
From Utopian Rural Pastor to Global Missioner

Author(s): Will Lissner

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14. H. M. Ingram, *op. cit.*

15. *Ibid.*

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THE LIFE of the Rev. Monsignor Luigi G. Ligutti, co-founder of *Agrimissio* (a world-wide agency assisting missionaries in their conduct of social action programs), Vatican diplomat and the first observer of the Holy See to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, has been a supreme adventure of the human spirit. An Italian immigrant who completed his boyhood in Iowa, he gave up teaching to be a country pastor in Granger, Iowa, and founded a utopian project, the Granger Homesteads, to enable a community of miners to regain human dignity by becoming self-supporting on the land. One of the founding members of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, he became president, then executive director of the conference, successfully defeated an effort to make it a creature of agribusiness and then built it up as a spokesman for the family farmer. Setting up an international affairs department of the conference, he succeeded in interesting a succession of popes in the welfare of family farmers over the world and made the Holy See a powerful and respected presence in the FAO and other world councils. And at 80, while promoting the interests of hard-pressed missionaries in the world's agricultural areas, he found time to become one of the most active canons of the Church of Sta. Maria Maggiore in Rome, working for its restoration.

Vincent A. Yzermans, known for his editorship of the writings and speeches of Paul J. Hallinan, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Atlanta, tells the story of Dr. Ligutti's life in a new biography, *The People I Love* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1976). Monsignor Yzermans notes that in many ways "this work is more autobiographical than biographical" and that it is, also, "prejudicial" in that it is "a testament of one midwestern priest to an older, wiser and great midwestern priest." His honesty is uncommon in biographers but it also distinguishes the work: it is as factual as a diligent researcher could make it, and as fact-packed as it was possible to achieve.

The author looks to a future historian to evaluate his judgments in the light of further evidence. He is entitled to expect from that worthy an expression of heartfelt thanks for an official biography written with the utmost dedication to the truth and with a very great sense of responsibility to the reader. It is a superb job. Monsignor Yzermans has not only captured the chief details of Dr. Ligutti's life but the very essence of his personality.

Of this I can speak from personal knowledge because Monsignor Ligutti has been a personal friend of mine since the 30s. I think we met when I wrote about the Granger Homesteads in *The New York Times* and covered the conventions of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. We shared a dedication to land reform and an interest in what the biographer calls "Georgian economics," as well as a concern for the whole area of social justice. Monsignor Ligutti has been a collaborator in this *Journal* from the first; as a distinguished rural sociologist he recruited technical assistance for us when we needed it most and year after year he has been our benefactor and friend. Altogether, Monsignor Yzermans' book is a masterpiece of the literary craft, a delight to all who know Monsignor Ligutti and treasure his example and friendship, and a valuable guide to the thousands who will make Dr. Ligutti's acquaintance for the first time through these pages.

The Most Rev. Maurice Dingmann, Bishop of Des Moines, calls Ligutti "Iowa's greatest contribution to the Catholic Church." That is the honor Dr. Ligutti would most cherish. But there is more to be said. Monsignor Ligutti is Italy's and North America's greatest benefactor of the family farmer. The movements he set in motion, within the Catholic Church and in the academic and workaday worlds outside, to improve the lot of the family farmer and assure the farm family of working conditions that would restore their human dignity, will be his monument.

WILL LISSNER