



PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM
DE IUSTITIA ET PACE

Celebration of Catholic Rural Life's 90th Anniversary

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson¹

6 November 2014

1. This is a birthday party! Throughout this year of 2014, Catholic Rural Life has been celebrating the 90th anniversary of its founding by Fr. Edwin V. O'Hara. For nine decades the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, now Catholic Rural Life, has played a vital role in the great rural mission of the Church, at both the national and international level, as an educator, advocate, and inspiration to lay men and women, helping them to enter more deeply into relationship with Christ and to apply the teachings of the Church in their communities and public lives. Thanks to our shared experience of the past two days, I have every confidence that CRL will continue to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ and Catholic Social Teaching to the hearts of rural America for decades to come. In the name of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, we thank God for this very happy anniversary, and for the members, the leadership, and the benefactors who have sustained Catholic Rural Life, for 90 years. Happy Birthday!

2. The best way I can introduce the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is to tell you about its birth and its mission. Some 50 years ago, St John XXIII threw open the windows of the Church so that we could better see what was going on in the world, and so that the world could better appreciate what is in the Church, namely, the ongoing life of Jesus Christ in history.

No Church document says it more eloquently than the pastoral constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*. "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men, women and children of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."² The Council found it urgent for the Church, with all her tradition and resources, to accompany humanity in its walk through history. How to accompany, or in other words, how to show solidarity?

¹ Due to the Ebola crisis, Cardinal Turkson felt obliged to cancel his trip to the U.S.A. in favor of meetings at the Vatican to assess the situation and develop a strategic action plan to guide the Holy See's response. Speaking in his place was the Cardinal's personal assistant, Dr. Michael Czerny S.J.

² *Gaudium et Spes*, § 1.

The answer is beautifully expressed in these words of Vatican II: “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 that is, in “sincere and prudent *dialogue*.”⁴

Such accompaniment, solidarity, and conversation or dialogue are not just an empty wish but a real commitment. These values were soon implemented or incarnated, and are institutionalized to this day, in several new Pontifical Councils: for Christian Unity, including a Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews; for Interreligious Dialogue; for Culture; and for Justice and Peace.

In the case of Justice and Peace, Vatican II itself expressed the wish for the establishment of such a body of the universal church. “Considering the immensity of the hardships which still afflict the greater part of humankind today,” the Council regarded it as “most opportune” that “an organism of the universal Church” be set up, which would soon be known as *Justice and Peace*. Why? “In order that both the justice and love of Christ toward the poor might be developed everywhere.” The role of this department would be “to stimulate the Catholic community to promote progress in needy regions and international social justice.”⁵ “The name, *Justice and Peace*, aptly describes its program and its goal,” explained its founder, Blessed Paul VI, “for every person’s complete development and for the development of all humankind.”⁶

3. To me it seems that “progress in needy regions” and “social justice” and “everyone’s complete development” and “the development of all humankind” are exactly what we have been working on for the past few days. So you see why Justice and Peace is very happy to have co-sponsored this Symposium and participated actively in it. Therefore, we thank God for the participants, for the organizers and the staff, and for the benefactors who have sustained this great *Symposium*⁷. Its theme and title, *Faith, Food, and the Environment*, could perhaps be re-expressed as follows: “Give us this day our daily bread: putting ethics to work in agriculture”. Here are a few brief lessons which can perhaps be drawn from our deliberations:

- Complexify, but don’t paralyze.
- Keep the picture big, but keep the action real.

³ *Gaudium et Spes*, § 3.

⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, § 21 ; cf. § 40.

⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, § 90.

⁶ Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, § 5

⁷ Hosted by the Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity, Catholic Rural Life, Farmers Union, John A. Ryan Institute for Catholic Social Thought, the University of St. Thomas, Minnesota Catholic Conference, and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

- Resisting our culture's bias in favor of bad news, let us celebrate and encourage the very creative research, experimentation and alternative practices which are providing good food and good work, sound human ecology and sustainable natural ecology.
- The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace wants very much to accompany the process of developing a publication on the "Vocation of the Agricultural Leader" and to listen to your experiences and best practices, appropriate pedagogies and communications strategies.

4. Now while the Council wants to listen to you, the Council would like you to listen to Pope Francis. Just last week, 150 representatives of grassroots movements from 80 countries came to the Vatican for a three-day meeting. They were slum dwellers and garbage pickers, day laborers and street vendors, landless peasants and displaced indigenous and other groupings of the very poor, the marginalized, the excluded. These are *the men, women and children of this age* [and of future generations] *who are especially poor and in many ways afflicted*. They represent the bottom billions who reap virtually no benefit from globalization but disproportionately bear its costs, especially in terms of the deteriorating climate and environment.

