

# Pope Places Vatican Support Behind Land Reform Movement

By WILL LISSNER

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UNITED NATIONS, N.Y. — Pope Paul VI is at the center of a Green Rising but the world doesn't know it yet. Still, it promises to achieve more for the landless peasant whose number is legion throughout the world than any of the bids of a succession of political movements for his allegiance.

Last summer a World Land Reform Conference was called in Rome by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), a specialized agency of the international organization which has its seat in the Italian capital city.

THE WORLD'S PRESS paid little attention to the conference, for meetings of international organizations are going on all the time in various parts of the globe. This one, however, deserved to fare better, because it was called to deal with one of the most important and most troublesome problems confronting every country.

The meeting attracted about 300 delegates from 72 countries and observers from many international organizations. One of the most active delegations was the one from the Holy See, consisting of Monsignor Luigi G. Ligutti, an American priest from Iowa, and Dr. E. Bonomelli, an Italian layman. Msgr Ligutti and Dr. Bonomelli are the Permanent Observers of the Holy See to the FAO.

But this was only part of the attention paid by the Vatican to the parley on land reform. The prefect of the Vatican Secret Archives, Monsignor Martin Giusti, ransacked his vast stores of materials to assemble an exhibit of selected original papal documents on agriculture and other ancient documents on the activity of the Church on behalf of cultivators of the soil. The exhibit was of unique interest and priceless value to the historian of land reform.

The world conference had a threefold aim. One was to promote the study of the relationship between land tenure structures and the increase in food production. Another aim was to promote study of the means for bettering the living conditions of rural people. Still another was to encourage study of how land reform can contribute to the economic progress of each nation.

MSGR. LIGUTTI, in a position paper that he presented to the conference, referred to many of the exhibits from the Secret Archives in tracing out the history of the land policy of the Holy See.

He pointed out that the ideological basis of this policy goes back to Old Testament teaching that the earth is the Lord's, an idea that was carried out through the economic reassessment of the jubilee year.

Then he turned to the teaching on the land question of the Latin and Greek Fathers of the Church, who were as outspoken on the monopolization of the land as such Old Testament prophets as Isaiah whose "woe to you that join house to house and lay field to field" rebuke still echoes down the corridors of time.

Msgr. Ligutti's recital turned up many curious facts. For example, that St. Melania, a good Roman lady who lived from 383 to 439, was perhaps the greatest absentee landlord in history.

THAT, OF COURSE, was not how she won the halo. She led the way in land division schemes, disposing of much of her vast holdings by sale and distribution. Such present-day worthies as the Shah of Iran, President Chiang Kai-shek on Taiwan, and the Emperor of Japan under the prodding of General Douglas McArthur, who have made hundreds of thousands of acres available to the landless of their country through modern land division schemes, may have thought of themselves as pioneers.

But no. Melania, the Hetty Green of fifth century Rome, beat them to it. To the historical title, that is. She doesn't have a monopoly on the claim to canonization, of course. And land hungry peasants still regard land distribution on a significant scale as an evidence of heroic piety.

Msgr. Ligutti discovered that Pope Zachary, an eighth century Greek, established five agricultural colonies called *Domus Cultae* in the Roman Campagna. And that a 10th century decree by an abbot by the name of Aligesna confirmed the legitimacy of cooperative farming.

Msgr. Ligutti's paper has just been published by an American scientific quarterly, the *Journal of Economics & Sociology*. Those interested in the land question, a problem high on the agenda of the National Catholic

Rural Life Conference in the United States, will find his paper an exercise in the application of scholarship to the advance of human welfare.

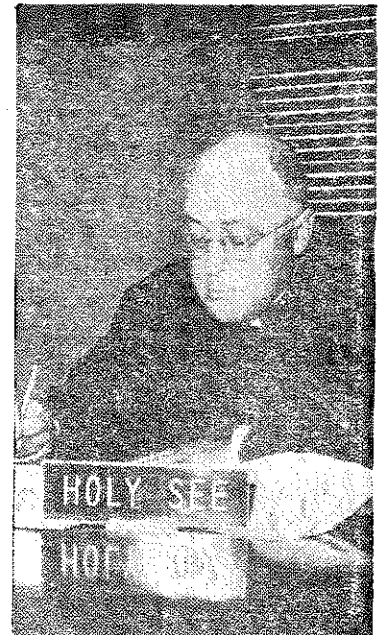
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TO MAKE IT clear to the world that he gave unstinting support to land reform, Pope Paul entertained the delegates at the Vatican and in an extended speech of welcome set out his own position.

First he thanked FAO and the International Labour Office for bringing the conference about.

"You, gentlemen, are personages of proven importance," he told the delegates: "You are specialists in the problems of land reform. You are fully cognizant of the need to improve policy in this field which is one of such capital importance for the well-being of countless millions of people of the globe."

After thanking the delegates for their visit, the Pope went on:



MONSIGNOR LIGUTTI

"Your deliberations are fraught with consequence. For land reform is assigned a vital role in the eradication of hunger and poverty from the countrysides of the world. And the problems to which you are so courageously addressing yourselves are possibly among the most difficult, but also, you may be sure, among the most vital and the most urgent confronting humanity at the present time.

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"LAND TENURE, redistribution of landed property, changes in the relations between landowner and farmer, the setting of limits to the territorial extension of ownership, consolidation, joint farming and land settlement — there, to mention only a few, are the problems before you."

Pope Paul remarked that some of his visitors might have wondered what the Pope would have to say and whether the Catholic Church had a solution to offer for these problems.

On the purely technical aspects, such as those of an economic, financial or administrative nature, the Church deferred to the technical specialists, the Pope said.

"But your own efforts reach above and beyond such technical aspects," he said. "What you are striving after is to make a worthwhile contribution to the prosperity and welfare of your fellows.

"And here you join hands with the Church, for she too, is striving, using methods and means peculiar to herself, to secure what she considers to be the true good of mankind.

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"SHE DOES NOT canvass this, that or the other solution to whatever problem it may be but she professes a doctrine which empowers her to judge which of the proposed solutions are in keeping with human dignity and of a sort likely to secure true progress for the individual and for society at large."

Pope Paul recalled that Vatican II had much to say on the question of land reform and had written into the text of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World a ringing declaration in support of its basis:

"God intended the earth and all things in it for the use of all peoples, in such a way that the goods of creation should abound equitably in the hands of all, according to the dictate of justice, which is inseparable from charity."

The Pope quoted at length from the con-

crete applications of the basic principle cited by way of illustration by the recent Council. He did so, he said, to help the delegates realize "that land reform and the efforts of those engaged in that noble undertaking have the care and the solicitude of the Church and that her heartfelt support goes out spontaneously to any initiative in this field that is in conformity with the great principles that she herself, but a short time ago, proclaimed afresh through her bishops in Council."

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THE POPE'S FIRST aim, of course, was to encourage those who struggle to achieve land reform. But, as one can see, he had another. This was to imbue with enduring Christian principles the land reform movement itself.

Land reform, in modern times, goes back to peasant uprisings in Europe like those in the Ukraine and later in all of Russia and to the Populist movement in the United States.

The Socialist efforts, Marxian and non-Marxian, have failed precisely because they did not make adequate provision for the role of the participating farmers. On the other hand the Mexican ejido or cooperative farm failed to build a network of cooperative agencies to support the agricultural enterprise.

The kibbutz or cooperative farm in Israel has proved to be a viable form which satisfies the needs of those, like former Premier David Ben-Gurion, who have been converted to its way of life. But they have proved to be a minority. The kibbutz is not a universal solution.

But now that science, ethics and religion have teamed up to tackle the question afresh there is hope that, if no universal solution is practicable, at least there can be solutions in each country valid for its traditions and value system which will bring the fruits of nuclear-space age science and technology to the world's poorest and hardest working class, the landless farmer.

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