

# The Christian Jubilee in History

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## Introduction

John Paul II issued in 1994 the apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*. In it he announced the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. He asked the Christians in general and Catholics in particular to prepare themselves spiritually for that great celebration. He declared 1997 the year of Jesus Christ, 1998 the year of the Holy Spirit, 1999 the year of the Father and the year 2000, the year of the Holy Trinity.

The Great Jubilee of the year 2000 has come. The Millennium arrived and the fears people entertained were not fulfilled. Most people welcomed the new Millennium with fanfare and fireworks. The reason for the celebration was lost to most people. The Pope precisely had tried to prepare mankind for the year 2000 of the Redemption of Christ. Two thousand years of the greatest event in human history: the Salvation achieved by our Lord Jesus Christ through His birth, death and resurrection.

## A. THE JEWISH JUBILEE IN THE BIBLE

Writers dispute as to the origin of the word Jubilee. It seems that it was derived from the Hebrew word *Jobel*, which means "a ram's horn." This instrument was used in Pre-Exilic times in the Old Testament to announce the celebration of the Jewish Jubilee. It conveys already the idea of rejoicing. Passing through the Greek words *jobelaios* or *jóbelos*, it was accepted into Latin as *jubilo*, which means "to shout." Derived from this word we have the words *jubilatio* and *jubilaus*. These have been accepted, more or less changed, in most modern European languages.

We see here a transposition of meaning. From the instrument used to announce the event, the ram's horn, it passed to mean the announcing of the event. Since the event announced was a most gracious and joyous one, the word came to mean the event itself. Hence jubilation, Jubilee, rejoicing.

It is difficult to trace the connection between the Jewish Jubilee, celebrated every fifty years, and the Christian Jubilee, started in 1300 by Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) and to be held, as stipulated in the Jubilee Bull *Antiquorum habet fida relatio*, every one hundred years.

The Jewish Jubilee Year had of course a Biblical background and a very clear social connotation. The legislation of the Old Testament (Leviticus, 25: 8-55) commanded for the Jewish Jubilee Year full and total remission. It was preeminently a time of joy, precisely because it was the year of remission and universal pardon.

What did this remission imply? Although I will try to present here the Jubilee Years through the eyes of Christian history, I have to present also the social and political dimension of the Jewish Jubilee Year. We can detect, at least, five main points:

1. Every household should recover all its lost members.
2. The land that was lost, for whatever reason, had to be returned to the former owners.
3. The slaves had to be given freedom. Emancipation was of the essence of the Jubilee Year.
4. All debts had to be remitted.
5. The land had to rest for a year.

Whether these conditions were fulfilled or not is another question but in the eyes of the Mosaic Law and in the eyes of God, everything returned to its original state, as it had come from the hand of God, in the Jubilee Year.

As we have just said, it is difficult to trace the direct link between the Jewish Jubilee Year and the Christian one. But although one thousand three hundred years passed between the last Jewish Jubilee and the first of the Christians, the spiritual connection is inescapable.

In the Jewish Jubilee the social importance was paramount. The five points mentioned go to the heart of the very social make up of the Jewish community. Could not the Christian Jubilee emphasize also some of these social aspects so relevant in Jewish Jubilee?

## B. THE FIRST CHRISTIAN JUBILEE: 1300

The idea of full remission, elevated to a spiritual level, was accepted by the Christian Church. Boniface VIII was the first pope who instituted the practice of the Jubilee in the Christian world, but it would be incredible to think that before him no idea existed of a spiritual jubilee. The Jewish one was there. The fiftieth anniversary, or golden anniversary, of a monk's profession, was also celebrated. The fiftieth year had, for many people, a mystical value, a spiritual sense, and it was connected with the idea of remission.

The background for the institution of the practice of the Jubilee Year by Boniface VIII was common talk and common practice years before the pope decided to establish the celebration of the Jubilee.

In fact, at the beginning of the XIII<sup>th</sup> century, it seems that already a Jubilee was celebrated in Rome. The adviser of Boniface VIII, Cardinal Stefaneschi, the author of a treatise on the first Jubilee, says that the pope was convinced to declare 1300 a Jubilee Year because some aged pilgrims told him of great graces and indulgences granted to people one hundred years before. "It can be taken as something certain that Boniface VIII's gesture in 1300 had been preceded by a long pastoral and doctrinal preparation, very intense precisely at the dawning days of the XIII<sup>th</sup> century. We should not forget that this spirit was helped by a true religious movement of popular religiosity, remembered by some old people.

Perhaps one could see in this movement not really the celebration of an institutional jubilee in the year 1200 but the collective memory of the Saint Thomas a Becket's Jubilee, about which Stephen Laugton preached in Rome in 1220, in front of the papal curia. There was also the memory of popular manifestations of joy and penance which under the influence of the milleniarism of Joachim [de Fiore] and the Spirituals, had taken place in some Italian cities."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr. R.G. Villoslada, *Historia de la Iglesia Católica*, 4 vols., Madrid, 1960-1963, Vol. II, p. 590, quoting R. Foreville, "L'idée de jubilé chez les théologiens et les canonistes", *Revue d'Histoire Ecclesiastique*, 56, (1961), 401-423. For the Jubilee indulgence and its history, see N. Paulus, *Geschichte des Ablasses im Mittelalter*, II, (Paderborn 1923), pp. 101-114. Cfr. A. Frugoni, *De centesimo anno iubilaeo. (Il libro del giubileo del card. Stephanneschi)*. Brescia 1950). For all the Jubilee Years, see P. Brezzi, *Storia degli anni santi*, Milan, 1950).

In the Bull the pope says that "certain of the mercy of Almighty God and founded on the authority of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, upon the advice of our brothers and in fullness of apostolic authority... we grant this year 1300 and all the future centuries 'not only full and copious but most full pardon for all their sins' to those who fulfill certain conditions."<sup>2</sup> These are the conditions:

1. True sorrow for their sins, humble and sincere confession;
2. Purpose of amendment, and;
3. Visit to the basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul in Rome, the princes of the apostles, 30 times for people in Rome and 15 times for pilgrims from outside.

It is not justified to think that the pope granted full remission of sins, as if the indulgence by itself meant the forgiveness of all sins. Sins were forgiven in sacramental confession, after true sorrow and promise of amendment of life. Then there was full remission of the penalty due to the sins already forgiven in sacramental confession with the previous conditions exposed above. But at this time there was not yet prescribed Eucharistic Communion.

Great masses of people flocked to Rome in 1300. Rumors had spread of great spiritual graces and grants of indulgences to persons who came to Rome, to visit the tombs of Peter and Paul. Pilgrims started to arrive at Rome from all parts of the Christian world in the hope of obtaining great spiritual favors. It has been said that at that particular juncture in time, a compelling need was felt for reconciliation, penance and peace. After the many divisions in Christianity and violent local wars among Christian principalities, there was a universal yearning for reconciliations and peace.

