



# The Holy See

---

## *VISIT OF POPE PAUL VI TO THE FAO ON THE 25th ANNIVERSARY OF ITS INSTITUTION\**

*Monday, 16 November 1970*

1. It is a profound joy for us – also an honour – to bring in our turn to this rostrum the debt of gratitude and the cry of anguish and hope of millions of men and women, on this twenty-fifth anniversary of FAO. What a road has been travelled since that far-off day, the sixteenth of October 1945, when the representatives of forty-four States were invited to sign the act which set up the United Nations Organization for Food and Agriculture. Historians will point out the remarkable accomplishments of FAO, its progressive influence, its unflagging dynamism, the boldness of its views, the variety and breadth of its activities – since «it is above all else an institution orientated to action» (FAO, son role, sa structure, ses activités, Rome, Pub. FAO, 1970) – the courage of its pioneers and finally the love of man and the universal sense of brotherhood which are the driving force behind its undertakings. They will point out also the extraordinary challenge thrust at you today: as your efforts increase and become organized, so the number of men multiplies, the misery of many is intensified and while a small number of people is sated with ever-increasing and ever diversified resources, an ever greater part of mankind continues to hunger for bread and education and to thirst for dignity. The first decade of development - it would be vain to conceal it - was marked by a certain disenchantment of public opinion in the face of frustrated hopes. Would it thus be the case, as with Sisyphus, to grow tired of rolling the heavy stone and give in to despair?

2. Such an idea could not be expressed in these precincts, in this meeting of persons who face the future with the aims of harnessing it for the service of mankind, notwithstanding the obstacles which may present themselves along the way. From the time of his first meeting with FAO, our predecessor Pope Pius XII highly praised the deep insight «of your institution, specialized for food and agriculture, the magnanimity which characterizes its economy and application, and finally the wisdom and the circumspect method which determine its realization.» (Allocution of 21 February 1948, Discorsi e Radiomessaggi di S.S. Pio XII, vol. IX, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, p. 461). His successor, good Pope John XXIII, would seize every opportunity to express to you his sincere

admiration. (Cf. in particular, Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, 15 May 1961, AAS 53(1961), p.439). For our part, we first knew the International Institute of Agriculture in its modest quarters in Villa Borghese, before seeing FAO «traverse the entire road which has led it to the magnificent developments which it knows today.» (Address to the 12th International Conference of FAO. 23 November 1963). From that time on we have not ceased to follow with sympathetic interest your generous and disinterested initiatives - particularly the campaign against hunger - to render homage to your many activities and to call upon the Catholics of the entire world to collaborate generously therein, together with all men of good will. (Cf. in particular, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, 26 March 1967, n. 46, AAS 59(1967), p. 280). Today we are happy to come to the headquarters of your Organization, situated within the very territory of our Diocese of Rome, and thus to return to FAO the many visits which the members of your working sessions have paid to the Vatican.

How could the Church, solicitous for the true good of men, not be interested in an activity so clearly orientated as is yours to the alleviation of the greatest distress? How could the Church not be interested in your activity, which is engaged in a merciless combat to provide each man with enough to live - to live a truly human life, to be capable by his own work of guaranteeing the upkeep of his family and to be able through the exercise of his intelligence to share in the common good of society by a commitment freely agreed to and by an activity voluntarily assumed? (Cf., for example, Rev. L.-J. Lebreton, O.P., *Development - Revolution Solidaire*, Paris, Editions Ouvrières, 1967). It is at this higher level that the Church intends to give you her disinterested support for the great and complex work which you carry out. Your work consists in stimulating international action for providing each person with the nourishment he needs, both in amount and quality, and thus promoting the progressive lessening of hunger, undernourishment and malnutrition. (Cf. for example, Josue de Castro, *Le livre noir de la faim*, Paris, Ed. Ouvrières, 1961). It means eliminating the cause of many epidemics, preparing trained labour and finding for it necessary employment so that economic growth may be accompanied by social progress without which there is no true development.

3. By what means do you intend to attain these goals, which we approve with all our heart? The absorbing study – as we can well describe it – of the many dossiers furnished us on your multiple activities have revealed to us the extraordinary and growing complexity of your efforts organized on a world-wide scale. A more intelligent utilization of basic physical resources, a better use of land and water, forest and oceans, an increased productivity from farming, livestock raising and fishing – all this certainly provides commodities in greater quantity and better quality. At the same time nutritional needs grow under the double pressure of a demographic increase – at times very swift – and of a consumption whose graphic curve follows the progression of income. The improvement of soil fertility, the intelligent use of irrigation, the redivision of plots of land, the reclaiming of marshes, the effort at plant selection and the introduction of high-yield grain varieties almost seem to fulfil the vision of the ancient prophet of the agricultural era: «The desert shall rejoice and blossom.» (Cf. Is. 35:1). But the carrying out of these technical possibilities at an

accelerated pace is not accomplished without dangerous repercussions on the balance of our natural surroundings. The progressive deterioration of that which has generally come to be called the environment, risks provoking a veritable ecological catastrophe. Already we see the pollution of the air we breathe, the water we drink. We see the pollution of rivers, lakes, even oceans - to the point of inspiring fear of a true «biological death» in the near future, if energetic measures are not immediately and courageously taken and rigorously put into practice. It is a formidable prospect which you must diligently explore in order to save from destruction the fruit of millions of years of natural and human selection. (Cf. *Ceres*, Revue FAO, vol. 3, No. 3, Rome, May-June 1970: *Environment: les raisons de l'alarme*). In brief, everything is bound up together. You must be attentive to the great consequences which follow on every intervention by man in the balance of nature, whose harmonious richness has been placed at his disposal in accordance with the living design of the Creator. (Cf., for example, Ps. 64: 10-14).

4. These problems surely are familiar to you. We have wished to evoke them briefly before you only in order to underline better the urgent need of a radical change in the conduct of humanity if it wishes to assure its survival. It took millennia for man to learn how to dominate, «to subdue the earth» according to the inspired word of the first book of the Bible (Gen. 1:28). The hour has now come for him to dominate his domination; this essential undertaking requires no less courage and dauntlessness than the conquest of nature itself. Will the prodigious progressive mastery of plant, animal and human life and the discovery of even the secrets of matter lead to anti-matter and to the explosion of death? In this decisive moment of its history, humanity hesitates, uncertain before fear and hope. Who still does not see this? The most extraordinary scientific progress, the most astounding technical feats and the most amazing economic growth, unless accompanied by authentic moral and social progress, will in the long run go against man.

5. Well-being is within our grasp but we must want to build it together: individuals for others, individuals with others and, never again, individuals against others. Over and above the magnificent achievements of these twenty-five years of activity is not the essential acquisition of your Organization this: the consciousness acquired by peoples and their governments of international solidarity? Are you not, sometimes without knowing it, the heirs of Christ's compassion before suffering humanity: «I feel sorry for all these people»? (Mt. 15:32). Do you not constitute by your very existence an effective denial of the discredited thought of ancient wisdom «Homo homini lupus»? (Plautus, *Asinaria*, II, 4,88). No, man is not a wolf to his fellowman; he is his compassionate and loving brother. Never in the millennial course of the inspiring adventure of man have so many peoples, so many men and women, delegated such a number of representatives with the unique mission of aiding men - all men - to live and to survive. For us this is one of the greatest motives of hope amidst the many threats that weigh upon the world. Those who in the years 2000 will bear the responsibility of the destiny of the great human family are being born into a world which has discovered, more to its advantage than to its disadvantage, its solidarity in good as well as evil, its desire to unite in order not to perish and, in brief, «to work together to build a common future for humanity.» (Cf. Appeal in Bombay, 3 December 1964, AAS

57(1965), p. 132; repeated in *Populorum Progressio*, No. 43, AAS 59(1961), p. 447). We hope that soon the circle of your family will widen and that the peoples that are now absent from this meeting may also sit down at your table so that finally all may contribute together to the same unselfish goal.

