act and as such is subject to the all-holy laws of God; immutable and inviolable laws, which must be recognized and observed. For this reason one cannot use means and follow methods that could be licit in the transmission of the life of plants and animals.⁸

53. Related Issues

53a) Surrogate Motherhood

Surrogate motherhood involves the hiring of a womb. A baby is conceived in the womb of one woman and is then transferred to the womb of another for the second woman to carry the baby until birth. It involves bringing a second woman into the marriage relationship and is, therefore, against the property of unity of the natural institution of marriage. It contravenes the right of the child to be conceived, carried in the womb, brought into the world, and brought up by its own parents. It represents a failure to meet the demands of maternal love and responsible motherhood.⁹ It also raises doubts about the identity of the mother, as well as legal problems.

53b) Gestation of Human Embryos in Animals

The practice of gestation of human embryos in animals is against the right to be conceived and to be born within marriage and from marriage. It is against human dignity.¹⁰

53c) Cloning

The process of cloning involves reproducing human beings without any connection with sexuality. It is also against the right to be conceived and born within marriage and from marriage.¹¹

53d) Pre-Nuptial Certificate

In some countries, a medical examination is recommended before marriage. This is justified especially when there is a high probability that the future spouses may be carriers of hereditary diseases. This medical examination may be morally lawful as long as it is not converted into an impediment to marriage. A pre-nuptial certificate, moreover, must not be obligatory or eliminatory.

The pre-nuptial medical inquiry must be restricted to information that will help the couple face their responsibilities. Future spouses should be aware of the limitations of such a document. Genetic counseling includes three aspects:

- i) Diagnosis of existing familial diseases
- ii) Probability of the disease in the couple or their descendants, expressed in numerical figures
- iii) Responses to questions

53e) Fertility Tests

A fertility test is done one year or so after continuous marital life, when necessary. There are ways whereby a specimen of semen can be obtained in a moral way. Obtaining semen specimens by masturbation is never morally licit.

53f) Prenatal Diagnosis

Prenatal diagnosis reveals the sex of the unborn child; it is morally licit if it respects the life and integrity of the fetus. It is sinful when the thought of a possible abortion is present, depending on the results.¹²

1. W. May, *Marriage, the Rock on which the Family is Built*, 17.
2. *Ibid.*, 19.
3. John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 14.
4. John Paul II, Address, Oct. 29, 1983.
5. Cf. CCC, 2377.
6. Cf. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum Vitae*, 82; CCC, 2376, 2377.
7. W. May, *Marriage, the Rock on which the Family is Built*, 98.
8. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum Vitae*, 82; cf. CCC, 2376, 2377.
9. Cf. CCC, 2376.
10. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2275, 2376.
11. Cf. *Ibid.*
12. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2274; John Paul II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, 14, 63.

37

Transmission of Life:
Education of Children

54. The Role of the Parents

Parents have the right and duty to educate their offspring. By conferring life on their children, they cooperated with God in generating a new human person; thus, they must take the task of helping that person to effectively live a fully human life. This parental duty is *original and primary* with regard to the educational role of others because of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children. It is *irreplaceable and inalienable*, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others.

The family is, therefore, the principal school of the social virtues, which are necessary to every society.¹ *Parents are the first and most important educators* of their children, and they also possess a *fundamental competence* in this area; they are *educators because they are parents*.

Parents must never feel alone in the educational task. The Church supports and encourages them, confident that they can carry out this function better than anyone else. Parents must approach this duty in a spirit of prayer, open and obedient to the moral truths of faith and reason that integrate the teaching of the Church, and always seeing children and young people as persons, children of God and heirs to the Kingdom of heaven. *Much of the formation in the home is indirect*, incarnated in a loving and tender atmosphere, for it arises from the presence and example of parents whose love is pure and generous.²

Even though being a family is something spiritual, we cannot ignore the material element: The family needs a *home*. To make its educational mission effective, the family needs an adequate environment, a minimum of comfortable material facilities.

55. Father and Mother as Educators

The most recent findings in the psychological and pedagogical sciences as well as human experience reveal the decisive importance of an affective atmosphere in the family for a harmonious education. A serene relationship between husband and wife, and their positive presence (both father and mother) facilitate the process of identification and spiritual growth of their children.

Certain serious failures of the parents (for example, one or both parents' absence from family life, a lack of interest in the children's education, or excessive severity) are factors that can cause emotional and affective disturbances in children. Parents must find time to be with their children and take time to talk with them.³

56. The Parents Educational Role Is Based on the Sacrament of Matrimony

The parents' mission to educate is rooted in their participation in God's creative activity. This mission is confirmed in the Sacrament of Marriage, which consecrates them for the Christian education of their children. The sacrament makes them share in the authority and love of God, and of Christ the Shepherd, and participate in the motherly love of the Church. It enriches them with wisdom, counsel, fortitude, and all the other gifts of the Holy Spirit in order to help the children in their growth not only as human beings but also as children of God. Thus,

- parents must give not only corporal life to their children, but also *the life of faith*;
- this mission is undertaken by means of *family life itself*, which becomes a school of Christian initiation and of following Christ.⁴

57. Relations with Other Educating Agents

The family is the primary and exclusive—but not the only—educating community. Other educators can assist in this task, but they can only take the place of parents for serious reasons (the parents' physical or moral incapacity). Parents may share their mission with other individuals or institutions, such as the Church and the state, since parents, by themselves, are often not capable of providing every requirement of the whole process of raising children, especially in matters concerning their schooling. But corresponding to their right to education, parents have a serious duty to commit themselves to a cordial and active relationship with teachers and school authorities. In these cases, it is recommended that parents keep themselves informed on the content and methodology with which such supplementary education is imparted.⁵

57a) The Principle of Subsidiarity

The mission of education must always be carried out in accordance with a proper application of the *principle of subsidiarity*. This implies the need of giving assistance to the parents, but only insofar as parents cannot impart this education by themselves. Thus, subsidiarity complements paternal and maternal love, because all other participants in the process of education are able to carry out their responsibilities only *in the name of the parents, with their consent*, and, to a certain degree, *with their authorization*. Nevertheless, parents have the right to claim for themselves any aspect of the education of their children; they may, for example, join other parents and put up educational projects.⁶

57b) Importance of the School

Among the various organs of education, “the school is of outstanding importance. In nurturing the intellectual faculties which is its special mission, it develops a capacity for sound judgment and introduces the pupils to the cultural heritage bequeathed to them by former generations. It fosters a sense of values and prepares them for professional life. By providing for friendly contacts between pupils of different characters and backgrounds it encourages mutual understanding.”⁷ The decisions that a person makes in the course of a lifetime depend, to a great degree, on the kind of formation he has received at school.

True educators never limit themselves to merely academic instruction; they seek the integral development of the person. When teaching intellectual habits to their students, they also form their consciences, and this has a powerful influence on the rest of their lives. Therefore, from a moral and religious point of view, there is no such thing as a “neutral school.” Either it gives an education in keeping with Christian principles, or it willfully ignores Christ, with all the serious consequences this brings with it.

However, the important thing is not that the school be Catholic in name, but in practice: in its teaching, in the formation it provides, and in the values it develops. A school fulfills this obligation when it faithfully follows the teachings of the Church.

58. Content of Formation

With respect to the content of the educational work of the parents, the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* lists the following:

- Parents must encourage the formation of right *values*, especially, a *correct attitude of freedom* with regard to material goods, the adoption of a simple and austere life style, and a conviction that “it is what a man is, rather than what he has, that counts.”⁸
- Children must learn to cultivate *virtues* if they are to truly be the persons they are meant to be. In a society shaken and split by tensions and conflicts that are caused by the violent clash of various kinds of individualism and selfishness, children must be enriched with *a sense of true justice*, which alone leads to respect for the personal dignity of each individual, and also, and more powerfully, with *a sense of true love*, understood as sincere solicitude and disinterested service with regard to others, especially the poorest and those in most need.
- Parents must also impart a *proper sexual education*, nourished by the virtue of chastity. This virtue empowers the children *to give themselves* away in love to others.⁹

58a) Education in Freedom

Family education should be carried out in an atmosphere of freedom.

Imposing things by force, in an authoritarian manner, is not the right way to teach. The ideal attitude of parents lies more in becoming their children's friends—friends who will be willing to share their anxieties, who will listen to their problems, who will help them in an effective and agreeable way.¹⁰

Often, an authoritarian attitude of the parents leads to a rejection of the principles they try to teach. Thus, authority should be exercised avoiding two extremes: too much softness, and too much severity.

It is not a matter of imposing a line of conduct, but rather of showing the human and supernatural motives for it. In a word, parents have to respect their children's freedom, because there is no real education without personal responsibility, and there is no responsibility without freedom.¹¹

That *sense of responsibility* should lead the children to assume with maturity the consequences of their actions and decisions, without passing the blame to the circumstances, persons, or events. It is not a matter of justifying oneself in front of the others, but of responding to God.

The function of the parents is double:

- i) To teach the children to be free
- ii) To discreetly monitor how they use their freedom

To orient the children's freedom and foster responsibility in them, parents need to display fortitude and serenity.

58b) Education in All Virtues

Character is the integration of several fundamental strengths of mind and will—which we call virtues—into one personality. Virtues are internalized, habitual, permanent habits and attitudes by which one deals with life in all its circumstances. Moral virtues are necessary means for a person to reach his goal. Among the virtues to teach are the following:

- *Faith.* The active belief in God and in all that he has revealed about himself, his Church, his justice and mercy, the meaning of life here on earth and afterwards in eternity.
- *Hope.* The confidence that God will give us the means of salvation, and that his loving providence watches over us throughout our lives; therefore, no problem is unendurable.
- *Charity.* An overriding love for God, a love that shapes and directs all other loves—for spouse, children, friends, strangers, or material goods. Parents ought to teach their children to be generous with others, to trust, and to avoid anything that may look like criticism, backbiting, or discord among siblings.
- *Prudence.* Today, we call this “sound judgment,” the ability to make the important distinctions in life: distinguishing right from wrong, truth from falsehood, fact from opinion, reason from emotion, the eternal from the transitory. A well-formed conscience is part of this virtue.
- *Justice.* This we could call “a sense of responsibility”—giving others what is due to them. It is the sense of duty that is implicit in recognizing the rights of others, including the rights of God. In one sense, this awareness of responsibility is the most important mark of moral adulthood—maturity *is* responsibility. Parents should guide their children to be sincere and loyal.
- *Fortitude.* This virtue is a disposition of toughness in one’s personality—that is, a willingness and ability to either solve difficulties or endure them. It is the power to overcome or withstand hardship, disappointment, inconvenience, and pain. Its opposite (very common today) is escapism. Fortitude is essential to real love. Love, after all, is not just a bundle of sentiments; it is the capacity and willingness to embrace hardship for the sake of someone’s welfare.

Children should be taught to be disciplined in their work and schedule.

- *Temperance.* This is self-control, self-discipline—a rational control over the passions and appetites, a self-imposed restraint for the sake of some higher good. Its opposite (also common today) is self-indulgence, a habitual pursuit of pleasure and comfort as ends in themselves. The good example of sobriety and vigilance in the use of television and other mass media, which may foster an attitude of laziness, is of great importance. Children should be trained to avoid whims and creating imaginary necessities, and to be austere in their expenses.

Moreover, parents should develop their children's critical capacity to fight against the attacks of a culture of consumerism. They should also foster the children's cultural interests adapted to each one's age.

58c) Sexual Education: Situation of the Problem

In the past, Christian parents seldom exercised the right and duty to provide specific sexual education for their children. Perhaps the need for it was not as acute as it is today. The parents' task was, in part, fulfilled by the prevailing social models and the role played by the Church and the Catholic school. The general culture was permeated by respect for fundamental values and hence served to protect and maintain them. Nowadays, the decline of traditional models has left children deprived of consistent and positive guidance, while parents often find themselves unprepared to provide adequate answers.

Moreover, though schools have made themselves available to carry out programs of sex education, they have commonly done this by taking the place of the family and, most of the time, aim only at providing information. This has often led to the deformation of consciences. In many cases, parents have given up their duty in this field or agreed to delegate it to others because of the difficulty and their own lack of preparation.¹²

58d) Education for Chastity

The natural method for sexual education is personal dialogue between parents and children. It is recognized that any child or young person has the right to withdraw from any form of sexual instruction that is imparted outside the home.¹³ Through this formation for chastity in the family, adolescents and young people learn to live sexuality in its personal dimension, rejecting any kind of separation of sexuality from love—understood as self-giving—and any separation of the love between husband and wife from the family.

PATHS OF FORMATION WITHIN THE FAMILY

59. Formation in the Community of Life and Love

The self-giving that inspires the love of husband and wife for each other is the model and norm for the *self-giving* that must be practiced in the relationships between brothers and sisters and the different generations that live together in the family.¹⁴

59a) Self-Control

Children should be trained in the virtue of self-control, which is an attitude and disposition of personal mortification and self-denial, a necessary condition for being capable of self-giving.

Also important in family life is the virtue of modesty, nourished by faith, and a life of prayer.¹⁵

60. Decency and Modesty

The practice of decency and modesty in speech, action, and dress is very important for creating an atmosphere that is suitable for the growth of chastity. Parents should be watchful so that certain immoral fashions and attitudes do not violate the integrity of the home, especially through misuse of the mass media, in particular, with regard to use of television or the Internet.

Respect for privacy must be considered in close connection with decency and modesty.¹⁶

61. Parents as Models for their Children

The good example and leadership of parents is essential in strengthening the formation of young people in virtues. This is also true for education in a spirit of sacrifice in families, which are subject more than ever today to the pressures of materialism and consumerism.¹⁷

The first example and the greatest help that parents can give their children is their generosity *in accepting life*, without forgetting that this is how parents help their children to have a simpler lifestyle.¹⁸

62. Educators in the Faith and Prayer

The parents are the first heralds of the Gospel for their children, and for this, they have received the specific grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony to teach their children the truths of faith (beginning with a simple catechism), and to teach them to pray.¹⁹

LEARNING STAGES

Parents, in particular, have the duty to let their children know about living Christian virtues and the mysteries of human life, because the family is, in fact, the best environment to accomplish the obligation of securing a gradual education.²⁰

63. Four Principles Regarding Information about Sexuality

- i) *Each child is a unique and unrepeatable person and must receive individualized formation.* Experience shows that this works out better when each parent communicates the biological, emotional, moral, and spiritual information to the child or young person of the same sex *through a personal dialogue.* Being aware of the role, emotions, and problems of their own sex, mothers have a special bond with their daughters, and fathers with their sons.
- ii) *The moral dimension must always be part of their explanations.* Parents must insist on the *positive value of chastity* and its capacity to generate true love for other persons. Only a person who knows how to be chaste will know how to love in marriage or in virginity. From the earliest age, parents should gently correct such habits that could become sinful later, and, when necessary, teach modesty as the child grows. It is always important to justify the judgment on adequate, valid, and convincing grounds, both at the level of reason and faith, that is, in a positive framework with a high concept of personal dignity.
- iii) The biological development of the children should always be *accompanied by a growth of spiritual life*, formation in chastity, and an ever-greater awareness of the dignity of each human person and his body. Parents can illustrate the positive values of human sexuality in the context of the person's original vocation to love and the universal call to holiness. They should pass on to their children the conviction that *chastity in one's state in life is possible and that chastity brings joy.* Therefore, they should teach them how to use the means to grow in the love of God and one's neighbor, and to overcome any difficulties. These *means* are:
 - guarding the senses and the mind,
 - avoiding occasions of sin,
 - the observance of modesty,
 - moderation in recreation,
 - good working habits,
 - wholesome pursuits,

- avoiding idleness,
- organizing one's life of piety,
- assiduous prayer,
- spiritual guidance or direction,
- frequent reception of the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist,
- devotion to the Immaculate Mother of God.

iv) *Parents should provide this information with great delicacy, but clearly and at the appropriate time.* Parents' words should be *neither too explicit nor too vague*. Giving too many details to children is counterproductive. But delaying the first information for too long is imprudent, because every human person has natural curiosity in this regard and, sooner or later, children begin to ask themselves questions, especially in cultures where too much can be seen, even in public.²¹

64. Children's Principal Stages of Development

64a) The Years of Innocence

One of Christian parents' important duties is that of preparing their children, as soon as they reach an appropriate age, for the reception of the Sacraments of *Penance* and the *Eucharist*.

At this age, children cannot integrate premature sexual information with moral responsibility. Such information tends to shatter their emotional and educational development. In general, the first sexual information to be given to a small child does not deal with genital sexuality, but rather with pregnancy and the birth of a brother or sister. Parents can take advantage of this happy experience to communicate some simple facts about pregnancy, but always in the deepest context of wonder at the creative work of God, who wants the new life he has given to be cared for in the mother's body, near her heart.²²

64b) Puberty

Puberty, which constitutes the initial phase of adolescence, is a time of self-discovery of one's own inner world, the time of generous plans, the time when the feeling of love awakens with the biological impulses of sexuality, the time of the desire to be together, and the time of particularly intense joy connected with the exhilarating discovery of life. But it is often also the age of deeper questioning, anguished or even frustrating searching, a certain mistrust of others and dangerous introspection, and sometimes the age of the first experiences of setbacks and disappointments. In this phase, the genital aspects in the context of procreation, marriage, and the family are educational matters of concern.

Instruction for both girls and boys should aim at pointing out the beauty of motherhood and the wonderful reality of procreation, as well as the deep meaning of virginity.

During puberty, the psychological and emotional development of boys can make them vulnerable to erotic fantasies, and they may be tempted to try sexual experiences. Parents should be close to their children and correct the tendency to use sexuality in a hedonistic and materialistic way.

To form their consciences, parents should teach their children that God has a project of love for every person, that moral law is positive and liberating, and that sin has caused a certain weakness in us. Thus, one should fight against natural bad inclinations; the main means is grace, which strengthens us on our path toward salvation. One's conscience must not be confused with a vague subjective feeling or personal opinion.²³

64c) Adolescence

The principal task of parents consists in imparting to their adolescent children a catechesis that leads them to grasp a genuinely Christian understanding of life. This catechesis must shed the light of the Christian message on those realities, which have greater impact on the adolescent, such as the meaning of bodily existence, love and the family, the standards to be followed in life, in work and in leisure, in justice and peace, and so on.

(1) *A time of rebellion*

Adolescence is a time of *rebellion*. Having previously depended totally on their parents, adolescents begin to acquire an awareness of their own autonomy. This rebelliousness is a natural tendency in all human beings and should not upset any sensible parent. It is a part of the process of maturation. At the same time, parents should remain attentive to help, respect, foster, and orient their children's freedom, without accepting the frivolities and errors to which they are exposed.

Parents should be brothers and *friends of their children*, and, at the same time, bearers of a loftier truth and ideal. They should give their children the chance to open up their hearts confidently.

(2) *Teaching how to be free*

Parents should help adolescent children to understand that freedom is fundamentally the capacity of each person to live in accordance with laws and right reason, and that this great gift can be abused.

