

The Pastor's Keyboard—Msgr. Richard Huneger

24th Sunday of Ordinary Time

September 12, 2021

Catholicism has affirmed as basic the *right to property* ("ownership," the moral power to possess and use a thing as one's own). It may be "private" (individual or collective, i.e., corporate) or "public" (belonging to State or Church). Eminent domain (with just compensation) is the prerogative of the State, to take private property for public need. Property types include "means of production," "consumer goods," "real property" (real estate, merchandise, money).

In the 19th century *Capitalism* and *Socialism* arose. The first insisted on unrestricted use of property ("laissez-faire"); the second denied any right to private property (Communism). This occurred in the wake of the abolition in France in 1789 of the medieval "guilds" (with a three-tier system of apprentices, journeymen, and masters, and an elected "consul" that helped set wages). The French Revolution wanted "unfettered competition" to reign. The Church took a middle position, insisting on the right to "property" (something that is "one's own" and freely employed by the owner), but also insisting on the "dual" orientation of goods: Yes, to one's "necessity and convenience," but also Yes, to the "universal destination" of goods, for the benefit of all ("property" has "social" obligations). Thus, individual initiative and responsibility and achievement are balanced by responsibility to "do good" with what God (ultimately) has placed in one's hands. The challenge to the rich young man to "sell all" and "give to the poor" *before* beginning to follow Jesus, and the example of "voluntary poverty" (no "private" property) in religious communities, modeled on the idyllic communal life in Acts 2, stand as a reminder. Some Socialist plans looked to make "public" the means of production, while allowing consumer goods to remain "private." Leo XIII recognized (*Rerum Novarum*, 1891) that the only way forward out of poverty for the masses was to foster the creation of wealth (widespread personally motivated energy and creativity), harnessing resources more efficiently (greater productivity) to enable at minimum a "living wage" for the worker (enough for the support of a "frugal and well-behaved workingman"). Pius XI (*Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931) spoke of the worker being entitled to a "family wage" ("adequate for the support of himself and his family"). Neither of these is identical with "equal pay for equal work." Pius XII furthered Pius XI's idea of "partnership contract" (profit-sharing by workers, beyond wages) in promoting "cooperatives."

We are social by nature, and called to contribute to the wellbeing of the social order at every level (reverence for parents and family loyalty, civic spirit, patriotism), according to a norm of facilitating everyone to enter and creatively support every greater "communion" among persons, to manifest a foreshadowing on earth of the world to come, and glorify God. Our achievements are not to draw attention to ourselves, but to facilitate beneficence of each to all and all to each, as the forum for glorifying God. This involves both *justice* and *charity*. "Justice" renders to each his due. It is "commutative" (exchange, wage for salary, goods for payment) between individuals, "legal" between rulers and subjects (making and obeying reasonable ordinances for the common good, punishing crimes), and "social" ("distributive" of benefits and burdens). "Charity" means "affective" (feeling compassion) and "effective" (doing something) beneficence, for the true good of another. Not just patching up injustice (handout to an exploited person), but "loving" neighbor "out of" love for God. Do you love God and everything God is in himself and wants to share with us (his very life) enough to help that become real in your neighbor? That is, do you love God whom you cannot see, enough to want to see the "image" of God flourish in your neighbor, whom you do see, so as to help you "see" God better? Plato saw Justice as being "each part doing its own" (each unique person's unique charism contributing, in team spirit, to the whole); thus, ordering society to give opportunity to each person to identify, develop, and employ his talent for the common good. D R Bhandari put it this way: "Plato contended that justice is the quality of soul, in virtue of which men set aside the irrational desire to taste every pleasure and to get a selfish satisfaction out of every object and accommodated themselves to the discharge of a single function for the general benefit." This is very different from recent "**woke**" carpings about "social justice" that focus on "class" (as defined by skin color, gender, etc.) "averages" of some fungible good (money, types of jobs, etc.) and argue that all *differences* in the *average* between one *group* and another are due to evil "supremacy" of the one class against the other, become "systemic" over time, and to be eliminated by shaming, violence, and mandated awarding of benefits (credentials, jobs, etc.) regardless of *individual* effort or achievement. "Wokeness" denies personal agency to exploit class grievances, in order to obtain raw power, ultimately socially destructive.