6. Certainly in the face of the difficulties to be overcome there is a great temptation to use one's authority to diminish the number of guests rather than to multiply the bread that is to be shared. We are not at all unaware of the opinions held in international organizations which extol planned birth control which, it is believed, will bring a radical solution to the problems of a developing countries. We must repeat this today: the Church, on her part, in every domain of human action encourages scientific and technical progress, but always claiming respect for the inviolable rights of the human person whose primary guarantors are the public authorities. Being firmly opposed to a birth control which according to the just expression of our venerable predecessor Pope John XXIII would be accomplished with «methods and means which are unworthy of man» (*Mater et Magistra*, AAS 53(1961), p. 447), the Church calls all those responsible to work with fearlessness and generosity for the development of the whole man and every man; this, among other effects, will undoubtedly favour a rational control of birth by couples who are capable of freely assuming their destiny. On your part, it is man whom you help and whom you support. And how would you ever be able to act against him, because you do not exist except through him and for him and since you cannot succeed without him?

7. One of the best assured invariable principles of your action is that the finest technical achievements and the greatest economic progress cannot effect by themselves the development of a people. However necessary they may be, planning and money are not enough. Their indispensable contribution, like that of the technology which they sponsor, would be sterile were it not made fruitful by men's confidence and their progressive conviction that they can little by little get away from their miserable condition through work made possible with means at their disposal. The immediate evidence of results creates, as well as legitimate satisfaction, the decisive commitment to the great work of development. In the long run, if nothing can be done without man, with him everything can be undertaken and accomplished; it is truly the spirit and the heart that first achieve true victories. As soon as those concerned have the will to better their lot, without doubting their ability to do it, they give themselves fully to this great cause, with all the gifts of intellect and courage, all the virtues of abnegation and self-sacrifice, all the efforts of perseverance and mutual help of which they are capable.

8. The young in particular are the first to give themselves with all their typical enthusiasm and a earnestness to an undertaking which fits their capabilities and their generosity. The youth of the rich countries, bored because they lack an ideal worthy of claiming their support and galvanizing their energies, the youth of the poor countries, in despair at not being able to work in a useful way, because they lack the proper knowledge and the required professional training: there can be no doubt that the combination of these young resources can change the future of the world, if we

adults can prepare them for this great task, show them how to approach it and furnish them with the means to give themselves to it with success. Is not this a plan that will claim the support of all young people, rich and poor, transform their outlooks, overcome enmity between nations, heal sterile divisions and finally bring about a new world: a world that will know brotherly love and solidarity in effort because it will be united in the pursuit of the same ideal - a fruitful world for all men?

9. A lot of money would be necessary, certainly. But will the world not finally grasp that it is a question of its future? «When so many peoples are hungry, when so many families are destitute, when so many men remain steeped in ignorance, when so many schools, hospitals, and homes worthy of the name remain to be built, all public and private expenditures prompted by motives of national or personal ostentation, every debilitating armaments' race becomes an intolerable scandal. It is our duty to denounce it. Would that those in authority would listen to us, before it is too late!» (Populorum Progressio, No 53, AAS 59(1967), p. 283). How is it possible not to experience a deep feeling of distress in face of the tragic absurdity which impels men – and whole nations – to devote vast sums to armaments, to fostering centres of discord and rivalry, to carrying out undertakings of pure prestige, when the enormous sums thus wasted would have been enough, if better employed, to rescue numbers of countries from poverty? It is a sad fate which weights so heavily upon the human race: the poor and the rich are for once treading the same path. Exaggerated nationalism, racism engendering hate, the lust for unlimited power, the unbridled thirst for domination: who will convince men to emerge from such aberrations? Who will be the first to break the circle of the armaments' race, ever more ruinous and vain? Who will have the good sense to put an end to such nonsensical practices as the brake sometimes applied to certain agricultural products because of badly organized transport and markets? Will man, who has learned how to harness the atom and conquer space, finally succeed in conquering his selfishness? UNCTAD - we like to hope - will succeed in putting an end to the scandal of rich countries buying at the lowest possible prices the produce of poor countries, and selling their own produce to these poor countries at a very high price. There is a whole economy, too often tainted by power, waste and fear, which must be transformed into an economy of service and brotherhood.

10. In view of the worldwide scale of the problem, there can be no fitting solution except on the international level. In saying this we do not in any way mean to belittle the many generous initiatives both private and public – suffice it to mention our indefatigable Caritas Internationalis – whose spontaneous appearance keeps alert and stimulates so much disinterested good will. Quite the contrary. But, as we said in New York, with the same conviction as our reverend predecessor John XXIII in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*: «Who can fail to see the need and importance of thus gradually coming to the establishment of a world authority capable of taking effective action on the juridical and political planes?» [Address to the General Assembly of the UN, 4 October 1965, AAS 57(1965), p. 880]. This you have in fact understood, and you have undertaken this World Indicative Plan for agricultural development (PIM), which intended to integrate in one worldwide

view all the various factors in this sphere. There is no doubt that freely entered into agreements between States will assist its being put into practice. Nor is there any doubt that the transition from selfish and exclusive profit-based economies to an economy which will voluntarily undertake the satisfaction of mutual needs calls for the adoption of an international law based on justice and equity, at the service of a truly human universal order. (Cf. M.F. Perroux, *De l'avarice des nations à une économie du genre humain*, in 39<sup>e</sup> Semaine Sociale de France, *Richesse et Misère*, Paris, Gabalda, 1952, p. 195-212).

It is therefore necessary to be brave, bold, preserving and energetic. So many lands still lie fallow, so many possibilities remain unexplored, so many human resources are as yet untapped, so many young people stand idle, so much energy is squandered. Your task, your responsibility and your honour will be to make these latent resources bear fruit, to awaken their powers and to direct them to the service of the common good. Here lie the breadth, the vastness, the urgency and the necessity of your role. Among responsible statesmen, publicists, educators, scientists, civil servants - indeed among all men - you must untiringly promote study and action on a world scale, while all believing men add their prayers to «God who gives the growth.» (I Cor. 3: 6- 7) Already there are appearing important results, which yesterday were still un hoped for, but which today are the guarantee of solid hope. In these recent days who has not acclaimed as a symbol the award of the Nobel Prize for Peace to Norman Borlaug, «the father of the green revolution», as he is called? How true it is that if all men of good will throughout the world could be mobilized in a concerted effort for peace, the tragic temptation to resort to violence could then be overcome.

11. More than one, perhaps, will shake his head at such prospects. Yet, permit us to say it plainly, on the human, moral and spiritual level which is ours: no strategy of a commercial or ideological nature will soothe the complaint which rises from those who are suffering from «undeserved misery.» (Populorum Progressio, No. 9, AAS 59(1967), p. 261) as the young, whose «protest resounds like a signal of suffering and an appeal for justice.» (Address to the ILO, for its 50th anniversary, 10 June 1969, AAS 61(1969), p. 502). If need and self-interest are powerful and often decisive motives for men's actions, the present crisis can only be surmounted by love. For, if «social justice makes us respect the common good, social charity makes us love it.» (Rev. J.-T. Delos, O.P., *Le bien commun international*, in 24<sup>e</sup> Semaine Sociale de France, *Le désordre de l'économie internationale et la pensée chrétienne*, Paris, Gabalda, 1932, p. 210) «Charity, that is to say brotherly love, is the driving force behind all social progress.» (Cardinal P.-E. Leger, in *Le pauvre Lazare est à notre porte*, Paris-Montreal, SOSFides, 1967, p. 13). Preoccupations of a military nature and motives of the economic order will never permit the satisfaction of the grave demands of the men of our time. There must be love for man: man devotes himself to the service of his fellowmen, because he recognizes him as his brother, as the son of the same Father; and the Christian will add: as the image of the suffering Christ, whose word moves man in his most hidden depths: «I was hungry and you gave me to eat....» (Mt. 25:35). This word of love is ours. We present it to you as our most precious treasure, the lamp of charity whose burning fire consumes hearts, whose shining flame lights the way of brotherhood and guides our steps along

the paths of justice and of peace (Ps. 85: 11-14)

---

\*ORa n.48 p.6-7, 8.

*Paths to Peace* p.12-16.

---

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana