

## HOLY YEAR 1975

### Introduction

#### Reconciliation and Renewal

On May 9, 1973, Pope Paul VI announced a Holy Year in 1975, with the plenary Indulgence to begin at the local church level throughout the world on Pentecost Sunday, June 10, 1973. The theme which gives focus to the traditional modes of penance and expiation is Renewal and Reconciliation, with a definite bent, compared to the 1950 Holy Year, toward the social. Pope Paul spoke of reconciliation as flowing from a "personal and interior renewal" and resulting in a "virtue of reconciliation in charity and justice with man" and "within the ecclesial community itself, in society, in the relations among nations, in ecumenism, in the sphere of peace." In his announcement the Pope noted that the Holy Year falls on the 10th anniversary of Vatican II and grounded the celebrations in history by saying they will be a "renewing in her spiritual vibrations of years and centuries of her past history and bringing back the tide of renewal of the recent Council." He urged that the Holy Year be taken with utmost seriousness; "It does not concern a fleeting moment of our journey in time; it concerns an orientation of modern life at the end of this 20th century." The Holy Year of 1975 will be for the Catholic layman a way of appropriating and celebrating the fundamental directions laid out for the Church in themes of Reconciliation and Renewal.

### History

#### Origin of the Holy Year

Although the dates are known, the origins of the first Holy Year are obscure. It seems that Pope Boniface VIII, in January 1300, responded to a popular expectation of special religious benefits in a centennial year and proclaimed a special Indulgence for all who visited the Basilica of St. Peter a certain number of times during that year. Succeeding Popes shortened the term to 50 years, then 33, and finally 25, giving as reasons their desire that every Christian might in his adulthood experience a Holy Year, or again, that the peril of the Muslim advance demanded penance by all Christians "to arrest the chastening hand of God." Except when prevented by political turmoil in the 19th century, Holy Years have been proclaimed every 25 years from 1450 to the present.

#### The Holy Door

The opening of the Holy Door on the previous Christmas Eve became the central symbolic event in 1500. This event occurs simultaneously in the four basilicas of Rome subsequently included in the list of required visits St. Peter's, St. Paul's, St. John Lateran, and St. Mary Major where in each a door normally bricked shut is struck three times with a silver hammer and caused to collapse. The Pope himself wields the hammer at St. Peter's, and he delegates cardinals at the other basilicas. During the Holy Year these Holy Doors (or Golden Doors) are open continually to the streams of pilgrims and then are resealed on the following Christmas Eve.

#### Rome at the Center

In its first three centuries the Holy Year was an important instrument for reestablishing Rome as the Church's symbolic center, suppressing political conflict in and around the papacy, and providing a practical communications "glue" for the world ecclesial system. It was used by Nicholas of Cusa in the 15th Century as a vehicle for preaching reform of the Orders in Germany. After Pope Alexander VI made the Jubilee Indulgence of 1500 available to all the world, contingent on payment of certain tariffs toward the defense of the faith, the Holy Year became synonymous with the whole Indulgence system which drew the attacks of the Protestant movement and the CounterReformation. The central importance of the Holy Year waned in the 17th and 18th centuries; it was suspended in 1800, 1850, and 1875 and then entered the 20<sup>th</sup> century in 1900 closer to its original form of being a vehicle for personal spiritual renewal and social repentance. Pope Pius XII likened Holy Year 1950 to the Lourdes and Fatima pilgrimages, which had assumed mass proportions, and emphasized the theme of Penance, calling the

pilgrimage to Rome an "act of reparation and expiation for the sins of the world."

