

About this Issue: The Ongoing Need for Liberation as the Jubilee Year 2025 passes

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In commemoration of the Jubilee Year 2025, Pope Francis published the papal bull *Spes non confundit* on 9 May 2024. Taking inspiration from Paul's letter to the Romans 5:5, the papal bull reminds the faithful to become "pilgrims of hope" amidst the various crises happening in the world today. In this regard, Pope Francis sees how Christian love is being tested with patience for a better future, thus reinvigorating the theological virtue of hope. The papal bull highlights "the tragedy of war", "*the loss of the desire to transmit life*", and the need to establish "*a social covenant to support and foster hope*" for prisoners, the sick, the youth, migrants, exiles, displaced persons and refugees, the elderly, and the poor, and the unjust "ecological debt" between the Global North and Global South as key issues that require immediate response (SNC n. 7-16). These matters reveal the different faces of the marginalized who are struggling in a world that is increasingly filled with uncertainties, hardships, and violence, making peace an elusive goal to achieve.

Rooted in the biblical custom of sanctifying the 50th year through debt cancellation, freeing the captives, and return of property to its original owners (Lev 25:8-54), the Christian practice of the Jubilee Year was first instituted by Pope Boniface VIII in 1300, calling it a Holy Year of pilgrimage, grace, reconciliation, and forgiveness (SNC n. 5). The economic terms of debt and redemption are intrinsically linked to the theological expressions of sin and forgiveness. While a naive dualistic mindset views a rigid material-spiritual distinction between these fields, a holistic understanding of the Jubilee Year demonstrates the integral restoration of one's relationship with God and fellow neighbor. This biblical practice allows the

world to rest by cancelling encumbering legal obligations. It resets the once broken relationships as part of the whole divine economy. The Jubilee Year is thus the *kairos* of God's mercy for it institutionalizes redemption from debt and forgiveness of sins.

The Jubilee Year is a call for social justice. When Pope John Paul II proclaimed the Great Jubilee Year 2000 through the papal bull *Incarnationis mysterium* on 29 November 1998, he called the attention of global financial institutions to provide debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC). Thanks to Paul Valley's advocacy as early as 1990, the practice of debt cancellation gained widespread support, later aligning it with the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals.¹ It benefited heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC), mostly from Africa, through debt restructuring. Despite these efforts, emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs) have rapidly accumulated large and broad amounts of debt, leading to what economists describe as the "fourth wave" of debt since 2010.² Although Pope Francis reiterates the call for debt cancellation, the 'globalization of indifference' epitomized by the neo-liberal economic system's prioritization of the private over the commons shows the immediate necessity to push for global financial and structural reforms. Until these changes happen, the cycle of indebtedness among poor countries, thus poverty, will remain.

Referencing the Jubilee Year's practice of debt cancellation, Jeffrey Sachs wrote in 2005, "Today, we can invoke the same logic to declare that extreme poverty can be ended not in the time of our grandchildren, but in *our*

¹ Paul Valley, *Bad Samaritans: First World Ethics and Third World Debt* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990).

² M. Ayhan Kose, Peter Nagle, Franziska Ohnsorge, and Naotaka Sugawara, *Global Waves of Debt: Causes and Consequences* (Washington D.C.: World Bank Group, 2021), 149-167.

time. The wealth of the rich world, the power of today's vast storehouses of knowledge, and the declining fraction of the world that needs help to escape from poverty all make the end of poverty a realistic possibility by the year 2025.”³ The vision to eradicate poverty has been programmatically incorporated into the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are set to be achieved by 2030. However, geopolitical tensions, especially in recent years, have created an environment that is uncondusive to promoting cooperation and mutual prosperity. This dire situation has thus put the full realization of the UN SDGs in jeopardy.

This cycle of financial indebtedness is mirrored by a moral indebtedness to the military-industrial complex, as evidenced by the record-high \$2.7 trillion in global military spending according to a UN report.⁴ Populist governments have reinforced a climate of fear through the politics of national security. In addition to ongoing conflicts in Myanmar, Ukraine, Palestine, Sudan, and Congo, Venezuela and Iran have emerged as new sites of military flashpoints and civil unrest. In the United States, the Trump administration has galvanized its Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to deport undocumented immigrants, sparking mass protests and violence that have even affected American citizens. These events reflect the global erosion of liberal democracy, raising questions about whether the State, as a political body, can continue to guarantee human rights, freedom, justice, and peace.

Having stated the tumultuous global situation during the Jubilee Year 2025, the five articles of *MST Review* 27,

³ Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for our Time* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), 3.

⁴ United Nations, *The Security We Need: Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future*, Report of the Secretary-General (New York: United Nations, 2025), 6.

no. 2 reflect on the social and ethical themes of community resistance to extractivism through integral ecology, God's favor in the poor, the dynamics of synodality, the ethical dimensions of divorce and marital relations, and democratic citizenship.