(3) *Discovering one's vocation*

In terms of personal development, adolescence represents the period of self-projection and, therefore, the discovery of one's vocation. Christian parents should educate their children for life in such a way that each one may fully perform his role according to the vocation that is received from God. The Church's teaching on the sublime value of virginity and celibacy and the vocational meaning of marriage must never be lacking.²⁴

(4) *Patiently and affectionately*

With regard to Christian life, parents have to give good example to their children and lead them with patient persuasion and affection. They

should not, however, impose Christian obligations by force.

(5) *Teaching purity*

The example of the parents is especially decisive in adolescence, the phase when young people are looking for living examples and attractive behavior models. Since sexual problems become more evident at this time, parents should also help them to love the beauty and strength of chastity through prudent advice, highlighting the inestimable value of prayer and frequent fruitful recourse to the sacraments for a chaste life, especially personal confession.

Masturbation particularly constitutes a very serious disorder that is illicit in itself and cannot be morally justified. Therefore, adolescents should be helped to overcome manifestations of this disorder, which often express the inner conflicts of their age and, in many cases, a selfish vision of sexuality.

A particular problem that can appear during the process of sexual maturation is *homosexuality*. A distinction must be made between a tendency that can be almost innate, and acts of homosexuality that are intrinsically disordered and contrary to natural law.

In the face of what hedonistic groups propose, especially in affluent societies, it is very important to present to young people the ideals of human and Christian solidarity and concrete ways of being committed in Church associations, movements, and voluntary Catholic and missionary activities.

Friendships are very important in this period. Through loving and patient advice, parents will help young people to avoid an excessive closing in on themselves.²⁵

64d) Toward Adulthood

The parents' mission does not end when their children come of legal age; young people need help when they enter the working world or higher education.

By keeping a confident dialogue that encourages a sense of responsibility and respects their children's legitimate and necessary autonomy, parents will always be their reference point, through both advice and example. Care should be taken that children do not discontinue their faith relationship with the Church.

In the period leading to *engagement* and in the choice of that preferred attachment that can lead to forming a family, the role of parents should not consist merely in prohibitions, much less in imposing the choice of a fiancé or fiancée.²⁶

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

65. Guidelines for Parents and Educators

For parents:

- Parents have the right to educate their children in conformity with their moral and religious conviction.
- Parents have the right to freely choose schools. The state and the Church have the obligation to give families all possible aid to enable them to properly perform their educational role. Public authorities must ensure that public subsidies are so allocated that parents are truly free to exercise this right without incurring unjust burdens.
- Parents have the right to ensure that their children are not compelled to attend classes that are not in agreement with their own moral and religious convictions. In particular, sex education is a basic right of the parents and must always be carried out under their close supervision, whether at home or in educational centers that are chosen and controlled by them.
- Parents must keep themselves informed on the programs, content, and methodology that are used to impart supplementary education to their children. The rights of parents are violated when they are forced to accept policies, educators, and programs that are contrary to the educational credo of the parents.
- If ideologies that are opposed to the Christian faith are taught in schools, the family must join with other families—through family associations, if possible—and with all its strength and wisdom help the young not to depart from the faith. In this case, the family needs special assistance from pastors of souls, who must never forget that parents have the inviolable right to entrust their children to the ecclesial community.
- Parents must be free to create study centers and to manage them. The state must be vigilant about the quality of schools and teachers, but cannot monopolize schools, programs of study, textbooks, etc.
- The family has the right to expect that the means of social communication will be positive instruments for the building up of society, and will reinforce the fundamental values of the family.²⁷

These criteria are demanded by the respect for the dignity of the human person and not because of any particular religious persuasion. But

these rights remain solely theoretical if the state does not subsidize private schools in a way that is similar to its subsidizing the public schools, whatever the specific system may be. An example of a fair system is the so-called *scholastic allowance* (or voucher program), in which each child is allocated the cost of one place at a public school. In this way, the parents will not find themselves, in practice, obliged to have recourse to the public school as the only feasible solution.²⁸

For all educators:

- No educator—not even parents—can interfere with a child’s right to chastity (cf. Mt 18:4–7).
- Respect should be given to *the right of the child and the young person to be adequately informed* by their own parents on moral and sexual questions in a way that complies with his desire to be chaste and to be formed in chastity.
- Respect should be given to *the right of the child or young person to withdraw from any form of sexual instruction that is imparted outside the home.*²⁹

66. Four Working Principles and their Particular Norms

Education for love can take concrete form in four *working principles*:

- i) Human sexuality is a sacred mystery and must be presented according to the doctrinal and moral teaching of the Church, always bearing in mind the effects of original sin.
- ii) Only information that is proportionate to each phase of their individual development should be presented to children and young people.
- iii) No material of an erotic nature should be presented to children or young people of any age, individually or in a group.
- iv) No one should ever be invited, let alone obliged, to act in any way that could objectively offend modesty or subjectively offend his own decorum or sense of privacy.³⁰

67. Recommended Methods

- The normal and fundamental method of education is personal dialogue between parents and their children, that is, individual formation within the family circle.
- As couples or as individuals, parents can get together with others who are prepared for education for love to draw on their experience and competence. These people can offer explanations and provide parents with books and other resources that are approved by the ecclesiastical authorities. Parents who find it very difficult to face up to the problematic side of education for love can have meetings with their children, guided by these expert persons.
- In certain situations, parents can entrust part of education for love to another trustworthy person, if there are matters that require specific competence or pastoral care in particular cases.
- Catechesis on morality may be provided by other trustworthy persons, with particular emphasis on sexual ethics at puberty and adolescence. Parents should take an interest in the moral catechesis that is given to their own children outside the home and use it as a support for their own educational work. Such catechesis must not include the more intimate aspects of sexual information, whether biological or affective, which belong to individual formation within the family.
- The religious formation of the parents themselves—in particular, solid catechetical preparation of adults in the truth of love—builds the foundations of a mature faith that can guide them in the formation of their own children. This adult catechesis enables them not only to deepen their understanding of the community of life and love in marriage, but also helps them learn how to communicate better with their own children. To make parents capable of carrying out their educational work, special formation courses with the help of experts can be promoted.³¹

1. Cf. *GE*, 3; John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 36.
2. Cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, *Guidelines for Education within the Family*, 40, 149.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, 50, 51.
4. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 39.
5. Cf. John Paul II, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, Oct. 22, 1983.
6. Cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, *Guidelines for Education within the Family*, 22, 23, 24, 25.
7. *GE*, 5.
8. *GS*, 35.
9. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 37.
10. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 27.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, *Guidelines for Education within the Family*, 1, 47.
13. Cf. *Ibid.*, 32, 115, 120, 149.
14. Cf. *Ibid.*, 52, 53.
15. Cf. *Ibid.*, 55, 58.
16. Cf. *Ibid.*, 57.
17. Cf. *Ibid.*, 59–60.
18. Cf. *Ibid.*, 61.
19. Cf. *Ibid.*, 62.
20. Cf. *Ibid.*, 64.
21. Cf. *Ibid.*, 65–75.
22. Cf. *Ibid.*, 76.
23. Cf. *Ibid.*, 87, 88, 92, 93, 95.
24. Cf. *Ibid.*, 98–101.
25. Cf. *Ibid.*, 102–104, 106–108.
26. Cf. *Ibid.*, 109–111.
27. Cf. John Paul II, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, Oct. 22, 1983; Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 40.
28. Cf. R. García de Haro, *Marriage and the Family in the Documents of the Magisterium*, 281.
29. Cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, *Guidelines for Education within the Family*, 118–120.
30. Cf. *Ibid.*, 121–127.
31. Cf. *Ibid.*, 128–134.

Part IV

**RELATION BETWEEN THE FAMILY AND
SOCIETY**

38

Participation in the Development of
Society

68. The Family, Origin and Principle of Society

The family is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life.

The Church recognizes that the family is *the first and vital cell of society*, a school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of society. The family remains the true foundation of society, constituting its natural and fundamental nucleus.

The family has a social task within society. “The family is by nature and vocation open to other families and to society; it takes upon itself an important social role.”¹ This social task is not something added to its being, but is carried out by the family being what it is. Family life is an initiation into life in society.

68a) Family Life, an Experience of Communion and Participation

The first and fundamental contribution of the family to society *is the very experience of communion and sharing* that should characterize the family's daily life.

The family contains in itself the very future of society. Its most special task is to contribute effectively to a future of peace.

The relationship between the members of the family community are inspired and guided by the law of "free giving." By respecting and fostering personal dignity in each and every one as the only basis for value, this free giving takes the form of heartfelt acceptance, encounter and dialogue, disinterested availability, generous service, and deep solidarity...

Thus, by becoming what it must be, the family fosters authentic and mature communion between persons, and becomes a school of social life, an example and stimulus for the broader community relationships marked by respect, justice, dialogue, and love. The family is thus, the place of origin and the most effective means for humanizing and personalizing society.²

68b) Social and Political Function of the Family

The family contributes to the good of society *by means of works of social service, especially by means of hospitality, whether material or spiritual*: by opening the door of one's home, and still more of one's heart, to the pleas of one's brothers and sisters. The family renders this service in a more human—and surely less costly—way than the state. A just family wage will spare the wife from working outside the home out of financial necessity, as often is the case, and this will solve many educational problems.³

69. Society at the Service of the Family

Society and the state must serve the family; they must make it possible for it to obtain the help of which it has need, without absorbing the tasks that are proper to the family.

69a) Complementarity of Functions: the Principle of Subsidiarity

Society and the state have a grave obligation to practice the principle of subsidiarity by soliciting the greatest possible and responsible initiative from the family. The intervention of public authorities is regulated by the principle of subsidiarity:

By virtue of this principle, the State cannot and must not take away from families the functions that they can just as well perform on their own or in free associations; instead it must positively favor and encourage as far as possible responsible initiative by families. In the conviction that the good of the family is an indispensable and essential value of the civil community, the public authorities must do everything possible to ensure that families have all those aids—economic, social, educational, political, and cultural assistance—that they need in order to face all their responsibilities in a human way.⁴

70. Fundamental Rights of the Family

The Church has encouraged the establishment of the inalienable and natural rights of the family in the *Charter of Rights of the Family*. Pope John Paul II, in the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, provided a list of the most important rights. These are the following:

- The right to found a family, support it, and exercise proper responsibility in the transmission of life and education of the children
- The right to the stability of the bond and institution of marriage
- The right to believe in and profess one's faith and propagate it
- The right to bring up children in accordance with the family's own traditions and religious and cultural values, with the necessary instruments, means, and institutions
- The right—especially of the poor and the sick—to obtain physical, social, political, and economic security
- The right to housing that is suitable for living family life in a proper way
- The right to expression and representation, either directly or through associations, before the economic, social, and cultural public authorities and lower authorities
- The right to form associations with other families and institutions in order to fulfill the family's role suitably and expeditiously
- The right to protect minors by adequate institutions and legislation from the harmful effects of drugs, pornography, alcoholism, etc.
- The right to wholesome recreation of a kind that also fosters family values
- The right of the elderly to a worthy life and a worthy death
- The right to emigrate as a family in search of a better life⁵

71. Some Errors on the Concept of Family

(1) *Liberal individualism*

Liberalism places the individual above the family and society with the consequent decrease of the common good. Thus, there is a high risk of falling into egoism that condones a pleasure-seeking “permissivism,” and ends in partial or total blindness to social justice and the common good.

When there is defective individualism, the concern for the individual and for the primacy of the person loses its balance, and becomes self-interest wrongly understood. By losing the sense of solidarity, common good and real human happiness disappear. This concern becomes “permissivism,” which is *laissez faire* in the wrong sense. It fails to see that society is precisely the means for man to attain his eternal fulfillment beyond this temporal life, and so society must also be good, and the individual is responsible for making it good.

Moreover, defective individualism ends up substituting the love of oneself (pure self-love) for the love of God and neighbor. Egoism becomes the rule of life, and even God is seen only as an accessory, i.e., “If God makes me happy, then I accept him.” From this practical atheism, it is easy to slide into a practical type of materialism.⁶ The impact of liberal ideology is felt on the family and human life:

The family is the singular victim of all this type of liberalism, materialism, rationalism, and pragmatism. When the hedonistic principle of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain at all costs is applied to the family, “reasons” can easily be found to justify divorce. When one equates happiness to sensible pleasure, suffering is rejected as evil; and when human marriage is equated to animal mating, it is easy to find “reasons” for marital infidelity and for the legalization of divorce. And since those “reasons” are based on self-centeredness and the hedonistic principles, the children of those “broken homes” dutifully “learn” such motivation, and so the spiral of evil keeps poisoning society.

With this hedonistic mentality, plenty of reasons can be found to justify all those practices against human life and its incalculable value. With those reasons abortion is legalized next to divorce, and contraceptives and sterilizations are made liberally available and encouraged. And the next thing to be legalize is euthanasia....

Meanwhile, sex and violence (contempt for human life and its origin) become the staple fare for the mass media and the largest source of revenue and business: the ultimate degradation of human dignity.⁷

(2) *Marxism*

Marxists advocate the eventual abolition of the family. To Marx and Engels, the original state of mankind was a community of goods and free love. It was only when private property was accepted that the need for security led to stable institutions such as marriage and the family, and the consequent enslavement of the woman. Thus, communists would “emancipate” the woman from the drudgery of family life, of having to raise children. They would beget children only when they want and with whom they want. They will bring them up in any way they want, with or without a male companion.

Christianity can correct the possible errors of liberalism and socialism, but this is not possible with Marxist socialism and communism, due to the constitutional atheism of this ideology and its radical denial of the spiritual transcendence of man and of the dignity of the individual person.⁸

1. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 42; cf. CCC, 2207–2213.
2. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 43.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, 44; CCC, 2208; R. García de Haro, *Marriage and the Family in the Documents of the Magisterium*, 366.
4. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 45.
5. Cf. *Ibid.*, 46; CCC, 2211.
6. Cf. J.M. de Torre, *Informal Talks on the Family and Society*, 107–121.
7. *Ibid.*, 121–122.
8. Cf. *Ibid.*, 132–135.

Part V

**THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY
IN THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH**

39

Family Participation in the Life and
Mission of the Church

72. Ecclesiastical Identity of the Christian Family

Christian spouses, by virtue of the sacrament of marriage, are the sign of the mystery of unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5:21–33). Thus, the ecclesial status of marriage (and of the family) is based on a sacrament. *The Christian family is, in its proper way, the image and figure of the Church.*

As in any other sacrament, the purpose of Christian marriage is to sanctify people, build up the body of Christ, and give worship to God. Christian spouses and parents are included in the universal call to sanctity. This call is carried out concretely in the realities that are proper to their conjugal and family life. This requires from them an authentic and profound conjugal and family spirituality. As worshippers leading holy lives in every place, they consecrate the world itself to God.

The family is not only a symbol of the Church but also *a realization* of her; it builds the Church here on earth by being part of her life and mission. Thus, the family can be seen as a miniature Church (*Ecclesia domestica*), because it is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church.¹ The spouses participate in this mystery by helping one another to attain holiness in their conjugal life and in the acceptance and education of the children.

73. The Family, Participant of the Mission of the Church

Among the fundamental tasks of the Christian family is its ecclesial task: The family is placed at the service of the building up of the Kingdom of God in history by participating in the life and mission of the Church.²

We should distinguish, however, between the mission of the *hierarchy* and the mission of the *laity*; these are two specific ways of participating in the total mission of the Church, the people of God.

The apostolic mission that is proper to the family—stemming from the universal call to holiness—is a true *ecclesial activity*, a real participation in the apostolate *of the Church*. It is not a participation of married people in the ecclesiastical activities of the hierarchy. To reduce the apostolate of the Christian family to such participation would be an impoverishment of the doctrine.³

74. The Ecclesial Mission that is Proper to the Family

The Christian family fulfills its proper mission by building up the Church through the everyday realities that concern and distinguish its *state of life*. Family members share the same apostolic zeal, and are committed to works of service.

The family has a specific and original ecclesial role: The Christian family is called upon to take part actively and responsibly in the mission of the Church in a way that is original and specific by placing itself in what it is and what it does as an “intimate community of life and love” at the service of the Church and of society.

Since the Christian family is a community in which the relationships are renewed by Christ through faith and the sacraments, the family’s sharing in the Church’s mission should follow *a community pattern*: The spouses together *as a couple*, the parents and children *as a family*, must live their service to the Church and to the world. They must be “of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32) in faith, through the shared apostolic zeal that animates them and through their shared commitment to works of service in the ecclesial and civil communities.

The Christian family also builds up the kingdom of God in history through the everyday realities that concern and distinguish its *state of life*. It is thus in the *love between husband and wife and between the members of the family*—a love lived out in all its extraordinary richness of values and demands: totality, oneness, fidelity and fruitfulness—that the Christian family’s participation in the prophetic, priestly and kingly mission of Jesus Christ and of his Church finds expression and realization. Therefore, love and life constitute the nucleus of the saving mission of the Christian family in the Church and for the Church.⁴

74a) The Supernatural Calling to Sanctity and Apostolate

Christian couples are to be consistent with their faith by the testimony of their lives. All are called to sanctity. This calling is not essentially different from the vocation of all persons to the faith of Christ, since sanctity is but the development and fruit of the seed of faith planted in our soul by Baptism.

What, then, are the specific demands of sanctity for married people? They should lend themselves to God's service by giving themselves reciprocally, one to the other, for the purpose of mutual perfection and the procreation and education of children. The Church sees Christian marriage as a supernatural vocation to holiness, and for this reason, also as the principle of a specific apostolic mission.⁵ Everyone in the family should seek sanctity and help others get closer to Christ; in doing so, they share in the threefold ministry of Jesus Christ.

75. The Prophetic, Priestly, and Royal Ministry of Jesus Christ

The Christian family participates according to its specific mode in the prophetic, priestly, and pastoral (or royal) ministry—the three *munera*—of Jesus Christ and the Church.

Having laid the foundation of the participation of the Christian family in the Church's mission, it is now time to illustrate its substance in reference to Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest and King—three aspects of a single reality—by presenting the Christian family as 1) a believing and evangelizing community, 2) a community in dialogue with God, and 3) a community at the service of man.⁶

76. The Family Home, Place and Means of Sanctification (Priestly Role)

The Christian family has a *priestly role* that can and ought to be exercised in intimate communion with the whole Church through the daily realities of married and family life. In this way, *the Christian family is called to be sanctified and to sanctify the ecclesial community and the world.*

The Church has a sanctuary in the home. The Christian family is a community in dialogue with God and has a priestly role:

- *Marriage becomes a sacrament of mutual sanctification and an act of worship.* The Church teaches that this sanctification is carried out concretely in the realities that are proper to their conjugal and family life.
- The Christian family's sanctifying role is based in *Baptism* and has its highest expression in the *Eucharist*.
- *The Sacrament of Conversion and Reconciliation* is an essential part of the Christian family's sanctifying role, which consists in accepting the call to conversion.
- In addition to the sacraments, *family prayer* achieves the transformation of the daily lives of family members into spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. It is prayer offered *in common*, husband and wife together, parents and children together.

