

## **THE YEAR OF THE JUBILEE: A MODEL FOR UPLIFTING THE LIVES OF THE POOR?**

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The Philippines has had a long experience of hardships under the hands of more powerful nations. For more than 350 years, the Spaniards colonized our country until we gained our independence in 1898. Then the Americans came and colonized us for around 40 years and the Japanese for another three years. This long period of colonization by foreign countries have ravaged our resources and have made us poor. The Philippines had since been liberated from these colonizing countries but a new form of slavery is keeping us in bondage – debt. This is the new colonizing power that the Philippines is facing in order to gain freedom and it is not easy.

There is a need to understand how debt has made the Philippines a poor nation. According to current trends, there are very good signs the Philippines is beginning to rise from poverty and play a major role in the economic situation in Asia, especially South East Asia. The Philippines is considered by Market Watch as "one of the 'new tigers'

with the potential to leave a bigger imprint on global growth for years to come while the developed world struggles with excess debt and traditional regional heavyweights China and India lose momentum."<sup>1</sup> The Philippines may be experiencing economic growth at this time but there is still a long ways to go in resolving this problem of poverty. This paper seeks to find new ways we could help the poor rise out of poverty, not just in the Philippine context but in other countries where there is a sizable Christian community.

## **I. Poverty Situation around the World**

The latest poverty estimates published by the World Bank reveal that 1.29 billion people in the developing world (22% of its population) were living on less than US\$1.25 a day in 2008, down from 1.9 billion (one in two) in 1981. The new numbers show that poverty has been more widespread across the developing world over the past 25 years than previously estimated, but also that there has been strong—if regionally uneven—progress toward reducing overall poverty.<sup>2</sup>

According to the World Bank, the developing world has achieved its goal to halve poverty by 2015 from its 1990 levels.<sup>3</sup>

From data provided by World Bank, the latest of which was in 2008.<sup>4</sup>

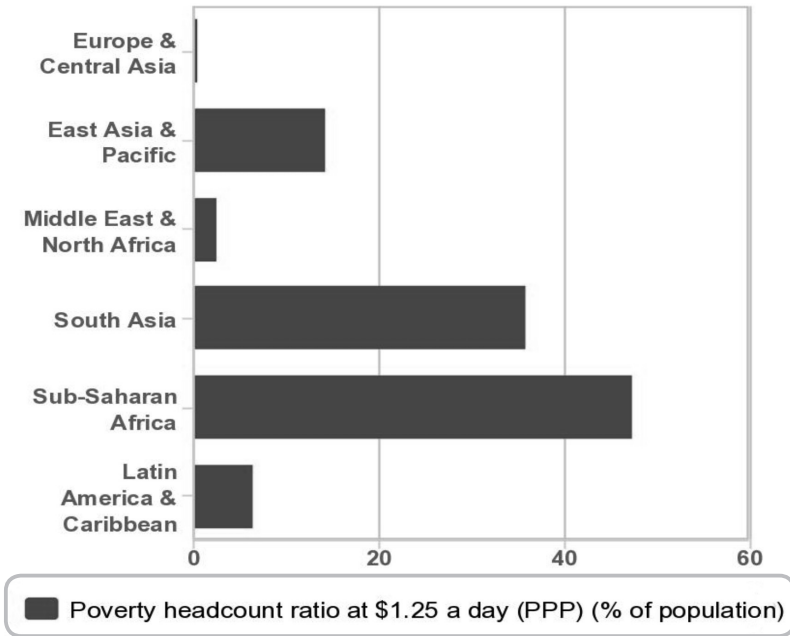
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<sup>1</sup> Kim Arveen Patria, "PH Is Among Southeast Asia's 'New Tigers'," Yahoo News, <<http://ph.news.yahoo.com/ph-is-among-new-southeast-asia-s--new-tigers-.html?page=all>> (accessed 27 November 2012).

<sup>2</sup> <<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:23130032~pagePK:64257043~piPK:437376~theSitePK:4607,00.html>> (accessed 21 February 2013).

<sup>3</sup> <<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:23130032~pagePK:64257043~piPK:437376~theSitePK:4607,00.html>> (accessed 21 February 2013).

<sup>4</sup> <<http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty>> (accessed 4 October 2012).

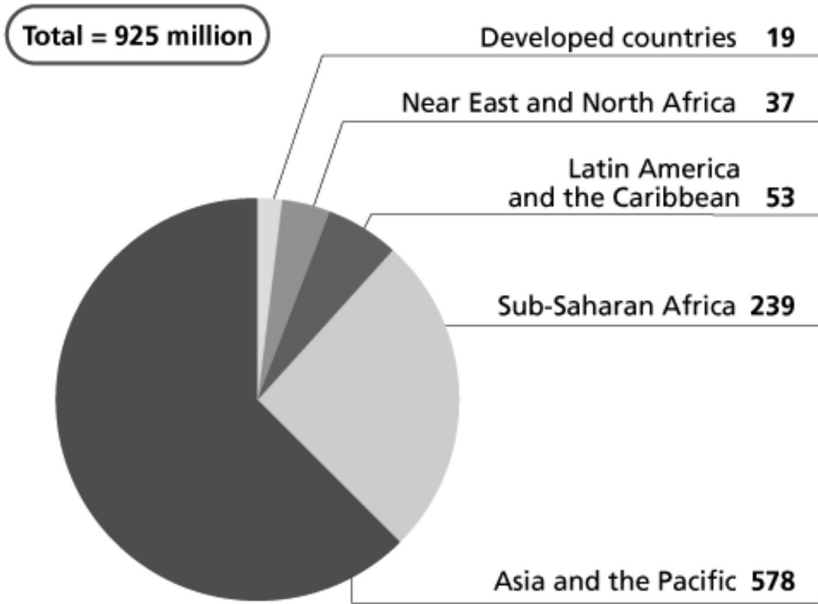


According to World Hunger Organization, there were 925 million hungry people in all in 2010.<sup>5</sup> This is 13.6 percent of the estimated 6.8 billion world population.

<sup>5</sup> World Hunger Education Service, "World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics," <<http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm>> (accessed 4 October 2012).

Number of hungry people in the world

925 million hungry people in 2010



Source: FAO.

The number has significantly increased since 1995-97 when the estimates were only around 780 million.<sup>6</sup> Of course, the total world population has also risen and has reached more than 7 billion people.

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<sup>6</sup> World Hunger Education Service, "World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics."

## II. The Riches of the Top 1 Percent in the USA

The past years we have been made aware of the top 1 percent of our population, especially in the USA. We have also been made aware of the Occupy Movement mainly because of the great disparity between the riches of the top 1 percent and the ordinary middle class. According to Alan Dunn, the average annual income of the top 1 percent is \$717,000 compared to the average income of \$51,000 for the rest of the population.<sup>7</sup> Comparing their net values will show that there is an even bigger gap – the 1 percent is worth about \$8.4 million which is 70 times the worth of the lower classes.<sup>8</sup> The 1 percent are mostly executives, doctors, lawyers, and politicians.

Alan Dunn also noted that "within this group of people is an even smaller and wealthier subset of people, 1 percent of the top, or .01 percent of the entire nation. Those people have incomes of over \$27 million, or roughly *540 times the national average income*. Altogether, the top 1 percent *control 43 percent of the wealth* in the nation; the next 4 percent control an additional 29 percent."<sup>9</sup>

It is true that the rich are getting richer and the poor getting poorer. In the US, the top 1 percent got 93% of income growth in 2010 according to a study done by Emmanuel Saez, a University of California at Berkeley economist.<sup>10</sup> According to estimates made

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<sup>7</sup> Alan Dunn, "Average America vs the One Percent," *Forbes*, <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/moneywisewomen/2012/03/21/average-america-vs-the-one-percent/>> (accessed 3 October 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Dunn, "Average America vs the One Percent."

<sup>9</sup> Dunn, "Average America vs the One Percent."

<sup>10</sup> Peter Robison, "Top 1% Got 93% of Income Grown As Rich-Poor Gap Widened," *Bloomberg News*, <<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-10-02/top-1-got-93-of-income-growth-as-rich-poor-gap-widened.html>> (accessed 3 October 2012).

by the US Census Bureau the top 1 percent households (around 1.2 million) saw their earnings increase by 5.5 percent in 2011 while earnings fell 1.7 percent for the 96 million households in the bottom 80 percent.<sup>11</sup>

Apple is now the biggest ever US company<sup>12</sup> with \$623.52 billion. At one point in time Apple has more money (\$76.2 billion in cash) than the US Treasury (\$73.8 billion).<sup>13</sup> But what is happening in its major manufacturing factory Foxconn in China where total employees reaches 1 million?<sup>14</sup> The company has been under close scrutiny for alleged abuse of its workers and has recently been forced to increase the salaries of its workers by 16 to 25 percent.<sup>15</sup> When Apple launched the iPhone 5 model, it sold 5 million units in just 3 days.<sup>16</sup> The rich are indeed getting richer and richer.

The USA and other so-called progressive countries have economies that are basically driven by consumerism. Globalization, liberalization of economic policies, free trade, and the like are not the solution to making our world a better place where there are few poor people. In fact, the world now is experiencing an economic downturn.

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<sup>11</sup> Robison, "Top 1% Got 93% of Income Grown As Rich-Poor Gap Widened."

<sup>12</sup> E.S. Brwoning, Steven Russolillo and Jessica E. Vascellaro, "Apple Now Biggest-Ever U.S. Company," *WSJ*, <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390443855804577601773524745182.html>> (accessed 3 October 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Brandon Griggs, "Apple Now Has More Cash Than the U.S. Government," CNN, <[http://articles.cnn.com/2011-07-29/tech/apple.cash.government\\_1\\_ceo-jobs-apple-cash-balance?\\_s=PM:TECH](http://articles.cnn.com/2011-07-29/tech/apple.cash.government_1_ceo-jobs-apple-cash-balance?_s=PM:TECH)> (accessed 3 October 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Michael Kan, "Foxconn Says Riot Engulfs Key Factory in China," *Techworld*, <<http://news.techworld.com/security/3399997/foxconn-says-riot-engulfs-key-factory-in-china/>> (accessed 3 October 2012).

<sup>15</sup> David Barboza, "Foxconn Plans to Lift Pay Sharply at Factories in China," *The New York Times*, <[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/technology/foxconn-to-raise-salaries-for-workers-by-up-to-25.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/technology/foxconn-to-raise-salaries-for-workers-by-up-to-25.html?_r=0)> (accessed 3 October 2012).

<sup>16</sup> "iPhone 5 First Weekend Sales Top Five Million," Apple Press Releases, <<http://www.apple.com/pr/library/2012/09/24iPhone-5-First-Weekend-Sales-Top-Five-Million.html>> (accessed 3 October 2012).

Former rich and progressive nations like Iceland, Greece, Italy, and Spain are facing bankruptcy. Poverty is no longer the experience of poor nations from Asia, Africa, Central and Latin America alone. The problem of poverty is affecting the economic powers like the USA and other European countries. Poverty is a worldwide problem that needs to have a biblical solution.

### III. The Philippine Debt and Poverty Situation

As of September 2012, the Philippine total debt has reached to 5.213 trillion pesos or \$126.89 billion. Of this total debt, P2.028 trillion or 38.91% is owed to foreign creditors while P3.184 trillion or 61.09% is owed to local creditors.<sup>17</sup> With a population of around 100 million for 2012,<sup>18</sup> that means each Filipino now owes approximately 52,130 pesos. We are really heavily indebted and this is a perennial problem. Every year this debt is getting higher. In 1970 we were paying for only \$307 million annually for total debt service, now it has grown to more than \$12 billion annually.<sup>19</sup>

Interest payment alone is taking a heavy toll on the country's budget. According to a report, interest payment from January to August of 2012 reached 221.115 billion pesos, which is 12.5 percent higher than what was paid in the same period last year.<sup>20</sup> The

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<sup>17</sup> From Bureau of Treasury, Statistical Data Analysis Division, <[http://www.treasury.gov.ph/statdata/monthly/monthly\\_outstandingdebt.pdf](http://www.treasury.gov.ph/statdata/monthly/monthly_outstandingdebt.pdf)> (accessed 19 November 2012). Also "Philippine Debt Hits 126.89 B as of Sept," <<http://www.philstar.com/breaking-news/2012/11/13/866457/philippine-debt-hits-12689-b-sept>> (accessed 14 November 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Rodrigo Calupitan, "The Philippines: An In Depth Presentation About the Population, Demographics, and Culture of the Philippines," <<http://worldpopulationreview.com/philippines-population-2012/>> (accessed 14 November 2012).

