

The Jubilee 2000, A Call to Justice / Love

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In his Apostolic Letter on the Jubilee, *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, John Paul II writes: "A commitment to justice and peace in a world like ours, marked by so many conflicts and intolerable social and economic inequalities, is a necessary condition for the preparation and celebration of the Jubilee."¹ The Jubilee 2000 is, indeed, an urgent call for us to fight injustice and practice justice. On this occasion, I wish to reflect with you on *The Jubilee 2000, a Call to Justice / Love*.²

As we develop the theme, we shall study (1) *The Jubilee in the Bible and Justice*; (2) *The Jubilee 2000 and Justice*; (3) *Justice/Love*; and (4) *The Preferential Love for the Poor*, as the priority of justice/love.

1. The Jubilee in the Bible and Justice

The Jubilee 2000 – as all other jubilees – takes us back to its biblical roots. Etymologically the word *Jubilee* seems to originate from the instrument announcing its celebration, *Yobel* in Hebrew, that is, a

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¹ John Paul II, *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* (TMA), Apostolic Letter, The Vatican, November 10, 1994, no. 51.

² The main immediate sources for our article will be the Apostolic Letter of John Paul II *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, and the Bull of Indiction convoking the Great Jubilee 2000; also of John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, The Vatican, November 29, 1998. See *Jubilee of the Year 2000*, The Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999. For a deeper theological development of justice/love and implications, see the author's book *Promoting Justice, Life, Love*, Manila: UST Publishing House, 1998.

special trumpet, a goat's horn (cf. Ex 19:13; Lv 25:10). The Hebrew word *Yobel*, meaning the *Jubilee*, that is, a joyful celebration, led Saint Jerome to translate it freely in Latin as *Iubilaeum*, or great joy. The Jubilee Year, therefore, is an occasion for joy. It is a joyful celebration: God loves his people.³

The Old Testament speaks of the *Sabbatical Year* – every seven years – and of the *Jubilee Year* – or the 50th year, that is, seven times seven, or 49, plus one (cf. Lv 25:10-14). Both years are rooted in the Sabbath Day, the day of rest and the holy day (cf. Ex 20:8-11). The Jubilee Year, therefore, is a super-sabbatical Year.

The Sabbatical Year had two main dimensions: the religious and the social. While the religious aspect focused on God's worship, the social dimension centered on justice/love – principally on justice/love to the poor. True worship, however, is not possible without justice/love to the poor: according to the Law of Israel, justice meant in the first place the protection of the vulnerable, the weak and the poor (cf. Dt 15:4, 7-9; Ho 6:6; Mt 9:12; Jm 1:27-2:5). How to protect the weak, the slaves and the disinherited?

The most important and revolutionary prescriptions of the Jubilee Year are the following four Rs: *Resting of the land*, *Restoring the land to its owners*, *Recalling the debt*, and *Releasing the slaves* (Ex 20:11 and 23:10-11; Lv 25:8-55). [To these four Rs, the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines added a fifth R: *Recovering the feminine principle*].⁴ Certainly, the Jubilee Year called for an

³ Cf. Santiago Guijarro Oporto, "Un jubileo en clave de compromiso," *Vida Nueva*, No. 2.214 (December 1999), p.26; M. Amaladoss, S.J., "Listen to the Spirit: A Jubilee People," *Vidyajyoti*, Vol. 64, No. 1, pp. 58-61; Hernando M. Coronel, *A Jubilee of Grace*, Manila: Catholic Book Center, 2000.

⁴ Philippine Jubilee 2000: "Journeying and Celebrating Together the Great Jubilee: Towards the Church of the Poor," *Religious Life Asia*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (October-December 1999), pp. 56-59. G. Iriarte suggests that after the Babylonian exile, and to make the hard prescriptions of the Sabbatical Year less hard – and, perhaps, realizable –, the Sabbatical Year was extended to seven cycles, or up to the 50th year, that is, the Jubilee year. (Cf. Gregorio Iriarte, "La deuda externa y el jubileo," *Yachay*, Vol. 16, No. 29, 1999, p. 64.) John Paul II writes: "What was true for the Sabbatical Year was also true for the Jubilee Year, which fell every fifty years. In the Jubilee Year, however, the customs of the Sabbatical Year were broadened and celebrated with even greater solemnity" (TMA, 12). See also Angel Aparicio, O.P., "The Jubilee Year in the Bible," *Life Today*, Vol. 55, No. 11 (November 1999), pp. 13-14.

equitable social order, in particular for justice/love. Herman Hendrick writes:

We may consider the institution of the Jubilee Year as a *social blueprint*, founded on the deeply religious concept of justice and equality, which intended to apply the simple sabbatical principle (cf. Lv 25:2-7) to a society which had become more economically complex. Although never realized in the letter, its spirit of respect for personal rights and human dignity sums up most of the Old Testament teaching and serves as a forerunner of the true equality of the Christian era as expressed; e.g., in Gal 3:26-29).⁵

The God of Israel is a faithful and a just God who cares for the poor. To be faithful to the Covenant with God, the Israelites must be faithful and just, too: "This is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God" (Mi 6:8).

Isaiah and his disciples underlined the meaning of the Jubilee Year as *the year of God's favor*. They extended its application to all peoples, and called for a more profound personal and social change (cf. Is 61:1-3). Jesus will build up on the preaching of Isaiah. The coming of Christ represents the real time of God's favor or grace. In the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus read Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord...

Then he began to speak to them, "This text is being fulfilled to-day even while you are listening" (Lk 4:18-21).

The "fullness of time" comes with Jesus the Messiah, who is the definitive *kairos* of God's grace: "The Jubilee, 'a year of the Lord's favor', characterizes all the activity of Jesus."⁶ He and his message – in

⁵ Herman Hendrick, *Bible on Justice*, Quezon City: JMC Press, 1978, p. 11. Albert Nolan, O.P. writes: "For nearly two hundred years Israel was indeed the most extraordinary nation in the history of humankind" ("Justice in the World," in *Justice and Truth shall meet*, Sinsinawa, Wisconsin: Parable, 1984, p. 80). See Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999.

⁶ John Paul II, TMA, no. 11.

him, the medium, himself, is the message, the Good News. The proclamation of the year of grace begins with Jesus' preaching of the Good News: "The project of Jesus is the full realization of the year of God's grace, which is good news to the poor and brings liberation and forgiveness to all."⁷

Jesus fulfills the Jubilee's goal: a year of favor; that is, a *year of forgiveness and liberation* centered on the poor as the marginalized. He was born poor ("there was no room for them at the inn") and died on the cross utterly poor! He is the Messiah because He announces the good news to the poor (cf. Lk 7:22-23). He proclaims the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor" (cf. Lk 6:20-21). This kingdom of grace is compared to a banquet: "When you give a party invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind" (Lk 14:14; see also verses 12-13). He teaches the disciples the *Our Father*: "And forgive us our debts as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us" (Mt 6:12). Commenting on his parable of the unforgiving servant, Jesus says: "And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart" (Mt 18:35; cf. 18:23-35). He connects forgiveness of sins and forgiveness of debts, and He does both.⁸

Following the prophets, the justice of Jesus is *loving* justice, or justice/love: a justice that is holiness (cf. Mt 5:6), a justice that is described as love of the neighbor in need, a justice which is principally justice – and love of neighbor – towards "the little ones," including the poor of the parable of the last judgment (cf. Mt 25:34-43). We see in the Gospels that throughout his life, Christ sides with the poor: "Blessed are the poor" (Lk 6:20). He asks his followers to seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice (cf. Mt 6:33), which entails becoming poor in spirit (cf. Mt 5:3:11; Lk 6:20-22; 14:5-55), sharing something with the poor. (Cf. Mt 25:31-46.) He condemns the rich who are possessed by riches (cf. Mk 4:7; Mt 13:22; Lk 8:14; I Tim 6:7-10), and warns them: "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God" (Mk 10:23, 25; cf. Lk 12:13-21; cf. Jm 5:1-6). Christ invites to universal and unconditional love of neighbor,

⁷ Santiago Gijarro Oporto, *a.c.*, p. 29.

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 29-30.

in the first place to the poor and oppressed. Only those who practice justice and solidarity with the poor will be saved (cf. Mt 25:34-43).

2. The Jubilee 2000 and Justice

The Christian Jubilee is often presented as *memory* and as *hope*: as grateful and penitent memory of our past, and as dynamic hope for the future entailing change and renewal. The first Holy Year was called by Pope Boniface VIII in the year 1300. Called by John Paul II, the Jubilee 2000, the Great Jubilee, is the 26th "ordinary" Holy Year, and it commemorates the Incarnation of Christ. It is a most joyful celebration: "God so loved the world that He gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16).

As presented by John Paul II, the *objectives* of the Jubilee 2000 are *growth in the theological virtues, time for thanksgiving, penance and forgiveness*, and for a *New Evangelization*. The *means* to celebrate the Jubilee are the *sacraments*, especially Penance and the Eucharist, the gift of *indulgence*, and *pilgrimages*. The *attitude* to celebrate this great feast ought to be an open, forgiving, ecumenical and dialogical attitude.⁹

The Jubilee 2000 is deeply christological: Jesus Christ is its center. It is also theo-centric; with Christ, the Son, we contemplate the other two divine persons, the Father and the Holy Spirit: "In celebrating the Incarnation, we fix our gaze upon the mystery of the Trinity."¹⁰ As disciples of Christ, as members of his Church, we celebrate the Jubilee 2000 by giving glory to the Blessed Trinity "from whom everything in the world and in history comes and to whom everything returns."¹¹ We contemplate the total Christ: born of the Virgin Mary, the Prophet, the Messiah, the Savior, the crucified and risen Lord, and the Liberator of all, particularly the poor, the sick and the marginalized in society.

⁹ John Paul II, TMA, nos. 17, 31-32, 34-37. See Fausto Jiménez, *Jubileo 2000. Todos los jubileos de la historia*, Madrid: Ed. CCS, 1999, pp. 13-14; Joseph G. Donders, *Countdown to 2000: Celebrating the Great Jubilee*, Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publ., 1999; Lucio Gutiérrez, O. P., "The Christian Jubilee in History," *Life Today*, Vol. 55, No. 11 (November 1999), pp. 15-20.

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, Bull of Indiction, The Vatican, November 29, 1998, no. 4.

¹¹ John Paul II, TMA, 55.

The Jubilee 2000, in particular, continues to be a symbol of Christ's social Gospel. (It has been noted that the Kingdom of God is the other social symbol of Christ. While the Jubilee looks at the beginning of creation, when everything was all right, the Kingdom looks at the end – it is an eschatological symbol, when everything will be fine). While the Holy Years of past centuries have usually been considered as mainly a time of prayer and penance, in our century they also challenge Christians in a more explicit manner to be socially renewed and committed to change an unjust world: "The Church was aware of her duty to act decisively to promote and defend the basic values of peace and justice in the face of contrary tendencies in our time."¹²

This is particularly shown in the *Social Doctrine of the Church* as powerfully presented by Leo XIII, Pius XI, Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II and Vatican II. Pius XII called the Holy Year 1950 not only for the sanctification of souls through prayer and penance, but also for the promotion of justice and for assistance to the poor and needy. In 1975, Paul VI, the author of the great social encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, convoked the Holy Year 1975 as the Holy Year of Renewal and Reconciliation; that renewal did not mean personal renewal only, but also ecclesial and social renewal; and this reconciliation meant also social reconciliation and structural change.

The Jubilee – every Holy Year – is a call to *integral conversion*, to personal, communitarian and social conversion, that is, to "conversion in the heart of each person, that extends to the believing community and then reaches to the whole of humanity."¹³ It calls to a radical and moral conversion. *Radical* conversion points to a conversion in the depth of the soul, to a new mentality, a change of heart – a *metanoia*. *Moral* conversion (*poenitentia*) means, negatively, renouncing sin and, positively, doing good – practicing the virtues, including justice and charity manifested in mercy, in solidarity with the neighbor, particularly the most needy. Integral conversion comprises reconciliation with God, within our own selves, with others and with creation – the reconciliation completed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It also signifies, then, conversion to the poor through the practice of justice and love.

¹² Id., TMA, 22.

¹³ Id., TMA, 49.

The celebration of the Jubilee 2000 is made up of different elements and dimensions that must be properly integrated, such as, personal and social conversion, practice of justice and charity, pilgrimages to designated churches – and pilgrimage to the poor! *Pilgrimage* is a key sign of the Jubilee Year. It signifies Christian life as a pilgrimage to God. In his Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, John Paul II tells us beautifully that “the whole of Christian life is like a great pilgrimage to the house of the Father.”¹⁴ A holy pilgrimage is “an exercise of practical ascetism, of repentance of human weaknesses, of constant vigilance over one’s own frailty, of interior preparation for a change of heart.”¹⁵ The Jubilee Year is a year that reminds us that we are pilgrims, *homines viatores* to heaven.

A Jubilee Year is, then, a pilgrimage year, and also a year of pilgrimages, of pious and sacred pilgrimages. A year to make sacred pilgrimages of conversion and renewal to different places and to churches assigned for the Jubilee Pilgrimage.

Another important sign of the Jubilee Year is the *indulgence*, which is connected with the Jubilee Pilgrimage. The Jubilee 2000 is, then, a year to make a pilgrimage (or many) as a condition to be able to receive the gift of indulgence: “With the indulgence, the repentant sinner receives a remission of the temporal punishment due for the sins already forgiven as regards the fault.”¹⁶ It is interesting to note with Joan Guiteras that John Paul II’s Bull convoking the Jubilee Year speaks mainly of indulgence in the singular, and – what is also significant – of the gift of indulgence. We have to go beyond the language that talked of “gaining indulgences,” for the indulgence is God’s grace to be received as a gift and accepted with thanks.¹⁷

Beside the pilgrimage to Rome, or to the Holy Land, or to the cathedrals and other designated churches of the local church, one may

¹⁴ Id. TMA, 49.

¹⁵ John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, 7.

¹⁶ Id., *Incarnationis Mysterium*, 8.

¹⁷ See Joan Guiteras, *Tē Deum Laudamus. Guía espiritual para celebrar el Jubileo del año 2000*, Valencia: Siquem, 1999, p. 54. Beside the pilgrimage to a designated church, the other conditions required to be able to receive the indulgence are the following: sacramental confession, holy communion, a prayer for the intention of the Holy Father, and acts of charity and penance.

also visit the poor! This visit is an innovative point for the Jubilee 2000. What does it mean? *Incarnationis Mysteriorum* explains it thus: visit for a suitable time, once, or a few times, or many times through the Holy Year, our "brothers and sisters in need or in difficulty (the sick, the imprisoned, the elderly living alone, the handicapped, etc.) as if making a pilgrimage to Christ present in them (cf. Mt 25:34-36), and fulfilling the usual spiritual and sacramental conditions and saying the usual prayers." Moreover, among the acts of charity – a requirement to receive the indulgence – the Church recommends donating a proportionate sum of money to the poor, or contributing voluntarily to religious or social works, including works to help the community or works to help needy groups such as abandoned children, young people in trouble, the elderly or needy foreigners.¹⁸

