



International Catholic Rural Association (ICRA)

IV WORLD CONGRESS ON RURAL LIFE

“Evolution and problems of the rural world

facing the challenges of globalization” (Rome, 23/06/12)

For the Integral Development of God's Land and People

Introduction: Signs of Yesterday and Tomorrow

Your Eminence, your Excellencies the Minister, the Director General of the FAO, (the Mayor of Rome), the President of ICRA, distinguished participants in the IV World Congress on Rural Life; dear brothers and sisters in Christ: In the name of ICRA and of PCJP, I welcome you warmly to the IV World Congress on Rural Life.

We gather in Rome fifty years after the First International Meeting of Catholics in Rural Life held in September 1962; fifty years after Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, one-quarter of which was devoted to land tenure and agriculture. Fifty years ago, oriented by Vatican II, the Church looked ahead, towards our present day:

The 1960s bring promising prospects: recovery after the devastation of the war, the beginning of decolonization, and the first timid signs of a *thaw* in the relations between the American and Soviet blocs. This is the context within which Blessed Pope John XXIII reads deeply into the “signs of the times” [cf. *Pacem in Terris*]. *The social question is becoming universal and involves all countries: together with the labour question and the Industrial Revolution, there come to the fore problems of agriculture, of developing regions, of increasing populations, and those concerning the need for global economic cooperation. Inequalities that in the past were experienced within nations are now becoming international and make the dramatic situation of the Third World ever more*

evident.¹

We are, thank God, beyond colonial times and the Cold War. But the signs of those times have become the agenda of today in the context, which Pope John virtually foresaw, of globalization: signs like agriculture, developing regions, population increase and decrease, and inequalities growing in scope and intensity. The problems in these areas will continue to worsen in the absence of global responsibility.

My words of greeting begin in Ghana, where I ask: who is paying for the real cost of gold? I will then consider the rural sector in its global context, to which, thirdly, the Church responds with analysis and teaching. I would then hearken to our faith foundations, and conclude with a new mandate to tackle the challenges in a truly faith-based holistic manner.

I. Land: to Whose Benefit?

Let me begin in my home country of Ghana (formerly, Gold Coast) with its long history of mining, especially gold. What happens to inhabitants when open-pit mining takes over forest reserves and rural farmland? The consequences can be far-reaching. In Ghana farmers have been arrested in their fields because a ministry of the government ceded their land to a mining company without their knowledge, not to mention compensation. Once the mine is operating and some of their land is gone, the villagers continue to suffer losses. The explosions that expose the ore also damage houses and destabilize their foundations, forcing villagers to relocate, again without compensation. To process gold ore requires cyanide, a process that can pollute local drinking water, kill fish and sicken villagers who, of course, have no ready access to healthcare. Mining has *not* improved the lives of many rural Ghanaians.

Should we imagine that the scientists and engineers, who do know how to blast an open pit and use cyanide to extract gold, do not know how to avoid ruining houses and poisoning water? Of course not. But the corporations and government-agencies in charge typically respond that the wealth created for the many outweighs the unfortunate consequences for a few.

Would that this were true! In spite of its mining wealth, Ghana remains largely underdeveloped, with about 80% of its 24 million people living on less than US\$2 a

¹ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 94, available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html

day.²³ In 2001, Ghana became one of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries⁴ and benefited from massive debt relief. But the HIPC initiative drew attention to how the country had failed to turn its mineral wealth into economic assets that would help the populace emerge from economic hardship and under-development. What HIPC did *not* make manifest is that the bulk of the profits goes abroad, to owners and shareholders. As little as 10% of mining profits remains in Ghana.

All of us here know this to be true. Economic statistics and social studies teach us such facts, which our own encounters with rural people make personal. My story about Ghana is, sadly, representative of many rural communities in our world not only wounded by sin but also being rapidly transformed by the ambiguous process of globalization, to which we now turn.

II. The Rural Sector in the Global Context

Psalm 24 affirms that “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof,” but with Pope Benedict we observe and decry a far different situation:

Life in many poor countries is still extremely insecure as a consequence of food shortages, and the situation could become worse: *hunger* still reaps enormous numbers of victims.⁵

The hunger and insecurity which recent Popes have denounced is a scandal, an offence against our generous Creator and his poor sons and daughters. Even those who live on the land have to struggle for their daily bread. Since the Green Revolution of the 1960s, corporate agriculture has been claiming that it can meet the world's needs – yet 2 billion are *still* food insecure.⁶ Prospects of long-term integral human development seem very remote.

Globalization, increasingly powered by communications technology, has further complicated the challenges facing rural communities. Our present global economic crisis was caused by unregulated and risky financial speculation, especially in the so-

³ According to the World Bank

⁴ The HIPC programme of the IMF and the World Bank initiated in 1996.

⁵ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (Civ), 2009, 27.

⁶ See *Compendium*, 458

called derivatives market. Financial speculators, wary of the risk and potential loss of profit, turned to other global markets to “hedge,” that is, to protect their investments.⁷ One such market was agricultural commodities futures. When billions of dollars flood in and out of this market every day, such speculation causes food prices to spike. In 2008, this led to an explosion of food riots around the world. Food prices, no longer set by the usual criteria of supply and demand in their complex interplay, fell prey to market speculation. Far removed from the land where people live and grow food, traders peer into computer screens and bet on the future prices of crops. Later in 2008 began the full-blown financial and monetary crisis.

Global oil prices also influence food prices; first, because petroleum products are a major requirement in agriculture; and second, because of the growing demand for biofuels. This so-called ‘green’ solution promises to wean us from our dependence on petroleum oil. It has resulted in ‘land grabs’ of unprecedented proportions, forcing many small subsistence farmers off their land and flooding the cities with large populations of internally displaced persons.