"Boniface VIII – we read – does not, by any means, seem either to have created this spirit of expectation or to have exploited it at all in the service of his public policy. Apparently he did little more than fulfill what, spontaneously, Christian piety was expecting of the Roman

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<sup>2</sup> Cfr. Philip Hughes, *A History of the Church*. Volume Three: *The Revolt against the Church: Aquinas to Luther*, London, Sheed and Ward, 1955, p. 74. See Bull *Antiquorum habet fida relatio*, translation in Thurston, S.J., *The Holy Year of Jubilee*, 1900, p. 13. This work of Thurston is still considered the standard authority in English on the subject. The important Latin words are the following *non solum plenam et largiorem, imo plenissimam omnium suorum veniam peccatorum*.

See, when by the bull of February 22, 1300 he instituted the Holy Year of the Jubilee."<sup>3</sup>

We have to say that these great crowds that started to come at the end of 1299 and beginning of 1300 came by themselves. In view of the massive arrival of pilgrims, all eagerly waiting for graces and reconciliation, the pope had to channel it, direct this yearning for forgiveness and renewal. The pope was a man of deep faith, not an skeptic as some historians have depicted him. He felt deeply moved and, as a great pope, tried to channel and focus that popular movement. As a true father of Christendom, he welcomed the children coming from afar, granting them, as Vicar of Christ on earth, the graces from heaven and the peace the pilgrims were yearning for. It was after almost two months, when huge multitudes were found in Rome, that the cardinals convinced Pope Boniface VIII to issue the Bull *Antiquorum habet fida relatio*, of February 22, 1300, the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter. The decree of the indulgence had a retroactive value beginning on December 24th, 1299 and lasted until December 24th 1300, declaring 1300 a Jubilee Year.

Greater crowds, increased now by the issuance of the bull, started to come with the knowledge of the plenary indulgence granted by the pope.

It is important to emphasize that the people of God, the ordinary people, were the first ones to take the initiative in coming to Rome. The granting of the plenary indulgence was the result, the effect or the response of the official hierarchical Church, through Boniface VIII, to the clamor of the People of God. A great need for expiation, penance and conversion seemed to fill Christendom at that particular time.

This need for expiation and conversion was strongly felt at the end of the century and the beginning of the next one. All authors agree that the end of a century seems to bring an acceleration of the hope of forgiveness and reconciliation. Milleniaristic ideas come to the fore and people are carried away by apocalyptical expectations. Some people expect the worse, like the coming of a cataclysm or the end of the world as a punishment for man's sins. Others look at it as a time of grace and forgiveness. A ray of hope never dies in the heart of man.

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<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Philip Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

During the XIII<sup>th</sup> century, we find preachers announcing the need for repentance and for ecclesiastical and social reform. Some people like Joachim of Fiore and the Franciscan spirituals and other independent preachers castigated the corruption of the Church and its rulers. The end of 1299 and the beginning of 1300 saw definitely an increase of hope of renewal, pardon, and indulgence in the ordinary Christian.

To quote a historian: "Indulgence and pardon of their sins was the hope of those pilgrims who came to the tomb of St. Peter. When some of them were asked for the cause of the presence of large crowds milling around, some answered without giving any reason that during that day people could gain a plenary indulgence. There was a man from Savoy, one hundred and seven years old, who remembered when he was a child, a hundred years before, that the same had happened at that time. Could it be that the Jubilee indulgence was a secular tradition?"<sup>4</sup>

In 1300, Rome, the Eternal City, seemed to be overwhelmed by the vast masses of people coming daily to the city.<sup>5</sup> Arrangements had to be made to take care of the streams of pilgrims. The offerings were huge, but they did not go to the coffers of the pope, but to the different churches they visited. The affluence of people was enormous, even at a time when France, due to its nationalistic interests, was putting tremendous pressure on Boniface VIII.

Historians tell us that during the peak of the Jubilee Year of 1300, the first Jubilee of which we have concrete information, more than two hundred thousand pilgrims were gathered in Rome at a given moment, over and above the normal population of Rome at that time.

The masses were orderly and devoted. No untoward incident was recounted. People moved to and from St. Peter's Basilica, crossing the old Ponte Sant'Angelo. Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) who came as a pilgrim to Rome seems to refer to this Jubilee in his *Divina Commedia*.

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<sup>4</sup> Villoslada, *op. cit.*, II, 590.

<sup>5</sup> We read in Daniel Rops: "it was difficult to find accomodation for them all; and Dante, who was there, tells us that it became necessary to turn the Ponte Sant'Angelo into a one-way street! These pilgrims were drawn from every land and from every level of society. They included whole delegations, representing various nations and cities *that of Florence* being distinguished from the rest by its magnificence," in *Cathedral and Crusade*, Volume I, Image Books, New York, 1963, p. 87.

(*Inferno*, canto XVIII, 29). Under the name *Giubileo*, he indirectly tells us of the throngs of people who went to and from St. Peter, as he speaks in the canto of the great masses of people crossing the bridges of Malebolge in opposite directions. Other famous pilgrims were Casella, the musician and the great painters Cimabue and Giotto. Giotto painted on the loggia of the Basilica of St. John the Lateran the promulgation of the Holy Year, as declared by Boniface VIII. Unfortunately little has remained of that beautiful fresco of the master Giotto after the many changes made on the facade of the Church. As was to be expected, people spoke differently of the effects of the Jubilee. To some, the Jubilee was a great success, to others it was pure business. Daniel Rops writes:

Evil tongues whispered that the only true beneficiaries of Holy Year were the Roman traderfolk; but it can hardly be denied that such a demonstration of piety must have strengthened the links of Christendom and spread devotion to the Church and her supreme head on earth.<sup>6</sup>

It cannot be denied that the Jubilee was a great success. Christians from everywhere flocked to the Eternal City. It is always difficult to judge the success of an event, like the Holy Year, for the effects take place in the heart of men. Who can measure this? But the masses, the zeal, the return to the sacraments is always a measure of the success of the event.

It cannot be denied that the Jubilee of 1300 was a great spiritual blessing for the whole of Christendom. It was a boon to the pope, Boniface VIII who had been, and still was, at odds with some Christian Kings, especially with the powerful and ruthless king of France, Philip IV the Fair (1285-1314). Now the whole of Christianity expressed its fidelity and boundless love for the Roman See. Boniface VIII became more self-confident and could see with his own eyes the religious loyalty expressed to the Apostolic See. This was, in a sense, prejudicial to him, for he was misled to judge the political reality and did not read well the inimical signs sent by France and other Christian rulers. He would soon be involved in the struggle with France and the King's representative, William of Nogaret (ca. 1260-1313). It cost Boniface dearly. It

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<sup>6</sup> *Cathedral and Crusade*, vol I, p. 87.

cost him even his life as a result of the physical injuries he received at the hands of the French soldiers and his supporters in the palace of Anagni.

We can say that the Jubilee of the year 1300 was the pacifying and most peaceful event of the eventful pontificate of Boniface VIII. It is the most luminous shining moment of a pontificate that has many shadows and showed the collapse of the pope's power and the strengthening of the nationalist movements of the Christian nations of Europe, especially France.

Some writers say that Boniface VIII became "intoxicated with the success of his Jubilee Year."<sup>7</sup> Writers have tried to find sordid reasons for Boniface VIII's proclamation of 1300 as a Holy Year. They seem to discover "financial, economic, political or even reasons of personal ambition in the decision of Boniface to celebrate the first Jubilee, as if the pope tried primarily to fill the papal treasury with the gold and silver from the alms of the pilgrims, or as if everything was a device to strengthen his political position vis-a-vis the Christian princes, or finally, as if a crazy desire of power would have impelled him to organize the Holy Year with solemn religious celebrations in which he could bring to the open his morbid inclinations to pomposity and ostentation."<sup>8</sup>

In the bull, no mention is made of the name Jubilee. He speaks of a celebration to occur every one hundred years, but Roman and foreign writers speak later of *Annus Jubileus*. Other names used were *Holy Year* or *Golden Year*.

### C. The 2nd Jubilee of 1350

Boniface VIII had decreed in the bull *Antiquorum habet fida relatio* that the next Jubilee Year should be celebrated one hundred years after. It had to be a centennial event.

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<sup>7</sup> Henri Daniel Rops, *Cathedral and Crusade*, Vol. II, p. 342. We cannot accept the opinion of some historians or chronicles of the age which say that Boniface VIII, dressed with golden shoes, spurs of gold and red vestments, with sword in the right hand, proclaimed himself emperor and superior to the whole of Christendom. Cfr. Villoslada, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 589.

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. R. Villoslada, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 589.



Pope Clement VI (1342-1352), a Benedictine Pope residing at Avignon, decided soon after his election to reduce it from one hundred to fifty years. Towards the end of 1342, a delegation from Rome came to see the Pope at Avignon, requesting him to return to the Eternal City and to reduce the span of time of the Jubilee to fifty years. One hundred years was thought too long. Most people would never have the chance to join a Jubilee Year celebration. The pope gave good words as to his return to Rome, but he readily agreed to the second. In a consistory of 1343, Pope Clement VI acquiesced to celebrate another Jubilee Year in 1350.

Meanwhile, the embassy was headed by a Colonna and by an Orsini, two of the most famous papal families. One representative of the people came in the delegation, Cola di Rienzo (ca. 1313-1354). He was a hot-headed man, a tribune of the Roman and Italian people, a dreamer of the glory that was Rome. He had fantastic plans and spoke to the pope with eloquence and warmth. He painted for him a terrible situation, emphasizing the physical and moral ruin of Rome.

Pope Clement listened attentively to him, admiring his style and oratory, and appointed him apostolic notary. But he was not convinced to return to Rome. Cola di Rienzo, nevertheless, convinced a resident in Avignon, the poet Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374). The poet, a true Christian believer, seemed to be seduced by the Roman tribune. In a poetic letter Petrarca presented Rome as the old widow pleading for the husband – the pope – to return to her. It described the situation in the Eternal City, the temples, the forts, the walls all in ruins. The city had relics everywhere. It also requested to reduce the span of time of the Holy Year from one hundred years to fifty. Life is brief, he said, and few will see a centennial Jubilee. We live and die in the twinkling of an eye. He also brought forward the Jewish Jubilee, celebrated every fifty years.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> We transcribe here, for the benefit of our readers, Petrarca's plea: ". . . Quot sunt mihi templa, quot arces, vulnera sunt totidem. Crebris confusa ruinis moenia, reliquias immensae protinus urbis ostentant . . . Hoc unum post multa precor. Breviore recursum annus eat reddeatque sacer . . . Vivimus et morimur oculi trepidantis in ictu. Ergo retro metum statuas, quae crimina mundi diluat, at solvatque reos, et vincula solvat." F. Petrarca, *Poemata minora*, pp. 5-30, in R. Villoslada, *op. cit.*, III, 111, footnote 29.

These were the main reasons adduced in the Bull *Unigenitus Dei Filius* of Clement VI dated January 27, 1343, but published in August of 1349.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of the terrible and confusing situation in the Eternal City, the Jubilee of 1350, the second in Christian history, was celebrated in Rome without the presence of the pope. He remained in Avignon, but sent two delegates. One was Cardinal Guido de Boulogne, who was late in coming. Since he saw the city in confusion, he left very soon after. The second was Cardinal Annibald of Ceccano, the real representative of the pope, who was a lover of pomp and splendour. He came with hundreds of knights. He soon came into conflict with the Romans, as he was strict and corrected vices without fear. He furthermore shortened the stay of pilgrims in the city, thus creating the opposition of traders, businessmen and people. He died, probably poisoned, soon after.

One of the most illustrious visitors was St. Bridget of Sweden (ca. 1303-1373), who came to Rome in the company of her children and a small group of pilgrims. As a pilgrim from far away Scandinavia she had visions of the Eternal City. She had seen in her dreams the streets of Rome made of gold and the canals flowing with the blood of Christians. Dreams were destined to be shattered as soon as she set foot in the city. As she entered Rome, probably inhabited at that time by no more than 20,000 people, living in squalor, in narrow dirty streets along the river Tiber, it is said that she exclaimed to her confessor: "Master Peter, is this the city of Rome."<sup>11</sup>

The previous year a great earthquake had struck the city. Great monuments were flattened. Others lay in ruins. The Basilica of St. Paul, along the Ostian Way, was completely destroyed. The Basilica of Letran had lost its roof. The first one was already a pilgrimage basilica. The next one was to be added later on.

We cannot forget that the Black Death struck the whole of Europe during the years 1348-1350. To make matters worse, the pope and the Roman Curia were not in Rome. The Popes, since Clement V (1305-1314) were residing at Avignon. Rome, without the popes, lacked the splendor that the Papacy carried by itself. The city had also expe-

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<sup>10</sup> Cfr. Villoslada, *op. cit.*, III, 111. Cfr. N. Paulus, "Das Jubilaeum von Jahre 1350." *Theologie und Glaube* 5 (1913), 461-74; 532-41.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. Villoslada, *op. cit.*, III, 112.

rienced the popular uprisings led by the very man who had requested the Pope Clement VI to return to Rome, Cola di Rienzo. At the time of the Jubilee he was in exile, but sometime before he had become master of the city.

Another of the famous pilgrim was Petrarca himself. He came to Rome to seek forgiveness of his sins, to atone for them and gain the indulgence. As he tells us in his letters, he came with a pure spirit and a sincere heart. He visited the basilicas with the spirit of a true pilgrim. Perhaps Cola di Rienzo, in exile, as we said, may have entered the city incognito. Another pilgrim was Louis I, King of Hungary who visited the basilicas with great devotion and offered 4,000 gold coins.

To wit, Villoslada says of this Jubilee:

The affluence of pilgrims was very large, though we have to mistrust the exorbitant numbers given by some chroniclers. One says that the whole of Christendom came to Rome in that year. Another – and he is the most moderate – gives an average of five thousand pilgrims coming to Rome every day. The world had just come out from the terrible nightmare of the Black Death. In many people the fear of God and the yearning for expiation were kept alive. Perhaps their greatest desire was to see the face of Christ printed in the famous shroud of the Veronica, venerated every Sunday in St. Peters.<sup>12</sup>

In spite of the terrible conditions of the city and Christendom, the Jubilee was celebrated without much difficulty, with great influx of pilgrims and revenues for the impoverished city. Hence 1350 is the Second Jubilee in Christian history.

#### D. OTHER JUBILEES

##### The 3rd Jubilee of 1390

Pope Urban VI (1378-1389), the pope of St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), decreed in April of 1389 with the Bull "*Salvator noster*

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<sup>12</sup> Cfr. Villoslada, *op. cit.*, III, 112. Pilgrims used to sing with deep fervor the hymn of John XXII: '*Salve, sancta facies nostri Redemptoris, in qua nitet species divini splendoris, impressa panniculo nivei candoris*: Hail, Holy Face of our Redeemer, in which shines the image of divine splendor, impressed in a cloth of purest whiteness'.

*Unigenitus*" that a new Jubilee Year would be celebrated the following year, 1390. A new Jubilee would have to be celebrated henceforth every 33 years out of respect to the age of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was supposed to have lived for 33 years. Thirty-three (33) years was also the average life span of a person during the Middle Ages. Urban died on the 15th of October of 1389. The Jubilee of 1390, the Third Jubilee in Christian history, was successfully celebrated in Rome by the successor of Urban VI, Pope Boniface IX (1389-1404). It was the first Jubilee with two Popes. The Avignon papacy was under the anti-pope Benedict XIII (1394-1417), known in Spanish history as *El Papa Luna*.

Two more basilicas were added since then to be visited in addition to the previous two of Saint Peter and Saint Paul; to wit, Saint John the Lateran and Saint Mary Major. Ever since, these four have been the places stipulated by the popes in order to gain the indulgence of the Jubilee.

#### **The 4th Jubilee of 1400**

The Fourth Jubilee was the Centenary of 1400. We know from history that every beginning and end of a century bring anxiety to people and nations. It has been seen that mankind becomes spiritually more alert as a century comes to an end and a new one approaches.

The year 1400 found the Church in a most serious crisis. There were two popes, one in Rome, the already mentioned Boniface IX and another one in Avignon, the anti-pope Benedict XIII. The two had their own obediences in the Christian world. It was the time of the great Western Schism (1378-1417). The robe of the Church was torn. Strange enough, great saints gave their obedience to different popes. St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1480) remained always faithful to the Roman obedience. The Great St. Vincent Ferrer (ca. 1350-1419) was a loyal and obedient servant to the pope in Avignon.

Boniface IX (1389-1404) who had presided at the Jubilee of 1390, also presided at this Jubilee of 1400. By the end of the century, the pope found himself in a difficult financial situation. He was ready to do anything to obtain the much needed money. He sold provisions and future appointments for cash. The indulgences of the Jubilee to be obtained through the usual spiritual practices of confession and pilgrimage, were bought for a price, with little regard to the essence of the

Jubilee Year and its radical spiritual, penitential dimension.<sup>13</sup>

The Jubilee of 1400 ran counter to the 33 years stipulated by Urban VI, but it was within the normal period stipulated by Boniface VIII and the fifty years span by Clement VI in 1350. What the main reasons were for Boniface IX to celebrate the Jubilee could be discussed but what cannot be denied was that the spirit of renewal was very accelerated at the end of the century. The year fourteen hundred (1400) was a centennial year and history proves in all cases the acceleration of spiritual renewal in the Christian world. Thus we read: "A sign of this tormented and suffering epoch were the multitudes and pilgrims who dressed with white habits of penance, scourging their backs, coming from Provence, Northern Italy and the German Kingdoms intoning along the way the *Stabat mater* and other religious hymns, or shouting 'peace', 'peace' and 'mercy'."<sup>14</sup>

### The 5th Jubilee of 1425

The Fifth Jubilee was supposed to have been celebrated in 1423, according to the stipulation of Urban VI (i.e., to celebrate it every 33 years), but Martin V (1417-1431) wanted to wait two more years in those troubled times. He celebrated it in 1425 without a Bull. Martin V is the pope who brought to an end the scandal of the Western Schism and took advantage of the Jubilee of 1425 to heal the wounds of division within the Christian West. Peace had been restored after the Great Western Schism in the Council of Constance (1414-1418). The anti-popes John XXIII and Benedict XIII were deposed in the Council.

It was a tranquil Holy Year. A great pilgrim was St. Bernardine of Siena and another St. Francesca Romana (Frances of Rome). The "Holy Door" in the Lateran Basilica was opened for the first time.

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<sup>13</sup> Cfr. Eric John, *The Popes. A Concise Biographical History*, London, Anthony Clark Books, 1964. We read on page 278: "In the Year 1400 the pope proclaimed a Holy Year and allowed the would-be pilgrims to the shrines of Rome to forgo the arduous journey for a sum roughly equivalent to what they would otherwise have spent. The bankers of Europe were called in to collect the offerings which they divided equally with the pope. There can be little doubt that Boniface IX who treated the whole business as a political problem, was guilty of simony on a large scale."

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. R.G. Villoslada, *op. cit.*, III, 211-212.

## The 6th Jubilee of 1450

The Jubilee of 1450, under pope Nicholas V (1447-1455), was celebrated with great solemnity and a large concourse of pilgrims. The Pope was able to display his spiritual power to the Christians that flocked to Rome in great numbers.

The Apostolic See after the setbacks of the Western Schism (1378-1417), the rise of conciliarism and the birth and growth of excessive nationalism regained once more its prestige. The ordinary faithful never lost the sincere, true love for the Vicar of Christ and the admiration for Rome, the Eternal City, the city of Peter and Paul and the Seat of Christianity. Martin V (1417-1431) and Eugene IV (1431-1447), after great efforts, were able to heal the wounds of division and restore the prestige of the papacy. The faithful wanted to see and meet the pope. The power of attraction of the Vicar of Christ was enormous. The pope read solemnly the bull of indiction on January 29 of the previous year, in the presence of all the cardinals, ordering Christmas Day as the solemn opening of the Jubilee. *The call of the pope was heard everywhere in Europe.*

Thousands of pilgrims from all over the Christian world came to the Eternal City. The accommodation, as was to be imagined, was insufficient. In spite of the Black Death (1448-1450), still felt in Europe, although the mortality was less severe in 1450 than in 1448 and 1449, vast crowds came to Rome. Hostelries, inns, hospitals, private houses were totally insufficient. Churches had to be open for the pilgrims.<sup>15</sup>

The Pope took full advantage of the Jubilee celebration. He walked barefooted to all the pilgrimage sites, as we were told by the famous Dominican, Saint Antoninus of Florence. The Pope canonized the great Franciscan preacher Saint Bernardine of Siena. The affluence of people became extremely large. The canonization in 1450 attracted enormous crowds. "The great preacher – writes Daniel Rops – had been very popular, and the entire Franciscan Order was determined to fan public opinion in order to give the desired splendour to the glorification of one of its own members."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Henri Daniel Rops, *The Protestant Reformation*, Vol. I, Image Books, p. 250.

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. *Ibidem*, 250.

To the celebration came thousands of Franciscans, among them St. John Capistrano, St. John of the Marches, both of them great preachers. St. Diego de Alcalá, a lay brother of high prayer and evangelical charity came as well. He showed this in Rome taking care of the sick. Others who came, St. Pedro Regalado, the austere reformer from Spain, people like St. Catherine of Bologna, and St. Rita de Cassia, of the Order of St. Augustine. From Brabant came the famous mystic Henry Herp, who while in Rome decided to take the Franciscan habit in the convent of the "Ara Coeli."<sup>17</sup> Other famous pilgrims were King Ferdinand of Naples, Queen Carlotta of Cyprus, Beato Angelico who painted some papal rooms for that occasion.

This Jubilee notably would be remembered for the tragedy that happened over Sant' Angelo Bridge. In a panic, more than two hundred pilgrims were trodden underfoot and killed. Others fell into the river Tiber and got drowned.<sup>18</sup> This tragedy motivated this pope, called the first Renaissance pope, to modernize Rome.

The transition of a medieval Rome, narrow and dirty, to a Renaissance one, wide, clean and palatial, was due to the initial push of this pope who surrounded himself with scholars and who caressed the dream of replacing the old basilica of St. Peter, built by emperor Constantine (306-337) with a new, larger and more splendid.

The visits to the basilicas was reduced to 3 days. People came to Rome as pilgrims fundamentally, but they used the time for other purposes. The city of Rome, its history, monuments and relics of the past had a strong power of attraction for people.<sup>19</sup>

During the Jubilee, the papal treasury received huge amounts of alms. The Pope, a Renaissance man, used part of it for buildings, books and the establishment of the Vatican Library and the Vatican Museum. In the words of Vespasiano de Bisticci:

The Apostolic See gathered large amounts of money. Due to this, the Pope started to construct buildings in various places and to

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<sup>17</sup> Villoslada, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, 341.

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. Daniel-Rops, *The Protestant Reformation*, Vol. II, p. 250.

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. G. Marcotti; "Il giubileo dell'anno 1450 secondo una relazione di Giovanni Rucellai." *Arch. Soc. Rom. Storia Patria*, 4 (1881), 563-568, esp. 566, as referred in Villoslada, *op. cit.*, Vol II, 340.

start buying Greek and Latin books wherever possible, regardless of the price. He hired many copyists, the best available, to continue the task of transcribing the codexes.<sup>20</sup>

Like all the other ones, the Jubilee of 1450 was extended to other regions of the Christian world, with different conditions to gain the plenary indulgence. One of the great preachers of this Jubilee of 1450 was the learned and pious Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), a forerunner of the Renaissance. He preached the Jubilee in the Holy Roman Empire of the Germanic Nation in the hope of affecting a moral and religious renewal and channeling the forces of change in the reform of the Christian world.

Nicholas of Cusa proclaimed the Jubilee indulgence emphasizing that the important thing was, not the indulgence, but a genuine and sincere conversion which must begin with a worthy reception of the Sacrament of Penance.

Pope Paul II (1464-1471) reduced the time of the Jubilee to 25 years in 1470, so that the next Jubilee Year would be 1475. Ever since, this has been the pattern for all the Jubilee Years, celebrated every 25 years, except the extraordinary one of 1933, celebrated to commemorate the nineteen hundred and thirty three years of the Redemption of Christ and 1983, one thousand nine hundred and fifty years of the Redemption.

### **The 7th Jubilee of 1475**

The Seventh Jubilee of 1475 was connected with the Franciscan Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484). In the Bull of Proclamation the Jubilee was called for the first time "Holy Year." Another peculiarity of this Jubilee was that the Bull of Proclamation was printed for the first time. Guttenberg, the father of the printing press of movable types, had invented it in 1468. With Sixtus IV the Renaissance reached its peak. Precisely as a result of the large crowds of pilgrims who came to Rome in 1475 the pope accelerated the process of transforming the Eternal City, from still a predominantly medieval city, into a Renaissance city. This was not precisely a spiritual effect of the Holy Year, as we may

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<sup>20</sup> Cfr. Villoslada, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 341, referring to *Vite di nomini illustri*: MAI, Spicilegium I, 48. Cfr. Manetti, Vita Nicolai V: "Rerum ital. Script." III, 2 col. 924.



see, but it was, nevertheless, a great chance to advance the arts and the sciences. Sixtus IV was truly a Renaissance man and a great humanist.

In 1480 – we read – he began to re-arrange the chief streets of Rome, straightening out their turns and paving them with tiles. A clear way was obtained between the Vatican and the bridge of San Angelo, thence through the Campus Martius to the Capitol. Across the Tiber he built the Ponte Sisto. It is possible that in these changes he sought not only to beautify Rome, but also to control its populace more easily. Within the Vatican he built the Sistine Chapel, which bears his name. Churches were restored especially that of S. Maria del Popolo. The painters of the time, among them Botticelli, received considerable employment from the pope who united them in 1478 into a confraternity under the patronage of St. Luke.<sup>21</sup>

Some of the best masters of the time painted frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, like Sandro Boticelli, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Cosimo Roselli and Pietro Perugino. Many people were compelled to reach the Basilica of San Paolo, *fuori le mure*, by boat because the River Tiber overflowed its banks.

### The Jubilee of 1500

The Jubilee of 1500 is one of the great ones in the history of the Church. It was celebrated after 25 years, following the rule of Paul II, and it was also a centenary year. The Jubilee was proclaimed with great pomp and to the blowing of trumpets. It was proclaimed by Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) of the Spanish family of *Borja*, italianized as *Borgia*. His family name brings to the fore the names of Giovanni Borgia, Cesare Borgia and Lucrezia Borgia, children of the pope before his accession to the papal throne. Alexander VI is considered one of the worst popes ever to occupy the papal chair. It cannot be denied that from the moral point of view, it was one of the darkest moments of papal history. With this view it is difficult to say anything good about him. And much, very much truly good can be said of him, not only as man and ruler, but as pope and priest. He was a very religious man, though this may sound contradictory, fond of religious ceremonies. He prepared things for God's service very thoroughly and methodically.

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<sup>21</sup> Eric John, *op. cit.*, 302.

Thus when the Jubilee of 1500 was approaching, he set things in motion for a great and successful celebration. He took a personal hand in the celebration. From the secular, practical point of view, he opened a road straight from St. Peter's to Ponte Sant' Angelo. Past Jubilee celebrations showed the human congestion in the area and, foreseeing the affluence of people, he widened the area. The road he opened was named in his honor, later called Borgo Nuovo. He cleared many streets and widened the whole area.

