

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

(According to the original book by H.H. Pope Shenouda, III)

The Eighth Commandment

"You Shall Not Steal"

(Exodus 20:15, Deuteronomy 5:19)

**"Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, will inherit the kingdom of God"
(I Corinthians 6:10)**

1. What Is Theft? From Whom Do You Steal?

What is Theft?

Theft is not, in its general sense, the acquisition of someone else's belongings. Thus, when the Lord's disciples felt hungry and plucked some corn in the field, He did not rebuke them. The criticism of the Pharisees centered around one point: that they did that on the Sabbath, (*Matthew 12:1,2*), which means that it was permitted for a hungry person to pick up some corn on the way and eat it. The law states in this regard: *"When you come into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure; but you shall not put any in your container. When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand; but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor's standing grain"* (*Deuteronomy 23:24-25*).

Therefore, theft is not partaking of the belongings of the others, but stealing them; for if you partake of them with the owner's consent and permission, or through his generosity, then your act is not theft.

Theft may take place in camera without the knowledge of the robbed one, such as what embezzlers do, what Judas did when he used to help himself from the box without the disciples' knowledge (*John 12:6*), and what robbers do when they break in and steal (*Matthew 6:19*) while the owners are absent or asleep.

However, if great love, companionship, and friendship exist between you and a friend, and if you need and help yourself to something that belongs to him knowing that he would not object even if he was present at the time, then your act is not considered theft on condition that you inform him of what you have done and seek his forgiveness.

Other forms of theft are included among those committed in secret. These thefts take the form of deceit, fraud, forgery, and the like. In all these forms, the robbed one is unaware of what is taken from him. To all these forms of theft another sin is added: the sin of lying.

Theft may also take place openly before the robbed one's eyes and in his hearing, yet without his consent. Such is the case when someone's money is stolen from him by force, by coercion, or by extortion in what is called "robbery with violence", performed by kidnappers, highway robbers, and pirates. These acts may sometimes also be accompanied with injuries to the victims.

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Theft is not only confined to "stealing" something, but it also includes "damage". He who damages something that belongs to another is actually causing him some loss of his belongings. This is included under the head fine of theft especially when it is performed on purpose. In this case the sin of theft is coupled with that of "non-loving". In general, he who causes damage to someone should repair it or compensate him for it.

A worse case is that of causing deliberate damage. A thief may benefit by stealing in a material way, but he who deliberately damages another's possession aims at nothing else but to satisfy his hatred.

Included in the above item also is the damage someone causes to public property, as in the case of demonstrations where street lamps, trees, or public transport cars are destroyed. This is considered a form of theft of the country's funds or the people's property.

In general, theft is a form of disrespect for other people's rights and property. It denotes that the thief is vile and dishonest. It destroys his character in the people's eyes, and calls upon them to beware of him, to despise him, and not to mix up with him. It even makes the thief himself look despicable in his own eyes.

However, we should not cast the same look at it when the matter concerns young children who do not differentiate between personal possessions and the right of others. They see everything before them as common and simply lying there to be picked up without any sense of committing evil. Children may even help themselves to something that does not belong to them, doing it secretly, not because of any feeling on their part of committing theft, but rather out of fear it may be taken away from them.

Through the passage of time and the factor of development, intellectually, psychologically, and educationally, the child starts to comprehend. The meaning of private property, to respect the rights of others, and to understand that taking whatever belongs to others will cause him remorse and arouse in him feeling of wrong doing. Then, his act is considered theft.

Theft may sometimes also be regarded as a form of sickness - a mere psychological sickness that requires treatment, not punishment. When having this sickness, a thief steals things that he neither needs nor knows how to benefit by. However, he experiences satisfaction in keeping them and taking them away from others. He may be driven to steal by internal motives that are beyond his will power, he may sometimes cry having to commit such a deed, but he is just unable to resist such an impulse. Such a person is in need of treatment and an investigation of the causes of his sickness and its roots that lie buried in his life history, in his environment, and his upbringing.

The illicit money acquired by a thief is capable of dissipating the good money that he already has. As the saying goes: "Illicit things take the good ones and dissipate them". Theft is a fire that burns away what the thief himself has. In this situation he resembles someone who has eaten rotten food: as soon as this food reaches his stomach, he throws up the good and bad food together that are inside him.

How beautiful it would be for people to live together in honesty and in mutual trust and confidence. Then one would have anything anywhere to find it later where one had left it. One would let the door of one's house open without anyone else helping himself to anything in it. If one forgot his mail or confidential papers somewhere, he would be confident that no one else would allow himself to go through them.

Theft was regarded as a mean act, despised and hated by people, even before the holy law where God said: *"You shall not steal"*. This indicates that, by his nature and conscience man has an aversion to it.

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When Laban went up to Jacob and accused him saying: *"Why did you steal my gods?"* (meaning his idols), Jacob felt the repulsiveness or the accusation and answered saying: *"With whoever you find your gods, do not let him live"* (Genesis 31:30,32). Thus he condemned the thief to death being undeserved to stay alive. This incident took place before the holy law. The same condemnation may also be found in the story of Joseph and his brothers. When the latter were accused of stealing his cup, they became immensely upset and answered haughtily and loftily, *"Why does my Lord say these words? Far be it from us that your servants should do such a thing... With whomever of your servants it is found...let him die"* (Genesis 44:7,9).

Theft is a sin that is so ashamed of itself that it works in the dark, and a sinner becomes disgusted with it, repudiates it, and tries to cast it away from him. Thus it is said: *"If the theft demon treads a road, the lying demon will say: take me along with you"*.

It is hard to find a thief who does not lie to cover-up his crime, though he may also lie to be able to accomplish it. He may lie during or before the theft in order to deceive the victim and be able to rob him. Such is the case with cheating in trade. He may also lie to whoever is watching or suspecting him. Since theft resorts to lying, confessors should pay close attention to this point. Thus whoever confesses a sin of theft should also be asked about its relationship to lying.

Two factors add to the burden of the sin of theft:

1. The degree of harm done to the victim.
2. The identity of the victim himself, especially if he is poor and needy, or if the stolen article is a sacred one.

Therefore we have to pose the question:

From whom do you steal?

The poorer and more needy the victim is, the greater the sin is. It is therefore an immensely horrible sin for someone, for instance, to steal an orphan's or a widow's money. That is what led Jesus Christ to rebuke the scribes and Pharisees, saying: *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses. Therefore you shall receive greater condemnation"* (Matthew 23:14, Mark 12:40).

The degree of seriousness of a theft is not measured by the value of the stolen article but by its value to the person from whom it has been stolen. For instance, if someone stole a tailor's needle or a painter's brush, these two objects might not in themselves be worth anything. However, they are of vital importance to their owners whose work and means of earning a living might be crippled by the theft.

The stolen object may, in itself, have no value, but, to its owner, it may represent a dear memory or be of special importance, so much so that losing it may inflict a profound pain upon his heart since he cannot replace it with another.

Stealing from a needy person denotes the nonexistence of any sensitivity in the heart of the thief. For instance, usury and pawning applied to a person, who finds it hard even to acquire his daily bread, would be like stealing his and his children's food. This needy person would not have resorted to borrowing or pawning but for his poverty. Would it be appropriate to apply usury to this person instead of assisting him with a spirit of love?

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Usury is a form of theft that is devoid of mercy, which is the reason why God prohibited it as He also prohibited pawning the necessities of life. Thus He said, *"If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest. If you ever take your neighbor's garment as a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down: For that is his only covering, it is his garment for his skin. What will he sleep in? And it shall come to pass, when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I am gracious" (Exodus 22:25-27).*

He also said, *"If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger, or a sojourner, that he may live with you. Take no usury or interest from him, but fear your God, that your brother may live with you. You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit" (Leviticus 25:35-37).*

He also said, *"You shall not charge interest to your brother, interest on money, or food or anything that is lent out at interest" (Deuteronomy 23:19).*

The excess money that a usurer takes from a poor person is an act of stealing his necessary requirements. It is different from the interest paid by banks and financial institutions, which invest the money of depositors, set up projects, and make a profit, for these banks and institutions regard the depositors as partners in their capital and pay them their share of the profit.

If this usury, that is applied to the poor, is regarded as a form of theft, regardless of what the merciless say that it is legal, then what should we say about the obviously horrible theft where a thief breaks into the house of a widow or a poor needy person!

Despite the fact that we talked much about the wickedness of stealing from the poor, it should not mean that robbing the rich is permissible or of no consequence! No, for what we are saying is that, if robbing the affluent rich who possess more than they need is a mean crime, then it should even be more so if someone should rob the poor and needy or do them an injustice that would affect their means of living!

If robbing common people is a horrible matter, then what about robbing a church or a priest?

Stealing of sacred things is a serious matter, and robbing altars and churches is unimaginable. That is why churches all over Europe are constantly open and unguarded despite what they contain. Nobody can expect or even imagine that a human being would find it in himself to break into the house of the Lord and steal something. Everything inside there, in God's house, is sacred, and everyone entering it is overcome with humility, awe, and a desire for repentance.

What should we say about those who steal a candle, a book, a parcel, or the like in a church? They have no excuse even if they say that they did it for a blessing! A blessing is not attained through stealing. And what should we say about someone who steals from the church funds, endowments, or homes, and uses what he steals for himself and his home? It is God's money, the poor's money, and sacred money.

And what should we say about those who steal the saints' bodies, bones, and treasures to transfer them stealthily to their churches or countries protesting that it is a blessing! The body of St. Mark was stolen in the ninth century, and the thieves justified their act before *their conscience* saying that they took it as a blessing! How many manuscripts were stolen from monasteries and churches in the name of love of knowledge and understanding! All these are excuses that cannot be justified. The most horrible *thing* of all is: What should we say about a person who steals from God Himself?

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A person steals from God when he refrains from paying tithes, first fruits, and offerings. This matter is expounded in the epistle of Malachi the prophet where it is said, *"Return to Me and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you said, 'In what way shall we return?' Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings...Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this, says the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 3:7-10).*

This money that we steal from God, that belongs to the poor yet we keep to ourselves and not give to its rightful owners, the needy ones, is unrighteous money about which the Lord says: *"Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon" (Luke 16:9).* The reference here is to the money that we keep to ourselves though we do not own. *It belongs* to the poor whom we have done injustice to by not giving them that which is due to them. Therefore it is unrighteous money that we should return to its owners who are then won over as our friends praying for us.

In the same way that we steal from God, the Church's and the poor people's money, so we do steal also time from Him. In our lives, there is a certain time for God that we steal from Him and which we spend in other pursuits. For Example:

(a) The day of the Lord: The Lord has a certain day of the week that belongs to Him and not to us. We do not have the right to use it in any way we wish, for it should be devoted to God's sincerity and worship. If we spent it otherwise, we would be stealing God's day from Him.

Another point is that, in Egypt, Christian's employees are given two hours off every Sunday morning (from 8:00 to 10:00 AM) in order to give them the chance to attend mass. If a Christian employee did not go to Church on Sunday morning but spent those two hours at home doing some other business of his choosing, he would be stealing that time kept aside for God.

(b) Worship time: In the same way that God has a day of the week, he also has certain times every day which should be devoted to prayer, meditation, invocations, readings in the Holy Bible and religious books, attending religious meetings, and service. If worldly affairs took over our lives leaving us no chance for worship, we would be robbing God of His time. In the same way that God is entitled to the first fruits of our money, so is He entitled to the first periods of our time. That is what the Psalm chanter means when he says: *"O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You" (Psalms 63:1).* God Himself said, *"Those who seek me diligently will find me" (Proverbs 8:17).* If we started every morning without God and busied ourselves with things other than His worship, we would be robbing Him of the first periods of our time due to Him.

(c) God's seasonal and feast days: God has other times that should be devoted to Him on certain seasonal days; e.g. Passion Week through which our priests devote themselves to prayers, hymns, and readings in Church; the evenings of the Coptic month of Kiahk which were devoted to glorification and praises; feasts and other holy days. We should, at all these times, consecrate our time to the Lord and not rob Him of them.

2. Slight Thefts

What is a thief?

A thief is not just the person who digs a hole in the wall, breaks into a house in the absence of its owners, or picks people's pockets, for the meaning of the word theft may expand so much as to include a lot of those whose names are honored and a lot of acts that go by false names other than theft.

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This sin may start with small thefts that seem to be trivial since those committing them do not sense their guilt. They may even do so shamelessly before the people.