According to John Paul II, for whom the Jubilee 2000 is a hermeneutical key of his Pontificate, "the primary objective of the Jubilee is the strengthening of faith and of the witness of Christians. It is therefore necessary to inspire in all the faithful a true longing for holiness, a deep desire for conversion and personal renewal in a context of ever more intense prayer and of solidarity with one's neighbor, especially the most needy."¹⁹

In his *Bull of Indiction* convoking the Great Jubilee, John Paul II speaks again of certain signs of God's mercy that will help us celebrate the Jubilee. He mentions, in particular, the sign of *the purification of memory* (recognizing the sins of Christians in the past and in the present and be sorry for them, as John Paul II did humbly and courageously on March 12, 2000, the First Sunday of Lent), *the memory of the martyrs* (remembering their witnessing of Christ), and the sign of *charity*. This sign of charity, which implies justice, "opens our eyes to the needs of those who are poor and excluded..."²⁰

¹⁸ Apostolic Penitentiary, *Conditions for Gaining the Jubilee Indulgence*, The Vatican November 29, 1990, no. 4; John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysteriorum*, 4.

¹⁹ John Paul II, TMA, 42; cf. *Ib.*, 23.

²⁰ *Id.*, TMA, 11-13. See Carlos H. Abesamis, S.J., "What is in it for Mr Pobre and Ms Pobre? (The Jubilee Year and the Sabbatical Year of the Bible)," *Religious Life Asia*, Vol. 1, No. 4, October-December 1999, pp. 24-55.

3. An Urgent Call to Justice/Love

One essential element in the Jubilee 2000 celebration is the social question, that is a great challenge for all Christians. The social question has to be illumined by the social doctrine of the Church, which "is rooted in the tradition of the jubilee year."²¹

The social doctrine of the Church is built upon four columns, namely *freedom, truth, justice and love*. These are also considered today universal human values – currently the focus of an emerging global ethics for our global village. Although love is the main value of social ethics, still we speak more of justice because we live in a world permeated by injustices.

The social doctrine of the Church is a paradigm of social ethics, part of moral theology, and, therefore, of Christian faith. Our Christian faith ought to be lived in justice and love: "Expressing our faith through deeds of justice and love is particularly urgent in the Philippines where the exercise of faith often seems to be restricted to the realm of religious activities and private morality."²² A theology of religious intercession ought to be complemented by a theology of social commitment – of true commitment to justice and love. To justice/love: there can be no justice without love, and no love without justice.

Justice today is not merely to give to each person his or her due; but, to give each person and people their due, that is, their rights, which are the necessary manifestation of their esteemed human dignity, which is equal in all human beings. The rights to life (from the moment of conception to natural death), to work, to freedom, to education, to a share in the goods of the earth, which are created by God for all – and not only for the rich! For the Christian, justice is an ethical mediation of love, which is the form of all virtues.

Justice may be described appropriately as a continuing commitment to a fair distribution of resources, to equality, to a rational consumption of limited goods. Justice includes *social justice*, that is cen-

²¹ Id., TMA, 13. See Hernando M. Coronel, *A Jubilee of Grace*, l.c., pp. 90-95; T. Howland Sanks, S. J., "Globalization and the Church's Social Mission," *Theological Studies*, 60, 1999, pp. 625-651.

²² PCP II, *Acts and Decrees*, Manila: CBCP, 1991, no. 80.

tered on the common good, *global justice*, that considers the global village as a human family, and *eco-justice*, which is concerned with the eco-system and ecological responsibility.

The promotion of justice today implies denouncing injustice, announcing justice in words and, principally, in deeds. We still have to denounce injustice: "Some nations, especially the poorer ones, are oppressed by a debt so huge that repayment is practically impossible."²³ The international debt of poor countries is an injustice that cries to heaven! Unless forgiven, the *external* debt of poor countries will become an *eternal* debt.

Above all, we are asked to announce justice convincingly, that is, by witnessing it at the personal, social and ecological levels. By respecting human dignity and rights, in particular the dignity and rights of those persons and peoples who seem not to have dignity and rights at the existential level.

There cannot be true justice without love. For justice alone is cold, imperfect, and impersonal. Its language is "mine," "yours" (cold words, according to Saint John Chrysostom). It needs the perfection of love, whose language is "ours" (a warm word). For, while in justice the other person remains another person (almost an alien, according to Josef Pieper), in love, the other becomes "another I," a brother/sister in Christ. While in justice I give to the neighbor what is his/hers, in love I give to him/her what somehow belongs to me. "Justice can reduce differences, eliminate discrimination and ensure the conditions necessary for respect for the dignity of the person. Justice, however, needs a soul. And the soul of justice is charity, a charity which places itself at the service of every person."²⁴

²³ John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, 12. See Aloysius L. Cartagenas, S.J., "Jubilee Ahead: Reflections on the Debt Problem," *Intersect*, Vol. 14, No. 12, December 1999, pp. 16-22; Jose Maria Z. Carpio, "The Jubilee Year 2000 and the Debt Crisis: Creating a New Bikol for a Better Future for Our Children," *Vinculum*, Vol. 16, No. 2, March 2000, pp. 162-187.