<sup>19</sup> "Philippines: Debt Service on External Debt," <<http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/philippines/debt-service-on-external-debt>> (accessed 27 November 2012).

<sup>20</sup> <<http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=853898&publicationSubCategoryId=66>> (accessed 30 September 2012).

approved budget for the fiscal year 2012 is 1.816 trillion pesos.<sup>21</sup> This has already taken up 12% of the total budget in just nine months. In contrast, The Department of Education, which gets the biggest share of the budget, gets a total of 238.8 billion for 2012.<sup>22</sup> Based on the projected government spending for 2012, the total money that will go to debt servicing will amount to 738.57 billion pesos. Interest payment will reach a total of 333.09 billion while principal amortization will reach 405.463 billion.<sup>23</sup> The debt servicing amount is almost 40% of the total projected government spending. In contrast, only 44.4 billion has been allotted for the budget of the Health Department for 2012.<sup>24</sup> This has been our situation for so many years now. On the average 35 to 40% have been given to debt servicing with interest payment alone getting 22 to 25% of our National Government Budget.<sup>25</sup>

According to Ricardo Reyes, the president of Freedom from Debt Coalition, debt is the root cause of poverty in the Philippines.<sup>26</sup> Forty percent of our budget going to debt servicing is an injustice as the poor are left with meager resources from the national budget. Our country continues to lack in health care facilities and services, infrastructures that will help improve communication and the transport of goods to

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<sup>21</sup> Christine Avendano, P1.8-Trillion National Budget for 2012 Signed, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 16 December 2011, <<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/111557/aquino-signs-p1-8-t-budget-for-2012>> (accessed 15 November 2012).

<sup>22</sup> <[http://www.socialwatchphilippines.org/images2/abi2012\\_educ.pdf](http://www.socialwatchphilippines.org/images2/abi2012_educ.pdf)> (accessed 15 November 2012).

<sup>23</sup> 2012 General Appropriations Act, in <[http://www.dbm.gov.ph/?page\\_id=775](http://www.dbm.gov.ph/?page_id=775)> (accessed 19 November 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Christine O. Avendano, "P1.8-trillion National Budget for 2012 Signed," <<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/111557/aquino-signs-p1-8-t-budget-for-2012>> (accessed 27 November 2012).

<sup>25</sup> <<http://fcaid.ph/press/12-statements/16-a-truly-free-philippines-is-free-from-the-burden-of-immoral-debts.html>> (accessed 26 November 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Presented in a forum on Debt and Poverty at Asian Theological Seminary in June 26, 2012.



the market, as well as basic education services such as classrooms, textbooks, and teachers.

There are now 23.1 million or 26.5% of Filipinos who are considered poor. They are considered poor because they earn less than P16,841 a year or less than P1,403.42 a month or less than P46.14 a day (\$1.25).<sup>27</sup> This is actually a significant development compared to that in 1997 when the poverty level reached 41% of the population.<sup>28</sup> Other causes of poverty in the Philippines are high population growth rate (more than 2% annual growth), unemployment and underemployment situation, and illiteracy.

We are not able to get out of debt despite all efforts by the Philippine government to manage its fiscal problems. There is a need to rethink interest rates on loans to the poor nations. These loans from the IMF, World Bank, and Asian Development Bank are initially helpful but in the long run are becoming a burden because of the difficulty to get out of debt. With this trend, the Philippines may forever be heavily indebted. This is why we need to consider looking into other models of helping the poor get out of their poverty situation.

The International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and Asian Development Bank were established after World War II with the goal of establishing international economic rules and policies that will help nations in financial crisis to rise above it. The IMF was the very first institution established in 1944 with World War II still raging.<sup>29</sup> These institutions have helped so many of the poor countries around the

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<sup>27</sup> "National Anti-poverty Program(2010-2016)," <[http://maps.napc.gov.ph/napcportal/images/stories/pdf/National\\_Anti-Poverty\\_Program\\_Part1.pdf](http://maps.napc.gov.ph/napcportal/images/stories/pdf/National_Anti-Poverty_Program_Part1.pdf)> (accessed 19 November 2012).

<sup>28</sup> <<http://www.indexmundi.com/g/g.aspx?c=rp&v=69>> (accessed 19 November 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Ngaire Woods, *The International Monetary Fund and World Bank*, <<http://www.globaleconomicgovernance.org/wp-content/uploads/Woods%20for%20Routledge.pdf>> (accessed 15 November 2012).

world by extending loans, even allowing rescheduling of payments.<sup>30</sup> Still, these efforts were not enough to help alleviate poverty and suffering. There was a campaign for debt relief for these poorest of the poor nations spearheaded by Jubilee 2000, an international coalition movement in over 40 countries calling for such action by the year 2000.<sup>31</sup>

The original proponent of this debt cancellation for the poorest nations came from Martin J. Dent, a retired lecturer from the University of Keele in England.<sup>32</sup> He said, "To be in a position of owing unpayable debt is a kind of slavery... In a fair world, monies should flow from rich to poor to alleviate their sufferings. The debt burden [on poor nations] has been producing a considerable reverse flow, thus nullifying much of the effect of aid."<sup>33</sup> He then proposed a solution whereby such poor country be given a radical one-off debt remission. Further he said,

This debt remission is not to be repeated for a long period. It is essential therefore that the remission should be the occasion for a new beginning for the country concerned, in which self-reliance, productive energy and honest financial management will replace the corruptions and extravagances of the past.<sup>34</sup>

He then proposed that the Old Testament concept of Jubilee be considered as the model for this project which eventually became

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<sup>30</sup> Woods, *The International Monetary Fund and World Bank*, 956.

<sup>31</sup> "Jubilee 2000," Wikipedia, <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jubilee\\_2000](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jubilee_2000)> (accessed 15 November 2012).

<sup>32</sup> "Genesis of the Campaign," Jubilee 2000: Yale School of Management Case Study, <<http://cases.som.yale.edu/jubilee/>> (accessed 15 November 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Martin Dent and Bill Peters, *The Crisis of Poverty and Debt in the Third World* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 15.