Apart from morning and evening prayers, certain forms of prayer are encouraged, such as reading and meditating on the word of God, preparation for the reception of the sacraments, devotion and consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and various forms of veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Among these should be mentioned the recitation of the rosary, grace before and after meals, and observance of some popular devotions.⁷

77. The Christian Family as a Believing and Evangelizing Community (Prophetic Role)

A Christian family is *a believing and evangelizing community*. The family appears as a prophetic community when it becomes a school of sanctity for each of its members and *irradiates that same universal calling to sanctity onto the others*.

Faith that is lived in love makes the Christian family a fire that sheds its light on many other families. Thus, a Christian family teaches with the words of its members, and with the testimony of their lives. This apostolic mission of the family flows from what the family itself is; it is exercised through fidelity to its own proper being as a community of life and love. This apostolic mission of the family is rooted in Baptism and receives from the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage new strength to transmit the faith, to sanctify and transform our present society according to God's plan. The apostolate of the family has two dimensions:

- i) It is exercised among its own members.
- ii) It makes Christian married couples and parents witnesses of Christ "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).⁸

78. At the Service of Mankind (Pastoral Mission)

The family exercises its pastoral (or kingly) task by putting itself at the service of human beings, as Christ did, and as he asks his disciples to do. This service pertains to the laity in a specific way: Lay people serve mankind *by sanctifying the temporal structures*, so that these might be delivered out of their slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (cf. Rom. 8:21). Lay people serve the Church by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will. Thus, the family makes the Church present and fruitful in a wide circle of places and circumstances.

Love goes beyond our brothers and sisters of the same faith. In each individual—especially in the poor, the weak, and those who suffer or are unjustly treated—love knows how to discover the face of Christ, and discover a fellow human being to be loved and served.

While building up the Church in love, with a sense of justice and concern for others, the Christian family places itself at the service of the human person and the world, bringing about real human advancement.⁹

1. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 49.
2. Cf. *Ibid.*, 49.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, 34.
4. *Ibid.*, 50; cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 9.
5. Cf. *GS*, 52.
6. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 50; cf. *CCC*, 897–913.
7. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 55–59; *LG*, 10, 41.
8. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 52–54.
9. Cf. *Ibid.*, 63, 64; *LG*, 36.

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Pastoral Care of the Family

79. General Principles on the Pastoral Care of the Family

The purpose of pastoral care is to help couples in their growth toward the model of a family that the Creator intended from the beginning and that Christ has renewed with his redeeming grace. It is accomplished through *a constant work of formation*. This is a matter of fundamental significance, because the future of the world and the Church passes through the family.

79a) Stages of Pastoral Care

The Church's Magisterium establishes the *stages* of pastoral care. This constant work of catechesis begins with the preparation for marriage, continues in its celebration, and later throughout the whole life of the spouses. Marriage preparation has to be seen and put into practice as a gradual and continuous process. The process includes three main stages:

- i) *Remote preparation* begins in infancy and must show that marriage is a true vocation and mission, without excluding the possibility of the total gift of self to God in the vocation to celibacy for the Kingdom of God, to the priestly or religious life.
- ii) *Proximate preparation* is directed to a more specific preparation for the sacraments, as it were, a rediscovery of them.
- iii) *Immediate preparation* is aimed at discovering the richness of marriage. It must always be set forth and put into practice, but omitting it is not an impediment to the celebration of marriage.

The catechesis ought to be developed also in the *celebration of marriage*, inasmuch as this is an expression of the essentially ecclesial and sacramental nature of the conjugal covenant between the baptized, in such a way that it nourishes the dispositions of those who are getting married and, particularly, their faith.

Catechesis ought to accompany the spouses *after the marriage*, by helping them discover and live their new vocation and mission, so that they learn to accept their children and love them as a gift received from the Lord of life and joyfully help them in their human and Christian growth.

One should not fall into rash judgment by judging the lack of faith of those who wish to contract marriage, in such a way that the celebration would be unjustly delayed. A delay would be justified only if they show that they explicitly and formally reject what the Church intends to do when the marriage of baptized persons is celebrated.¹

79b) Structures of Family Pastoral Care

Familiaris Consortio emphasizes the need to reach a deeper grasp of the truth, in such a way that the catechesis leads to a *formation of consciences*. Otherwise, the truth becomes a subjective feeling and does not become a source of life. Consciences must be correctly formed according to Christian values and not according to the standards of public opinion. The structures for the pastoral care of the family are:

- the ecclesial community (in particular, the parish),
- the family itself,
- associations of families.

80. Pastoral Care of the Family in Difficult Cases

A generous and intelligent pastoral commitment is required to help all those who find themselves—whether of their own fault or not—in difficult situations. The deepest causes of these situations should be studied and specific measures should be applied for each case. Such difficult circumstances, for example, are:

- the families of migrant workers,
- the families of those who are obliged to be away for long periods of times, such as members of the armed forces, sailors, and all kinds of itinerant people,
- the families of those in prison, refugees, and exiles,
- families in big cities living, practically speaking, as outcasts,
- families with no home,
- incomplete or single-parent families,
- families with children that are handicapped or addicted to drugs,
- families of alcoholics.

In cases of mixed marriages, attention must be paid to the obligations that faith imposes on the Catholic spouse with regard to the free exercise of the faith and the consequent obligation to ensure, as far as is possible, the baptism and upbringing of children in the Catholic faith. The Catholic spouse should be strengthened in faith and positively helped to mature in understanding and practicing the faith.²

81. Pastoral Action in Certain Irregular Situations

There are irregular situations that entail a falsification of love.

81a) Trial Marriages

Human reason leads one to see that trial marriages are unacceptable by showing the unconvincing nature of carrying out an “experiment” with human beings, whose dignity demands that they should be always and solely the object of a self-giving love without limitations of time or of any other circumstance.

81b) “Free” Unions

“Free” unions (or *live-in* partnerships) are unions without any publicly recognized institutional bond, either civil or religious. “Free” unions provoke grave religious and moral consequences (the loss of the religious sense of marriage seen in the light of the covenant of God with his people, deprivation of the grace of the sacrament, grave scandal), as well as social consequences (the destruction of the concept of the family, the weakening of the sense of fidelity, possible psychological damage to the children, the strengthening of selfishness).

The Church reaches out to couples in these sad situations, advising pastors to make tactful and respectful contact with them, enlighten them patiently, correct them charitably, and show them the witness of the Christian family life in order to smooth the path for them to regularize their situation.³

81c) Separated or Divorced Persons Who Have Not Remarried

Various reasons can unfortunately lead to the often irreparable breakdown of valid marriages. These include mutual lack of understanding and the inability to enter into interpersonal relationships. Obviously, separation must be considered as a last resort, after all other reasonable attempts at reconciliation have proved unsuccessful.

Loneliness and other difficulties are often the lot of separated spouses, especially when they are the innocent parties. The ecclesial community must support such people more than ever. It must give them much respect, solidarity, understanding, and practical help, so that they can preserve their fidelity even in their difficult situation. It must also help them to cultivate the need to forgive, which is inherent in Christian love, and to be ready, perhaps, to return to their former married life.

The situation is similar for people who have undergone civil divorce, but, being well aware that the valid marriage bond is indissoluble, refrain from becoming involved in a new union and devote themselves solely to carrying out their family duties and the responsibilities of Christian life. Here, it is even more necessary for the Church to offer continual love and assistance without there being an obstacle to admission to the sacraments.⁴

81d) Civil Marriages and Divorced Persons Who Have Remarried

The divorced and remarried are and remain members of the Church, because they have received Baptism and retain their Christian faith. The Church loves them and suffers because of their situation. The aim of pastoral action should be to make people who are entangled in *civil marriage* understand the need for consistency between their choice of lifestyle and the faith that they profess. Pastors should try to do everything possible to induce them to regularize their situation in the light of Christian principles.

Pastors and the whole community of the faithful should help the *divorced* so that they do not consider themselves as separated from the Church. They should be encouraged to listen to the word of God, attend the sacrifice of the Mass, persevere in prayer, contribute to works of charity and the community effort for justice, bring up their children in the Christian faith, and cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God's grace. However, so long as the irregularity continues, Catholics who are involved in civil marriages cannot be admitted to the sacraments. This holds true not only for those who simply live together outside marriage but for all irregular unions, e.g., Catholics who have been united only in a civil ceremony, and *divorced Catholics who have remarried*.

The Church reaffirms her practice, which is based upon Sacred Scripture, of not admitting to Eucharistic Communion divorced persons who have remarried. In truth, they exclude themselves, since they place themselves in objective contradiction to the union of love between Christ and the Church. This love is signified and effected by the Eucharist. Besides this, there is another special pastoral reason: If these people were admitted to the Eucharist, the faithful would be led into confusion regarding the Church's teaching about the indissolubility of marriage.⁵

For the same reasons, the Church forbids any pastor to perform ceremonies of any kind for divorced people who remarry. The Church, naturally, distinguishes carefully the case of those who have not caused this kind of situation but are rather its victims, while remaining faithful to their marriage vows. They should be praised for their example of fidelity and

Christian consistency, which takes on particular value as a witness before the world and the Church.⁶

81e) Those without a Family

The Church is a home and family for everyone, especially for those who are homeless and live in conditions of extreme poverty. There is an urgent need to work courageously in order to find solutions at the economic, social, and political levels that will assist them in overcoming their inhuman conditions of degradation. For all, the Church reaffirms that “the future of humanity passes by way of the family.”⁷ And the Church reminds all to have recourse to the Holy Family of Nazareth, “the prototype and example for all Christian families.”⁸

81f) Pastoral Recommendations

Agents of pastoral care should help people who are involved in irregular situations with genuine love, but without making any compromises, which would only aggravate their condition. They should make use of:

- the solidarity of the whole community,
- the virtue of mercy respecting, at the same time, the truth of marriage,
- trust in God's law and in the Church's provisions, which lovingly protect marriage and the family,
- the virtue of hope.

Furthermore, the whole Christian community should support the *fidelity to the Sacrament of Marriage* by a constant commitment to:

- providing for the preparation and celebration of the sacrament,
- explaining the value and meaning of conjugal and family love,
- guiding each family member to improve his Christian life,
- encouraging separated or divorced couples to remain faithful to the duties of their marriage,
- promoting doctrinal formation of pastoral workers,
- praying for those who are experiencing difficulties in their marriage,
- distributing pastoral guidelines.

Pastors, relatives, and friends should *help the couple to overcome these problems*. Everything possible should be done to bring about reconciliation.

Spiritual guidance should be given to lead the couple to conversion. Priority should be given to the regularization of their situation.

1. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 66–69; R. García de Haro, *Marriage and the Family in the Documents of the Magisterium*, 376.
2. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 77, 78.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, 80, 81.
4. Cf. *Ibid.*, 83.
5. Cf. CCC, 1650.

6. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 82–84.
7. *Ibid.*, 86.
8. *Ibid.*; cf. R. García de Haro, *Marriage and the Family in the Documents of the Magisterium*, 380.

The Last Things

by Carlos Escartín

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The Last Things

by Carlos Escartín

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Introduction

THE STUDY OF the Last Things is the branch of sacred theology that studies what lies beyond man and the world. It explains what revelation—contained in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition—tells us about the events that shall take place at the end of the world and those following each person’s death.

This study is sometimes called *de novissimis* (“last things” in Latin), and also *eschatology* (from the Greek *eskhata*, “last things,” and *logos*, “study”). Both titles emphasize that it deals with the *end*, with the ultimate events of both the world and history, and of each person’s life on earth.

The study of the Last Things is usually placed toward the end of the theology curriculum. This subject is closely linked with the study of creation and Redemption. Moreover, it heavily depends on the truths that are provided by metaphysics on one hand and revelation on the other.¹

It will be helpful, therefore, to recall the main principles of what we may call Christian anthropology—the principal truths about man, his nature, origin, and end. Some of these truths are attainable through reason alone, and others only through divine revelation.

1. What is Man?

Man is a being who is directly created by God in his origin.² Two elements or principles constitute man, namely, a material body and an immortal and spiritual soul. These two are substantially united to each other; they constitute only one substance, the soul acting as substantial form of the body. Each person has his own soul, directly created by God when it is infused into the body. The body, on the other hand, comes from the parents through generation. The whole human race comes from one couple.³

This particular teaching is especially relevant today. Some emphasize the personal *unity* of man to the extent of reducing his being to pure matter. They thus deny the existence of the spiritual soul—proved by experience and metaphysics, and always upheld by the Magisterium. Others claim that the body-soul *duality* of man is an idea of Hellenic rather than biblical origin. This leads to denying *intermediate eschatology*—the events that befall man between death and resurrection.

Those who claim that the Church's doctrine about man is based on Hellenic dualism show great ignorance of both Greek philosophy and biblical teachings on the body-soul composition of man. Hellenic anthropology and biblical anthropology differ greatly in their principles, methods of analysis, and conclusions. It is true, though, that Tradition, in order to convey the concept of man that is found in Sacred Scripture, has used Hellenic-like terminology, but it has retained a strictly biblical content. As a summary, we can say:

The doctrine of faith on the nature of man is clear and constant. Man is described as a being composed of body and soul, which are joined together in a profound unity. This duality in no way resembles that “dualism” having such derogatory connotations in Anthropology. Actually, “dualists” are those who, lacking an understanding of the intimate union between body and soul, conceive the marvelous human *microcosm* as two things (matter and spirit) accidentally and superficially united like water in a glass. These comparisons are used by Neoplatonic dualists, and Gnostics, to express their idea of man. Against that doctrine, we must affirm that the body and the soul are intimately joined together, forming a single being. But those in the opposite extreme also go against reality and the doctrine of the Church. Overreacting perhaps against a stereotyped dualism, or because of materialistic prejudices, they reduce man to mere matter or deny the specific properties of the components of man, like the spirituality and immortality of the soul.⁴

1. The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in the letter *Recentiores Episcoporum Synodi* (“On Certain Questions Pertaining to Eschatology”) pointed out that some hypotheses that question the existence of the soul raise doubts against the faith upheld by the Church. The letter goes on, saying that “if the content of the words ‘life everlasting’ is uncertain for Christians, the promises contained in the Gospel and the meaning of Creation and Redemption disappear, and even earthly life itself must be said to be deprived of all hope.”
2. Cf. CCC, 355–384.
3. Cf. DS 461, 462, 502, 567, 2135, 3514, 3897.
4. Manuel Guerra, *El Enigma del Hombre* (Pamplona, Spain: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 1978), 162–163.

Part I

THE LAST THINGS OF MAN

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Death

THE DOCTRINE ON man's eternal destiny is especially relevant today. Materialistic trends, setting their goals in the goods of this life, can completely erase from our minds any thought of the afterlife: the fact that, after death, man is destined to reach his definitive, eternal destiny. After losing sight of God,¹ the next step is usually the loss of the sense of sin, which puts man in danger of eternal perdition. The question of our eternal destiny forces us to face a tremendous reality: the extreme alternatives of eternal salvation and eternal damnation. For this reason, the Pope declares:

Nor can the Church omit, without serious mutilation of her essential message, a constant catechesis on what traditional Christian language calls the four *last things of man*: death, judgment (universal and particular), hell and heaven. In a culture that tends to imprison man in the earthly life at which he is more or less successful, the Pastors of the Church are asked to provide a catechesis that will reveal and illustrate with the certainties of faith what comes after the present life: beyond the mysterious gates of death, an eternity of joy in communion with God or the punishment of separation from him. Only in this eschatological vision can one realize the exact nature of sin and feel decisively moved to penance and reconciliation.²

2. Notion of Death

Death is a fact of experience.³ We see people dying everyday, yet the real nature of death escapes us. We can observe only that, after a given moment, a certain organism is no longer alive. It seems to lose its unifying vital principle, and decays. Philosophically speaking, *death* is defined as the *separation of body and soul*. This wider and deeper insight transcends the mere experimental and sensible evidence. Since the soul is the body's vital principle and the substantial form of man, this separation brings about the disintegration or corruption of the body, the material organism that, up to then, had been animated by the soul.

In Sacred Scripture, to die is “to depart” or to “be away from the body” (Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:8). These and other analogous expressions suggest that death is the *dissolution of the unity in man*, or the moment in which *the soul leaves the body*. The decomposition of the body is evident, but simple beings (those that are not substantially composed) like pure spirits or the soul cannot be dissolved or decomposed.

Death, understood as the separation of body and soul, pertains to the doctrine of the faith since it is expressly affirmed in both the Old and the New Testaments (cf. Wis 3:2; 7:6; Eccl 12:6–7; Phil 1:21, 23; 2 Tm 4:6; 2 Cor 5:8–9).

It is absolutely necessary to assert the survival and subsistence of the soul after death. It is demonstrable by reason alone, and has been repeatedly taught by the Church. The whole of eschatology rests on this premise. The Fifth Lateran Council (A.D. 1513) solemnly defined the spirituality and the immortality of the soul. It expressly recalled the formula used by the General Council of Vienna (1311–1312) against the errors of Peter John Olivi.⁴

After the separation of body and soul, the body decays while the soul subsists by virtue of its spiritual nature. Later on, we will study in detail the situation of the separated soul.

Since each human has an individual soul, which is created at the moment of informing the body,⁵ a person dies only once. There is no more than one death. We can, of course, use *death* analogically to refer to sin, since it causes the loss of grace, and therefore, the loss of supernatural life.

Common experience also shows that one dies only once. Moreover, the epistle to the Hebrews clearly states that “it is appointed for men to die once” (Heb 9:27).

On the other hand, we know that our Lord resurrected people, as in the case of Lazarus (cf. Jn 11:41ff). These were not the final and definitive resurrections that we will consider later. The Magisterium has not said anything on this matter, but most theologians hold that these deaths were only *provisional* in nature. It was as such that God ordained them to happen, since these people were destined to live again by a miracle, and later on die once more. Obviously, these were completely extraordinary and exceptional cases.

3. Cause and Origin of Death

The first question to examine is the reason for death. Divine revelation teaches us in no uncertain terms that “God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things that they might exist, and the generative forces [creatures] of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them; and the dominion of Hades is not on earth” (Wis 1:13–14).

When God created man, besides investing him with the supernatural gifts of grace, he gave him other privileges. These are known as the *preternatural gifts* since they perfected human nature within its own order, yet they were not strictly demanded by nature itself. One of these gifts was the *bodily immortality* that Adam was meant to pass on, with life itself, to his own descendants. Even though man possessed a mortal nature, God destined him not to die.⁶

Material beings, like the human body, are naturally corruptible. Adam and Eve, therefore, would have been naturally mortal before original sin had God not granted them immortality as an additional and gratuitous privilege.

