

Celebration of Jubilee Years in the History of the Church

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“Throughout its history, humankind has rethought its situation, sometimes with the intention of undoing the evil that besets it and ‘turning history back’ in the words of Ignacio Ellacuria. This supposes an ongoing hope that justice, solidarity and peace are a possibility for the human family. It also supposes the need for conversion. This idea is common to many cultural and religious traditions; it is central in the Biblical-Christian tradition, and the idea that hope is from and for the poor is basic to this. ‘Jubilee’ can well be taken as the term to express this examination of conscience, this hope and this decision to change” Virgilio Elizondo and Jon Sobrino.²

The latest jubilee year in the history of the Catholic Church is the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy lasting from December 8, 2015, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, till November 20, 2016, the Feast of Christ the King. Already on March 13, 2015, during a penitential service held at St. Peter’s Basilica, Pope Francis announced his intention to have an Extraordinary Jubilee Year dedicated to Mercy. And on April 11, 2015, through the papal bull of indiction *Misericordiae Vultus* (The Face of Mercy) he formally convoked the Holy Year of Mercy. In

this proclamation of the Jubilee Year Pope Francis is following the 700 year long tradition of the Catholic Church.

Holy Year

From the Middle Ages onwards Popes “spiritualized” the Judeo-Christian Jubilee tradition and proclaimed a Holy Year or Jubilee Year beginning and ending with special rites and ceremonies. In keeping with this trend in the Christian tradition the term Jubilee Year is often substituted with the term Holy Year to denote the holiness of life as the aim of the promulgation of the Holy Year. From 1300, the first Holy year in Christian tradition, conversion and transformation of Christians, remission of sins and obtaining of indulgences through pilgrimages, confession and communion were insisted upon.

Ordinary and Extraordinary Jubilee Years

Two kinds of Jubilee years are celebrated in Christian tradition – Ordinary Jubilee Year and Extraordinary Jubilee Year. Ordinary Jubilee Year is celebrated following the set period of 25 or 50 years. In addition to that Extraordinary Jubilee Years are proclaimed depending on a need or to mark some significant event. For example, with the encyclical *Fulgens Corona* Pope Pius XII declared the First Marian Year “Little Holy Year” for 1954 and Pope John Paul II proclaimed a Marian Year in 1987, and now Pope Francis has declared the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Religious Ceremonies

In due course of time certain religious ceremonies connected with the Holy Year celebrations became established. They are followed today with certain exceptions. An Ordinary Jubilee Year usually begins on

December 24 with the praying of the first vesper of Christmas. On that day the Holy Door of the four Papal basilicas in Rome – in the beginning it was restricted only to St. Peter's Basilica – Archbasilica of St. John Lateran, St. Peter's Basilica, the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls and the Basilica of St. Mary Major – were simultaneously opened by the Pope and three cardinals appointed for that. Certain conditions were laid down so that the pilgrims may obtain Jubilee Plenary Indulgences.³ They include confession made especially to gain indulgence, receiving Holy Communion and visiting the four basilicas in Rome for the pilgrims who come to Rome and to those living in Rome. Others were allowed to go as pilgrims to churches designated by the local bishop. Each papal document prescribes exact conditions of the Holy Years. But the local bishop is given faculties to exempt people from these conditions, for people unable to fulfill these conditions.

Jubilee Year among Israelites

Those who are familiar with the Biblical tradition think immediately of Leviticus 25 when the word jubilee is mentioned. Lev 25:8 says that the Jubilee year is to be celebrated on every seventh Sabbath year: "You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years." The year at the end of the cycle of 49 years is called the 50th year. Lev 25:11 states that "That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you." It calls for the proclamation of the Jubilee as solemn and hallowed with the ram's horn "trumpet sounded loud" (Lev 25:9). Further with the proclamation of the Day of Atonement on the tenth day of the seventh

month, jubilee year becomes hallowed. Lev 25:11-12 explicitly states what should not be done and what should be done: “you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces.” Not only the land should not be worked but the proclamation of Jubilee called for redistribution of land and returning to one’s family – neither to work nor suffer as a slave for anyone but to enjoy freedom. Through these aspects of redistribution of land and liberation the people of Israel were called to make the Jubilee sacred: “And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family” (Lev 25:10). “Jubilee and liberation were practically synonymous in the eyes of the beneficiaries,” observes Elsa Tamez.⁴ In pre-exilic Judaism during the jubilee year debts were pardoned and slaves were freed. After the exile till 70 A.D. Jews continued to celebrate the Jubilee and the remission of debts was restricted only to fellow Jews.

Jesus and Jubilee

“For Christians, one of the most significant aspects of the jubilee tradition in the Hebrew Bible is the fact that Jesus of Nazareth built on it in his proclamation of the kingdom of God,” says Elsa Tamez.⁵ Luke portrays Jesus “filled with the power of the Spirit” (Lk 4:14) beginning his ministry with the Nazareth manifesto “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the

oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Lk 4:18-19). Lukan Jesus begins his ministry in the context of the jubilee by referring to "the year of the Lord's favour" – the words of Prophet Isaiah (61:1-2). As Elsa Tamez succinctly points out: "The core of the message [in Lk 4:18-19] refers to liberation, which will be 'good news to the poor'. He twice mentions freedom (*aphesis*): 'release to the captives' and the oppressed 'go[ing] free'. ... Furthermore, the Greek word *aphesis*, freedom, is the same word that Septuagint employs for remission of debts (in Hebrew *shmittah*; cf. Deut 15:1), which were generally linked to slavery. So there is no doubt of Luke's – or Jesus' – deliberate intention of putting the jubilee into effect with the arrival of Jesus." Megan McKenna, in a similar way, calls Lk 4:17-19 a Jubilee declaration. He says: "This is Jubilee proclamation! It has begun Jesus' presence in the world, heralds the new day, the new creation, the new order of business, the word of God loose in the world again, proclaimed and obeyed by the beloved child of God, and by all those who will be his followers and disciples."⁶

Thus the core message and ministry of Jesus – the Reign of God – was built on the foundation of the Jubilee. Jesus historicizes salvation – liberation of the whole human person already experienced here and now in the healing of the sick and good news to the poor. He gives expression to it in another context. To the question of the disciples of John whether he was the one who was to come or they have to wait for another Jesus replied, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to

them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me” (Mt 11:2-6).

Early Christian Community

The early Christian community sought to give concrete voluntary expression to the Jubilee demand of redistribution of wealth where there will be no one who was needy: “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44-45). Again we read “Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common” (Acts 4:32). In the later centuries when there emerged within the Christian community the division of rich and poor and the worldly values of wealth, power and prestige were priced more than the values of Jesus, some radical Christians left the world to go and live in the desert, eventually to lead a life in common where the model they wanted to follow was the first Christian community. Even later when Benedict, the Father of Western Monasticism, started static community form of monastic life he presented the early Christian community as the model to have things in common.

Patristic Age

Not only in the monastic tradition but also in the life of Christians in the Roman Empire the Fathers of the Church came back again and again to the redistribution of wealth based on the firm belief that God created everything for everyone. This was similar to the Jubilee tradition of the Jews where God was seen as the one to whom belongs

all the land and so the remission of land was demanded by God.

Two examples from the writing of the Fathers of the Church, one from the Western Church and another from the Eastern Church – Ambrose of Milan and John Chrysostom – will show us beyond doubt the radical social teaching of the Fathers of the Church. Ambrose of Milan insists that creation is for all and that nature does not recognize the division of people into poor and rich. By describing what will happen to the rich after their death he challenges them to have a change of life – to return the unjustly amassed wealth.

Earth at its beginning was for all in common, it was meant for rich and poor alike; what right have you to monopolise the soil? Nature knows nothing of the rich; all are poor when she brings them forth. Clothing and gold and silver, food and drink and covering – we are born without them all; naked she receives her children into the tomb, and no one can enclose his acres there. A little turf suffices for poor and rich, and the earth which proved too narrow for the appetites of the living is wide enough at last for the rich and all that is his.

Nature, impartial at our coming, is impartial at our going; she bears us all equal, and entombs us equal in her bosom. Who can tell class from class among the dead? Open the earth again and find your rich man if you may; excavate a tomb a short while after, and if you know the man that you see, prove by token that he was poor. The sole difference is that the rich has more to waste away with him; the silken garments and cloth of gold swathing his body are lost for the living without helping the dead. Being rich, he has perfumes lavished on him, but that does not stop the stench; he wastes the sweetness that might be used by others and is none the sweeter for it himself.⁷

John Chrysostom goes a step further and calls those who refuse to give possessions to others as robbers. The golden mouth orator who did not mince words in his criticism of wealth and pomp in the Catholic community forcefully proclaimed:

Not giving part of one's possessions to others is already a kind of robbery. If what I am telling you sounds perhaps rather odd, do not be surprised. I will adduce a text from the divine Scriptures which says that it is rapine, avarice and theft, not only taking possession of things belonging to others but also refusing to give part of one's possessions to others. Reproaching the Jews through the mouth of the prophet, God says that the earth has produced its fruits but you have not brought in tithed, and robbery of the poor dwells in your house. "Because you have made the customary offerings," says the Lord, "you have taken away what belongs to the poor," This he says in order to make it clear to the rich that what they possess belongs to the poor, even when they receive the inheritance from their parents or come in for some money, whatever the source. Elsewhere he also says: "Rob not the poor man of his livelihood" (Sirach 4:1). A robber is one who takes things belonging to others, since texts therefore teach that if we refuse to give alms, we will be punished in the same way as robbers.⁸

Spiritualized Jubilee Tradition

Unfortunately in the jubilee tradition that was started in the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages the concrete expressions of freedom of persons and redistribution of land as part and parcel of Jubilee celebration were lost sight of. It was spiritualized and the focus became remission of sins and gaining of indulgences. It took many centuries before this trend was set right. It must be observed that already

in the Patristic era we have the beginnings of this interiorizing expression of jubilee.

Jerome paved the way for this spiritual sense of Jubilee in his translation of the Bible. "In the translation of the Hebrew Bible, Jerome renders *yovel* by *iubilaetus* and explains it as a *remissionis annus* (year of remission). It was therefore soon understood as a time of penitence inciting the human soul to turn to God," says Jacques Nicole.⁹ He further points out that with the assimilation in Latin of *iubilaetus* and *iubilare* (to shout), the Hebrew meaning was still more changed. In the monasteries the word *iubilatio* was used to describe the inner joy that comes from the contemplation of the divine mysteries. This trend is seen in the comment on Lev 25:8 by Richard of St. Victor (1110-1173), one of the most influential religious thinkers in the twelfth century. He wrote:

The one who deserves to possess spiritual gifts in the full quietness of soul, after the cycle of seven times seven years, seems in some ways to enter in the forty-ninth year. Then comes the fiftieth, called the jubilee... Then the flesh "sabbatizes" when earthly desires no longer prevail, and it delights in spiritual exercises... Therefore the spirit of the human, overjoyed in jubilation, is carried away into praise of God perfectly and fully.¹⁰

Furthermore, in the Christian tradition the concept of jubilee and remission was developed in the context of crusades. Bernard de Clairvaux (1090-1153) called the second crusade a jubilee because of the plenary indulgences offered to those who were ready to take part in the crusades and fight as soldiers of Christ. Against the background of the crusades no less a theologian than Thomas Aquinas

(1225-74) articulated the penitential doctrine and practice of the Catholic Church regarding indulgences. He argued that since the Lord Jesus Christ gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 16:19) to apostle Peter, the Petrine Office has the “power of the keys” to dispense of the treasure of merits common to the whole church. The pope can therefore pronounce a total or partial remission of the penalty because of sins committed in the present life, shortening the time to be spent in purgatory.¹¹ This explanation led to a great expansion of the practice of indulgences. After the end of the last crusade, indulgence was granted to penitent pilgrims travelling not only to Jerusalem sanctified by Christ, but also places like Santiago de Compostela and Rome sanctified by the sacred remains of the apostles.

History of Holy Years

Plenary indulgences and remission of sins combined with pilgrimage found their way into the spiritual activities connected with the Holy Years proclaimed by the Popes from the 14th century onwards. In the beginning of the 14th century people underwent a lot of suffering due to war and infectious disease like plague. People attributed their sins to be the cause of the tragedy that had befallen them. So they wanted to do penances to obtain remission of their sins and receive God’s grace and good health. Catholics decided to go as pilgrims on foot to Rome to pray at the tomb of Peter and Paul and to receive Pope’s blessings. They sought to obtain grace and strength to carry on their difficult daily life. Aware of people’s wish Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) proclaimed the first Ordinary Jubilee Year in the history of the Catholic Church on February 22, 1300,

Feast of the Chair of St Peter, with the bull *Antiquorum habet fida relatio*. The decree of the indulgence had a retroactive value beginning on December 24, 1299, and lasted till December 24, 1300. Besides other things the Bull declared

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 the full and broadest but the most complete forgiveness of sins.

