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THE PROBLEM OF PRIVATE PROPERTY
ACCORDING TO ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Anton Hermann Chroust* and Robert J. Affeldt**

In *Summa Theologica* 2.2, quaest. 66, art. 2 ad 1, St. Thomas definitely states his position in reference to the problem of private property:

The possession of all things in common is ascribed to the natural law; not in the sense that the natural law dictates that all things should be possessed in common, and that nothing should be possessed as one's own; but in the sense that no division of possessions is made by the natural law. This division arose from human agreement which belongs to the positive law...Hence the ownership of possessions is not contrary to the natural law, but a super-addition (*ad inveniendum*) thereto devised by human reason.

This passage has been the occasion of considerable controversy among eminent scholars. It has been reduced, for the most part, into obscurantism by social propagandists. The true meaning of this passage resides in the fact that, in the final analysis, it is a compromise or synthesis between the Aristotelean realistic or practical attitude toward the social significance of private property and the Apologetic-Patristic (and Stoic) idealistic postulate of a communion of all property and possessions. St. Thomas merely points out the social and moral significance of both of these forms of property.

The Thomistic compromise essentially consisted in the rejection by St. Thomas of the early Christian conviction that the end of the world was at hand. This, together with the arguments advanced by Aristotle in favor of private property, definitely determined his attitude toward the problem of private possessions and private property. Although St. Thomas did not refute the authority of the earliest Christian

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thinkers and Churchfathers, his views no longer conformed with their eschatological or apocalyptic expectations. In large measure this was owing to the fact that St. Thomas had come to the realization that since the Church of Christ had existed over 1200 years, it would probably continue to exist for many more years. To a certain degree, therefore, man was under the realistic compulsion to make some "long term property arrangements" for his own secular future as well as that of his descendants.

It must be kept in mind that even though St. Thomas accepted the survivance of human secular existence and the secular institutions of historical Christianity, he yet did not draw the full consequences from such facts. This not only explains the position of St. Thomas as expressed in *Summa Theologica* 2.2, quaest. 66, art. 2 ad 1, but it is also responsible for some of the rather extravagant and conflicting interpretations of this passage suggested by a variety of scholars.

In order to realize more completely the Thomistic conception of private property, it is necessary to reconstruct some of the fundamental attitudes toward secular matters in general and private property in particular as displayed by the leading Christian authors during the various periods of early Christianity. Relying upon Christ's own words that He would soon return to judge the world in righteousness,¹ many among the early Christian believers felt that the time of man's work had expired and, consequently, they not only saw the end of time as being imminent,² but they actually yearned for this final and conclusive event.³ This firm belief in the proximity of the final Kingdom of God, as well as the realization that Christ's kingdom "is not of this world,"⁴ should explain why the early Christians on the whole displayed an attitude of general apathy in the affairs and problems of a secular nature.⁵ In view of this impending event, as far as the individ-

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¹ Cf. Matthew 3.2; 24.34; 28.36; 16.28; Mark 9.1; 14.39; Luke 9.9; 9.27; 21.26 ff.; 21.32; John 14.3; Acts 1.11; 2.20; 17.31; 1 Corinthians 1.7; 2 Corinthians 5.10; 2 Peter 3.9 ff.; Revelation 11.18.

² John 21.22 ff.; Epist. of James 5.8; Revelation 1.1; 6.11; 22.7; 22.10; 22.12; 22.20; 1 Thessal. 4.15; Philipp. 4.5; Matthew 10.7.

³ Revelation 22.20.

⁴ John 18.36.

⁵ Cf. Matthew 22.21; Mark 12.17 ff.; Luke 20.25; 12.24 ff. See also Mark 12.14 ff.; Matthew 10.9; 18.3 ff.; 5.25-31; The Sermon in the Mount (Matthew 5.1-7.27); The Sermon in the Plain (Luke 6.17-6.49); The Parable of the Rich Young Man (Matthew 19.16-30; Mark 10.17-31; Luke 18.18-30). Cf. A. H. Chroust, "The Metaphysics of Time and History in Early Christian Thought," in: New Scholasticism 29 (1945) no. 4, pp. 326 ff.; E. Salin, Urchristentum und Staat, in: Schmoller's Jahrbuch fur Gesetzgebung, 55. Jahrgang, 1. Halbband (Muenchen and Leipzig 1931). Salin, on page 23, makes the following observation: "It can hardly be disputed that history and historical continuity would lose all coherent meaning if one should claim on the one hand that the whole of Christ's life was completely determined by this 'my kingdom is not of this world' (John 18.36), and, nevertheless, insist that the history of
ual was concerned, there could be only one relevant command, namely an apodictic METANOEITE—a “repent and return to God.” And this METANOEITE, in turn, meant to many a complete rejection of all the riches of this earth, including individual possessions and private property.

At the same time it was well remembered that Christ had never ceased addressing to poor and the sick, the blind and the lame: “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.” For “has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to those that love Him?” In this fashion poverty actually was looked upon as a kind of virtue, or to be more exact, a kind of social virtue.

This general attitude towards property and private possessions is stressed in the *Acts of the Apostles*, where the abolishment of all private property and earthly riches is considered the result of true brotherly love:

Now the multitude of believers were of one heart and one soul; and not one said that anything he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common . . . and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there anyone among them in want. For those who owned lands or houses would sell them and bring the price of what they had sold, and laid it at the Apostle’s feet; and distribution was made into every man, according as any one had need.

And again we are told that “Joseph, who by the Apostles was surnamed Barnabas, . . . having land, sold it and brought the price, and laid it at the Apostle’s feet.” Apparently this unselfish deed of a Levite, which is the manifestation of that truly Christian spirit of brotherhood which sees in poverty a Christian and, hence, a meritorious virtue, is recited here with particular emphasis in order to stimulate others to follow the example set by Barnabas. An attempt at putting aside money for personal use, on the other hand, is severely punished:

A man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a piece of land and by fraud kept back part of the price of the land, with

Christ’s Church and the Christian middle ages is based on this dictum, on the other hand. In fact, the only correct and fruitful type of interpretation must hold just the opposite view: The Christian Church and the Christian State must be understood as the living and hence irrefutable proof for the fact that the work and word of Christ also contained a definite meaning and distinct ends pertaining to this world.”

*If* Tacitus (*Annales* 15.44) reports that Emperor Nero subjected the Christians to tortures which under the law could only be applied to the *humiliores*, that is, the lowly and poor people, then we may assume that the majority of the early Christian converts belonged to the poorest class of people.

*Matthew* 11.28.

*Epistle of James* 2.5.

*Acts* 4.32-35.

*Acts* 4.36-37.
the connivance of his wife, and bringing a part only, laid it at the feet of the Apostles. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan tempted thy heart, that thou shouldst lie to the Holy Spirit and by fraud keep back part of the price of the land? While it yet remained, did it not remain thine; and after it was sold, was not the money at thy disposal? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thy heart? Thou hast not lied to men, but to God." And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and expired. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.\[^{10a}\]

The ideal of Christian brotherhood practicing the social virtue of poverty and mutual charity, is first stated in the *Acts of the Apostles*:

And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and would sell their possessions and goods and distribute them among all men as everyone had need.\[^{11}\]

Essentially the same idea is expressed in the *Epistle of St. James*, namely where the latter stated:

Your gold and silver are rusted, and their rust will be a witness against you, and will eat your flesh as it were fire.\[^{12}\]

This sweeping negative attitude toward all earthly possessions—the result of the eschatological or apocalyptic expectations harbored by the early Christians—was soon modified and replaced by a charitable interpretation of the meaning of personal wealth and property. To some extent such a change of attitude might have been brought about by the historical fact that gradually people of wealth began to embrace the Christian faith. The new converts used their possessions to alleviate the poverty of their brethren. Thus the initial resentment against any form of property and wealth, so pronounced during earlier days, seems to have abated somewhat. At the same time we also experience a change from absolute rejection of all property which was identified with paganism, to a toleration of private property and private possessions, provided that the latter were used for charitable purposes. This transition may be considered as lying at the very foundation of organized charitable institutionalism as devised by early Christianity. But such a charitable institutionalism of necessity must recognize the institution of private property, even though it makes definite demands on the use of this property. This novel attitude finds its expression in the *Epistle of St. James*, where we are exhorted:

Behold, the wages of the laborers who reaped your fields, which have been kept back by you unjustly, cry out: and the cries of those who have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.\[^{13}\]

\[^{10a}\] *Acts* 5.1-5.
\[^{11}\] *Acts* 2.44-45.
\[^{12}\] *Epistle of James* 5.3.
\[^{13}\] *Ibid.* at 5.4.
At the same time St. James also touched upon the relationship of faith and good or charitable works:

What will it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked and in want of daily food, and one of you say to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," yet you do not give them the things which are necessary for the body, what does it profit? So faith too, unless it has works, is dead in itself. But someone will say, "Thou hast faith and I have works." Show me thy faith without works, and I from my works will show thee my faith. Thou believest that there is one God. Thou dost well. The devils also believe and tremble. But dost thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? Dost thou see that faith worked along with his works, and by works that faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, and he was called the friend of God. You see that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. In like manner was not Rahab...also justified by works, when she welcomed the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith also without works is dead.14

But the transition from the rigoristic eschatological or apocalyptic attitude toward all earthly possessions to a more tolerant "charitable interpretation" of property rights and wealth was a gradual process. Thus we read in the Didache, written toward the end of the first century:

If you have means at your disposal, pay a ransom for your sins...Do not turn away from the needy, but share all things with your brother, and do not say, "It is private property." If you are sharers in what is imperishable, how much more so in the things that perish.15

This passage, which reminds us of certain statements found in the Acts of the Apostles, was once more re-iterated in the Epistle of Barnabas, written during the early part of the second century:

Have all things in common with your brethren, and do not say, "It is private property." For, if you are sharers in what is imperishable, how much more so in things that perish.16

The so-called Sheppard of Hermas, probably written around the middle of the second century, resolutely demanded that we "relinquish this world and all its riches."17 St. Justin Martyr, in his Apology written

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15 Didache (or, The Apostles’ Creed) 4.6-8. Cf. Luke 11.42; Acts 2.44; 4.32; Romans 15.27.
16 Epistle of Barnabas 19.8.
17 Sheppard of Hermas, edit. Simonides 9.31.2: "Opertet illos derelinquere hoc saeculum et divitias suas."
about the middle of the second century, also followed in the path of the eschatological or apocalyptic tradition when he proclaimed:

We who once loved riches and earthly possessions above everything else, now turn into common property even that which we already possess, and share it with the needy.\(^{18}\)

Minucius Felix, in his dialogue *Octavius*, written during the last half of the second century, asserted:

The poor is less encumbered and hence does not groan under the burden of riches when journeying through this life . . . We could ask God to bestow upon us earthly riches if we were to consider them as something useful. Since God possesses everything He could give us a considerable share of these riches. Nevertheless, rather than to possess them, we prefer to disregard earthly riches.\(^{19}\)

But perhaps the most extreme anti-proprietarian position is held by Irenaeus who, possibly toward the end of the second century, indignant-ly claimed that all private property and possessions are the product of "the mammon of injustice,"\(^{20}\) thus anticipating Proudhon's famous "*qu'est ce que la propriété? La propriété c'est le vol.*"\(^{21}\)

The transition from an unwavering eschatological or apocalyptic spirit toward property to a charitable humanistic interpretation of property and wealth was greatly stimulated by the realization that the end of his world did not materialize as early as had been expected. The new spirit found its first tangible expression in the establishment of Christian charitable institutions. The first traces of such institutions can already be witnessed in the *Act of the Apostles*, that is, in those instances where we are told that a man

sold all his earthly possessions and brought the price of the things sold, and laid it down at the feet of the Apostles: and distribution was made unto every man according as anyone had need.\(^{22}\)

In other words, prompted by the dictates of Christian brotherhood and Christian charity, the brethren voluntarily taxed themselves in order to support not only their Church, but also all those of their less fortunate brethren who were incapable of providing for themselves. The

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\(^{21}\) It should be noted that this statement of Proudhon, which was made in 1847, can be traced back to Brissot, one of the authors of the French declaration of "The Rights Of Man."

\(^{22}\) *Acts* 4.34-35. Cf. *Id.* at 4.37: "[And Joses] . . . having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it to the Apostles' feet." 4.45: "[And all] . . . would sell their possessions and goods, and distribute them among all men, as anyone had need."
revenue from this "self-taxation," which was meant to profit the whole community of believers, was then distributed by the community or its Elders according to existing needs. This idea was clearly formulated by St. Justin Martyr when he said:

But the rich and he who is willing to do so, gives whatever he wishes to give, and everyone gives according to his own fancy. And that which has been collected in this manner is deposited with the Elder.

The vital tone of this new spirit toward property can also be detected in the exhortations of St. James:

Behold, the wages of the laborers who have reaped your fields, which have been kept back by you unjustly, cry out: and the cries of those who have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

Clement of Rome is quite forthright when he stated:

The rich man shall give support to the poor man; and the poor man shall give thanks to the Lord for having received relief from his distress. Whoever knows of someone weighed down by misery, and does not come to his succor, commits a grave sin and becomes guilty of his blood.

It is quite obvious that these views and exhortations, at least by implication, accept the actuality both of individual wealth and personal property or possessions. It also becomes apparent, however, that wealth and private property can morally be justified only by their charitable use. Thus St. Ambrose of Milan, writing during the second half of the fourth century, could openly proclaim that whatever the Church terms its own is actually nothing other than the property or "estate" of the poor which the Church merely held in trust. And St. Augustine was able to defend the institution of Church property against the attacks of the Donatists, who still adhered to the eschatological radicalism of the earliest Christians, by declaring:

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23 Out of these voluntary contributions were supported above all the teachers and officials (cf. Didache 13,) the poor and helpless such as widows or orphans, and finally those who were sick and could no longer work. In addition, the revenues were also used to bury the dead who were too poor to provide for their own funeral. Cf. St. Paul, 1 Timothy 5.16, and especially 5.17: "Let the Elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and the doctrine." Lactantius, Divinae Institutiones 6.12.—Hence it might be said that the revenues from this voluntary or self-imposed taxation was used as a kind of "social insurance" for all those within the community of believers who for some reason could not support themselves or defray the ordinary expenditures of a minimum of decent human existence.

25 Epist. of James 5.4.
26 Epist. 1 ad Corinthios 38, PG 1.284.
27 Sheppard of Hermas 4, PG 2.1011-1012.
28 Epist. 18 ad Valentinianum 16.
If we admit of property in order to meet our needs, we do this not in order that we may have property or possessions, but solely in order that the poor among us may have something. For we are so to speak the trustees of the property and the rights of the poor, whose property we do not appropriate by usurpation which would be anathema with us.

The idea of charity in form of self-imposed taxation among the early Christians did not limit itself merely to the giving of alms or voluntary contributions to the community of the brethren. It is a fact of common knowledge that the earliest Christian communities organized something like "employment agencies" which provided work not only for the members of the community, but also for all those brethren who had come from other lands or communities. For did not St. Paul insist that every man had not only the duty, but also the right to work.

Thus the Didache, referring to itinerant laborers, stated:

If anyone intend to settle down among you, then, in case he be a craftsman, see to it that he can work for his living. If he has no trade or craft, use your own judgment and take steps in accordance with the Christian maxime that no follower of Christ may live in idleness among you.

These "social welfare institutions" devised by the early Christian communities were a visible manifestation of application of the Christian concept of brotherly love and the communion of all the faithful in Christ.

Aside from their deeply moral value, these social welfare institutions of the early Christians had also a historical and political significance of the first magnitude: despite its military power and glory, the Roman Empire, with the exception of the short-lived efforts of Caesar, had never been able to cope effectively with the ever growing socio-economical distress facing the average inhabitant of the Empire.

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29 Epist. 185 ad Bonifacium 9.36, PL 33.809.
30 1 Thessal. 4.10-11: "We beseech you, brethren, ... to work with your own hands, as we commanded you." 2 Thessal. 3.10-12: "...this we commanded you: if any man would not work, neither let him eat. For we have heard that there are some who walk among you working not at all, but are busy at meddling. Now such persons we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ that with quietness they work and eat their own bread." Ephesians 4.28: "He who was wont to steal, let him steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands at what is good, that he may have something to share with him who is in need." Cf. 1 Corinth. 4.12; Genesis 3.19: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." 1 Thessal. 5.12-13.
31 Didache 12. Cf. 2 Thessal. 3.10; Acts 18.3. See also Didache 13.
32 The early Christians also practiced hospitality and offered asylum to the persecuted. Those of the faithful who on account of their faith had been sentenced to forced labor, were provided for by ample private donations or "endowments" especially designated for this purpose.
33 To mention but one example: During the second century A.D. the rather large province of Africa, which included modern Tunisia and Eastern Algiers, actually belonged to six individual absentee landowners. Many of the farmers or Roman colonists in Africa, who had been disposessed—often by totally illegal means—had fled either into the hills where they banded together in order to raid the surrounding country side, or had moved into the cities
Neither did the Empire or its rulers ever contend that one of the primary functions of a well ordered body politic was to provide for the social welfare of its many peoples. Hence the social welfare institutions of the early Christian actually filled a crying need—a need which the pagan Empire of Rome could not, and would not meet effectively. In this sense—and herein lies the socio-historical significance of the early Christian Church—the latter became a socio-political factor within the Roman Empire in that it supplemented one of the essential functions of any well organized state. It was but a matter of time until the Church had interwoven itself into the basic fabric of the Empire. By establishing itself as an integrant part of this secular pattern, the Church gradually realized that it was also a socio-political power which commanded universal respect. This newly acquired power and authority of the Church was greatly enhanced when Emperor Constantine, by the Edict of Toleration in 313, officially recognized the Church, and when Emporer Theodosius declared the Church a “juristic person” capable of acquiring rights and real property. It is obvious that such a development of necessity begets a novel attitude toward the significance of property and wealth.

The evolution of the basic attitude of the early Christians toward property and its significance on the whole moves along the following historical lines: While the first Apologists in their eschatological or apocalyptic fervor completely rejected any and all forms of private property or individual wealth, the Fathers of the Church, being faced with an entirely new political and social situation, assumed what may be called a “socio-reformatory” attitude toward private property and private wealth. This new attitude was marked by the shifting of emphasis from the possession to the use of property. Although circumstances had compelled the Fathers to abandon the eschatological positions of the earliest Christians, they continued to regard themselves as “solidarists” in principle. The realistic viewpoint of the Fathers, at

where they further swelled the already over-populated ranks of the city proletariat.