After sin, Adam lost the preternatural gift of immortality, together with all the other gratuitous gifts and privileges, both supernatural and preternatural. This loss affects his descendants as well. From then on, man had to die as a *consequence of nature*, since the body is naturally corruptible, and also *as a penalty*, part of the punishment involving the loss of the supernatural life and preternatural gifts or privileges enjoyed by our first parents.⁷

What followed from the soul’s rebelling against God was the rebellion and disorder of the appetites (*fomes peccati*) and the entry of death, the “wages of sin” (Rom 6:23), into a world that had been made for life. “Bodily death, from which man would have been immune had he not sinned” (cf. Wis 1:13; 2:23–24; Rom 5:21; 6:23; Jas 1:15),⁸ is thus the last enemy of man, which must be overcome (cf. 1 Cor 15:16).

The penal character of death is a dogma of faith that is solemnly defined by the Church when she condemned the following proposition: “Adam, the first man, was created mortal so that, whether he sinned or not,

he would have died a bodily death, that is, he would have departed from the body, not as a punishment for sin, but by the necessity of his nature.”⁹

4. The Universality of Death

Death is universal; all men die, since they are descendants of Adam and Eve and, therefore, heirs of original sin.

This universality is seen in Sacred Scripture: “Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned” (Rom 5:12; cf. Gn 2:17; Wis 2:13–14; 1 Cor 15:22). The Council of Trent authoritatively interpreted the passages of Hebrews 2:14 and Romans 5:12, teaching that death is one of the consequences of original sin for the whole of mankind.¹⁰

The universal law of death—a consequence of original sin—does not have to be applied to the Blessed Virgin, who was conceived immaculate. The Church has always made an exception of Mary in the Magisterium regarding the consequences of original sin. *Munificentissimus Deus*, which defined the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, purposely left the question of her death unsolved. It affirms only that she was “immune to the corruption of the sepulcher,”¹¹ but it does not say whether she died or not. Some theologians focus on her Immaculate Conception. Since the Blessed Virgin had no original sin and was full of grace from the moment she was conceived, she did not have to die. Others stress that, because of her singular union with Christ, she has an exceptional role in the work of Redemption; she is often called co-redemptrix. That close union would call for her to share also in Christ’s painful experience of death.

Moreover, St. Paul says that “we shall not all sleep” (1 Cor 15:51), and makes reference to some “who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord” (1 Thes 4:15). These expressions may mean that those who are alive at the end of time will not die. Among Bible scholars and theologians, however, “it is held with greater probability and more commonly that all those who are alive at the coming of our Lord, will die and rise again shortly after.... If, however, it be true ... that they will never die the debt of death is nonetheless in them, and ... the punishment of death will be remitted by God, since he can also forgive the punishment due for actual sins.”¹²

Seen as a consequence of original sin, death itself becomes meaningful. This eventually explains the baffling problem of the existence of evil in the world. Catholic faith teaches that God is not distant and

arbitrary, but a God who comes down to earth to partake of the destiny of man—even death—in order to redeem him. Christ transformed death. Jesus, the Son of God, also suffered death—proper to human condition. In spite of being deeply distressed and troubled, Jesus took death upon himself as an act of total and free submission to the will of the Father. Jesus’ obedience transformed the curse of death into a blessing (cf. Rom 5:19–21).¹³

Christian death has a positive dimension. “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). “The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him” (2 Tm 2:11). In Baptism, a Christian “dies with Christ” sacramentally, to live a new life. If he dies in the grace of Christ, physical death completes his “dying with Christ” and perfects his incorporation into Christ in his redeeming action.

In this light, death acquires a new meaning: For man, *to die in Christ* is to participate in the Redemption (cf. Phil 2:7; Col 1:24).¹⁴

5. Death as End of the Time to Gain Merits

Death marks the end of the time to acquire merit; it is the end of the *status viatoris*, the time of trial. Right after death, one acquires the *definitive state*: eternal torment in hell, or eternal bliss in heaven—immediately or after a period of purification in purgatory. After death, there is no more time to change one’s mind, improve, or repent. The *Profession of Faith* proposed by Pope Clement IV to Michael Paleologus, who accepted it in the Second Council of Lyons (A.D. 1274), affirms: “If those who are truly penitent die in charity before they have done sufficient penance for their sins ... their souls are cleansed after death in purgatorial or cleansing punishments [that is, in purgatory].... The souls of those who have not committed any sin at all ... are promptly taken up into heaven. The souls of those who die in mortal sin ... soon go down into hell.”¹⁵

Sacred Scripture illustrates this truth in many ways: the parable of the rich man and the poor Lazarus (cf. Lk 16:19–31), that of the wise and the foolish virgins (cf. Mt 25:1–13), expressions like “Night [death] comes, when no one can work [win merits]” (Jn 9:4) or, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). This truth became especially clear on Calvary, when our Lord told the good thief: “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43).

After death, “there is no more space for repentance, no time for satisfaction. It is here where we lose or keep our life, where we gain our eternal salvation through the worship of God and the merit of faith. No one should feel that his sins or old age block the way back to salvation; as long as we are still in this world, it is never too late to repent. The doors of God’s pardon are always open, and entrance is easy for those who search for and come to understand the truth.”¹⁶ This aspect of death should impress a sense of urgency in our lives. We have only a limited time to accomplish our lives; thus, “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before ... the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Eccl 12:1–7). The Church encourages us to prepare ourselves for the hour of our death, to ask the Mother of God to intercede for us “at the hour of our death,” and to entrust ourselves to St. Joseph, the patron of a good death.¹⁷

When the soul leaves the body, it permanently adheres to the object that is chosen as its last end at the moment of death. It cannot, and will not, change its choice any more. When death comes, the will becomes irrevocably fixed in good or in evil, in a state of conversion to God or rejection of him. Up to that very moment, one can choose between salvation or condemnation, though, ordinarily, a person's final hour will be a consequence of what his life has been.

Sacred Scripture affirms in many places that, after having passed the frontiers of this life, no one can turn back (cf. Eccl 11:3; Mt 25:46; Lk 16:26; Gal 6:10; Jn 9:4). The Fathers of the Church also unanimously affirm this.

There is a theological explanation for this. The separated soul is a pure spirit; it no longer depends on the fickleness of the imagination and the senses. Consequently, it adheres to its chosen end in an unchangeable manner.

Theologians unanimously acknowledge that the ultimate reason why death ends the time of trial is that God himself has established it thus. His providence requires man to merit his last end. Neither the body alone nor the separated soul are meant to give moral actions a transcendent value; it is the whole human nature—body and soul—that performs meritorious actions. Consequently, it is reasonable for the time of trial—during which merit and sin are possible—to end when the body and the soul separate from each other.

Some people speak about *reincarnation*, meaning that, after death, the soul can inform a new body, starting a new existence on earth. This hypothesis is typical of non-Christian cultures. It openly contradicts the doctrine of faith, which teaches that the soul, being the substantial form of the body,¹⁸ can be the substantial form of only one subject. This means that each person has his own soul,¹⁹ which does not exist prior to its informing the body.²⁰ Reincarnation or metempsychosis is an erroneous doctrine, since it maintains that a soul can successively animate several bodies. It also contradicts right reason, which shows the union between body and soul to be verifiable through experience. That unity cannot be founded on either body or soul alone, for this would imply that the body and the soul—both complete substances in themselves—are joined *accidentally*, and not *substantially*.

6. The Condition of the Separated Soul

Christians must firmly hold the two following essential points: On the one hand, they must believe in the fundamental continuity—thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit—between our present life in Christ and the future life; on the other hand, they must be clearly aware of the radical break between the present life and the future one, due to the fact that the economy of faith will be replaced by the economy of fullness of life. Our imagination may be incapable of reaching these heights, but our heart does so instinctively and completely.²¹

Within the limits of prudence, we are in a position to make some statements about the condition of the separated soul, since we know its nature and operations.

Since the soul is the substantial form of the body, their relationship can be reduced to the composition of act and potency. No longer limited by a potency (the body), the separated soul is, in a sense, in a more perfect condition. However, since the soul is *meant to inform the body* through which it had acted, in this sense it is incomplete and less perfect than it was before.

Being a spirit, the separated soul performs the operations that are proper to spirits, since operations follow being.²² Obviously, it cannot perform sensitive operations because it is separated from the body and its senses. Nevertheless, it keeps all the knowledge acquired in life and can establish relationships, combinations, and comparisons between known things. It knows itself, and can reflect on or contemplate its own spiritual essence, for this essence is in itself intelligible and adequate to the soul's knowledge. In the same way, it knows other separated souls and the angels, though, in the latter case, the knowledge is imperfect, because the angel's nature far exceeds human intelligence.

On the other hand, the soul is capable of *receiving intelligible species* that are directly infused by God. These infused species allow the soul to acquire a knowledge that surpasses that attainable through the senses. This is especially true of the knowledge of God that is acquired with the help of the *lumen gloriae*.

The other operation that is proper to the spiritual nature is *volition*. Here, we have to distinguish between love for the end and love for the

means. We have already seen that the separated soul adheres irrevocably to the object that is chosen as its last end at the moment of death; no further choice is possible. With respect to the means, however, the separated soul is still able to choose, but only between those means that lead to the last end that it has adhered to.

Lastly, the soul continues to be a *subject of relations*. Thus, it can establish relations with God, with the angels, and with the other separated souls. With the help of God or of the angels, it can also get in touch with those who are still living on earth, but always in accordance with the general laws of providence.²³

1. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Reconciliatio et Poenitentia*, 18.
2. *Ibid.*, 26.
3. Cf. CCC, 1006–1019.
4. Cf. DS 902, 1440.
5. Cf. DS 403, 657, 1440.
6. Cf. CCC, 1008.
7. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 164, a. 1, ad 1.
8. *GS*, 18.
9. DS 222.
10. Cf. DS 1511–1512.
11. DS 3902.
12. *ST*, II-II, q. 81, a. 3 ad 1.
13. Cf. CCC, 1009.
14. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1009–1012.
15. DS 856–858.
16. St. Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum*, 25.
17. Cf. CCC, 1007; 1013–1014.
18. Cf. DS 902, 1440, 2828; CCC, 1013.
19. Cf. DS 657.
20. Cf. DS 403.
21. Cf. CCC, 366, 1005.
22. Cf. DS 3223.
23. Cf. *ST*, Suppl. q. 69, a. 3.

The Particular Judgment

THE ETERNAL FATE of each person is determined immediately after death. This is a truth of faith, and has been repeatedly taught by the Magisterium of the Church.¹

7. Existence of the Particular Judgment

The New Testament speaks of the judgment mainly from the perspective of a final meeting with Christ in his second coming. But we also find in many places of the Sacred Scripture references to the retribution immediately after each one's death as a consequence of one's faith and deeds. Thus, we find the parable of the rich man and the poor Lazarus (cf. Lk 16:22ff), and the promise made by Christ to the good thief from the cross (cf. Lk 23:43) that he will immediately be with him in paradise. Other texts of the New Testament describe the last destiny of the soul (cf. Mt 16:26; 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23; Heb 9:27; 12:23), which may be different for one or the other.

Thus, we know with the certainty of faith that each man, after dying, receives—in his immortal soul—his eternal retribution in a particular judgment. He immediately refers his life to Christ, going either through a period of purification,² or directly to his definitive state in heaven,³ or to eternal condemnation.⁴

This passage to the definitive state would not be possible without a previous judgment, where each person's fate is clearly and summarily decided before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body. The epistle to the Hebrews says that it is appointed for men to die once and after that, the judgment comes (cf. Heb 9:27). The existence of the particular judgment is a truth of faith, because it is directly related to the explicit affirmations of the Magisterium of the Church about immediate retribution after death for good or bad deeds. Theologians, or at least a great majority of them, hold it as an *implicitly defined truth of divine faith*.

Lumen Gentium of the Second Vatican Council says:

We make it our aim, then, to please the Lord in all things (cf. 2 Cor 5:9) and we put on the armor of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil and resist in the evil day (cf. Eph 6:11–13). Since we know neither the day nor the hour, we should follow the advice of the Lord and watch constantly so that, when the single course of our earthly life is completed (cf. Heb 9:27), we may merit to enter with him into the marriage feast and be numbered among the blessed (cf. Mt 25:31–46) and not, like the wicked and slothful servants (cf. Mt 25:26), be ordered to depart into the eternal fire (cf. Mt 25:41), into the outer darkness where “men will weep and gnash their teeth” (Mt 22:13; 25:30).⁵

Being considered *worthy* to enter the wedding feast, or being *counted among the elect*—as well as being *ordered out* to eternal fire and exterior darkness—implies a reckoning or rating: a judgment. This sentence has to be passed before the definitive Kingdom of God, which will come only after the final judgment. The same document suggests this immediately afterwards:

Before we reign with Christ in glory we must all appear “before the judgment of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body” (2 Cor 5:10), and at the end of the world “they will come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment” (Jn 5:29; cf. Mt 25:46).⁶

This document also describes the relation between the *celestial Church* and the *pilgrim Church* until the second coming of our Lord: “Some of his disciples are pilgrims on earth. Others have died and are being purified, while still others are in glory.”⁷ These three situations coexist now: those living now in this mortal life, the deceased who still undergo a process of purification, and those who already enjoy heavenly glory. The last two current states necessarily imply having already appeared before Christ’s tribunal. Those who are still on earth have not yet crossed the threshold of death, while those condemned are not mentioned because they are outside the communion of the Church.

This truth is also found in the teachings of the apostolic Fathers like St. Clement of Rome, St. Ignatius of Antioch, and St. Polycarp of Smyrna. The writings of later Fathers are more concerned with the controversy brought up by the *Millenarians* and the *Gnostics*, which is beyond the scope of our subject matter. But from the fourth century on, the Fathers clearly attest to the existence of the particular judgment.⁸

The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* teaches that the particular judgment takes place when each of us departs this life, for then, one is instantly placed before the judgment seat of God, where all that one has ever done, spoken, or thought during life shall be subjected to the most strict scrutiny.⁹

St. Thomas explains many times the fittingness and existence of the particular judgment. He says that each man is both an individual person and a member of the human race. Thus, he has to submit to a double judgment: a private and particular judgment as an individual, and a general and

universal one as a member of the human race.¹⁰ Besides, since man cannot earn merit after death, there is no reason for him to be judged and rewarded only at the end of the world. And since he is immediately requited, there must be a particular judgment.¹¹ Moreover, the soul, if not immediately judged, would be uncertain of its fate until the day of the final judgment. That delay would be a reward for the damned and a punishment for the blessed.¹² Regarding the universal judgment, St. Thomas affirms that “there is still another judgment of God in which every one will receive after death the deserved requital ... since it is not likely that such separation [between the blessed and the damned] would happen without a divine judgment or that this judgment would not be within the sovereignty of Christ.”¹³

8. The Nature of the Particular Judgment

Basically, the particular judgment consists in the communication of the divine sentence to the separated soul. Due to its spiritual nature, the soul understands it through a most simple and instantaneous act of the intellect.

The particular judgment cannot be conceived of as a *litigation* about one's good or evil acts, or about the standing of the separated soul with regard to its faults and responsibilities.

It is also wrong to picture the particular judgment as some kind of *self-trial*: an intellectual operation by which the soul itself acknowledges its faults, and accepts the corresponding sanctions. We should not forget that pride resides in the soul, making it difficult for the separated soul to accept its own faults.

The particular judgment is rather an act by which *God makes the soul see* with all clarity. God communicates this act to the soul, which cannot dispute it. By this act, the soul gets to understand in some way its state of either union with God or hideous sin, the *mysterium iniquitatis*. It is a light that comes from God and will lead either to the soul's union with God—immediately or through purgatory—or to its definitive damnation.

The passage of 2 Corinthians 5:10 clearly shows that the sentence *will come from outside* and *will be received* by the person. Therefore, it will be a verdict issued by God, not the result of a court litigation, and even less of a self-trial.

St. Thomas asserts that “judiciary power is common to the entire Trinity; still by special *appropriation* such power is attributed to the Son.”¹⁴ He adds that “judgments of this kind were exercised by Christ before his Incarnation, inasmuch as he is the Word of God; and the soul united with him personally became a partaker of his power by the Incarnation.”¹⁵ This enables us to understand when Sacred Scripture says that the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son (cf. Jn 15:22, 27), a power which Christ has inasmuch as he is the Son of Man. Thus, the sentence is immediately and directly communicated to the soul by divine power, but this does not necessarily imply the vision of God.

9. Immediate Execution of the Sentence

Pope Benedict XII's constitution *Benedictus Deus* repeatedly affirms and defines that the punishments of the damned, the reward of the blessed, and the time of purgation of those who die without mortal sin but with light faults take place "soon [*mox*] after death."¹⁶

The Second Council of Lyons (1274) had earlier defined that the souls of the just immediately enter heaven.¹⁷ The then Pope John XXII, before being elected, had been involved in a controversy about the beatific vision. Later on, as pope, he did not take part in it anymore. In 1336, Benedict XII definitively resolved the question with *Benedictus Deus*. There, the new pope clarified once and for all that the execution of the sentence is immediate.

St. Thomas gives several arguments in support of the Catholic faith. Since the separated soul can receive both punishment and reward, there is no reason to defer either of them.¹⁸ Moreover, merit and punishment redound to the body only through the soul, since only voluntary actions gain merit. Thus, there is no need to wait for the resurrection of the body before executing the sentence. It even seems more fitting that the souls be rewarded or punished before the bodies.¹⁹ The reunion of the body and the soul in the resurrection does not add anything to *essential* bliss—which consists in the beatific vision—since the beatific vision corresponds to the soul. The same can be said of *essential* punishment. Hence, the body is not necessary in either case, except for accidental integrity. Thus, unless the soul goes to purgatory first, reward or punishment are received right after death.²⁰

1. Cf. DS 839, 856–858, 1000; CCC, 1021–1022.
2. Cf. DS 857–858, 1304–1306, 1820.
3. Cf. DS 990, 1000–1001.
4. Cf. DS 1002; CCC, 1022.
5. *LG*, 48.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, 49.

8. Cf. St. Hilary of Poitiers, *In Ps. 2.* 49 (Migne, PL 9. 290); St. Efraim of Syria, *Sermo In Eos, Qui In Christo Dormierunt*, 3. 266ff; St. John Chrysostom, *In Matth. Hom.* 14.4, (PG 57. 222); St. Jerome, *In Joel*, 2.1 (PL 25. 965); St. Augustine, *De Anima et Eius Origine*, 2.4.8 (PL 44. 498ff).
9. Cf. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 1.8.3.
10. Cf. *ST*, Suppl. q. 88, a. 1 ad 1; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4.96.
11. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4.91.
12. Cf. *ST*, III, q. 59, a. 5; Suppl. q. 69, a. 2.
13. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium Theologiae*, 242.
14. *ST*, III, q. 59, a. 1 ad 1.
15. *Ibid.*, III, q. 59, a. 4 ad 3.
16. DS 1000–1002.
17. Cf. DS 856.
18. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4.91.
19. Cf. *Ibid.*
20. Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 4, a. 5; Suppl. q. 69, a. 2.

Purgatory

THE CHURCH HAS expressly acknowledged the existence of purgatory as a truth that is revealed in Sacred Scripture and defined by the Magisterium.¹ Moreover, she has always lived in accordance with this truth, teaching the need and efficacy of suffrages for the faithful departed.