First, Alvenio G. Mozol Jr.'s *Extractivism and Survival: Community Resistance through Integral Ecology* discusses how extractivism has destroyed local communities to become 'sacrifice zones' in the name of profit through slow violence. Following Urie Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework, Mozol's study analyzes the multi-systemic impact of corporate exploitation of nature, ranging from the deep-microsystem of a person (tissues, cells, biochemistry, psychology), which is intertwined with the microsystem of the family (domestic relations, interactions), the community mesosystem (places and contacts away from home), the institutional exosystems (social structures and institutions), the broad cultural macrosystem (overarching cultural values, economic systems, and ideological frameworks), and the long-term chronosystems. Apart from citing concrete examples of devastating mining practices from the Philippines, Colombia, and Ecuador, the paper demonstrates how grassroots communities become conscientized by organizing collective resistance against environmentally destructive corporations and government policies. Inspired by Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*, Mozol's paper thus demonstrates how community resistance is reinforced through integral ecology as a framework for fighting extractivism's systemic violence to transform sacrifice zones into sites of renewal.

Second, Joenel Buencibello's article, *The Mystery of Divine Predilection and the Preferential Option for the Poor in Matthew 20:1-16*, examines how God's favor for the poor is articulated in the biblical parable of the workers in the vineyard. The study places this scriptural

theme in dialogue with two distinct theological frameworks: Thomistic scholastic theology, grounded in metaphysical reflection on divine predilection, and liberation theology, rooted in socio-political and historical praxis through preferential option for the poor. By comparing these approaches, Buencibello demonstrates that God's love for the poor is neither arbitrary nor unjust but a manifestation of divine generosity that transcends human calculations of merit. Despite the apparent ambiguity of the Gospel narrative, the article argues that divine predilection ultimately serves justice by affirming God's freedom to bestow grace in ways that uphold both compassion and equity.

Third, Wilfried Vanhoutte's research, *Nicholas of Cusa on Peace of Faith: A Foundational Framework for Synodality?*, explores the relevance of Nicholas of Cusa's key philosophical-theological concepts of *docta ignorantia* and *coincidentia oppositorum* as constructive resources for contemporary synodal practice. Situating the discussion within the historical context of the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Vanhoutte examines *De pace fidei* as Nicholas of Cusa's theological response to the urgent need for dialogue and peaceful coexistence among diverse religious traditions. Against this backdrop of political fragmentation and interreligious conflict, the article argues that Cusanus' vision of unity-in-difference offers a foundational framework for synodality, one that embraces epistemic humility and reconciliation of opposites to enable genuine communal discernment and ecclesial dialogue.

Fourth, Joshua Jose R. Ocon's article, *Discoursing Divorce: Three Ethical Readings on the Subject of Divorce*, offers a sustained ethical analysis of marital dissolution through the lenses of Thomistic natural law, Kantian deontology, and Habermasian discourse ethics, with particular attention to the Philippine context where

divorce remains legally prohibited. Framing divorce not merely as a juridical concern but as a deeply ethical issue shaped by Catholic moral influence, Ocon examines how natural law prioritizes the indissolubility of marriage in view of procreation and the common good, while allowing limited prudential accommodations in cases of grave harm. He then contrasts this with Kant's contractual understanding of marriage, which foregrounds personal dignity and autonomy, thereby permitting divorce when the marital bond becomes a site of instrumentalization or abuse. Finally, drawing on Habermas, Ocon argues for discourse ethics as a mediating framework that emphasizes inclusive, rational, and non-coercive consensus-building, especially attentive to marginalized voices affected by the absence of divorce legislation. The article concludes that ethical deliberation on divorce in the Philippines must move beyond polarized legal and religious positions toward a dialogical process capable of addressing human dignity, social justice, and moral pluralism.

Lastly, Francis Aung Thang Shane's *A Plea for an Ethics of Citizenship: Inviting the Catholic Church to Respond to the Democratic Deficit in Southeast Asia* reflects on the growing repressive political systems in the region. While Catholic Social Teaching (CST) promotes the principles of human dignity, the common good, solidarity, and subsidiarity, Shane argues that it lacks clear guidance regarding citizenship in politically constrained contexts. In response, the article proposes a virtue-inspired citizenship affecting political, economic, cultural, and ecological life based on CST's moral anthropology to make the faithful capable citizens of renewing democracy. To implement this, the author suggests five strategies of political literacy, lay empowerment, interreligious collaboration, prophetic witness, and

internal reform to frame citizenship as a profound ecclesial vocation and responsibility.

The articles in this issue respond to the Jubilee Year's 'signs of the times' by proposing ways to defuse tensions and reset broken relationships. On the day before he died, Pope Francis gave his Easter *Urbi et Orbi* message, appealing to political leaders to be responsible in creating “weapons’ of peace: weapons that build the future, instead of sowing seeds of death.”⁵ Pope Francis’s clamor for peace was reiterated by Pope Leo XIV during his election, emphasizing that the peace of the risen Christ is “A peace that is unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering.”⁶ Although the Jubilee Year 2025 has passed with many opportunities for global reform missed, the call for just and lasting peace through liberation and social-structural change remains immediate. May these insights thus inspire and strengthen our relationship in the resurrected Christ to walk together (i.e., synodality) to a future where the globalization of indifference is finally overcome by the audacity of hope.

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⁵ Francis, *Urbi et Orbi Message of His Holiness Pope Francis*, 20 April 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/urbi/documents/20250420-urbi-et-orbi-pasqua.html> [accessed 30 December 2025].

⁶ Leo XIV, *First Blessing “Urbi et Orbi” of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV*, 8 May 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/urbi/documents/20250508-prima-benedizione-urbietorbi.html> [accessed 30 December 2025].