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## **A JUBILEE FOR A NEW MILLENNIUM- JUSTICE FOR EARTH AND PEOPLES OF THE LAND**

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Cosmic creation and social transformation are inextricably linked. The Spirit in whom all creatures live and move and have their being continues to bring the universe into existence. The Spirit calls people to care for their niche in creation, to care for each other, and to care for all life. In the Christian tradition, Creation and Incarnation are woven together in the biblical Jubilee Year, which serves as a periodic reminder for people to acknowledge and actively fulfill their responsibilities to God, to each other, and to all creation.

### Cosmic Genesis

In the beginning, the Creator Spirit  
envisioned the universe,  
and gave birth to the universe;  
since the beginning, the Spirit  
has been creating the universe;  
the Spirit  
has given life to the universe and  
cares for the universe;  
the Spirit  
has become part of the universe and  
enlightens the universe;  
the Spirit  
fills the universe  
with creative power  
and loving Presence.

### **A Spirit Transcendent and Immanent**

The Spirit is distinct from, yet permeates, the universe. The creative power of the Spirit continues to bring forth a cosmos in process. The universe is *sacred* and *dynamic*: it emanates from divine vision, emerges in divine presence, and is energized and enlivened by divine imagination and creative power. The universe is ever emanant, emergent and evolving, a dynamic dance of energies and elements enlivened and enhanced by divine creative love.

In this dynamic universe, people are invited—as individuals and as communities, as the integrating consciousness of creation—to care for the world and for each other. In the course of human history, people often have rejected or misunderstood this caring responsibility. As a consequence, the Earth has been harmed and the goods of the Earth have not been distributed equitably. The reign of God, initiated by Jesus, has yet to be coextensive with creation and community. The common good of humanity—and of the whole biotic community, the community of all life—frequently has been ignored. Anthropocentrism and individualism often have displaced creation care and community collaboration.

In the past and to some extent yet in the present, people have been imbued almost exclusively with a sense of God transcendent—even though Jesus, when asked to teach his Apostles to pray, told them to call God “Abba,” a term of intimate love and relationship. People also have tended to view and to relate to the natural world of their human lives as solely a place of passage, a short-term dwelling site about which they are to have little concern. They have separated creation from incarnation and redemption, negating the integral relationship between these complementary aspects of God’s action in the universe. They have misunderstood Jesus’ negation of the “world” to be a negation of the physical universe; they do not realize that he is rejecting a dominating and acquisitive way of thinking, in his time and through time, that conflicts with the emerging reign of God.

The new millennium with its Jubilee celebration offers people an opportunity to focus anew upon the vision presented by Jesus. It gives humanity a moment to envision and explore how God’s will might be done “on Earth as it is in heaven.” As a moment of participation in the Jubilee, whose principles for social and planetary transformation are outlined initially in Leviticus and later reaffirmed by Jesus in Luke’s gospel, the new millennium can inspire people to ask how the biblical Jubilee might be implemented today. The Jubilee was not just something for a past age: people must take responsibility for renewing it in their own place and time. What should the Jubilee mean in the U.S., in this part of the Earth, for peoples of the land and for all creatures?

### **The Jubilee Call**

In the bible, God instructs the people of Israel to proclaim a Jubilee, a “sabbath of sabbaths,” every fifty years. The Jubilee Year was to include sabbath year provisions, and add to them a requirement for land reform. The biblical promulgation of the Jubilee Year expressed the crucial teachings that ultimate ownership of the Earth is God’s alone, and that God expects human caretakers of God’s Earth to provide equitably for the needs of the human community and to integrate respectfully and relationally with all creatures. The celebration of Jubilee 2000 reminded Catholics that their awareness of biblical teachings about the Jubilee should challenge them to observe the Jubilee today in ways appropriate to their own era and context.

The bible describes four practices for the Jubilee Year (Cf. *Lev 25; Dt 15; Ex 23*):

- rest for the land;
- release of slaves;
- remission of debts;
- redistribution of the land.

