



The Holy See

*Address of His Holiness Paul VI to the
Intergovernmental Committee of the World Food Programme**

Thursday 20 April 1967

Before your departure from Rome, ladies and gentlemen, following the session of your Intergovernmental Committee, you have kindly done us the honor of a visit.

We are all the more pleased to receive you, because this visit comes for us on the eve of the publication of an important document of our term of Office which very closely concerns the problems and preoccupations that are yours.

You are the delegates, coming from 24 countries, of the "World Food Program". Your aim is to mobilize the resources of the entire international community in the struggle against hunger, in such a way that the solution found should be linked to the economic and social development of the under-developed countries.

What we have proposed to the Church and to the whole human community in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* is a vast program of action in favor of the developing countries which takes into account a fact that is major in the view of the Church. That fact is that economic growth alone is not sufficient; that it must be fully human and thus be concerned with the global and balanced development, social, moral and spiritual as well as material, of individuals and peoples.

You will see, therefore, the profound harmony between your goals and activities and the concerns of the Church for the well-being of her children and of all mankind. And you will understand the pleasure we feel at speaking for some moments with an audience so highly qualified on a subject so near to our heart.

You will wish no doubt to know what the Church is doing or plans to do in the matter of aid for developing countries.

Her action is not entirely on the same level as your own, and the convergence of efforts and points of view leaves intact the distinction that exists between a spiritual society like the Church and the temporal society constituted by the countries you represent. (Cf. *Populorum Progressio*, No. 13).

But you will surely have noticed, particularly in these last years, that the Church more and more exhorts Her children to engage fearlessly in temporal tasks at the service of their brothers and of the common good of the earthly city.

There is no need to reiterate here the innumerable material and cultural benefits (cf, *ibid*, No. 12) brought by the missionaries, in addition to the spiritual ones, to the countries they have evangelized. The Church has never recognized as hers a conception of religion that is disembodied, purely spiritual, a conception which would keep Christians away from worldly tasks. On the contrary she makes it into a duty for them to accept social and economic responsibilities and to carry them as faithful disciples of Christ - he said it to us Himself - "not in order to be served, but to serve" (Matt. 20:28). The conciliar "Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," which is no doubt known to you, is particularly explicit in this regard, and the great movement of renewal, introduced in the Church by the Council, moves in the same direction.

We ourselves have in our message indicated to the United Nations how concerned we were that our Catholic children should enlarge their hearts and their actions to the immense needs of the world. In several countries, Catholic organizations have been set up, under the direction of the Bishops, for aid to the "Third World." Others, already existing, have enlarged their activities in this direction. We have directed a large international organization to incorporate and co-ordinate this action and to represent it worldwide: *Caritas Internationalis*, which is no doubt not unknown to you.

Finally, given the importance and the growing seriousness of these problems, we have not hesitated, despite the extra costs to us, to create a new organization within the Roman Curia, a bureau of studies, the Secretariat Justice and Peace, the name of which makes clear its program and its goals.

Here, then, is what the Church is doing in this domain. Its contribution, on the material side, can seem rather modest compared to the contributions of your States. But this is only the least important part of its intervention in the problems which occupy you. The other part is not measured by figures and by balances, and yet it is by far the more notable. It is the part which springs from its spiritual mission.

In what, it will be asked, can this aspect of the Church's mission influence the problems of under-development? It is in the hearts of people that there exists the deep root of every durable solution in this domain.

A contemporary thinker has said it in a striking statement, seemingly paradoxical but profoundly

exact: "Bread for myself is a material question; bread for my neighbour is a spiritual one" (Nicolas Berdiaeff). Effectively, it is a question first of tearing peoples and nations away from their egoism, their cupidity, their avarice. One can even say that the efforts to resolve the problem of world-wide hunger and poverty are headed for failure if one does not succeed in making a real change in the hearts of the worlds populations and in developing there a deeper and more effective altruism, enlarged to global dimensions.

It is here, it seems to us, that the Church brings its most effective contribution to your problems. She can act on the hearts of men, for she knows "what there is in man" (cf. Jo. 2:25); she has a doctrine on his origin, his nature, his destiny: and it is under this heading that we have taken the liberty of presenting ourself before the United Nations under the title of "expert on humanity".

If the role of the Church is not to dictate technical solutions for reforming the structures of society, she may, instead, stimulate conscience "which has a new voice for our era" (Populorum Progressio, No. 47), awaken conscience to its new duties in today's world. Thus she can bend the political, social and economic structures of the nations in the direction of real progress. That means the participation of all men in the benefits of development, the elevation of all to living conditions worthy of human beings.

It suffices to tell you, gentlemen, how much the Church rejoices to see men of warm heart, aware of their responsibilities, devote themselves as you do to increasing the bread on the table of the great human family. We have noted with emotion that the voluntary contributions which come to you from Governments, come not only, as one might believe, from rich countries. No, nations which are themselves on the path of development offer you, they too, their contribution. An admirable example, which would confirm, were it needed, how far your work transcends the simple material level to situate itself at the level of what is greatest, most beautiful, and most elevated in Man: his soul and his heart.

With our congratulations and warmest wishes for the felicitous continuation of your beautiful task, we assure you, gentlemen, of the deep interest with which we follow its course, and with our whole heart we invoke upon your persons, your families and your activities the most abundant divine blessings.

**Paths to Peace* p.308-310.