<sup>34</sup> Dent and Peters, *The Crisis of Poverty and Debt in the Third World*, 16.

the Jubilee 2000. The Pope later endorsed Jubilee 2000 through an apostolic letter<sup>35</sup> and this was also supported by the Anglican Church.<sup>36</sup>

The Jubilee 2000 movement made some positive strides toward debt relief for the poorest nations of the world. One of these is the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries program initiated by International Monetary Fund and World Bank. The HIPC has identified 39 countries as potentially eligible to receive full or partial debt relief.<sup>37</sup> Most of these countries are from Africa and the Caribbean Islands. The Philippines is not included in the list. The fruit of this program is still to be seen in the coming years.

What many Filipinos are against at are the so-called "immoral debts" the Philippines has entered into with these international lending institutions. I am also against immoral debts. Argentina defaulted from their foreign debts in 2001 because they see these debts as immoral, calling them "vultures" and "scavengers." US District Court Judge Thomas Griesa recently made an order that Argentina should pay \$1.3 billion to hedge funds when it will begin to make regular payments to its debt this December, effectively saying that Argentina was wrong in defaulting from their debts.<sup>38</sup> The world now is waiting to see how Argentina will respond to this.

The Philippines has its own share of immoral debts as well over the years and this is what we need to focus on. I am for what the

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<sup>35</sup> Pope John Paul II, "*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*," <[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_10111994\\_tertio-millennio-adveniente\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_10111994_tertio-millennio-adveniente_en.html)> (accessed 15 November 2012).

<sup>36</sup> "England: Synod Meets," <<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/news.cfm/1996/12/19/ACNS1053>> (accessed 15 November 2012).

<sup>37</sup> "Heavily Indebted Poor Countries," Wikipedia, <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heavily\\_Indebted\\_Poor\\_Countries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heavily_Indebted_Poor_Countries)> (accessed 16 November 2012).

<sup>38</sup> "Argentina Hedge Fund Pay," CNN, <[http://edition.cnn.com/2012/11/22/business/argentina-hedge-fund-pay/index.html?hpt=hp\\_t3](http://edition.cnn.com/2012/11/22/business/argentina-hedge-fund-pay/index.html?hpt=hp_t3)> (accessed 23 November 2012).

FCAID is doing right now in our country. FCAID stands for Faith-based Congress Against Immoral Debts. This was established in October 15, 2007 when many groups of concerned Filipinos came together in a "faith-based unity congress." This community declared that "all illegitimate debts are immoral! All immoral debts are to be repudiated" and "all those responsible should be held accountable."<sup>39</sup>

A very clear case that the Philippines experienced was the mothballed Bataan Nuclear Power Plant project of the Marcos era. Despite all the anomalies uncovered with this project our government could not default in payment obligations because of the Automatic Appropriations on Debt Servicing. The interest payment alone was very oppressive for the national budget. This is the kind of immoral debt that we should fight for. It was only in 2007 that we finished paying for this "immoral debt."<sup>40</sup> Now the Aquino administration is promoting the facility as a tourist spot.<sup>41</sup> This is a big joke. There are many more examples of these such as the ZTE National Broadband Project, North Luzon Railways Project, SEMP2 Textbook anomaly, and others. The North Luzon Railways Project that was entered into during the Arroyo administration is very anomalous with the Philippines continuously paying for this loan even though not a single meter of railway has been laid until now.

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<sup>39</sup> <<http://fcaid.ph/involvement-on-the-debt-advocacy.html>> (accessed 26 November 2012).

<sup>40</sup> <<http://www.newflash.org/2004/02/hl/hl105754.htm>> (accessed 26 November 2012).

<sup>41</sup> <<http://www.thepoc.net/thepoc-features/what-on-earth/what-on-earth-features/11987-bataan-nuclear-plant-now-a-tourist-attraction.html>> (accessed 27 November 2012).

#### **IV. What the Bible Says about Riches and Poverty**

God, as creator of heaven and earth, has created a world that is abundant in resources, enough for everyone as long as humans restrain themselves from greed and excesses. The problem though is that in our sinfulness, we have often destroyed these God-given abundant resources. The rich are guilty of hoarding and taking advantage of the poor.

There is now a great disparity and gap between the rich and the poor. This is not part of the original plans of God. God desires to build a community that reflects his glory. The purpose for which God chose Abraham was to eventually have a nation that will bless all the other nations. God said to Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you." (Ge 12:2-3, NLT)

God desires to build a community where there will be no poor. Deuteronomy 15:4 says, "There should be no poor among you, for the LORD your God will greatly bless you in the land he is giving you as a special possession." (NLT) The key here is for the Israelites to practice God's command that on every seventh year, they will cancel all debts (Dt 15:1). Unfortunately this was not practiced by the Israelites.

We are living in a society where the poor will always be around us. God foresaw this as it is written in Deuteronomy 15:11, "There will always be some in the land who are poor." (NLT) God though, told the Israelites not to be hard hearted towards the poor. They are to be generous to them and lend to them whatever they need (Dt 15:7-8). They are to share freely with the poor.

In the New Testament, we see Jesus saying the same thing. In Mark 14:7 it is recorded that Jesus said to his disciples, "You will always have the poor among you, and you can help them whenever you want to. But you will not always have me." (NLT) Jesus himself

focused much of his preaching the message of the kingdom of God to the poor. He exemplified God's heart for the poor.

The apostles also emphasized the need to help the poor. The early church practiced communal living where they shared everything they had (Ac 2:44; 4:32). Some even sold land and properties in order that they may help the poor among them (Ac 2:45; 4:36-37). The result was that there were no needy people among them (Ac 4:34).

Paul mentioned that the pillars of the church (James, Peter, and John) made only one request to him in his ministry focus – that they keep on helping the poor; which Paul was very eager to do (Gal 2:9-10). Paul himself spearheaded a campaign to help the brethren in Jerusalem when it was hit by a famine (2Co 8-9).

As the church grew in numbers, problems arose and some of these were greediness and covetousness. This is what happens when the people of God lose their focus in life. Instead of loving God above all, Christians began to pursue wealth, pleasure, and power. This led to the destruction of lives. The apostles warned against this.