10. Existence of Purgatory

Before entering heaven, every trace of attachment to evil must be eliminated, every imperfection of the soul corrected. Purification must be complete. The Church calls *purgatory* the final purification of the souls of those who, having died in grace, have not fully paid the punishment for their pardoned mortal sins or their venial sins. This purification is completely different from the punishment of the damned. The term *purgatory* does not indicate a place, but a condition of existence. The separated souls, being spirits, do not properly occupy a *place*. In common language, however, purgatory is understood as a place for these souls.

The existence of purgatory has been clearly affirmed by the solemn *Magisterium*. Pope Innocent IV teaches that, in purgatory, “sins are truly purified by that temporal fire—not grievous or capital sins that have not first been remitted by penance, but small and slight sins that remain a burden after death.”² The Profession of Faith of Michael Paleologus, presented to the Second Council of Lyons (1274), mentions “purgatorial ... punishments” for those who have not satisfied the punishment of their sins.³ The constitution *Benedictus Deus* reminds us that souls can enter heaven only “after they have been purified after death.”⁴ Clement VI, in his letter *Super Quibusdam* (1351), affirms that “Purgatory ... is the destination of the souls of those who die in grace, but have not yet done satisfaction for their sins by a complete penance.”⁵ Similarly, the bull *Laetentur Coeli* of the Council of Florence (1439) points out again the necessity of purification after death.⁶ In his bull *Exsurge Domine* (1520), Leo X condemns Luther’s denial of purgatory.⁷ Canon 30 of the Council of Trent’s decree *De Iustificatione* (1574) states that the repented sinner who has not yet paid the debt of temporal punishment must go to purgatory “before the gate of the Kingdom of Heaven can be opened” for him.⁸

The *Magisterium*’s affirmation that purgatory exists rests on *Sacred Scripture*, both the Old and New Testaments. There is no need for the Scriptures to use the word *purgatory*; it is enough that the *idea* of purgatory be sufficiently and clearly described in the Scriptures and in Sacred Tradition.

The Old Testament praises Judas Maccabee for having offered suffrages for the dead (cf. 2 Mac 12:39ff.). It is obvious that such persons had died without mortal sin, but are still suffering for their sins. Their *situation* is neither beatitude nor damnation, since the suffrages would be useless for souls in any of these states.

The New Testament is more explicit. Authors usually cite passages such as Matthew 12:31–32, Luke 12:47–48, 1 Peter 1:7, and 2 Timothy 1:16. The most explicit text is 1 Corinthians 3:10–15, where two “fires” are mentioned: one “fire” to examine the good or evil of men’s deeds, and the other to purify some before they are saved.⁹ The first “fire” clearly refers to the particular judgment, the latter to purgatory.

Sacred Tradition offers countless witnesses to the need of purification for some after death.¹⁰

Even more eloquent is the testimony of the *funeral liturgy*—particularly of the Eucharistic sacrifice¹¹ that is offered for the deceased—and of the Christians’ frequent prayers for the faithful departed.

The weight of these testimonies—both of the Fathers and of the very life of the Church ever since the beginning—made Calvin complain that “this custom of praying for the dead was introduced in the Church thirteen hundred years ago. All of the ancients were led into error.”¹² No comment is needed: The infallible Church has upheld the truth.

St. Thomas tackles the matter from different angles. First, forgiven mortal sins have been pardoned as regards the *guilt*, but not necessarily as regards the totality of the *temporal punishment*. Justice demands a proportionate punishment to repair the order that is damaged by sin. Thus, it is reasonable that those who have not fully paid the debt due to sin be purified after death by undergoing a punishment.¹³ Second, the soul cannot be elevated to the beatific vision if it is not totally purified. Since such purification is not always accomplished in this life, it is logical that it should take place after death and before entering heaven.¹⁴ St. Thomas is quite explicit: “Those who deny purgatory speak against the justice of God. ... Such a statement is erroneous and contrary to Faith.”¹⁵

11. The Nature of Purgatory

The Church has not said that purgatory is a place; she has pointed out that purgatory is a state, *a process of purification*.¹⁶ She has said that purgatorial punishments do exist, but has not specified the nature or the characteristics of such torments.

It is common doctrine among theologians that there is a distinction between two basic forms of punishment. These are called *pain of loss* and *pain of sense* by analogy with those of hell.

St. Thomas categorically affirms that the pain of loss is a delay in the vision of God.¹⁷ Others speak about the punishment of *postponement* of glory, which is just the same. The basic nature of this pain seems to consist in a certain delay in entering heaven. We should stress that the expression “pain of loss” is used here in an analogical and improper sense, very different from hell’s pain of loss—the complete and definitive separation from God, as we will see later on.

The souls in purgatory are not farther from God than we are on earth. Unlike us, they are completely sure of beholding God in the future. What constitutes their punishment is the delay in seeing him.

Therefore, in purgatory, there is joy and pain at the same time. There is pain because the souls that are retained there long for the vision of God and are prevented from reaching it. Their desire to be with the Lord is no longer weakened by material occupations and realities. The souls of purgatory are not interested in created goods any more, but only in the Lord of all creation, the only good that is capable of satisfying them. Besides, their desire to possess God is extremely intense, because they know that they are destined to eternal happiness. But they cannot enjoy God until they totally expiate their faults and the punishment of their sins. They also know perfectly that the blame is exclusively theirs. They could have entered heaven earlier if, while still on earth, they had avoided venial sin, striven to do the will of God, and accepted with joy the trials and sufferings of life, which are a preparation for heaven.

The more saintly a soul is, the greater its suffering, since it longs more intensely for the beatific vision. But that greater severity of pain is offset by a more perfect abandonment to the divine will and a fuller surrender to the execution of the divine justice.

However, there is also joy in purgatory, because the souls that are retained there know that they are destined for eternal happiness in paradise. They are consoled by the angels. They are helped by the suffrages of the Church and the prayers of the Virgin and the saints. Purgatory is not a mollified hell, but the antechamber of heaven.

The pain of sense, on the other hand, is referred to in several documents of the Magisterium as *fire*. This expression suggests a purifying form of suffering, different from the pain of loss. Thus, the letter *Super Quibusdam* of Clement VI speaks about the souls of purgatory as being tormented temporarily with fire.¹⁸ The First Council of Lyons mentions a “temporal fire” that purifies the souls of purgatory.¹⁹ It seems that the Magisterium did not want to mediate in the dispute that had arisen between the Greek and Latin Fathers about the nature of this fire. The former claimed that it is not easy to understand how a material fire can harm a spiritual soul.

We can say, however, that purgatory’s pain of sense “will be more severe than anything man can suffer here in this life.”²⁰ It seems more probable that it is a real fire as the Latin Fathers and most theologians think. “This fire works on the soul not by its own power, but as an instrument of divine Justice, just as baptismal water produces grace in our souls by virtue of God’s power.... This fire’s way of operating is mysterious.”²¹ According to St. Thomas, “the corporeal fire is enabled as the instrument of ... divine Justice thus to detain a spirit; and thus it has a penal effect on it, by hindering it from fulfilling its own will, that is by hindering it from acting where it will and as it will.”²² The soul suffers this punishment for having taken creatures as its end instead of directing everything to the glory of God.

12. Properties of the Pains of Purgatory

The *purpose* of the punishments in purgatory is to cleanse the soul so that it can reach the total purity that is required to enjoy the beatific vision.

The pains of purgatory represent, therefore, the payment of the debt of temporal punishments that is due to both venial and already forgiven mortal sins. Properly speaking, this atonement does not have any *satisfactory* value, which would require a free and spontaneous offering of the punishment. Neither does it have *meritorious* value, since the time for merit will have ended with death. Theologians usually describe these pains as *satispassion*: The souls gladly accept the purifying punishment, but do not seek the pain; they just passively endure it. We can say that they want to be freed from it as soon as possible.²³

Regarding the *intensity* of the pains, we should keep in mind that the souls in purgatory ardently want to see God. The suffering caused by the delay is proportional to the strength of the desire. The pains are therefore *unequal*. Not all souls in purgatory suffer in the same degree, neither in duration nor in severity of the pains. “Severity of punishment corresponds properly speaking to the amount of guilt: whereas the length corresponds to the firmness with which sin has taken root in its subject. Hence it may happen that one may be delayed longer who is tormented less, and vice versa.”²⁴ And thus, a soul that is stained with grave sins in moments of weakness, after suffering with great intensity, may leave purgatory ahead of another soul that, without having seriously offended God, lived in tepidity, despising the calls of grace to a life of greater self-surrender, and not giving importance to venial sins.

When we use the terms *duration* or *temporal* in connection with the pains of purgatory, we should not forget that, for the separated souls, *time* or *duration* is not the same as what we experience here on earth. These terms are applied to them *by analogy*.

But it is worth recalling that purgatory is not a sad “place”; it is rather the opposite, in spite of the pains. Although the souls in purgatory suffer incomparably more pain than one can experience on earth, their joys and consolations are beyond description. They are certain of salvation, totally identified with God’s will, happy to be purified, constantly comforted as

they approach the end of their punishment, and they enjoy the special spiritual help of the Blessed Virgin and the angels.

Furthermore, the pains of purgatory can be reduced through the *suffrages* that we offer. We have already mentioned, as a proof of the Church's doctrine on purgatory, the existence—since time immemorial—of the liturgy for the dead. The Church has insistently praised and defended it. Actually, a great part of the Magisterium documents that are cited here were issued, in the course of the centuries, as a defense of suffrages for the dead. We can mention the Second Council of Lyons, the Council of Florence, the Council of Trent, and the apostolic constitution *Indulgentiarum Doctrina* of Pope Paul VI.²⁵

Sacred Tradition has always upheld this teaching, as the Fathers and the life of the Church attest. The latter offers many testimonies in the liturgy, funeral inscriptions, and monuments. This doctrine has always been taught together with the dogma of the communion of saints.²⁶

Prayers for the dead have always been considered as a *pious duty* and as a work of mercy.²⁷ It is a requirement of *charity*, since we have to wish the good of others. It is an obligation of *piety* toward members of the same natural or supernatural family. And it is also an obligation of *justice*, since some souls may be detained in purgatory partly through our fault because of our sins of commission or omission.

Among the different ways of helping the souls of purgatory, the most important is the sacrifice of the Mass. On All Soul's Day, all the priests of the Church offer Mass for the souls in purgatory. On many other occasions, the Mass may be applied for that intention as well. The application of indulgences for the dead is a common practice, as well as giving alms in their memory, or offering up sacrifices and penance on their behalf.

It is also good to remember that, by virtue of the communion of saints, the souls in purgatory can help us greatly with their intercession. The Church does not invoke them in the liturgy, but the custom of invoking them privately is widespread in the Church. This Christian practice has never been forbidden. On the contrary, some prayers asking for their help have even been enriched with indulgences.

1. Cf. CCC, 1030–1032.
2. DS 838.
3. DS 856.
4. DS 1000.
5. DS 1066–1067.
6. Cf. DS 1304.
7. Cf. DS 1487.
8. DS 1580.
9. Cf. St Augustine, *Enarr. In. Ps.*, 37.3; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Ep. I ad Cor.*, 3.2.
10. Cf. Tertullian, *De Corona*, 3.8; St. Basil, *Hom. in. Ps.*, 7.2; St. John Chrysostom, *In Philip. Hom.*, 3. 4; St. Ambrose, *Epist.*, 39.4; St. Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo.* 104.2; St. Isidore of Seville, *De Eccles. Off.*, 1.18.11 and many others.
11. Cf. DS 856.
12. John Calvin, *Inst. Christ.*, 1.3.5.10.
13. Cf. *ST*, Suppl. app. 2, a. 1.
14. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4.91.
15. *ST*, Suppl. app. 2, a. 1.
16. Cf. CCC, 1031.
17. Cf. *ST*, Suppl. app. 1, q. 2, a. 1.
18. Cf. DS 1048.
19. DS 838.
20. St. Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps. 37.*, 3; cf. *ST*, Suppl. app. 1, q. 2, a. 1.
21. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Life Everlasting*, 248–249.
22. Cf. *ST*, Suppl. q. 70, a. 3; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4. 90.
23. Cf. *ST*, Suppl. app. 1, q. 2, a. 1.
24. *Ibid.*, Suppl. app. 1, q. 2, a. 6.
25. Cf. DS 856, 1304, 1753.
26. Cf. *LG*, 49–50.
27. Cf. CCC, 958.

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Hell

13. Existence of Hell

We cannot be united to God unless we freely choose to love him. We cannot love God if we sin grievously against him, our neighbor, or our own selves. “He who does not love remains in death. Any one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 Jn 3:14–15). To die in mortal sin, without repentance and without seeking refuge in the compassionate love of God, implies remaining separated from God forever because of our free choice. *Hell* is, thus, this state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed in heaven.¹

The existence of hell is a truth of faith that is clearly and repeatedly found in Sacred Scripture. To describe this reality, Sacred Scripture uses a symbolic language, which will be progressively explained. In the Old Testament, the condition of the dead had not yet been fully disclosed by revelation. Moreover, it was thought that the dead were amassed in Sheol, which is described as a land of darkness (cf. Ez 28:8; 31:14; Jb 10:21ff; 38:17; Ps 30:10; 88:7, 13), a pit from which one cannot escape (cf. Jb 7:9), a place in which it is impossible to praise God (cf. Is 38:18; Ps 6:6), and other names (cf. Nm 16:30; Ps 48:18; Is 14:15;).

The New Testament sheds new light on the condition of the dead, proclaiming above all that Christ, by his Resurrection, conquered death and extended his liberating power to the kingdom of the dead. Redemption, nevertheless, remains an offer of salvation, which it is up to people to freely accept. This is why they will all be judged “by what they had done” (Rv 20:13). By using images, the New Testament presents the place that is destined for evildoers as a fiery furnace, where people will “weep and gnash their teeth” (Mt 13:42; cf. 25:30), or like Gehenna with its “unquenchable fire” (Mk 9:43).

Jesus also says that he will proclaim the sentence: “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire” (Mt 25:41). All this is narrated in the parable of the rich man, which explains that hell is a place of eternal suffering, with no possibility of return nor of the alleviation of pain (cf. Lk 16:19–31). The Apocalypse also figuratively portrays in a “lake of fire” (Rv 20:14) those who exclude themselves from the book of life, thus meeting with a “second death” (Rv 20:15). Whoever continues to be closed to the

Gospel is therefore preparing for “eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2 Thes 1:9).

The images of hell that Sacred Scripture presents to us must be correctly interpreted. They show the complete frustration and emptiness of life without God. Rather than a place, hell indicates the *state* of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God, the source of all life and joy.

The existence of hell is also a common teaching of the Fathers of the Church. St. Ignatius of Antioch talks of the “inextinguishable fire,”² St. Polycarp speaks of the “eternal punishment,”³ and we also have the testimonies of St. Irenaeus,⁴ St. Ambrose,⁵ and St. Augustine.⁶

As we shall see later on, the Magisterium of the Church has repeatedly taught the existence of hell for those who die in mortal sin and the eternal duration of its punishment.

However, there is also a constant tendency to explain away hell, perhaps because it is such a terrible reality. These teachings contradict the doctrine of the Church and ultimately deny the existence of hell as a reality. Basically, these errors can be reduced to three:

- i) *Conditionalism* affirms that only the souls that die in justice and sanctity will survive after death, because those that die in sin will be annihilated (the existence of hell is denied) or else sent to a “temporal hell” (the nature of hell is denied). Gnostics and all those who deny the subsistence of the soul after death belong to this line of thought, as well as those who admit a final resurrection only for the just (there may be a short resurrection for the condemned, but they will immediately die again after receiving their sentence in the last judgment). This is the position of Jehovah’s Witnesses and some Adventists.
- ii) *Universalism* affirms that all will be saved sooner or later. This is the thought of some Origenists who describe hell as some sort of “prolonged purgatory.” Also in this group are the Albigensians, who say that purification is to be carried out through a series of successive incarnations, as well as the Anabaptists, some nineteenth century Protestants who were especially influenced by Schleiermacher, and, in the present century, the Lutheran Karl Barth.

iii) *Aterminism* is Origen's own doctrine: After the present stage of history will have reached its end with the final judgment, another age shall begin—everything will start all over again, following an endless cycle.

With respect to *conditionalism*, it is enough to recall what was said about death in the introduction and in the first chapter of this treatise, along with the teachings of the Magisterium there quoted. *Aterminism* was condemned by the Synod of Constantinople in A.D. 543, which was later ratified by Pope Vigilius I.⁷ Both tendencies contradict the professions of faith, like the *Quicumque* Symbol and Damasus's Formula of Faith.⁸

The solemn Magisterium of the Church teaches that the souls of those who leave this world in mortal sin go to hell, to suffer forever in the inextinguishable fire.⁹

Contrary to the position of the *Universalists*, neither revelation—Sacred Scripture and Tradition—nor the Magisterium of the Church teach that hell exists simply for “pedagogical” purposes, like a bogeyman for mischievous children. Both teach that hell is an existing reality. Certainly, we do not know how many are condemned, but Scripture's insistence on the reality of hell and the fact that we continuously risk eternal damnation help us understand that hell is an *actual* reality. The Church has never said (and will never say) who or how many are in hell. But she is in a position to declare as dogma the reality of hell and stress its importance for man's eternal destiny.

Theology explains the existence of hell in the light of God's sanctity and justice. Hell's existence is known only through faith, but this does not mean that the need of a reward or punishment for our actions in this life defies reason. Actually, since this requital is not carried out on earth, it seems logical to expect it after death. Taking into account the nature of sin, its consequences (breaking our friendship with God, the resulting *enmity* with him, subjection to the devil) and the magnitude of the offense in the light of God's infinite dignity,¹⁰ it is easy to understand the existence of a punishment that is in proportion to the offense that was committed. These arguments show the fittingness of hell. That is as far as theology can go, since hell is a supernatural mystery that is known only through revelation.

14. The Nature of Hell

God is the infinitely good and merciful Father. But man, called to respond to him freely, can unfortunately choose to reject his love and forgiveness once and for all, thus separating himself for ever from joyful communion with God. This is precisely the content of the Christian doctrine on eternal damnation or hell. Hell is not a punishment that is imposed externally by God but a development of premises that are already set by people in this life. It is the state of those who definitively reject the Father's mercy, even at the last moment of their life. "Eternal damnation," therefore, is not attributed to God's initiative, because, in his merciful love, he can desire only the salvation of the beings that he created. In reality, it is the creature who closes himself to his love. Damnation consists precisely in definitive separation from God, freely chosen by the human person and confirmed with death, which seals his choice forever. God's judgment ratifies this state.

The nature of hell is described in revelation and in the above-quoted declarations of the Magisterium. The words of our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire" (Mt 25:41), give us a glimpse of hell, which is closely related to the mystery of sin.