36 Id. at 124.
37 There is much loose talk about the so-called “communism” within the early Christian communities. K. Kautsky, Der Ursprung des Christentums (Stuttgart 1910), pp. 347 ff., and M. Beer, Allgemeine Geschichte des Sozialismus und der sozialen Kämpfe, 7th edit. (Berlin 1931) 1.100 ff., outright claim that these early Christian communities were the true forerunners of present day communism. This thesis, which completely misunderstands the spirit and aim of these communities, has been completely blasted by Morin, Schilling, and others. D. Morin, in: Mönchtum und Urkirche (Muenchen 1922) 136, points out that Acts 2.44-45 refers primarily to that vita communis which is of the essence of Christ’s Church. That such a spiritual vita Communis, particularly in the circle of the small early Christian community in its isolation from the surrounding pagan world, also promoted a spirit of secular solidarity
least by implication, contains a spirit of toleration of property and wealth, provided that they are used in a charitable manner.³⁸

Pre-eminently, the Fathers of the Church were concerned with the preservation of the Apostolic tradition. In particular, by clinging, at least theoretically, to the idea of the self-sufficiency of the Christian community, on the whole they displayed a spirit of passive resistance to the law or legal order imposed by the Roman conquerer in whom they frequently saw the workings of the forces of evil. It cannot surprise us, therefore, that the writings of the Fathers also contain many statements dealing with the problem of private property, individual possessions, and personal wealth. In turn, the Roman legal system, fashioned by the concept of a property right as the unrestricted ius utendi et abutendi—the right to use and abuse—was designated as being responsible for the many social and economic injustices which made life in the Roman Empire practically unbearable for the average person. In addition, every form of abuse, that is, a use contrary to the nature and ordination of a thing, in the eyes of the Christians constituted an evil. A law permitting abuse, was considered an evil; and an institution sanctioning the right to abuse, was declared the work of abomination. Thus it came about that nearly everyone of the Fathers took issue with the fundamental question, so eloquently expressed by the very title of Clement's of Alexandria Quis dives salvetur?—Who among the rich might be saved?

This novel Patristic concern with the problem of property and wealth and its relation to man's salvation can easily be explained: As soon as Christianity had somewhat abandoned its extreme eschatological position and with it, its totally negative attitude toward the secular world and temporal matters, it found itself forced to assume a more affirmative viewpoint in relation to this world and the many institutions which in their historically accrued totality are part of man's earthly existence. It now became necessary to allocate the legal, economic, and political institutions to their proper place in the eternal orderliness and to interpret and define anew their formal functions in the spirit of Christ's teachings. But in doing this, the Fathers did not propose to adapt Christianity to the existing situation; the situation, on the contrary, had to be adapted to Christianity and the Christian teachings.

and an attitude of sharing the relative few earthly goods which the brethren possessed, goes without saying. Such a spirit of solidarity even in secular matters is merely the natural consequence of the supernatural communion of all true Christian believers who felt united and one in the mystical Body of Christ.

³⁸ What the Patristic reformers in particular rejected was the Roman law conception of property, the ius utendi et abutendi, which was totally devoid of all moral considerations. As a matter of fact, every abuse was considered an evil and contrary to the nature and ordination of a thing. Hence the Christian could not agree to this Roman ius abutendi.
Clement of Alexandria,\textsuperscript{39} in his homily *Quis dives salvetur?*\textsuperscript{40} discussed the parable of the rich young man.\textsuperscript{41} He took issue with those who had insisted that possessions and wealth in themselves constitute an unsurmountable barrier to salvation, and that hence the wealthy man, if he really wishes to be saved, must dispose of all his earthly possessions. He pointed out rather emphatically that Christ had not excluded any and all rich men from salvation, but had merely insisted that we should make proper,\textsuperscript{42} that is, charitable use of our possessions. Hence, at least in principle, private property is admissible and even justifiable.\textsuperscript{43} Properly used, personal property and individual wealth can under certain circumstances actually become a means of attaining eternal salvation. For the commandment which compels us to love our neighbor, can best be complied with through the charitable use of our possessions.\textsuperscript{44} In itself, property and wealth are morally indifferent. Because a man may be both "poor and rich, have or have no earthly possessions, and make or not make use of this world."\textsuperscript{45} Hence property and wealth acquire their specific moral significance through the kind of use their owner makes of them;

If you should use a tool adroitly, then this tool itself becomes adroit . . . And such a tool is also wealth. If you should know how to use it properly, then it becomes a means for you to attain true justice. But if you should use it unjustly, wealth itself becomes the handmaid of injustice.\textsuperscript{46}

The proper or just use of wealth is seen in that spirit whereby the rich invite the poor to share in their wealth. It is the will of God that property shall benefit all men, and not merely its owner.\textsuperscript{47} Really rich is not he who possesses and holds on to his possessions, but he who gives. Not possessions as such, but giving to others makes man truly happy.\textsuperscript{48} And when we give we should not decide by ourselves who may be worthy of our charity, and who may not.\textsuperscript{49}

But Clement at times also directed some rather condemning words at private property and wealth, words which are reminiscent of the extreme anti-proprietarian attitude of the earliest Apologists. Thus he

\textsuperscript{39} Born in Athens c. 150, he died between 211 and 216.
\textsuperscript{40} PG 9.603-652.
\textsuperscript{41} Mark 10.17-31; Matthew 19.16-30.
\textsuperscript{42} Chaps. 4-26, PG 9.607-630.
\textsuperscript{43} This same idea is also expressed in Clement, *Stromata* 2.18.84, PG 8.1031-1032, where we are told that it is our duty to share all our possessions with others. But in order to be able to share something we must first possess the thing we are about to share.
\textsuperscript{44} *Quis dives salvetur* chaps. 27-42, PG 9.631-652.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid. at 20, PG 9.623-626.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid. at 14, PG 9.617-620.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid. at 13, PG 9.615-618. Cf. Ibid. at 31, PG 9.635-637.
\textsuperscript{48} *Paedagogus* 3.6, PG 8.603-608. Cf. Ibid. at 2.3, PG 8.431-440.
\textsuperscript{49} *Quis dives salvetur?* 33, PG 9.637-640.
stated quite emphatically that any form of property "is by nature an injustice." In another place he asserted that "the things which a man possesses for himself alone are actually not his." For no owner can really be called the absolute master of his property. And the proper use of one's property consists in liberality and charity, and not in the personal enjoyment of this property. The basic attitude of Clement of Alexandria toward private property and personal wealth, however, was essentially solidarist when he pointed out:

If everything which friends possess belongs to them in common, and if man is the friend of God, then it follows that everything belongs to men, because everything belongs to God. And thus everything belongs in common to the two friends, to God and to man.

The truly perfect man, we are told, "is the just, wise, and temperate man, but never the rich man." "The best and, as a matter of fact, the only worthwhile wealth is poverty—the poverty of earthly desires."

Clement of Alexandria and his *Quis dives salvetur?* were highly esteemed by subsequent theologians and philosophers. The many *Florilegia*, particularly the historically important *Sacra Parallela* of St. John of Damascus, frequently quoted passages from the *Quis dives salvetur?* And through these works the ideas of Clement became the common intellectual property of the early middle ages. It should also be noted that Clement, when discussing the problem of private property and wealth, did not merely rely on theological, moral, or dialectical arguments, but also took into consideration sociological issues. Thus he pointed out that property and wealth, if properly used, that is, if properly and justly distributed, constitute an effective means of maintaining peace on earth and bringing about the true brotherhood of man in this world.

Origen sharply rejected the common classification of people as rich or poor, "haves" or "have-nots." To him it was a matter of general knowledge that the most just men on this earth have always lived in a state of greatest poverty. All earthly things, we are exhorted

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53 *Cohortatio ad gentes* 12, *PG* 8.244-246. This idea seems to go back to an Antishenian-Cynic tradition. Cf. Diogenes Laertius 6.37: "He (scil., Diogenes of Sinope) used also to reason thus; All things belong to the gods. The wise men are friends of the gods, and friends hold things in common. Therefore all things belong to the wise."
56 He was born in 185 or 186, probably at Alexandria, and died in 254 or 255.
are tantamount to a vanishing and empty shadow, and can in no way be compared with the spiritual gifts of divine grace which alone will secure us our ultimate salvation.  

Thus, at least for Origen, wealth and possessions were not a real good, for wealth was actually "blind."  

Tertullian called God the "aspersatorem divitium, advocatorem pauperum"—the despiser of the rich and defender of the poor. Jesus, we are told, has always taught the fastidium opulentiae—the contempt for riches; He always justified the poor, while condemning the rich. The whole attitude of Tertullian was one of contemptus pecuniae et saeculi—disregard of money and the world in general. In no way did he justify private possessions or wealth, not even as a means of being charitable. For everything belongs to God, and to Him alone. That which seems to belong to us, is actually not ours; and whenever we should lose something, we are merely deprived of that which never belonged to us. This radically negative attitude toward private property is even more perceptable in his conception of Christianity as a corpus or fraternitas:  

We who are one both in soul and spirit do not doubt that all things are common to all . . . except our wifes.  

For "according to natural law, we are all of one single mother." Hence Tertullian considered even the gentiles his beloved brethren.  

Commodian, who at times seems to be under the influence of the the Sheppard of Hermas, likewise insisted that God alone is the true owner of all things: "God has exclusive control over your fields and pastures, and whatever you may possess." Hence he exhorted his/her/their believers:

59 De oratione 17, PG 11.469-474.  
61 Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus was born c. 160 in Carthage, and died probably between 240 and 250.  
62 Adversus Marcionem 4.15, PL 2.392-393.  
63 De patientia 7, PL 1.1371-1373.  
64 Ibid.  
65 Ibid.  
66 Apologeticus adversus gentes pro Christianos (or, Apologeticum) 39, PL 1.534-535.  
67 Ibid. at 39. As to other passages dealing with the problem of property, cf. Ad usum 28, PL 1.1413-1415; De cultu feminarum PL 1.1417-1448; De oratione 6, PL 1.1264-1266; Adversus Marcionem 2.19, PL 2.306-308; 4.17, PL 2.398-401; De praescriptionibus 37, PL 2.50-51.  
68 Apologeticus 39, PL 1.531-541.  
69 Wrote between 250 and 260.  
70 Instructiones 1.29.
That Commodian considered wealth and private property an absolute evil may be gathered from his insistence that we should “expiate the evil of possessions by charitable deeds.” That property and wealth are an evil for which we will have to atone.

