



# The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORLD CONFERENCE  
ON AGRARIAN REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT\****

*Saturday, 14 July 1979*

*Mr President,*

*Dear Friends,*

YOUR CONFERENCE in Rome is dealing with a subject of extreme importance for the destiny of the human family, and one of lively interest for the Church, which by virtue of her mission feels a commitment to making an impartial contribution, corresponding to her nature, to the human uplifting of those who live and work on the land.

There can be no doubt that the agrarian reform and rural development that you are dealing with will mark a further step forward along the path that the international Organizations specialized in this matter, among them FAO, have always followed since they were set up. I am happy to make use of this special occasion in order to reaffirm, in continuity with my predecessors, the heartfelt appreciation of the Apostolic See for the incisive and efficient action that the Organizations of the family of the United Nations carry out in the sphere of nutrition, agriculture and rural development<sup>[1]</sup>. Your meeting offers you the chance to share with one another information on a great variety of experiences, and it is very probable that from this variety there will emerge orientation that will be an invitation and stimulus to fruitful collaboration in the spheres that you are studying. I express the hope that these orientations will enable you to outline really practical solutions that can be adopted in internal policies, such as to make possible the attainment of a greater harmonization on the international level, taking into consideration the cultural originality, legitimate interests and autonomy of each people, and responding to the right of those living and working on the land to growth in individual and collective life. The divine command to master nature in the service of life of course implies that the reasonable improvement and use of natural resources should be directed towards attaining fundamental human aims<sup>[2]</sup>. This is also in conformity with the basic principle that all the goods of the earth are meant to benefit all the members of the human family. Undoubtedly, "development demands bold transformations, innovations that go deep"<sup>[3]</sup>. With conditions as they are within the

individual countries, one foresees a land reform involving a reorganization of land holdings and the stable and direct assigning of productive areas to the agricultural workers, together with the elimination of forms and structures that are unproductive and damaging to the community. The Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* has already done justice to these requirements<sup>[4]</sup>, by including the legitimate quest for a more effective productive use of the land within the more basic preoccupation that the work of agricultural workers should be carried out in conditions and ways that harmonize with their dignity as persons, and for objectives that are similarly in harmony therewith. The words that I addressed in Mexico to the Indios at Cuilapan hold good here: "The depressed rural world, the worker who with his sweat waters also his affliction, cannot wait any longer for full and effective recognition of his dignity, which is not inferior to that of any other social sector. He has the right to be respected and not deprived, with man œ uvres which are sometimes tantamount to real spoliation, of the little that he has. He has the right not to be impeded in his aspirations to share directly in his own advancement. He has the right to be rid of the barriers of exploitation, often made up of intolerable selfishness, against which his best efforts of advancement are shattered. He has the right to real help – which is not charity or crumbs of justice – in order that he may have access to the development that his dignity as a person and as a child of God deserves"<sup>[5]</sup>.

As I said on another occasion, the right to ownership of land always involves a social mortgage<sup>[6]</sup>. Therefore, in the reform of structures, I permit myself to invite you to take into the deepest consideration all forms of agrarian contracts that make possible efficient use of the land through work, and guarantee the primary rights of workers.

Reference is made not only to the possibility of working the land efficiently but also to the guarantee of an adequate return from agricultural work.

It is urgently necessary to attain the objective of the right to work, with all the presuppositions required for widening the possibilities of absorbing the available resources of agricultural manpower and of reducing unemployment. Equally, one must promote among the workers a responsible attitude in the functioning of agricultural enterprises. This will also have the aim of creating, as far as possible, a special relationship between the worker of the land and the land that he works.

Furthermore, this right to work the land must be guaranteed together with the greatest possible improvement of human and civil life in rural conditions. This is the only way of ensuring the active presence above all young people in the economy of agricultural development, and of avoiding excessive flight from the land.

Agrarian reform and rural development also demand that consideration be given to reforms aimed at reducing the gap between the prosperity of the rich and the anxiety and need of the poor.