By mortal sin, we *exclude* God from our life. It brings about a *breach between man and God*, and is essentially an act of *disobedience to God*.¹¹ In the same manner, hell is the total and definitive separation of the creature from its Creator, of the son from his Father, of man from his God and Lord. This is the meaning of the words "Depart from me, you cursed," which the Church identifies with the *pain of loss*.

Moreover, mortal sin is also an act in which one exchanges "the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man" (Rom 1:23), worshipping and serving "the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom 1:25). This corresponds in hell to the *pain of sense*, referred to in the Gospel as *fire*.

The Magisterium affirms that this state of suffering will last forever. This is explicitly taught in the above words of Christ, when he speaks of the *eternal fire*.

15. The Pains of Hell

Hell, therefore, involves a twofold punishment: the *pain of loss* and the *pain of sense*.

The *pain of loss* is the eternal privation of the vision or union with God, in which precisely lies our supreme bliss and happiness. It is doubtless the greatest and most terrible of all pains, both from the objective and the subjective point of view.

God does not predestine anyone to go to hell. In order for anyone to go to hell, there must be a voluntary aversion to God (a mortal sin), and a persistence in sin until the end of one's life.

Man has been created by God and elevated to the supernatural order, being thus ordained to an end beyond his nature. Created by—and ordained to—the love of God, man longs for union with God as his Creator and end, even without knowing or admitting it. The privation of God is then the most terrible situation in which man as a creature can find himself, since it means existing without any reason or purpose: an absolute lack of meaning and, therefore, a state of absolute unhappiness.

Aside from that, man has been redeemed by Christ and, being a mere creature, has been made a child of God. The separation that goes with the pain of loss implies losing the love of God, which is the supreme vocation of the Christian. As we have seen, sin is basically *aversio a Deo*, a rupture of the friendship and communion with God due to man's fault. Through mortal sin, man ceases to be a child of God and becomes an *enemy* of his Creator and Redeemer. The punishment of this aspect of sin is the pain of loss, which consists in the eternal privation of the beatific vision. Man is placed in a paradoxical situation with no escape: He is a creature, but he does not recognize his Creator. This is a permanent state of conflict with no hope of solution. He knows he is called to love the Supreme Good, but he finds himself forever incapable of accomplishing his vocation and consummating his happiness. Hell brings to completion the breaking away from the love of God, to which man is called as a creature and, above all, as a child of God.

The pain of loss corresponds to what is most terrible in mortal sin: the formal opposition to God himself. It is the punishment for being at enmity with one's Creator and end. St. Thomas assuredly affirms that "mortal sins

deserve ... the privation of seeing God, *to which no other punishment is comparable.*"¹²

The pain of loss brings with it the suffering that is caused by the obstinacy of the will in its hostility to God, without any hope of rectification. This implies an inner conflict in the subject who experiences it.

The punishment of the damned will be increased, firstly, by their separation from God and from all good. This is the pain of loss, which corresponds to the aversion, and is a greater punishment than that of sense....

Secondly, the damned shall suffer from remorse of conscience....

Nevertheless, their repentance and groaning will be of no avail, because it rises not from hatred of evil, but from fear and the enormity of their punishments....

Fourthly, there is the despair of their salvation. If some hope of delivery from their punishment would be given them, their punishment would be somewhat lessened; but since all hope is withdrawn from them, their sufferings are most intense.¹³

Moreover, the pain of loss deprives of all the rewards that accompany the beatific vision, like the glorious body, brightness, and impassibility.

The pain of loss is the proper and essential punishment of hell, since it corresponds to the formal breach of the friendship with God in mortal sin.

Aside from the pain of loss, there is the *pain of sense*. It torments the souls of the condemned from the moment of death, and will torment their bodies as well after the final resurrection. This punishment corresponds to the other aspect of mortal sin: a disorderly attachment to creatures (*conversio ad creaturas*).

Sacred Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium point out that, aside from the privation of God (pain of loss), the damned suffer punishments usually called "fire." The majority of the Fathers and Doctors, as well as almost all of the theologians, understand this fire to be a real fire. We cannot disregard the importance that is given to this punishment by revelation, the Magisterium, and theology. St. Thomas, for example, emphasizes the "great pain of sense. It is the fire of hell, which tortures the soul and the body; and this, as the Saints tell us, is the sharpest of all punishments. They shall be ever dying, and yet never die; hence it is called eternal death, for as dying is the bitterest of pains, such will be the lot of those in hell."¹⁴

Aside from hellfire, the pain of sense includes several other torments:

- The very condition (or state) that hell is, where only horror, calamity, and misery are to be found
- The company of reprobates and devils, among whom only hatred reigns
- The torment of the internal and external senses
- The eternal remorse of conscience due to the corruption of sin, along with the despair, hatred, and anger that it will produce in the soul

And yet the pain of sense is a lesser punishment than the pain of loss, which involves a greater evil: the eternal privation of the friendship of God. In spite of this state of enmity with God and all its bitter consequences, the damned will not repent.

16. Properties of the Pains of Hell: Eternity and Inequality

The main property of the pains of hell is *eternity*. This eternity is not the divine attribute, but a duration that cannot and will not end. We can just say that the pains of hell will last forever.

The eternity of the punishments in hell is expressly revealed in Sacred Scripture. It has been solemnly defined in the above-mentioned documents of the Magisterium.

Since mortal sin goes against love itself, which is God, it is understandable that the infinite gravity of the offense demands a proportionate punishment. And since the punishment cannot have an infinite intensity, it should logically be infinite in duration, that is, eternal.

The punishments of hell are also of *unequal* intensity, depending on the importance and number of the mortal sins committed in life. Subjectively, the pain of loss will be unequal: some will feel it more than others, depending on the gravity and number of their sins. Objectively, however, the definitive and complete separation from God will be the same for all.

Thus, the inequality of the punishments—at least objectively considered—applies mainly to the pain of sense. In this case, the sufferings will be objectively different, in proportion always to the gravity and number of sins. Consequently, some will suffer more than others.

The affirmations of Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church on hell are a call for man to use his freedom with a *sense of responsibility*. At the same time, these affirmations are an *urgent appeal to conversion*.¹⁵ However, the thought of hell—and even less the improper use of biblical images—must not create anxiety or despair, but is a necessary and healthy reminder of freedom within the proclamation that the risen Jesus has conquered Satan, giving us the Spirit of God, who makes us cry “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).

1. Cf. CCC, 1033–1037.
2. St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 16.1–2.
3. St. Polycarp, *Martyrdom of St Polycarp*, 10.
4. Cf. St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Hæreses*, 4.39.
5. Cf. St. Ambrose, *Com. in Luc.* 7.20.
6. Cf. St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 21.17, 22; *Enchiridion*, 24.111, 113.
7. Cf. DS 409, 411.
8. Cf. DS 76, 72.
9. Cf. DS 780, 801, 858, 1002, 1306; *LG*, 48.
10. Cf. *GS*, 13.
11. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Reconciliatio et Poenitentia*, 14.
12. *ST*, I-II, q. 88, a.4.
13. *The Catechetical Instructions of St Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 76–77.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Cf. CCC, 1036.

Heaven

WHEN THE FORM of this world has passed away, those who have welcomed God into their lives and have sincerely opened themselves to his love—at least at the moment of death—will enjoy fullness of communion with God, which is the goal of human life. Generally speaking, the teachings of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition refer to *retribution*, that is, a reward or a punishment according to each person's deeds. Therefore, practically every time hell appears in revelation, heaven is mentioned as well.

17. Existence of Heaven

The *Creed of the People of God* says: “We believe that the multitude of souls gathered round Jesus and Mary in Paradise forms the Heavenly Church. There they enjoy eternal joy, seeing God as he is. There also, in different degrees and ways, they share with the holy angels in that exercise of divine power which belongs to Christ in his glory when they intercede for us and come to the aid of our weakness in brotherly care.”¹

The existence of heaven is a dogma of faith: “The souls of those who have not committed any sin at all after they received holy Baptism, and the souls of those who have committed sin, but have been cleansed, either while they were in the body or afterwards ... are promptly taken up into heaven.”²

The Old Testament alludes to heaven in different ways (cf. Is 60:1; Wis 3:1; Dn 7:27), but the New Testament is much more explicit and insistent. Our Lord affirms in the Gospel that the angels in heaven continuously see the face of God, and that it is the reward of the clean of heart and those who are found with the nuptial dress, the state of grace. Heaven is compared to a banquet where the desire for happiness is satisfied. But one has to become like a child, fight strenuously to attain it, follow the narrow path, and comply with the will of the Heavenly Father (cf. Mt 7:13–14, 21; 11:12; 18:1–4, 10; 22:11–12; Lk 13:29; 14:15). Another set of texts can be gathered from the teachings of the apostles (cf. 1 Cor 2:9; 13:12; 1 Jn 3:2; Rv 21:3).

Heaven is one of the fundamental teachings of the Gospel, for this is the “Good News” of our salvation: the real possibility of one day being united to God, and sharing his eternal bliss.

Theology explains the existence of heaven in the same way as that of hell. It is fitting to the infinite justice and sanctity of the love of God that the just—those who die in friendship with God—receive a reward.

18. The Nature of Heaven

Metaphorically speaking, heaven is understood in Sacred Scripture as the dwelling place of God, who is thus distinguished from human beings (cf. Ps 104:2ff; 115:16; Is 66:1). He sees and judges from the heights of heaven (cf. Ps 113:4–9) and comes down when he is called upon (cf. Ps 18:9, 10; 144:5). However, the biblical metaphor makes it clear that God does not identify himself with heaven, nor can he be contained within it (cf. 1 Kgs 8:27). This is true, even though, in some passages of the first book of Maccabees, “Heaven” is simply one of God’s names (1 Mc 3:18, 19, 50, 60; 4:24, 55).

The depiction of heaven as the transcendent dwelling place of the living God is joined with that of the place to which believers, through grace, can also ascend, as we see in the Old Testament accounts of Enoch (cf. Gn 5:24) and Elijah (cf. 2 Kgs 2:11). Thus, heaven becomes an image of life in God. In this sense, Jesus speaks of a reward in heaven (cf. Mt 5:12) and urges people to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Mt 6:20; cf. 19:21).

The New Testament amplifies the idea of heaven in relation to the mystery of Christ. Since believers are loved in a special way by the Father, they are raised with Christ and made citizens of heaven. The fatherhood of God, who is rich in mercy, is experienced by creatures through the love of God’s crucified and risen Son, who sits in heaven on the right hand of the Father as Lord. After the course of our earthly life, participation in complete intimacy with the Father thus comes through our insertion into Christ’s paschal mystery. St. Paul emphasizes our meeting with Christ in heaven at the end of time with a vivid spatial image: “Then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thes 4:17–18).

In the context of revelation, we know that the “heaven” or “happiness” in which we hope to find ourselves is neither an abstraction nor a physical place in the clouds, but a living, personal relationship with the Holy Trinity. It is our meeting with the Father, which takes place in the risen Christ through the communion of the Holy Spirit.

The happiness of eternal life is, as defined by the Fathers, an exemption from all evil, and an enjoyment of all good. Heaven consists in

the perfect and total possession of the good, without any mixture of evil.⁴ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that heaven is the ultimate end and the accomplishment of the most profound aspirations of man, the supreme and definitive state of bliss.⁵

The greatest happiness in heaven, its proper object, “consists in the vision of God, and the enjoyment of the beauty of God, who is the source and principle of all goodness and perfection.”⁶ Our Lord himself announced it when he said, “And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent” (Jn 17:3).

The Magisterium has described the encounter with God in heaven as an “intuitive and even face-to-face vision, without interposition of any creature in the function of object seen; rather the divine essence immediately manifests itself to them plainly, clearly, openly.”⁷ The vision of God that the angels and saints enjoy in heaven is not like the knowledge of God that we have on earth, even when it is revealed knowledge. St. Paul exclaims, “Now we see in a mirror dimly; but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood” (1 Cor 13:12).

19. The Nature of the Direct Vision of God

The *Catechism* teaches that, because of his transcendence, God cannot be seen as he is unless he reveals his mystery to man's direct contemplation, and gives man the capacity to contemplate him.⁸

The reason is that we know and understand things through representations of reality that are formed in our intellect. But it is impossible to extract from reality any representation of the essence of God. "It is impossible that any image drawn from created things should be equally pure and spiritual with God, no resemblance can enable us perfectly to comprehend the Divine Essence.... The only means ... of arriving at a knowledge of the divine essence is that God unite himself to us."⁹ There is direct vision of God because God unites himself to the intelligence of the blessed in heaven, and from this union flow the other characteristics of heavenly bliss.

In heaven, the souls of the blessed "see clearly the Triune God himself, just as he is,"¹⁰ and thereby get to know intimately the intra-Trinitarian life. Pope Pius XII, in the encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, affirms that this contemplation of the intimate life of God makes the saints "rejoice with a happiness very much like to that with which the holy and undivided Trinity is happy."¹¹

The beatific vision, and the joy that it engenders, make the soul, in a way, identified with God, "for those who enjoy God, while they retain their own nature, assume a certain admirable and almost divine form, so as to seem gods rather than men."¹² This divinization of the soul and of its powers, which will also affect the body after the resurrection, does not take away the difference between Creator and creature—God, who is absolutely transcendent, cannot enter into communication with any creature. This is the great mystery of the beatific vision.

Tradition sheds some light on this mystery with an eloquent analogy: When placed in the fire, iron becomes red hot like fire itself.¹³

The blessed contemplate God as he is in himself, but, in him, they also have a most perfect knowledge of creatures (especially those that are close to them), and this knowledge, too, gives them an immense joy. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the saints, who form part of the

universe, know in the Word everything that belongs to the adornment and wholeness of the world. As members of the human community, they know the objects of their love or interest on earth, and as creatures that are elevated to the order of grace, they clearly know the truths of the faith that refer to salvation: the incarnation of our Lord, the divine motherhood of Mary, the Church, grace, and the sacraments.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the blessed cannot know God with absolute fullness and depth, as he knows himself. This is due to the immensity of his perfection, goodness, and beauty, which no creature will ever be able to fully comprehend. Actually, in order to be able to see God face to face, the soul has to be elevated by the *lumen gloriae*.

20. Necessity and Nature of the *Lumen Gloriae*

The strictly supernatural character of the beatific vision can be understood—up to a certain point—if we consider that “all created things are circumscribed within certain limits of perfection, while God is without limits; and therefore nothing created can reflect his immensity. The only means, then, of arriving at a knowledge of the divine essence is that God unite himself in some sort to us, and after an incomprehensible way elevate our minds to a higher degree of perfection, and thus render us capable of contemplating the beauty of his nature.”¹⁵

This supernatural strengthening and elevation of the created intellect enables the spiritual creature to see God face to face. It is known in theology as the *lumen gloriae*, or “light of glory.”

The necessity of the *lumen gloriae* in order to enjoy the beatific vision is a truth of faith. The Magisterium solemnly defined it in condemning as heretical the following proposition: “Every intellectual nature is in itself naturally happy, and the soul does not need the light of glory to elevate it to see God and to enjoy God in blessedness.”¹⁶ The supernatural elevation is totally gratuitous and unmerited. Sacred Scripture promises it when it talks about the fountain of life and of light (cf. Ps 35:10), and about the light of the Apocalypse’s city (cf. Rv 21:23ff).

The Church has also defined that “this vision of the divine essence and the enjoyment of it do away with the acts of faith and hope in those souls, insofar as faith and hope are theological virtues in the proper sense.”¹⁷ In heaven, God gives himself to the saints as the object of contemplation and joy. There is no longer any need for the virtues of wayfarers on earth, those that tend by their very nature to the perfection of charity.

In summary, in our present condition, even with the help of grace, we cannot see the divine essence; we only get to know about it through revelation. Without the help of God, that is, naturally, the vision of the divine essence is impossible for our bodily eyes and intellect. This applies to angels as well. Only with divine assistance is it possible to see God as he is in himself.

In heaven, we will see as we are seen: not through a likeness or an image, but face to face (cf. 1 Cor 13:9ff). For this, God must help the

human and angelic intellect in a supernatural and gratuitous way. This assistance of God, a supernatural and free gift, is the *lumen gloriae*. It is infused in the created intellect, preparing it for the intellectual union with God and making it capable of the beatific vision.

21. Beatific Vision and Happiness

The beatific vision—the face-to-face vision of God—consists in the contemplation of the Trinity and of all its attributes and properties, which are identified with its essence.¹⁸ This vision does not exhaust the divine essence, which is incomprehensible, and cannot be completely grasped even with the *lumen gloriae*.

The term *intellect* comes from the Latin *intus legere*, “to read into.” True knowledge, in a certain way, is a “going inside” the known object in order to capture its form and its truth. In an ineffable way, man’s intellect, with the aid of the *lumen gloriae*, is brought into the divine essence, where it contemplates the Blessed Trinity and participates more fully in the intimate life of the eternal processions.

The act of the will (love) follows the act of the intellect (knowing). Thus, the direct vision of God brings about a most intense act of love, fully uniting the soul to God.

This union with God through vision and love produces perfect happiness and an unimaginable satisfaction of the deepest longings of the soul. And these are even surpassed, because the soul is elevated to an order far beyond our natural order on earth, even with the help of grace.

The essential happiness consists in the immediate vision of God, and of creatures in God, and in the infinite joy of their vision. But God’s mercy is so great, and he is so generous, that he has wanted his chosen ones to find happiness in the legitimate created goods that man seeks.

Aside from the vision of God, “the full and perfect satisfying of every desire,” eternal life consists in “the happy society of all the blessed, and this society will be especially delightful. Since each one will possess all good together with the blessed, and they will love one another as themselves, they will rejoice in the other’s good as their own. It will also happen that, as the pleasure and enjoyment of one increases, so will it be for all.”¹⁹ Being with Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin, the angels, and the saints is part of the accidental glory, which consists in the “clear and distinct knowledge which each one [of the blessed] shall have of the singular and exalted dignity of his companions [in glory].”²⁰ Meeting those whom we loved while on earth will cause a special joy.

This joy and happiness is completed as other souls enter heaven, as loved ones still on earth progress in their spiritual life, and as one's apostolic efforts and sufferings endured in the service of God bear fruit with the passage of time. It is finally crowned after the universal judgment with the glorification of one's own body.

The *Catechism* teaches that this mystery of blessed communion with God and with all those who are in Christ surpasses all understanding or representation. "No eye has seen, no ear heard, no the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9).²¹ "The faithful should be deeply impressed that the happiness of the saints is full to overflowing of all those pleasures which can be enjoyed or even desired in this life, whether they regard the powers of the mind or of the perfection of the body."²²

22. The Glorification of God and the Beatific Vision

The images that are used by Sacred Scripture to refer to heaven, especially in the Book of Revelation (cf. Rv 4; 5; 6), show the saints to be in continuous adoration of the Blessed Trinity. They praise the glory of God (cf. Eph 1:6, 12, 14) by being united to him, through their total identification with his will, which desires the supreme good for us.

For this reason, the eternal glorification of God and the eternal happiness of the saints are like the two sides of a coin. Perpetual praise is given to God, the Supreme Good that irresistibly attracts the human will, and the saints find the greatest possible happiness in this praise and recognition of the glory of God.