²⁴ John Paul II, *Address to UNIV Conference*, The Vatican, March 31, 1999; quoted by NCCB/USCC, *In All Things Charity: A Pastoral Challenge for the New Millennium*. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 21, 3 ad 2. Fausto Gómez, O.P., *The Praxis of Justice and Solidarity*, 2nd ed., Manila: UST Press, 1988.

There cannot be true love without justice. In fact, justice is mini-charity, and charity – to be authentic – must be a just charity. In the Sacred Scriptures, Albert Nolan writes, “justice and mercy (compassion) meet; they are co-terminus; there is no dichotomy between justice and love in the Bible.” Truly,

Christian love of neighbor and justice cannot be separated. For love implies an absolute demand for justice, namely recognition of the dignity and rights of one’s neighbor. Justice attains its inner fullness only in love. Because every man is truly a visible image of the invisible God..., the Christian finds in every man God himself and God’s absolute demand for justice and love.²⁵

The justice of the Christian is, like the justice of Jesus, *fraternal* justice. Jesus taught us about the justice of the Father of the prodigal son, a justice quite different from the justice of the elder son (cf. Lk 15: 11-32). He spoke to us of the justice of the one who needs workers for his vineyard and pays the same salary to the workers invited last (cf. Mt 20:1-16). The justice of Jesus is the justice of his Father who is just with a justice resulting from love, compassion, generosity; that justice of which Saint John of the Cross tells us: “He being just, you feel that He loves you and gives gifts justly.”²⁶

Loving or fraternal justice is also manifested in *almsgiving*, an act of charity that implies justice. Almsgiving implies justice; without justice, almsgiving is really a cover-up for injustice: “We Christians have done more almsgiving than justice, and almsgiving has been and continues to be frequently more like a drug to quiet our conscience than real communication of goods, as this was denounced already by the prophets, and above all by the great prophet Jesus of Nazareth, who said: “Go and learn the meaning of ‘I want mercy, not sacrifice.’”²⁷

²⁵ Synod of Bishops 1971, *Justice in the World*, II, no. 34. See Albert Nolan, O.P., “Justice in the Bible,” in *Justice and Truth shall meet*, Sinsinawa, Wisconsin: Parable, 1984, pp. 84-85.

²⁶ St. John of the Cross, *Llama de amor viva (B)*, Madrid: Ed. de Espiritualidad, 3rd ed., 1988, 3, 6, p. 814. See Macario Ofilada Mina, “Teología mística-cristiana para nuestros días. III. Respuestas Fundamentales,” *Vida Sobrenatural*, Vol. 79, No. 603, May-June 1999, pp. 174-194.

²⁷ Rafael Rojo, *El amor no pasa nunca*, Madrid: Paulinas, 1987, p. 19. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), no. 2447; Ma. Ceres P. Doyo, “Farewell to alms,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Opinion, January 20, 2000.

Justice/love is radically a gift of God that we implore in *prayer*. Authentic prayer leads to and is fed by justice-love. What God wants is mercy, that is, justice and love (cf. Ho 6:6; Mt 12:7, and 23:23). He accepts the sacrifices of those who practice justice and equity (cf. Is 56:1). "None of those who cry out 'Lord, Lord', will enter the Kingdom of God, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt 7:21). And the will of the Father is 'no' to worship without justice-love (cf. Is 1:11, 17; Ho 4:1-2; Am 5:7-17; Jr 7:1-11), and 'yes' to prayer and the preferential justice/love for all the poor, the powerless, and the wretched of the earth. (Cf. Mt 25:31-46.)

The Lord taught us to pray the Our Father. Does the Lord's Prayer say anything about justice/love? When we pray the *Our Father*, we ask God: *Give us this day our daily bread*. What is "our daily bread"? The Word of God and the Bread of the Eucharist, the food for our body, and also the grace to share our bread. We read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC): "The presence of those who hunger because they lack bread opens up another profound meaning of this petition. The drama of hunger in the world calls Christians who pray sincerely to exercise responsibility toward their brethren, both in their personal behavior and in their solidarity with the human family. This petition of the Lord's Prayer cannot be isolated from the parables of the poor man Lazarus and that of the Last Judgment." And in the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (CFC): "Bread is human only when it is shared and supports communion with others. This bread calls for a collective conversion that responds to the scandalous hunger and starvation so widespread, and so unnecessary, in the world today, and even in our own Philippines."²⁸

Petitioning the Lord for bread implies asking him for the Bread of the Holy Eucharist. The Jubilee 2000, as John Paul II has said, is an "intensely eucharistic" year; the *Eucharist* is, as Vatican II said, "the fount and apex of the whole Christian life"²⁹ (cf. Jn 6:51). The Eucharist, however, is not only the great prayer of thanksgiving and intercession. It is the Sacrifice of Christ on the cross, the Sacrament of Sacraments, and Real Presence of Christ. It is a constant call to compassion

²⁸ CCC, 2831. CFC, 2170.

