



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN XXIII
TO THE 10th SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION ****

November 10, 1959

You wanted to interrupt briefly the work of your 10th General Conference to come to seek here the encouragement and the blessing of the Pope. We are very happy to receive you because, as you know, the FAO is well-known at the Vatican. The members of your preceding sessions were received in audience more than once by our Predecessor of happy memory, Pope [Pius XII](#), who always offered them the warmest reception. Formerly we used to pass often near the large FAO building, and seeing the many windows lighted at night, we never failed to send a grateful thought to those who were working there for the good of humanity. And now from our own apartment we can see the imposing headquarters of your organization rising on the horizon: so, you see, you are very present to us in mind and in heart.

We are anxious to tell you that the Church is very interested in the FAO. With maternal concern, the Church looks upon the great and beautiful example you offer with your technicians working all over the world to organize the struggle against hunger, to improve soil, plants, animal species, fishing techniques, dairy organization, forestry development...and all this in order to assist the most unhappy and the most deprived of our brothers and sisters, those who suffer, those who are hungry! This is truly a great and wonderful thing which inspires admiration, edification, confidence in the future.

You know that, with a full heart, we exhort the pilgrims who come to see us to undertake material as well as spiritual actions motivated by the love of God and neighbor which Church tradition calls the «works of mercy». And, what is the entire activity of the FAO except an immense work of mercy, a work of mercy on a world-wide scale! We scarcely need to exhort you, so eloquent is the very lesson itself which you give to the world. Rather, we want to rejoice with you, to congratulate you warmly, to assure you that we bless your works.

First, we rejoice sincerely and we thank God that an enterprise like the «Food and Agriculture Organization» could be born, organized and developed following the frightful conflict which bloodied the world. Doubtless, one of the most remarkable and most fortunate facts of the post war years was the recognition by the responsible authorities of the great difference in the standard of living among the nations, of the economic misery of the poorest, – the under-developed, as they were called – in comparison with those who retained the principal sources of wealth. From there, in those noble and dedicated persons concerned with the welfare of humanity, there arose the desire for effective service, a great movement for study, research, exchange of information, placement of technicians was initiated and you have arrived finally at those beneficial achievements which are the result of FAO's activities in recent years and which illustrate so well the booklet which you have offered us: «The FAO at work». How much beautiful and effective energy actually placed intelligently at the service of the good! Allow us to congratulate you most sincerely for it.

We would like to pick out one characteristic which, in our view, accompanies these fine activities: it is that spirit, wisely realistic and at the same time serenely optimistic, which animates your organization. The FAO does not fear difficulties: it confronts them. It is not discouraged by the number and the size of the obstacles which appear in its way: the ruins and ravages brought about by war, the extent of poverty in certain regions, the epidemics spread by malnutrition and increasing it... without mentioning problems permanently posed by the constant increase of the world population. The FAO wisely saw to the most efficient means to provide, to improve, and to share food through careful distribution, and it put its services at the disposition of interested governments. The Church highly esteems this spirit of positive achievement and of disinterested service; it praises this reasonable boldness, and this confidence in the possibility of solving the great human problems. The Church also is optimistic.

A precious result of your activities, – and, as we know, also one of the goals of your Organization – is, ultimately, raising the standard of living of those who live in the rural areas. Coming from a rural family, we have seen with our own eyes, during our young years, and we will never forget it, the fatigue and the suffering of those given over to working the land. To contribute to lightening their burden, to giving a bit more material comfort to those who provide the bread for the rest, what a beautiful work of mercy that is also, and how worthy of encouragement and of praise!

We would also like to add another thought which came to us in reflecting on the broad, strengthening perspectives which the results already achieved by your organization open to the mind. In a world still shaken by war and its consequences, humanity searches for sources of real peace and for those who will be the most effective artisans of peace. The enlightenment from political interaction is still so uncertain, so subject to extinction after having aroused such great hopes! On the other hand, those who promote the practice of good deeds from nation to nation, mutual aid on the economic plane, in a disinterested spirit of friendly benevolence, are not these therefore the ones who set the surest paths to unity and peace among peoples?

In continuing your beautiful activities, may you also, Gentlemen, work for the peace of the world! In taking our leave from you, we could not give you a greeting which corresponds better, it seems to us, to your wishes as to ours, a wish most surely in conformity, in any event, to that of God the Creator and Savior of humanity. In order to better assure its realization, we grant our paternal apostolic blessing most cordially to all.

**Paths to Peace*, p.300-301.