23. The Inequality of Blessedness

Although the blessed are all immensely happy contemplating God face-to-face, “some [see God] more perfectly than others according to their respective merits”²³ gained on earth. In support of this, the Council of Trent quotes the epistle to the Romans: “For he will render to every man according to his works” (Rom 2:6).²⁴

St. Thomas explains this question on the basis of the level of grace in each soul:

The faculty of seeing God, however, does not belong to the created intellect naturally, but is given to it by the light of glory, which establishes the intellect in a kind of likeness to God....

Hence the intellect which has more of the light of glory will see God more perfectly; and he will have a fuller participation of the light of glory who has more charity; because where there is the greater charity, there is the more desire; and desire in a certain degree makes the one desiring apt and prepared to receive the object desired. Hence he who possesses the more charity, will see God the more perfectly, and will be the more beatified.²⁵

This inequality in happiness will not sadden those who have received less. First of all, their total identification with God’s will already brings about their perfect happiness. There is, furthermore, a reason of fittingness: the perfect charity that unites all souls in heaven leads them to wish the greatest good and happiness for the others—a desire that they will see fully satisfied.

The blessed in heaven continue joyfully fulfilling the will of God with regard to other people and the entire creation. They reign with Christ. With him, “they shall reign for ever and ever” (Rv 22:5; cf. Mt 25:21, 23).²⁶

24. The Eternity of Heaven

The eternity of heaven is a dogma of faith. “The same vision and enjoyment remains continuously without any interruption or abolition of the vision and enjoyment, and will remain up till the final judgment and from then on forever.”²⁷

The *essential* glory that each soul gets upon entering heaven will remain the same for eternity. The *accidental* glory, however, may increase, and does in fact increase.

This is easy to understand. Good works do not end with their execution; they continue bearing fruit, and only at the end of time can their consequences be fully reckoned. Thus, a good work or an exemplary life does not reach its full stature until all the good effects that it caused—and continues to cause along the course of history—can be completely measured and accounted. As long as history lasts, accidental glory can increase.

Moreover, the operations of the soul will be more perfect after the resurrection, when they shall have rejoined their own bodies. And the glorification of the body shall further add to the accidental glory of the soul.

25. The Properties of Blessedness

The essential properties of beatitude are:

- *A most perfect love for God*, which completely fills and satisfies the aspirations of the human heart, bringing about perfect happiness,
- *Absolute impeccability*, which is a consequence of the direct vision of God and of perfect charity,
- *Eternity*, which has to be understood as lasting forever, as having no end, but should not be confused with the divine attribute of eternity.

1. Paul VI, *Creed of the People of God*, 29; cf. DS 1000; *LG*, 49.
2. DS 857; cf. *CCC*, 1023–1032.
4. Cf. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 1.12.5; cf. St Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 22, 30.
5. Cf. *CCC*, 1024.
6. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 1.12.6.
7. DS 1000.
8. Cf. *CCC*, 1028.
9. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 1.12.8.
10. DS 1305.
11. DS 3815.
12. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 1.12.17; cf. *CCC*, 1023.
13. Cf. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 1.12.10.
14. Cf. *ST*, I, q. 89, a.8.
15. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 1.12.8; cf. *CCC*, 1028.
16. Council of Vienne, Errors of the Beghards: DS 895.
17. DS 1001.
18. Cf. *CCC*, 1028.
19. *The Catechetical Instructions of St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 74–76.
20. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 1.12.8; cf. *CCC*, 1024.
21. Cf. *CCC*, 1027.
22. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 1.12.12.
23. DS 1305.
24. Cf. DS 1549.
25. *ST*, I, q. 12, a. 6.
26. Cf. *CCC*, 1029.
27. DS 1001.

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Limbo

26. The State of those Who Die Without Personal Sin

Limbo was suggested as an intermediary *state* of the souls of those who die without personal sin, but with original sin still unwashed by Baptism. After the resurrection, their bodies would join their souls. Since, seemingly, these conditions can be found only in children who die before reaching the age of reason, this state is also called *limbo of children*.

The doctrine of limbo has never been defined as dogma by the Church; it was a theological hypothesis mostly depending on St. Augustine's doctrine of original sin.

Sacred Scripture does not expressly mention limbo. The sacred books focus instead on the possibility of death in sin (and subsequent hell), or in grace (and ensuing heaven). Thus we read: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5). Moreover, it is expressly stated that the damned are in hell due to personal sins (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

The *Magisterium* also dealt about this issue in the past. Catholic theology has sought answers in accord with the mercy of God the Father. God's universal will for salvation is a fact, ("God wants everybody to be saved," 1 Timothy 2:4), and also is true that "Jesus died for all." The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, while not failing to stress the paramount importance of baptism, teaches that,

As regards children who have died without Baptism, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus' tenderness toward children which caused him to say: "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them," [Mk 10 14; cf. 1 Tim 2:4] allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism. All the more urgent is the Church's call not to prevent little children coming to Christ through the gift of holy Baptism. ^[1]

Jesus instituted the sacraments as ordinary means to salvation. The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude; this is why she takes care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptized are "reborn

of water and the Spirit.” The sacraments are ordinarily necessary; those who can receive them and refuse to do so are accountable before God. But God did not bind himself to these means. Baptism of desire and the feast of the Holy Innocents are confirmations of this. God has the power to remedy this lack of grace even without a sacrament.^[2] Therefore God could supply that grace outside of Baptism. Thus, one may think that the aborted babies, and probably other unbaptized babies also, are given grace by God outside the Sacrament of Baptism, and so do not depart this world in original sin, which is merely the lack of grace that should be there.

The great compassion of God, who wants everyone to be saved, and Jesus’ tenderness toward children allow us to presume that there is a way of salvation for children who die without Baptism.^[3]

“The Church has always held the firm conviction that those who suffer death for the sake of the faith without having received Baptism are baptized by their death for and with Christ. This Baptism of blood, like the desire for Baptism, brings about the fruits of Baptism without being a sacrament.”^[4]

The Church, fulfilling the mission entrusted by Christ, urges the celebration of Baptism for children as soon as possible.^[5] The *Code of Canon Law* says: “Parents are obliged to see that their infants are baptized within the first few weeks. As soon as possible after the birth, indeed even before it, they are to approach the parish priest to ask for the sacrament for their child, and to be themselves duly prepared for it.”^[6] Any unreasonable delay of the reception of Baptism is frowned upon, since Baptism is necessary for supernatural life and salvation (cf. Jn 3:5).^[7] The necessary preparation of parents for the baptism of their children is not an excuse to postpone the sacrament, since that would deprive the child of supernatural life and put him in danger of not being saved. Therefore, the same canon says that, “if the infant is in danger of death, it is to be baptized without any delay.”^[8] This canon upholds the permanent teaching of the Church on the matter.^[9]

[1] CCC, 1261.

[2] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II. 68.2.c. “God is not bound to the visible sacraments.”

[3] Cf. CCC, 1261.

[4] CCC. 1258.

[5] Cf. CCC, 1261.

[6] CIC, 867.

[7] Cf. DS 903–904.

[8] CIC, 867.

[9] Cf. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Inst. *Pastoralis Actio*, Oct. 20, 1980.

Part II

THE LAST THINGS OF THE WORLD

WE SHALL NOW study the last events of the world, that is, what will happen at the end of time. This includes a series of closely related events: the second coming of Christ at the end of time, the final judgment, and the resurrection of the dead. They are usually called *last things of the world*, or *final eschatology*.

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The Second Coming of Christ

27. Christ Will Come Again

The second coming of Christ at the end of time is a truth of faith repeatedly found in Sacred Scripture: “For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and high... And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled” (Is 2:12–17). “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him” (Dn 7:13). “Then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Mt 24:30; cf. Mk 13:26; Lk 21:5–36). “Hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mt 26:64; cf. Ps 110; Mt 16:27). “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thes 4:16). Many other passages of Sacred Scripture attest to this truth (cf. Am 5:18; Zec 9:9; Acts 1:11, 3:20; Jn 21:22; Ti 2:13; 2 Thes 2:8; 1 Tm 6:14).

This truth is repeatedly found in Tradition as well, and has been constantly proclaimed by the solemn Magisterium of the Church, and by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.¹ The *Creed of the People of God* affirms that Christ “ascended into heaven, whence he will come again to judge the living and the dead, each according to his merits. And of his kingdom there will be no end.”²

28. Christ Coming as Judge

The usual formula of the symbols of faith links the Ascension of Christ to heaven with his sitting at the “right hand of God the Father Almighty,” from where he will come to judge the living and the dead, and establish a kingdom without end: the Kingdom of God (cf. Lk 24:51; Mk 16:19; Acts 1:9; 2:33).³

The Sacred Scripture informs us that there are two comings of the Son of God: the one when he assumed human flesh for our salvation in the womb of a virgin; the other when he shall come at the end of the world to judge all mankind. This latter coming is called in Scripture the day of the Lord (2 Pt 3:10). “The day of the Lord,” says the Apostle, “shall come as a thief in the night” (1 Thes 5:2); and our Lord Himself says: “Of that day and hour no one knoweth” (Mt 24:36; Mk 13:31).

In proof of the [final] judgment it is enough to adduce the authority of the Apostle: “We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the proper things of the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or evil” (2 Cor 5:10). There are numerous passages of Sacred Scripture [cf. 1 Kgs 2:10; Ps 95:13; 97:9; Is 2:12; Jer 46:10; Dn 7:26; Jl 2:1, 81; Zep 1:7, 14; Mal 4:1; Mt 13:40; Lk 17:24; Acts 1:11; 3:20; Rom 2:16; 1 Cor 15:51; 1 Thes 1:10; 2 Thes 1:10; Rv 20:11] which the pastor will find in various places and which not only establish the truth of the dogma, but also place it in vivid colors before the eyes of the faithful. And if, from the beginning of the world, that day of the Lord, on which he was clothed with our flesh, was sighed for by all as the foundation of their hope of deliverance; so also, after the death and ascension of the Son of God, we should make that other day of the Lord the object of our most earnest desires, “looking for the blessed hope and coming of the glory of the great God” (Ti 2:13).⁴

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that the resurrection of all the dead—the just and the sinners (cf. Acts 24:15)—will precede the final judgment.⁵ This will be the time when “all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment” (Jn 5:28–29). Then, Christ will come “in his glory, and all the angels with him.... Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.... And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Mt 25:31, 32, 46).

29. The Parousia

The second coming of the Lord is also known as *parousia*, a Greek word meaning “apparition” or “presence.” At the parousia, Christ will appear in power and majesty as judge (cf. Dn 7:13; Mt 16:27; 24:30; 26:64), and establish his Kingdom—which was inaugurated at the Incarnation—in all its fullness.

From the viewpoint of salvation history, the parousia marks the definitive triumph of Christ over sin and death. This triumph was manifested in Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension, and can be shared in an inchoate way through sanctifying grace. But it will be fully manifested only at the end of the world. The parousia is the culmination of the history of salvation: The plans of God will reach complete fulfillment, in a renewed universe inhabited by glorious bodies.

Upon assuming human nature, our Lord became the head of the human race. On behalf of mankind, he offered himself to the Father on the cross as a redemptive sacrifice. After the Resurrection, he shows, in his glorious body, his victory over sin and death, and the superabundance of grace for the salvation of mankind. Christ is not only the *meritorious cause* of man’s reconciliation with God; he is also the efficient-instrumental cause of our salvation as well. Ever since his ascension to “the right hand of God the Father,” his kingship over creation has been manifested in history, drawing all things to himself (cf. Jn 12:32). His attraction or drawing force is shown every time a person becomes a child of God through grace. Divine filiation is a victory that becomes definitive for each person at the moment of death. By dying in fidelity to Christ, man is united to him forever in heaven, and becomes a member of the Church triumphant, enjoying the vision of God. The Church triumphant will reach her perfection and plenitude at the final moment of history, when Christ shall come in power and majesty to judge the world and to communicate all his saving power to the elect through the resurrection of their bodies and the total renovation of the world.

30. Nature of the Second Coming of Christ

As we have seen earlier, Sacred Scripture makes many direct references to the second coming of Christ, or *parousia*. St. Mark's description is especially interesting: "You will see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mk 14:62). This is obviously related to the prophecy of Daniel: "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him" (Dn 7:13).

Equally noteworthy is the whole section of the synoptic Gospels known as the *synoptic Apocalypse*. It contains descriptions of the coming of Christ in glory and majesty (cf. Mt 24–25; Mk 13; Lk 21). The synoptic Apocalypse contains the following points:

- The prophecy of the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem
- The disciples' questions about that event
- The answer of our Lord

We must bear in mind that the apostles were inquiring about four different matters, which they understood as one because of the prophecy of Daniel. This prophet associated the destruction of Jerusalem with the end of the world (Dn 8:11–13, 16–17). Consequently, when our Lord announced that "there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down" (Mt 24:2), the apostles understood that he was referring to the destruction of the temple and to his second coming *at the same time*. That is why the disciples asked, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" (Mt 24:3)

The Gospels, especially St. Matthew's, report a long conversation between Jesus and his disciples. It begins when Jesus left the temple, and continues while they walk until he sat on the Mount of Olives (cf. Mt 24:1, 3). The Evangelist reports only Jesus' answers, leaving aside the questions of the apostles. Our Lord deals with four clearly defined issues:

- i) The ruin of Jerusalem (cf. Mt 24:21–28)
- ii) The signs that will precede the ruin of Jerusalem (cf. Mt 24:4–20)
- iii) The end of time (cf. Mt 24:29ff; 25:21ff)
- iv) The signs that will precede the end of time and the second coming of Christ (cf. Mt 24:36ff; 24:14; Rom 11:25ff; 2 Thes 2:3)

Sacred Scripture describes the second coming of Christ as the arrival of a king in glory, with all the pageant and solemnity of an official ceremony. Our Lord will be received by people who will go out to meet him as people go out to meet their sovereign. St. Paul says, “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thes 4:16–17).

On the other hand, we are told that a new age, the definitive era, will begin. It will be the times of the restoration of all things (cf. Acts 3:21), when God will be “everything to every one” (1 Cor 15:28).

As we said before, the parousia, or second coming of Christ, is called the “day of the Lord” (cf. 1 Cor 8; 2 Cor 1:14; 1 Thes 5:2; 2 Thes 2:2), meaning the triumph of Christ over all and everything. “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:22–26; cf. Ps 2:9; 110:1).

31. The Signs of the Coming of Our Lord

Some passages of Sacred Scripture read as if the hagiographer saw the parousia as imminent. This is the case of the above-quoted epistle to the Thessalonians (cf. 1 Thes 4:16–18). The Apostle seems to be convinced that he will be still alive at the time of the parousia. We should understand this in the sense that the second coming of Christ should be *desired* and expected as soon as possible, since it implies the triumph of Christ and the coming of the Kingdom of God. Thus, we ask in the *Lord's Prayer*, “Thy kingdom come” (Mt 6:10).

This is the most probable meaning of the liturgical and biblical expression *Maranatha*: “Our Lord, come!” (1 Cor 16:22). Others take it as an *announcement*: “The Lord comes.” In any case, the Apocalypse clearly expresses a desire for the coming of our Lord, which can be only his *second coming*: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come.’ ... He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rv 22:17, 20).

This desire for the coming of our Lord may be confused with the belief in the imminence of the parousia. St. Peter already sounded a warning: The time will come when people ask, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation” (2 Pt 3:4). And he gave the answer as well: “But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pt 3:8).

In other words, the *prophecy* of the second coming of our Lord is not explicit about the exact date of the event. Nevertheless, we know that some signs will precede the coming of Christ.

In the first place, the Gospel itself says that *cosmic disasters or catastrophes* will precede the day of the Lord. “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up” (2 Pt 3:10). St. Mark says that “in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not

give its light. And the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken” (Mk 13:24–25).

Another sign will be the *preaching of the Gospel throughout the world*. As St. Matthew says, “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come” (Mt 24:14).

The coming of the glorious Messiah, in a specific moment of history (cf. Rom 11:31), is tied up to the acknowledgment of the Messiah by all of Israel (cf. Rom 11:26; Mt 23:39). Thus, the *conversion of the Jews* is also included among the signs of the parousia. St. Peter tells the Jews of Jerusalem after Pentecost: “Repent, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old” (Acts 3:19–21). St. Paul affirms: “For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?” (Rom 11:15). And, “Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:25–26). The entry of the fullness of the Jews (cf. Rom 11:12) in the Messianic salvation, following the fullness of the Gentiles (cf. Rom 11:25; Lk 21:24), will make the people of God reach “the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13) in which “God may be everything to every one” (1 Cor 15:28).⁶

Finally, there is a third sign with a double content: *general apostasy* and *triumph of the Antichrist*. The Church will have to go through a final test that will shake the faith of many believers (cf. Lk 18:8; Mt 24:12). The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on the earth (cf. Lk 21:12; Jn 15:19–20) will reveal the “mystery of iniquity” under the form of religious deception, which will provide an apparent solution for people’s problems at the price of apostatizing from the truth.

St. Paul reassures the Thessalonians, who worried about the imminent coming of our Lord: “Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion [other versions read *apostasy*] comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that

he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thes 2:3–4).

The supreme religious deception is the Antichrist’s, that is, a pseudo-Messianism in which man will glorify himself, installing himself in the place of God and his Messiah.⁷

The Kingdom will not be accomplished by a triumph of the Church (cf. Rv 13:8) in the form of a growing historical process, but by a victory of God over evil (cf. Rv 20:7–10) who will make his bride come down out of heaven (cf. Rv 21:2–4). God’s triumph over the rebellion of evil will take the form of a final judgment (cf. Rv 20:12) after the final cosmic destruction of this world (cf. 2 Pt 3:12–13).

1. Cf. DS 30, 125, 150, 801; CCC, 678–679, 1038–1041.
2. Paul VI, *Creed of the People of God*, 12.
3. Cf. DS 30, 41, 150.
4. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 1.7.2.
5. Cf. CCC, 1038.
6. Cf. *Ibid.*, 674.
7. Cf. *Ibid.*, 675–677.

49

The Resurrection of the Dead

32. The Truth of the Resurrection

When Christ comes to judge humans in all his power and majesty, their bodies will rise. Each man will recover his own body, and will remain in this situation for all eternity. What we said before about the immortality of the soul is especially relevant here: Only the *bodies* resurrect, joining their respective souls, which subsisted separately after death.¹

Many passages of Sacred Scripture affirm the truth of the resurrection. References are more frequent in the New Testament, but the Old Testament is also quite explicit (cf. Is 26:19; Dn 12:2; Mt 24:31; Lk 14:14; Jn 5:29; 1 Cor 15:32; Rom 8:18–25; 1 Thes 4:13–17; Heb 6:2; Rv 20:12). We profess this truth in the Creed: “We believe in the resurrection of the body.”² It is similarly expressed in all the symbols and in countless declarations of the solemn Magisterium of the Church. The Christian dogma affirms that the dead will resurrect, that is, that they will assume again the same bodies from which they were parted at death.³

33. The Resurrection of the Body

Sacred Tradition has always used the expression *resurrection of the body*, while *resurrection of the dead* is seldom found. There are very specific reasons for this. When a person dies, it is the *whole subject* that suffers death—the separation of body and soul. The body, deprived of its vital principle, decays. The soul, being spiritual, subsists. When resurrection is understood as applying to the *whole subject*, it means that the soul recovers its body, informing it again. Scripture, however, understands resurrection in the sense of restoration of the body: The souls are supposed to rejoin their bodies, which have already decomposed and, therefore, have to be restored in some way.

