



The Holy See

*Message of His Holiness Paul VI
to H.E. U Thant, Secretary-General of the United Nations Organization,
on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the United Nations*

At this time when the United Nations Organization is celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of its foundation, we are happy to convey to it, through your good offices, our confident good wishes, and the assurance of our good-will and our support for its worldwide mission. Today we wish once more to repeat the words which we had the honour to pronounce on 4th October 1965 from the tribune of your Assembly «This Organization represents the path that has to be taken for modern civilization and for world peace.» [AAS. 57(1965), p. 878]

Is not an anniversary such as this a propitious occasion for assessing and reflecting upon the results which it has been possible to achieve in the course of this first quarter of a century? If it has not been possible to fulfil the expectations and hopes which were raised when your institution came into being, it must at least be recognized that it is within the United Nations Organization that the desire of governments and peoples to work together efficaciously for the establishment of brotherly unity is most surely followed up. Where else, moreover, could these governments and peoples better find a bridge to link them, a table around which they can gather, and a tribunal where they may plead the cause of justice and peace? Even if the sources of violence still smoulder, flaring up here and there into fresh conflagrations, the conscience of humanity still makes itself heard no less clearly in this privileged forum where, going beyond selfish rivalries, men find once more that inalienable part of themselves which unites them all - the human element in man.

Is it not so as to assure, ever more firmly, respect for this human element that your Assembly has rightly taken pains to lay down in appropriate texts, pacts or declarations, the conditions of dignity, of freedom and of security which must be guaranteed «by all, in all places and for all?» [Message to the Teheran Conference, AAS, 60(1968), p. 285]. At this agonizing hour of their history, the peoples are more vividly aware than ever of the gap which separates these generous resolutions from their effective implementation. In the face of so many inextricable situations, conflicting

interests, deeply rooted prejudices and the tragic series of conflicts, discouragement lies in wait for even the best, as they witness the collapse of the hope of peaceful coexistence by obstinately hostile forces. Let us presume to say this: there will be no lasting peace until a new spirit impels individuals, social groups and nations to true reconciliation. That is why we must strive untiringly to substitute relationships based on force with relationship of deep understanding, mutual respect and creative collaboration.

Proclaimed more than twenty years ago by your Assembly, the Charter of Human Rights remains in our view one of its greatest claims to fame. To ask that all, without distinction of race, age, sex or religion should be able to enjoy human dignity and the conditions necessary for its exercise - is not this to express strongly and clearly the unanimous aspiration of men's hearts and the universal witness of their consciences? No violation in practice can stifle the recognition of this inalienable right. But in circumstances of prolonged oppression, who will prevent those who are humiliated from succumbing to the temptation of what seems to them to be the solution of despair?

In spite of inevitable setbacks and the many obstacles placed in the way of such a vast body by its very complexity, it must be the honoured task of your Assembly to lend its voice to those who are not able to make themselves heard, to denounce, without care for ideologies, all oppression, whatever its source, and to ensure that cries of distress receive a hearing, just requests be taken into consideration, the weak be protected against the violence of the strong and the flame of hope thus be kept burning in the breast of the most humiliated section of mankind [Cf. Address to the ILO, AAS, 61(1969), pp. 479, 499]. It is to the heart of each man - «for the real danger comes from man» [Address to United Nations, AAS, 57(1965), p. 885] - that is necessary to repeat untiringly: «What have you done to your brother?» (Cf. Gen. 4: 10), that brotherly integral development of man and that interdependent development of mankind to which we have boldly invited them, in the name of a «full-bodied humanism,» in our Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (Cf. n. 42).

As the Second Development Decade dawns, who better than the United Nations Organization and its specialized agencies will be able to take up the challenge presented to all mankind? It is a question of ensuring that the nations, while preserving their identity and original way of life, shall agree at least on the means to be taken to support their common will to live, and, in the case of some of them, to assure their survival. Let us recognize this fact: the common good of the nations, be they large or small, demands that States should rise above their merely nationalistic interests, so that the most brilliant schemes may not remain a dead letter and that well ordered dialogue structures may not be dislocated by plans capable of putting all mankind in peril. Is it not surrendering mankind to an uncertain and perhaps catastrophic future to continue to throw away on war budgets the most astonishing opportunities for progress that mankind has ever known? Has not the hour struck for reason to take stock of that terrifying future which so much wasted energy risks preparing for the world? «They will hammer their swords into ploughshares, their spears into sickles» (Is. 2:4). May your untiring perseverance, placed at the service of all plans for reciprocal and controlled disarmament, ensure in our industrial age the realization of those words

of this ancient prophet of the agricultural era. May it ensure that the resources thus made available are employed for scientific progress, for the harnessing of the immense resources of land and sea and for the sustenance of the ever growing numbers of the members of the human race. May the work of the living never be used against life; on the contrary, let it be used to feed that life and to make it truly human. With imagination, courage and perseverance, you will thus enable all peoples peacefully to take their rightful place in the concord of nations.

To move forward, this new dynamism requires, it must be said, a radical change of attitude, in order to acquire «a new way of thinking about the pathways of history and the destinies of the world» [Address to the United Nations, AAS, 57(1965), p. 884]. There is scarcely need to emphasize the fact that spiritual progress does not stem from material progress-to which however it alone gives true meaning - as the effect from its cause. Technical achievements, however admirable, do not of themselves bring moral advance. When science advances from success to success, its use places ever greater demands upon the conscience of the man who sets it to work. The modern world, troubled in its most dynamic and most youthful elements by the gravest question that has ever assailed it, the question of its survival, hesitates between fear and hope, and desperately searches for a meaning to give its arduous ascent, to make it genuinely human.

It is thus of capital importance that your Organization has recognized among the fundamental rights of the human person what our venerable predecessor John XXIII called man's right "of being able to worship God in accordance with the right dictates of his own conscience, and to profess his religion both in private and in public" [Pacem in Terris, AAS, 60(1963), p. 260]: this is religious freedom, the complete value of which was fully affirmed by the Church in the Ecumenical Council (Declaration Dignitatis Humanae, n. 2). But alas, this most sacred of all rights is for millions of men, innocent victims of intolerant religious discrimination, ridiculed with impunity. And so we turn with confidence towards your distinguished Assembly, in the hope that it will be able to promote, in a domain so fundamental to the life of man, an attitude in conformity with the insuppressible voice of conscience, and to ostracize conduct incompatible with the dignity of mankind.

How great is the hope reposed in your Organization that it may achieve that community of free men which is the ideal of humanity; how great is the vigour it must show to bring such a programme to fulfillment. But, as a great contemporary thinker has so rightly observed: «The more difficult this immense task, the more it must attract men. People are not moved to act except for difficult things.» (J. Maritain, *Christianisme et Démocratie*, Paris, Hartmann, 1947, p. 71)

There exists in effect a common good of man, and it is up to your Organization, because of its dedication to universality, which is its reason for being, to promote it untiringly. In spite of permanent tensions and unceasingly recurring oppositions, the unity of the human family shows itself more and more in the very rejection of injustice and war and in the very hope of a world of fraternity where people and communities can freely develop themselves according to their material, intellectual and spiritual potentialities. In the midst of the worst confrontations there

appears ever more strongly the aspiration towards a world where force - especially that of the strongest - no longer dominates with its blind and selfish weight, but where force is the exercise of a larger and higher responsibility at the service of a free and healthy cooperation among all human groups, in mutual respect for their own proper values.

Is not the task of the United Nations that of strengthening States against the temptations and helping peoples on the road towards a society where each one may be recognized, respected, and supported in his efforts to achieve spiritual growth towards a greater mastery of self in genuine freedom? Yes, the work of men and the conquests of human genius meet the design of God the Creator and Redeemer provided that his intelligence and his heart rise to the level of his science and his technology and are able to eliminate the forces of division, that is of dissolution, which are always at work in the human race.

So we renew our confidence that your Organization will be able to meet the immense hope of a world fraternal community in which each one can live a really human life. As disciples of him who gave his life to reunite the scattered children of God, Christians for their part, buoyed up by the hope, which is drawn from the message of Christ, intend to take an energetic part in this great work in collaboration with all men of good will. May the United Nations, in the unique position it occupies, apply itself resolutely to this task and go forward with confidence and courage. Upon this generous future in the service of all men and of all peoples, we invoke from our heart the blessing of the Almighty.

Sunday 4 October 1970

*ORa n.42 p.3, 4;

Paths to Peace p.64-67.