From the spiritual point of view, he was no less careful. "In a beautiful bull, *Inter curas multilplices*, of December 22, 1499, after presenting a good history of the Jubilee and encouraging the faithful to come to Venerate the tombs of the Holy Apostles, he exposes the conditions to gain the indulgence. He exhorts the people to reform their lives, abstain from sin and expiate them through penitential sorrow, a humble spirit, a sincere contrite heart, alms-giving, pilgrimage and visits to the Roman Basilicas."<sup>22</sup>

Alexander VI elaborated a new liturgical rite for the Holy Year, especially the solemn opening of the *Porta Sancta*, Holy Door, a rite that has continued to the present age. His predecessors had not prepared a precise rite for this. This symbolic unwalling was accompanied with special prayers, referring to the words of Jesus: "I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved; he will go in and out and find food."<sup>23</sup>

The rite of the unwalling or opening of the *Holy Door* is the one that captures most the popular imagination. It is this ceremony that people remember most and is kept in their minds. The commemorative coins prepared for the Jubilee Years usually carry the opening of the *Porta Sancta*. This rite seems to have had its final format during the time of Alexander VI. He took part in the celebration. On December 24, 1499, with the cardinals and faithful he went in procession to the portico of St. Peter's Basilica and stood in front of the *Porta Aurea* Golden Gate. After the singing of the antiphon the pope recited the prayer and with a hammer struck the brick door. The bricks fell to the

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<sup>22</sup> Cfr. Villoslada, *op. cit.*, III, p. 476.

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. Ego sum ostium. Per me si quis introierit, salvabitur: et ingredietur et egredietur, et pascua inveniet". St. John, 10:9, Vulgate.

ground. The people knelt down and, after a while, entered through the door into the Basilica, thus ushering in the Jubilee Year of 1500.

Three other delegates went to the three basilicas that were also centers of pilgrimage, to wit, St. John the Lateran, Saint Mary Major and St. Paul. The affluence of people was enormous. In the words of a contemporary, Segismund dei Conti, the world was found in the city of Rome: *Orbis in Urbe*. They came from all nations and from all walks of life. The pope with a big retinue visited the four basilicas on April 14, 1500. The master of ceremonies of the pope<sup>24</sup> says that on Easter the pope gave the blessing to 200,000 persons. A huge figure indeed.<sup>25</sup> Whether the figure is true or false, the Chroniclers of the age give the impression that people flocked to Rome from all over the Christian world. It is good to repeat that it was centennial year, with the subsequent intensification that an end and a beginning of a century bring in.

One of the great pilgrims was Copernicus (1473-1543), at that time a young man. He stayed in Rome for a year, teaching mathematics and astronomy. Among his students were Michelangelo and Alexander Farnese, later on Pope Paul III (1534-1549).<sup>26</sup>

### The Jubilees of 1525, 1550 and 1575

Little can be said of these Jubilees. The Jubilee of 1525 was convoked by Clement VII (1522-1533) of the Florentine family of the Medici. The year 1525 and subsequent years, were extremely confusing years. The war between the Pope, favorable to France, and the Emperor Charles V (1518-1558) was a great hindrance to a successful Holy Year. The war compelled the Pope to take refuge in Cartel Sant' Angelo. The troops of the emperor, many of them sympathetic to Protestantism, committed serious excesses in Rome. The city was sacked in 1527. Luther had already lighted the flames of Protestantism and

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<sup>24</sup> Cfr. *Liber notarum II*.

<sup>25</sup> Cfr. Villoslada, *op. cit.*, III, p. 477.

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. Nicola Copernico is the italianized form of Nikolaj Kopernik, the original Polish name. He became a priest and while a priest he wrote the famous book *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (1543). His theory that the earth and the planets turn around the sun in circular orbs meant the end of the Aristotelian cosmology. It was, at that time, a scientific revolution. Hence ever since a Copernican revolution.

Europe was entering a new age of religious division leading finally to the Wars of Religion of the XVIth & XVIIth centuries.

The Jubilee of 1550 is the Jubilee of the two Popes. It was proclaimed by Pope Paul III (1534-1549), who died on November 10th, 1549. The celebration of the Jubilee took part with Pope Julius III (1550-1555). Worthy of mention is the charitable work of St. Philip Neri. To accommodate and help the large number of pilgrims he established the Anchicon fraternity. That was a real spiritual effect of the Holy Year of 1550.

One famous participant as pilgrim was St. Francis Borgia, of the famous Spanish *Borja* family and later on Master General of the Jesuit Order.

The two popes of the Jubilee, Paul III, who proclaimed it, and Julius III, who celebrated it, are the popes of the Council of Trent. The first session (1545-1547) under the first and the second session (1551-1552) under Julius III.

The Jubilee Year of 1575 was convoked by the great Pope Gregory XIII (1572-1585). We know little about the influx of pilgrims and the effect on them.

Gregory XIII is one of the great popes of the age. Two events of universal importance take his name. The first is the change of the Julian Calendar, in practice since the time of Julius Caesar, and known in Gregory's honor as Gregorian Calendar, still vident today.

The other is the establishment of the *Collegium Romanum*, of the Society of Jesus. It became in time the Gregorian University in honor of the said pope.

Another important event for the Philippines is the erection of Manila as a diocese in 1579, with Domingo de Salazar, O.P., as the first bishop. Gregory XIII took a great interest in the missions and the expansion of the Gospel in America and the Far East. We know that pilgrims came from far away, from the regions of Ethiopia Arabia and even the Far East.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Cfr. P. Noval, *Manual y recuerdo del Año Santo de 1900*. Rome, 1900, p. 49.

### The Jubilee of 1600

We have also to mention as a very important Jubilee Year the one of 1600. It was also centennial year, with the spiritual acceleration we have spoken of before. It was celebrated under Clement VIII (1592-1605). The Jubilee brought millions of pilgrims to Rome—people speak of 3 million people—and bore brilliant testimony to the rejuvenated Church of the Counter-Reformation. We are told that 80,000 witnessed the opening of the Holy Door at St. Peter's, on December 31, 1599, presided by the pope. This pope is connected directly with the Philippines, for in August 14 and 30, of 1595, he created the metropolitan see of Manila, with the three suffragan sees of Nueva Segovia, in Northern Luzon, Caceres, in Naga, Bicol, and the most extensive of the *Santisimo Nombre de Jesus*, in Cebu.

A point worthy of note in this Jubilee is that the Pope prohibited the amusement proper to a Carnival. The opening and the celebration of the Holy Year had brought in many secular and purely civil celebrations. The Pope took steps to correct the popular abuses and passed wise decisions against the excesses.

The Pope paid 70 visits to the basilicas and fasted on bread and water every Wednesday and Saturday. He took upon himself to wash the feet of the pilgrims in the hospices and served them at table. He sat down in St. Peter's at the confessional for many hours. Given the large number of pilgrims, many afflicted with serious sicknesses, charitable souls helped them, St. Camillus of Lellis started the Hospital of St. Mary Magdalene for the sick. St. Robert Bellarmine was actively involved.