²⁹ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 11. See The Theological-Historical Commission for the Great Jubilee 2000, *Eucharist, Gift of Divine Love*, Pasay City: Paulines, 1999.

with all and to sharing with the poor and needy: "To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren."³⁰ Words to ponder:

How is it possible for defenders of oppressive systems and those they oppress, all of us and the Third World, to celebrate the one Eucharist together as Christians? We drink from our full cups but do not share the one cup among one another. The great scandal among us is not inter-communion among Christians of different communions: that is a sign of hope. The scandal is the inter-communion of rich Christians who remain rich and poor Christians who remain poor while celebrating the same Eucharist, taking no notice of the Christian model of sharing possessions: the sharing of the one cup of salvation among one another. For this salvation also has social and economic consequences.³¹

4. The Preferential Love for the Poor

After Vatican II, Christians began to be more conscious of the plight of the poor and its implications for our Christian faith. As we begin the Third Millennium, the poor of the world continue challenging us. "At the beginning of the century, the issue which challenges most our human and Christian consciences is the poverty of countless millions of men and women."³² Thus, the priority of the Church continues being the needy. Her love for the poor is "essential and part of her constant tradition."³³

The poor are considered also the *priority of service* of the Church in Asia, "where more than half of the population suffers deprivation, poverty and exploitation."³⁴

And the specific priority of the Philippine Church is the poor. The *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* says: "Never has the gap between

³⁰ CCC, 1397. See TMA, 55.

³¹ E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., *God Among Us: The Gospel Proclaimed*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1983, p. 178.

³² John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, January 1, 2000.

³³ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 57; cf. CCC, no. 1932.

³⁴ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, Apostolic Exhortation, The Vatican, November 6, 1999, no. 34. See Felix Wilfred, "Church's Commitment to the Poor in the Age of Globalization," *Vidyajyoti*, Vol. 62, No. 2, February 1998, pp. 79-80.

rich and poor been so wide, so tangible (conspicuous) and so shameless." The Philippine Church is deeply committed to becoming *the Church of the poor*. As the PCP II *Message* states: "As we approach the year 2000, Christ bids this community – ourselves, the laity, religious and clergy of the Catholic Church in the Philippines – to be a Church of the Poor."³⁵ The Church of the Poor, Bishop Julio Labayen likes to repeat, is the Church with a mother's heart. Words to ponder:

Frequently, people are tempted to blame the poor for the conditions that oppress them. "It will be necessary above all to abandon a mentality in which the poor – as individuals and as people – are considered a burden, as irksome intruders trying to consume what others have produced" (John Paul II).³⁶

The preferential love (or option) for the poor is a necessary obligation of Christian faith, a concrete obligation of justice and charity. It is an option which is not optional, but an essential part of Christian faith, and connected with the Christian's fundamental option which is Christ.

What is the meaning of the preferential love for the poor? *Preferential love* means to choose the poor as a priority of justice and, principally, of charity.³⁷ It is not – in the perspective of faith, it cannot be – an exclusive or excluding option: charity loves all unconditionally, but preferentially the poor.

Who are the poor? The *poor* are the economically and socially deprived: the powerless, the marginalized, the oppressed, the exploited. In our ecological context, the poor are the most threatened specie of the earth (L. Boff). Poor are those human beings who lack what is needed to live a truly human life. In Asia, the priority of service to the poor is focused on migrants, indigenous and tribal peoples, women and children.³⁸ PCP II presents to us the faces of our poor: the rural and urban

³⁵ CBCP, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics*, Manila, 1999, no. 732; see also *Ib.*, no. 1187; *Id.*, PCP II, *Message*.

³⁶ NCCB/USCC, *In All Things Charity: A Pastoral Challenge for the New Millennium*, l.c., III.

³⁷ See. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42; CFC, 1187.

³⁸ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 34.

poor, tribal Filipinos, street children, farmers, fishermen, women, the disabled...³⁹

What are the implications of the preferential love for the poor? This option may be practiced in different situations and degrees of commitment. Basic, obligatory elements for all are the following: poverty in spirit, a simple lifestyle, and solidarity with the poor.

The preferential love for the poor is a consequence of *poverty in spirit*, which is necessary for salvation. Jesus said: "I tell you solemnly, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:3). Poverty in spirit is a condition of discipleship. It implies the power to recognize the Lord in the poor, the downtrodden, the "fallen" on the many roads of injustice, oppression and exploitation. José Luis Martín Descalzo advised us: "No one can be poor in spirit while living like the rich man."

Poverty in spirit leads to a simple style of living. When we see people dying of hunger, or merely surviving, how may we waste food, or other resources, or simply have too much? Enough is enough! Our humanity and our faith urge us to have a simple lifestyle (cf. Lk 12:22-34; Jn 5:1-5; I Tim 6:8). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that excessive spending, and squandering are sins.⁴⁰ As it is often repeated, let us live simply so that others might simply live. W. Barclay advised us: "No man has the right to live like the rich man while Lazarus is at the gate."⁴¹

Poverty in spirit and a simple lifestyle lead to *solidarity with the poor*. This solidarity is neither antipathy nor apathy, but sympathy and empathy for them; sharing, accompanying them on their way to their equal dignity and rights, to their seat at the table of life.