## Symbolism

### The Jubilee Year

More than the theology of Indulgences, which provides its rationale, it is the vast network of symbolism drawn to a knot in the Jubilee concept and in the Holy Door ceremonies that infuses the Holy Year with continuing power, even beyond the Church. The word Jubilee derives from the Hebrew for ram's horn; such a horn was blown to signal the beginning of the year of Jubilee in postexilic. The Jubilee Israel (also used to bring down Jericho's walls!). The Jubilee year occurred after 49 years (7 X 7, the sabbath of the sabbath) and was a time for the remitting of debts among fellow Jews and freeing of Jewish slaves (Lev. 25: 8ff). (Similarly, Pentecost, the fiftieth day or seventh Sabbath day after Passover, held special symbolic power.) The Jubilee year had been a time of social renewal and setting to rights and so came to be associated with the plenary Indulgence of Holy Year, itself understood as a general pardon available freely to all who chose to participate. Other symbols used to emphasize the mercy of the Indulgence include Moses striking the rock to release streams of water, Joseph welcoming his brothers in Egypt, and Ganymede, cupbearer to the gods, pouring ambrosia for the Olympians.

### A Drama of Repentance

The opening of the Holy Door refers most basically to the role of the Church in mediating God's mercy to sinners. In its origin it was associated with an annual drama of penance in which penitentiaries were cast from the church door on Ash Wednesday (literally or symbolically) and readmitted through the door on Maundy Thursday of Repentance (in later centuries the Pope and his Cardinals washed the feet of pilgrims on Maundy Thursday of Holy Year). The opening takes place on Christmas Eve; the symbolism of the nativity combines with that of the Indulgence in such words as these: "On this day salvation has come to the world; the gates of heaven are open too." Ringing the changes down the centuries, the same concept comes out in 1950 in these words: "The Pope opens the doors of the safe containing the spiritual treasures, gathered from the suffering of our Savior and the many martyrs. . ."

### I Am the Door

The event has drawn to it a variety of images concerning doors, just as from earliest times the church door itself figured in ceremonies of Baptism, Palm Sunday and Church Dedication. Since the essential act for gaining the Indulgence is visiting a church, the door is the natural symbol. The Pope's words as he strikes with his hammer are, "Open to me the gates of justice." He acts as the Vicar of Christ, 3dading His sheep to the door. There are such New Testament allusions as, "Behold I stand at the door and knock," and "I am the door for the sheep to come in." The Pope knocks three times to signify the joy of all souls in earth, purgatory, or heaven, or again, to call pilgrims from the three sectors of the world. As the iron door miraculously opened to release Paul from prison, so this opening door releases men from the perils of human life into the blessed state of forgiveness. The pope, by virtue of his holding the Power of the Keys, has thrown open the Holy Gate of Paradise for all sinners to enter and be refreshed. The list of images and allusions is endless, but the theme is clearrepentance and forgiveness-for personal salvation, and on behalf of the world.

## The 1975 Holy Year

### 1. A Spiritual Movement

From his first announcements of the Holy Year in May, 1973, Pope Paul has emphasized as a profound innovation the central role of the local church:

#### Honoring the Local Church

According to the centuries old custom, the Holy Year has its focal point in Rome. And it will still be so, but with this innovation. The conditions prescribed for acquiring special spiritual benefits will this time be anticipated and granted to the local Churches, so that the whole Church spread throughout the world may immediately be able to profit from this great occasion of renewal and reconciliation.

The Central Committee for the Holy Year couples this reversal with the unusual length (two and a half years) and affirms the

Pope's intention to make of the celebrations a real "spiritual movement." Three reasons were given for the shift: 1) to increase the sense of responsibility of the local church, 2) to help the laity understand the meaning of hierarchy and the bond of unity, and 3) to spread this spiritual movement throughout the whole church. The celebration divides naturally into two stages, in which pilgrimage is imaged first as a movement of the faithful from the parish to the cathedral, then (in 1975) from the diocese to the basilicas of Rome. This twostage movement is the context for activities at the parish and diocesan levels.

## 2. Holy Year in the Local Parish

### Pilgrimage Dramaturgy

Probably typical of the implementation at the diocesan level in North America is the program of the Archdiocese of Chicago. An Executive Committee for the Holy Year has chosen the theme "A Time of Healing", produced background materials for clergy and teaching materials for the laity, and prepared liturgies for pilgrimage events. Among these, the liturgies are the most impressive; they develop the ancient tradition of specially designated "stational churches", where on fast days bands of pilgrims walked "in processional movement or simply stood in Church for lengthy periods of prayer." Pilgrimages from these stational churches to the Holy Name Cathedral are a preparation for those planning to join tours to Rome led by bishops, and a way of participating for the many who are unable to make this second stage in person. By contrast with this dramaturgical power, teaching materials focus on healing in the family and community in a fairly trivial way.

