

also that the size and the frequency of the movement decrease in proportion as our experience with the faithfulness of God is enriched. One falls less far and also less often. The Christian couple tends, therefore, toward a final balance of their recovered communion. Such is the grace of God; it makes us recognize the conditions necessary for the life of God's kingdom in the midst of the sinful world.

Let us say, further, that the seal of the grace of God on a couple is *the child*. Moreover, although the seal may not be indispensable for believing in this grace, it is a sign of it.

Ultimately the child is the one who makes adultery impossible. If it is already grievous and fraught with consequences for one to be unfaithful to the mate God has given us, how much more is it so to be unfaithful to the child God gives us as a sign of his mercy!

God knows the causes of infidelity both for us and for our children; he does us the favor, therefore, of giving us this precise commandment: "You shall not commit adultery." In being faithful to each other a man and a woman announce to the world the possibility of human fidelity to God. In the struggles of their married life they proclaim the struggle and final victory of God in Jesus Christ. A faithful couple is a sign of the kingdom which is coming.

❏ QUESTION 110. *What does God forbid in the eighth commandment?*

He forbids not only the theft and robbery^a which civil authorities punish, but God also labels as theft all wicked tricks and schemes by which we seek to get for ourselves our neighbor's goods, whether by force or under the pretext of right,^b such as false weights^c and measures,^d deceptive advertising or merchandising,^e counterfeit money, exorbitant interest,^f or any other means forbidden by God. He also forbids all greed^g and misuse and waste of his gifts.^h

a. 1 Cor. 6:10. Nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-13.

b. Luke 3:14. Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?"

And he said to them, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

Cf. 1 Thess. 4:6.

c. Prov. 11:1. A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is his delight.

d. Ezek. 45:10. "You shall have just balances, a just ephah, and a just bath."

Cf. Deut. 25:13-16.

e. Prov. 12:22. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight.

f. Luke 6:35. "Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish."

Cf. Ps. 15:5.

g. Luke 12:15. He said to them, "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Cf. 1 Cor. 6:10.

h. Luke 16:1-2. He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a steward, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'"

❏ QUESTION 111. *But what does God require of you in this commandment?*

That I work for the good of my neighbor wherever I can and may, deal with him as I would have others deal with me,^a and do my work well so that I may be able to help the poor in their need.^b

a. Matt. 7:12. "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets."

b. Eph. 4:28. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need.

Cf. Phil. 2:4.

You shall not steal. The eighth commandment is dominated by the promise of God to Abraham and through him to all the people of Israel. "I will give to you, and to your descendants after

you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Gen. 17:8; see also Leviticus 25:38; Numbers 34:2; Deuteronomy 32:49).

God is the owner and master of all things and it is he who gives to man all the goods he needs in order to live. Man is never more than a manager, one to whom God entrusts the responsibility of oversight. Moreover, the one who possesses something is accountable to God and to the neighbor for it. Calvin pleads: "We must remember that what each person possesses did not happen to him by fortuitous chance but by the choice of the one who is sovereign Master and Lord of all. This is why one cannot defraud anyone of these bounties, lest God's purpose for him be violated" (*Institutes*, Book I, Ch. XVI, pp. 197 ff.).

The promised land, the country of Canaan, has been given to Israel as a sign of the sovereignty and love of God. God does not want his own people to lack the necessities of life, and he gives these things to them for their use. But he remains the owner of them all: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1).

All the legislation of Israel aims at safeguarding this right of God. "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are all strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. 25:23). This explains the stubbornness of Naboth in his refusal to Ahab: "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers" (1 King 21:3).

Everything belongs to God: "The silver is mine and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts" (Hag. 2:8).

Such is the basis of the economic morality which rises out of the providence of God. God intends to retain the ownership of everything, because he wants to have everything at his disposal for all his creatures.

In this perspective, we are far removed from economic theories based upon humanism and humanitarian concern. Everything was distorted in this domain the day that man claimed a right which belonged only to God. In robbing God, man has cheated his neighbor. At such a point one could say the situation has become so flagrant that "ownership is theft." So it is whenever God is no longer recognized and confessed as the Master and Lord of all things.

On the very day when we said with Jean Jacques Rousseau that "the earth belongs to no one," there began the economic and social difficulties in which we are still entangled today. By opposing one economic system to another, men are searching, without even realizing it, for a better organization of society to compensate for the initial mistake which was to make all systems inadequate, namely, that God is no longer acknowledged as the sole owner of all goods. It is man's responsibility to bear fruit to the glory of his Lord and for the welfare of other men. We blame the systems, but it is man himself who is indicted by the Word of God.

It is not without reason that one of the most secretive, mysterious, and inscrutable sectors of man's life has always been that of money. It is preeminently the subject about which one does not speak in company, and for a very good reason!

The falsification of life is always the result of man's lie to God. The deceit without equal consists in pretending to God and to men that we are administering his goods, whereas we have actually hoarded them for ourselves (Acts 5:1-11).

Luther has called attention to the fact that the eighth commandment covers practically every facet of social life: "This commandment involves an act which produces many good works and condemns numerous vices. That act is benevolence; thereby each one, while helping himself, is desirous of helping and of being of service to others. On the other hand, it not only fights against theft and extortion but also against all the depreciation which can be practiced against other people in regard to their worldly goods, for example, greed, usury, exorbitant taxes, exploitation, making use of deceptive merchandising, false weights and measures. And who could enumerate all those things, those little, sharp, new, and clever tricks of which the number increases daily in all industry, and by which each one seeks his advantage to the detriment of others, thereby denying the law?" (*Op. cit.*: Weimar VI, p. 270; *Luther's Works*, Vol. 44).

Our Christian vocation calls us to be witnesses of the new order established in this world by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, to the end that life may be possible for all men on earth.

"You shall not steal" is really an echo of God saying, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the house of bondage."