### The Jubilee of 1650

The Holy Year was celebrated under Pope Innocent X (1544-1555). For the first time the dome of St. Peter was illuminated. This Pope is directly connected with the Philippines and the Dominican Order. Since I am writing for Filipino readers, I have to mention that Innocent X issued the bull *In supereminenti*, of 1645, declaring the *Colegio de Santo Tomas* of Manila a university. The official title she has, finds its connection with this Pope.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Cfr. Archives of the University of Santo Tomas, Manila, (AUST) where the original copy of the Bull *In Supereminenti* is found.

### **The Jubilee of 1700**

The Holy Year was inaugurated in 1700 by Innocent XII (1691-1700) and closed by Clement XI (1700-1721). Great pilgrims to Rome were Maria Casimira, widow of John Sobieski, King of Poland and savior of Vienna and Europe against the Turks, and Cosmas of Medici, the great Duke of Tuscany.

### **The Jubilee of 1725**

Proclaimed by Benedict XIII (1724-1730) an ascetical Dominican who would kneel when writing to his Superior General. The Pope wanted an austere Jubilee without the usual illuminations and pagentry. During the Holy Year, a council of Italian bishops was called at St. John Lateran to legislate matters on discipline and catechetics. Clerics were prohibited from wearing wigs and playing the lottery. The Congregation of Mercedarians managed to collect sufficient money to redeem 3,710 slaves who arrived in Rome from Tunisia. They were blessed by the Pope and each received a medal and a sum of money. For the first time a trained horse was given to the Pope by the King of Naples in the Piazza Santi Apostoli. 10 saints were canonized among whom were St. Pellegrino Laziosi, St. John of the Cross, St. Louis Gonzaga, St. Stanislaus Kostka, St. John Nepomuceno.

### **Jubilee of 1750**

It was celebrated under Pope Benedict XVI (1740-1758). Many definitions, clarifications and grant of indulgences are due to him as well as regulations regarding the Jubilee.

### **E. JUBILEES IN THE MODERN AGE**

We have had 26 Jubilee Years. They have been celebrated regularly and with great concourse of pilgrims, except in 1800, because of the occupation of Rome by Napoleon. The pope Pius the VI (1775-1799) had died in exile in the Citadel of Valence, France. Many intellectuals, freemasons and anti-Christian people thought it was the end of the papacy. Goethe, the great German poet, celebrated the death of the papacy. There was no Jubilee Year, but soon there was a new pope Pius VII (1800-1823).

### Jubilee of 1825

Pope Leo XII (1823-1829) celebrated the Jubilee in 1825, although with less concourse of people. A kind of popular mission was organized in the different squares of Rome, where the main and most important preachers took place.<sup>29</sup> There was no Jubilee in 1850, because on November 9 of 1848 a republic was declared in Rome and the pope had to escape to Gaeta.

In 1875, Pope Pius IX, (1846-1878) as a prisoner in the Vatican, celebrated it again in a very humble way.

The XIX century was the most difficult. The enemies of Christianity sung the end of the Papacy.

### The Jubilee of 1900

Proclaimed by Leo XIII (1878-1903), it was carried out in a solemn and impressive manner with 400,000 pilgrims. The Pope consecrated the world to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. St John Baptist de La Salle and St. Rita of Cascia were canonized. The latter had been a pilgrim to Rome during the Jubilee Year of 1450.

A witness of the Holy Year writes:

“Almost at all hours of the day one can contemplate the beautiful spectacle of devoted faithful, both Roman and foreign pilgrims, kneeling down in front of the Holy Doors praying with fervor; they advance later to kiss the holy places and advance still kneeling to enter the church to pour out their hearts in front of the merciful Lord, who through his Vicar on earth has granted to all people full pardon and inexhaustible treasures of graces.”<sup>30</sup>

### The Jubilee of 1925

Proclaimed by Pius XI (1922-1939) whereby 3 cardinals were authorized to open the Holy Doors of the other 3 basilicas. Very many pilgrims came from all over the world. The Pope instituted the Feast of Christ the King and beatified 5 souls and canonizing 6 others. Among

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<sup>29</sup> Cfr. P. J. Noval, *op. cit.*, p. 50

<sup>30</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 51

them were the Cure of Arms and St. Therese of the Infant Jesus. The Pope left the Vatican for the first time to go to St. John Lateran. From the time of Pius IX (1846-1878) the Pope called himself the 'prisoner of the Vatican'.

### **The Jubilee of 1933**

Proclaimed as an extraordinary year by Pius XI on the 19th centenary of Redemption. Although it was to be a totally spiritual Holy Year, it was manifested by much solemnity with many pilgrims and ecclesial meetings. The Pope spoke for the first time on the radio. St. Bernadette Soubirou and St. John Bosco were canonized.

### **The Jubilee of 1950**

Proclaimed by Pius XII (1939-1958), some 3,500,000 pilgrims came to Rome. Msgr. Montini explained the significance of the Holy Year as follows: "Men return to God, believe in his goodness and in his mercy, examine yourselves before him and repent and you will find yourselves needing to be cleansed by his pardon." The dogma of the bodily Assumption of Mary to heaven was defined (Nov. 1st). Dominic Savio and Maria Goretti were proclaimed saints.

### **The Jubilee of 1975**

Proclaimed by Paul VI (1963-1978) it was an unexpected event as word was going around that the Holy Year has lost its meaning. The theme was "Renewal and Reconciliation". 9 million pilgrims came to Rome although from Pentecost of 1973 the Jubilee was extended to all the world. Paul VI granted 2 public audiences every Wednesday. One was held in the Nervi Hall and the other in the Plaza of St. Peter's. Crowds numbered from 40,000 to 120,000 each time. The Pope proclaimed 13 blessed including Giuseppe Moscati and 6 saints including Elisabeth Seton the first North-American saint. There was also the famous meeting of Paul VI with Metropolitan Meliton, representative of the Patriarch Constantinople.

### **The Jubilee of 1983**

Proclaimed by John Paul II as an extraordinary year commemorating 1950 years of our Redemption with the Bull *Aperite portas*



*Redemptori*. It began the opening of the Holy Door in St. Peter's on March 24th. Every diocese was united to it with concomittant celebrations. The Holy Year was extended to all the world for the benefit of the sick, elderly and the cloistered. It was enough to visit the churches indicated by the bishop and participate in a diocesan or parochial celebration; accompanied by a prayer according to the intention of the Pope. This participation ought to be accompanied preferably by a work of mercy. For those who cannot go to the cathedral, it was sufficient to visit parish churches. For the sick and physically challenged, it was sufficient to celebrate it with the family. In Rome it was necessary to visit the 4 basilicas or the catacombs, or the Basilica of the Holy Cross and to recite the creed, an Our Father and a prayer according to the intentions of the Pope.