Thefts within the scope of children and married couples:

A child may take things such as food and toys that belong to someone else without their knowledge. He may not realize in the beginning that it is an act of theft. However, when he grows up, he realizes it and may abandon or go on with it fully realizing his guilt. This thieving practice then increases gradually when he helps himself stealthily, at play or at school, to things that belong to his friends and colleagues.

This age bracket imposes upon use two things to do:

1. That we do not deprive the child in such a way as to make him steal things in secret, and
2. That we accustom him to be so frank as to always reveal what he takes in secret, without our punishing him for it, or retrieving the stolen thing from him except when necessary, all this while giving him the suitable guidance whenever necessary.

Theft may take place between married couples, and it may be mixed up also with lying. Thus, a husband may conceal or reduce the true amount of his income when telling his wife about it, and the wife may conceal from her husband the true amount of her expenditures, mostly adding to them.

The treatment of this matter requires an atmosphere of frankness, understanding, and cooperation, and a feeling that whatever belongs to the husband belongs also to the wife, and whatever the wife owns is also the property of her husband. This should be accompanied with a mutual understanding of both parties' points of view as regards requirements and capabilities.

Other forms of theft that may seem trivial:

Many employees may sometimes use the blank stationary that belongs to the business to do their own private work. Although this stationary is cheap in price, it is not theirs. This behavior is inappropriate. The same also applies to using other articles as well.

Some higher employees use their official cars for their own private transportation. In so doing, they make the State pay for the gas, the car depreciation, and the driver's wages, all of which being inappropriate since it is they who are using the cars. Some of them even exploit the workers by making them serve them personally. All this may strangely seem so slight that even the "honorable" ones do it without experiencing any sense of guilt.

This same category includes those who board a bus or a tram without paying the fare protesting that the conductor was too busy to ask for it. In the same way, a train passenger may occupy a seat in a higher-class section of the train without paying the difference.

The stricter the man is in trivial things, the more he indicates how sensitive his conscience is.

Forgetfulness:

Many trivial thefts occur through forgetfulness, especially when one borrows something and forgets to return it

to its owner whom in turn forgets to ask for it. This borrowed thing may remain in your constant possession as if it were yours, though you have no right to it.

You may go into a friend's library, find a book that you like and ask for it that you may read and return it. The book may stay so long in your possession that you forget whom it belongs to especially that it may not carry the name of its owner. The latter, in his turn, may have forgotten the one who has borrowed the book, thus losing it. In the meantime the book remains in your unlawful possession. This too is included in the category of unpremeditated thefts. Many people lose their books and pens in this way.

You may want to write something in a rush, but you find that you have no pen. You borrow a pen from someone, write what you want, then unintentionally and by force of habit you put it into your pocket. There it lies forgotten by you and by its owner.

Therefore you should either have a good memory, keep a record of what you take from people, or keep in the book a slip of paper carrying the name of the owner. If you are already in one of those situations, reveal it to your friends and acquaintances telling them that you have a certain book which you do not know its owner, or that you have taken a pen from someone and that you still have it. Such notifications may reveal the identity of the owner.

3. Theft in Commerce

Many a time one's conscience becomes so loose in commercial dealings that it is said it may swallow a camel. A merchant of this sort imagines that this is a form of skill and art that brings him the utmost profit. The following examples illustrate this theft in commerce:

Theft through cheating:

An example of this is selling a damaged object as if it were sound and taking advantage of the buyer not noticing the damage. How noble it would be for a seller to draw the attention of the buyer to the defect or damage in the article. In so doing, he would win respect and confidence of those dealing with him.

Some may say that then he would sell nothing. Not so, for he will sell his goods at a price commensurate with the defect in them. It would be a lesser price, but the money would be legitimate and blessed.

What would you say if a merchant, for instance, sold you fruits or vegetables, then put a large quantity of damaged, corrupt or unripe products in the bottom of the bag and covered it with a few chosen ones of excellent quality? You would be deceived, would pay the price, and would not discover the trick until you went home! You would then realize that the merchant was dishonest. This category may include selling of damaged articles as sound ones, selling of used articles as new ones, and agreeing to sell a certain brand but delivering one of a lesser quality or value.

