

St. Thomas Aquinas: Justice, Property and the Poor

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As human beings, as Christians, we look around us and see injustice with different names. We need to continue talking on justice, one of the basic social virtues.

We watch our people—near us and far from us— and we perceive poverty with many faces. We see that the majority of the people of our country, of our region, of our world are poor in various ways. We have to go on speaking on the priority of justice, that is, the preferential option for the poor and of their right to property.

To reflect on justice, property and the poor we need to go back to our roots as social human beings and as followers of Christ. To meditate on the virtue of justice and its demand of respect for the rights of all, in particular the poor, we have to ask the Sacred Scriptures and Christian Tradition. We must question the Fathers of the Church, privileged representatives of Christian Tradition, and the great theologians, especially St Thomas Aquinas, still the most influential among them.

In this study, we go to St. Thomas, still—as Vatican II stated—*a special guide* and *a special master*; still—as manifested by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*—a singular theologian, and—as shown by John Paul II in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*—an outstanding philosopher; still a creative and even revolutionary teacher of justice, property and the poor.¹

¹ Vatican II, OT, 16; GE, 10. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (English Edition. Manila: ECCE, Word and Life Publ., 1994) quotes St. Thomas 64 times (after

We shall develop, then, the theme *St. Thomas Aquinas: Justice, Property and the Poor*. Not merely to repeat his essential teaching on the matter, but to try to translate its importance and relevance to our age, still permeated by glaring injustices, above all the injustices to the poor.

1. St. Thomas on Justice

It has been said that Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is the most important book on ethics from antiquity, and that St. Thomas' second part of the *Summa Theologica* is the most representative from the Middle Ages. In both masterful ethical works, the virtue of justice is an essential component. Thus, in our pursuit of the theory of justice St. Thomas represents an obligatory stop: not only by reason of his teaching on justice, but also because he has been the most influential philosopher and theologian in the development of the Christian theory of justice. What is, then, St. Thomas' theory of justice?

His theory of justice is built upon the philosophical column of Aristotle, the theological column of Sacred Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church, and the juridical-legal column of Ulpian. Through St. Thomas, the impact of Aristotle in the Middle Ages and thereafter becomes decisive: the philosopher's book five of *Nicomachean Ethics* represents the philosophical bases of St. Thomas' treatise *De justitia* (of justice), that the latter deepens, explains and widens brilliantly.²

In his pace-setting treatise, however, the Angelic Doctor not only does philosophy but also, and mainly, theology: he uses the theological sources, specially the Sacred Scriptures and the teachings of the Fathers of the Church.

St. Augustine, who is quoted 92 times). See P. De Luis, "San Agustín en el nuevo Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica. Datos y observaciones críticas," *Estudio Agustiniano*, Vol. XXVIII, Fasc. 1, Enero-Abril, 1993, pp. 109-155. In *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), St. Thomas is the most quoted single theologian, 22 times (even before St. Augustine, who is quoted 16 times); cf. E. Pérez Delgado, O.P., "Para que la verdad moral resplandezca. Sin ira," *Teología Espiritual*, XXXVIII, Enero-Abril 1994, pp. 7-29.

² Cf. D. O. Lottin, "Le concepte de justice chez les theologiens du moyen age avant l'introduction d'Aristotle," *Revue Thomiste*, T. 44, No. 3 (1938), pp. 511-521; D. Mongillo, "La estructura del 'De Justitia' II-II, 57-122," *Angelicum*, 48 (1971), 355-377.

St. Thomas is considered the great innovator of systematic moral theology³ and of the philosophy and theology of virtues; in fact, for him the whole matter of moral theology is reduced to the study of virtues.⁴

In traditional philosophy and theology, in Christian thought, particularly from St. Thomas on, justice is considered a basic human and Christian virtue, one of the four cardinal virtues, the social virtue of fair interpersonal relationships.

For Aquinas, virtue is the attitude *par excellence*. It is a good operative habit, a power of the human person to do good in his personal and social life. For a Christian, the greatest virtues are the *theological virtues* of faith, hope and charity: they direct a person's life with God. The greatest among the three is charity, the Christian virtue. All other virtues, to become really *virtues* —powers to do good, to direct human beings to their destiny— must be mediations of charity, the form of all other virtues (1 Cor 13:13).⁵

The *moral virtues* direct man's ethical personal and social life. Among them, the most important are the *cardinal virtues*, namely, prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance: upon these four major virtues —it has often been said—, a person's moral life pivots like the door upon its hinge. Moreover, to possess a virtue in its perfect state, the human person needs to have all the others, for virtues are connected. Therefore, to possess justice in its perfection, the Christian must have charity: true and perfect justice is a mediation of love; in fact, justice is the initial demand of love.⁶

Meaning of Justice

The three theological virtues and the four cardinal virtues represent the seven basic attitudes in a Christian's life. For St. Thomas, in fact, a Christian is the follower of Christ who has and tries to practice

³ B. Haring, CSsR, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, Vol I (Great Britain: St. Paul Publ., 1978), p. 44

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, prol.

⁵ Cf. Ibid., II-II, 23, 6 & 8.

⁶ Cf. I-II, questions 55-62.

these seven virtues. Total Christian commitment is a constant commitment to the practice of these seven virtues. Justice, then, is one of the basic Christian attitudes, and Christian commitment to justice, a great duty of faith, hope and, above all, love.⁷ *What is justice?*

Following Aristotle, St. Thomas defines justice as *the habit whereby a person, with a lasting and constant will, renders to each his due*. If understood rightly, this definition is really good. Writes Aquinas:

Since every virtue is a principle of good activity, it has to be defined by that in a specific field of virtue. Now with respect to justice this is made up of deeds that bear on another, as will be shown later. So then the activity of justice in relation to its proper field and objective is touched on in the phrase, *rendering to each one his right*: as Isidore remarks, *A man is called just because he safeguards right*. Then for an act to be virtuous in any field whatever it has to be voluntary and to spring from a stable and firm disposition... Hence the definition starts with the *will* in order to show that the act of justice has to be voluntary, and qualifies this as *lasting and constant* in order to indicate the firmness of the act.⁸

Justice is a moral attitude of the person that inclines his will unwaveringly to give to every human being what is due to him or her, that is, his/her right. The *object* of justice is, therefore, "right" and its *act* is to give to another what is due to him, to pay to him the debt. The point of reference of justice is "the other person"; its *measure* is equality; its *subject*, the will.⁹

⁷ Saint Thomas develops the study of justice (S.Th. II-II, questions 57-122) thus: (1) Justice in itself (questions 57-60); (2) Justice in its parts (qq. 61-120); (3) The Gift of Justice, that is, Piety (q. 121); (4) The precepts of Justice (q. 122).