#### F. PILGRIMAGE AND "HOLY DOOR"

John Paul II, in the Bull of Indiction, *Incarnationis Mysterium* writes: "In the course of its history, the institution of the Jubilee has been enriched by signs which attest to the faith and foster the devotion of the Christian people." And he mentions first the pilgrimage; second the sign of the holy door; another distinctive, and one familiar to the faithful, is the indulgence, which is one of the constitutive elements of the Jubilee. To these traditional signs the pope adds three more, to it: the sign of the purification of memory. Another sign of the mercy of God, which is especially necessary today, is the sign of charity. "A sign of the truth of Christian love, ageless but especially powerful today, is the memory of the martyrs." This is the third new one. I shall mention here only two: the pilgrimage and the holy door.

The pilgrimage was always seen as a sign of spiritual journeying towards God. It is a journey of conversion. In the history of Israel the first sign of liberation was represented by the journey of the Exodus. And even before that there was the journey of Abraham and the patriarchs. It was always a sign of journeying towards God and with God.

The pious Israelites went as pilgrims to the Temple in Jerusalem, always with the enduring dispositions of joy, austere sobriety, active charity in helping others. It was in this spirit that the family of Nazareth journeyed (Lk 2:41-50). Toil and discomfort were the price of this spiritual itinerary; it was an endurance training for the tests and risks in life for the love of God. Even Jesus made a pilgrimage from heaven to us, from Nazareth to Jerusalem, from earth to heaven.

His life was a continuous journey, hence he called his disciples to follow him. He introduced himself as "the way" to the Father. Christian life is fundamentally a journey, walking behind him and with him. St. Peter taught that we are "pilgrims" (*paroikoi*) and life is a "pilgrimage" (*paroichia*) (1Pet 1:17; 2:11) because we are strangers in this world and we have no permanent home here because our homeland is in heaven (Phil 3:20-21; 12-20).

The pilgrimage to Rome consists of a prayerful visit to the principal basilicas indicated each time by the decrees proclaiming the Jubilee. Different basilicas were chosen but among these, the basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul were always included.

### Confession of Sins

The sacramental confession of sins is a sign of acknowledgement of one's wickedness and infidelity to God; of repentance and conversion of heart; of the sincere return to the house of God; of re-establishing communion with God; of recovering the divine life lost due to grave sin. In order to do all these, it is necessary to recover the sense of sin and the sense of God in life. Today the sense of God is lost hence also the sense of sin. Secularized humanity is disposed, at worst, to recognize only some of man's errors and mistakes, but not sins because they do not exist for him.

Psalm 50 still teaches us something about true repentance of the heart and the desire of true communion with God. Suffice to bear in mind some of its forceful expressions of prayer to God: "Against you, against you alone have I sinned and what is evil in your eyes I have done... In your love remove my sin... Wash me from all my faults... Purify me with hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow... Make me feel joy and happiness and my bones you have humbled will exult."

All we are sinners, no one is excluded (1 Jn 1:8, 10). The fullness of God's mercy is at our disposal just as it was described by Jesus in his parables of the lost sheep, the lost Drachma and the Prodigal Son (Lk 15).

To re-create humanity Jesus gave us "the sacrament of Penance" when he gave the Church the power to forgive sins, all sins. It is the moment of grace and certain purification, if lived with sincerity and true repentance.

### Why is the "Holy Door" opened in the Jubilee?

The reason lies in its symbolism. The door is always an essential element in the architecture of a city or a house. Often it is a monument recalling some prestigious event or a fortification for defense. The door gives security and delimits the area which a community claims. From ancient times, the gate of a city was the place where civil, cultural and political life revolved; often owing to the lack of adequate space within the city walls. Thus the gate became a place of meetings, of assemblies, of commerce and judicial activities. It came to the extent that the gate was identified with the entire city: whoever possessed the gate also possessed the city, and whoever held the key of the gate held dominion over the city.

In the grand Israelite pilgrimages one entered Jerusalem and the Temple of God through gates. This came to be celebrated as the culmination of a long-awaited desire because it was a necessary passage in order to enter into communion with the Lord who lived on Mt. Zion: "What joy when they said to me: let us go into the house of the Lord. And now our feet are standing at your gates, O Jerusalem!" (Ps 122:1-2). It was precisely the gate/door which gave God the possibility of putting his believers in the most direct contact with himself, introducing them into his house; hence it came to be said that "the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than the dwellings of Jacob" (Ps 87:2). Whoever entered through the gate which is Jesus becomes a member of the family of God and thus a rightful citizen of that city: "It will be said of Zion: this one and that one were born in it, the Most High will establish it, the Lord writes in the book of the peoples: this one was born there. And dancing, they will sing. All my springs are in you" (Ps 87:5-7). The pilgrims that arrived at the gates of the Holy City felt that they shared in the blessing and peace which God himself established.

The gospels vitalized the image of the door and made it a symbol of Jesus who declared solemnly: "Truly, truly I say to you: I am the door of the sheep.... I am the door: if anyone passes through me, he is saved, he will enter and leave and will find pasture" (Jn 10:7-9). Jesus wanted to say that he was the only way to reach the Father, the unique mediator between God and humanity; only through whom one gains access to God.

Jesus expressed this concept also in other imagery when he spoke of himself: "I am the way, the truth and the life. Nobody comes to the Father if not through me" (Jn 14:6). Through Jesus, God communi-

cates with us and we communicate with God. He is the bridge between heaven and earth (Eph 10:19-23). To teach this truth, Jesus recalled the dream of Jacob in Bethel to his first disciples. Jacob had seen a ladder that stretched from earth to heaven and he exclaimed: "This is truly the house of God! This is the gate to heaven!" (Gen 28:17; Jn 1:51).

The Holy Door is therefore a symbol of Jesus Christ, the true Gate of Heaven. Through him, the true and only mediator of salvation for humanity, we have reconciliation and divine forgiveness: and through him, the only way to enter into communion with God, we are introduced as children of the Father's house. His dwelling becomes our dwelling, his family becomes our family. The door of the roman basilica, the symbol of the house of God, is opened to us so that we may feel at home with him.

## CONCLUSION

"The two thousand years which have passed –wrote John Paul II– since the Birth of Christ (prescinding from the question of precise chronology) represent an extraordinary great Jubilee, not only for Christians but indirectly for the whole of humanity, given the prominent role played by Christianity during these two millennia" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 15). And he continues: "She [the Church] invites everyone to rejoice, and she tries to create conditions to ensure that the power of salvation may be shared by all. Hence the Year 2000 will be celebrated as the Great Jubilee" (*Ibidem*. 16).

I end this article with another quotation from John Paul II:

The Holy Door of the Jubilee of the Year 2000 should be symbolically wider than those of previous Jubilees, because humanity, upon reaching this goal, will leave behind not just a century but a millennium. It is fitting that the Church should make this passage with a clear awareness of what has happened to her during the last ten centuries. She cannot cross the threshold of the new millennium without encouraging her children to purify themselves, through repentance, of past errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency, and slowness to act. Acknowledging the weaknesses of the past is an act of honesty and courage which helps us to strengthen our faith, which alerts us to face today's temptations and challenges and prepares us to meet them." (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 33). □