## 3. Signs of the Times

In the literature emanating from the Central Committee, every aspect of contemporary society has been discussed in relation to the themes of renewal and reconciliation. The treatment of two phenomena which seem particularly relevant to Movement concern tourism and mass media show the method of reflection.

### Tourism and Pilgrimage

Tourism is taken to be the secular analogue to pilgrimage. In an age when "400 Japanese tourists arrive daily in Rome", how does the Church present its historical buildings and treasures as more than objects of curiosity? And how are the Holy Year pilgrimages to Rome more significant than the excursions of hordes of tourists arriving on the same planes? Tourism demands "a proper formation so that the tourist understands that his journey is meaningful only if it is ordered to the Law of God."

### The Corporateness of Pilgrimage

The official literature devotes large space to recovering the significance of pilgrimage. The aspect of corporateness is central, the pilgrim seen as a member of a body moving toward a goal. The interior dimension is also explored: Pilgrimage is a sign of an interior searching, at times a sign of unhappiness, but always a sign of hope. Basically it can be taken as a sign of that other pilgrimage which the Church sees or anticipates in man.

The following summary indicates the wealth of pilgrimage imagery in Western tradition: the pilgrimage suggests life as a journey, denotes detachment, imposes sacrifices, forces solidarity and fervent charity, stirs ardor, and fosters a spirit of recollection and meditation. Coming full circle, tourism is seen relating to pilgrimage when it becomes a means of reconciliation (e.g. arranged meetings of eastern European and western pilgrim groups), ecumenical dialogue (groups of Roman Catholics and other Christians), and evangelism. We see here the Church in its role of naming and significating the sociological reality of our times.

### Mass Media and Presence

In a similar way, the phenomenon of mass media challenges the Church to understand its role in the Global Village. In 1950 very few were able to witness the opening of the Holy Door. On Christmas Eve 1974 hundreds of millions were "present" as the Pope struck three times with his hammer. The coined word "coinpresence" points to the issues of presence and participation at a distance; in what sense were pilgrims to Rome more present than those watching television sets? But the real point being made is not theological but concerns the question of responsible implementation. The imperative to use the media to enable global participation, to compete in quality and coverage with commercial programming, to choose the right media, to generate excitement while avoiding sensationalism these questions are forced upon the Church as the Holy Year rides the media into every household across the globe.

#### 4. Theology and Sociology

The deep struggle of the Roman Church in regard to the Holy Year comes at the point of social relevance. In his first announcement, the Pope expressed his hesitation in affirming the authenticity of the Holy Year concept:

##### Social Relevance

We have asked ourselves if such a tradition should be continued in our times, which are so different from times gone by and so conditioned both by the style of religion given to ecclesial life by the recent Council and by the practical lack of interest of many parts of the world in the ritual expression of other centuries.

Reading the documents that have proceeded from the Central Committee and certain of the Pope's later addresses, one must be impressed with the quality of the theosociological statement through which the Church is striving to delineate the springs of social renewal. The themes of reconciliation and renewal are "the intentions of the Church, conceived and formulated in the light of her reading both of the word of God and of the aspirations of men, thus fulfilling her mission of evangelization and service."

Something of this theosociological language was seen above in the discussion of media and tourism. In a more general way, the poles of personal renewal and social reform are linked in this statement:

##### The Social Mentality

The Holy Year, a time of prayer, of reflection, of penance, can not but affect the internal forum; it must bring a "cure", some spiritual wellbeing to every conscience," as the Holy Father has said. And then he immediately added that these benefits of the Holy Year ought to lead to "reflection, on the social mentality."

Social mentality is discussed as more than the structure of the social body; it is a way of thinking, judging, behaving, or again as "ritual vital nucleus or personality open to communion" and the "internal basis of sociality." On Ash Wednesday of this year, the Pope spoke on the text, "The poor you always have with you;" and grounded this "social mentality" in terms of world poverty and hunger. "The Christian. . . understands the words of Jesus in the sense that

none of his followers can ignore the fact that Jesus identified Himself with the poor. . . Yes, this is what we ask of you today at the beginning of Lent: genuine solidarity, a practical solidarity

with Christ's poor. . ."

The intent here seems to be to cut over against social activism as the Church's only response to social crisis. It understands reform as a process in the whole world society:

##### Social Renewal

A collection of great and small actions, initiatives, pressures, stimuli, pushes coming from all parts of the human conglomerate (cultural, work 9 associations, public opinion, etc.) all of these come together in global results which constitute the social dimension of the obligations and responsibilities of each. Thus we are all equally responsible on the moral plane for the common good and the common evil. . .

The corollary for structural reform would be, not the imperative of building new structures, but an indicative "riding" and transforming of structures already in existence (such as mass media and tourism).

The plenary Indulgence, traditionally at the heart of the Jubilee Year, has been a source of embarrassment to liberal Catholics and to ecumenically minded Protestants. The Central Committee, recognizing these issues, made this startling statement:

##### The Meaning of the Indulgences

The Catholic Church, moreover, would willingly adopt the following affirmation of a Protestant member of the World Council of Churches: "Jesus Christ is the plenary Indulgence."

There is also an effort to make the Indulgence an occasion for lay reeducation. Pilgrimage, penance, and absolution as a community event, not an individual accomplishment, emphasis on faith as the complement of works as a precondition, and selfconsciousness about the Indulgence as a "pedagogical sign" these are genuine concerns of those formulating the Holy Year story.

The Holy Year should be seen not as the source of this effort at reformulation but as its occasion. The Church sees the opportunity to begin a healing process within her body that was made necessary by the effects of Vatican II and the secular ideological struggles of the last decade. Despite criticism by liberals within and without the Church regarding the value and appropriateness of a Holy Year, the Pope has chosen to continue the tradition and use it for the immense task of reeducating the laity to the life significance of the ancient symbols.

### Implications

In considering implications for the Movement, the following four arenas might serve as starting points.

#### 1. Human Resurgence Mission

Holy Year may provide a way of promoting the HRM in Catholic churches. Brochure design, workshop design, decor, and symbol reappropriation are areas that come to mind. The gap between theosociological thought and local programs is waiting to be bridged with Movement methods.

#### 2. World Council of Churches

With the World Council of Churches Assembly in Nairobi falling in the same year, thought must be given to Holy Year as an occasion for "ecumenical events" in local parishes. Further, if HRM can be demonstrated as an ecumenical tool for engagement of laity, it might be the "gift" which the Movement has for the WCC. Protestants may be excited by the chance to participate in the aura of ancient tradition surrounding Holy Year. Finally, is there any way that Holy Year might provide a way back to the Orthodox churches?

#### 1. Naming History

In the 1970's the stance of the Roman Church on social responsibility is being formulated for decades, to come. In proclaiming a Holy Year the Church takes on the role of ordering history on a grand 25 year rhythm and relates to this time rhythm a call for social repentance and the renewal of every individual and every society. Jubilee, the name given to this season, itself calls forth images of reordering, renewal, and resurgence. The Holy Year of Jubilee is occasioning theosociological reflection which offers a glimpse of the Church in the long process of coming to terms with the social implications of Vatican II. It is also the direct or indirect occasion for efforts at reconciliation and consensus between evangelical and progressive wings within the Church.

#### 4. Bicentennial

There are similarities between Holy Year as a way of holding huge pieces of history and social fabric together and the Bicentennial as a way of recovering the meaning of nationhood. One Catholic writer, referring to the Bicentennial celebration, suggests that the Holy Year should be the occasion "for input by religious and value oriented persons into the spiritual meaning of America." An HRM construct adapted to Holy Year symbolism might be a springboard for Town Meetings in extended Catholic parishes. At least we need to learn from Holy Year in the area of mass media, and the rhythm of pilgrimages from local to diocese to Rome might be a model for pull-together of 5000 Town Meetings.