These Jubilee observances were designed to rejuvenate the Earth and the community. The Jubilee teachings promote recognition of God's ultimate ownership of the land, and relate human trusteeship of God's Earth to care for the land and justice for the poor. People are called to use God's land and goods responsibly, and to care for that part of the land and those goods that God entrusts to them, as individuals and families, on behalf of the community as a whole.

### **Rest for the Land**

The jubilee prescription of *rest for the land* was intended to remind the ancient Israelites first, that God was the ultimate and only absolute owner of the land: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is mine, and you are but aliens who have become my tenants" (*Lev 25:23*); second, that the land needed periodic rest from the impacts of human work: "you shall not sow, nor shall you reap the aftergrowth or pick the grapes from the untrimmed vines" (*Lev 25:11*); and third, that all of God's creatures had a right to the land's produce: "you shall let the land lie untilled and unharvested, that the poor among you may eat of it and the beasts of the field may eat what the poor leave. So also shall you do in regard to your vineyard and your olive grove" (*Ex 23: 10-11*); "While the land has its sabbath, all its produce will be food...for your livestock and for the wild animals on your land" (*Lev 25:7*). All of these practices enabled the land to rest, and its "volunteer crops" to be enjoyed by all of the creatures in its regional ecosystem.

The practice of rest for the land reminds the people that the Earth is God's and that they should respect and care for God's creation and God's creatures. This observance required that the land not be sown or harvested during the Jubilee Year. It reminded people to have faith that God would care for them just as God had done in the wilderness years, when God's Earth provided for their needs. They were to rely on God to provide for their needs from the end of the sixth year's harvest until the harvest at the end of the first year of the next cycle of years. Wildlife and domestic animals were not to be chased from the farmer's fields: the farmer has no exclusive ownership in land, and all creatures have a right to provide for their needs from the Earth's bounty. The prescription meant also that the Earth has a right to rest, as do people. In a practical sense, this meant that farmers would not overwork the land, which would be detrimental to their self-interest; but it meant also that they should recognize that God calls all the Earth "good" in itself, not just because it helps to provide for humanity.

### **Release of Slaves**

The Jubilee Year required *release of slaves*: "This fiftieth year you shall make sacred by proclaiming liberty in the land for all its inhabitants" (*Lev 25:10*). Slavery was an important economic benefit for the slaveholders, who had to recompense their workers with little more than food, clothing and shelter for their survival and reproduction. Slaves in Israel were to be treated with respect, but that did not eliminate the demeaning nature of their social status, nor their lack of opportunity to have a family and an occupation of

their own choosing. In the Jubilee, people who were constrained to provide economic benefits solely for others were to be freed and given the right to use their labor to provide for themselves. Community members were to help their neighbors both by negating the circumstances—health, natural disasters, personal shortcomings—that had brought them to slavery, and by amending the economic policies and social practices that maintained them there.

### **Remission of Debts**

The Jubilee Year prescribed *remission of debts*: “At the end of every seven-year period you shall have a relaxation of debts, which shall be observed as follows: every creditor shall relax his claim on what he has loaned his neighbor....” (*Dt* 15:1-2). This Jubilee teaching suggests a redistribution of wealth: those who had most benefited from the combination of their own talents and the laws of their economic structures should give back to those who had experienced economic hardship, an opportunity for a financial comeback and a renewed stake in society. The remission requirement urges the members of the community to practice economic compassion and to promote economic renewal. Those who would benefit most from this requirement would be the people with the least financial resources, who had little or no hope of paying their creditors. Freed from their immediate economic burden, they would be enabled to start over and use their abilities to benefit primarily themselves and their families.

### **Redistribution of the Land**

The Jubilee Year required *redistribution of the land*: “It shall be a jubilee for you, when every one of you shall return to his own property, every one to his own family estate” (*Lev* 25:10). People were to receive back, from those who had bought their family homestead, their ancestral property—free of all encumbrances. The intent of this requirement was to prevent the land base of Israel from being consolidated into the hands of one or a few large landholders. If the land were not periodically redistributed, social and natural wealth would be controlled by a wealthy minority, to the detriment of the community as a whole. The landholders would decide how the land should be used, and how much of it was to be dedicated to the (sometimes selfish) interests of property owners and how much to the needs of the people as a whole. Concentrated ownership would violate Israel’s religious understanding that the Earth is primarily and ultimately God’s, secondarily a community good, and lastly a private benefit. The Jubilee taught that individual families were to earn their livelihood by working with the Earth, in conjunction with working for the well-being of the community. The redistribution of land every fifty years would mean that even those whose family had owned the agricultural land that was least productive and therefore least economically viable would receive it back if it had been sold, and have an opportunity to start over again with their restored land as their economic base; and those with the most productive land would not be able to use its natural wealth as a source of power to control the lives and future of all the people.

