

1

Preview

A VIGOROUS INTERDISCIPLINARY MEETING takes the neatness from our particular world and sometimes makes us wonder whether it exists at all.

Such was the case at the Second Conference on Goals and Values in Agriculture, held in February 1963 at Iowa State University.

Conflicting goals and values were expressed as those participating in the conference sought to understand and judge the devastating tide of urban migration in which most people are or promise soon to be caught.

Top men in their fields asked such questions as these:

Is rural life inherently superior?

Is it, in any case, worth saving?

Or are family farms becoming family businesses and food production more an aspect of the laboratory than of the farm?

From the rural side, what can be done on behalf of those who will move to town?

Must we save the farm in order to save the family? During the conference, a political scientist asked, as eyebrows were raised, whether we might not even have to do without the family. His point: we cannot have the world as we want it until we come alive to its complex forces — and deal with them.

In this volume, spokesmen for churches, government agencies and farm organizations first candidly state their official aspirations. A theologian and three social scientists then comment. And finally, the comments, questions and special points of view of the many who participated in a general "dialogue" are included as the last chapter.

FARMING AS A WAY OF LIFE

In this volume the warmest controversy centers on the nature of farming as a way of life. Divergent points of view are noted. However, the conclusion prevails that while the rural community is capable of producing a good life, it would be a mistake to consider it as superior to other types of communities.

Catholic and Protestant points of view are expressed on this subject by the Rt. Rev. Msgr. George H. Speltz, St. Mary's College, and by Dr. Shirley E. Greene, secretary for the Church in Town and Country, United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, United Church of Christ.

Monsignor Speltz says the farmer's deep attachment to the soil is a source of stability and strength in nations.

"In speaking of the work of the farmer I wish to emphasize its therapeutic value. Much of the work of contemporary man, like repetitious factory or clerical work, lacks this value. Though we must accept this condition of things, we should not organize agriculture without giving thought to this social problem.

"Classical Socialism solves it by saying that when everything has been organized for production, then the worker will be able to find the good life in a Utopia of material plenty which he will have the leisure to enjoy. In this view, work is to be endured; a man enjoys life and perfects himself in his leisure hours, principally, and not through his work. Work is not regarded as having any significant cultural value.

"The Catholic perspective, for theological as well as philosophical reasons, is quite different. Man has need to work, not only for the acquisition of the necessities of life, the primary end of manual labor, but also because it is necessary for his spiritual and physical development."

The popes have expressed concern that an impersonal economic organization of society, based predominantly upon mathematical calculations, tends to reduce the laborers to mere objects without any significant identity. Because the living things with which the farmer works do not lend themselves readily to merely quantitative determinations but must be handled according to the far more complex laws of the organic realm, it is reasonable to hope that the agricultural worker can be spared the depersonalizing influences of modern technology and economic organization. As Pope Pius XII noted, labor on farms "still reflects the natural order willed by God, namely, that man, with his own labor, ought to rule material things not material things rule man."

"No more profound reason could be given for the inherent dignity of agriculture," Monsignor Speltz asserts.

Speaking as a Protestant, Dr. Greene notes the Christian thesis that man is a sinner who stands forever under God's judgment. He affirms that this thesis forces a re-examination of the "pleasant assumptions" some of us have lived with so long about the "superiority of the 'rural way of life,' the purity of 'rural values,' and the specially sacred nature of the 'farmer's calling.'"

"In my own attempts to appraise the rural way of life I have discovered that for every virtue attributable to country living and to the agricultural vocation there is to be found a counter-vailing vice. For example, to mention but a few: strong family structure — patriarchalism. Neighborliness — nosiness. Religious sensitivity conditioned by natural environment — deep seated pagan naturalism. Self-reliance — stubborn individualism. Absence of class stratification — family clannishness. Community loyalty — narrow provincialism. Respect for tradition — blind conservatism. And the list could be indefinitely prolonged.

