



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ITALIAN NATIONAL CONFEDERATION
OF INDEPENDENT FARMERS [COLDIRETTI]**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 31 January 2015*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

I welcome you on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the *Confederazione Nazionale dei Coltivatori Diretti*. I thank your President for the courteous words he addressed to me on behalf of everyone. I extend my greeting to the national ecclesiastical Councilor and to those of the regions present here, a sign of the special attention that the Church reserves for your work.

The name “*coltivatori diretti*” (small farmers) refers to “*cultivating*”, which *is a form of work characteristically and fundamentally human*. Indeed in the work of farmers there is the acceptance of the precious gift of the land which comes to us from God, but there is also its appreciation in the equally precious work of men and women, called to respond with audacity and creativity to the mandate that has been consigned to man from the beginning, that of tilling and safeguarding the land (cf. Gen 2:15). The word “cultivate” calls to mind the care which the farmer has for his land in order that it bear fruits and that they be shared: how much passion, how much attention, how much dedication in all that this demands! That familiar relationship is formed and the earth becomes “sister” earth.

Truly *there is no humanity without the cultivation of land*; there is no good life without the food that it produces for the men and women of every continent. Thus, agriculture shows its inalienable role.

The labour of those who cultivate the earth, generously dedicating time and energy to it, appears as a genuine vocation. It deserves to be recognized and appropriately appreciated, also in concrete economic policies. This means eliminating those obstacles which penalize so precious

an activity which often make it seem unappealing to young people, despite statistics showing growth in the number of students attending Agrarian schools and institutes, fostering the expectation of an increased number of workers in the agricultural sector. At the same time due attention should be paid to the already too widespread reallocation of agricultural land for other, perhaps seemingly more profitable, enterprises (cf. Message for Thanksgiving Day, Italy, 9 November 2014). Here too, money dominates! It is similar to the action of those people who have no feelings, who sell their family, sell their mother, but here the temptation is to sell mother earth.

This reflection on the centrality of agricultural work draws our gaze to two *critical areas*: the first, that of *poverty* and *hunger*, which unfortunately still affect a large portion of humanity. The Second Vatican Council recalled the universal destination of earthly goods (cf. Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 69), but in reality the current economic system excludes many from benefiting fairly from them. Absolutizing market rules, a throwaway culture and waste which, in the case of food has unacceptable proportions, together with other factors, create misery and suffering for so many families. Therefore, the system of food production and distribution needs to be thoroughly re-thought. As our grandparents taught us, “bread is not to be trifled with!”. I remember that, as a child, when bread fell off the table, we were taught to pick it up and kiss it, and put it back on the table. Bread in some way forms part of the sacredness of human life, and this is why it cannot be treated as a mere commodity (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, nn. 52-60).

But — to come to the second critical area — it is important to remember that in the Book of Genesis, Chapter 2, verse 15, it speaks of the call to man not only to till the land, but also to *safeguard it*. Indeed, the two things are after all, strictly related: each farmer is well aware of how much more difficult it has become to cultivate the land in a time of accelerated climate change and increasingly widespread extreme climatic conditions. How do we continue producing wholesome food for the life of all when climate stability is at risk, when the air, water and the soil itself are losing their purity due to pollution? Do we truly realize the importance of urgent action to safeguard creation; it is imperative that nations succeed in cooperating for this fundamental goal.

The challenge is how to implement a type of agriculture with a low environmental impact. How can we ensure that the way that we cultivate the land safeguards it at the same time? Only in this way, in fact, can future generations continue to live on and cultivate it.

In facing these questions, I address an appeal and a proposal. The appeal is that of *rediscovering love for the earth* as “mother” — St Francis would say — from which we are drawn and to which we are constantly called to return. And this also leads to the proposal: *safeguard the land*, establish a covenant with it, so it may continue to be, as God wants, a source of life for the entire human family. This will counter the exploitation of the land, as though it had no relationship to us — no longer mother —, and then leaving it to weaken and abandoning it because it is useless.

It is precisely the history of this covenant that your tradition embodies daily: the history of social

agriculture with a human face, created from a sound and vital relationship between man and the land: vital relations: the land bears us fruit but the land also has a quality for us: the land protects our health, the land is our sister and mother who cures and heals. The ethical inspiration, which motivates and sustains your action in light of the Catholic Social Teaching, has, from its very origin, brought *Coldiretti's* mission close to that of the Church, and their cooperation has borne much fruit in Italian society as a whole.

Dear friends, I hope that your work to till and safeguard the land may be appropriately considered and appreciated; and I invite you to always give priority to the ethical demands with which you as Christians address the problems and challenges of your activity.

And, please, I ask you to pray for me and I wholeheartedly bless you.