### **Jesus and the Jubilee**

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus calls for a Jubilee Year, a “year of favor from the Lord” (*Is* 61: 1-2) while teaching in his home town synagogue in Nazareth (*Lk* 4). As Isaiah and Jesus indicate, the Jubilee is indeed “good news for the poor.” A person in the worst economic situation, in which they had lost the family farm, overworked it, gone into debt trying to save it, and become a slave when unable to pay their debt or even to obtain food and shelter, would be extraordinarily exhilarated when the Jubilee was observed. They would

get back the family homestead, it would rest for a year to be rejuvenated, debts that encumbered the land and burdened themselves would be cancelled, and they could work the land as free people. Obviously, the poor of the land would be lifted up again, while the rich who lost land, slaves and debt servicing would be unhappy. Jesus called for the Jubilee. He declared that it was time for the Jubilee and that justice required its promulgation.

### **A New Jubilee**

Jesus asks his followers to be the leaven extending the reign of God throughout the Earth. This means eliminating those aspects of human life and culture, those problems and injustices of any historical moment, which contradict principles expressed in Christian social ideals. Participation in the reign of God is expressed in the implementation of contemporary expressions of the Jubilee Year. The Jubilee celebration in the year 2000 marked the beginning of the third millennium of the Christian era. What vision for a transformed Earth might people formulate and enact in this time and place, as they seek to care for creation and to benefit future generations of humans and other members of the biotic community?

1. *Rest for the land* would be implemented by *responsible care for the ecosystem entrusted by God to human care*. People would see their region as a commons, as their common dwelling and as the provider of the natural goods needed by all members of the community of life. Natural habitats would be conserved and restored. Mining operations would be carefully controlled, and prohibited when they polluted the Earth solely to gain metals, such as gold, used primarily for adornment. Mined and forested lands would be restored. Agricultural lands, of course, could not all be rested simultaneously: this would result in global starvation and loss of family livelihood; but appropriate crop rotations and rest for selected parts of the farm, practices in which most family farmers are today actively engaged, would fulfill the spirit of the Jubilee requirement.

2. *Release for slaves* would be implemented as *freedom for the poor of the land*. People would be conscious of their particular responsibility for the poor, and promote policies and activities guided by the “option for the poor” advocated by Latin American bishops in their “Puebla Document” and affirmed in the U.S. bishops’ economic pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All*, which states: “*All members of society have a special obligation to the poor and vulnerable....As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental ‘option for the poor’—to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to assess lifestyles, policies and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor.*” (§16) Although slavery in the U.S. has long been illegal, unemployed and low-income working people in the new millennium and across the nation have suffered economic deprivation and poverty parallel to that experienced by slaves in earlier times and places. God intended a universal destination—an equitable distribution—of the goods God provided for human use. Compassion for the most vulnerable in our society, and legislative actions taken to enable them to live with dignity and to secure the necessities of life, would parallel the jubilee concern for the well-being of slaves.

3. *Remission of debts* would be implemented by an *economic restructuring based on the needs of the poor*. This would require an analysis of U.S. economic structures in terms of their impacts on the poor and vulnerable among us. The U.S. economic system is built in part on borrowing and lending money. Equitable financial arrangements among borrowers and lenders, just interest rates, fair renegotiation of oppressive existing loans, and cancellation of some debts (of U.S. family farm owner-operators, and of citizens of Third World nations, for example), as appropriate, would parallel the cancellation of debts required in the biblical Jubilee.

4. *Redistribution of land* would be implemented by a *just redistribution of the land and water and the rights pertaining to each, to benefit the common good*. This would require a reevaluation of patterns and practices of land ownership in the U.S., and laws and policies related to them, in the light of the common good and the needs of the commons. Land ownership could be redistributed through a progressive land tax and progressive inheritance laws, and provision of low-interest loans to actual and potential owner-operators of family farms. Key naturally occurring goods ('resources') such as oil would become public property, whose extraction would be licensed to responsible corporations and cooperatives. Agricultural, industrial and commercial cooperatives would be initiated and maintained.

Were the Jubilee to be observed—and it need not be remembered only every fifty years—people would take steps to restore relationships among themselves, and between themselves, the Earth and all Earth's inhabitants. When people rest the land and invite free and domestic animals to partake of its bounty, they are in some sense reenacting the idealized relationship of people, all creatures, the Earth and God expressed in the story of the Garden of Eden (*Gn 2*). When people free economic slaves and forgive debts, they give priority to compassion over profit, and they progress beyond financial practices focused on profits over people, which is characteristic of some economic systems. When people redistribute land equitably in communal or private holdings, they acknowledge that God, the Earth's Creator, wills that all people have the opportunity to care for and live from the Earth's bounty. The practice of the Jubilee, if its ideals were to be extended throughout the world and appropriately adapted to differences of culture and place, gradually would lead people toward providing a context for the reign of God to be fulfilled in a new Earth.

#### **Care for the Common Good and the Good of the Commons**

Regional bishops have issued pastoral letters offering guiding principles or points of understanding to promote the well-being of human communities and their Earth home. Recently, the Catholic bishops in the bioregion of the Columbia River Watershed in the Northwestern U.S. and Southwestern Canada issued a pastoral letter on the ethics, economics and ecology of the river region: *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good* (2001). In their letter they noted seven "Convictions that Underscore the Need to Care for the Earth":

\*God is the Creator of the universe and maintains its existence through an ongoing creative will.

- \*God's presence is discernible in all creation.
- \*God has blessed and called 'very good' all that is created.
- \*God loves the community of life.
- \*God's creatures share a common home.
- \*God entrusts the earth to human care. People are stewards of God's world.
- \*God intends the earth's goods to be equitably shared.

These convictions express and reinforce fundamental attitudes toward creation, and have a significance far beyond the region in which they were promulgated. If people were to live according to their tenets, the Earth and all creatures would be integrated into connected and balanced ecosystems: social and ecological settings where the common good of humanity and of all creatures of the commons would be sought.

### **Creation Care is not "Elitism"**

It is not "elitist" to care for creation; it is a primary human responsibility. Elitism emerges when either a use of creation or efforts to impede responsible uses of creation are undertaken to benefit oneself or one's social group, or to exclude humans or other creatures who need natural goods provided by the Earth in a particular place. "Need" is a key concept here. When people view humanity as part of nature, and seek to meet human needs while respecting the ecological needs of nature, they are not elitists; rather, they are community-conscious caretakers of creation.

An exclusivist type of "land elitism" is evident today. Some try to remove all lands from human use, without regard for human needs, without reflection on their own use of Earth's goods, without respecting others' employment needs and without objectively reviewing even ecologically responsible proposals and plans. Their attitude contradicts the biblical teaching that people can responsibly work with the Earth to meet their needs, even while their perspective promotes another biblical mandate, to care for creation.

An exclusivist "property elitism" is also evident. Some try to dedicate all lands to human use, with that 'use' usually defined by how they want it to be a private, personal benefit for themselves, rather than a good for all people; they do not respect public lands as a public good, but rather seek to privatize the public good; they exploit and dominate Earth and nonhuman members of the biotic community; they disrupt animal habitat; and some even threaten government workers trying to protect public lands on behalf of the biotic community and of all citizens. These attitudes and actions, while expressing concern for the civil right to private property, contradict the biblical and natural law teachings that God intends Earth's goods to meet the needs of all people and other living beings, and that God calls people to responsible care for creation.

