

Pope John Paul II on Poverty and Debt

At present, the positive efforts [toward reducing poverty] are being affected by the still largely unsolved problem of **the foreign debt of the poorer countries**. The principle that debts must be paid is certainly just. However, it is not right to demand or expect payment when the effect would be the imposition of political choices leading to hunger and despair for entire peoples. It cannot be expected that the debts which have been contracted should be paid at the price of unbearable sacrifices. In such cases it is necessary to find — as in fact is partly happening — ways to lighten, defer or even cancel the debt, compatible with the fundamental right of peoples to subsistence and progress.
John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 1991

Christians will have to raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world, proposing the Jubilee as an appropriate time to give thought, among other things, **to reducing substantially, if not cancelling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations**.

Tertio Millennio Adveniente, 1994

I make a pressing appeal to all those with responsibility for financial relations on the worldwide level. I ask them to make a sincere effort to **find a solution to the frightening problem of the international debt of the poorest nations**. International financial institutions have initiated concrete steps in this regard which merit appreciation. I appeal to all those involved in this problem, especially the more affluent nations, to provide the support necessary to ensure the full success of this initiative. An immediate and vigorous effort is needed, as we look to the year 2000, to ensure that the greatest possible number of nations will be able to extricate themselves from a now intolerable situation . . . In this way, lasting development will become a possibility for those nations facing the greatest difficulties, and the millennium now before us will become for them too a time of renewed hope.

Respect for Human Rights: The Secret of True Peace, 1999

The tragedy of poverty remains closely linked to the issue of the foreign debt of poor countries. Despite significant progress in this area, the problem has not yet been adequately resolved. Fifteen years ago I called public attention to the fact that the foreign debt of poor countries “is closely related to a series of other problems such as foreign investment, the proper functioning of the major international organizations, the price of raw materials and so forth”. Recent moves in favor of debt reduction, centered mainly on the needs of the poor, have certainly improved the quality of *economic growth*. Yet, because of a number of factors, this growth is still quantitatively insufficient, especially in relation to the millennium goals. Poor countries remain trapped in a *vicious circle*: low income and weak growth limit savings and, in turn, weak investments and an inefficient use of savings do not favor growth.

World Day of Peace Message, 2005

Reflection

What are some of the Catholic Social Teaching principles that prompted John Paul II to continue making his “pressing appeals” to developed countries about the forgiveness of the debt of poor countries?

Why did John Paul II call for extensive forgiveness of poor country debt even after some debt reduction mechanisms were put into place?

There will be an important meeting of the heads of the leading developed countries in July 2005 in Scotland. Catholic organizations and many other faith-based groups are supporting campaigns that are calling for significant commitments to reduce global poverty, including debt cancellation, when the leaders meet. Check the Jubilee USA web site to learn more and to find ways to support the call for debt forgiveness: www.jubileeusa.org

Father of forgiveness, help us follow your command to forgive others. Guide the leaders of the rich nations to heed Pope John Paul II’s call to forgive and cancel the debt of poor countries where sickness and poverty cause suffering for so many. Help us take on our own responsibility to speak out for debt cancellation as a work of mercy. Amen.



Pope John Paul II on Hunger

Permit me to enumerate some of the most important human rights that are universally recognized: the right to life, liberty and security of person; **the right to food**, clothing, housing, sufficient health care, rest, leisure . . .
John Paul II, Address to the United Nations, October , 1979

It is the task of nations, their leaders, their economic powers and all people of goodwill to seek every opportunity for a **more equitable sharing of resources**, which are not lacking, and of consumer goods . . . It requires firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.

This outlook calls for a change of attitude and habits with regard to lifestyle and the relationship between resources and goods, as well as to increase awareness of others and their legitimate needs. . . nothing will change at world level, if the leaders of nations do not put into practice [policies] to promote **economic and food policies based not only on profit but also on sharing in solidarity** . . .

It seems essential here to make a comparison with the sums allocated for defense or the superfluous spending which is customary in the most developed countries. **Urgent choices become necessary**, both at national and international levels and at the level of the different communities and families, in order to identify significant ways of guaranteeing food security. A peace factor does not only consist in building up considerable food reserves, but especially in giving each individual and family the possibility of access to an adequate supply of food at all times. . .

We must find the most suitable measures to encourage local agricultural production and the protection of agricultural land, while safeguarding natural resources. Guaranteeing a just sharing of productive ownership, to promote the activities of agricultural and cooperative associations, and to protect market access for the benefit of rural populations. All this will certainly be inadequate if efforts are not made to educate people to justice, solidarity and the love of all human beings who are their brothers and sisters.
John Paul II, Address to World Food Summit, November, 1996

Every person, every people, has the right to live off the fruits of the earth. At the beginning of the new millennium, it is an intolerable scandal that so many people are still reduced to hunger and live in conditions unworthy of humans. We can no longer limit ourselves to academic reflections: we must rid humanity of this disgrace through appropriate political and economic decisions with a global scope.

John Paul II, Jubilee of the World Agriculture Address, November, 2000

The international community is committed to guaranteeing that basic **freedom from hunger and access to adequate and healthy food which are primary expressions of the right to life** and respect for human dignity which are so often solemnly proclaimed but are still far from being a reality. In fact, while humanity's attainments offer the hope of a future more responsive to human needs, the world tragically remains divided between those who live in abundance and those who are lacking even what is essential for their everyday sustenance. This situation constitutes one of the most obvious obstacles for building a society worthy of humanity, a world that is truly human and fraternal.

John Paul II, World Food Day, 2002

Reflection

Pope John Paul II proclaims that everyone has the right to food and links this to the right to life. What is the difference between providing food to people because it is their right and providing food as an act of kindness? Why is it harder to secure rights than encourage charity?

John Paul II notes that there is adequate food in the world to feed everyone, then explains some of the problems that cause hunger. Reflect on some of the causes he mentions in the quotes on this page.

Catholic Social Teaching emphasizes the transformation of unjust systems. The current food production system is dominated by large agri-business corporations. What do you know about these corporations? Why has John Paul II called for more help for small farmers?

God, who comes to us as bread, help us to bring all to the table of your abundance.