Complete forgiveness of sins was granted to those who fulfilled certain conditions – truly penitent, visit to St. Peter's and St. Paul Outside the Walls basilicas at least once a day for 30 days for residents of Rome and 15 days for pilgrims from outside Rome. The word Jubilee did not occur in the bull. But the Pope announced that a similar year would be celebrated every 100 years. But some writers and some Romans described the year as "Jubilee Year" and others called it "Holy Year" or "The Golden Year". Since then it has been called Jubilee Year or Holy Year. Commenting on the proclamation of the Jubilee Year by Pope Boniface Holmes and Bickers observe that the Pope did that act

in order to stress the strength of the papacy and to boost his own flagging reputation – which effectively made Rome an enormously popular place of pilgrimage. As vast numbers of pilgrims poured into the city Boniface forgot his previous difficulties and began to cling to an unreal appreciation of his own popularity and authority.¹²

The 100 year period fixed by Pope Boniface was changed by Pope Clement VI (1342-52). While the papacy was in Avignon (1305-77), France, Pope Clement in 1343 decreed a jubilee every 50 years and thus the second jubilee year was in 1350. Among others St. Brigitta of Sweden urged Clement to proclaim this second jubilee year in Catholic history though the Pope did not return to Rome. He sent instead Cardinal Gaetani Cecceno to Rome to represent him.

In 1389 Pope Urban VI (1378-89) fixed the interval between the Holy Years at thirty-three years – the claim that Our Lord Jesus lived on the earth for 33 years became the deciding factor for celebrating Holy Year every 33 years – the first of which was to be celebrated in the next year, 1390. But he did not live to celebrate it. Instead his successor Pope Boniface X (1389-1404) opened the Holy Door on Christmas Eve, 1390. At this time two more basilicas were added to obtain indulgences – St. John Lateran and St. Mary Major. The fourth Jubilee was the century year 1400. The number of pilgrims who came to Rome was so great that Pope Boniface X granted the indulgences though he had not officially proclaimed a Holy Year.

The fifth was held in 1425 since Pope Martin V (1417-31) preferred to wait for two more years (1390+33+2) because of troubled times. He issued a commemorative medal on that occasion and the opening of the Holy Door was in St. John Lateran. Twenty-five years later in 1450 Pope Nicholas V (1447-55) celebrated a Jubilee during which time he canonized St. Bernardine of Siena, popularly known as “the Apostle of Italy”. In 1470 Pope Paul II (1464-71)

fixed the year back to twenty-five years. So the next Holy Year was to be held on 1475 but he did not live to that year. Instead Pope Sixtus IV(1471-84) proclaimed the next Holy Year in 1475. He ordered the building of the Sistine chapel and the Sixtus Bridge over the Tiber River to mark the occasion.

In 1500 Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) prescribed the ceremonies to be observed during the Jubilee year, which with some minor changes are followed even today. They are: (1) Using the prescribed rites and prayers the Pope opens the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica and three cardinals are appointed to do the same in the other basilicas in Rome; (2) At the end of the Holy Year the Holy Door is again walled up.

In 1525 the jubilee was called by Pope Clement VII (1523-34) on December 24, 1525. In 1550 Pope Paul III (1534-49) proclaimed the next Holy Year. But it was opened by Pope Julius III (1550-55). St. Philip Neri helped in assisting the great number of pilgrims who came to Rome on this occasion. In 1575 Pope Gregory XIII (1572-85) called the eleventh Holy Year. Some 300,000 pilgrims came to Rome during this Holy Year. The next Holy Year was proclaimed by Pope Clement VIII (1592-1605). It began on December 31, 1599 and closed on January 13, 1601 due the ill health of the Holy Father. It is said that during this Holy Year Pope Clement paid 70 visits to the basilicas, listened to the confession at St Peter's Basilica for many hours, fasted on bread and water every Wednesday and Saturday and washed the feet of pilgrims in hospices and served them at table.

In 1625 Pope Urban VIII (1623-44) opened the Holy Door for the Jubilee Year. But because of war in northern Italy only a few pilgrims came to Rome. The outbreak of the dreaded disease plague killed many pilgrims. Moreover, since the river Tiber burst its banks instead of opening the holy Door in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, it was opened in St. Mary in Trastevere.

