

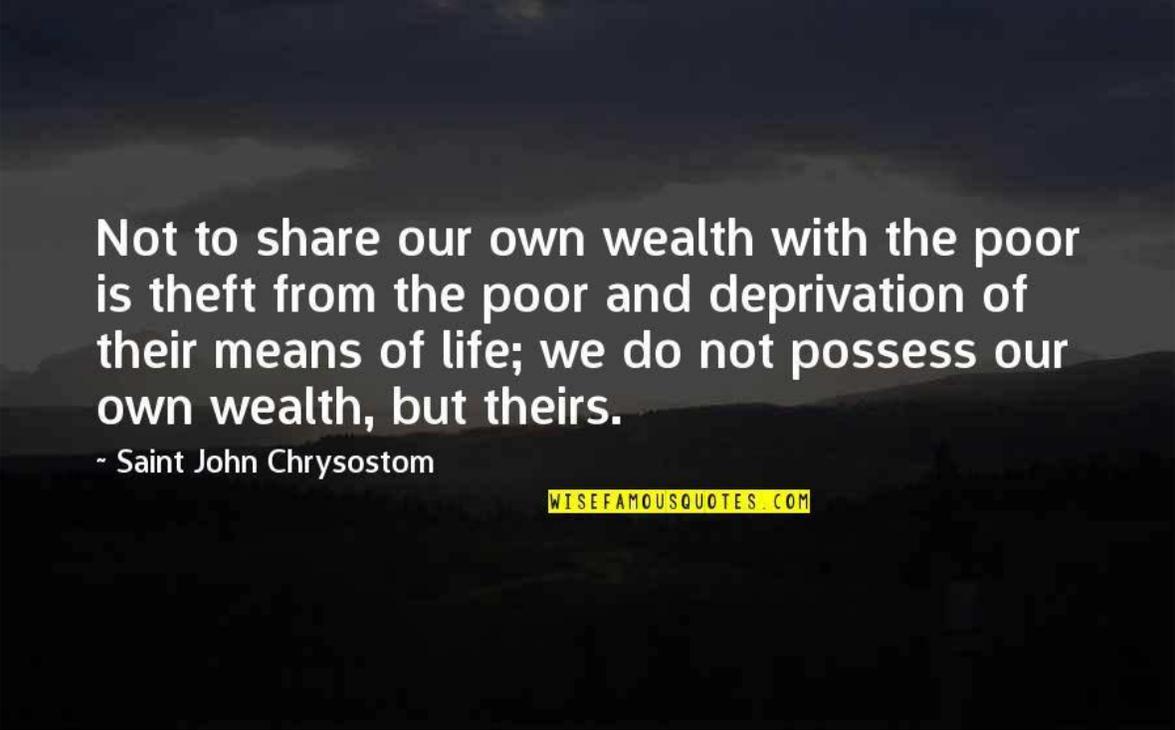
## Giving to the Poor—A Matter of Justice, not Charity

Contrary to modern thinking (in some circles) that giving to the poor is a matter of charity (an optional free will issue), both Scripture and orthodox Christian history testify that issue of giving to the poor falls under the category of justice. Moreover, this justice is primarily based on the dignity of the person and not based on merit or demerit (undeserving poor). In a previous post, I have noted Aquinas' testimony on how giving to the poor was viewed as a matter of justice rather than charity. Consider the testimony of John Chrysostom, especially what he says about undeserving poor:

“ . . . this also is theft, not to share one's possessions. Perhaps this statement seems surprising to you, but do not be surprised. I shall bring you testimony from the divine Scriptures, saying that not only the theft of others' good but also the failure to share one's own goods is theft and swindle and defraudation. . . . The poor man has but one plea, his want and his standing in need; do not require anything else from him; but even if he is most wicked of all men and is at a loss for his necessary sustenance, let us free him from hunger. . . . So you likewise, when you see on earth the man who encountered the shipwreck of poverty, do not judge him, do not seek an account of his life, but free him from his misfortune. Need alone is this poor man's worthiness . . . We show mercy on him not because of his virtue but because of his misfortune. . . . I beg you remember this without fail, not to share our own

wealth with the poor is theft from the poor and deprivation of their means of life; we do not possess our own wealth but theirs” (60-61, cited by Wolterstorff in "Justice").

Perhaps if modern man realized that giving to poor is a matter of justice before God rather than merely a free will option, we would not have our monstrous modern welfare state, which is often inefficient and can do more damage than good (by creating unnecessary dependency).



**Not to share our own wealth with the poor is theft from the poor and deprivation of their means of life; we do not possess our own wealth, but theirs.**

- Saint John Chrysostom

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