They were invited because, as Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice"; because the Church wishes to practice the special love of Jesus for the poor by showing them a 'preferential option'; and because Pope Francis believes, not that they should be "lifted up" out of their misery by others, but that they themselves must be protagonists of the needed changes, and artisans of their own and indeed of our common destiny.

Pope Francis arrived in the Old Synod Hall on October 28 at about 11:00. First he met selected representatives. Then he delivered an inspiring speech.⁸ He listened to a half-dozen testimonies. Finally, he greeted each participant individually. He left again about 1:00.

I can do no better, I think, than to invite you to listen in on the event. Out of the entire *mini-social encyclical* on housing (*domus*), work (*labor*), land (*terra*), violence and the environment which Pope Francis delivered, please let me slowly read you the paragraphs on our topic, *terra*, addressed to the *campesinos* (peasants, farm-workers, sharecroppers, subsistence farmers). Please imagine that you are a participant observer, a participant listener there amongst the 150 representatives of the world's several billion marginalized and excluded. Notice how the Holy Father is addressing many of the concerns we have shared during this Symposium; at the same time, please notice what a difference it would make if the world's excluded participated actively in how you state the problem and undertake the solution:

In the beginning, at creation, God created man and woman, stewards of God's work, charging (mandating) them *to till and to keep* it. I see that here there are dozens of

⁸ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141028_incontro-mondiale-movimenti-popolari.html

campesinos and I want to congratulate you for stewarding the land, for cultivating it and for doing so in community. The wiping-out of so many brother and sister *campesinos* worries me, who are uprooted, and not because of wars or natural disasters. It is land grabbing, deforestation, expropriation of water, inappropriate pesticides: these are some of the evils which uproot people from their native land. This separation is not only physical, but existential and spiritual, because there is a relationship with the land. This sad separation is putting rural communities and their special way of life in notorious decline and even at risk of extinction.

The other dimension of this already global process is hunger. When financial speculation conditions the price of food, treating it as just another commodity, millions of people suffer and die from hunger. At the same time, tons of food are simply discarded. This constitutes a genuine scandal. Hunger is criminal, food is an inalienable right. I know that some of you demand an agrarian reform in order to solve some of these problems, and let me tell you that in some countries – and here I cite the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* - “agrarian reform is, besides a political necessity, a moral obligation”.⁹

“It is not just me saying it, it is in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Please carry on your struggle for the dignity of the rural family, for water, for life, and so that everyone can benefit from the fruits of the earth.

An economic system centered on the divinity of money also needs to plunder nature to sustain its frenetic level of consumption. Climate change, the loss of biodiversity, deforestation are already showing their devastating effects in the great cataclysms which we see and which are most suffered by you, the humble ...

Brothers and sisters: creation is not a property, which we can dispose of just as we feel like; much less is it the property of only some, of a few. Rather, creation is a gift, it is a present, it is a marvelous gift, which God has given us so that we might care for it and use it for the benefit of everyone always with respect and gratitude. You may know that I am preparing an encyclical on ecology: be assured that your concerns will be present in it.

With these stirring words of the Holy Father, let me propose a historic challenge:

- To include the *campesinos* among the agricultural leaders. Having invited Dr. Clifford Canku to the Symposium is a step in this direction.
- To include the *campesino* organizations in discussion and writing the *Vocation of the Agricultural Leader*.

⁹ *Compendium*, § 300.

Can you, in other words, include the excluded and, together, look for solutions to our biggest problems of food, farming and the environment? Can you accept the Holy Father's insistence that there is no solution, for any of us, without them?

5. This Symposium—*Faith, Food, and the Environment: The Vocation of the Agricultural Leader*—and the various collaborations it represents, gives wonderful witness to what is possible when we join ourselves to the person of Christ.

In conclusion, let us reflect on these simple words of Christ in the Gospel of John: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser” (Jn 15:1). Christ tells us that His Father is the gardener who is at work in the fields of the world, and He counts on us as His co-creators, carrying on the work of Creation which He began “in the beginning”.

Let us join ourselves to the True Vine, entrust ourselves to the Gardener, and allow the work of this gathering – tonight and in the months and years to come – to bring forth much fruit in the vineyards of the Lord. Thank you.