Christian teachings declare that employment provision *and* environmental conservation are complementary, not exclusive, and that humans are a part of the natural world *and* responsible to God and community to care for it. Humans may *use* Earth's goods to meet their needs, but not *abuse* Earth's goods to satisfy their wants. Private property is a civil good that must be integrated with public property as a common good; in the natural law tradition, common needs take precedence over individual wants, and property holdings—whether in land, water or any of Earth's elements and energies—are all part of God's creation and are intended to meet community needs first, before any individual appropriation. When the community benefits then all

individuals, as members of the community, also benefit. When solely an individual benefits, the community can suffer.

### **A Sacramental Universe**

In their environmental pastoral letter *Renewing the Earth* (1991), the U.S. bishops teach that God's creation is a "sacramental universe," a "world that discloses the Creator's presence by visible and tangible signs." In that expression, the bishops reflect an idea of Augustine in the fifth century that there are uncountable sacraments in the world, aspects of creation that can draw people to God, their Creator. Augustine's understanding reflects well the passage in *Wisdom* that "from the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen" (13:5).

The universe and its local places, then, are *sacramental*. The cosmos as an integrated whole and in each of its parts can truly be a sign of God's creativity, a revelation of God's presence; an occasion of grace and conveyor of God's blessing; and a bearer of sacred creatures, all blessed by God as 'good'.

The understanding of a sacramental universe complements current Catholic Church teachings on the seven sacraments; both relate to Church and biblical traditions. The Church's seven rituals designated "sacraments" mediate, usually through the actions of a priest, the active, engaging, grace-giving Presence of God in a special way and moment. The universe, God's creation permeated by God immanent, mediates—becomes the occasion of, the means through which—the active, engaging, grace-giving Presence of God experienced in limitless ways and moments. The sacramental universe, as a whole and in each of its parts, is a mediation of God's immanence.

The Church's sacraments, instituted by Christ, the historical Word, are signs of God's graceful Presence; and creation is sacramental, a sign of the eternal Word's cosmic creative Presence, activity and guidance. The Word remains in creation as its activating Presence, principle and power. Thus, the work of Christ Jesus, God and Man, is expressed sacramentally in two ways: through the Church—which carries on the teachings of Christ and the grace-conferring activity of Jesus, the Word made flesh, through the seven sacraments—in its teachings and practices; and through creation—which carries on the creative activity of the Word begun prior to the Word's incarnation in the historical Jesus—in its evolutionary processes.

### **A Sacramental Commons**

In biblical teachings and the Christian tradition the Earth is a *commons*, a shared sacred space and a source of the goods required to meet living creatures' needs. This commons is not for humans alone, although as part of nature they share in it. The Earth is intended by God to provide for all of God's creatures as they live in ecological relation, in complex and at times distinct and diverse ecosystems. Complementarily, scientific studies have stimulated increased respect for the work of God and enhanced appreciation for creation's intricately related biotic communities inhabited by incredibly diverse and complex species. Scientific data and spiritual awareness should help people to extend the use of the term "sustainable" to include not just an organized and integrated system of community economic viability, but also a context of inherent ecosystem integrity.

The “sacramental universe” is localized in the “sacramental commons.” When people view a place as *sacramental*, it can reveal to them God’s loving creativity in its diversity of creatures, in its varied topography, in its distinct peoples, and in its ability to provide food and shelter for its inhabitants. The eyes of faith can see signs of the Spirit in the book of nature, signs that complement the understandings of God revealed in the books of the bible. Each place is naturally a *commons*: a home shared by all the members of the community of life where their respective food and habitat needs are integrated, where their competitive needs are balanced, and where their relationships are collaborative.

The bible teaches that human property and goods are part of a human commons. In *Acts*, for example, members of the early Christian community in Jerusalem “had all things in common” (2:44) “in order that everyone’s needs would be met.” People are called to see the Earth as a *global commons*, a shared home providing for all creatures, and to see private property as part of a *community commons*, whose benefits are to be distributed justly to meet human needs. Pope Paul VI taught in *Populorum Progressio* that “private property does not constitute for anyone an absolute or unconditioned right...the right to property must never be exercised to the detriment of the common good.” Pope John Paul II emphasized this point toward the beginning of his pontificate, in Cuilapán, Mexico in 1979, when he declared that “private property always carries with it a social mortgage”; he reiterated this teaching in his 1987 encyclical *On Social Concern* (§42).

