



Occupy World Food Prize Event

Des Moines, 16 October 2013

Distinguished Participants of *Occupy World Food Prize*, 2013,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, thank you for inviting me this evening. I have already enjoyed the informal exchanges and I look forward to listening to Jim Hightower before going to the Interfaith Prayer Service. We are all inspired by the memory of your late Bishop, the beloved Maurice Dingman. Defending farming as a vital contribution to society and as a very valid livelihood, the Bishop denounced “the value crisis” and called passionately for the re-introduction of a truly human scale of values into the important enterprise of agriculture.

As you may know, about 50 years ago, the Second Vatican Council carefully reviewed the mission of the Catholic Church in the modern world. The Council found it urgent that the Church, with all her resources, accompany humanity in its walk through history. She made her own “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the [people] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted.”¹ Recently Pope Francis put it straightforwardly to a meeting of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO): “the Catholic Church, with all her structures and institutions, is at your side,”² that is, at the side of everyone who seeks in good faith to meet the challenges of world hunger.

The Vatican Department that was mandated to study and to promote the Church's accompaniment of humanity is the *Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace*, which I preside over. And the spirit of our work – and of my presence – is beautifully expressed by Vatican II with these words: “Giving witness and voice to the faith of the whole people of God gathered together by Christ, this Council can provide no more eloquent proof of its solidarity with, as well as its respect and love for the entire human family, than by engaging with it in *conversation* about these various problems.”³

¹ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, § 1.

² Pope Francis, *Address*, 38th Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 20 June 2013.

³ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, § 3.

In 2004 our Pontifical Council produced a *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Nine of its 583 paragraphs⁴ are devoted to biotechnology: not to the science or the industry, but to the ethical criteria that people of good will should apply to the development and use of these technologies. I warmly recommend this text, along with Pope Francis' address to the Food and Agriculture Organization in June,⁵ to everyone involved in working on sustainable agriculture towards global food security.

To engage in *conversation* about the problems of hunger that afflict our world: that is why I join you at this evening and the Borlaug Symposium tomorrow.

And yet because the stakes are high, tempers tend to run short; sharply divergent views make the conversation shrill. When that happens, as Vatican II foresaw, we must courageously go even further and deeper than conversation, into *dialogue*: "The Church sincerely professes that all [people], believers and unbelievers alike, ought to work for the rightful betterment of this world in which all alike live; such an ideal cannot be realized, however, apart from sincere and prudent dialogue."⁶ Let us dialogue about concerns we have and positions we take, even when they are at variance, and especially when they are in direct opposition.

The Church promotes listening, dialogue, patience, respect for the other, sincerity and even willingness to review one's own opinion. The Church encourages, orients and enriches discussion and debate.⁷ It strives to *indicate directions* for the work of those who are technically and politically responsible for dealing with concrete problems.

With this orientation, let me now spell out more specific orientations which I will present tomorrow at the Borlaug Conference. Such ethical commitments need to accompany work in science and technology, including biotechnology, as well as international trade and commerce. This is still not a Church position on GMOs as such, but rather, the assistance of the Church in the form of guidance based on her Social Doctrine.

A. Spirit of courage: Face up to the reality of hunger decisively and with genuine charity and openness of heart. In the words of Pope Francis: "Something more can and must be done in order to provide a new stimulus to international activity on behalf of the poor, inspired by something more than mere goodwill or, worse, promises which all too often have not been kept... There is a need to move beyond indifference and a tendency to look the other way, and urgently to attend to immediate needs, confident that the fruits of today's work will mature in the future. We cannot devise programs which are bureaucratic and antiseptic, which do not work today." Keep on studying the causes of world hunger as broadly and deeply as possible, seeking the greatest variety

⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2004, §§ 472-480.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Address*, 38th Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 20.06.2013.

⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, § 21 ; cf. § 40.