Love of neighbor is rooted in fraternity and practiced in solidarity with the poor. Rooted in the ethical principle of stewardship, this solidarity entails sharing something or much with the poor peoples and persons. God created the world and its riches for all humans. Thus,

³⁹ PCP II, nos. 377 and ff.

⁴⁰ CCC, 2409. Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 34.

⁴¹ See. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 53; Synod of Bishops 1971, *Justice in the Word*, 48.

the right to private property is subordinated to the common right to a share in the goods of the earth, expressed by the social teachings of the Church through the principle of the universal destination of the goods of the earth.

Based on the principle of the universal destination of the goods of the earth (God created them for all), Saint Ambrose makes us reflect with these words:

The tale of Naboth (cf. I K 21:1-29), ancient though it may be, is of perennial application... Ahab is not one person, someone born long ago; everyday, alas, the world sees Ahab born, never to die out – if one such dies, a multitude rises up instead, and the spoilers still outnumber the spoiled. And Naboth is not one person either, a poor man who was once murdered; everyday some Naboth is done to death, everyday the poor are murdered.

You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what have been given in common for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all, and not only to the rich.⁴²

Saint Thomas Aquinas goes a bit further by defending, based also on the common property of the goods, which is a natural right (as compared to private property, a positive right), what we would call “stealing.” Why? “In the case of necessity everything is in common.”⁴³ The poor have a right to a share in the goods of the earth, created by God for all humans. God is the Lord of creation (cf. Lv 25:23). Hence the earth belongs to God who has given it for its management and administration to all humanity, to everyone.

Charity as love of neighbor includes justice and is witnessed in the preferential love for the poor. Thus, Pope John Paul II tells us: “In the spirit of the Book of Leviticus (25:8-12), Christians will have to raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world.” The Holy Father adds:

There should be no more postponement of the time when the poor Lazarus can sit beside the rich man to share the same banquet

⁴² St. Ambrose, *De Nabuthe*, 3, XIII: PL, 14, 747.

⁴³ St Thomas Aquinas, I-II, 66; cf. CCC, 2408. See also Fausto Gómez, O. P., “St. Thomas Aquinas: Justice, Property and the Poor,” *Philippiniana Sacra*, Vol. XXX, No. 89, pp. 251-276.

and be forced no more to feed on the scraps that fall from the table (cf. Lk 16:19:31). Extreme poverty is a source of violence, bitterness and scandal; and to eradicate it is to do the work of justice and therefore the work of peace.⁴⁴

5. Conclusion: Action, Please!

Rooted in the biblical jubilees and centered on Christ, the Great Jubilee 2000 is a great religious celebration. Hopefully, it will go beyond solemn liturgies and tourist-like pilgrimages: the Jubilee 2000 has a deeply social dimension, that calls for a *renewed commitment to justice / love* – an authentic commitment manifested in deeds of justice and charity as love of neighbor. Let us not forget that: Believing and not practicing justice is not truly believing; denouncing injustice and announcing justice by words only and not by deeds is not really being just; being just as individuals and not witnessing the preferential love for the poor is not being fully just. For a Christian, to be just means to practice justice/love with others.

Through the Holy Year, we are asked by our humanity and our faith to renew our personal, ecclesial and social life. Are we really convinced of this? Saint Teresa advised “determined determination.” Do we really, really want to be converted? Conversion is indeed possible! Do we realize that to be really convinced and converted must be shown in the Christian praxis of justice and love?

What truly matters, and is at the same time a credible word, is witnessing. We Christians, and in particular some bishops and theologians, and preachers talk a bit too much, perhaps. The great Bonhoeffer said that the Church’s utopia for the future is “to keep quiet, do justice and pray.”

Moral theology is the science of Christian praxis, and social ethics is the praxis of social transformation. What matters, then, is praxis: “To know and not to do is not yet to know” (Buddhist saying). Here is a simple recipe to do justice/love.

First, there is the need of *personal conversion*. Paul VI wrote in *Octogesima Adveniens*:

⁴⁴ John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, 12; cf. Id., TMA, 51.

Let each one examine himself, to see what he has done up to now, and what he ought to do. It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustices and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action. It is too easy to throw back on others responsibility for injustices, if at the same time one does not realize how each one shares in it personally, and how personal conversion is needed first. This basic humility will rid action of all inflexibility and sectarianism; it will also avoid discouragement in the face of a task which seems limitless in size.⁴⁵

Personal conversion implies the proper celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, which includes authentic sorrow not only for the sins against religion and chastity, but also against justice – that requires *restitution* – and charity as love of neighbor. Archbishop Orlando Quevedo has said:

As a priest, there are certain sins I wish to hear but never heard in the past 25 years of my priesthood. I wish people would come to me and confess: "Bless me Father for I have sinned. I hired goons to threaten labor union leaders and even kill them. I do not pay my workers a just wage even if I could. I ordered the surreptitious burning of an office to destroy anomalous records. I paid off the people at Customs in order to get my goods through. I take 10 percent commission for every project I approve. I reject the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law because I do not want to lose any of my property. I support and protect gambling because I get a certain amount from it every month. I am sorry for all these sins, Father."⁴⁶

Second, there is a need of *ecclesial transformation*. As members of the Church of Christ we are all charged with the mission of evangelizing the world. In our local church the focus is on New Evangelization, that is deeply concerned with a renewed catechesis, worship and social apostolate; this is centered on the practice of justice/love and its

⁴⁵ Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, Apostolic Letter, The Vatican, May 14, 1971, no. 48.

