



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE HOLY SEE TO THE UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION
FOR EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND CULTURE (UNESCO)**

To Mons. Francesco Follo

Permanent Observer of the Holy See at UNESCO

1. The 50th anniversary of the Permanent Mission of the Holy See at UNESCO enjoys a special importance, and I am happy to join in spirit and cordially greet all the participants in the colloquium called to observe this event. On this occasion, I am pleased to recall the illustrious memory of your predecessor, Mons. Angelo Roncalli, Blessed Pope John, who was the first Permanent Observer of this Mission of the Holy See.

2. Created in the 20th century immediately after the Second World War, the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) was born of the desire of the nations to live in peace, justice and freedom, and to provide one another with the means to promote this peace actively through a new international cooperation, marked by a spirit of mutual assistance and founded on the intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity. It was natural for the Catholic Church to be associated with this great project because of the unique sovereignty of the Holy See, but, as I said to this assembly in 1980, also and especially, by reason of the "organic and constitutive link which exists between religion in general and Christianity in particular, on the one hand, and culture, on the other" (*Address to UNESCO*, 2 June 1980, n. 9; *ORE*, 23 June 1980, p. 10).

3. The intuitions that prevailed at the foundation of UNESCO more than 50 years ago, stressed the importance of education for peace and solidarity, not losing sight of the fact that "if wars are born in people's minds, it is in the human spirit that the defences of peace must be built" (*Constitution of UNESCO*, 16 November 1945). Today these intuitions have been fully confirmed. The phenomenon of globalization has become a reality defining economics, politics and culture,

bringing with it positive and negative values. They are areas that offer a challenge to our sense of responsibility so that a truly worldwide solidarity can be organized that alone can give our earth a secure future and lasting peace. In the name of the mission she has from her Founder to be the universal sacrament of salvation, without ignoring any situation, the Church never ceases to speak and act in favour of justice and peace, inviting nations to dialogue and understanding. Thus she bears witness to the truth she has received about man, his origin, his nature and his destiny. She knows that this search for the truth is the person's innermost pursuit and that it is not defined by what he possesses but by what he is, by the capacity to surpass self and to mature in humanity. The Church also knows that, by inviting our contemporaries to seek the truth about themselves with burning rigour, she calls them to their true freedom, while other voices, enticing them to take an easier path, contribute to enslave them to the renewed fascination and power of today's idols.

4. The Catholic Church, in her mission to all the peoples of the earth, is not identified with any race, nation, or culture. In the course of her history, she has always used the resources of many cultures to make known to humanity the Good News of Christ because she is fully conscious that the faith that she proclaims can never be reduced to one cultural element, but is the source of salvation for the whole human person and his activity. However, it is through the diversity and multiplicity of languages, cultures, traditions and mentalities, that the Church expresses her catholicity, unity, and faith. She does her best to respect every human culture, because in her missionary and pastoral activity she follows the rule that "whatever good is found sown in the minds and hearts of men or in the rites and customs of peoples, these not only are preserved from destruction, but are purified, raised up, and perfected for the glory of God, the confusion of the devil and the happiness of man" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 17).

For these reasons, the Catholic Church holds in high esteem the nation, since it is the forge in which the sense of the common good is created, where one learns what it means to belong to a culture, through language, the transmission of family values and formation in the common memory. Similarly, the multiform experience of human cultures that she possesses because she is "catholic", that is, universal in both space and time, makes her desire to help people abandon an excessive particularity and narrow and exclusive nationalism. We should keep in mind that "every culture, as a typically human and historically conditioned reality, necessarily has its limitations" (*Message for the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2001*, 8 December 2000, n. 7; *ORE*, 20/27 December 2000, p. 10). Thus, "in order to prevent the sense of belonging to one particular culture from turning into isolation, an effective antidote is a serene and unprejudiced knowledge of other cultures" (*ibid.* n. 7).

It is precisely the noble mission of UNESCO to foster such reciprocal knowledge of cultures and to encourage their institutional dialogue by all sorts of projects at the international level, namely, meetings, exchanges, formation programmes. Building bridges between human beings, and, even sometimes rebuilding them when the folly of war has worked to destroy them, is a long-term, never finished project that entails the formation of consciences, the education of youth and the change of

mentalities. This is a major opportunity for a globalization that will not produce a homogenization of values or reduce everything to the laws of the global market, but rather bring about the possibility of pooling the legitimate treasures of each nation in order to serve the good of all.

5. For her part, the Catholic Church rejoices in what has been done, even if she knows its limitations, and she continually encourages the peaceful encounter of human beings through their cultures and the consideration of the religious and spiritual dimension of individuals, which is part of their history. This really is the reason for the presence of the Permanent Observer of the Holy See at the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture, who for 50 years has been a vigilant witness to the catholic nature of the Church and to her resolute dedication to the service of the human community.

May the observance of this anniversary strengthen everyone's dedication to work tirelessly to serve true dialogue among the peoples through their cultures, so that everyone may be more conscious of belonging to the same human family and peace in the world may be better guaranteed!

To you and to those taking part in the colloquium, I cordially grant a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 25 November 2002.

JOHN PAUL II

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English 2003 n.3 p.6.*

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana