



NEWS LETTER

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Sowers of hope for new horizons

The crisis we are experiencing has structural aspects, as pointed out by the Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical, "Caritas in Veritate". This means that there are no pre-ordained and tested models for development (understood as both mere economic growth and as integral development...), that rural areas, that have remained relatively marginalized from global economic flows, may see their situation become chronic, while several of those who experienced processes of agricultural modernization after World War II (particularly in developed countries), may find themselves going towards an apparently uncontested decline.

The crisis is a crisis of models of thought, of the ability to experiment with new ways and although the overtaking of the city on the country (in number of inhabitants) should already have occurred (2007), the countryside remains an important place for the production of food and other commodities (e.g.: energy),



for the protection of the environment, for our cultural identity. In the crisis, the countryside assumes a dual role: it is the last place where care is given to the lowest of the low, even to those who have been geographically forgotten

(the poor that have no voice), and it is also the place where a bottom-up experimentation tries to find new production formulas, new urban-rural links with the society on the production-consumption-environment relation-

ship, and therefore the countryside is a place of hope.

The reactions to the price crisis of 2007/08, the increase of chronically undernourished in 2009, who, we must repeat it, are mostly rural residents (farmers, laborers, etc. ..), has led to some important political-cultural acquisitions in the priorities and the language used by international institutions (the World Bank, FAO and other UN agencies). Today many say that we must invest again in agriculture, that farmers must be in-



volved and empowered, that agricultural policies are necessary and should aim at territorial development; and then there are those who behave as if agriculture was a thing of the past to leave behind.

There are interesting processes such as the reform of the FAO-CFS, with its desire to be the center of the discussion on agricultural policies and the fight against hunger, which implicitly means the defense of people's food sovereignty, if you will, represented by the involvement of civil society.

In short, in the crisis there are signs of hope associated with a new ability to think and provide for ourselves by focusing on the human person and human communities, on the relationship with the land and the environment, and on the solidarity between generations. These experiences need intelligence, and economic rationality, but they can be explored in all their depth from a new heart capable of meeting the "Lord Who comes", Who speaks an ancient, yet new language, Who gives us the courage of hope, the capacity to take new roads when the certainties of the recent past disappear. The task ahead

is immense. We must try to bring our small contribution, we must put together complaints and proposals, conversion, the understanding of the signs of the times and ability to work and carry out activities, and analyse them all with the same intelligence and in the same cultural project.

As Forum, we must break the bread of the new horizons that the DCD shows us and of which we have had a

glimpse in the changes taking place in the society, in its lights and shadows. Conversely, we must enrich the DCD with the understanding of the problems of different worlds with the signs, the works, new and old, (but with a new spirit), that emerge from them.

The greatest gift we can give to the Universal Church is our ability to see and operate this hope in the reality of the activities we carry out, in the light of a new conversion of hearts and minds, in the lived knowledge of the Lord of Light, the ability to assume our responsibilities and work to meet the challenges of our time.

Our worlds have always been, and will forever be the place where God's presence shines, in the thunder and in the gentle breeze, in the light filtering through the leaves, in the look that captures the horizon, in the alternation of the seasons, in the work done in the fields, seen as the use and care of God's creation. We, too, have to defend this legacy and bring new life to it.

Vincenzo Conso

The food problem

World Food Day is an opportunity to verify once again that, as in most typical stories about incommunicability between specializations, a common vision between technology experts and other agricultural disciplines (economics and other social sciences) is still far from becoming a reality. The latter maintain that the tool needed to solve the problem of extreme poverty, regardless of market access and market power, is innovation and increased yields.

The story has always been the same for decades now. Hundreds of millions of people living below the absolute poverty line (the dollar per day in purchasing power, which became in 2008 one dollar and twenty-five)? It takes more than technology and innovation to increase the yield of agricultural products. Unfortunately, after the “green revolution” of recent decades, hunger has not disappeared with the surprise of the supporters of this solution. Instead of rethinking the problem, the supporters of the “progressive magnificent destiny” re-propose, one after the other, new drastic solutions to solve the problem by going to its roots. New technologies ap-



pear, biotechnology promises miracles. But hunger does not disappear. Indeed, after the global financial crisis, it is estimated that the world population below the absolute poverty line has increased of about 200 millions.

Despite the lessons of the past, summit after summit, the usual mantra is repeated. The problem is not defeated but it seems to get worse? We need to further increase productivity just as when we think that to solve depression problems that become more and more common in western countries strongest and more effective antidepressants are necessary.