But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. (1Ti 6:9-10, NLT)

It is not wrong or evil to be rich if God would so bless a person. The important thing to remember as a Christian is that we should not love money or be pursuing riches. This is not our calling. Our calling is to be blessing God and one another.

## **V. A Proposal to Reconsider the Biblical Jubilee Model as Alternative Model to Help Alleviate Poverty**

The prophets, Jesus, and the apostles emphasized the need to help the poor. Psalm 72 is a psalm which emphasized that God will surely help the poor. God says to the prophet Jeremiah that to know him means giving out justice and helping the poor (Jer 22:16). Jesus mentioned that his followers are to help the poor (Mk 14:7). The apostles' directive to Paul and his team of ministers reaching out to the Gentiles was for them to keep on helping the poor (Gal 2:10).

As God desires to make Israel a nation that will bless all the rest of the nations as they live under his covenant, there are specific provisions given to the Israelites in order to ensure that there will be no poor among them. The covenant provisions are very specific as to what they need to do. The provision for a Jubilee Year is the most relevant provision in addressing the problem of poverty in the community. Central to an understanding of the Jubilee Year is Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 15. In these two chapters provisions are given regarding the Sabbath Year and the Jubilee Year. It also includes the provisions for the redemption of property, the redemption of the poor and the enslaved.

### **1. Sabbath Day**

The foundation for the understanding of the Sabbath Year and the Jubilee Year is the Sabbath Day. Why did God command his people to observe the Sabbath Day (Ex 20:8-11)? One has to go back to Exodus 16 where the Israelites had their first experience of Sabbath day rest. After being set free from their bondage in Egypt, the Israelites were tested regarding their new found freedom. The test came in the form of trusting God for their daily food. They were travelling in the wilderness so there was no food visible to them. They began to grumble against Moses and Aaron regarding food (Ex 16:2-3). God provided them with manna in the morning and quail in the evening with the instruction that they were to gather only what they can eat

and not hoard anything. This was a lesson on trust. Some of them did not trust God on this that they hid some to be sure they will have something to eat the following day. However, it grew maggots the following day and God became angry with them (v. 20)

On the sixth day they were to gather double the quantity for on the seventh day or Sabbath, there will be no provisions. It will be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord (v. 23). They were to believe God that this time it will not be spoiled. This was another lesson on trust for which some of them did not believe (v. 27).

This story tells us that even before the Ten Commandments were given at Mount Sinai, the Israelites were told to keep the Sabbath day holy by resting from gathering food. God is able to provide. This was indeed a lesson on dependence on God for their needs as they were living in the desert at that time. Later on God commanded Moses to keep some of the manna in the Ark of the Covenant as a memorial of God's faithfulness in providing for their needs (Ex 16:34). All the people had enough to eat. Nobody was poor.

Sabbath keeping is not only about trusting in the Lord for provisions, it is also meant to break the cycle of work on a weekly basis so that all (workers, slaves, and animals) can rest. Exodus 23:12 gives us this perspective:

You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but on the seventh day you must stop working. This gives your ox and your donkey a chance to rest. It also allows your slaves and the foreigners living among you to be refreshed. (NLT)

Sabbath Day rest is important for human health as well as for the animals. Workers, slaves, and animals are all prone to abuse and exploitation in the name of making more money. Sabbath Day rest is meant to counter this. Rest and recuperation are part of the intent of the Sabbath Day rest. In the covenant community that God established



through Abraham and Moses, God promised to provide for everyone's needs. God is concerned as well that there will be no exploitation. God desires that there will be no poor among his people.

Sabbath Day rest is also anchored on the fact that the Israelites are no longer slaves in Egypt. The commandment was given as part of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments was given to the Israelites in Mount Sinai, far away from Egypt where they had been slaves for more than 400 years. This then poses two alternatives for them: Sabbath rest or slavery.<sup>42</sup> Sabbath then is for the good of all. It is a way for people not to be trapped by greed which is the prevailing value of most people today. Workers are paid more as it is considered "overtime work." Then there are those who are exploited on this aspect as they are not given any overtime pay.

## **2. Sabbath Year**

As God made the provision for Sabbath Day rest for his people and for the animals, he also made the provision for the Sabbath Year. The very first reference to this is found in Exodus 23:10-11, part of the Covenantal Code.

Plant and harvest your crops for six years, but let the land be renewed and lie uncultivated during the seventh year. Then let the poor among you harvest whatever grows on its own. Leave the rest for wild animals to eat. The same applies to your vineyards and olive groves. (NLT)

Just like in the Sabbath Day mandate, the concern is for humans and animals to have rest but now rest is being given to the land every seventh year or Sabbath Year. This mandate will specifically benefit

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<sup>42</sup> Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2000), 12.

the poor and the wild animals for they are allowed to harvest what is left out in the fields.

The next reference to the Sabbath Year mandate can be found in the Deuteronomic Code<sup>43</sup>, more specifically in Deuteronomy 15:1-18.<sup>44</sup> This is a more detailed account of what the Sabbath Year involves. It now includes the cancellation of debts every seventh year.<sup>45</sup> This applies only to their fellow Israelites and not to the foreigners.

<sup>1</sup> At the end of every seventh year you must cancel the debts of everyone who owes you money. <sup>2</sup> This is how it must be done. Everyone must cancel the loans they have made to their fellow Israelites. They must not demand payment from their neighbors or relatives, for the LORD's time of release has arrived. <sup>3</sup> This release from debt, however, applies only to your fellow Israelites—not to the foreigners living among you. (vv. 1-3 NLT)

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<sup>43</sup> The Deuteronomic Code, found in Deuteronomy, chaps. 12–26, is a reinterpretation or revision of Israelite law, based on historical conditions as interpreted by the 7th-century-bc historians known as the Deuteronomists. Discovered in the Temple at Jerusalem in 621 bc, the Deuteronomic Code attempted to purify the worship of Yahweh from Canaanite and other influences. From "Deuteronomic Code," Encyclopaedia Britannica, <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/159728/Deuteronomic-Code>> (accessed 17 October 2012).

<sup>44</sup> Eugene Merrill notes that "Deuteronomy is a covenant text in a broader than normal sense inasmuch as it contains not only the sine qua non of standard documents of that genre but also itineraries, narratives, hymns, and homilies, all designed to provide both a covenant document as well as a historical, existential, and eschatological context in which to interpret it. Thus there are the solemn and formal pronouncements of covenant initiation as well as constant enjoinders to be faithful to its stipulations." Eugene Merrill, "Theology of Deuteronomy," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1996), 172. Deuteronomy 15:1-18 is part of the stipulations demanded by Yahweh to Israel, his covenant recipient.