People share with other creatures common origins both from God’s creativity and in the expanding singularity whose elements and energy all living beings embody. Humans are but one species among a multitude of living organisms that inhabit the Earth. Christian tradition teaches that people, as images of God, have a particular responsibility to care well for God’s creation. Acceptance of this role in creation should not lead to anthropocentric arrogance. Rather, as people study the land, air and water and become aware of other members of the biotic community through scientific discoveries and the traditions and insights of regional peoples of the land, they come to know of the interrelatedness of all life, and of living beings’ dependence on the integration within their local commons. The concepts “web of life” and “circle of life” describe interrelated beings. People now know more than before—and have much still to learn—about the sometimes delicate associations they have with other creatures of God. People depend sometimes on the sacrifices of other creatures’ lives to meet their needs. These sacrifices should not be taken lightly nor unnecessarily.

People are part of a community of life, a family of God’s creatures. As such, they should enhance their relations not only with members of human communities from distinct ethnic groups, social classes, political ideologies and religious beliefs, but also with other lives and with the landscapes that all inhabit together and on which all depend for their needs. All species share a common origin in the creative acts of God that began in the primordial moment and continue to unfold among and around them, and all creatures share as well a common bond as participants in the dynamics of the Earth.

People, like God who transcends and yet is present to creation, should be solicitous of the wondrous works of God: the Earth and the Earth’s inhabitants. Creation is *sacred* because it is from God and reveals God. The Earth is a sign of God’s presence and the context of human life, and in that sense is like a natural “sacrament” for people and a “commons” for all God’s creatures. Sacramental moments are occasions of

grace revealing God's presence among us. The whole of creation can be sacramental for the person of faith: the beauty of a mountain lake, a flowing river, a flourishing old forest, a farm well-integrated with its Earth setting, all can lead minds and spirits to acknowledge the presence of God.

At this dawn of the new millennium, people should look at the spiritual meaning of 'sacramental' and the social meaning of 'commons' and apply them jointly to restore and conserve ecologically integrated regions. People must appreciate and advocate consciousness of the sacramental commons, the locus of God's interactive presence. In this commons they should care for God's creation, celebrate the diversity of life, earn their livelihood responsibly, and equitably share common goods. Plants and animals, fish and birds, should be able to dwell in the habitat they require for their well-being and relate to each other and to people in ecological balance.

Earth is a commons, the home and habitat and provider whose benefits humans share with all creatures. In the commons, as people share in its bountiful benefits to meet their needs, they must be conscious of and act for the common good not only of human beings but of all of God's creatures. They must care for the common good and the good of the commons.

The concept of the *common good* usually has been used to express a religious or political concern to meet human needs. In the integration of the needs of the global commons and the community commons, the concept of the common good might be extended to include the needs of all of God's creatures, since all share in God's blessing and depend on the bounty and health of a common ecosystem.

### **Family Farmers in the Commons**

In agriculture, the Jubilee prescriptions and the understandings of a sacramental universe and a sacramental commons come together in a unique way. Family farmers were especially singled out for recognition in the biblical Jubilee Year, not just because agriculture was the predominant occupation of the time, but also because food for family and community was an essential need and issue. No matter what technological developments might occur in a society, farming will remain the most important occupation; no one can survive without food. Agriculturalists (who, as Wendell Berry has pointed out, are distinct from agribusinesspeople) should be enabled to work well with the community commons that they have "socially mortgaged" from the community as a whole.

In order to care for that part of creation entrusted to their care, owner-operator family farmers must receive, as should all people, a living wage for their work: prices for their goods that cover land and production costs, support their family, and offer modest security for the future. Moderate-sized family farms should be promoted. Organic food and production processes should be fostered, and conservation techniques utilized. Agribusiness corporations should not dictate what farmers produce, nor how they produce it, nor what price they receive for their product. Government policies should promote family agriculture, and prohibit the non-family corporatization of agriculture.

If owner-operator family farms were to become the norm in the U.S. and abroad, then agricultural goods would be healthier and safer, rural communities and economies would be revitalized, the land would be conserved and restored, and the commons would bloom for all creatures.

