



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI TO THE WORLD LAND REFORM CONFERENCE*

Monday, 27 June 1966

We extend to you, Gentlemen, the most cordial welcome to the Vatican. Your World Land Reform Conference, with its more than 300 delegates from nearly 80 nations, is an event of far-reaching significance and one that, to be sure, no less authorities than the international organizations of such high competence as the United Nations, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the International Labour Office were instrumental in bringing about. To those Organizations go first of all our salutation and this renewal of our greatest deference and esteem.

You, gentlemen, are personages of proven competence; you are specialists in the problems of land reform. You are fully cognizant of the need to improve policy and programming in this field which is one of such capital importance for the well-being of countless millions of people of the globe. And you are meeting in order to tell each other of your experiences and to evaluate your action programs. We are greatly honored and deeply touched at your thought in interrupting your labors for a moment to visit us.

Your deliberations are fraught with consequence. For Land Reform is assigned a vital role in the eradication of hunger and poverty from the country sides of the world. And the problems to which you are so courageously addressing yourselves are possibly among the most difficult, but also, you may be sure, among the most vital and the most urgent confronting humanity at the present time. Land tenure, redistribution of landed property, changes in the relations between landowner and farmer, the setting of limits to the territorial extension of ownership, consolidation, joint farming and land settlement - there, to mention only a few, are the problems before you.

Some of you, on this visit to the Vatican, may have wondered what the Pope was going to say on the subject and whether the Catholic Church had an opinion, a solution to offer, in regard to these great problems facing mankind.

In truth, in all that concerns the purely technical aspects of these problems - administrative aspects, for example, or those of an economic and financial nature - the Church, as such, has no specific competence and, by that token, no solution to propose. But your own efforts reach above and beyond such technical aspects. What you are striving for is to make a worthwhile contribution to the prosperity and welfare of your fellows. And here you join hands with the Church, for She, too, is striving, using methods and means peculiar to Herself, to secure what She considers to be the true good of mankind. She does not promote this, that or the other solution to whatever problem may present itself; rather She professes a doctrine which empowers Her to judge which of the proposed solutions are in keeping with human dignity and of a sort likely to secure true progress for the individual and for society at large.

This doctrine has been proclaimed afresh by the Ecumenical Council that lately brought together the bishops of the Catholic world. The Council Fathers, numbering over two thousand, adopted the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. There one may read this solemn affirmation: "God intended the earth and all things in it for the use of all peoples, in such a way that the goods of creation should abound equitably in the hands of all, according to the dictates of justice, which is inseparable from charity. Whatever the forms of ownership, adapted to the lawful institutions of the peoples and in accordance with diverse and changing circumstances, this universal apportionment of goods must be borne in mind at all times."

It is easy to see, Gentlemen, all the consequences that derive from this basic principle. But the Council, having proclaimed the principle, goes on to consider a number of concrete applications, and there is one of these which we feel is very deserving of your attention: "In a number of the economically less-developed regions, there are extensive and even vast landed estates which are poorly cultivated or set aside for speculative purposes, while the majority of the population has no land or only a pitiable amount, at a time when agricultural production is patently of the utmost urgency."

Here, Gentlemen, as you see, we are at the core of the problem. The Council analyses the matter further: "It often happens that those employed by the owners of these large estates or who cultivate rented plots of land on them receive wages or have an income unworthy of their status as men. They have no decent living quarters and are exploited by the middlemen. Utterly without security, they live in a state of personal dependence such as to deny them practically any possibility of initiative and responsibility, cultural betterment or a share in social and political life. Reform, therefore, is imperative, (the Council concluded) in order, as the case may be, to increase incomes, improve working conditions and security of employment, foster initiative and even to redistribute under-cultivated land among men capable of bringing it into production."

We ask your indulgence, Gentlemen, for this lengthy quotation. but, as we see it, it is not without interest for you to realize that Land Reform and the efforts of those engaged in that noble undertaking have the care and the solicitude of the Church. Moreover, Her heartfelt support goes

out spontaneously to any initiative in this field that is in conformity with the great principles that She herself, but a short time ago, proclaimed afresh through Her bishops in Council.

It remains for us to thank you once again, Gentlemen, for your kind visit and to say how fervently we wish you a felicitous continuation of your labors. From our heart we invoke upon those labors, as upon you yourselves, your families and your countries, the most abundant blessings of God.

**Paths to Peace* p. 276-277.