⁴⁶ Orlando B. Quevedo, "Peace, Justice, and Transformation: A Church Perspective," *BBC Chronicle*, Vol. 16, No. 4, July 1990, p. 10.

priority, namely, the preferential love for the poor. As members of a local church in Asia, we are called to mission. In their pastoral letter on the Jubilee 2000, our Bishops write:

We must go beyond the signs of pilgrimages and indulgences to the ongoing renewal of our individual and communal lives by responding to the missionary call of the Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation 'Ecclesia in Asia'. To respond to this missionary call, we must not only care and share, but even dare to face the risks of becoming a missionary church, a church forever reaching out to people in greatest need.⁴⁷

Third, there is a need of *social commitment*. St. Basil, pastor and monk, wrote the following text:

He who takes the clothes from a man is a thief. He who does not clothe the indigent, when he can, does he deserve another name but thief? The bread that you keep belongs to the hungry; to the naked, the coat that you hide in your coffer; to the shoeless, the shoes that are dusty at your home; to the needy, the silver that you hide. In brief, you offend all those who can be helped by you.

Thief is he who accumulates more than what he needs.⁴⁸

In their pastoral letter *In All Things Charity: A Pastoral Challenge for the New Millennium*, the United States Bishops propose:

Reach out to a person in need; study the issues involved; these actions help to put a name and face to Christ among the poor, transforming the helper. Make one social issue your special concern, and join a group – church or civic group – that is working on that issue; become active in a diocesan-sponsored legislative network; write to members of Congress or local elected officials, and vote responsibly.⁴⁹

For its part, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines is committed, with other Church's groups and associations, to the Jubi-

⁴⁷ CBCP, *Open Your Hearts to the Lord*, Pastoral Exhortation, Tagaytay, January 26, 2000. See Jose Ma. Tinoko, O.P., "Jubilee 2000: Juridico-Pastoral Aspects," *Life Today*, Vol. 55, No. 11, pp. 21-23.

⁴⁸ St Basil, *Hom. VII in famem*, I: PG, 31,325. Cf. St Thomas Aquinas, II-II, 66, 2.

⁴⁹ NCCB/USCC, *In All Things Charity: A Pastoral Challenge for the New Millennium*, IV.

lee 2000 Campaign for Return of Land. Moreover, CBCP has created a *Solidarity Fund* to help pilgrims of less economic conditions. Through CBCP's intercession, President Joseph Estrada has approved a moratorium on executions during the Jubilee Year 2000.

Here is an inspiring and exemplary story. Bishop Romulo de la Cruz, of Isabela, announced some weeks ago that he would forgive the debtors of his Prelature in celebration of the Jubilee Year. When asked the reason for doing this, he replied: "The Church cannot demand from international organizations that they forgive the debts of the poor countries if she herself does not do what she is asking others to do."

Fourth, *following Christ* in a deeper manner. Jesus Christ, "the same yesterday, today and forever" (Hbr 13:8), is the power of the Christian to be personally converted, ecclesially transformed and socially committed. When all is said and done, what truly matters is Christ, the only Way to God, to love, to happiness. As Archbishop Carlos Amigo Vallejo says: The program for the Jubilee was written by Christ two thousand years ago. "He wrote his message not with paper and ink, but with his life, and his blood. Here is the secret and the reason for every chapter and all the chapters of the Jubilee celebrations."⁵⁰ In the context of social commitment, the follower of Christ is not merely a social *activist*, but also – and necessarily – a *contemplative*: for him or her social action and contemplation fertilize each other.

As Christians, we are asked to follow Christ with our Mother and Virgin Mary, Mother of the Son of God, Mother of the Church and Mother of mercy, the first follower of Christ and disciple, who continues telling us: "Do whatever He tells you." (Jn 2:5).⁵¹ The Lord Jesus keeps telling you and me: "I give you a new commandment: love one another... This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34).

At the end of our journey, we all will be examined on love; principally, on love of "the little ones" of Jesus – the poor, the sick, the abandoned, the marginalized. PCP II tells us: "Eternal salvation depends on the living out of a love of preference for the poor because the poor

⁵⁰ Carlos Amigo Vallejo, "Año de bienes," *ABC*, December 24, 1999, p. 3

⁵¹ John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, 14; Id., TMA, 54.

and needy bear the privileged presence of Christ.”⁵² Have we committed sins of injustice and un-love against the poor? On March 12, 2000, the *Day of Pardon*, Pope John Paul II prayed: “Lord, forgive us [forgive me] for not listening to the cry of the poor.”

As we walk by the path of life, our Lord Jesus joins us – like He joined the disciples of Emmaus – and asks us one question: “What are you doing for the poor persons around you?” There is a pause of silence. The Lord breaks the silence to say to you and to me: “What you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do it to me” (cf. Mt 25:31-46.) □

⁵² PCP II, o.c., no. 312.

