



The Holy See

*Address of His Holiness Paul VI
to the 16th Session of the Conference
of the Food and Agriculture Organization**

Friday 12 November 1971

The welcome that FAO gave us on 16 November last on the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary, remains as a source of gratitude in our memory, as we are happy to testify to you today on the occasion of the sixteenth session of your general Assembly. This meeting coincides, moreover, with the twentieth anniversary of FAO's establishment in Rome, and in this instance we wish, together with our best wishes for the fruitfulness of your work, to pay a public tribute to those who, these many years were the devoted and efficient Observers of the Holy See to your Organization, our old friend the late Commander Emilio Bonomelli, who often welcomed you at Castel Gandolfo, and dear Msgr. Luigi Ligutti, whose experience and competence you have all long appreciated, in the radiance of his human and priestly virtues, and who has just retired to enjoy a well-deserved rest after so many years of good and loyal service.

We have studied with great interest some of the preparatory documents for your work: in particular the analysis of the main trends and outstanding facts of the world food and agricultural situation, the prospective study of world agricultural development in the context of the international strategy of the second development decade, the progress of agricultural research, the orientations of the World Food Programme, the balance-sheet and the imperatives of agrarian reform, your relations with the great international organizations on question of common interest; and particularly, your participation in the important U.N. Conference on the Human Environment, which will be held in Stockholm in June 1972, and will deal with very grave questions - some of them really distressing - regarding the future of mankind.

On reading your work, we were struck by the fundamental concern that inspires your research: an increasingly lively awareness of the solidarity that unites all the members of the great human family and an ever more resolute determination to induce peoples and governments to draw the

necessary conclusions to help all men to live a fully human life. How could the Church fail to rejoice in this policy, in such conformity with the demands of her message of universal love, as with the best aspirations of the men of our times? We said so in our encyclical *Populorum Progressio*: "The starving people are becoming aware of their individual hardship" (No. 9).

The increasing discrepancy of income and the more keenly felt disparity of ways of life, make this realization even more acute today.

The rising younger generations within the rural world are living this situation with an impatience that is difficult to control, while they claim more and more insistently increased participation, on the triple plane of property, knowledge and power: "to do more, to know more and have more. in order to be more" (ibid. No. 6).

So it is only right that the problem of "agricultural adaptation", as you define it in point 7 of your provisional agenda (document C 71/41, of 25 August 1971), should claim all your attention. Who does not see that the most remarkable technical progress and the most advanced technological attainments would not be of any use, if rural youth throughout the world did not realize that the progress in question is also within their reach and to their advantage; and that by bringing it about they fulfill themselves. In every village one and all must be interested in his work, given the concrete means of improving it and helped to understand what is at stake. The importation of ready-made techniques would have a short lived effect if this patient and persevering education were not undertaken and carried out by experts deeply concerned about this authentic promotion of man, so true is it that programming and financing are not sufficient: "it is truly the spirit and the heart that first achieve true victories" (Address to the FAO, 16 November 1970, in AAS, 62 (1970), p.835, n.7).

It must be said expressly: economic and social action, however indispensable it may be, is not enough, unless it is sustained and promoted by a plan that is at once psychological, pedagogical and spiritual. We are, in fact, up against radical transformations that are causing upheavals in the life of the world. Rural civilization, which was formerly that of the majority of men and ensured them legitimate development, is now attacked on all sides by the rise of an urban, mechanical civilization, that provides multiple objects intended to make men's lives more comfortable. Frequently isolated in remote country areas, are not the young often losing hope in their future as human beings? Do they not feel that in the last resort, they are working for people in the towns and that there is no real participation for them in what appears to them from far away as a kind of marvellous golden age? The reality, it is true, is quite different from the dream; and disappointment is not long in coming when they are plainly confronted with this reality. But, as everyone knows, the power of myths is such that it shakes mentalities in their most secret depths.

Young rural people wish to live like other young people today, to exercise a well defined profession, to have a clearly marked social status, a house equipped with a minimum of comfort

with surroundings worthy of the name, free time that is a source of legitimate satisfaction, living conditions that they do not blush to share with their mate, schools that educate their children holidays that make it possible for them to renew their daily horizon.

In short, it is no longer sufficient to check the growing discrepancy of the situation of the rural populations in the modern world. It is a question of giving them a full place in it, of seeing to it that the rising generations no longer feel the weakening sensation of being left on the shelf, so to speak, living on the fringes of society, deprived of the best elements of modern progress. Who will succeed in convincing them of the value, the interest, the necessity, and at the same time the humanity and the dignity of their toil, in comparison with industrial and bureaucratic work? Who will succeed in giving them the means of living with dignity, and being happy to lead this life, freely taken up? Times have changed, and Georgic and Arcadian poetry is no longer enough - "Beatus ille qui procul negotiis....," Horace, Epodon I, Vitae rusticae laudes - to meet the expectation of the rural world. We must help them to construct a whole new society, by giving them the means. economic means, of course, we repeat, but equally cultural, human and spiritual means. On these terms only will it be possible to overcome the present really distressing crisis of the young, only thus will rural families find again their natural balance and will villages become once more animated with cultural and religious life. A noble task, worthy of arousing the enthusiasm of the young and uniting them to carry out a really fascinating project of life!

It is up to you to meet this legitimate expectation, and in this way to put a stop to the dangerous disenchantment that is spreading all over the countryside as a result of too many frustrated hopes. Men and women, the young especially, need to be helped to obtain means of subsistence with their work and reasons for living through their commitment to the service of a great cause. When it is a question of increasing world food resources, of providing needy populations with the essential foodstuffs, the means strictly indispensable for their subsistence, cannot the same generous impulse be aroused as the one that animates the great achievements of human genius? Is it possible that man is more inclined to direct his inventive skill towards extravagant projects or enterprises of destruction (cf. *ibid.* p. 836, n. 9) than to utilize the immense resources of his spirit and his hands to fertilize the earth? May your generous and efficient action bring forth concerned effort among all men of goodwill to exploit so many lands lying fallow and so many productive energies (cf. *ibid.* p. 837, n. 10). A fertile land for all men: may this ideal, thanks to your persevering effort, find expression more and more in the reality of the world, on the scale of the dimensions of the international community, the peaceful establishment of which animates the dynamism of all men of feeling.

This tells you with what esteem we follow your work and what hope it arouses in us, after a Synod that marked the acute concern of the Church to contribute to establishing justice among all peoples. Your mission is a deeply human one, and the ideal that inspires it honours you. Your enterprise is a noble and difficult one; it calls for great courage, and never-failing generosity and perseverance. Far from letting yourselves be discouraged by the vastness of the task to be carried

out, may its urgency be for you a stimulus to shoulder your responsibility even more generously and also an appeal to creative imagination, which will inspire liberating solutions. At a time, in fact, when some people feel the insidious temptation to retire within a selfish and absolute nationalism, it is for you to open the ways to increased international cooperation, marking the transition from economies dominated mainly by the pursuit of profit to an economy in the service of the common good. Who does not see that it is on these terms that intelligent mobilization of the innumerable resources of lands and oceans will give all persons what they need to live as human beings?

This world-wide mission of yours is certainly part of the designs of divine Providence, which invites us to share our daily bread lovingly and see to it that every man can procure it himself by his diligent work. So we warmly call upon your work the abundance of divine graces, in token of which we give you a generous Apostolic Blessing.

*ORa n.47 p.8;

Paths to Peace p.313-315.