



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE  
**BOLLETTINO**

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS  
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**Audience with the International Catholic Rural Association: rural communities must not remain at the margin of political, social and economic decisions**

“Your concern for rural life, grounded in the vision of the Church’s social doctrine, is an eloquent expression of that imperative to ‘till and keep the garden of the world’ to which we have been called, if we wish to carry on God’s creative activity and to protect our common home”, said the Pope this morning as he received in audience in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace the members of the International Catholic Rural Association (ICRA) at the conclusion of their meeting.

Francis referred to agriculture as work that is “at times fatiguing, yet it is carried out in the awareness of providing a service to others. In your efforts to work the land and to ensure its fruitfulness year in and year out, you also encounter difficulties resulting from climate change, a reality which is unfortunately aggravated by human neglect”.

“Paradoxically, agriculture is no longer considered a primary sector of the economy, yet it clearly continues to be important for policies of development and for addressing disparities in food security and issues in the life of rural communities”, said the Holy Father. “In some places, agricultural development remains the best response possible to poverty and food shortages. But this means remedying the lack of organized agencies, the unjust acquisition of lands whose productivity is taken out of the hands of its rightful beneficiaries, unjust methods of speculation, and the lack of specific national and international policies”.

“Looking at rural life today, we see the primacy of the market, which determines actions and decisions. Making money, above all else!” he exclaimed. “Even at the expense of sacrificing the rhythms of agricultural life, with its times of work and leisure, its weekly rest and its concern for the family. Those who live close to the land are led to conclude that development is not equal for everyone, that the life of farming communities is of lesser value. Solidarity itself, frequently invoked as a remedy, is insufficient unless it is accompanied by justice in the allotment of land, in agricultural salaries and in access to markets. For small farmers, a share in decision-making remains a distant prospect, due to the absence of local institutions and the lack of clear rules that recognize as values honesty, fairness and above all trustworthiness”.

“What can be done?” he asked. “The history of ICRA shows that it is possible to combine being Christians with

acting as Christians in the concrete circumstances of agricultural life, where the importance of the human person, the family and community, and a sense of solidarity represent essential values, even in situations of significant underdevelopment and poverty. Your worldwide structure and your relationship with the great international organizations are the way that an NGO of Christian inspiration like your own can react to challenges and respond to needs. But this calls for an extra dose of humanity, seen above all in courageous and technically competent decisions, so as to cooperate with the state and international institutions in making technology available and in offering solution to problems, always from a humane perspective. Your role is thus one of proposing ideas that can help rural communities not to remain at the margin of political decisions, regulations or action plans in the different sectors of social and economic life”.

In your training projects, he continued, “you are rightly critical of models of agribusiness. Your own emphasis is on real needs, linked to individual and local situations. This enables you to avoid not only losses and waste in production, but also a rash recourse to technology that, for the sake of an abundant harvest, can eliminate the variety of species and the richness of biodiversity, and furthermore we do not know the consequences for human health. When we see so many so-called rare diseases, whose origin we do not know, we must think... May we never find ourselves ‘silent witnesses to terrible injustices’, as can happen when ‘we think that we can obtain significant benefits by making the rest of humanity, present and future, pay the extremely high costs of environmental deterioration’.

Finally, the Pope emphasised that “in contributing to the work of international institutions, your role as an NGO solidly rooted in the Church’s social doctrine is primarily one of building bridges, grounded in a deep awareness of your own roots and committed not simply to participating in processes but to working to change strategies and projects. This calls for competence and not improvisation, even one that expresses goodwill or a lofty sense of altruism. As members of ICRA, you are called to propose a sober lifestyle and a culture of agricultural work that has its foundations as well as its goals in the centrality of the person, in openness to others and in gratuitousness”.

“If I may, I would like to relate a personal anecdote: just over a month ago I had a conversation with a farmer. He told me how to prune olive trees. A simple farmer, who cultivated olives. And when he told me how he did this, I assure you that I saw tenderness there; he had that relationship with nature. And he tended to his trees as if he were their father, with tenderness. May this relationship with nature, with creation, never be lost! This guarantees dignity to all of us”.

“I give my blessing to your efforts and I join you in asking the Lord to watch over farm workers, rural families and all those engaged in the agricultural sector”, he concluded. “And I ask you, please, to remember me in your prayers, as I am in need of this. Thank you”.

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