Pope Innocent X (1644-55) proclaimed the Holy Year in 1650. During that occasion the Dome of St. Peter's Basilica was illuminated. Pope Clement X (1669-78) presided over the Holy Year in 1675. The celebrations were marked by festival display – firing of guns and fire-crackers and sound of trumpets, drums and bells. The Pope beatified John of the Cross and Francis Solanus.

Pope Innocent XII (1678-1700) called for the next Holy Year in 1700 but it was presided over by Pope Clement XI (1700-21), because Innocent died on September 27, 1700 and his successor Clement was elected on November 9, 1700. Unlike the previous Jubilee celebration of pomp and splendor this one was marked by austerity. The austere Dominican Pope Benedict XIII (1724-30) proclaimed the Holy Year 1725. Like the previous one he also wanted an austere Jubilee devoid of illuminations and public ceremonies. He canonized 10 saints among whom were St. John of the Cross, St. Louis Gonzaga and St. Stanislaus Kostka.

Jubilee Year 1750 was called by Pope Benedict XIV (1740-58) through the Papal Bull *Peregrinantes a Domino*. St. Leonard of Port Maurice preached the Holy Year in the piazzas of Rome. The Pope set up the Way of the Cross in the Colosseum. He was the first to prescribe Communion

also for obtaining the indulgence. It is reported that more than a million people came to Rome as pilgrims to celebrate the Holy Year, among them were about 200,000 Armenians.

The Holy Year 1775 was announced by Pope Clement XIV (1769-74). He organized preaching in the piazzas of Rome. But he died on September 22, 1774 and the Holy Door to mark the beginning of the Holy Year was opened by his successor Pope Pius VI (1775-99). The Jubilee was celebrated in a subdued way and the Confessors were authorized to give dispensation to pilgrims regarding the visits to the 4 basilicas. Pope Pius VII (1800-23) refused to call a Holy Year in 1800, because the French occupation of Rome prevented public celebrations. Pope Leo XII (1823-29) proclaimed and presided over the public celebration of the next Jubilee Year in 1825, which was popularly called the Jubilee of the Restoration because many rulers were restored back to their Kingdoms after the politically turbulent years of French Revolution and Napoleonic wars. Since St. Paul Outside the Walls was being rebuilt, Leo XIII substituted St. Mary in Trastevere as a place of pilgrimage.

Political troubles prevented the Jubilee of 1850, because the War of Independence forced the temporary exile of Pope Pius IX (1846-78). The New Italian Government granted restricted freedom to the Pope – only within the Vatican. So the Jubilee Year of 1875 was celebrated in a subdued way without any external solemnity. The Holy Doors were not opened. The Jubilee was extended to the Catholic dioceses in the world.

Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) renewed the celebration of the Holy Year in 1900 to mark the inauguration of the twentieth century. But the celebration lacked the external accompaniment of splendour because of the self-enforcement of the Pope within the walls of the Vatican. The Pope consecrated the world to the Sacred Heart and canonized St. John Baptist de LaSalle and St. Rita of Cascia.

Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) proclaimed Ordinary Holy Year in 1925 and Extraordinary Jubilee Year in 1933, to celebrate Jesus' life in this world. He opened the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica and authorized 3 cardinals to open the Holy Doors of the other three Basilicas. He instituted the Feast of Christ the King and beatified/canonized some, among whom were the Cure of Ars and St. Therese of the Infant Jesus. He asked the pilgrims to pray for peace among people so that they could obtain jubilee indulgence.

Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) called Jubilee Year 1950 for the following reasons – prayer and penance for the sanctification of souls, unfailing faith in Christ and the Church, action for peace and protection of the Holy Place and defence of the Church against her enemies. That year the Holy Father defined the bodily Assumption of Mary to heaven as the dogma of the Church. He canonized Dominic Savio and Maria Goretti as saints. He used the Jubilee occasion to declare a new national anthem for the Vatican City.

Pope Paul VI (1963-78) called the Ordinary Jubilee Year 1975. The theme was renewal and reconciliation with a view to guiding the Catholics toward the Third Millennium.

Although from Pentecost of 1973 the Jubilee was extended to the Catholic world, still 9 million pilgrims came to Rome. Moreover, Paul VI granted 2 public audiences every Wednesday – one in the Nervi Hall and the other in the Piazza of St Peter's.