Recently, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith recommended that the vernacular versions of the Creed retain the expression *resurrection of the body*. This is in order to prevent the mistaken notion that *the soul will also resurrect*.⁴

34. The Reality of the Resurrection

This perennial teaching of the Church is founded on Sacred Scripture, which clearly speaks of the resurrection at the end of time. St. Mark says, “And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living” (Mk 12:26). In the Gospel of St. John, we read: “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment” (Jn 5:28–29; cf. Mt 22:23–33; Lk 20:27–38).

Chapter 15 of the first epistle to the Corinthians is especially relevant. There, on the basis of our Lord’s resurrection, St. Paul refutes those who deny the resurrection of the dead. St. Paul clearly sees—as anyone can—that the resurrection of our Lord is an apologetic argument of the first order. St. Peter uses it in the same way for his catechesis, especially in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 2:14–36; 3:11–26; 4:5–12). St. Paul, however, goes one step farther in his epistle. He shows that the resurrection of our Lord is the *true cause of our resurrection*: “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:20–22). In his discourse in Capernaum, our Lord said several times that he would resurrect the dead on “the last day” (Jn 6:40, 44, 54). It is obvious that his preaching had spread the faith in the resurrection, as is shown in Martha’s statement before the resurrection of Lazarus (cf. Jn 11:23–26).

Sacred Tradition unanimously affirms this truth of faith. It is clear both from the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and from Christian archaeology—cemeteries, veneration of relics, and funeral liturgy.

Theology can explain the fittingness of the resurrection of the body with metaphysical and theological reasons. First, the spiritual and immortal soul subsists after death, but it continues to be ordained to the body as its substantial form. Thus, resurrection is in some way convenient for the soul.⁵

Moreover, death is a result of original sin. Christ's triumph over sin is also a victory over its consequence, death. St. Paul already advanced this argument: "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor 15:26).

There is still a third argument, which is of a moral nature: The necessity of an adequate requital. A perfect remuneration, in accordance with the wisdom of God, has to affect the whole person, body and soul. This requires the resurrection of the body.⁶

35. Nature of the Resurrection

Christian dogma affirms the existence of the resurrection. It also states that we will resurrect precisely with our own body, “in the same flesh in which we now live ... not ... in a body of air or in any different kind of body (as some have foolishly thought); but we shall rise in this very body in which we now live and are and move ... in this same flesh which we have and not any other.”⁷

St. Paul is quite specific: “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’ You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.... So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.... We shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable” (1 Cor 15:35–37, 42–44, 51–52).

Resurrection is described as the reunion of the souls with *their bodies*, a point emphasized by the most recent Magisterium.⁸

St. Thomas deals with this doctrine in different places, but he always insists that:

We cannot call it resurrection unless the soul return to the same body, since resurrection is a second rising, and the same thing rises that falls: wherefore resurrection regards the body, which after death falls, rather than the soul, which after death lives. And consequently if it be not the same body that the soul resumes, it will not be a resurrection, but rather the assuming of a new body.⁹

The risen body should be the same in which man served God with good works, or the devil with sins, so that it can also share in the reward or punishment of these deeds.¹⁰

Christian humanism emphasizes integral human fulfillment in Jesus. But fulfillment in Jesus is more than fulfillment in divine life. Since Jesus is not only God but man, and now man with a glorified, resurrected body; union with him also means fulfillment in human life and in human goods, including bodily resurrection life. As this authentic humanism emerges, Christian life comes to be seen more clearly as

communal life. So, for instance, Pius XI, stressing the restoration of all things to God in Jesus, established the feast of Christ the King; the implication is that Christians are fellow citizens of his kingdom, which is already present (though imperfectly so) on earth. Similarly, the Church comes to be seen not simply as an institution providing spiritual services, but as the community of Christian faith and apostolic life. Pius XII presents it as the Mystical Body of Christ, Vatican II as the People of God. These are communal, corporate concepts; the Church is one bread, one body, one people.¹¹

After the resurrection, there will no longer be any change. Every man will remain in his definitive state for all eternity. No further separation of body and soul is to be expected, because bodies will have been made incorruptible, and therefore, immortal. But resurrection will have a different meaning for the just and for the sinners: The former will be glorified and the latter will be condemned.

36. Qualities of the Resurrected Bodies

Divine revelation emphasizes that the resurrection—the transformation of the entire man—is the ultimate object of Christian hope. Our hope does not look forward to the eternal life of the soul alone, but to the eternal life of the whole human person, body and soul. There is an eternal life of salvation, as a participation of the entire man in the glorious Resurrection of Jesus Christ. And there is also an eternal life of damnation, in which the separation from God, which is effected by sin, will become eternal. This separation will also affect the bodies of the damned.

The resurrection implies a radical transformation of the condition of the body, far beyond the present mode of life. St. Paul mentions some qualities of the risen bodies.

- *Incorruptibility* means that the just will not suffer or die again. They will be impassible. The Book of Revelation says, “And death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rv 21:4). This quality is called *impassibility*, and is described as an “endowment or gift ... that shall place them beyond the reach of suffering anything disagreeable or of being affected by pain or inconvenience of any sort. Neither the piercing severity of cold, nor the glowing intensity of heat, nor the impetuosity of waters can hurt them. ‘It is sown,’ says the Apostle, ‘in corruption, it shall rise in incorruption.’ This quality the Scholastics call *impassibility*, not *incorruption*, in order to distinguish it as a property peculiar to a glorified body. The bodies of the damned, though incorruptible, will not be impassible; they will be capable of experiencing heat and cold and of suffering various afflictions” (cf. 1 Cor 15:42–44).¹²
- *Brightness or clarity* is another property of the resurrected bodies. The bodies of the saints will share in the brightness of the glorious body of our Lord.

The bodies of the Saints shall shine like the sun, according to the words of our Lord recorded in the Gospel of St. Matthew: “The just shall shine as the sun, in the Kingdom of their Father” (Mt 13:43).

This brightness is a sort of radiance reflected on the body from the supreme happiness of the soul. It is a participation in that bliss which the soul enjoys, just as the soul itself is rendered happy by a participation in the happiness of God.

Unlike the gift of impassibility, this quality is not common to all in the same degree. All the bodies of the Saints will be equally impassible; but the brightness of all will not be the same, for, according the Apostle, “One is the glory of the sun, another the glory of the moon, and another the glory of the stars, for star differs from star in glory: so also is the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor 15:41–42).¹³

- *Power, strength, or agility* is the third quality of the risen body. In this life, frailty and heaviness nag the body as a consequence of original sin. By virtue of its *agility*, “the body will be freed from the heaviness that now presses it down; and will take on a capability of moving with the utmost ease and swiftness, wherever the soul pleases.”¹⁴
- *Spirituality or subtlety* is the fourth quality of the risen body. St. Paul uses the term *spiritual body*. This quality “subjects the body to the dominion of the soul, so that the body shall be subject to the soul and ever ready to follow her desires (cf. 1 Cor 15:44).”¹⁵ The soul, in turn, is perfectly subject and docile to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

It should be noted that the Pauline teaching on the qualities of the glorious body does not contradict the Magisterium’s doctrine of the identity between the resurrected and the mortal body. St. Paul himself affirms this identity, despite the differences between the two situations of the same body (cf. 1 Cor 15:35–44, 53–54).

Theologians do not agree as to the *manner* of this *identity*. Some think that it requires the presence of the same matter constituting the body at some stage of its life. Others believe that a *formal* identity is enough, since the body, regardless of its matter, will be the same body as long as it is informed by the same soul.

Nevertheless, the first opinion seems to be more in agreement with the Magisterium, which has repeatedly affirmed that the soul will return *to its own body*, or to *its own flesh*.

For the damned, the resurrection will not be an effect of grace, but a consequence of the personal unity of man. It is only just that the bodies that had been party in the commission of sin share in the punishment of their souls.

Sacred Tradition is not very explicit on the condition of the bodies of the damned. The only affirmation we can find is that, for the reprobates, resurrection will mean the raising of their bodies for eternal damnation, with all its consequences.

St. Thomas thinks that the bodies of the damned will probably rise without any deformity, but still with the defects that are proper to the material state. Besides, they will be incorruptible, since, being destined to hell for all eternity, they will have to endure forever the torment of fire without being consumed.¹⁶

Finally, St. Thomas also emphasizes the *passible* character of the bodies of the damned. They are destined to eternal torments, and if they were impassible, they would be invulnerable to pain (cf. Mt 25:46).¹⁷

1. Cf. CCC, 988–1004, 1038.
2. DS 41.
3. Cf. DS 72; CCC, 998, 1001, 1038.
4. Cf. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Recentiores Episcoporum Synodi*.
5. Cf. *ST*, Suppl., q. 75, a. 1.
6. Cf. *Ibid.*, q. 75, a. 1; St. Thomas Aquinas, *In IV Sent.* d. 43, q. 1, a. 1, sol. 1 ad 3.
7. DS 72; cf. DS 540, 797.
8. Cf. DS 76, 801, 859; Paul VI, *Creed of the People of God*, 29.
9. *ST*, Suppl., q. 79, a. 1; cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 4.80–81; *Comp. Theol.* 53.
10. Cf. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 1.11.8.
11. G. Grisez and R. Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ*, 396.
12. Cf. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 1.11.13.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. Cf. *Ibid.*
16. Cf. *ST*, Suppl., q. 86, a. 1.
17. Cf. *Ibid.*, q. 86, a. 3.

The Final Judgment and the Renewal of the World

AS WE SAW earlier, prophecies and symbols describe the second coming of Christ “in power and majesty.” We can then portend that that power and majesty is related to the *last judgment* and the definitive establishment of the Kingdom of God. The latter is in turn linked to the *total renewal of the world*. We will discuss both in this last chapter.

37. The Final Judgment

Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the Magisterium clearly and constantly attest to the truth of the final judgment. St. Augustine affirms that “no one denies or doubts that there will be a final judgment by Christ, as the Sacred Books proclaim.”¹

It is a dogma of faith that Jesus Christ will come to judge the living and the dead, that is, all people of all times. Christ himself solemnly announced this when he talked about his second coming. He repeated the announcement on the day of the Ascension, and his apostles and disciples understood it in that way (cf. Mt 16:27; 26:31–46; Acts 1:11; 10:42; Rom 14:10).

In the Old Testament, the universal judgment forms the backdrop of the prophecies against the infidelity of Israel, against the peoples of the earth, and against the whole world. The New Testament is much more explicit, revealing that, at a certain moment, at the end of time, the whole human race will appear before Christ, who will come with great power and majesty to judge all people according to their works (cf. Jer 46; 51; Is 13; 27; Rom 2:2–10; Mt 24:30–31; 25:31, 32, 46; 2 Cor 5:10; 1 Pt 4:4–5; Rv 20:13).

The Fathers and Doctors of the Church speak in many ways about the final judgment. They describe in great detail the way in which it will take place and its different aspects. This shows that the issue was quite clear in Sacred Tradition.

The Magisterium of the Church has defined as dogma the existence of the final judgment. This teaching is already found in the earliest symbols: the *Apostles' Creed*, the *Quicumque Symbol*, the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*, and the Profession of Faith of the Fourth Lateran Council. It has also been upheld by the Second Council of Lyons, the Council of Florence, the Council of Trent, and the bull *Benedictus Deus* of Benedict XII.²

Paul VI's *Creed of the People of God* professes it as follows: “He ascended to heaven whence he will come again to judge the living and the dead, each according to his merits. Those who have responded to the love

and compassion of God will go to eternal life. Those who have refused them to the end will be consigned to the fire that is never extinguished.” And it concludes saying, “And of his kingdom there will be no end.”³

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* declares that the final judgment will reveal the last consequences of our actions and omissions. The truth of the relations of each person with God will be shown when we appear before Christ, who is the Truth.⁴

Sacred Scripture alludes to divine wrath in connection with the last judgment. Nevertheless, its main theme will be the triumph of Christ and the establishment of the definitive world, or *total renewal of the world*. Hence, the preaching of the last judgment is seen against the backdrop of the love of God inviting us to penance.

Sacred Scripture does not give many details about the final judgment. We know only that:

- Christ will come in all glory, surrounded by angels;
- he will summon all peoples and all men;
- he will requite each one for his deeds, according to the measure of his love;
- he will establish his definitive Kingdom, and hand it over to the Father; and
- he will be assisted by the apostles in this judgment (cf. Mt 25:35–46; 1 Cor 15:23–28; Lk 22:30).

The main difficulty lays in the existence of two judgments. If every man undergoes a particular judgment, it seems that there is no need for a universal judgment. St. Thomas faced the problem and found a solution: “Why a Universal Judgment? Are not all men rewarded right after death? It has to be pointed out that the reward granted to men in the just judgment of God is twofold. In the first place, the reward of the soul; later, the reward of the body. The reward of the soul is given out right after death; but in the Final Judgment they will also receive the glory of the body.”⁵

The final judgment will take place “when on the same day and in the same place all men shall stand together before the tribunal of their Judge, that in the presence and hearing of all human beings of all times each may know his final doom and sentence. The announcement of this judgment will constitute no small part of the pain and punishment of the wicked; whereas

the good and just will derive great reward and consolation from the fact that it will then appear what each one was in life.”⁶

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that the final judgment will happen when Christ returns in glory. Only God the Father knows the day and the hour. He will pronounce through his Son, Jesus Christ, the last judgment over history. We will know the ultimate meaning of the entire work of creation, and of the economy of salvation. We will understand the admirable way through which God’s providence has led all things to their ultimate end. The final judgment will show that God’s justice prevails over all the injustices that are perpetrated by his creatures, and that God’s love is stronger than death (cf. Song 8:6).⁷

The arguments that are offered by theologians can be summed up as follows:

- The glory of Christ and his universal sovereignty
- The open manifestation of providence in individual lives and in the whole of history
- The public ratification of the irrevocable sentence of the particular judgment
- The resurrection of the bodies, which will mean more accidental glory for the blessed and more punishment for the damned

The universal judgment is the definitive triumph of good over evil. Once the devil, sin, and death are defeated and all people are judged, all things will return to God for his eternal glory.

38. The Total Renewal of the World

At the end of time, the world and everything in it will not return to nothingness. They will instead be renewed or changed for the better. This is a truth of faith. In 1459, Pius II condemned a series of propositions by Zaninus de Solcia. One of these stated that the world would be annihilated.⁸

The *Catechism* teaches that the unity of human kind will be accomplished, and that mankind will be no longer wounded by sin. Because of the profound community of destiny between the material world and man, the material universe will also be transformed “so that the world itself, restored to its primitive state, will be at the service of the just without any obstacle,”⁹ and will participate in the glorification of the risen Christ.¹⁰

Isaiah speaks of a new heaven and a new earth. In the New Testament, Christ asserted that heaven and earth will pass away, but then be regenerated or transformed. St. Peter, speaking in the name of Christ, preached the same doctrine (cf. Is 65:17; 66:22; Mt 5:18; Mt 19:28; 24:35; Acts 3:21; 2 Pt 3:3–13).

St. Paul adds that this new creation—human and cosmic—goes through stages. It was inaugurated with the resurrection of Christ. Christ is the “first fruits” and after him will come “those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father.... The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:23–24, 26). He also describes the creatures that expect to be freed by the manifestation of the liberty of the glory of the children of God. The Book of Revelation is especially eloquent: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.... And he who sat upon the throne said: ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ Also he said: ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.... He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son’” (Rv 21:1–2, 5, 7; cf. Rom 8:19–22).

Theology explains this truth on the basis of the dignity of the creator, which requires creation not to be annihilated, but rather transformed at the end of history.

There is also an anthropological reason. Man is the king of creation, and the destiny of creation is, in some way, bound up with his. Cosmos and history are the stage of man's actions, for good or for evil.

Finally, man is the head of the universe, the Church is the head of mankind, and Christ is the head of the Church. For St. Thomas, the Pauline *recapitulation of all things in Christ* means the “re-establishment of everything in Christ—that is, by Christ—in heaven and on earth, since peace is made between heaven and earth; this restoration is to be understood as regards sufficiency, although not all will be restored according to efficacy” (cf. Eph 1:9–10; Col 1:18–19).¹¹

The manner of this renewal is usually summarized as follows. In the first place, there will be a universal conflagration, a break between this world and the world of the future. The new world will not be just a continuation of the present one. Besides, the world will be somehow purified from the remains of the sins that were committed by humans in this present world. To explain this point, the present world is usually compared to a temple that has to be consecrated anew after a profanation. The world—the temple that is inhabited by man—has been defiled by sin. It needs a new consecration for Christ to reign in it after his second coming. This renewal should not be understood as an essential change, but simply as a change of situation, state, or quality.

The purpose of this renewal is hinted when we say that the new world is destined to be the dwelling *place* of the glorified bodies. It thus has an anthropological purpose. But its main purpose is *Christological*. Christ will restore all things in himself, those of the heavens and those of the earth, thus freeing them from the slavery of sin (cf. Rom 8:19–22). This restoration implies a renewal, giving rise to a world that is united in harmony, over which the victorious Christ will reign. Creation will thereby share in the glory of its head, Christ.

Thus, the goodness of God will shine forth in the new world. The divine wisdom will be manifested and God will be “everything to every one” (1 Cor 15:28).

39. Epilogue

The subjects that were studied in this work are an integral part of the whole unity of theology. However, they are especially related to the specific treatises on creation, salvation, and the Church. Specifically, the conclusions of the treatises on grace and salvation are a necessary premise for the study of the Last Things.

The Last Things, especially those of man discussed in the first part, are taking place now, although they will reach their consummation only at the end of time. This gives a new and special relevance to the study of *eschatology*: There is a constant “communion” between the pilgrim Church in this world, the suffering Church in purgatory, and the triumphant Church in heaven. This communion will reach its consummation in the definitive Kingdom of God toward which history is headed.¹²

1. St. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, 20.30.
2. Cf. DS 11; 30; 41; 76; 150; 801; 852; 1338; 1862; 1002.
3. Paul VI, *Creed of the People of God*, 12.
4. Cf. CCC, 678–679, 682, 1038–1041.
5. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Expos. in Ev. Mt.*, 25.
6. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 1.7.3.
7. Cf. CCC, 1040.
8. Cf. DS 1361.
9. St. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 5.32.1.
10. Cf. CCC, 1042–1050.
11. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epist. ad Eph.*, 1.3.
12. Cf. *LG*, 48–50.