Another form of cheating is selling something under brand name of another. An example of this is when merchant sells you synthetic as natural silk, since you are no expert on silk and its varieties, or a gold coated metal as pure gold and at the price of the latter. False jewelry and antiques are also included in this category. A merchant may also sell you a fountain pen as a Parker pen while it is only an imitation and has nothing to do with the genuine Parker except for the name.

All that cheating is a form of theft mixed up with lying. In committing it a seller receives a price that his

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merchandise is not worth, and the difference in price is unlawful money stolen from the buyer. What makes this sin more horrible is that it is accompanied with false propaganda to deceive the buyer.

A clear and obvious type of cheating is the use of incorrect measures, weights and scales.

In this type, cheating does not take place in the kind or quality of the merchandise but in its quantity, since the buyer receives a quantity that is less than what is due to him.

Theft through greed and price increase:

Unreasonable price increases are included in theft because it is a form of embezzlement of the buyer's money. God allows a merchant to make a reasonable profit, but an exorbitant profit that is full of greed and void of mercy is not approved by any religion. This type of theft may occur through monopoly, where a merchant is the sole manufacturer or importer of the merchandise, or the sole agent authorized to sell it. In this case he may impose exorbitant prices, thus exploiting the buyer's need and stealing money from the people who are compelled to buy from him.

This theft may also occur in the form of a black market. A merchant may store the merchandise until it becomes unavailable on the market, or buy it and store it until the other outlets are empty of it, then he offers it for sale at an exorbitant price, exploiting the buyers' need and embezzling their money.

These are forms of theft performed through exploitation. The merchant in this case is the sole seller, the buyer is in need, and time favors the seller who imposes a certain price, forces the buyer to pay it and makes an exorbitant profit which is then a form of theft.

Thefts through economic maneuvering:

There are other practices, such as market maneuvering, which are considered forms of theft. Thus speculation practiced by merchants, who raise or lower prices, may lead to the bankruptcy of small traders whose money is embezzled by big speculators: e.g. what used formerly to take place in the cotton market.

Another example of theft in trade is the practice of some banks, corporations, or individuals of declaring a premeditated and intentional bankruptcy whereby all the investors' money is lost.

Also included in this category are the illusory economic projects whereby people's money is amassed through tempting advertisements, which prove later on to be a fraudulent means of theft.

Thefts committed by buyers:

A thief in sales may be the buyer not the seller. This takes place when the buyer resorts to excessive bargaining, especially with poor sellers.

Sometimes a merchant is poor and in dire need to sell his merchandise at any price in order to get his daily bread, or because he has a sick person at home. When some dire necessity compels him to act in this way, he sells what he has at any price mindless of whether he gains or loses.

A buyer may exploit a merchant's need and impose upon him a price that does not coincide with the value of what he wants to buy nor with the seller's efforts and his right to a legitimate profit. It is possible that the

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merchant may accept the transaction out of necessity, which acceptance may put the buyer's conscience to rest. However, this is an injustice done to the merchant who is actually robbed of his earnings.

The theft may not have led to the poor merchant assuming any loss in what he sells, but he may have made a very small amount of profit, which is not enough to feed him and his family. This situation is brought about by the instance of the buyer who robs the seller of his profit, and yet who goes away with an untroubled conscience and a happy heart. Thus it is well said in the saying that: *"A concealed charity lies in buying and selling"*.

One of the fathers once said: *"When you go to buy something, do not be stringent in setting the price as the laymen do. Whatever is said to you about the article, increase its price a little and take it"*.

Many of the bargains conducted with poor merchants indicate the cruelty of the buyer's heart.

A poor merchant deserves your charity, even if you do not buy anything from him. Therefore, the least you can do to him is to offer him this charity through buying from him without hurting his feelings.

And rest assured that the poor merchant's invocation for you is more valuable than the difference in price.

4. Injustice and Unpaid Labor

Unpaid labor and low wages:

Unpaid labor is a form of theft. If someone uses another to do him so unpaid work, he will be stealing his wages. If he hires him and pays him very low wages below the borderline of sustenance, he will be stealing his effort and labor. For example, if a servant works for you, but you do not pay him enough for his lodging, his food, his children's expenses, you will then be stealing his labor and actually killing him.