St. Cyprian, who himself gave away all his earthly possessions in order to achieve an even greater Christian perfection, pointed to the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem as an example of true Christian communal life:

But while the Lord commands us to sell all our earthly possessions, we insist on acquiring and hording the goods of this earth.

St. Cyprian also denied that there is a right to succession or inheritance:

Leave to God all those earthly possessions which you have accumulated for your heirs. He will be the guardian of your children. And the things left to God cannot be confiscated either by the State or the imperial fiscus.

But the truly anti-proprietarian attitude of St. Cyprian becomes manifest when he exclaims:

We must avoid all property, as we should avoid an enemy: flee it as we would flee before a bandit: and fear it as we would fear a sword or poison.

The essentially solidarist views of St. Cyprian are clearly expressed in his famous assertion: “Quodcumque Die est, in nostra usurpatione commune est—whatever is really God’s, belongs, in man’s usurpation, to all men in common.” He admits, however, that only the most per-

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71 Ibid. at 2.22.
72 Ibid. at 1.30.
73 Cf. ibid. at 2.31; 2.35; Carmen apologeticum verses 16 ff.; 23-28 (also PL 5.223-224). See also Clement of Alexandria, Quis dives salvetur? 33, PG 9.637-640.
74 St. Cyprian was born c. 200, and died a martyr September 14, 258.
75 Epistola ad Donatum 3-4, PL 4.198-202; ibid. at 11, PL 4.215-217. In this latter place St. Cyprian stressed the worthlessness of all earthly possessions.
77 De opere et eleemosynis 19, PL 4.616. Cf. ibid. at 16, PL 4.613-614; 18, PL 4.615-616.—The De opere et eleemosynis was prompted by a pestilence which ravaged Carthage between 252 and 254. It is an appeal to the people of Carthage to be more charitable towards the victims of this catastrophe.
78 De lapsis 35, PL 4.493.
79 De opere et eleemosynis 25, PL 4.620. For additional references to the problem of private property, cf. Epistola ad Donatum 1, PL 4.191-223; Epistola ad presbyteros et diaconos 5, PL 4.231-235; Epistola ad clerum de pregando Deo 7, PL 4.240-245; Epistola ad clerum de lapsis et catechumenis 12, PL 4.258-259; Epistola ad presbyteros et diaconos Romae consistentes 14, PL 4.261-264; Epistola ad Donatum 11-12, PL 4.215-219; De opere et eleemosynis 12-15, PL 4.610-615; ibid. at 21-22, PL 4.617-618; De lapsis 6, PL 4.606-607; 11, PL 4.609-610; 12, PL 4.610: De habitu virginum (or, Ad virgines) 7-11, PL 4.446-450; 15; PL 4.454-455.
flect among the Christians can fully live up to this ideal of the *vita
communis*.

According to Lactantius,80 God intended all men to be *aequos, id est, pares*:

He gave to all men the same conditions of life. . .Before God no one is a slave, and no one a master. For if He is truly the father of all, then we are all free by the same right. Whenever not all people are equals, there exists no equality. And inequality itself excludes all justice. For the whole power of justice consists in this: that it makes equal all those who through the same fate have come into the condition of this life.81

The question as to how man came into the possession of wealth and earthly things, was answered by Lactantius in the following manner:

In order to make other people dependent upon them, certain men began to accumulate and hoard the things necessary to sustain life. Afterwards they kept these things under lock and key, so that they may gain a monopoly of the gifts of heaven (*beneficia coelestia*).82 God in His infinite wisdom and charity, however, gave this earth to all men to have and to hold it in common, in order that all men could live a life of true communion, but not in order that the spirit of insane and frantic avarice should claim everything, or that some should lack the things which are meant for everyone.83

St. Asterius of Amasea,84 who in a certain respect seems to follow Lactantius’ ideas on property and wealth, pointed out that

Greed is the cause of all inequality and injustice. And since greed is without pity, it is the enemy of the whole of mankind. Greed and avarice have thrown into disorder the lives of men. While some, being over stuffed with possessions, are vomiting from sheer over-satiation, . . . others, hard pressed by hunger and want, face disaster. This is the result of insatiable greed. Had this greed not introduced into human existence inequality, there would be none of those social extremes which are contrary to reason and natural right; and neither would the change from extremes cause so much distress and tears in our lifes.85

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80 The dates of Lactantius’ life are very uncertain. We know that he went to Nicomedia in Bithynia during the reign of Emperor Diocletian (284-305). Between 313 and 317 he moved to Gaul where he died.

81 *Divinae institutiones* 1.30.—Attempts have been made to deny the solidarist views of Lactantius by relying on his famous statement, found in the *Epitome divinarum institutionum* 1.33, that “it does not harm any one if through his own industry a man should possess more than the other; and neither does it help anyone if through his own fault a man should possess less than his fellow man.” This statement, if properly understood in its context, actually means this: The kingdom of heaven cannot be attained merely through poverty alone; and the rich man is not debarred from salvation merely on account of his wealth.

82 *Divinae institutiones* 5.6.

83 Ibid. at 5.5.

84 Born c. 350, he died c. 430.

85 *Homilia 3 adversus avaritiam*, *PG* 40.209-210. For the whole text of this homily against avarice, cf. *PG* 40.193-216.
St. Athanasius, who in this matter was definitely under the influence of certain ideas already voiced by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Lactantius, called the possessions of the wealthy "empty fantasies of the dreamer which are even less reliable than mere shadows." The *Vita S. Antonii* of St. Athanasius, on the whole, is nothing other than an eloquent praise of voluntary poverty, the greatest among all virtues. St. Cyrill of Jerusalem echoed St. Athanasius' eulogy of poverty when he claimed that the true Christian is the man who is satisfied with having food and a garment, and who tramples wealth under his feet.

St. Basil the Great, in his famous *Homilia dicta tempore famis et siccitatis*, thundered at his contemporaries:

> As individuals we possess what actually belongs to the many; and as individuals we usurp what really should be the common possession of all.

Referring to the social solidarity displayed by the ancient Spartans, he exhorted his listeners:

> Let us follow the example of the Greeks and their collectivist way of life. Why, some of these Greeks even had common messes for the whole of a large citizenry.

At times St. Basil reminds us of certain passages from the *Epistle of St. James* when he vents his wrath over the greed of man:

> Are you not greedy? Are you not acting like robbers? Are you not usurping that which you have received merely in trust? He who steals some one else's garment is called a thief. But he who fails to clothe the naked even if he were able to do so, does he by chance deserve to be called by a different name? The bread which you hold back actually belongs to the hungry; the garment which you lock in your chest belongs to the naked; the shoes which rot in your store house belong to the bare-footed; and

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86 Born c. 295 at Alexandria, he died May 2, 373. During his life time St. Athanasius was considered the standard bearer of orthodox Catholicism in the East, while, according to the report of St. Basil (*Epist. 66*), in the whole West no one was held in higher esteem than St. Athanasius.

87 *Expositio in psalmum* 72, 18-19, *PG* 27.331-332.

88 *PG* 26.835-976.

89 Born c. 315, he died as metropolitan of Jerusalem on March 18, 386. The latter date, however, is not absolutely certain.

90 *Catecheses 5 de fide et symbolo* 2, *PG* 33.507-508.

91 Born c. 330 at Caesarea in Cappadocia, he died January 1, 379.

92 This homily was delivered in connection with the great famine which visited Caesarea in 368.

93 *PG* 31.303-328, especially *id.* at 8, *PG* 31.325-326.

94 *Ibid.* at 8, *PG* 31.325-336. St. Basil refers here to the Spartan institution of the *andreia*, later called *phidia*, where the *homoioi*, the "peers," dined together in public messes. Each member of such an *andreia* made a fixed monthly contribution to these common meals. These public messes of the Spartans were actually a survival of the older Greek custom to hold public banquets at which all the citizens gathered together at a table spread in honor of the gods of the city.
the money which you are hiding...belongs to the needy. Thus you do a great injustice to all those whom you could succor.55

Turning to the rich, St. Basil exclaimed:

Whom do I injure, says the greedy, if I merely keep what is mine? But then, tell me, what is really thine? Wherefrom did you take it? And how did it get into thy life? Is the greedy person not like the man who, after having taken his seat in the theater, restrains all latecomers from attending the show, thus acting like one who considers his own that which actually is meant for the common use of all? Are not the rich of this type? For after having taken care of themselves by crude usurpation, they declare that everything they have gained by this usurpation is theirs forever. But if any man would claim only what he really requires in order to satisfy his true needs, and would leave to the needy what exceeds his own immediate needs, then no one would be rich, and no one poor.96

In keeping with his basically negative attitude toward private property and individual wealth, St. Basil also denied that there was such a thing as a natural right to succession or inheritance.97 Although the scion of a very wealthy and influential family, he fully lived up to what he preached. Preferring a life of poverty, he gave all his earthly possessions to a hospital which he himself had founded in Caesarea. It might be said that St. Basil was probably the first among the truly great authors of the Church who, after having studied the Apostolic reports on the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem, came to the conclusion that a perfect economic solidarity existed among the first Christian brethren. It was this positive solidarity of early Christianity, both spiritual and economic-social, which he extolled in his many sermons as the ideal Christian social order.98