⁷ Cf. Pope Francis, *Audience* for PCGP Conference on *Pacem in Terris*, 3.10.2013.

of possible solutions, since we need “a complete knowledge of particular situations, suitable preparation, and ideas which take into account every individual and every community.”⁸

B. Ethics of all human endeavors: Some would claim that research is ethically neutral, and only its application or implementation may be good or bad. But any activity which deserves the name “human” requires ethical guidance if it is to serve the common good. Therefore, a researcher always should work “to satisfy the demands of justice, fairness and respect for every human being”;⁹ not merely for the sake of profit. The same criteria apply to those who are responsible, in later phases of the process, for industrial production, international trade, commercial distribution, and so forth. There should be no “washing of the hands” at any step along the way.

C. Prudence. The full costs and consequences of introducing genetically modified organisms may emerge only with time, in the long-term. Therefore let us apply the *principle of precaution* or *prudence* by taking every reasonable measure of caution beforehand, to avoid the risk of damaging human health or the environment. Such prudence, I might add, is a necessary element of any effort to advance the common good through public, that is governmental, action.

D. Transparency: Adopt the highest standards of communication with the public, as well as rules of labeling in order to guarantee producers’ and consumers’ right to information. This is necessary for everyone to have a true choice. This is the *principle of transparency*.

E. Access: Patents and intellectual property rights are legitimate, but they need to be monitored and regulated. Fair ways must be found to share the fruits of research and ensure that developing countries have *access* both to natural resources and to innovations. Otherwise whole populations can be discriminated against, exploited and deprived of what they rightly should have a share in.

F. Biodiversity: Bio-diversity is humanity’s patrimony. It needs to be protected, indeed privileged. The development of new types should not require, or lead to, the disappearance of traditional species.

G. Subsidiarity: A very healthy principle of Catholic Social Teaching is subsidiarity, which favors the exercise of responsibility at every level and resists “top-down” approaches where inappropriate. It is often better to support local efforts than to provide or even impose solutions from elsewhere. And given the complexities of globalization, effective **coordination** of efforts at all levels is also increasingly required.

H. Commerce: Analyze, condemn and fight “financial speculation, which presently affects the price of food, treating it like any other merchandise and overlooking its primary function.” Abandon any form of “short-sighted economic interests and the mentality of power of a relative few who exclude the majority of the world’s peoples, generating poverty and marginalization and causing a breakdown in society.”¹⁰ And educate our youth to do the same. ... with *criteria of justice and*

⁸ Pope Francis, *Address to the 38th Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Rome*, 10.06.2013, §§ 2, 3, 4. For a comprehensive presentation of the principles here mentioned, consult the *Compendium*, especially §§ 472-80.

⁹ Pope Francis, *FAO*, § 1.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *FAO*, § 2.

solidarity governing the commercial and economic conditions, avoiding any commercial-economic monopoly

I. Finally, **conversation and dialogue**. Sharp differences of opinion (e.g., between WFP and “Occupy”) about agriculture and biotechnology show how important are these issues. Their importance does not justify harshness (polemic) or manipulation (bullying). At every level from the global to the local, one might ask, what should be people’s input into research, agricultural and trade policies, development policies, funding priorities, and so forth. “Every proposal must involve everyone,” Pope Francis insists. “To move forward constructively and fruitfully in the different functions and responsibilities involves the ability to analyze, understand, and engage, leaving behind the temptations of power, wealth or self-interest and instead serving the human family, especially the needy and those suffering from hunger and malnutrition.”¹¹

I will stop here. There may be other desirable or even essential criteria for serious, realistic, honest and courageous dialogue on this topic. If so, let them be put on the table. For the diverse parties to participate in good faith, they must hold themselves as well as others to such criteria. The world needs everyone, the heirs of Bishop Maurice Dingman and the heirs of Dr. Norman Borlaug, to stay at the table and solve these issues, rather than abandon the dialogue and leave the world’s poor at an empty table. Thank you for inviting me, in the name of the Church, to offer some encouragement of the needed dialogue.

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson
President

¹¹ Pope Francis, *FAO*, § 3.