⁸ II-II, 58, 1.

⁹ St. Thomas treatise on justice is the most extensive, concerning virtues. It covers from question 57 to question 122, inclusive, of the second part of the second part of his *Summa Theologica* (II-II, 57-122). Question 58 is radically important, for it deals with the definition and division of justice. In the previous question (57), Aquinas studies "right" as the object of justice. The order is most appropriate, because "right" is the juridical aspect of reality as ordered and adjusted. See II-II, 57; Id., *Summa Contra Gentes*, II, 28; J. L. Aranguren, *Etica* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1972), pp. 401-411; J. Pieper, *Las virtudes fundamentales* (Madrid: Ed. Rialp, 1976), p. 85 and ff.

The three main properties of justice that flow from its definition are otherness, indebtedness and equality. Otherness refers to the fact that justice is always directed to another person, the subject of rights: it puts order in a person's relations with other persons. Thus, while in charity, the other person becomes a brother or a sister in Christ, in justice the other remains another, "almost a stranger," as J. Pieper says commenting St. Thomas.

Indebtedness as a property of justice signifies that the demand of justice is not answered by a gift, but by an obligation to pay back what belongs to another. While in charity one gives of what is "his," or "hers"; in justice a person gives what belongs to "another."

Equality expresses the basic element of justice: certain equality. The "mean" of justice —*virtus in medio*— is not the rational (and subjective) mean of reason, but the *real mean* of objectivity: one gives, *proportionately*, what is due, neither more nor less.¹⁰

Kinds of Justice

The virtue of justice is essentially, and always, directed "*ad alterum*,"¹¹ towards another person, to whom what is due to him, his right, what is "just," must be given. The "other" can be considered as an individual person and as a member of the social whole. Hence, there are three possible kinds of social relationships, namely, individual person to individual person, individual persons to society (social whole), and society to individual persons. We have, therefore, three kinds of justice, respectively: commutative justice, legal (or general) justice and distributive justice. (Properly speaking, only the human person is the *subject* of justice, and not the social, or the community; the human person as an individual being or as a member of society.)

The tripartite division of justice is rooted in Aristotle. St. Thomas developed it dynamically. It is the common division of justice in Western tradition. The three kinds of justice are interrelated.

General or legal justice orders the relationships of the individual persons to the social whole (*ordo partium ad totum*). Its object is the

¹⁰ Cf. I-II, 64.

¹¹ II-II, 57, I; *Ibid.*, 58, 2.

common good carried out by all citizens in obedience to just laws, enforced by the constituted authority. By reason of this object, general justice is above all the moral virtues because the common good is above personal good.¹² In a wide sense, we can accurately say that general justice is "all virtues" (the particular good of every virtue is referred to the common good of justice) and that its integrated parts are "to do good" and "to avoid evil" regarding the common good. Therefore, general justice is a general virtue. Moreover, it is "a special virtue in essence." Why? St. Thomas answers:

For as charity may be called a general virtue because it sets the activities of all the virtues towards the divine good, so it is with legal or general justice which sets them towards the common good. And, to continue the comparison, as charity, which is centered on God's goodness as its proper object, is of its essence a special virtue, so general or legal justice, which regards the common good as its proper object, yet remains a special virtue, so general or legal justice, which regards the common good as its proper object, yet remains a special virtue in essence.¹³

It is called *legal* justice because the ordering of the parts —the citizens— towards the whole society is established by laws through which the leaders of government direct all citizen towards the achievement of the common good.

Within general justice, and following Aristotle, St. Thomas, includes equity (or *epikeia*), as its subjective part. Equity is the most noble part of general justice, a virtue that disposes the person not to be a slave of the letter of the law. In fact, general justice is subordinated to equity, which is, therefore, a superior rule of the human acts.¹⁴

Particular ("partial" for Aristotle) justice is subdivided into two kinds or species, namely, commutative and distributive justice. *Commutative justice* directs the relations between individual persons (*ordo*

¹² Ibid., 58, 12.

¹³ Ibid., 58, 4 & 6. In this article 6, St. Thomas says that the virtue of a good citizen is "general justice which governs our acts for the common good."

¹⁴ Ibid., II-II, 120, 1-2. St. Thomas writes: "*Epikeia* is a part of justice taken in the widest sense. In this way it is clearly a subjective part. And it is called justice in a fuller sense than legal justice, because *epikeia* is a norm over and above legal justice. *Epikeia* thus stands as a kind of higher rule for human actions" (II-II, 120, 2).

partium ad partes) according to strict equality or the real mean of arithmetical equality. It is called also compensatory or contractual justice in as much as it is regulated by the private right of contracts and demands: exchanges between persons must be of equal value.

Through established authorities, *distributive justice* directs the relationships of the social whole to the individual persons according to proportionate equality: the real mean of geometrical proportion according to the prominence of persons (*ordo totius ad partes*).¹⁵

Following Aristotle, St. Thomas speaks of “other kinds” of justice: *Justice towards oneself* (when the appetite obeys reason “politically”¹⁶); *domestic justice* between parents and children (the child belongs, in part, to his parents) and similarly between husbands and wives. St. Thomas adds a new kind of justice, also improperly speaking: *religious justice* (man owes everything to God; although he will never be able to repay Him fully).¹⁷

In Christian perspective, moreover, this religious justice becomes justification by faith. Justice, then, Domingo de Soto comments, is a virtue by which man becomes submissive and grateful to God, and acceptable to his will. (By the way, Aquinas defines *justification* as the movement of the rational creature from sin to justice.¹⁸)

Obviously, St. Thomas does not speak of social justice explicitly. The adjective “social” (already implicit in the three kinds of justice) was added to “justice” in the middle of the XIX century, and underlined the strictly social —and even structural— dimension of justice. However, the basic understanding of social justice is already found in the Common Doctor, who speaks of justice as a relational virtue, and of the common good as the object of general (legal) justice, and of the pre-eminence of common property over private property.

