

'It doesn't take a Wikileaks to document U.S. pressure on Vatican in favor of GMOs'

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One doesn't have to go to Wikileaks to find out about U.S. advocacy of GMOs to the Vatican. It has been a consistent effort: Colin Powell as Secretary of State tried to have the Vatican silence Jesuit Fr. Peter Henriot who helped the Zambian government reject GMO grain during a food crisis in Zambia.

The first thing that Condoleezza Rice told the Vatican on her first visit was to support GMOs. The U.S. mission to the Holy See has always supported the moral imperative to have the Vatican support GMOs and convinced the Pontifical Academy of Sciences to host two conferences on this topic, one in 2004 and one in 2008. The second meeting only included supporters of GMOs, including among the speakers was Nino Fodoroff, biotechnology advisor to Secretary of State Hilary Clinton.

The advocacy has been bipartisan. One wonders whether it is one of the major agenda items of theologian Miguel Diaz now Ambassador to the Holy See and former employee of Saint John's University. I fear that it is. The current President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, whom I met this past summer has been quoted in the Catholic press as stating that peasant farmers should be able to plant their own seeds and the only one supported by GMOs are the corporations.

Even the Pontifical Academy of Sciences has tried to balance itself by inviting Hans Herron, a consultant to the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge Science and Technology, which challenged heavy dependence on GMOs in developing countries in 2008, to be a member. Hans Herron told me of this invitation in 2009. So, there has been a long, published history of the dogged pursuit of the Vatican by the US government to support GMOs, so far it hasn't gotten official support.

Recently when the proceeds of the last meeting on GMOs held in the Vatican were published, companies touted the support of the Vatican and were rebuked by the Academy of Sciences saying there was nothing official from the Vatican in that report, it was only an document of the participants. The United States and corporate supporters have tried hard to secure a moral voice from the Holy See in support of GMOs.

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