

Human life is thus embedded in a world of multiform relationships. A human life is a social life. The idea of a totally autonomous person misses the reality of what is human. The Bible asserts that, from the beginning, God created all members of humanity to be with and for each other. God created human persons "in his image, in the image of God" (Gen 1:27). Just as the revelation of three divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are bound in a community of love, so human persons are called to mirror that community of divine persons bound in relationship to each other by love. This was the prayer of Jesus: "That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you" (John 17:21).

However, social relationships do not develop automatically, out of their own doing. Social relationships require intentional choices and decisions. Actualization of mutual values and goals requires organization structured in such a way to support human interaction, foster collaboration, and provide a stable framework for humans who live and work together. A guiding principle for a just society is not simply the good of the majority. This can disenfranchise the minority of their rights and dignity. Rather, for a just society, it is the common good that must be the guiding light for all structural and organizational decisions. The Second Vatican Council addressed this principle of the common good and its complexity. One of the final documents of that council, *Gaudium et Spes*, proposed a comprehensive description of the common good:

The common good, that is the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment, today takes on an increasingly universal complexion and consequently involves rights and duties with respect to the whole human race. Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other

groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family. (*Gaudium et Spes* 26)

It is precisely in these multiform dimensions of social life that justice becomes vital in order to protect and foster the welfare of all members, communities, and groups within broader human society.

What Does Justice Mean?

Justice (Hebrew: *tsedaqah*) in the OT is identified with the nature of God and with the activity of God. The Ten Commandments establish justice in the lives of God's people. To be "just" is depicted as knowing Yahweh and imitating the divine activity of Yahweh. Ultimately, justice will prevail in the messianic reign. In the New Testament (NT), *justice* (Gk., *dikaioynē*) is used only once in Luke and not at all in Mark, but in Matthew it is found seven times. One of these uses is in the Beatitudes, and the other six uses concern respectful relationships with the poor. In addition, John the Baptist sees Jesus as the fulfillment of all justice. The proclamation of the gospel is about justice. All in all, this means that in the Old and New Testaments, the experience of God's justice is meant to overflow into a harvest of justice in the world.

Later, in the Middle Ages, moving to the writings of Thomas Aquinas, which were based on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the general virtue of justice was defined as "the strong and firm will to give to each his due." According to Aquinas, justice subordinates individual human behavior to the common good. This means the good of the individual cannot be separated from the common good of the community. Three more distinctions traditionally characterize different aspects of the virtue of justice: commutative, distributive, and legal.

Commutative justice is about the relationships of society's members with one another, that is, about how they give and take with one another.

Distributive justice is about the benefits its people receive from the rights of the state. The needs of citizens are met, and all of them are included. It goes beyond the individual and moves beyond the family to the community in which we live. It is about the structures of society, including the economy. So the state refers to its citizens. King Jr. was a comment on the and "unjust" the human condition degrades from the Irish bishop.

Justice is about the common good. It is about the rights of the individual and the community. It is about the rights of the individual and the community. It is about the rights of the individual and the community.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. 1962

"Any religion that does not take account of the souls of the poor and the oppressed is a religion of the dead."