"I can and will defend the thesis that there are those aspects in rural life, especially as we have known it in the economically well-adjusted sectors of the American scene, which are conducive to the development of strong character, wholesome family life, stable and fine communities and democratic qualities of life. No more than this. Rural life at its best provides a favorable environment for these values; it does not guarantee them. It has all too often produced their opposites."

However, Dr. Greene believes we should not lean so far away from nostalgic glorification of rural life as to fall into an equal but opposite fallacy.

"In recent years I have heard some speeches in glorification of the metropolis and the urban way of life which have been quite as oblivious of the Christian doctrine of judgment as anything in the romantic literature of rural life. The 'holy earth' boys have, if anything, been topped by the 'holy city' boys."

COMMUNITY CHANGE

Dr. Andrew Hacker, Department of Government, Cornell University, asserts that churches are passive and are forced to serve vested interests rather than bring about change. But both the Rev. Henry McCanna, executive director, Department of Church in Town and Country, National Council of Churches, and

the Rev. Edward O'Rourke, executive director, National Catholic Rural Life Conference, see in churches the best instrument, perhaps the only instrument, capable of renewing and invigorating rural society.

Father O'Rourke notes that among the organizational tools recently made available one of the most promising is the Rural Areas Development program.

"In nearly 2,000 counties and larger areas of the United States RAD committees have been established. These committees coordinate the efforts of private organizations and agencies of the government. They seek to improve agricultural income, develop small industries and expand public facilities.

"The NCRLC heartily endorses the RAD program and promotes it at the national, state and local levels. We remind our people of their responsibilities toward their communities and urges them to assume positions of leadership in RAD committees."

The Rev. McCanna observes that lay and clerical church leaders need to be trained in "new and radical methods" to help low status groups develop their own leaders, identify their own concerns, develop varied mutual associations to help themselves and participate in the "larger" community.

The people who need help the most must find an articulate voice, he states. Local pastors, more than any other local group, can aid in the stimulating or initiative, and they can both seek out and help the dispossessed become articulate.

"To assume that the present county and town power structures will do this is an illusion — too much of vested interest is at stake. It is up to the pastor and his dedicated and sensitive laymen.

"Old rivalries between town and town must be absorbed into a comprehensive cooperative area approach. Again, it is up to the pastor as he works with other pastors of such an economic area to set an example of cooperation and to aid in the process of reconciliation. Economic salvation will never occur apart from such social reconciliation," the Rev. McCanna says.

FARM POLICY

Sharply varying viewpoints on the farm problem are expressed by farm organization and government agency spokesmen.

W. E. Hamilton, director of research for the American Farm Bureau Federation, says that farmers best may earn high per-family real incomes in a manner preserving freedom and

opportunity if the market price system is preserved as the principal influence in allocating the use of farm resources and in distributing farm production. Reliance on the market system does not automatically result in a Utopia in which there are no human problems.

"There is a place for private charity and for government programs to aid the less fortunate, but Farm Bureau believes that such efforts should be designed to supplement rather than replace the market system. It also believes that private charity benefits both the giver and receiver, whereas the increasing assumption of welfare responsibilities by a centralized government tends to reduce the individual's concern with other people's problems."

Hamilton adds that transitional programs are needed to liquidate accumulated surpluses and facilitate needed adjustments in resource use in order to keep the mistakes of past programs from placing an intolerable burden on the operation of the market system.

Dr. Willard W. Cochrane, principal economic advisor to Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman and director of agricultural economics for the U. S. Department of Agriculture, maintains that a fair return to agriculture cannot be achieved without some management of market supplies and hence some sacrifice of entrepreneurial freedom.

Even when pressed to the fullest extent possible, programs to expand demand for farm products, to open up new uses for farm resources and to create non-farm job opportunities "are likely to fall short of achieving a fair return to agriculture for considerable time to come."

Dr. Cochrane declares that studies indicate we have millions of acres under cultivation now that will not be needed to produce agricultural products we can use, even two decades ahead.

"Stated positively, there is little possibility of bringing total farm output in line with total demand at reasonable prices which does not involve supply management programs that, in some degree, limit the otherwise unrestrained power of farmers to produce as much as they choose.

"It is conceivable that farmers might prize entrepreneurial freedom so highly that they would prefer sacrificing whatever degree of a fair return necessary to prevent any loss whatsoever of entrepreneurial freedom. But, in general, we know of no evidence that farmers prize entrepreneurial freedom that highly."

Herschel D. Newsom, grand master of the National Grange, says a major cause of low incomes among farmers is protected prices and wages in industry which have become farmers' production and living costs.

Newsom points out the necessity for reducing trade barriers now is universally recognized by free nations, the American farm people and other Americans. But he asserts that others must be made to understand that the right of American farmers to protection from the full, free international market (comparable to that afforded nonagricultural labor, investment or industry) is not incompatible with the long-time objective of progressively reducing trade barriers.

"It is in this light that the propriety and reasonableness of the wheat certificate program, for example, as an instrument to achieve such levels of protection to the American wheat producer, in terms of a soundly balanced American economy, should be presented and evaluated."

Gilbert C. Rohde, president of the National Farmers Union in Wisconsin, observes that the NFU's proposal to establish family farm "maximums" in terms of production units and to make direct payments to farmers is receiving much attention at this time.

"Farmers Union is convinced that a direct payment program, incorporating supply management, has several advantages over our present price supports through government purchases."

He notes that payments would be made directly to the producer and not to the processor. Since the market would be allowed to clear the product, consumers would receive lower food prices and government would not have to meet high storage costs. With the ready-made government market removed, processor plants would operate in a more genuinely competitive market. Prices at which American products move in international trade will be reduced in keeping with our policy to liberalize world trade.

Oren Staley, president of the National Farmers Organization, declares that "it's time for the farmer to start putting the price tag on the product he sells instead of going to the market and asking 'what will you give me?'"

He says that to accomplish this farmers must organize, must affect the total supply, must use bargaining power and must secure contracts with processors to stabilize their price gains.

As a result of the NFO's holding action last year "we have been able to move forward in signing master contracts" and now have signed a larger number of them.

"No longer can farmers as individuals meet the problems of their industry. They must organize or relegate themselves to a lower and lower standard of living," Staley says.

Dr. Tyler Thompson, professor of the philosophy of religion, Garrett Theological Seminary, provides an ethical critique of the programs discussed by previous speakers.

He concludes that "God's love, man's sin and God's reconciling power, which never can be fulfilled short of our outgoing concern for every man," provide a framework which can bring all of the goals and values for agriculture to judgment — "whether propounded by individuals, or voluntary organizations or government agencies or churches."

FREEDOM VS. OTHER GOALS

Dr. Robin M. Williams, Jr., Cornell University, notes that entrepreneurial freedom is incompatible with several of the other important goals and values desired by farm people.

"Because we want several incompatible things, the agricultural programs of the future will continue to represent complex compromises among different values and goals.

"There is a limit to the subsidization of comparatively well-off commercial farms that will be politically tolerated in an urbanized democracy. There is no limit to the acceptability to the conscience of the public of the mass misery of migratory farm workers or of the rural slums of stranded populations."

The Cornell sociologist adds that "the only hope for an effective agriculture and an enduring rural life is in selective change and adaptation to new conditions. There is no simple panacea. Some answers will be found in research, teaching or extension services. Some will be devised by individuals, by cooperatives, by local communities, by private voluntary associations. A very substantial amount of governmental regulation and guidance will continue. New social inventions will be needed and will emerge — new forms of organization, new procedures."

DON F. HADWIGER

Associate Professor of History and Government
Iowa State University

EDWIN O. HAROLDSEN

Assistant Professor and Editor for
Center for Agricultural and Economic Development
Iowa State University