### **Native Peoples of the Earth**

In the U.S. and other parts of the world, physical and cultural genocide against native peoples has caused not only the disappearance of distinct human communities, but also a diminished respect for the Earth. Church efforts are underway to support native peoples and to affirm the spirituality of nature which they offer. Pope John Paul II declared to native peoples during his visit to Phoenix, Arizona:

I encourage you as native people belonging to the different tribes and nations in the east, south, west and north, to preserve and keep alive your cultures, your languages, the values of customs which have served you well in the past. We should all be grateful for the growing unity, presence, voice and leadership of Catholic Native Americans in the Church today.

The U.S. bishops issued a complementary statement: *1992: A Time for Reconciling and Recommitting Ourselves as a People -- Pastoral Reflections on the V Centenary and Native American People*. It incorporates an important aspect of Native American traditions: the relationship between the Earth and spirituality (implicitly recognizing that native religions embody much of the respect for creation proclaimed by Catholic Church documents). The bishops recognize the importance of native traditions, and after apologizing for the harsh treatment of native peoples in the past, including by misguided missionaries, they point out that

...the coming of religious faith in this land began not 500 years ago, but centuries before in the prayers, chants, dance and other sacred celebrations of Native people.

The bishops call for remembering native peoples' sufferings from the past; reconciliation between Native- and Euro-Americans, "a genuine reconciliation between the essential traditions of Catholic faith and the best of the traditions of Native American life, each respecting, shaping and enriching the other"; and recommitment on the part of the church to Native Americans, "to stand with native peoples in their search for greater justice in our society." Regarding treaty rights, the bishops declare that

We also renew our commitment to press for justice in the prompt and fair adjudication of treaty rights....Native Americans have the right to be self-determining, to decide the ways their land and natural resources on those lands are used for the benefit of their people and for the broader common good.

These statements indicate a heightened respect, on the part of Church leaders, for non-Christian and non-Western cultures and spirituality. The recognition of traditional indigenous faith, in particular, marks a profound shift from earlier Christian missionary attitudes toward and practices in indigenous communities of the Americas.

## Steps Toward a Renewed Earth

The New Jubilee can become a reality if progressive steps are taken to bring it into being:

1. *Social analysis*: careful assessment of the social and political structures, policies and practices that justify: disparities between rich and poor; lack of basic necessities for the poor; unavailability of good jobs at living wages and in safe and healthy work environments for working people; consolidation of agricultural lands and value-added enterprises into the hands of agribusiness giants; increasing ownership of industrial and commercial enterprises by corporate giants evading at least the spirit if not the letter of monopoly laws; estate tax laws that solidify control of wealth and land in the hands of a few; elevation of individualism and competition over community and collaboration; and pollution of the air, land and water needed for healthy human communities and healthy ecosystems for all creatures.
2. *Spiritual reflection*: remembrance of the ideals for creation and community presented in the bible and in the Christian tradition, and an analysis in faith of the ways in which the current social and ecological situation contradicts those religious ideals.
3. *Social vision*: imaginative projection of a spiritually, socially and ecologically transformed Earth, in which human communities are integrated into and enhance local ecosystems while meeting human needs and promoting the common good and the good of the commons; imaginative vision of people guided by engagement with the immanent Spirit, revealing in their lives and works God's compassionate concern for creation and community.
4. *Social project*: engagement in practical, collaborative efforts to restore community and creation, to effect a congruence between social vision and social reality, while patiently realizing that intermediate goals leading toward a transformed Earth, a restored and conserved local commons, and renewed communities with productive employment and family agriculture must be developed cooperatively and implemented collaboratively.

The occasion of a new millennium should prompt people to assess their attitudes and actions toward the Earth and each other. It should provide a spiritual, intellectual, social and ecological context for a new dedication to working for the coming of the reign of God. The Jubilee Year provides a particular point of reference for peoples of the land, especially those involved in agriculture.

Conscious of the presence of the Spirit and of our responsibilities to serve creation and community, to act for the good of the commons and the common good, let us go forth with the Spirit to proclaim the Jubilee and renew the Earth.

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