In 1983 Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee Year to commemorate 1950 years of redemption with the Papal Bull *Aperite portas Redemptori*. It began with the opening of the Holy Door in St Peter's Basilica on March 24, 1983. Every diocese was united to it with related celebrations. The Holy Year was extended to the sick, elderly and the cloistered through the changes introduced in the conditions for obtaining indulgence – enough to visit the churches indicated by the bishop accompanied by a prayer according to the intention of the Pope and for those who were sick it was sufficient to celebrate it with the family, and for those in cloisters visiting the chapel in their cloister was sufficient.

Great Jubilee Year 2000

John Paul II announced a Great Jubilee for the year 2000, the beginning of the Third Millennium, with the Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (As the Third Millennium approaches) of November 10, 1994. In this letter he called for a three-year preparation period – the first year 1997 dedicated to meditation on Jesus, the second to the Holy Spirit and the third to God the Father – eventually leading up to the opening of the Great Jubilee in December 1999. Besides the Basilicas in Rome shrines worldwide were designated to obtain indulgence.

The formal convocation of the holy year came through the papal bull of indiction, *Incarnationis Mysterium* (*Mystery of the Incarnation*), on November 29, 1998. He explained that this Jubilee would be a chance to open new horizons in preaching the Kingdom of God, a time of repentance, both for individuals and for the Church as a whole. He presented the Jubilee for all Christians and for the whole world.

In contrast to previous custom, at midnight on December 24, 1999, Pope John Paul II pronounced the blessing *Urbi et Orbi* (to the city, ie. Rome and for the world). For the first time the Pope himself opened besides the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica the three Holy Doors of St. John Lateran, Mary Major and St. Paul's Outside the Walls in December and January. The fourth Holy Door – of St. Paul's Outside the Walls – was not opened until January 18, 2000, to launch the week of prayer for Christian Unity. For that celebration, the Pope planned to have an ecumenical service. So he invited leaders of all Christian religions to take part in it. Twenty-two Christian leaders accepted the invitation, along with a representative of the World Council of Churches. The opening of the Door was carried out simultaneously by the Pope, Metropolitan Athanasias, representing the Ecumenical Patriarch, and George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury. The liturgy of the day included readings from the Bible, from the Lutheran martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Russian theologian Georges Florovsky.

The Jubilee was closed by the Pope on January 6, 2001 by the closing of the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica and the promulgation of the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (Upon Entering the New Millennium). This Letter outlined Pope's vision for the future of the Church. He

appointed cardinals to close all the Holy Doors except St. Basilica's.

Shift in Emphasis

In recent times in the celebration of jubilee years in the Roman Catholic Church the emphasis has moved from the traditional notion of indulgence to spiritual renewal, faithfulness to the gospel, commitment to justice and compassion in human society, as we see for example in *Jubilaeum maximum*, by Pope Pius XII, 1949. Pope John Paul II, through the proclamation of the Jubilee Year 2000, has brought to the forefront once again the Biblical character of Jubilee Year. As Konrad Raiser observes:

The granting of indulgences, which became the central feature of the holy year, must be considered as a distortion of the original jubilee principle. More recently, the emphasis of the holy year has moved to spiritual renewal in the love of God, faithfulness to the gospel, reconciliation and commitment to justice and compassion in human society. The jubilee or holy years have often been occasions to affirm Roman Catholic integrity, notably in the year 1950 with the promulgation of the most recent mariological dogma and the encyclical *Humani generis*. It is therefore a welcome change of orientation that Pope John II in his letter to prepare the great jubilee of the year 2000 offers a full biblical explication of the jubilee concept, showing the rich and very concrete meaning of this idea in the biblical tradition.¹³

Across the World

This thrust on the justice in the Biblical jubilee tradition is reflected in the reflections of Jubilee Year 2000 in the Catholic Church across the world. In the editorial for the special issue of *Concilium 2000: Reality and Hope* the

editors of that issue, Virgilio Elizondo and Jon Sobrino, wrote that Jubilee

is above all for the poor and victims of this world, for the crucified peoples: this is the tradition of Leviticus. But we should like to add something more novel and more scandalously Christian: the salvation the poor bring to their oppressors – the tradition of the Servant of Yaweh – so that the Jubilee works in two directions. This is important if – from a historical perspective – the Jubilee is not to be reduced to aid from the North to the South (which is certainly necessary and in justice has to be given as reparation), but is also understood as aid – in humanization – from the South to the North (which is perhaps even more urgent and necessary and is certainly what will make this world change).¹⁴