However, it has to be borne in mind that to overcome imbalances and the strident inequalities in living conditions between the agricultural sector and the other sectors of the economy, or between the social groups within a given country, the public authorities must have a well-planned policy, one that is committed to the redistribution of income to the advantage of the very poor.

I think it fitting to repeat what I said on another occasion, namely that a wider reform and a more just and equitable distribution of wealth is foreseen "also in the world in general, ensuring that the stronger countries do not use their power to the detriment of the weaker ones"[7].

The reform necessarily extends therefore to that of a new regulation of relationships between countries.

But for reaching such an objective "it is necessary, in international life, to call upon ethical principles, the demands of justice... Primacy must be given to what is moral... to what springs from the full truth concerning man"[8].

In brief, it is a question of restoring to agriculture its proper place in the sphere of internal and international development, and of modifying the tendency which, in the process of industrialization, has until recent times tended to give a privileged position to the secondary and tertiary sectors.

One is pleased to note that it is now clear, on the basis of experience, how necessary it is to correct the one-sided industrialization of a country, and to abandon the utopian expectation that industrialization will certainly and directly lead to economic development and civil progress for everyone.

The great importance of agriculture and the rural world is obvious from the decisive contribution made by agriculture in providing society with basic foodstuffs.

But today there is also a growing awareness of the decisive function of agriculture both in preserving the environment and as a valuable source of energy.

Love for the land and for work on the land is not an invitation to a nostalgic return to the past, but an affirmation of agriculture as the basis of a healthy economy in the totality of the development and civil progress of each country and of the whole world.

Active collaboration by the rural population in the whole process of the growth of the community is taking on increasing importance.

It is obvious that it is always preferable and desirable that collaboration in economic, labour-related and political decision should take place in a personal and responsible way. This certainly constitutes, in the different economic and political systems, the gradual maturing of an authentic expression of that freedom which is an essential ingredient of true progress.

One likewise notes the ever clearer importance of various form of associations which can lead to new expressions of solidarity between rural workers, and facilitate the inclusion of qualified young people, as well as women, in agricultural activity and the civic community.

Naturally, one always has to bear in mind that the suggesting and carrying out of real and effective reforms presuppose good will and a fundamental change of attitude on the part of everybody, as was recognized by John XXIII in his words to the Directors and Officials of FAO on 4 May 1960: "We are all jointly responsible for the undernourished peoples; people's consciences must be trained to the sense of responsibility that weighs upon the community and upon each individual, especially those who are most favoured"[9].

I appeal to all of you who are responsible for the choices and orientations of internal and international policies.

I appeal to all who are in a position to act as experts, officials and promoters of undertakings that will aid development.

I appeal especially to all those who are able to work for education and training, particularly of the young.

Permit me to express my firm confidence that everyone will be moved by this appeal to the generosity of each individual.

Finally, I ask almighty God to assist all of you, the members of this World Conference assembled in the name of human solidarity and fraternal concern. I pray that the efforts that you are making before the witness of history and in the face of the pressing challenges of this generation will bear abundant fruit for the betterment of humanity – fruit that will last.

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[1] Cfr. Ioannis XXIII *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961) 439.

[2] Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptor Hominis*, 15.

[3] Pauli VI *Populorum Progressio*, 32.

[4] Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 71.

[5] Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad "Indios", quos dicunt, in pago "Cuilapan"*, die 29 ianuarii 1979: AAS 71 (1979) 199.

[6] Cfr. Eiusdem *Allocutio ad Episcopos, in urbe Puebla aperiens Coetum Generalem Episcoporum Americae Latinae*, III, 4, die 28 ianuarii 1979: AAS 71 (1979) 199.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

\*AAS 71 (1979), p. 1354-1358.

*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. II, 2 p. 50-55.

*L'Osservatore Romano* 15.7.1979 p.1,2.

*L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n.30 p.6, 7.

*Paths to Peace* p. 278-281

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