St. Gregory of Nyssa,99 the younger brother of St. Basil, likewise held that everything belongs to God, and that all men form one single spiritual as well as secular solidarity or community:

Everything belongs to God, our common Father, and we are only brethren of one single tribe. But if we are brethren, then it is

55 Homilia in illum dictum evangeli secundum Lucam: Destrueram horrea mea 7, PG 31.275-278.
56 Ibid. at 7, PG 31.275-276.
57 Sermo 5 de divitiis et paupertate, PG 32.1169-1170.
58 For other references to the problem of property and wealth, cf., in general, Homilia in divitiis, PG 31.277-304; Homilia 7 in Hexaemeron 3, PG 29.153; Homilia 8 in Hexaemeron 3-4, PG 29.171-174; Homilia in illud dictum evangeli secundum Lucam 2, PG 31.265-266; ibid. at 4, PG 31.267-270; ibid. at 5, PG 31.271-272; Homilia in divites 1, PG 31.281-282; ibid. at 2, PG 31.283-286; ibid. at 4, PG 31.287-290; ibid. at 5, PG 31.291-294; ibid. at 7, PG 31.297-300; ibid. at 8, PG 31.299-302; Homilia de invidia 5, PG 31.383-384; Sermo de legendis libris gentilium 8, PG 31.385-386; Regulæ fuscæ tractoriae, interrogatio 9, responsio, PG 31.541-542; Epistola 151.3, PG 32.605-606; Sermo 6 de avaritia 1, PG 32.1181-1182; ibid. at 2, PG. 32.1185-1186; ibid. at 3, PG 32.1185-1186; ibid. at 4, PG 32.1189-1190; ibid. at 5, PG 32.1189-1192.
59 Born probably in 333, he died after 394.
best and certainly just that we all have equal share in the great inheritance.0

For "we are not permitted to be strangers to those who partake in our nature."0 Like St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nyssa insisted that man holds merely in trust the many gifts which God has bestowed on him. But man is never the true owner of anything; neither has he an unlimited ius utendi et abutendi over the goods of this earth. Frequently, when referring to riches or earthly goods, St. Gregory of Nyssa did so in a purely allegorical manner, but never in order to justify wealth:

According to the Holy Scriptures there are two kinds of possessions of which the one is desirable, and the other objectionable. Desirable is a wealth of virtue, because such a wealth becomes a possession of the soul. Objectionable is all earthly wealth, because it is essentially a deception of the senses. But if we know of two kinds of wealth, and if we contrast wealth and poverty, then we must also, by way of analogy, distinguish between two kinds of poverty, namely between the cursed and the blessed poverty. He who lacks temperance or is devoid of the exalted possession of justice or wisdom or rational knowledge or any other similarly precious jewel, is truly poor and miserable, and fully deserves our compassion. He, however, who lacks the things which only cause evil—who, in other words, has nothing of the things which are of the devil, but is fully aware of the Spirit and through the Spirit gains much treasure, does truly live in blessed poverty.1

St. Gregory of Nazianzus or St. Gregory Nazianzen,0 the friend of St. Basil, also followed the latter in his general attitude toward private property and personal wealth. Going back to the Genesis, chaps. 1-3, he insisted that private property in any form is the result of original sin. According to him God gave the lands, the rivers and the forests to all men. And He meant that they shall belong to all men, thus providing for the natural needs of every man. These divine gifts are not subject to man’s arbitrary actions, legal restrictions, or individual partition. And this is so because the equal dignity of all men had to be recognized and made manifest by equal gifts.0 But with the fall of man a great change occurred, caused by the envy of the subtle serpent. For now the whole of mankind became divided into free men and slaves, rich people and poor people.0 From that day on greed and avarice have perverted the natural dignity of man. And since greed has succeeded in turning even the law into its handmaid willing to

100 Sermo de pauperibus amandis et benignitate complectendis, PG 46.465-466.
101 Sermo 2 in pauperibus amandis, PG 46.473-474.
102 Oratio 1 de beatitudinibus, PG 44.1199-1200.
103 Born probably in 329 or 330, he died in 389 or 390.
104 Sermo 14 de pauperum amore 25, PG 35.889.890.
105 Ibid.
secure the domination of the strong over the weak, the natural equality of the whole human race has been completely extinguished. St. Gregory of Nyssa admonished his listeners always to remember the original solidarity and equality of all men, and not to be influenced by the present state of mankind divided by inequality and ancessant strife:

Support that which is according to nature with all thy strength. Honor the old freedom. Turn into thyself and relieve misery. Do not strive after earthly possessions, but try to become rich by turning into thyself. Do not acquire gold, but try to increase in virtue which is the better of the two. Become more worthy of thy neighbor and more respected by him in that you are more willing to be his fellow man, always ready to come to his succor.\(^{106}\)

God alone is the sole real possessor of all things we might have:\(^ {107}\)

And we never want to be dishonest trustees of the goods which are merely lent to us, so that the word of St. Peter may never apply to us: Be ashamed you who withhold that which is not yours. Imitate God Who distributes everything equally, and no one among you will be poor.\(^ {108}\)

St. John Chrysostom,\(^ {109}\) in his Twelfth Homily on the First Epistle to Timothy, dealt rather thoroughly with the problem of private property and individual wealth:

Tell me, wherefrom did your wealth come? Perchance from some other person? But to whom, then, does this other person attribute his wealth? Some may say, to their fathers, some, to their grandfathers. But even by retracing your whole genealogy, can you prove that this wealth was acquired justly and honestly? Most assuredly, you cannot do this. On the contrary, the very beginning of this wealth necessarily is rooted in some act of injustice. Why? Because in the beginning God did not create one man rich and the other man poor. He did not disclose to one man the secret for accumulating material riches while preventing the other man from discovering it. To the contrary, God gave the earth and its resources for the benefit of all men in order that all may possess and enjoy them. But if this one earth is the common property and possession of all men, how can it be possible that some of you own so many acres of land, while others do not have even a clod of soil? You may answer me by replying that your father left it to you. But from whom did he inherit it? From his ancestors, I suppose. But no matter how far we go back, we will always have to come to a beginning of all this. Jacob was rich, but his wealth was in whatever he had

\(^{106}\) Ibid. at 26, PG 35.891-892.

\(^{107}\) Ibid. at 22, PG 35.885-886. Cf. ibid. at 23, PG 35.887-888, and at 29, PG 35.897-898.

\(^{108}\) Ibid. at 24, PG 35.889-890. For additional references to the problem of private property and wealth, cf. ibid. at 1, PG 35.859-860; ibid. at 2, PG 35.859-860; ibid. at 4-9, PG 35.861-870; ibid. at 21, PG 35.879-886; ibid. at 28, PG 35.895-896; ibid. at 34, PG 35.903-904; ibid. at 37, PG 35.907-908.

\(^{109}\) Born probably in 344 at Antioch, he died September 14, 407.
earned through his own labors. All riches must have been acquired justly, and they must not be tainted with the stigma of robbery. You are not responsible for whatever your father has accumulated by his greed: you simply have and hold the fruits of his robbery, but you yourself are not a robber. Let us assume that your father did not commit robbery, but derived his wealth from working the soil. What difference would this make? Would this actually turn wealth into a real good? Assuredly not. But you may counter that wealth is not an evil per se. For, no doubt, it could be said that if a man of wealth is willing to share his treasures with the needy, then this wealth is not an intrinsic evil. But if this be not the case, then wealth would be an evil and dangerous thing. Some of you may even claim that a person who commits no positive act of evil, cannot be called evil himself, although he does nothing that could be called good. Now if a person attempted to exercise dominion over the goods of this earth, arrogating to himself the supreme power over that which is actually in the common possession of all men, would you not call him an evil-doer? Is not the earth and everything it contains the property and possession of God? But if all our possessions really belong to God, then do they not also belong to all our brethren who are one with us in our common worship of God? Everything that belongs to our Lord is also the common property of all men. Or should we have forgotten that this is the way in which a large household can be maintained. Is it not true that in such a household everyone receives the same amount of bread which comes from the stores of the master? The house of the Lord is open to all. Even the property of the king is common property and common possession, and the cities, the markets, and the stores belong to the whole people in common, and all of us make common use of them. Let us now contemplate the household of God. God made certain things the common possession of all...such as the air, the sun, the water, the soil, the heavens, the light, and the stars. And all these things He distributed equally among brethren. And He gave to all the same eyes, the same body, and the same soul... From dust, that is, from one single man everyone originated, and God gave one single house to all. But all this was of no avail with us. God also made other things the common possession of all, such as public baths, cities, market places, and arcades. It is well to remember that such a social structure founded upon the possession of all goods in common promotes peace and security through the elimination of man’s motives for class conflicts. But as soon as some one tries to appropriate a thing to himself by making it his private property, strife begins; it is as if nature itself were aroused over the fact that, despite God’s efforts to keep us together in peace and harmony by all possible means, we are in tent upon being torn asunder in our efforts to acquire private property and private possessions. Yes, nature is aroused over the very mentioning of the metallic words ‘mine and thine.’ From that moment the battle was joined and all vileness began. But wherever this ‘mine and thine’ is unknown, there exists no
struggle or strife. From all this should follow that the community
of possessions is a more appropriate form of life than private
property. And this community of all possessions is also more
according to nature. Why is it, tell me, that no one starts legal
action over the title to the public market place? Simply because
it is held in common by all. But we witness multifarious litiga-
tions over houses or money. That which is necessary to sustain
life, therefore, is for the common use of all. But we do not live
by this solidarity of possessions, not even as regards the most
elementary matters. In His infinite providence and wisdom God
has given to us the things necessary to life so that we may
possess them in common. From this we should also learn to
possess all other things in a spirit of solidarity. But apparently
we cannot be taught anything.—Let us state once more the things
we have said previously: How is it possible or even conceivable
that a rich man should also be a good man? This is plainly
impossible. For a good man can be only he who shares his
wealth with others. But if a man were to possess nothing, he
would be a good man; and if a man were to share his goods with
others, he too would be a good man. But as long as he merely
possesses, he cannot very well be a good man.110

In another place St. John Chrysostom called wealth "unmitigated
murder,"111 proclaiming that it is impossible to be both rich and hon-
orable at the same time.112 Again and again he lamented the fact that
most people measure all values in terms of money.113 The love of
money, he cried out, is the cause of wars, personal enmities, and rob-
bery; it makes us forget the natural law and the law of God;114 it has
destroyed all human relations by poisoning them.115 But perhaps the
most significant statement concerning private property and wealth was
made by St. John Chrysostom in his Eleventh Homily on the Acts of
the Apostles which he delivered in the year 400 while he was bishop
of Constantinople:

Because they (scil., the early Christians) gave and received joy-
ously, all enjoyed the fruits of divine grace, and no one suffered
destitution. And they gave not merely one half of their posses-
sions, while retaining the other half for themselves. . . They sur-
rrendered all they had, and considered nothing their private prop-
erty. All fixed conceptions of inequality were erased from their
thinking. Everyone had plenty, and all this was performed with
true dignity. In order that the needs of all could be satisfied
from a common fund and not from private property, they laid
their gifts at the feet of the Apostles and appointed them the
administrators and guardians of all their possessions. And when

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110 Homilia 12 in epistolam ad 1 Timotheum 4, PG 62.561-564.
111 Homilia in Eutropium Bunnuchum patricium 1, PG 52.392.
112 Homilia 12 in epistolam ad 1 Timotheum 3, PG 62.561-562.
113 Homilia 16 in epistolam 1 ad Corinthios 5, PG 61.136-137.
114 Homilia 17 in epistolam 1 ad Timotheum 3, PG 62.594-595.
115 Homilia 16 in epistolam 1 ad Corinthios 5, PG 61.136-137.
they gave, they did not limit themselves to small gifts, or gave
with a condescending attitude. If this were still the case today,
we all would live in greater happiness, for all would be rich and
poor at the same time. . .Let us therefore develop a plan: All
people shall sell their possessions and deliver the receipts to the
community. And I emphasize again: no one shall hesitate to do
so, be he rich or poor. How much gold, do you believe, could be
collected in this fashion? I estimate, although I cannot make an
exact statement, that, if all men and women were to hand over
all their possessions, their lands, their movable property, and
their houses. . .we might perhaps collect a million pounds of gold,
and perhaps even two or three times that much. For how many
inhabitants dwell in our city?216 How many Christians? Prob-
ably one hundred thousand. How many gentiles and Jews?
How many ten thousand pound of gold are horded in our city?
And how many poor people do we have among us? I believe
that there are not much more than fifty thousand. In order to
feed these every day, how much would we have to spend? If pro-
viding for them would be organized on a communal basis, the
costs of all this could not be very high. What, then, could we
achieve by intelligently using all the treasure thus collected?
Do you believe that it could even be exhausted? And would not
God's blessings flow down upon us in abundance? . . .Would we
not turn this earth into a paradise? If this method proved itself
so marvelously with three or five thousand so that none of these
had to suffer real want, how much more should it prove itself
with so great a multitude as you are? And would not some of
those who most certainly will join as later, add to our common
treasurer?

There is, however, still another matter I wish to bring before
you. The distribution or individual partition of possessions in
itself is expense, waste, and the beginnings of poverty. Take,
for instance, a single household composed of a husband, a wife,
and ten children. . .Do they spend more money if they maintain
one single common household, or if each of them keeps his own
house? Certainly, they spend more money if they maintain
separate households. Should the ten children leave their par-
ent's home, they will need ten homes of their own, ten tables,
ten servants, and everything else multiplied by the same propor-
tion. What are the people doing with their slaves? Are they
not permitted to eat together at one table in order to keep down
expenses? Division and separation, as a rule, cause loss; soli-
darity and co-operation make for increase. . .Who, under such
conditions, would starve to death; who would not have his full
support? . . .

Let us execute this plan with vigor and courage. How ben-
ficial such project could be. In the early days the small num-
ber of Christians encountered only hostility from the whole
world. . .Yet even under such circumstances the faithful went
to work courageously. How much greater would be our success
today when, thanks to the grace of God, there are faithful

216 St. John Chrysostom refers here to the city of Constantinople.
throughout the whole world. Who, under those conditions, would want to remain a heathen? None, I can assure you. We would attract them all and incorporate them in our community. If we were to proceed along such lines, I hope to God, our future will be as I have just described. Simply follow me, and we shall achieve the great work. And if God should grant me a long life, I hope that we will soon establish such a communal solidarity.117

This famous sermon of St. John Chrysostom gives us striking evidence that he entertained a definite program of social and economic reform aimed at achieving total social solidarity among the Christian brethren. This system of solidarity, based on principles of social as well as individual morality, contains some remarkably "modern" ideas. An example of this is St. John Chrysostom's statement on the division and inter-cooperation of labor.118

In his Epistle to Hædibia,119 St. Jerome120 eloquently pointed out that

all riches are the result of iniquity and unrighteousness. For unless one should lose the other cannot gain. Hence the old saying seems to be most true: the rich man is either wicked or the heir of wickedness.121

In another place St. Jerome made it quite clear that

should you possess more than you absolutely need in order to feed and clothe yourself, then you must give away the excess. This you owe to others as you know only too well.122

In his De officiis ministrorum,123 St. Ambrose of Milan124 contrasted the pagan and the Christian concept of law and justice. He saw the fundamental distinction between these two concepts in the fact that the pagans held that formal justice consists in that everything common, that is, public should be considered a matter of public law, while everything private should be looked upon as the concern of private law and the law of property. But this is not according to nature, because nature gave everything to all people in common. Thus God ordained that everything should be ar-


118 These ideas seem to have met with much approval among the Christians at Constantinople. This might be gathered from the fact that when in 403 Emperor Arcadius tried to depose and banish St. John Chrysostom, the whole Christian community in Constantinople rose up in indignation, forcing the Emperor to rescind his decree of deposition and banishment.

119 Epistola 120 ad Hædibia, PL 22.980-1006.

120 Born c. 342, he died September 30, 419 or 420.

121 Epistola 120 ad Hædibia 1, PL 22.984.

122 Ibid. at 1, PL 22.985.

123 De Officiis Ministrorum 1.28, 132, PL 16. 62 Cf. ibid. at 1.30, 149-152, PL 16.66-68.

124 Born probably around 330 or, according to some, around 340, he died April 4, 397.
ranged in such a manner that . . . it could be shared by all, and that the earth should belong to all in common possession. Hence nature is actually the basis of the principle of solidarity, while individual usurpation is the root of all private law.  

According to St. Ambrose, God ordained that all possessions be held in common. But man, inflamed by greed, rebelled against this order and ate the fruit from the forbidden tree. This rebelliousness, this primaevul greed, enkindled envy in other men and resulted in the whole human race becoming torn asunder—a complete eruption of the divinely ordained order of things. The prima avaritia, the "first greed," is the real root of private law and private property: "Nature, which generates all the poor people, does not know the rich man." But "as long as we justify private property, we are destroying the solidarity of all possessions."  

In his interpretation of Luke 16.9, "make friends for yourself with the mammon of wickedness," St. Augustine made the following observation:  

In all probability whatever you possess you have have acquired through unrighteousness. And all your possessions are wicked, because you have something while the other has nothing—because you live in plenty and the other lives in want. Make friends for yourself through this mammon of unrighteousness. . . . and be prudent in this: be one with all the others by not defrauding them.  

When seeking for a moral or legal justification of private property and individual wealth, St. Augustine observed:  

How does it come about that anyone possesses whatever he possesses? Perchance through the positive law? For according to the divine law the earth in all its fullness belongs to God: God created both the poor and the rich out of the same dust; and one earth sustains both the poor and the rich. But according to positive law one man is permitted to say, 'this villa is mine, this house is mine, this slave is mine.' And this is so because of the positive law, the law of the Emperor.  

It would be a grave mistake to contend, however, that the Patristic moral rejection of private property and individual possessions could be reduced to one single uniform interpretation. Such an over-simplification would simply ignore the many complex processes commonly

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126 St. Ambrose, *De Nabuthe Israeletita 1*, *PL* 14.731.  
128 Born November 13, 354, he died August 28, 430.  
129 *Enarratio in psalmum 48*, sermo 1.12, *PL* 36.552.  
130 *Enarratio in psalmum 48*, sermo 1.12, *PL* 36.552.  
131 In Joannis evangelium 6.25, *PL* 35.1436-1437. Cf. ibid. at 6.26, *PL* 35.1437; *Enarratio in psalmum 118*, sermo 11, *PL* 37.1531; Epistola 153.6.25, *PL* 33.665. For other references to the problem of private property, see *De sermone Dei in monte* 2.14.47, *PL* 34.1290; *Sermo 41.5*, *PL* 38.250; *Sermo 50.3.6*, *PL* 38.328; *Sermo 113.2.2*, *PL* 38.648.
referred to as historical actualities. The majority of the Fathers, it must be admitted, was fully aware of the actuality of historical fact and historical situation. Thus St. Augustine reminded the secular authorities that certain postulates of social justice should be recognized, irrespective of any apparent conflicts between the Church and the Roman Empire. The extent of the criticism directed by St. Augustine against the legal and social order represented by the Roman Empire of his day terminated at this point. It does not occur to him, however, to revolutionize this order. Only in a very few instances did the Fathers openly denounce the legal institutions of the Empire by declaring them null and void. This is the more interesting since these institutions, after all, were in the main merely declaratory of the predominant socio-economic trends of the day. Thus, on the whole, the Fathers only attempted to modify the effects of some legal provisions which in their harshness were considered incompatible with the new Christian spirit of social justice and Christian charity. In particular they could not ignore the Roman idea of the significance of private property, the *ius utendi et abutendi*. If the Roman jurists had interpreted this idea in the light of the overall social meaning of law, a decisive congruity with the spirit of Christian social philosophy would probably have taken place. A successful rapprochement between the Roman legal order and Christian teachings, of course, was conditioned upon the dissolution of the *ius abutendi* and the determination of the *ius utendi* as a *ius utendi socialiter*—the right to use one's property and possessions in a social way, that is, in a manner profiting the whole of society. The influence of this Christian "social interpretation seems to be reflected in the *Institutes* of Justinian: *Expedit enim rei publicae ne quis re sua male utatur*—it is in the interest of the commonweal that no one should make ill use of his property.\textsuperscript{130a} This provision, which is definitely the result of a late Roman development, definitely discards the extreme solipsist view on private property characteristic of the earlier Roman law.\textsuperscript{131} It was, therefore, more reconcilable with the Patristic concept of natural law and natural justice. In this fashion also the

\textsuperscript{130a} *Institutes* 1.8.2. This passage actually refers to a rescript of Emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161) which specifically restrains slave-owners from inflicting cruel punishment on slaves. A similar idea can be found in Gaius 1.53, which also refers to the treatment of slaves and, hence, cannot really be considered a general principle of Roman Law.

\textsuperscript{131} In any event the Justinian Roman Law recognizes certain limitations on the use of private property in the interest of society. This can be also gathered from *Digest* 50.17.144pr.: "Non omne quod licet honestum est." This passage implies that the honorable man should also observe certain social norms and standards, although the law as such does not enforce such an observation. In other words, this passage should make it clear that the Roman Law does not condone anti-social acts. Cf. *Digest* 50.17.151; 39.2.24.12; 50.17.55; 19.1.42 pr.; 43.29.32; 47.10.135; 50.17.155.1.— Hence it might be said that the old idea of declaring property the radical *ius utendi et abutendi*, was no longer absolutely valid during the late Roman Empire.
positivistic—Roman—concept of private property gradually became more satisfactory to the Christian thinkers. The expiatory nature and mission of the Church has always stood in sharp relief as a grim warning to a world steeped in materialism. It has consistently preached renunciation and moderation; it has consistently condemned greed and avarice. The ecclesiastic conception of property rights was cogently expressed by William of Auxerre, who says that the motive which induces one to acquire property is the element that determines the good or badness of the act. If a man accumulates property from the mere desire of possession, he commits a mortal sin. If, however, he does so from the practical realization that the weakness and greed of human nature demand distinct and pronounced property rights, the abolishment of which would lead to a war of all against all—then he does a good act. The same question, the question whether private property is permissible under the moral natural law, also occupied the canonist Gratian who to a large extent influenced many subsequent discussions on this subject. Gratian, after having distinguished between the natural law and the "customary law," stated authoritatively:

According to the natural law, all things belong to all men in common; only through the "customary law" or positive law has it come about that this particular thing is called mine, and that thing is called thine.

In this Gratian seemed to follow St. Augustine who had already pointed out that private property is not a principle of the natural law, but merely a perpect of the positive law, the *ius imperatorum*.

Hence it might be said that despite the radically idealistic exhortations of the Apologists and the Churchfathers, a practico-social attitude of toleration toward private property and individual wealth finally prevailed and became accepted in the social teachings of the Church. This practico-social standpoint found additional support in the newly re-discovered Aristotelean writings on politics and ethics, and the many commentaries to these Aristotelean works produced during the thirteenth century. It was the practical attitude of Aristotle toward private property and its social significance within an existing social organization which determined, at least theoretically, the new scholastic attitude toward the problem of private property and private wealth.

Despite this Aristotelean influence, St. Thomas Aquinas to some extent is still determined by the Apologetic-Patristic tradition in matters concerning he problem of private property. Yet he differs fundamentally from the Churchfathers insofar as his arguments on private property are historical, philosophical, and juristic arguments. In addi-

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133 He died between 1231 and 1237.
134 *Summa aurea* 3, tract. 7, chap. 1, quaeat. 2.
135 *Decretum* 7, part 1.
136 Cf. note 130 supra.
tion, St. Thomas goes beyond the Fathers in that he clearly distinguished between the divine law and the natural law; the primary natural law and the secondary natural law; the \textit{ius gentium} and the secondary natural law; and the positive law and the \textit{ius gentium}. In order to comprehend fully, at least from a historical point of view, the attitude of St. Thomas toward the problem of private property, it must be remembered that he attempted to reconcile the Church-fathers, Aristotle, Ulpian (and Gaius), and Isidore of Seville. Ulpian and Gaius, in a most general manner, had subdivided the law into the \textit{ius naturale}, the \textit{ius gentium}, and the \textit{ius civile} (or \textit{ius positivum}). By \textit{ius naturale} they meant that law which "nature has taught all animals—\textit{quod natura docuit omnia animalia}". By \textit{ius gentium} they had in mind "that law of which all men make use of—\textit{quod omnes gentes utuntur}"; or "which natural reason has established among all men—\textit{quod naturalis ratio inter homines constituit}". By \textit{ius positivum}, again, they meant the Roman civil law. This Roman concept of the \textit{ius gentium} was then introduced into Christian jurisprudence by Isidore of Seville who, in turn, passed it on to St. Thomas.

The Roman concept of the \textit{ius gentium} has succeeded in becoming one of the most nebulous terms in Thomistic jurisprudence, a constant source of confusion to scholastic philosophy. It seems strange that a system remarkable for its perspicuity and conclusiveness becomes rather vague and indeterminate when it approaches the various subdivisions of the positive or human law. This conundrum must be traced to the fact that St. Thomas adheres to the subdivision of law is proposed by Isidore of Seville. According to St. Thomas' third definition of the \textit{lex naturalis (moralis)} as that "inclination to the good according to the nature of his (\textit{scil.}, man's) reason, which is proper to him," one might expect that the Roman law definition of the \textit{ius gentium} would be classified by St. Thomas as a form of the natural law, or to be more exact, the secondary natural law. St. Thomas' secondary natural law, in other words, seems to be identical with the Roman concept of the \textit{ius gentium}.

Despite this close affinity, there is a certain ambiguity in St. Thomas' position. This can be attributed to two main reasons. First, the Thomistic \textit{ius gentium} is the product of man's intelligent deliberation; it is not, as has been assumed, the effect of man's sinfulness. Secondly, this Thomistic \textit{ius gentium} has a dual origin and, hence, a dual essence. When speculating "whether the \textit{ius gentium} is identical with the \textit{ius naturale}," St. Thomas insisted that it is merely a form of the posi-

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137 \textit{Summa Theol.} 1.2, quaest. 95, art. 1; art. 2; art. 3; art. 4; \textit{ibid.} at 2.2, quaest. 57, art. 3.—Isidore himself drew heavily on the Fathers and probably some elementary works on Roman Law.
138 \textit{Summa Theol.} 1.2, quaest. 94, art. 2.
139 \textit{Ibid.} at 2.2, quaest. 57, art. 3.
tive of human law. In another place, however, he called the *ius gentium* a kind of secondary natural law. But then again he insisted that the positive or human law is subdivided into the *ius gentium* and the *ius civile*; and that the *ius gentium* "falls short of the natural law . . . , because the latter is common to all animals, while the former is common to man only." But eventually he seemed to recall once more the close affinity of his own definition of the natural law with the Roman law definition of the *ius gentium*. Thus he felt compelled to incorporate the *ius gentium* in his natural law, or to be more exact, in his secondary natural law.

On the one hand, the Thomistic *ius gentium* is grounded in certain historically developed conditions of time, place and circumstances. Its formal basis lies in the accomplishment of the common good which it strives to secure through human agreements and the observance of established customs. On the other hand, St. Thomas held that the *ius gentium*, like the secondary natural law, has originated from logical conclusions drawn from first principles. Used in the latter sense, the *ius gentium* partakes of the absoluteness of the natural law.

It has already been demonstrated that the *ius gentium* of St. Thomas emanates from the rational human faculty which takes into consideration certain historically developed factors and their cogent effects upon the well-being both of the individual and of society as a whole. Hence the *ius gentium*, understood in this sense, is not really the consequence of the fall of man. As we shall see presently, private property, at least with St. Thomas, is essentially a principle of the Thomistic *ius gentium*. Hence private property is not so much an institution which has become necessary through the fall of man, but rather an institution of intelligent social co-existence based on ratiocination.

Before discussing in greater detail the position of St. Thomas in matters of private property, attention must be drawn to the fact that in a general manner he is both the representative of a new era and the commentator of a past tradition. Being the representative of a new era,

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140 Ibid. at 1.2, quaest. 95, art. 4.
141 Ibid.
142 Ibid. at 2.2, quaest. 57, art. 3. Obviously St. Thomas has in mind here the Roman Law definition of the natural law—that law which nature teaches all animals—and not the moral natural law.
143 Cf. ibid. at 1.2, quaest. 94, art. 6: "...there belong to the natural law...certain most general principles which are known to all men." See also ibid. at 1.2, quaest. 94, art. 2; 1.2, quaest. 92, art. 2; 1.2, quaest. 91, art 2 and art. 3.
144 Cf. ibid. at 2.2, quaest. 57, art. 3; quaest. 60, art. 3, ad 1.
145 Ibid. at 1.2, quaest. 95, art. 2.
146 Ibid. 1.2, quaest. 95, art. 4.
147 Whenever St. Thomas considers the *ius gentium* a kind of positive law, he claims that it has come about "ex condito," "ex consensu humano," "ex communi placito," "ex pacto," "on the basis of a necessitas," or "secundum utilitatem consequentum." Cf. Ibid. 2.2, quaest. 57, art. 3; quaest. 60, art. 5; quaest. 66, art. 2; etc.
the doctrines of St. Thomas Aquinas as regards certain social problems necessarily manifest a certain rejection of the past. In his philosophy he accepts Aristoteleanism against the traditional Augustinian Platonism; in his social philosophy he transcends, although never completely, the remnants of a predominant agrarian and feudalistic tradition. Thus in the social writings of St. Thomas one can always detect a distinct propensity toward urbanism and capitalism, characteristic of the late middle ages. This trend which stresses individualistic and "anti-solidarist" ideas is clothed in the formalistic conceptualism of Aristotle. Aristotle furnished St. Thomas with the philosophical form for the systematic expression of certain ideas which are symptomatic of a new socio-economic era. It became the task of St. Thomas to examine closely the ideas on property and wealth advanced during the first twelve centuries of Christianity, in order to confront and co-ordinate them to the newly arising problems of the thirteenth century. In fine, the real task of St. Thomas is nothing less than a comprehensive synthesis of Apostolic-Patristic tradition and Aristotelean "modernistic" views. Obviously, he could not and never intended to reject or criticize the Apostolic-Patristic authorities and the tradition of natural law based on these authorities. It is one of the immemorial achievements of St. Thomas that he succeeded in achieving a synthesis in the domain of socio-political theory which did full justice both to the old convictions and the new situation. In doing this, St. Thomas established a durable theoretical system for centuries to come, a system that is to say, which will affect the many moral, social, and theoretical issues arising from the problem of private property.

It has already been pointed out that the most crucial statement of St. Thomas concerning the problem of private property is to be found in *Summa Theologica* 2.2, quaest. 66, art. 2 ad 1. In another place St. Thomas makes it quite clear that

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148 Quoted at the beginning of this paper.—Cf., in this connection, *Summa Theol.* 2.2, quaest. 57, art. 3: "...the natural law or right is that which by its very nature is adjusted or commensurate with another person. Now this may happen in two ways: first, according as it is considered absolutely... Secondly, a thing is naturally commensurate with another person, not according as it is considered absolutely, but according to something resultant from it, for instance, the possession of property. For if a particular piece of land be considered absolutely, it contains no reason why it should belong to one man more than to another; but if considered in respect of its adaptability to cultivation, and the unmolested use of the land, it has a certain commensuration to be the property of one and not of another man, as the Philosopher shows... Now it belongs not only to man but also to other animals to apprehend a thing absolutely: wherefore the right which we call natural, is common to us and other animals according to the first kind of commensuration..." *Ibid.* at 2.2, quaest. 57, art. 1: "...external things...as regards their use...man has a natural dominion over external things, because by his reason and will, he is able to use them for his own profit, as they were made on his account...It is by this argument that the Philosopher proves...that the possession of external things is natural to man..."  

149 *Ibid.* at 1.2, quaest. 94, art. 5, ad 3.
the possession of all thing in common...[is] said to be of the natural law, because the distinction of possessions...[was] not brought in by nature, but [was] devised by human reason for the benefit of human life.

This latter passage is in full accord with *Summa Theologica* 2.2, quaest. 66, art. 2 ad 1, where we are told that

the possession of all things in common is ascribed to the natural law, but not in the sense that the natural law dictates that all things should be possessed in common, and that nothing should be possessed as one's own, but in the sense that the division of possessions is not made by the natural law. This division arose from human agreement which belongs to the positive law...Hence the ownership of possessions is not contrary to the natural law, but a super-addition thereto devised by human reason.150

This passage does not permit of any arbitrary interpretation in the sense that St. Thomas could be called the intellectual father of either

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150 The first objection in *Summa Theol. 2.2*, quaest. 66, art. 2, reads as follows: "It seems that it is unlawful for a man to possess a thing as his own. For whatever is contrary to the natural law is unlawful. Now according to the natural law things are common property; and the possession of property is contrary to the community of goods. Therefore it is unlawful for any man to appropriate any external thing to himself." Cf., however, *ibid.* 1.2, quaest. 105, art. 2: "...the power of private persons is exercised over the things they possess, and consequently their dealings with one another, as regards such things, depend on their own will...But with regard to possessions, it is a very good thing, says the Philosopher (in: *Politics* 1263 a 25) that the things possessed should be distinct, and that the use thereof should be partly common, and partly granted to others by the will of the possessor. These three points were provided for by the Law. For, in the first place, the possessions themselves were divided among individuals...And since many states have been ruined through want of regulations in the matter of possessions, as the Philosopher observes (in: *Politics* 1270 a 23), therefore, the Law provided a threefold remedy against the irregularity of possessions. The first was that they should be divided equally...A second remedy was that possessions should not be alienated forever, but after a certain lapse of time should return to their former owner, so as to avoid confusion of possessions. The third remedy aimed at the removal of this confusion, and provided that the dead should be succeeded by their next of kin..." See also *ibid.* 1.2, quaest. 105, art. 2, ad 3; *ibid.* at 2.2, quaest. 66, art. 2: "Two things are competent to man in respect to external things. One is the power to procure and dispense them, and in this regard it is lawful for man to possess property. Moreover this is necessary to human life for three reasons. First, because every man is more careful to procure what is for him alone than that which is common to many or to all: since each one would shirk the labor and leave to another that which concerns the community. Secondly, because human affairs are conducted in a more orderly fashion if each man is charged with taking care of some particular things himself, whereas there would be confusion if everyone had to look after any one thing indeterminately. Thirdly, because a more peaceful state is ensured to man if each one is contended with his own. Hence it is to be observed that quarrels arise more frequently where there is no division of the things possessed. The second thing that is competent to man which 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...he is ready to communicate them to others in their need..."
"theoretical socialism" or "theoretical capitalism." His position is one of compromise, and consists in the fact that, supported by twelve hundred years of Christian history, he no longer shared in the extreme apocalyptic or eschatological "idealism" of the earliest Christians, and hence, in respect to the problem of private property, he refused to draw conclusions from this "idealism." He likewise refused to draw unwarranted conclusions from the fact that the Church of Christ could look back upon a long historical existence rich in spiritual as well as secular institutions. Neither the long historical actuality of the Church, nor the actuality of certain secular institutions devised by man, influenced St. Thomas in the direction of a shallow socio-historical realism. The synthesis achieved by St. Thomas in his teachings on property must be recognized in the fact that he considered private property something justifiable, or to be more exact, something conditionally justifiable on the basis of the ius gentium, while at the same time he maintained that the community of all property and possessions is absolutely justified through the lex naturalis, the natural law.

Within his philosophical system St. Thomas tries to prove that private property and private possessions is an institution which can be justified objectively in that it must be considered as something determined by historical necessity and historical actuality. But this does not mean that he deduces the institution of private property from history itself. The objective historical justification of private property consists in the fact that St. Thomas defines it as a subsequently added institution based on intelligent consideration and common human consensus. St. Thomas does not consider private property as an institution imposed on man as a consequence of original sin. Being merely the product of man's rational consideration, private property, logically speaking, is a temporal and, therefore, imperfect institution.\(^{151}\) Although he looked upon private property as an ephemeral institution, there exists a considerable difference between his attitude and the solidarist views of the Apologists and the Churchfathers. This difference must be detected in the fact that while the Apologists and Fathers always stressed the high moral and social significance of a solidarist conception of all possessions and property, St. Thomas, without denying the importance of the solidarist standpoint, justified private property both morally and logically.

In summary it might be contended that St. Thomas justified, but never completely sanctioned the existence of private property. He justified it, as has been shown, because it constitutes an intelligent human institution "super-added" to the natural law in form of the ius gentium and useful to the achievement of the common good. By means

\(^{151}\) Cf. \textit{ibid.} at 2.2, quaest. 57, art. 3; 2.2, quaest. 66, art 2, ad 1.
of this paradoxical position St. Thomas for all times made the Church
the final arbiter in all matters concerning the problem of private prop-
erty and private possessions. And this is the lasting historical impor-
tance of the much discussed and much misunderstood passage in Sum-
ma Theologica 2.2, quaest. 66, art. 2 ad 1. It furnishes the most excel-
lent argument not only against all immoral excesses of a capitalistic
system in that it reminds us of the original communion of all posses-
sions, but also against all forms of a materialistic communism by
pointing out that the institution of private property rests upon the sanc-
tity of a human agreement—the ius genium—and is the product of that
intelligent human conduct which is akin to acting in conformity with
the natural law.