<sup>45</sup> Duane Christensen commented that "the release (cancellation of debts) here means much more than simply delay in repayments of loans due." Duane Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, Word Biblical Commentary 6 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 308. Gerhard Von Rad said that "the logic of v. 9 probably favors a complete discharge of the debt" and not simply a suspension of payment for that year. Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, The Old Testament Library, trans. Dorothea Barton (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 106.

God promised to richly bless them so that there will be no poor among them as long as they apply these conditions given to them (vv. 4-6). I agree with Christensen when he said that "In spite of the reality of the human condition that produces poverty, the law here is an attempt to alleviate the suffering of the poor. If Israel obeys God's law, it will be so prosperous 'many nations' will turn to Israel for loans in time to come."<sup>46</sup>

If there are poor people among them they were told to be generous and not be tight-fisted nor look into the number of years before the Sabbath Year as a consideration whether they will lend or not (vv. 7-11). The term "hand" (v. 7) is used here for those who have the capacity to shape society,<sup>47</sup> that is, they are the powerful people who have hold over their creditors. The Israelites were summoned "to meet the poor at all times with an open hand and an open heart."<sup>48</sup> Many are tempted to skip this mandate at all as it is unrealistic in practice.

Looking into the structure of verses 1-11, one could notice the two subunits (vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-11) and they could be outlined in concentric fashion. It will be seen then that the center of these two structures highlights the primary concerns of this mandate – that there shall be no poor among them (v. 4) and to remove the temptation not to give to the poor (being "mean-spirited" in NLT) because the year for canceling debts is close at hand (vv. 9-10).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, 313.

<sup>47</sup> Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, 313..

<sup>48</sup> Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 106.

<sup>49</sup> Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, 310.

This provision of the law clearly shows that God is for the poor. God desires to build a community where there is social justice and not an oppression of the poor as is very common in today's societies. Jeffries Hamilton mentioned four main features from this section of Deuteronomy that he found in his understanding of the ideology of social justice. These are

that doing social justice is not an abstraction but is something which can be detailed; that both the identity of the one to whom obligation is owed and the breadth of that obligation are given the widest possible compass; that the justness of society can be measured by its treatment of the dependent; and that YHWH serves as advocate for those in special need of care.<sup>50</sup>

The Sabbath Year also involves the setting free of all slaves. It is not a simple letting go of the slave but they are to send them off with generous gifts in appreciation for their services (vv. 12-14, 18). If the slaves do not want to be set free then they are to pierce their earlobes with an owl, signifying that they voluntarily accept being slaves for life (vv. 16-17).

The main reason why the Israelites are given this command by God was that they themselves had been slaves in Egypt before (v. 15). This is the foundation of this Sabbath Year mandate. As Yahweh has liberated the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt, they in turn are act with compassion towards the poor in their community. As Kinsler and Kinsler noted,

The release laws of the Sabbath Year point to an ideology of social justice in which inclusion of the poor, the indebted, the slave is central. The remission of debts and the liberation of slaves are essential means

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<sup>50</sup> Jeffries Hamilton, *Social Justice and Deuteronomy: The Case of Deuteronomy 15*, SBL Dissertation Series 136 (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1992), 139.

to overcome the usual tendencies toward exclusion. Peasant farmers lived under the perpetual risk of losing their crops, falling into debt, losing their land, and ending in slavery. Wealthy and powerful elites tended to look for opportunities to extend their land holdings and accumulate more wealth by exploiting the plight of these poor farmers, offering loans at high interest, taking their land as failed mortgages, and enslaving them as bond servants. This predicament could to a large extent be resolved if Israel would obey the Lord God who saved them from slavery in Egypt.<sup>51</sup>

### 3. Jubilee Year

Leviticus 25 is the main section of the Bible which speaks of the Jubilee Year. The Jubilee is like a super-Sabbath Year,<sup>52</sup> coming after seven Sabbath Years (v. 8).<sup>53</sup> It is to be proclaimed with the sound of a trumpet on the Day of Atonement (v. 9). On that year every family of Israel, except the Levites, will have the right to recover and return to their land (vv. 10-13). The land is to be valued then according to the quantity of crops it can produce until the next Jubilee (vv. 15-16). No one is to take advantage of another (v. 17).

The theological foundation for this mandate can be found in verse 23:

The land must never be sold on a permanent basis, for the land belongs to me. You are only foreigners and tenant farmers working for me. (NLT)

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<sup>51</sup> Kinsler and Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life*, 75.

<sup>52</sup> Kinsler and Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life*, 15.

<sup>53</sup> Young Hye Kim formulates that the Jubilee Year is on the 50th year with the first year beginning with the first of the seven Sabbath Year celebrations. Young Hye Kim, "The Jubilee: Its Reckoning and Inception Day," *Vetus Testamentum* 60 (2010): 149.

God is the Sovereign owner and ruler in Israel. This is very important especially for farmers who are dependent on the produce of the land. Farmers are very vulnerable to natural disasters that could inflict heavy damages to their economic life. In times like this they could be so impoverished that they will be forced to sell their land to the rich. The Jubilee Year thus becomes their rescuer from perpetual poverty. The Jubilee Year gives hope to the poor in Israel (v. 28). Jeffrey Fager argued that

...the Jubilee did not present a merely ideological alternative to one particular (economic) system; it was a countermeasure to a system that provided wealth for a few at the expense of many. It attempted to restrict the latifundism [large land holding] which was prevalent in the Ancient Near East in order to keep the means of production evenly distributed among independent families. Possibly because of that prevalence, the Jubilee recognized the constant threat of the loss of land, so it established a means of regaining the proper balance.<sup>54</sup>

The Philippines is in large part an agricultural country. Most of the farmers though are poor and landless and thus could relate well with the Jubilee mandate of Leviticus 25. The Philippines is heavily prone to natural disasters as well. Every year an average of 20 typhoons hit it. One study (covering the years 1970 to 2002) done by the US government showed that the Philippines has the highest storm index of 0.0370 followed only by the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Haiti.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Jeffrey Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee: Uncovering Hebrew Ethics through the Sociology of Knowledge*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield, 1993), 88.