In the context of the Jubilee 2000 Pedro Casaldaliga has expressed contrition and thanksgiving and hope in the form of prayer in the “Jubilee Litanies”. Its opening prayer is:

God of love, our Father, our Mother, In the midst of this humanity all of it your daughter, we who are the church of Jesus feel the need to ask your pardon and at the same time give you thanks as we complete these two thousand years of Christianity in history and in the hope of a new millennium more worthy of your heart and of humankind itself. We ask this for all those men and women who throughout these twenty Christian centuries have honoured the Gospel with their lives and perhaps even their deaths, and in the name of all the poor on the earth, for whom the gospel of your kingdom should be Good News indeed.¹⁵

In response to the proclamation of the Jubilee Year 2000 the Church in India celebrated Yesu Krist Jayanti 2000 in Bangalore from 20th to 24th September 2000. The theme of the celebration was “Towards a New Society.”¹⁶

While writing his book *A Call to Jubilee* in the context of the Great Jubilee 2000 Amaladoss calls us to be just in restitution. He points out that “the jubilee is about the poor and the restoration to them of their rightful share of God’s creation. We are not asked to be generous to them with our charity. We are asked to be just in restitution.”¹⁷

Conclusion

We have now entered into the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. In his homily for First Vespers for Divine Mercy Sunday Pope Francis has explained the reason for the jubilee year:

Here, then, is the reason for the Jubilee: because this is the time for mercy. It is the favourable time to heal wounds, a time not to be weary of meeting all those who are waiting to see and to touch with their hands the signs of the closeness of God, a time to offer everyone, everyone, the way of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The Jubilee year began with the opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica, and that of the Basilica of St. John Lateran on the following Sunday. On that day, the Doors of Mercy were also opened around the world at cathedral churches and important shrines. Throughout the year Jubilee celebrations are envisaged especially for the groups engaged in works of mercy and for those who have been shown God’s mercy. The clarion call of Pope Francis to all Christians is to take active participation in these celebrations “recognizing God’s mercy in their own local communities.”

Endnotes

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- ² Virgilio Elizondo and Jon Sobrino, "Editorial," *Concilium* 5 (1999) vii.
- ³ Plenary Indulgences obtain the remission of the penalties one's sins had merited.
- ⁴ Elsa Tamez, "The Jubilee in Judeo-Christian Tradition," *Concilium* 5 (1999) 52.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.
- ⁶ Megan McKenna, Jubilee and Stewardship or "The Sweetest Sound in all the World," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 37.4 (2000) 356.
- ⁷ Ambrose of Milan, *On Naboth*, 2, in Peter C. Phan, *Social Thought: Message of the Fathers of the Church*, vol. 20, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1984, 168.
- ⁸ John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus*, Homily II, 4, in Peter C. Phan, *Social Thought: Message of the Fathers of the Church*, vol. 20, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1984, 138.
- ⁹ Jacques Nicole, "The Jubilee: Some Christian Understandings throughout History," in Hans Ucko, ed., *The Jubilee Challenge: Utopia or Possibility*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997, 54-55.
- ¹⁰ As cited by Jacques Nicole, "The Jubilee: Some Christian Understandings throughout History," 55.
- ¹¹ For detailed treatment of plenary indulgences and crusade see "St. Thomas Aquinas on Satisfaction, Indulgences, and Crusades," in: *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 2 (1992): 74-96. <http://www.thomisme.org/images/stories/cessario/cessariocrusader-1992.pdf> accessed on 09/04/2016
- ¹² D. Holmes and B.W. Bickers, *A Short History of the Catholic Church*, London: Continuum, 2002, 100-101.
- ¹³ Konrad Raiser, "Utopia and Responsibility," in Hans Ucko, ed., *The Jubilee Challenge: Utopia or Possibility*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997, 24.
- ¹⁴ Virgilio Elizondo and Jon Sobrino, "Editorial," *Concilium* 5 (1999) viii.

¹⁵ For the full litany see Pedro Casaldaliga, "Jubilee Litanies," *Concilium* 5 (1999) 121-124.

¹⁶ For details about the celebration see Paul Puthanangadi, *Yesu Krist Jayanti: Towards a New Society*, Bangalore: National Committee Yesu Krist Jayanti 2000, 2001.

¹⁷ M. Amaladoss, *A Call to Jubilee*, Dindigul: Vaigarai, 2000, 139.