Since Pius XI’s encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* (1931), the social doctrine of the Church has often used the term *social justice*. The

¹⁵ J. Pieper, o.c., p. 125; cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, II-II, 58; D. De Soto, *Tractatus de Iustitia et Iure* (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1967), Bk. II, q. 2.

¹⁶ II-II, 58, 2.

¹⁷ Ibid., 80, 1.

¹⁸ I-II, 113, 1; cf. D. De Soto, o.c.

Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992) speaks forcefully of social justice, and innovatively places its consideration within the general part of moral theology.¹⁹

The tripartite division of justice is complete. Therefore, social justice cannot be a new kind —or specie— of justice. It can be one of the three kinds, or two kinds, or the three kinds together: we have opinions for the three possibilities. We are inclined to think that social justice is centrally general (or legal) justice and distributive justice. Social justice is, at least, general justice: the object of both is the common good. But, social justice is more —we believe— than general justice, because it possesses a distributive aspect. Based on the fact that the human person is a social being, and that society ought to be organized in community, social justice structures society in such a way that the double objective of the common good and its just distribution among all the members of society is properly achieved.

Social justice, then, is not a new kind of justice, but it does reveal a new vision of the social reality: a vision whose horizon is made up of the absolute value of human dignity and inalienable human rights, the values of the essential equality of all human beings, and the common good, which is truly the defense and promotion of the dignity and rights of all humans. Social justice envisions a new world order permeated by the most significant four social values proclaimed by the social teachings of the Church, namely, justice, truth, freedom and solidarity.

We can truly say that Thomas already spoke of these four social values as the way to peace: the way, the objective and the ideal of a true, free, just and fraternal society.

Aquinas underlines that, properly speaking, peace is a consequence of charity, of human and Christian love (*"opus solidaritatis pax"*), but it is also an effect of justice: peace is the result of justice (*"opus iustitiae pax"*) in the sense that justice removes obstacles to peace. According to Aquinas, there can be no true peace without freedom, for peace is rooted in freedom.

In freedom, then, and with justice and love, we march peacefully towards social peace. How about the need of truth? Truth is also necessary to a peaceful social life. In fact, the most important social

¹⁹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City, 1992), no. 1928ff.

values for Aquinas are truth and love: "As man cannot live in society without truth, he cannot live without love."²⁰

We are not trying to say, but of course, that St. Thomas tells us everything we have to know about justice, or that he should not be criticized. Not at all. In fact, he has to be improved, completed and, when warranted, not followed. Let us just point out here, by way of example, a few additions regarding the meaning of justice today.

Understandably, Thomas insists too much on commutative justice, while today we underline social justice, or justice in key of human dignity and rights. He speaks almost exclusively on justice as a virtue residing in the will of the person, who is the subject of justice; but today we talk also of the objective character of justice, considering the social structures as quasi-subject of justice or injustice. Moreover, we stress much more than Thomas justice not statically but dynamically, justice in schatological perspective: as a virtue that questions unceasingly the *status quo of society*, and *defends courageously the rights of all*, particularly of the defenseless; as a value that calls people to fight non-violently for more equality at the national, regional and global levels.

When all is said and done for and against Thomas Aquinas, the substantial fact remains: justice is not everything for humans and for Christians, but, it is a necessary and irreplaceable component of the social order. An outstanding social virtue and value, particularly if it becomes a mediation of love, of charity, which is not only works of mercy but also works of justice. Before commenting on the treatise of justice of Thomas Aquinas, Domingo de Soto, one of his great commentators, writes: "We will study the most noble virtue of Justice, legitimate descendant of Faith, support of Hope, companion of Charity, luminous splendor of all other virtues." Soto ends his commentary thus: "Freedom, the greatest natural good of man, is defended principally by Justice, which is the mother of most beautiful Peace."

2. St Thomas On Property and the Poor

In pointing out the sources of St. Thomas' study of justice, authors have usually emphasized the substantial influence of Aristotle and

²⁰ II-II, 114, 2 ad 1; II-II, 29, 3 ad 3; II-II, 29, 1 ad 1, See our *The Praxis of Justice and Solidarity* (Manila: UST SRC, 1988), pp. 41-48.

only mentioned its biblical and patristic sources. Except during the 16th and 17th centuries—as we shall see—, Aquinas' radical teaching on property, the "rights" of the poor, unjust laws and even on civil disobedience was not generally highlighted and at times—in particular, on common property—, sidelined.

For St. Thomas, as we mentioned earlier, moral theology or Christian ethics is an ethics of virtues. Hence, for him social ethics in an ethics of social virtues, radically of justice and love; above all, of the virtue of charity as love of neighbor. For St. Thomas, charity is the Christian virtue, the greatest and the form of all virtues.

Justice, then, to be perfect, must be or become a mediation of love: Domingo Báñez said that the just one is the one who lives in divine charity.²¹ General justice is, in a real sense, "all virtues," because it directs all virtues towards the common good; but, charity is, in a perfect and total sense, the general virtue, because "it sets the activities of all the virtues towards the divine good."²²

Justice, as a special mediation of love, as a specific virtue is practiced by giving to persons and society their due. But, how may one give his due to a very poor person? What are his claims, his rights?

The Rights of the Poor and Property

Following the Fathers of the Church, St. Thomas speaks of the *rights of the poor*, of justice to the poor, and condemns the injustice done to them. Speaking of injustice, he says that there is illegal injustice (opposed to general or legal justice), and unfairness towards persons (against particular justice). When is one unfair to another? When he has more goods—like riches and honours—than he ought to have, or less evils—like burdens and taxes—than he ought to bear.²³

Justice involves, then, to return to others what belongs to them so that they will also have their just share of the goods of the earth. (When Aquinas implemented the last will of one of his brothers-in-law,

²¹ Dominic Báñez, *In IIam-IIae*, q. 23, a. 4; cf. II-II, 23, 6 & 8; II-II, 64, 3 ad 2.

²² II-II, 58, 6.

