



# The Holy See

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VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER PAUL VI  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION\****

*Monday, 4 October 1965*

As we begin to speak to this audience that is unique in the whole world, we must first of all express our profound thanks to Mr. Thant, your Secretary General, who was kind enough to invite us to pay a visit to the United Nations on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of this world institution for peace and collaboration between the nations of the whole world.

We also want to thank the President of the Assembly, Signor Amintore Fanfani, who has had such kind words for us from the day on which he took over the office.

We want to thank each of you here present for your kind welcome, and we offer you our cordial and respectful greetings. Your friendship has brought us to this gathering and admitted us to it. It is as a friend that we appear before you.

In addition to our own respects, we bring you those of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, now meeting in Rome. The Cardinals who have accompanied us are its eminent representatives. In their name, as in our own, we pay honor to all of you and offer you greetings!

This gathering, as you are all well aware, has a twofold nature: it is marked at one and the same time by simplicity and by greatness. By simplicity because the one who is speaking to you is a man like yourselves. He is your brother, and even one of the least among you who represent sovereign States, since he possesses - if you choose to consider us from this point of view - only a tiny and practically symbolic temporal sovereignty: the minimum needed in order to be free to exercise his spiritual mission and to assure those who deal with him that he is independent of any

sovereignty of this world. He has no temporal power, no ambition to enter into competition with you. As a matter of fact, we have nothing to ask, no question to raise; at most a desire to formulate, a permission to seek: that of being allowed to serve you in the area of our competence, with disinterestedness, humility and love.

This is the first declaration that we have to make. As you can see, it is so simple that it may seem insignificant for this assembly, which is used to dealing with extremely important and difficult affairs.

And yet, as we were telling you, and you can all sense it, this moment bears the imprint of a unique greatness: it is great for us; it is great for you.

For us, first of all. You know very well who we are, and whatever your opinion of the Pontiff of Rome may be, you know that our mission is to bring a message for all mankind. We speak not only in our own name and in the name of the great Catholic family, but also in the name of the Christian brethren who share in the sentiments we are expressing here, and especially of those who have been kind enough to designate us explicitly as their spokesman. This is the kind of messenger who, at the end of a long journey, is handing over the letter that has been entrusted to him. Hence we have an awareness of living through a privileged moment - brief though it be - when a wish borne in our heart for almost twenty centuries is being accomplished. Yes, you recall it. We have been on our way for a long time and we bring a long history with us. Here we are celebrating the epilogue to a laborious pilgrimage in search of an opportunity to speak heart to heart with the whole world. It began on the day when we were commanded: «Go, bring the good news to all nations.» You are the ones who represent all nations.

Permit us to say that we have a message, and a happy one, to hand over to each one of you. Our message is meant to be first of all a solemn moral ratification of this lofty Institution, and it comes from our experience of history. It is as an "expert on humanity" that we bring this Organization the support and approval of our recent predecessors, that of the Catholic hierarchy, and our own, convinced as we are that this Organization represents the obligatory path of modern civilization and world peace.

In saying this, we are aware that we are speaking for the dead as well as the living: for the dead who have fallen in the terrible wars of the past, dreaming of world peace and harmony; for the living who have survived the wars and who in their hearts condemn in advance those who would try to have them repeated; for other living people too: the younger generation of today who are moving ahead trustfully with every right to expect a better mankind. We also want to speak for the poor, the disinherited, the unfortunate, those who long for justice, a dignified life, liberty, prosperity and progress. People turn to the United Nations as if it were their last hope for peace and harmony. We presume to bring here their tribute of honor and of hope along with our own. That is why this moment is a great one for you too.

We know that you are fully aware of this. So listen now to the rest of our message, which is directed completely toward the future. This edifice that you have built must never again fall into ruins: it must be improved upon and adapted to the demands which the history of the world will make upon it. You mark a stage in the development of mankind. Henceforth, it is impossible to go back; you must go forward.

You offer the many States which can no longer ignore each other a form of coexistence that is extremely simple and fruitful. First of all, you recognize them and distinguish them from each other. Now you certainly do not confer existence on States, but you do qualify each nation as worthy of being seated in the orderly assembly of peoples. You confer recognition of lofty moral and juridical value upon each sovereign national community and you guarantee it an honorable international citizenship. It is in itself a great service to the cause of mankind to define clearly and honor the nations that are the subjects of the world community and to set them up in a juridical position which wins them the recognition and respect of all, and which can serve as the basis for an orderly and stable system of international life. You sanction the great principle that relationships between nations must be regulated by reason, justice, law and negotiation, and not by force, violence, war, nor indeed by fear and deceit.

This is as it should be. And permit us to congratulate you for having had the wisdom to open up access to this assembly to the young nations, the States that have only recently attained national independence and liberty. Their presence here is proof of the universality and magnanimity that inspire the principles of this Institution.