On these upheavals, Pope Benedict has reflected in *Caritas in veritate*: “Nature, especially in our time, is so integrated into the dynamics of society and culture that by now it hardly constitutes an independent variable.” (*Civ* 51) That is, nature cannot be properly understood as standing apart from human culture and society. As Pope John Paul II said earlier, “we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations.”⁸

The effects of unmanaged globalization are multiple: on food production, on rural life, on the natural environment. How are farming communities to contend with such practices? Let us turn to Pope Benedict's social teaching which not only assigns responsibilities where they belong but provides a comprehensive approach to the challenges posed by globalization to the rural world.

III. The Church Responds

No matter how complex such problems are, the Gospel requires the Church's creative, collaborative, and determined response. In *Caritas in veritate* the Holy Father begins with food insecurity, to articulate the long-term institutional responses that are

⁷ Cfr. *Towards reforming the financial and monetary systems ...* Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2011.

⁸ John Paul II, Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace. Cited in *Compendium* 459.

needed under both normal and emergency circumstances:

Hunger is not so much dependent on lack of material things as on shortage of social resources, the most important of which are institutional. What is missing, in other words, is a network of economic institutions capable of guaranteeing regular access to sufficient food and water for nutritional needs, and also capable of addressing the primary needs and necessities ensuing from genuine food crises, whether due to natural causes or political irresponsibility, nationally and internationally. The problem of food insecurity needs to be addressed within a long-term perspective, eliminating the structural causes that give rise to it and promoting the agricultural development of poorer countries. (Civ 27)

The Holy Father notes that, in addition to institutional change and over-arching policies, particular streams of investment are needed:

This can be done by investing in rural infrastructures, irrigation systems, transport, organization of markets, and in the development and dissemination of agricultural technology that can make the best use of the human, natural and socio-economic resources that are more readily available at the local level, while guaranteeing their sustainability over the long term as well. (ibid.)

An additional element is involvement and empowerment of those who are directly affected, and respect for their traditional knowledge:

All this needs to be accomplished with the involvement of local communities in choices and decisions that affect the use of agricultural land. In this perspective, it could be useful to consider the new possibilities that are opening up through proper use of traditional as well as innovative farming techniques, always assuming that these have been judged, after sufficient testing, to be appropriate, respectful of the environment and attentive to the needs of the most deprived peoples. (ibid.)

Thus the three dimensions spelled out by Benedict XVI are the needed institutions, the well-focused investments, and the broad participation of rural peoples. Obviously in touch with competent research and expert analysis, the Church makes use of these within its holistic, long-term view of human needs and potential. Moreover, the Holy Father is unafraid to speak of human ideals as well as human failings, thanks to our Catholic faith and tradition, to which we now turn.

IV. Foundations in Faith and the Church

The Church has long opted for the rural world. This extends back to the people of Israel whose life on the land became the setting of Israel's experiences of God's blessings and curses: fertility of the land and abundant harvest represented divine blessing, while drought and poor harvest signified divine curses.

Later, the prophets often spoke of salvation in natural, rural and agricultural terms, for example, "As the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do" (Isaiah 55: 10-11). Our Lord Jesus uses similar imagery to proclaim our Father's generosity and love. Yet today, "hunger still reaps enormous numbers of victims among those who, like Lazarus, are not permitted to take their place at the rich man's table, contrary to the hopes expressed by Paul VI"⁹ and indeed by our Lord himself when he told the cutting parable of luxury enjoyed in full view of starvation.

The Church blesses the land – before planting, during its growth, and at harvest time. During the holy Mass, gifts of bread and wine are blessed, recognizing the work of the Creator and of human hands. This makes the Eucharist a cosmic action, a prayer of thanksgiving for our salvation. We Catholics in particular are a profoundly sacramental people, not only in our sacramental celebrations, but also in seeing the entire created world as mediating God's bountiful love and care.

A proverb of the Akans in Ghana says: *Adwen nnyi baakofo tsirmul*: "Knowledge cannot be found in only one head" but always in many who consult and share. Accordingly, our Church and related organizations have shared useful knowledge with men and women in rural communities. They have increased awareness of basic rights to information and even property, and developed leadership and practical skills. It is with both faith and competence, with hard work and liturgical celebration, that we want to embrace what God and the Church ask of ICRA and PCJP at this Congress.

V. In Conclusion, a New Mandate

Excellencies, esteemed delegates, dear brothers and sisters: from 1962 to today, *Mater et Magistra* has provided fundamental guidance for ICRA. During these same first fifty years, Catholic Social Teaching has deepened and developed remarkably, culminating for us in *Caritas in veritate* of 2009. We thank God for the knowledge he has put in our

⁹ Civ 27 citing *Populorum Progressio*, 47.

heads. Building on it, may I now propose that *Caritas in veritate* provide the overarching orientation and basic criteria for many years to come.

One sentence serves to draw my reflections to a challenging conclusion: “Integral human development is primarily a vocation, and therefore it involves a free assumption of responsibility in solidarity on the part of everyone” (Civ 11). On the one hand, those in rural life make a vital contribution to the integral human development of all humankind; at the same time, those in rural life want opportunities to develop integrally themselves, their families and their communities. Only if we have both, are we fulfilling God's design for his sons and daughters. And only if we take an integrated view of the challenges and marshal our expertise and good intentions in an integrated manner, can we hope for improvement in the most needed areas without deterioration in others.

May this IV World Congress on Rural Life help us faithfully to discover our vocation, freely to take up our responsibilities, and joyfully to strengthen our solidarity on the long way ahead.

Thank you.

Cardinal Peter Turkson

(President)