

READING PATRISTIC TEXTS ON SOCIAL ETHICS

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR
TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY CHRISTIAN
SOCIAL THOUGHT

EDITED BY

Johan Leemans

Brian J. Matz

Johan Verstraeten



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Brian Matz

8. The Principle of Detachment from Private Property in Basil of Caesarea's *Homily 6* and Its Context

I have two sons. The older of my boys, now age four, enjoys building elaborate sets with his wooden train tracks. The younger of my boys, now age one, enjoys "playing" with his older brother by tearing apart the train set as it is being built. The four-year-old is understandably upset, and some sort of physical behavior is displayed to retrieve the tracks from his younger brother. What is a parent to do in this situation? I suggest the problem is not simple. The older boy has applied his time, energy, and talents into constructing something new from which he now draws some sense of personal dignity. He has put his labor to good use to fashion some sort of property, and he believes he has earned the right to enjoy what he has made. The younger boy believes that this new property should not be treated as private, but should be for all to share and to play. As a parent, I would like to find some middle ground between asking the older boy to share his property and trying to occupy the younger boy with some other activity. Yet, if pressed on the matter, ought I to lean towards protecting the right to private property or towards ensuring all property is made common? In addition, how much does the application of a child's own labor in the production of property figure into the calculation?

These types of questions have long been a part of Christian ethical reflection on the merits of private property. This includes studies of the ear-