This is as it should be. Such is our praise and our wish, and as you can see we are not reaching outside to find a basis for them. We are drawing them from within, from the very nature and spirit of your Institution.

Your Charter goes even farther, and our message moves ahead with it. You are in existence and you are working in order to unite nations, to associate States. Let us use the formula: to bring them together with each other. You are an association, a bridge between peoples, a network of relations between States. We are tempted to say that in a way this characteristic of yours reflects in the temporal order what our Catholic Church intends to be in the spiritual order: one and universal. Nothing loftier can be imagined on the natural level, as far as the ideological structure of mankind is concerned. Your vocation is to bring not just some peoples but all peoples together as brothers. A difficult undertaking? Without a doubt. But this is the nature of your very noble undertaking. Who can fail to see the need and importance of thus gradually coming to the establishment of a world authority capable of taking effective action on the juridical and political planes?

Again we repeat our wish: go forward! Even more, act in such a way as to bring back into your midst those who have separated themselves from you, and look for means to bring into your pact

of brotherhood, honorably and loyally, those who do not yet belong. Act in such a way that those who are still outside will desire and deserve the confidence of everyone of you, and be generous in according it to them. And you who have the good fortune and honor to sit in this assembly of a peaceful community, listen to us: so act that this mutual confidence and trust that unites you and allows you to do great and good things may never be stained and never betrayed.

The logic of this wish which pertains, you might say, to the structure of your organization leads us to complete it with other formulas, as follows. Let no one as a member of your organization be superior to others: not one over the other. This is the formula of equality. We know, of course, that there are other factors to be considered aside from mere membership in your organization, but equality is also a part of its constitution. Not that you are all equal, but here you make yourselves equal. And it may well be that for a number of you this calls for an act of great virtue. Permit us to tell you so, as the representative of a religion that works salvation through the humility of its divine Founder. It is impossible for someone to be a brother if he is not humble. For it is pride, as inevitable as it may seem, that provokes the tensions and struggles over prestige, over domination, over colonialism, over selfishness. It is pride that shatters brotherhood.

Here our message reaches its culmination and we will speak first of all negatively. These are the words you are looking for us to say and the words we cannot utter without feeling aware of their seriousness and solemnity: never again one against the other, never, never again!

Was not this the very end for which the United Nations came into existence: to be against war and for peace? Listen to the clear words of a great man who is no longer with us, John Kennedy, who proclaimed four years ago: "Mankind must put an end to war, or war will put an end to mankind." There is no need for a long talk to proclaim the main purpose of your Institution. It is enough to recall that the blood of millions, countless unheard-of sufferings, useless massacres and frightening ruins have sanctioned the agreement that unites you with an oath that ought to change the future history of the world: never again war, never again war! It is peace, peace, that has to guide the destiny of the nations of all mankind!

All thanks and honor to you who have been working for peace for twenty years and have even given distinguished victims to this holy cause! All thanks and honor to you for the conflicts that you have prevented and for those that you have settled. The results of your efforts in behalf of peace right up to the last few days may not yet have been decisive, but still they deserve to have us step forward as spokesman for the whole world and express congratulations and gratitude to you in its name.

Gentlemen, you have accomplished and are now in the course of accomplishing a great work: you are teaching men peace. The United Nations is the great school where people get this education and we are here in the assembly hall of this school. Anyone who takes his place here becomes a pupil and a teacher in the art of building peace. And when you go outside of this room, the world

looks to you as the architects and builders of peace.

As you know very well, peace is not built merely by means of politics and a balance of power and interests. It is built with the mind, with ideas, with the works of peace. You are working at this great endeavor, but you are only at the beginning of your labors. Will the world ever come to change the selfish and bellicose outlook that has spun out such a great part of its history up to now? It is hard to foresee the future, but easy to assert that the world has to set out resolutely on the path toward a new history, a peaceful history, one that will be truly and fully human, the one that God promised to men of good will. The pathways are marked out before you and the first one is disarmament.

If you want to be brothers, let the arms fall from your hands. A person cannot love with offensive weapons in his hands. Arms, and especially the terrible arms that modern science has provided you, engender bad dreams, feed evil sentiments, create nightmares, hostilities, and dark resolutions even before they cause any victims and ruins. They call for enormous expenses. They interrupt projects of solidarity and of useful labor. They warp the outlook of nations. So long as man remains the weak, changeable, and even wicked being that he so often shows himself to be, defensive arms will, alas, be necessary. But your courage and good qualities urge you on to a study of means that can guarantee the security of international life without any recourse to arms.

This is an aim worthy of your efforts, and this is what peoples expect from you. This is what you have to achieve! And if it is to be done, everyone's confidence in this institution must increase and its authority must increase, and then, let us hope, its aim will be achieved. You will win the gratitude of the peoples of the world, who will be relieved of burdensome expenditures for armaments and delivered from the nightmare of ever-imminent war. We know - and how could we help rejoicing over this - that many of you have given favorable consideration to the invitation in behalf of peace that we issued to all nations from Bombay last December: to devote to the benefit of developing nations at least a part of the money that could be saved through a reduction of armaments. We want to repeat this suggestion now, with all the confidence inspired in us by your sentiments of humaneness and generosity.

To speak of humaneness and generosity is to echo another constitutional principle of the United Nations, its positive summit: you are working here not just to eliminate conflicts between States, but to make it possible for States to work for each other. You are not content with facilitating coexistence between nations. You are taking a much bigger step forward, one worthy of our praise and our support: you are organizing fraternal collaboration between nations. You are establishing here a system of solidarity that will ensure that lofty civilizing goals receive unanimous and orderly support from the whole family of nations, for the good of each and all. This is the finest aspect of the United Nations Organization, its very genuine human side. This is the ideal that mankind dreams of during its pilgrimage through time; this is the greatest hope of the world. We would even venture to say that it is the reflection of the plan of God - a transcendent plan full of love - for the progress of human society on earth, a reflection in which we can see the Gospel message turning

from something heavenly to something earthly. Here we seem to hear an echo of the voice of our predecessors, and especially of Pope John XXIII, whose message in *Pacem in Terris* met with such an honored and significant response among you.

What you are proclaiming here are the basic rights and duties of man, his dignity, his liberty and above all his religious liberty. We feel that you are spokesmen for what is loftiest in human wisdom - we might almost say its sacred character - for it is above all a question of human life, and human life is sacred; no one can dare attack it. It is in your Assembly, even where the matter of the great problem of birth rates is concerned, that respect for life ought to find its loftiest profession and its most reasonable defense. Your task is so to act that there will be enough bread at the table of mankind and not to support an artificial birth control that would be irrational, with the aim of reducing the number of those sharing in the banquet of life.

But it is not enough to feed the hungry. Each man must also be assured a life in keeping with his dignity, and that is what you are striving to do. Is this not the fulfillment before our eyes, and thanks to you, of the prophet's words that apply so well to your Institution: "They shall beat their swords into pruning-hooks" (Is. 2:4)? Are you not employing the prodigious forces of the earth and the magnificent inventions of science no longer as instruments of death, but as instruments of life for the new era of mankind?

We know with what increasing intensity and effectiveness the United Nations Organization, and the world bodies dependent upon it, are working where needed to help governments speed up their economic and social progress.

We know with what ardor you are working to conquer illiteracy and to spread culture in the world, to give men modern health service adapted to their needs, to put the marvelous resources of science, technology, and organization at the service of man. All this is magnificent and deserves everyone's praise and support including our own.

We would also like to set an example ourselves, even if the smallness of our means might prevent anyone from appreciating the practical and quantitative significance of it. We want to see our own charitable institutions undergo a new development in the struggle against hunger and toward meeting the main needs of the world. This is the way and the only way to build peace.

One word more, Gentlemen, one last word. The edifice you are building does not rest on purely material and terrestrial foundations, for in that case it would be a house built on sand. It rests most of all upon consciences. Yes, the time has come for "conversion," for personal transformation, for interior renewal. We have to get used to a new way of thinking about man, a new way of thinking about man's community life, and, last of all, a new way of thinking about the pathways of history and the destinies of the world. As St. Paul says, we must "put on the new man, which has been created according to God in justice and holiness of truth" (Eph. 4:23).

The hour has come when a pause, a moment of recollection, reflection, you might say of prayer, is absolutely needed so that we may think back over our common origin, our history, our common destiny. The appeal to the moral conscience of man has never before been as necessary as it is today, in an age marked by such great human progress. For the danger comes neither from progress nor from science; if these are used well they can, on the contrary, help to solve a great number of the serious problems besetting mankind. The real danger comes from man, who has at his disposal ever more powerful instruments that are as well fitted to bring about ruin as they are to achieve lofty conquests.

To put it in a word, the edifice of modern civilization has to be built on spiritual principles, for they are the only ones capable not only of supporting it, but of shedding light on it and inspiring it. And we are convinced, as you know, that these indispensable principles of higher wisdom cannot rest on anything but faith in God. Is He the unknown God of whom St. Paul spoke to the Athenians on the Areopagus - unknown to those who, without suspecting it, were nevertheless looking for Him and had Him close beside them, as is the case with so many men of our times? For us, in any case, and for all those who accept the ineffable revelation that Christ has made to us of Him, He is the living God, the Father of all men.

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*\*Paths to peace p.2-6.*