²³ Ibid., 59, 1.

he returned to their legitimate owners, the properties and goods unjustly taken from them by the brother-in-law.) The most innovative teaching of the Angelic Doctor is, without doubt, his doctrine on property. As expert R. Alberdi wrote:

The primacy of the universal destiny of the goods of the earth and the obligation to share them with the neighbor in need are the bases of St. Thomas' doctrinal building. His originality is found in his new approach, in the reasons to justify private property and the Aristotelian distinction between the power of disposition and the use of the goods.²⁴

In discussing theft and robbery-with-violence as sins opposed to justice regarding private property, St. Thomas deals with three inter-related problems: *Can men possess external goods? Is it lawful for a person to possess goods as his own? Is it justifiable for a man-in-need to steal?*

In his question 66, II-II of the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas gives us his innovative teaching on property. In article 1, he asks himself: *Is the possession of external goods natural to man?* With regard to their nature, the answer is in the negative: External things are not subject to man's power, "but only to God's sovereign power." God has pre-eminent dominion over all. Now, with regards to the use and management of external things, however, the answer is in the affirmative: Man does have natural dominion over external things. Man has "a mind and a will with which to turn them —imperfect things— into his own account." Furthermore, this dominion (the power to use things) is expressed by the Lord in the act of creation: "Then God said: 'Let us make man in our own image and likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish...'" (Gen 1:26).²⁵

²⁴ R. Alberdi, "Evolución de la doctrina de la Iglesia sobre la propiedad," *Documentación Social*, No. 40 (Julio-Septiembre, 1980), pp. 90-91; cf. St. Thomas, II-II, 58, 11; *Ibid.*, 66, 1-2; 32, 5; I-II, 94, 5.

²⁵ II-II, 66, 1. R. Alberdi writes: "Translated to the language of contemporary economics, St. Thomas' principle in the anthropological level wants to say that man is the end of the economy, and not economic growth; that man must not allow himself to become dominated by things, but turn these to his end; nor must he allow to be trapped by his own creations, such as the economic systems through which he becomes alienated" (a.c., p. 91. See also M. Vidal, *Moral de Actitudes*, II (Madrid: PS Editorial, 1980), pp. 357-367.

In this first article, therefore, St. Thomas does not speak of private property. He only says that God has absolute dominion over all creation (He is the creator of all things) and man shares in that dominion in a real but subordinate manner. This human dominion involves the power to use things.

In article 2 of the same question, Aquinas asks himself a more difficult and complex question: *Is it legitimate for individual men to possess anything as their own?* In the objections, St. Basil and St. Ambrose would seem to answer in the negative, while, in the "Sed Contra" (On the contrary), St. Augustine answers in the positive: Married folks and property owners can be members of the Christian congregation and have hope of salvation. It is worthwhile to quote fully St. Thomas' affirmative answer in the body of the article. He writes:

Man has a twofold competence in relation to material things. The first is the title to care for and dispose of the earth's resources. Understood in this way, it is not merely legitimate for a man to possess things as his own, it is even necessary for human life, and this for three reasons. First, because each person takes more trouble to care for something that is his sole responsibility than what is held in common or by many — for in such a case each individual shirks the work and leaves the responsibility to somebody else, which is what happens when too many officials are involved. Second, because human affairs are more efficiently organized if each person has his own responsibility to discharge; there would be chaos if everybody cared for everything. Third, because men live together in greater peace where everyone is content with what is his. We do, in fact, notice that quarrels often break out among men who hold things in common without distinction.

Man's other competence is to use the world's resources. Now in regard to this, no man is entitled to have things merely for himself, but for all, so that he is ready to share them with others in case of necessity. This is why Paul writes to Timothy, "As for the rich of this world, charge them to be liberal and generous".²⁶

Like the Fathers of the Church, St. Thomas teaches that the goods of earth were created by God for all. Unlike the Fathers, who accepted private property as a consequence of original sin, St. Thomas states that private property can also be justified (he gave us three

²⁶ II-II, 66, 2.

reasons). However, Aquinas adds that private property is subordinated, in a sense, to the common property of external things or, as we say today, to the universal destiny of the goods of the earth. More concretely: The use of the goods of the earth is universal, that is, for all humans; their appropriation by some refers to their administration and management, which will be better achieved if goods are in private hands.²⁷

Answering the objections by St. Basil and St. Ambrose, St. Thomas completes his argument by concluding that individuals are only stewards of external things or, as we put it today, of the resources of the world.²⁸

Therefore, common property (community of goods) is by natural law and private property (individual appropriation) is by positive law. The latter, however, is not contrary to natural law, but an addition to it.²⁹

The use of the goods of the earth is for all. Their administration and limited ownership is also good: one cares more responsibly for what is "his"; and this is managed more efficiently, if it is "his," and by reason of peace. St. Thomas says: "Men live together in greater peace where everyone is content with what is his."³⁰

A modern theologian writes:

Private ownership in the matter of the goods of this earth is then only secondary and subordinate to common benefit: it exists

²⁷ Mary O'Driscoll, O.P., "Justice in Dominican Tradition," in the book *Justice and Truth Shall Meet* (Sinsinawa, Wisconsin: PARABLE, 1984), P. 90.

²⁸ Ibid., 66, 2 ad 2 & 3. M. Lefebure, O.P. comments: "The second paragraph of the body of the article (2), and the replies to objections 2 & 3 contain the nub of the teaching that individuals should be only trustees and stewards of the world's resources — and, presumably, on behalf of future generations of the human race as well as of the living" (Blackfriars English Edition of the *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 63-79, Vol 38. Great Britain: Blackfriars, 1975, p. 69, f.).

²⁹ II-II, 66, 2 ad 1.

³⁰ The Blackfriars English translation put it: "Because men live together in greater peace where everyone is *content with his task*" (underscoring, added). St. Thomas words: "*Dum unusquisque re sua contentus est.*" The meaning is not the same as that of the English translation.

only as a responsibility and a trust. It follows then than any individual rights to possessions are intrinsically limited by their common origin and their common end. If taken seriously, these ideas are not only radical, they could be seen also as subversive of our existing ideas and economic-political policies.³¹

The Poor, Theft and Almsgiving

The problem is this: How can one who has nothing or not enough to live a decent human life be content? St. Thomas answers this question indirectly by saying that in case of need one ought to "steal" from those who have, and that those who have are obliged to share with the needy.

In article 7 of the same question 66, Aquinas inquires on this: *Is theft justifiable in case of necessity?* His answer is: *Yes!* Why? Because "in the case of necessity everything is in common. Therefore a person who takes somebody else's property which necessity has made common again so far as he is concerned does not commit sin" (*Sed contra*). To take what is needed is not a theft, but a right: the natural law of the community of goods is above the positive law of individual appropriations. Theft in case of real need is restitution —as the Fathers of the Church said. From this also follows that "according to natural law goods that are held in super-abundance by some people should be used for the maintenance of the poor."³²

The debatable statement here is "in imminent danger" (body of the article), or "a case of urgent necessity" (ad 1), or "extreme necessity" (ad 2) or "extreme need" (ad 3: here St. Thomas hints, that a third person can also "steal" secretly to help those in extreme need). What, then, is to be in real need? Some capitalists would answer: One is in real need when he is dying. This is, obviously, a cynical answer, although, practically —as a professor used to say—, more common than we might admit. Certainly the right to life is above the right to property. Again, the words of Mary O'Driscoll:

The injustices in our present system of private ownership is highlighted in the fact that in our society we penalize heavily any

³¹ Mary O'Driscoll, O.P., a. c., p. 93.

³² II-II, 66, 7.

crime of theft, or damage to private property, but have no system of penalizing those who accumulate more and more wealth while others are without the basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter.³³

(Parenthetically, we ask: May we not apply this doctrine on "theft" by the poor to not paying somehow the huge debts of poor countries to rich countries?)

The poor in need may—and should—take from the squandering and selfish rich; this taking, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* repeats, is not really "theft," because the natural order created by God demands that the use of goods is for all.³⁴ This doctrine brings us to St. Augustine's definition of justice as "succouring the needy."

Inquiring on whether the act of justice is to *render each one his due*, Saint Thomas begins by placing as objection Saint Augustine's definition of justice, that is, *succouring the needy*, which seems to imply that the act of justice cannot be "giving to each his right." St. Thomas answers that succouring the needy is somehow connected with justice, too:

Since justice is a cardinal virtue, other secondary virtues hinge on it, such as mercy, liberality, and the like... And therefore to succor the needy, which is a work of mercy or compassion, and to be open-handedly beneficent, which is a work of liberality, come back in a sense to justice, which is the main virtue.³⁵

Strictly speaking, however, and as St. Thomas states, the virtue of mercy, in particular, is a virtue directly connected with the virtue of charity—and also with human love.³⁶ But, St. Thomas adds, also with justice in a particular way: to help the needy is a precept of Christ, and all the precepts are precepts of justice. For Aquinas, the field of laws is the field of justice—legal justice. In a such a way, that human laws

³³ A.c., p. 93.

³⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, l.c., no. 2408.

³⁵ II-II, 58, 11 ad 1. St. Thomas compares justice with liberality, magnanimity and fortitude in the following article, art. 12, in his answer to the objections. See II-II, 58, 1 ad 6: to serve God entails "giving to each one his dues."

³⁶ Cf. II-II, 30; II-II, 29, 3 ad 3; cf. John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, no. 7.

command only through precepts for acts of justice. If human laws command acts from other virtues, it is only because they are related to justice.³⁷

In this context of precepts and justice, *almsgiving*, which is properly under charity, is also connected with justice. Unfortunately many of us, Christians, continue covering injustices with almsgiving, which, of course, has to be in the first place an addition to justice. A modern theologian writes:

We Christians have made more almsgiving than justice, and almsgiving has been and continues to be frequently more like a drug to quiet our own conscience than real communication of goods, as this was denounced already by the prophets, and above all by the great prophet Jesus of Nazareth: "Go and learn the meaning of 'I want mercy, not sacrifice'."³⁸

Christian faith tells the Christians to succour the needy, to give alms to the poor. Above all, it asks them to be just, to be socially just, that is, to work for equality, to share their goods with the poor, who have a right to a share of the goods of the earth, created by God for all —as St. Thomas told us. Moreover, Aquinas adds that the communication of goods is a requirement of Christian faith.³⁹

In cases of real need, we said, the poor may take what they really need from the rich. Furthermore, the rich are obliged to give to the needy what they do not need, what St. Thomas calls what is "superfluous." Now, the hard question is, What is *superfluous*? It is debatable —and still being debated! Although Aquinas considers this within the treatise of charity, it should also be connected with justice, precisely because the goods of the earth belong to God, who created them for all. St. Thomas writes powerfully:

Earthly goods which a man has from God are his, as far as the ownership of them goes; not so with the use of them, which he must not keep to himself, but share with others, who can be supported out of what he has over and above his own needs.⁴⁰

³⁷ I-II, 100, 2; II-II, 122, 1; Ibid., 32, 5.

³⁸ Rafael Rojo, *El amor no pasa nunca* (Madrid: Ed. Paulinas, 1987), p. 19.

³⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *In Symbolum Apostolorum Expositio*, 10.

⁴⁰ II-II, 32, 5 ad 2.

To close this section let us add a few more important points from St. Thomas. He says that the possession of material goods increases the desire for them, and that to possess too much (this is an intriguing statement) may be a sign of reprobation.⁴¹

Concerning the legal system, Aquinas says that court decisions ought to help the poor as much as possible, but without compromising justice, the application of which should be with equality without acceptance of persons.⁴²

May be if Thomas had known that the application of capital punishment would fall, in general, more on the poor and marginalized of society, he would not have been in favor of the death penalty. May the death penalty be a just punishment? St. Thomas, as we all know, answers in the affirmative. Speaking of homicide, under the section of vices against justice, he asks himself a question that today pierces our ears: *Is it lawful to kill sinners?* If the condition of the principle of totality is fulfilled, then "yes" it is lawful: the great sinner —the criminal— is like a gangrenous limb that threatens to infect the other members of society; as we amputate a limb of the body when it is a threat to its life, similarly we apply capital punishment to a sinner who is a threat to the other members of society. St. Thomas gives other arguments: the other two classical arguments refer to the defense of the death penalty as an act of legitimate defense of the State and as a deterrent against future crimes by other members of society.

