

members of my family, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). Love for the sake of Christ is the primary motivation for acts of mercy.

937 The Christian ascetical tradition teaches us about seven spiritual works of mercy and seven corporal works of mercy. The seven spiritual works of mercy are: to counsel the doubtful, to instruct the ignorant, to admonish the sinner, to comfort the sorrowful, to sincerely forgive injuries, to bear wrongs patiently, and to pray for the living and the dead. The seven corporal works of mercy are: to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless, to minister to the sick, to visit the imprisoned, and to bury the dead.

938 Neglecting mercy is a sin against Christian love. "As you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me" (Mt 25:45). A social sin is both a sin against an individual at the level of their societal interaction (murder, theft, robbery, fraud, etc.) as well as a sign of an entire structure of sin which exists in society or the international community (corruption, human trafficking, drug trafficking, etc.).

Remember, O God, those under trial, in mines, exile,  
bitter slavery and in every tribulation, constraint and trouble  
(Anaphora of the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great)

### **3. Social Justice**

#### ***a. Private Property, Just Stewardship, Fair Exchange, and Distribution of Material Goods***

939 The right to private property and a fair distribution of material goods in society are conditions for guaranteeing the dignity of the individual who lives in that society and a guarantee of the means needed for one's full development. It is precisely the defence of the dignity and rights of a human being, created in the image of God, and the safeguarding of peace and harmony among people and communities as a manifestation of the social dimension of Christian love, that are the aims which all of society's material goods serve. The just stewardship and distribution of material goods is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve the comprehensive development of each individual person, as well as of society as a whole.<sup>565</sup>

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<sup>565</sup> See VATICAN COUNCIL II, Constitution *Gaudium et spes* [The Church in the Modern World], 69.

- 940 Private property is a form of personal control of the goods that are required for a person's full and comprehensive development. With the help of such property, each person obtains the "space" for individual and familial independence. Consequently, private property is an important element in the realization of personal freedom in social life. Respect for this form of ownership and the guaranteeing of one's right to it are important elements of a just and free society.<sup>566</sup>
- 941 In defending one's right to personal property, Christian tradition does not make this right an absolute, but regards it in the context of the universal appointed purpose of all material goods. In this appointed purpose lies the social function of private property. Only the Lord, as Creator of heaven and earth, is Master of the whole world that he created. We are but stewards in the Lord's vineyard. He has entrusted it to our care. Thus, in timely fashion we are to return its fruits to their true Master (see Mk 12:2-11).
- 942 Justice as a social virtue consists in giving God and each person—each member of society—that which is their due. Such justice in social life is realized in two basic forms: in a fair distribution of material goods, on the one hand, and their fair exchange, on the other. Distributive justice is safeguarded when communal goods—in accordance with just laws—become accessible to all members of society. Examples of this are: appropriate social security, health care, pension protection, etc. Fair or just exchange is achieved through the fair trade of material goods between different members of society. One example is when the price of a product corresponds to its quality. Distributive justice regulates what the community owes its citizens in proportion to their contribution and needs; it ensures that no member of society is denied access to basic goods and services (for example, appropriate social protections, health care, pension income, and the like). Legal justice concerns what the citizen owes in fairness to the community, and insures that all citizens have equal protection under the law, regardless of status or wealth.

### **b. Morality in Social Relations**

- 943 Human society is impossible without interpersonal relations. The fundamental condition for human interaction, and by extension for social dialogue, is recognition of the dignity of others and respect for them. This respect, which begins with traditional gestures of politeness, includes truthfulness and trust between those communicating with each other. One form of social dialogue is the dissemination and exchange

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<sup>566</sup> See Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 176-181.