God took a stand against unpaid labor during the days of the Pharaohs and said: *"I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters" (Exodus 3:7)*.

In the same way, Saint James, the apostle, says about low wages: *"Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you keep back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth" (James 5:4)*.

Suspension of rights, or wasting them:

Unpaid wages or delays in paying them are part of unpaid labor and low wages. In this regard God says: *"You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brethren, or one of the aliens who are in your land within your gates. Each day you shall give him his wages, and not let the sun go down on it; for he is poor, and has set his heart upon it, lest he cry out against you to the Lord, and it be sin to you" (Deuteronomy 24:14-15)*.

Included in this category is the director who delays an employee's raise or promotion if the latter deserves it. In this case the director is stealing the employee's earning through depriving him of his rights. It is no excuse for him that he has not pocketed the employee's earnings but has left it for the country's budget. Does the poor employee's heart not scream against the director, saying, "You have done me an injustice. You have eaten up

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my earnings". The same applies in the case of an employee who works some hours more than his regular time, yet his manager denies him the overtime he deserves. This also is robbing him of his earnings.

The same applies to a director who deducts money from an employee's earnings without any justification. It is true that it is a director's right to penalize his employees if they commit something that justifies a deduction from their salaries. However, if the penalty has no justification, the director will then have committed the sin of theft.

Therefore, theft is not only an act of stealing people's money for oneself, but it also includes denying the right of someone whether it is to keep it for oneself or for someone else.

Hence, an injustice committed in money matters is a form of theft. An illustration of this is what took place with Zecchaeus, the tithe collector who said: *"...and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold"* (Luke 19:8). Zecchaeus did not openly steal, but through defamation and denouncement, he oppressed the people, who thus lost their rights. Such an act falls within the scope of theft.

The same thing also applies to a tax collector that is not just. If he exaggerates in assessing someone's taxes he will be robbing that person of his money. On the other hand, if he imposes upon him an amount that is less than he should pay, he will be robbing the State of its dues. In both cases, he does not take anything for himself, but he robs one party of a certain amount of money that he hands over to the other. Therefore, such an employee should be very fair in his assessment and should not favor any party at the expense of another.

Bribery:

Bribery also is a form of theft, for it is an unmerited embezzlement of people's money. An employee should perform his work without charging the public anything in return for his services for which he receives a salary. If, however, he receives a bribe, then it is clearly *committing* theft. This is more so if this bribery takes the form of an imposed tribute where such an employee does not serve anyone without first receiving a certain bribe.

As for the bribery an employee receives to exempt someone from a duty imposed upon him by the State, it means that he is actually committing two thefts: he is stealing that person's money by receiving a bribe from him, and he is stealing the State's money by wasting the rights due to it from that person. The person paying the bribe is also committing an act of theft since he is robbing the State of its dues from which the bribed employee has exempted him.

Bribery is not relieved of its liability when it takes up a name that is different from its disgraceful one. Thus it may assume the form of a gift, which in truth it is not, for gifts are exchanged among lovers and friends without any condition attached that a certain deed be performed in return.

Bribery does not include a tip that is given to a porter or a servant if it takes the form of charity or assistance offered in love to a poor person who is not required to break the law in return.

Dishonesty at work:

In the same way as the employer robs an employee or a laborer through corvee, by depriving him of his rights, his raises, or promotion, or by inflicting unjust punishments upon him, the laborer or the employee may rob his employer in several ways, such as.

a) Stealing time:

Working time does not belong to the employee but to the employer who pays him for it. Therefore if an employee exploits working time in attending his own personal affairs, in spending it having fun with his fellow workers, or in taking illegal casual or sick leaves, he will be stealing this working time or the pay he receives for it.

b) Dishonesty at work:

An employee is paid for the time he spends doing a certain job. If, however, he neglects his work, does not perform it as honestly, diligently and skillfully as he should, does not accomplish the service required of him but evades it in every possible way, postponing it carelessly, or shuns it by referring it to someone else, he will be stealing the pay due to him for performing the job since he actually breaks the agreement that requires him to work in return for his pay.

c) Destruction of tools:

We often notice that a worker who owns a tool takes very good care of it. However, if he is a hired hand who uses his employer's tools, he often neglects them and does not care if they become damaged, though damaging such tools is a form of theft where the employer's money is stolen. This is to be noticed when we compare the case of a taxi-driver who owns his own taxi and another who works for pay on someone else's car.

Theft in other forms of injustice:

There are many forms of injustice that fall within the scope of theft. Some of them are:

a) Wrongful agreements:

An agreement may be concluded between two parties whereby one is wronged and the other is put in a position where he can rob the first. An example of this is what takes place sometimes in contractual work, which leads him to be exploited by the other party.

b) Exploitation of authority:

Someone may sometimes exploit his authority over someone else and compel him to do things that involve injustice and theft, in the same way as King Ahab did when he wanted to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite (*1Kings 21*), and tithe-collectors did when they robbed people and coerced them. Under the pressure of authority, and in the presence of the factor of threats, man may accept something despite the fact that it includes an obvious form of robbery and injustice.

c) Circumventing the law:

Certain people use their intelligence and resourcefulness to circumvent the law. In this way, they amass money for themselves in an unlawful way, or evade their obligations towards the State or towards each other, their conscience being rendered dormant by their worldly delight at acquiring a fleeting gain.

5. Theft in Dealings and Transactions

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Theft is not confined to plunder, robbery, and abduction, for it also becomes apparent in dealings and transactions such as:

Denial of a trust, or of something found:

If someone entrusted a friend with something, then the latter denied receiving it or refused to return it, that friend would be a thief. This applies also to a person who refuses to return something he has borrowed, or to repay a loan, a mortgage, or a debt. About such acts the holy law says:

"If a person sins and commits a trespass against the Lord by lying to his neighbor about what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or about a pledge, or about a robbery, or if he has extorted from his neighbor, or if he has found what was lost and lies concerning it...because he has sinned and is guilty, that he shall restore that he has stolen, or the thing which he has extorted, or what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or the lost thing which he found" (Leviticus 6:2-4).

Theft particularly includes, not only denying a trust or something found and not returning it, but also damaging or using it.

Letting accounts stand uncorrected:

Included in theft is the case where two people have joint financial dealings. One of them may discover a mistake in his favor increasing his financial share. He accepts it and does not correct it, though he should have returned the extra money, which he has unrightfully taken. For instance, a boy may buy something, hands the seller a bill, and receives his change. How great his honesty would be if he counted the change, discovered that he had received more than was due to him, returned to the seller, and gave him back the extra change he had wrongfully received.

Gambling and Betting:

Money won from someone through gambling is illicit as it is unjustly received. So also are all those tricks used to cheat children out of their money.

Participating in Theft:

One is regarded as an accomplice in a crime when one joins a thief in the act or *"Whoever is a partner with a thief"* (Proverbs 29:24). The same applies to whoever harbors or directly encourages him, or whoever justifies his act or eases his sense of guilt.

6. Stealing Ideas and Secrets (Plagiarism)

Types of thefts:

Stealing ideas means that someone takes the idea of someone else and ascribes it to himself, or quotes something without referring it to its originator as if it belonged to himself.

An example of this is one who steals someone else's piece of music and inserts it within his own composition as if it were all his, or one who steals a plot, the concept of an invention, or the thoughts for a book. In literature, there is a well-known chapter about "poetic plagiarism". Some writings are literally plagiarized,

while others are slightly modified.

Some may try to cover up their plagiarism by calling it "adoption" or "learning", though what they are supposed to do is mention the reference quoted.

Hence, laws have been issued to uphold copyrights, and the rights of publishers, printers, inventors, etc.

Cheating in Examinations:

In the same way as one steals an invention that belongs to someone else, one may steal a degree for oneself, or someone else's ideas and attributes them to himself. Cheating falls under the domain of plagiarism as does helping others to cheat, for an accomplice is the same as the wrongdoer.

It is to no avail that some try to include helping others to cheat within the scope of mercy or cooperation, for the methods and procedures of morality must be as good and moral as it in itself is. The means does not justify the end.

If it was said that the act had taken place by the supervisor himself by his permission, we would respond saying that he had not the right to do so, and that he had, through his act, made himself liable to be prosecuted.

Cheating is not a mere act of theft, for it rather includes many other sins.

Stealing Secrets:

One may steal someone else's secrets through spying or ears dropping where one hears things he has no right to hear. One may also read someone else's letters or notes without the latter's knowledge.

One is supposed to respect the secrets of others and never allow oneself to try to know them. Stealing of secrets is the lowest form of theft, for they pertain to the person himself and not to his belongings.

It is nobody's right to read, in secret, someone else's letters, even those of one's sons. However, if upbringing sometimes forces one to do it, one has to ask the son's permission beforehand. However, a father may, through love, convince his son to voluntarily tell him his secrets for the purpose of consultation and getting the father's advice. However, it is improper to do it in secret.

7. Other Types of Stealing

There are other types of stealing beyond what we have mentioned, the most important of which are stealing of countries, and stealing of souls. Stealing of countries is done through occupation and colonialism, while stealing of souls is accomplished by heretics and the followers of strange religious sects. Jesus Christ referred to the latter as: *"All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers" (John 10:8).*

About these thieves and robbers, Gamaliel, the doctor of law, said: *"For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished and all who obeyed him were dispersed" (Acts. 5:36-37).*

These are the innovators who steal souls:

They include the followers of Arius and Nestorius, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the other innovators who took away the Church's children from its embrace only to lead them astray as they themselves had been led astray before them. The Bible called upon us to beware of them saying: *"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds"* (2John 10,11).

8. Motives For Stealing and Their Treatment

Motives for Stealing:

Lust, greed, love of money, and possessiveness, as well as lack of love for the others, disrespect for their rights, injustice, cruelty, and mercilessness are all reasons and motives for stealing.

The reason for stealing may be a meanness that has been given rise to through heredity, imitation, or corrupt upbringing.

Poverty, indigence, and destitution may also lead to stealing.

Stealing may be a sickness, a habit, or a pleasure in a lowly soul. Hence what Solomon said: *"Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant"* (Proverbs 9:17).

Theft, when committed by the rich who are not in need, is more hideous. It may be a form of sickness, or an insatiable greed, destitution, and love of money. Thus the Wise man said: *"All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full"* (Ecclesiastes 1: 7).

The rich are not innocent of the theft committed by the needy poor, for maybe it is the miserliness of the rich and the destitution of the poor person that lead the latter to it. Theft also may be a form of vindictiveness that the poor have against the rich.

However, theft committed by the poor cannot be justified by their need. Thus the Bible says: *"People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he is starving. Yet when he is found, he must restore seven fold; he may have to give up all the substance of his house"* (Proverbs 6:30,31).

Treatment:

The first treatment is planting into one's soul love for honesty and elevating it above the low baseness of stealing. People must also accustom themselves to loving others and respecting their rights. If people loved each other, they would take care of each other's possessions and would never betray each other. Even if one found something that another had lost, one would think with a sense of love and with the spirit of the loser. He would try hard to identify the latter and give him what belonged to him. People should know that illicit money is a fire that eats up the licit as well. The poor should get used to a life of contentment, and people should all become accustomed to the pleasure of making an honest profit and to the beauty of earning a living by working hard. Those who enjoy a life of plenty should be generous and lavish and not let others be in dire need.

Young people should stay away from the life of luxury, entertainment, lavishness and frivolity which requires a lot of spending and, in particular, relationships with women and late parties of drinking, buffoonery, and

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gambling. They may not afford the expense and may slide into the pit of stealing either by forcing their parents and families into unbearable situations, or by seeking to get unlawful money.

Repentance for Stealing:

It is not enough that a person confesses that he has stolen and has the priest read his absolution, for he has to do his best to return or make up for what he has stolen, though in camera and in secret. In the Old Testament it was not enough for one to return what one had stolen. In many instances, one had to double it several times.

In the Book of Leviticus (6:4) we read that a person *"shall restore what he has stolen, or the thing which he has extorted"*.

In the book of Exodus (22:1) we read that *"if a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it, or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep"*. Refer also to (Exodus 22:7,8 and Proverbs 6:30,31).

In his repentance, Zacchaeus declares, *"If I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold"* (Luke 19:8).

If a thief cannot return all these doubles, he should at least return the stolen object. If he is ashamed to do so, he has to choose a way that will not reveal his identity.