



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS PAUL VI
TO THE 19th SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION***

Friday, 18 November 1977

We are particularly happy today to welcome you who are now participating in the Nineteenth Session of the Conference of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. It is truly a joy to see the delegates of so many countries gathered to study the means of responding to the needs of the hungry. We appreciate your efforts and congratulate you for them. However, satisfaction for them cannot prevent consideration being given to what remains to be done. You are all aware of this and, together with our good wishes that your work will be fruitful, we express to you again this morning those hopes which so many who lack the necessities of life would like to place in your Organization.

Indeed, the food problem is still one of the principal concerns of our time; it is an elementary need of mankind, the satisfaction of which urgently demands large-scale undertakings within the framework of a renewal of the economic and social activities of the international community. The Church has unceasingly shared this pressing anxiety.

We shall simply recall two particularly tragic and urgent manifestations of this problem. One is the frequent repetition of catastrophes that should be matter for reflection by all mankind: droughts, famines, floods, etc. - catastrophes in which the phrase "died of starvation" is at its most literal. The other is undernourishment and malnutrition, which are major characteristics of underdevelopment and which have so many consequences, such as infant mortality and the lessening or destruction of the ability to work.

Admittedly there are optimistic reports concerning production. The improved agricultural situation is due not only to climatic reasons but also to the steps taken at various levels, especially since the World Food Conference, and above all to the awareness stirred up by that Conference

particularly among policy-makers in the international and national fields. This optimism must however be moderated, for as you yourself remarked, Mr. Director-General, in the field of food and agricultural development, "although spectacular results are obtained, they are often ephemeral: the results do not measure up to what was promised and there has to be a drastic lowering of sights". It is precisely your Organization that has the main task of acting as a catalyst and "moderator" of efforts for international agricultural development, seeing that improvements are consolidated, and that progress rests on a sufficiently sound basis for it to remain constant.

From this point of view we think it important to recall that FAO has among its primary objectives not only production but also the advancement of rural areas and people, especially in the developing countries. While international production has improved, the same does not seem to hold true for the rural areas of the Third World. This is shown in the clear increase in the proportion of production coming from developed countries in relation to production from the rest of the world. In this can be seen both a structural and institutional problem and at the same time, the need to improve the situation and the training of agricultural workers, especially small farmers and rural youth. We mentioned the need previously, when we addressed the World Food Conference.

The developing countries also have a choice to make concerning the organization of their economic and social plans. Without any wish to keep perpetually attached to the land the great number of people who now make their scanty living from it, nevertheless it is wise to think of advancing a large proportion of these people in the agricultural sector, rather than to envisage transplanting them into the industrial sector or especially to run the risk of seeing them crowded into suburbs. Furthermore, it is of the highest importance that the developing countries should aspire to the greatest possible self-sufficiency in the field of agricultural consumption by their people. As a result of international trade systems for which they are most often not responsible, too many of them are living in a dependence that is deeply harmful to their economies, which consequently are heavily in debt.

Finally, we cannot fail to draw your attention once more to the problem of the distribution of food products and of the balance to be achieved among all the factors governing trade in those products. On the one hand, the cost of importing the agricultural products needed by the developing countries makes a large dent in their meagre resources; on the other hand, receipts from their agricultural exports are not such as to provide them with a fair profit which would constitute a normal contribution necessary for their national budget and an encouragement for the producers. Any speculation exploiting elementary human needs is iniquitous, in a very special way speculation on food and arms. It is to be hoped that in this matter the developed countries, whatever their social and economic system, will finally decide on revisions, however costly, of the practices that they impose on most of the world. Forums for joint efforts, such as FAO, ought to be special centres for success in this regard.

Nobody can fail to see that the problems with which you are concerned, and of which we have

merely mentioned some salient points, are not just technical problems. They are also moral problems. For they imply a concept of the human person that cannot be disregarded in the search for solutions. Therefore, we urge you never to lose sight of the ethical aspect of the problems you are dealing with, and to think of your activities first and foremost as a service - a service to the part of humanity that lacks the most elementary goods, those that ensure subsistence.

May you have the joy of being counted one day by the Lord himself among those who have truly responded to the needs of their hungry brethren. We ask him now to bless you and your efforts.

*ORa n.48 p.2, 3;

Paths to Peace p.324-325.