We are not going to quarrel or accuse Aquinas for these ideas that were common then. But we strongly contend that they should not be defended today, particularly from a Christian perspective. Even from a human perspective, can we say that a criminal is only a part of society? No, for he is a person, a microcosm, an image of God, and must not be subordinated to society, nor can he be made a means of exemplariness to others. We have written a lot against the death

⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas, *In Ep. ad Hebr.*, quoted by Charles Journet, *The Meaning of Grace* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1962), p. 62. Journet writes: "In his commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, Saint Thomas makes the terrible statement that continuous success in temporal affairs may, in some cases, be a sign of reprobation." The psalmist prayed: "Save me from those who in this life have all they want" (Ps 17, 14).

⁴² II-II, 63, 4; *Ibid.*, 63, 4 ad 3.

penalty, and this is not the place to repeat it. Suffice it to say that today, how may a Christian be in favor of capital punishment? God is the Lord of life and death. Jesus' life and death are implicitly against capital punishment. How may one read the Sermon on the Mount and be in favor of the death penalty? We are happy about John Paul II's statement on the matter in his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* and in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*.⁴³

The Common Doctor tells us that human laws oblige only if they are just laws, that is, if they derive from eternal law, through natural law, or the law of being human. When laws are unjust, either because their end is not the common good, or are not issued by legitimate authority, or do not impose burdens proportionately, they are not binding, and must not be obeyed (cf. Ac 5:29), except when disobeying them would mean a greater evil or scandal.⁴⁴

Sharing with the poor, then, is an expression of justice, but, principally of charity as love of neighbor rooted in fraternity and manifested in solidarity, that is, love of neighbor in action. Justice is, indeed, very important for Aquinas, but it is not the most important virtue. Charity is the most important, and justice—to be saving, in the context of salvation—ought to be a mediation, an expression of love or charity, that needs and requires the fulfillment of the demands of

⁴³ Cf. II-II, q. 64, aa. 2 & 6; II-II, 68, 1; II-II, 108, 3, ad 3. See JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), pp. 204-211; *Evangelium Vitae* (Rome, 1995), nos. 27-28, 55-56. Here the Pope writes: "The nature and extent of the punishment must be carefully evaluated and decided upon, and ought not go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity...; such cases are very rare, if not practically non-existent." See also our chapter entitled "Is the Death Penalty Against Justice and Solidarity?" in our book *The Praxis of Justice and Solidarity* (Manila: UST-SRC, 1988), pp. 221-243; cf., our article "The New Catechism in Favor of the Death Penalty?" *Summons*, Vol. 4, no. 1 (May 1994), pp. 8 & 7.

⁴⁴ II-II, 96, 4 ad 3; cf. II-II, 60, 5, ad 1. The same Saint Thomas writes: "A tyrannical government is unjust because it is not directed to the common good, but to the private good of the ruler, as Aristotle says. Consequently disturbing such a government has not the nature of sedition, unless perhaps the disturbance be so excessive that the people suffer more from it than from the tyrannical regime. Indeed it is the tyrant rather that is more guilty of sedition, since he fosters discord and dissension among his subjects in order to lord over them more securely. For this is tyranny, to govern for the ruler's personal advantage to the people's harm." (II-II, 42, 2 ad 3).

justice. As Thomas writes, "All things issue from charity as from a principle, and all things are ordered towards charity as to an end."⁴⁵

The Christian is asked to practice justice as a minimal requirement of charity. He is also asked to work for justice. Today we stress more than Thomas the obligation of every Christian not only to be just but to work for justice in society, in the world, to practice what we call "the preferential option for the poor" — an obligatory option not only of charity, but also of justice. Aquinas says:

Not only he who suffers for his faith in Christ does suffer for Christ, but also he who suffers for any action of justice for the love of Christ.⁴⁶

3. Recapturing St. Thomas' Teaching on Private and Common Property

Theologian Clodovis Boff has said that modern theology is obliged to "remember and re-take" the political theology of St. Thomas, in particular his doctrine on common and private property.⁴⁷ After an "involution" of this doctrine in the XIX century and first half of the XX century, the teaching of Aquinas on property and the poor continues to be very relevant today.

Common and Private Property

After St. Thomas, the great theologians of the XVI and XVII centuries continued his radical teaching on property and the poor, and some even went further in their almost revolutionary interpretations: they clearly stated that the universal destination of the goods of the earth belonged to natural right, while their individual appropriation to positive law. Domingo Bañez even said that the prince —the law-

⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *In Jn*, XV, 2.

⁴⁶ Id., *In Ep. ad Rom.*, VIII, 7.

⁴⁷ Clodovis Boff, "St. Thomas Aquinas and the Theology of Liberation," *Dominican Ashram*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (September 1986), pp. 128-144; cf. F. Gómez, O.P., *Liberation Theology and Christian Liberation* (Manila: UST Social Research Center, 1987), pp. 73-83.

giver— may transfer the goods possessed by one to another, if this transaction promoted the common good. Among the great theologians, promoters of justice and the rights of the poor, we mention Francisco de Vitoria and Bartolomé de las Casas.

In his book *The Power of the Poor in History* (1983), liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez compares the theology of Vitoria with that of Las Casas to conclude that the latter is a better theologian. He even criticizes Vitoria, who wrote creatively the first acknowledged International Law and Human Rights, as a centrist theologian and, therefore, a theologian with reactionary positions. Chenu thought quite differently—and we agree with him. Both theologians must not be compared; one reflects on justice (Vitoria), and the other does justice; Vitoria is the example of the theologian, and Las Casas the example of the prophet. Chenu adds that each one played “an equally important, though different, roles in the great struggle for justice and freedom in Latin America.” Moreover, “they needed each other in order to do this...” It is important, Chenu concludes, “it is extremely important to recognize the convergence of the (speculative) teaching of Vitoria with the evangelizing of Las Casas. The theologian in Vitoria embraces the prophet in Las Casas.”⁴⁸

The radical —and Christian— vision of Aquinas, followed by Vitoria, Las Casas, and many others, was somehow lost or at least tamed throughout the XIX century and first half of our century: private property was given more radical importance than common property and the rights of the poor. This tamed teaching is also found in some documents of the social doctrine of the Church. The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II), asked us once to explain the distinction between private and common property. Hereafter is the explanation we gave the conciliar members.

As a member of the Council's Commission on *Social Concerns*, we were invited by PCP II (Manila, January 20-February 17, 1991), at its beginning, to attend the plenary session where our Chairman, Archbishop Orlando Quevedo, OMI, of Vigan, presented the Draft of said

⁴⁸ M.-D. Chenu, quoted by Mary O'Driscoll, O.P., “Justice in the Dominican Tradition,” in the book *Justice and Truth Shall Meet* (Sinsinawa, Wisconsin: Parable, 1984), p. 88; cf. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983), pp. 194-197.

Commission. After the presentation, Bishop Teodoro Bacani, of Manila, raised some important points. One of them: "Kindly explain Pope John Paul II's statement at his Inaugural Address to the Puebla Conference (1969) stating that 'private property is under social mortgage'."

We said then, in substance: That statement referred to the social dimension of private property, a dimension always present in the documents of the social doctrine of the Church. Following Vatican II and Paul VI, John Paul II went further in *Laborem Exercens* (LE, 14) by asserting that the right to private property is not absolute, and it is subordinated "to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone." The Pope continued expanding his teaching (going back to St. Thomas, really) in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (SRS, 42), where he repeats that "private property is under 'social mortgage', meaning that it has an intrinsically social function, based upon and justified precisely by the principle of the universal destination of goods." Hence, he added, the Church, that "takes her stand beside the poor" (SRS, 39), is obliged by her vocation to live according to this doctrine and, therefore, to share with the poor "not only of her 'abundance' but also out of her 'necessities'" (SRS, 31).

At that occasion, we also made reference to Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno*, and John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra*, where private property seems to be presented as a natural right and not—like St. Thomas—as a positive law.⁴⁹ And added, then, that with Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* and Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, the Church developed dynamically the radical teaching of Christian tradition (not only of St. Thomas, of course) on the universal destination of the goods of the earth and the intrinsic social dimension of private property.⁵⁰ Furthermore, and although not presented anymore as a natural right, the right to private property—we said—remains "valid and necessary in itself."⁵¹

⁴⁹ Cf. Leo XIII, RN, nos. 10, 11, 16, 17, 27, 36; Pius XI, QA, 44-45; John XXIII, MM, 109-112. See F. Gómez, O.P., "Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*: One Hundred Years Later," in *The Way of the Shepherd*, ed. by Socrates B. Villegas (Makati, MM: Salesian Publ. 1992), pp. 239-254.

⁵⁰ Vatican II, GS, nos. 69 and 34; Paul VI, PP, 22-24.

⁵¹ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*, no. 42; cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, 87, 90.

We continued our explanation with a distinction common in social ethics, which is rooted in Sacred Scriptures and creatively expounded by the Fathers of the Church, and especially by St. Thomas Aquinas, namely, that common property (created goods belong absolutely only to God, and their use to all) is by natural law while private property (individual appropriation), management of goods) is by positive law. Moreover, we added, private property is not contrary to natural law, but an addition to it and from it—as we analyzed earlier in this study.

We stated too that Aquinas speaks of the significant right of property for all (this is also powerfully stressed by Léo XIII). Although very much in favor of private property, he subordinates it to the natural right of possessing things like in common (which is not utopian communism): As creator of all things, God has absolute dominion over all creation; the human person shares relatively in God's dominion in a subordinate manner; this involves the human being's power to use things, a power to be shared by all. This is why private property is never an absolute right, a natural right for anyone, and it has an intrinsically social dimension, and it is subordinated to a radical natural right: the right of all humans to the use of materials goods. Writes Aquinas:

Community of goods is said to be part of the natural law not because it requires everything to be held in common and nothing to be appropriated to individual possession, but because the distribution of property is a matter not for natural law but, rather, human agreement, which is what positive law is about... The individual holding of possession is not, therefore, contrary to the natural law; it is what rational beings concluded as an addition to the natural law.⁵²

Following the Fathers of the Church, we stressed, St. Thomas defends the rights of the poor—not only out of solidarity with them, but as a demand of justice—to a share in the goods created by God for all.

Concerning justice, we also owe to Aquinas the great significance of the Fathers, whom he quotes often. On the particular matter of property and the poor, Thomas quotes very frequently the most representative among the Fathers, that is, St. Basil and St. Ambrose. A text from St. Basil, who calls the poor “the proxies of Christ”:

⁵² II-II, 66, 2 ad 1.

He who takes the clothes from a man is a thief. He who does not clothe the indigent, when he can, does he deserve another name but thief? The bread that you keep belongs to the hungry; to the naked the coat that you hide in your coffers; to the shoeless, the shoes that are dusty at your home; to the needy, the silver that you hide. In brief you offend all those that can be helped by you.⁵³

A text from St. Ambrose, quoted by Paul VI and PCP-II, reads:

You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what has been given in common for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all, and not only to the rich.⁵⁴

How come the clear distinction of St. Thomas between common property (or use of goods for all) and private property (or relative dominion over things, subordinated to common property) was sidelined or misinterpreted at times in Christian tradition? Theologian Ricardo Antoncich answers:

The confusion between the natural right of use and the positive right of ownership, thus making the latter a natural right, was due to Luigi Taparelli, former professor of Leo XIII whom he induced to speak of "a natural right of private property." Properly speaking, this expression has a legitimate meaning and has continued in use in the Church's social teaching. Ever since Pius XII(?), however, it has been kept clearly subordinated to another more radical and primordial, natural right: the right of all human beings to the use of all material goods. This is the present teaching of the Popes and of Vatican Council II.⁵⁵

Theological Explanation Today

How may we explain, or translate, Thomas' intuition on property today? We find the explanation of well-known moralist Marciano Vidal interesting, convincing and basically faithful to Aquinas' teaching.

⁵³ St. Basil, *Hom. VII in famem*, I: PG, 31, 325; cf. II-II, 66, 2.

⁵⁴ St. Ambrose, *De Nabuthe*, 3, XIII: PL 14, 747; cf. Paul VI, PP, 23; PCP II, l.c., nos. 297-303, pp. 101-104; II-II, 66, 1 ad 3.

⁵⁵ R. Antoncich, *Christians in the Face of Injustice. A Latin American Reading of Catholic Social Teaching* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987), p. 125.

Vidal speaks of three significant levels of reality, and of their corresponding morality. *First level*: Relation of the "dominion" of the human person to economic goods. This is the "anthropological" category. *Second level*: The destination of the goods is to the service of all human persons. This means property as an "ethical" category. *Third level*: Effective appropriation of the goods by the human being. Property as a "socio-juridical" category: the need to accept private property, in line with St. Thomas arguments, against a radical and utopian "communism." However, this appropriation "must not contradict the affirmation of the real verification of the previous ethical demand of the universal destiny of the goods, and the arguments to defend private property must not be improperly utilized to defend private property".⁵⁶

We would like to add to Vidal's concretization of Thomas' basic teaching on property the radical basis, that is, that God is really the owner of all things, and we humans are only stewards. This is the "theological" dimension.

Private property, then, can be considered a right, but subordinated to a more radical and important right, the universal right to a share by all in the goods of creation. The sad reality is that often private property is "depriving property." Theologian Marc Oraison wrote:

The question of "depriving property" is a very complicated one. Possessions is a fundamental requirement of existence and of survival... There are certain things the ownership of which is absolutely necessary—those things that enable me to survive independently and ensure me a minimum of self-respect. But where does this absolutely necessary ownership stop, and where does "depriving property"—that is, aggressive ownership, directed against other human beings—start? The ills caused by ownership are known to everyone. There is even a French axiom to express it: *La propriété, c'est le vol*—"Property is robbery"...

A certain Jesus of Nazareth once said that no man can serve both God and Mammon...⁵⁷

⁵⁶ M. Vidal, *Moral de Actitudes: III, Moral Social* (Madrid: PS Editorial, 1979), pp. 357-367. See also R. Giménez, *Ricardo Alberdi: entre el realismo y la utopía* (San Sebastian-Donostia: Publicaciones Idatz, 1993), pp. 217-233; Ottorino Benetollo, "L'ordinamento economico alla luce del pensiero antropologico di S. Tommaso," *Sacra Doctrina*, XXXV, 5 (Settembre-Ottobre, 1990), pp. 443-458.

⁵⁷ Marc Oraison, *Morality for Moderns*, trans. by J.F. Bernard (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1972), pp. 46-47.

St. Thomas' option for justice and, in a real sense, for the preferential option for the poor, in the practice of justice, as a mediation of love, are rooted in the ethical principle of *the university destination of the goods of the earth*. God is the real owner of the earth He created for all. Humans are only its stewards. Hence, expropriation can be ethical, and also "stealing" in case of real need.

Furthermore, with St. Thomas, traditional theology has taught that "superfluous" goods belong in justice to the poor. Vatican II says:

God intends the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people. [...] Whatever the form of ownership may be, as adopted to the legitimate institutions of people according to diverse and changeable circumstances, attention must always be paid to the universal purpose for which created goods are meant. In using them, therefore, a man should regard his lawful possessions not merely as his own but also as common property in the sense that they should accrue to the benefit of not only himself but of others. For the rest, the right to have a share of earthly goods for oneself and one's family belongs to everyone.⁵⁸

Conclusion

In his best-seller book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, John Paul II laments the fact that Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* has been somewhat neglected today, and adds: "It is not good that his thought has been set aside in the post-conciliar period; he continues, in fact, to be the *master of philosophical and theological universalism*."⁵⁹

As Christians, we need to go back to the masters of our tradition and thought —St. Augustine, St. Thomas... We continue studying Aquinas, not to present him exclusively or to repeat him routinely; but to know him, to analyze him, to criticize him..., to translate his letter and spirit to our times. "St. Thomas," writes Congar, "is a master of thought, a model of loyalty and intellectual honesty, a man of dialogue, the symbol of open-mindedness, the genius of reality. We should remain faithful to his spirit. I doubt that a better intellectual guide can be found."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Vatican II, GS, 69.

⁵⁹ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, l.c., pp. 29-31.

⁶⁰ Yves Congar, in "Interview with Yves Congar," *America* (May, 1967), pp. 676-677. The great French theologian added: "St. Thomas is proposed as a master by

On the topic of justice, St. Thomas continues to be for us an acknowledged master, a seminal thinker and —more than any other author— the creative discoverer of Aristotle and the Fathers of the Church. Indeed, in our historical, philosophico-theological analysis of justice, we have to go back to him: Aquinas represents a necessary stop—not the only one—in our search for the meaning and implications of the virtue of justice in human and Christian perspective.

More in particular, we must re-capture Thomas' radical teaching on private and common property, and on the poor, as the priority in the practice of justice, particularly in the perspective of the Gospel. Today we aptly call this priority "the preferential love for the poor." This option, an obligatory commitment for all Christian, without which salvation is not possible, is, in a true sense, a new presentation—which takes into consideration also the economic, political, cultural and social structures of society— of the ever present priority of the poor: in the prophets of the Old Testament, in the Prophet and Saviour Jesus Christ above all, in the Fathers of the Church, in St. Thomas Aquinas.

It is important to stress before closing our study that, as we all know, moral theology, the theology of virtues, is ordered to practice. It is, principally, practice. Hence, when we reflect on justice, property and the poor according to Thomas Aquinas, it is not mainly to know his teachings, but to carry them out in social life. "*Prius vita quam doctrina*," the Angelic Doctor said: Life before doctrine!

We hope that the readers of this article are moved (with me, in the first place) to practice justice with all, principally with the poor, who are usually treated unjustly in a world dominated by capital.

Novelist Andre Brink has said, through one of his characters, that there are only two kinds of madness we should guard against: one is the belief that we can do everything; the other is the belief that we can do nothing. Therefore, the only thing we can and ought to do is something: Let us try harder to be just and fraternal to all people and principally in solidarity with the poor. Prophet Micah encourages us "to act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with Lord" (Mic.6:8).

Vatican II. This does not mean simply repetition and the exclusion of other theologians. Rather it means that we study under his guidance; we follow his spirit."