Unfortunately, agricultural poverty is not a problem of productivity, but of market access and power. Technologists do not take sufficient account of the fact that the increase in yield and supply of agricultural products is transformed into competitive markets where the demand for food is not very elastic, in price reductions on final products (we teach that to the students in the first year of economics). That, although the value created by industry (ranging from basic producers, to local brokers, importers





and retailers) does not decrease but remains constant, its distribution among the actors depends on their bargaining powers (and therefore small and unorganized producers who deal with local monopolist intermediaries will be always given just the bits of the cake). That wonderful yields can be reached, but if there is a bottleneck in the distribution, transport routes and control of the distribution itself, the small producers will not have access to the market. In essence, the technological progress in agriculture exists, but it does not always enrich the producers in the dynamics of competitive markets and, through the production chain, the greatest profits go to those who have proprietary rights on the assets that improve productivity (machinery, biotechnology, etc..)

The additional element that worsen this picture is that commodities have for quite a

while become a ground for speculative finance just as any other equity. The volatility of agricultural prices is partly structural (stiffness in the demand, and weather shocks) but it is exacerbated by purely financial fluctuations. This has dramatic effects on the ability of producers to make plans for their future. Numerous studies have shown that people living near the poverty line are forced to use their children as insurance and to move them from school to work to meet the emergencies of the downtrends in prices. One of the most important values that the mechanisms of supportive agriculture can produce is precisely the implicit insurance on prices with a major impact on child schooling.

The fight against marginalization and exclusion for the one billion of “stranded” people is played mainly on their access to credit and education, and on their increased bargaining power along the supply chain through the creation of producers associations and cooperatives that climb the slope of the added value chain (exactly what has happened in Italy from the post-war years to present date). The FAO itself recognizes and knows all this very well, having started a training program to help small producers to certify their products in one of those chains (organic, local denomination of origin, fair trade) that add intangible values by incorporating social and environmental values and allow to sell at higher prices. In addition, they promote technological upgrading, self-development and export services for their members.

Despite these tentative openings, we find that the gap between the wisdom of those who work on the ground and the proclamations of the large international organizations is still wide.

Leonardo Becchetti

World Water Day

As already mentioned, last March 22 was celebrated the World Water Day, a celebration introduced by the United Nations in 1992, after the Rio Conference on Environment and Development. It was an important opportunity to reflect on a what has become a particularly delicate issue, especially in recent years.

Water is a scarce and at the same time indispensable commodity for human life and for this reason it is necessary to make a conscious use of it in the countries of both the northern and the southern hemisphere.

According to data provided by FAO, in the world 70% of the water is used in agriculture, and therefore this is the sector where it is necessary to act to avoid waste.

FAO has for some time now started a series of interventions that have as their main aim that of producing a greater quantity of

food, of better quality and with less use of water. FAO then provides technical advice and support to governments for technical interventions to improve unconventional water systems and projects for the use of water, for instance through the desalinization of water, the reuse of waste water or rainwater harvesting . FAO also set a system going to collect information on water characteristics of the various countries, called Aquastat.

Even the Church recognizes the inestimable value of water. In his Encyclical Letter “Caritas in Veritate”, the Holy Father speaks of access to water as a “universal human right of all human beings, without distinction or discrimination.” Since water is a precondition for achieving other human rights, the Holy Father stressed the need to mature a “public conscience” to ensure equitable access to this resource for all human beings.

Similarly, the Social Doctrine of the Church recognizes water as a major gifts of God and provides guidance on how it should be managed. In paragraph 485 of the Compendium, it is stated that “ water, by its very nature, can not be treated as a mere commodity among others and its use must be rational and supportive.”

Just because it is vital to the life of every human being, then water must be managed and used having human dignity as a reference.



The problem of water in Palestine

The International Water Day was celebrated on March 22, and for this occasion, the Centro de Estudios de Oriente Medio de la Fundación Promoción Social de la Cultura (CEMOFPSC), one of the NGO belonging to the Rome Forum, has organized in Madrid a day to raise awareness on the water issue in the Middle East with a special focus on Palestine. The title chosen for this day was “El El Agua en Oriente Medio y su relación con la Paz”.

The celebration of the International Water Day this year took on special significance, as it is the first time that the availability of water is recognized as a fundamental human right.

In the summer of 2010. in fact, the United Nations passed two resolutions, one of the General Assembly and the other of the Human Rights Council, which recognize water as a fundamental human right, a precondition for the enjoyment of all other human rights. If there is no access to water, in fact, the very life of man is in danger: without water, for example, it is not possible to grow food and thus to ensure food security.

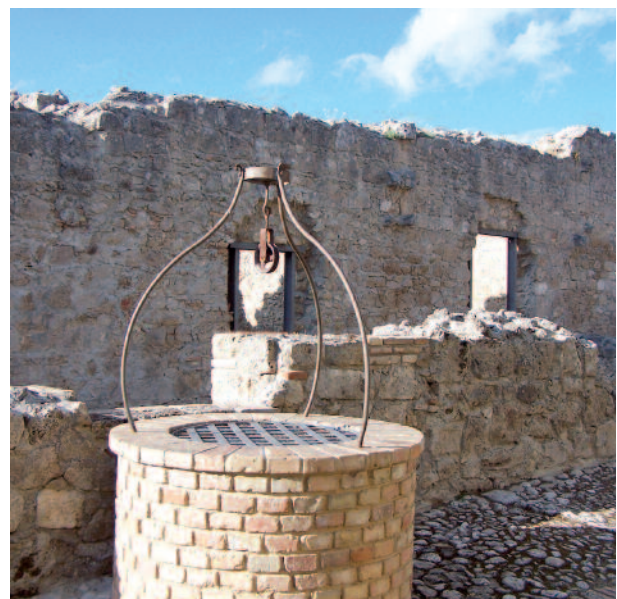
This study day was preceded by a presentation on the water issue in the Middle East, the way in which the water has been at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict from the beginning and how it was handled in the peace agreements; in fact, it was in turn cause and instrument of struggle in the age-old Arab-Israeli conflict.

In fact the Middle Eastern region is very dry and the situation is particularly delicate in the region of the Jordan River. This river is contended for by five nations (Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestinian Territories). Even more serious is the situation in the

Palestinian Territories, where the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 has prevented the development of an efficient water system, thus leaving the Palestinians in a state of continuous emergency.

A discussion was developed on these issues by experts and journalists, during which the FPSC representatives presented some of their projects under construction in the region.

The FPSC has started to intervene in the region since 2000 with a series of projects aimed at improving the management of water resources to ensure food security in these areas. The intervention strategies include the creation and improvement of irrigation-oriented infrastructures and tools, the training of farmers on new agricultural techniques and maintenance of irrigation systems, the strengthening of farmers' associations and other groups involved in water management, the enhancement of social participation in water management and the strengthening of a more active role of women in water management.



A Meeting of the Forum and the WFP

On March 28, 2011 at the premises of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, a morning session of study was held on food security and the manner in which this issue is addressed by the World Food Program.

The meeting was open to the NGOs belonging to the Rome Forum and the diplomatic representatives accredited to the Holy See. The main speaker was Dr. Paul Larsen, Director of the Department for the Relations with the ONGs at WFP.

The meeting was preceded by greetings from Bishop Mario Toso, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, who praised the importance of the networking done by the Forum and noted the importance of unity to achieve the objectives identified by the social doctrine of the Church. "The various elements of civil society must unite to create a real participatory democracy as a sign of faith and humanisation".

Dr. Conso, coordinator of the Rome Forum, introduced the speakers and the day of study focused on the action of WFP and, for the NGOs, on the possibility of identifying new areas of cooperation.

WFP is the world's largest humanitarian agency dedicated to fighting hunger, established in 1961 as an experimental program of three years between FAO and the UN General Assembly. Since 1965 it has obtained a permanent status.

It is an agency run by 36 member states and managed by an Executive Director appointed jointly by the UN Secretary and the Director-General of FAO.

All the action of the WFP is based on voluntary contributions of the partners, that mainly come from governments but also from the private sector and individuals.

WFP activities are carried out especially in emergency situations, where the agency

operates by providing food and helping communities to overcome the hardest moments of crisis, and later on it helps reconstruction. WFP headquarters are in Rome, but here only on 10% of its staff are located, the remaining 90% work in the field. All WFP action is directed to the achievement of food security for all, and especially for those people who live in riskier areas. To do this, WFP has developed a number of intervention strategies that are included in the strategic plan developed for the period 2008-2013.



A view of the room

This five-year plan was particularly important because it marked the transition of WFP from aid agency to support agency, and consequently from an action focused only on the supply of food through the redistribution of global surplus, to a long-term action designed to reduce aid dependency and to support the efforts of governments in the fight against hunger.

The largest number of the beneficiaries of WFP projects are women and children, the more vulnerable part of the population. For them, strategies aimed at providing adequate food have been developed, first of all in the most delicate and fundamental periods of life, according to the principle of the right food at the right time: the pregnancy for the mother and the child, and the first

1000 days of life for the child, that are fundamental for his future life.

Then there are programs for kids that try to put together food and education.

Another interesting program is the P4P through which the WFP buys food from farmers' associations (including women associations) and in so doing it helps the local economies of agricultural products.

The WFP strategy relies largely on the action of NGOs. There are currently more than 2000 partnerships. The collaboration between civil society and the WFP is based on some basic principles which are: equality, transparency, complementarity and responsibility.

For more information on the possibility of collaboration with WFP, visit the web page <http://www.wfp.org/about/partners/ngos>



Another view of the room

The presentation of candidates to the position of FAO Director General

April 13 was an important day at the FAO as candidates to fill the role of Director General presented their programs to the Member States.

Jacques Diouf, who has been leading FAO for the past 17 years, is coming to the term of his mandate this year and the election of his successor will take place at the beginning of the 37th FAO Conference to be held in Rome from June 25 to July 2. It is the first time that a comparison between the candidates and those who will be called to elect them is taking place, in accordance with the will of transparency that has characterized the process of reform of the institution during these years.

Applications have been expressed by individual countries: Franz Fischler for Austria, José Graziano da Silva for Brazil, Indroyono Soesilo for Indonesia, Mohammad Saeid Noori Naeini for Iran, Abdul Rashid Latif for Iraq and Miguel Angel Cuyaubé Moratinos for Spain.

Each candidate has had fifteen minutes to present his program, then a State for each regional area has raised questions about specific topics.

All candidates have important background and experiences in the international arena,

and they have mentioned that in their presentations, each identifying some specific goals they would like to realize during their mandate.

Graziano da Silva, Brazil's representative, presented his experience of struggle against hunger, having starred in his country in the "Hambre cero" programme as minister for food security in the Lula government since 2003. In his speech he insisted on some fundamental pillars as the need to fight hunger to open the doors to development, the sustainability of food production, the South-South cooperation and the role of FAO, stressing the need to complete its reform.

In his speech, the Spanish representative, Moratinos, first of all presented his candidacy as a universal one, overcoming the opposition between the Northern and Southern countries of the world. The key words of his speech have been "commitment" (compromiso) and "dialogue" to continue in the activity undertaken to date by the FAO and lead it through the challenges of the new millennium. According to his program, his efforts will be directed towards the eradication of hunger, the prevention of food crises, the strengthening of the role of small producers with a focus on women. The realization of these objectives must also pass through the identification of new financial instruments that will not increase the contributions of individual countries, but that should for instance target the private sector.

The Austrian candidate Fischler stressed the need to restore the centrality of the FAO as a UN agency leading the international scene and in this way to bring back





issues as the eradication of world hunger, food security and sustainability of food production as first topics on the international agenda. Fischler also stressed the importance of research and transfer of know-how of FAO as the primary means for achieving these objectives. Regarding the reform of the agency, he stressed its importance but also pointed out that the reform must not be an end in itself but a mean to achieve greater efficiency, so it will be necessary to conclude it in the shortest delay to start as soon as possible to work according to the new principles.

The presentation of the Iranian representative focused on his personal experience. He talked about his poor origins, during which he experienced firsthand the problem of hunger, and then he talked of when he began his academic career that led him to confront these issues also at a theoretical level and finally to work with the FAO. He therefore introduced himself as an expert of the topics covered and of the mechanisms of the agency, and stated his personal commitment to work together to meet the evolving needs worldwide, with an

eye to needy, as main element of his mandate.

The representative of Indonesia identified some principal pillars on which to base his project to fight hunger starting from the need to deal with the main problems related to food (availability, accessibility, sustainability) in a step by step approach and placed at the core of this strategy the tools available to FAO.

The Iraqi representative, after identifying the main challenges that FAO has to meet with respect to the fight against hunger, presented his vision of the agency, insisting on the need to increase the democracy and neutrality of its action, so that each State could feel directly responsible for the realization of the common objectives. He then supported the need to continue along the road of reform thus securing maximum efficiency and increasing the presence of the FAO on the field of action, supporting decentralization and cooperation with civil society.

The Forum and the next World Food Day

Last 31 May, at the premises of the Forum of the Catholic non-governmental organizations a meeting was held with Edgardo T. Valenzuela, the head of the World Food Day and Advocacy Activities Coordination Unit, for a first reflection on the themes of the World Food Day 2011.

This day of celebration is held annually on October 16 at the FAO since 1981, when it was instituted for the first time with a UN resolution.

The choice of this date is not accidental and recalls the founding of FAO itself.

The goal of the World Food Day celebrations is to raise awareness and inform the public on issues related to the problem of world hunger, focusing on global food security and creating synergies to support all activities related to this issue.

The theme chosen for 2011 is “Food prices-from crisis to stability.” From the food crisis of 2008, the price volatility has become a major threat to achieving food security for all. The organization of events on this theme for the October 16 Day will allow to reflect on the reasons behind this phenomenon and on possible solutions.

The events related to October 16 aim at involving governments, parliaments, but also non-governmental organizations and the private sector: that is, all those people potentially involved in the actions needed to achieve the right to food and food security for all.

The heart of the celebrations is, of course, Rome and the FAO headquarters, but all the countries are organizing events related to the theme chosen each year.





Every year during the celebrations for the World Food Day , a message of the Pope is received and read.

As we said, the World Food Day is an important time to raise the issue of world hunger. Other two initiatives organized by FAO for years have the same goal: the am-

bassadors' programme and the Telefood programme.

Since 1999, when the ambassadors' programme was launched, VIPs act as testimonials to give visibility to FAO's activities.

Since 2005, there are even some extraordinary ambassadors, important politicians appointed to provide a broader scope to the same activities.

The Telefood programme was launched in 1997 following the World Food Summit of 1996, and, by raising funds through concerts and public events, it funds small local projects that help small-scale farmers produce more food. The budget for each project does not exceed \$ 10,000, or a period of 12 months.

This exciting opportunity offered by the FAO has so far allowed the realisation of 2500 projects in 130 countries worldwide, allowing many farmers in the southern hemisphere to obtain the few resources required to produce more food.



Celebration in Rome to mark the centenary of the Teresian Institution

May 21, 2011: in the Aula Magna of the Gregorian University the centenary of the Teresian Institution is celebrated.

A hundred-year-old, but still full of enthusiasm and looking to the future. The secret? Cardinal Rylko, who chaired the discussion panel and later celebrated the Eucharist, explained it to us *“from where has it drawn in the past and where does it draw now the force to continue its mission and its growth? What is the secret of its enduring vitality, despite the passing years? The answer is simple and is contained in one word: charisma.”*

The first session was a discussion panel entitled: *“One hundred years of life: from memory to commitment”* moderated by Father Alfio Filippi. After an introduction by Cardinal Rylko, the topics of the panel



were covered by Daniela Corinaldesi, Francesca Cocchini and Aranzazu Aguado who illustrated how, starting from the spirituality of the early Christians, the Teresian Institute was able to respond to the signs of the times with a commitment rooted in the heart of the world. In the solemn Mass celebrated in the church of S. Croce and St. Bonaventura dei Lucchesi, about thirty priests concelebrated together with some

bishops and Cardinal Rylko who presided the celebration. At the end, the director general of the Teresian Institute read the message of Pope Benedict XVI, who in this way wanted to be present at that celebration.

The celebration was concluded the day after, a Sunday, with the participation in S. Peter's Square in the recitation of the Regina Coeli by the Pope who once again, at the end, mentioned and greeted the Institution.



José Graziano da Silva of Brazil elected FAO Director-General

Succeeds Senegal's Jacques Diouf

26 June 2011, Rome - José Graziano da Silva of Brazil was elected Director-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) today.

Graziano da Silva, who is 61, received a total of 92 votes out of 180 votes cast, winning over former Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos Cuyaubé, who received 88 votes. There were no abstentions.

The election took place on the second day of the biennial 191 member nation Conference of FAO, which also will vote on the Organization's budget for 2012-2013.

As Brazil's Extraordinary Minister of Food Security and Fight Against Hunger he was responsible for implementing the country's highly-successful "Zero Hunger" ("Fome Zero") programme, in whose design he also played a leading role. The programme helped lift 24 million people out of extreme poverty in five years and to reduce undernourishment in Brazil by 25 percent.



José Graziano da Silva

Since 2006, he has served as FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Graziano da Silva was born on 17 November 1949. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Agronomy and a Master's Degree in Rural Economics and Sociology from the University of São Paulo as well as a Ph.D. in Economic Sciences from the State University of Campinas. In addition, he has two post-Doctorate degrees in Latin American Studies (University College of London) and Environmental Studies (University of California, Santa Cruz). Brazilian and

Italian by nationality, he is married and has two children and two grandchildren. He speaks English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Graziano da Silva is FAO's eighth Director-General since the Organization was founded in Quebec City, Canada on October 16, 1945. The term of the new Director-General, who will succeed Senegal's Jacques Diouf, will start on 1 January 2012 and run through 31 July 2015.

*The Rome Forum of Catholic NGOs
expresses its congratulations to the new Director General of FAO
and wishes him a good job in his difficult commitment
for the integral development of the poor of the world,
offering its sincere cooperation for the solution of problems
in the full respect of human dignity*