

## FIVE KINDS OF JUSTICE

### BIBLICAL JUSTICE

“In the Jewish Scriptures, God is described as a "God of justice" who loves justice and delights in it. God demands justice from the whole people and executes justice for the needy. Central to the biblical presentation of justice is that the justice of a community is measured by its treatment of the powerless in society, most often described as the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the stranger (non-Israelite) in the land. The Law, the Prophets, and the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament all show deep concern for the proper treatment of such people. What these groups of people have in common is their vulnerability and lack of power. They are often alone and have no protector or advocate. Therefore, it is God who hears their cries, and the king who is God's anointed is commanded to have special concern for them.” [USCCB, *Economic Justice for All*, 1986, no. 38.]

[In the Gospels:] “When he began to preach the Kingdom, crowds of the dispossessed followed him, illustrating his words: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor’ (*Lk* 4:18). He assured those burdened by sorrow and crushed by poverty that God has a special place for them in his heart: ‘Blessed are you poor, yours is the kingdom of God’ (*Lk* 6:20); he made himself one of them: ‘I was hungry and you gave me food to eat,’ and he taught them that mercy towards all of these is the key to heaven (cf. *Mt* 25:5ff.).” [Pope Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium*, 2013, no. 197]

### MEDIEVAL SYNTHESIS: THREE DIMENSIONS OF JUSTICE [USCCB, *Economic Justice for All*, no. 69-71]

The U.S. bishops note the development of three dimensions of basic justice which state “the minimum levels of mutual care and respect that all persons owe to each other in an imperfect world”:

*“Commutative justice calls for fundamental fairness in all agreements and exchanges between individuals or private social groups. It demands respect for the equal dignity of all persons in economic transactions, contracts or promises. ...*

*“Distributive justice requires that the allocation of income, wealth and power in society be evaluated in light of its effects on persons whose basic material needs are unmet. The Second Vatican Council stated: “The right to have a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family belongs to everyone. The fathers and doctors of the church held this view, teaching that we are obliged to come to the relief of the poor and to do so not merely out of our superfluous goods.” Minimum material resources are an absolute necessity for human life. ...*

“Justice also has implications for the way the larger social, economic and political institutions of society are organized. *Social justice implies that persons have an obligation to be active and productive participants in the life of society and that society has a duty to enable them to participate in this way.* This form of justice can also be called “contributive,” for it stresses the duty of all who are able to help create the goods, services and other non-material or spiritual values necessary for the welfare of the whole community.”

### STRUCTURAL JUSTICE.” [Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 1999, no. 18]

“This constant dedication to the poor and disadvantaged emerges in the Church's social teaching, which ceaselessly invites the Christian community to a commitment to overcome every form of exploitation and oppression. It is a question not only of alleviating the most serious and urgent needs through individual actions here and there, but of uncovering the roots of evil and proposing initiatives to make social, political and economic structures more just and fraternal.”