<sup>55</sup> Rigiberto Tiglao, "The Typhoon Curse and What to do About It," in *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 8 August 2012, <<http://opinion.inquirer.net/34341/the-typhoon-curse-and-what-to-do-about-it>> (accessed 9 November 2012).

The Jubilee Year also serves as the ultimate solution to the problem of exploitation, poverty, and marginalization, as the land will eventually be redistributed to the families of the original owners (v. 28). This is not just a socioeconomic plan but a divine mandate (Lev 25).

The Jubilee Year also involves the cancellation of debts so that those who have been enslaved will be freed (v. 54). Sharon Ringe notes that "each of these regulations (in Lev 25) is a concern for social justice, not as charity, but as liberation. Undergirding all of them is language that acclaims God as sovereign over the people themselves and over all creation."<sup>56</sup>

The fundamental reason for this Jubilee Year, as in the case of the Sabbath Day and Sabbath Year, is in their Exodus experience where God set them free from slavery and made them his people (v. 55). Israel, being the covenant people of God, was to live by a different standard compared with the surrounding nations. Verse 38 says, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God." They will always have this in their mind and thus they are to treat one another and others with love and compassion (cancelling debts and returning land to its original owners). Fager also said,

The cultic nature of the Jubilee expresses the notion that proper ownership by God entails acts which benefit the poor. The implementation of the belief in an equitable distribution of the land is a sacred act defined by proper rituals and times that express its holiness. The fact that the priests (writers of Leviticus) turned the Jubilee into cultic law reinforced by the motive clause "I am the Lord your

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<sup>56</sup> Sharon H Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee: Images for Ethics and Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 16.

God" removed the issue of land tenure from the realm of economic expediency and introduced it into that of divine interest. The priests intended to make the issue of land tenure one of cosmic importance, the neglect of which would court a return to chaos.<sup>57</sup>

## **VI. Why Israel Failed in Applying the Jubilee Year**

Some would say that the Jubilee Year mandate is bound to fail in actual application. It is really difficult because it is very radical from what the society practices. It is intentionally transformative and is a challenge to the social monopolies of the day, then and now.

1. Sinfulness of the heart. Greed and covetousness were such strong idols that could not be easily overcome.
2. The idea that the cancellation of debts and returning of land to its original owners are impractical. Duane Christensen, quoting J. H. Tigay, says that the law was modified significantly in subsequent Jewish tradition, so that "it does not cancel unpaid wages, bills owed to shopkeepers for merchandise, and certain types of secured loans." In this regard, the law is similar to the misharum act of the Babylonian King Ammitsaduka whereby business loans were not cancelled (Lemche, *JNES* 38 [1979]: 11-22). So the "release" applies only to specific situations.<sup>58</sup>
3. Israel rejected Yahweh as the Sovereign Lord who rescued them from bondage in Egypt. The covenant relationship was discarded as Israel became unfaithful to Yahweh in worshipping idols.

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<sup>57</sup> Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee*, 107.

<sup>58</sup> Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, 312.



As a result, Israel, as a nation, was judged by God and resulted in their destruction and exile in a foreign land.

## VII. Jesus and the Jubilee Year

Jesus started his ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth by announcing to the people that he had come to preach the good news to the poor and also liberation to all that are oppressed (Lk 4:18-19, quoted from Isa 61:1-2a). He has come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor – a reference to the Jubilee Year. Luke and the other Gospel writers presented Jesus as a royal messenger announcing the "good news" of liberation at the beginning of God's reign.<sup>59</sup>

Luke 4:18-19 expresses the thrust of the Jubilee mandate. Jesus did not offer a heavenly home to the poor when they die. Jesus came to change the prevailing socioeconomic, religious, and political landscape. This is the good news to the poor which included the following during the 1st century world – the indebted peasant farmers, landless people, and enslaved or unemployed laborers (cf. Mt 18:21-30; 20:1-16). Jesus came to release those in captivity. The original reference here is to the exiles in Babylon (Isa 61) but in Jesus' time it probably referred to debtors who were in prison with no means to repay their debts.<sup>60</sup>

Throughout Jesus' ministry on earth, he showed his love for the poor and the oppressed. Not only did he preach the good news of God's reign to them, he also liberated them from demonic possession and oppression, he fed the poor, he brought healing to the blind, lame,

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<sup>59</sup> Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, xiv.

<sup>60</sup> Kinsler and Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life*, 104.

and lepers. He spent more time with these outcasts of society. As a result, it was generally the poor who responded to him and committed their lives to him. "Those who are excluded by the dominant socioeconomic-religious-political system"<sup>61</sup> were the ones who became his followers (tax collectors, former prostitutes, rebels, etc.).

### **VIII. Recommendations for Today**

As the Philippines is a predominantly Christian country, I believe we can practice the mandates of the Sabbath Day, Sabbath Year, and the Jubilee Year. Here are some of my recommendations for social transformation in our own society today.

1. As Christians, we are to say "no" to all forms of marginalization against and exclusion of the poor. Abusive interest rates, unfair market competition, manipulation of currency value, unjust economic policies, very low wages or underemployment, use of child labor, exploitation, gender bias, and other unjust practices are to be condemned. We are to support movements which are against "immoral debts." Let us not leave such advocacies limited to a few organizations outside of the church. Churches are to be actively involved in these advocacies. The church should not remain silent.
2. We are to advocate for simple living. Living extravagantly is immoral when you know that every day hundreds of millions or even more than a billion people go hungry and thousands die of

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<sup>61</sup> Kinsler and Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life*, 99.

malnutrition. We have to be in solidarity with the poor just like our Lord Jesus showed us. We are to say "no" to accumulation of wealth at the expense of the poor but rather share what we have so that all will have enough to live.

What happened to the early church where believers shared freely of what they have to the poor and sacrificially selling properties just to address the needs of the poor should not be the exception but the normal experience. As followers of Jesus, we have the obligation to care for the poor.

3. Lend directly to the poor with no interest. I do not believe in doling out money to help the poor.<sup>62</sup> In this case we can use our savings to help alleviate the lives of the poor. Bank interests on savings are almost negligible. Why not make a better investment by helping a poor family rise above poverty by lending them money for a small business without charging any interest at all? The apprehension of many will be that the poor will squander this "easy" money. The solution here is to tie up the loan with a livelihood training program to help them get into a small business project.
4. Churches are to encourage their members to pull together their savings and organize this into a cooperative or non-profit organization that will help the poor by lending at very minimal

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<sup>62</sup> Opportunity International uses the term "hand up" to indicate their efforts of helping the poor rise out of poverty by microfinance or micro loans as small as \$100. <[http://www.opportunity.org.au/?gclid=CLm1oc6bzMCFUstdpQod90sA\\_A](http://www.opportunity.org.au/?gclid=CLm1oc6bzMCFUstdpQod90sA_A)> (accessed 14 November 2012).

interest rate (say 0.5% per month), just enough to cover the cost of operations and not aiming to have any profit. Minimal interest rate means much lower than what the bank charges or even what some Christian micro-lending organizations charge (interest rate is around 2.5% to 3.5% per month which I could not really agree with as this is usurious). I really find this practice by so-called Christian micro-finance groups oppressive. The church should be at the forefront in helping the poor and not exploiting them. We need more NGOs that are really helping the poor and not exploiting them to become rich.

5. Push for the Philippine government to fully implement land distribution to our poor farmers under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program or Republic Act 6657 signed into law by then President Corazon C. Aquino in 1988. The law has very good intentions toward promoting social justice and giving opportunity to landless farmers to rise out of poverty. The challenge though is in its full implementation and the fact that this will end soon in 2014 after being given a 5-year extension in 2009.<sup>63</sup> Our President, Benigno Aquino III, has to set the example by distributing the Hacienda Luisita (covering almost 5,000 hectares of land) to the farmers as ordered by the Supreme Court. The issue that has bogged the implementation is the pricing of the land but the Supreme Court has rejected with finality the bid of the Aquino clan to put the value of the land based on the 2006 price. The price

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<sup>63</sup> Ceres P. Doyo, "Romancing the Land," <<http://opinion.inquirer.net/30175/romancing-the-land>> (accessed 27 November 2012).

remains at the 1989 level.<sup>64</sup> Time is fast running out since 2014 is only 2 years away and there are still about 900,000 hectares to be distributed to beneficiaries.<sup>65</sup> We have to be vigilant on this matter and continue to lobby the Department of Agrarian Reform to finish their task of distributing land to the rightful beneficiaries. The Filipino people are eagerly watching as to how our new Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Ma. Lourdes Sereno, will order the distribution of the Hacienda Luisita to its beneficiaries, knowing that she is an appointee of President Benigno Aquino III.

## **IX. Conclusion**

The story of the Exodus calls us to experience a continuous liberation — liberation from social, economic, political, and military oppression and bondage. As people of God we are called to live according to kingdom principles, particularly the principle of love and compassion for all people. We are called to be different (1Pe 2:9). We are to be different from the world system and values as we live according to kingdom principles. We are in this world but are not of this world.

Like the author of the book of Isaiah, we are to look forward to that day where God indeed will be King over the earth and establish a new heaven and a new earth with a very counter cultural government:

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<sup>64</sup> <<http://opinion.inquirer.net/27635/boost-to-land-reform>> (accessed 27 November 2012).

<sup>65</sup> Doyo, "Romancing the Land."

<sup>17</sup> Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth, and no one will even think about the old ones anymore. <sup>18</sup> Be glad; rejoice forever in my creation! And look! I will create Jerusalem as a place of happiness. Her people will be a source of joy. <sup>19</sup> I will rejoice over Jerusalem and delight in my people. And the sound of weeping and crying will be heard in it no more. <sup>20</sup> No longer will babies die when only a few days old. No longer will adults die before they have lived a full life. No longer will people be considered old at one hundred! Only the cursed will die that young! <sup>21</sup> In those days people will live in the houses they build and eat the fruit of their own vineyards. <sup>22</sup> Unlike the past, invaders will not take their houses and confiscate their vineyards. For my people will live as long as trees, and my chosen ones will have time to enjoy their hard-won gains. <sup>23</sup> They will not work in vain, and their children will not be doomed to misfortune. For they are people blessed by the Lord, and their children, too, will be blessed. <sup>24</sup> I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers! <sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb will feed together. The lion will eat hay like a cow. But the snakes will eat dust. In those days no one will be hurt or destroyed on my holy mountain. I, the Lord, have spoken! (Isa 65, NLT)

Isaiah's vision is clearly for a radical kind of community. There will be no exploitation or oppression of people. There will be no poor in it so that the sound of weeping or cry of distress will not be heard of. God will rule and he will rule justly. There is hope for us as long as we live these kingdom values and follow the Jubilee mandate.

## ABSTRACT

Every year the gap between the rich and the poor is getting bigger. The Philippines, despite its good economic performance the past years, remain heavily indebted. This is the major reason why the Philippines cannot rise out of poverty.

The biblical model of the Jubilee gives us hope though. Following the Jubilee mandate of cancellation of debt and returning of land to the poor will help solve the problem of poverty in the Philippines. If even a partial amount of their loans will be cancelled under the Jubilee mandate, it will help solve the problem of poverty as more money will go to much needed services such as education and health.

Our vision is for a biblical model of community where there will be no more poor people. This is the reason for the Sabbath, the Sabbath Year mandate, and the Jubilee Mandate. Jesus came not just to preach the good news to the poor but also to liberate those who are oppressed, oppressed politically, socioeconomically, and religiously (Lk 4:18-19).

## 撮 要

每年世界各地的貧富懸殊情況不斷加劇，以菲律賓為例，即使過去幾年她的經濟表現良好，可是她仍處於嚴重欠債的危機中，而這正是菲律賓無法脫貧的主要原因。

聖經的禧年模式讓我們有所盼望。根據禧年的原則，窮人的債項獲撇清，土地歸還給他們，這方法有助解決菲律賓的貧窮問題。即使她的部分債務按禧年的規定被免除，她也可以投放較多資金於教育和醫療上，以助解決貧窮的問題。

我們期盼一個合乎聖經原則的社羣，當中沒有貧窮人。這正是安息日、安息年和禧年的意義。耶穌來不但要傳福音給貧窮人，也要讓受壓制的得自由，無論是受政治、社會經濟或宗教上的壓迫（路四18~19）。