



# The Holy See

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*Message of His Holiness Paul VI  
to Mr. René Maheu, Director-General of UNESCO,  
on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Organization\**

The Twenty-fifth anniversary of the Organization of the United Nations for education, science and culture affords us the opportunity to express to you, with our satisfaction for the work accomplished, our best wishes for its fruitful development. Are not the great international institutions privileged centres of creative exchanges for the future of man? According to its charter of foundation, UNESCO has principally the vocation of "contributing to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture."

Such a purpose could not leave the Church indifferent. So as soon as your Organization was created, the Holy See manifested all its interest in it by choosing in the person of Mons Roncalli – the future John XXIII – its first Permanent Observer, and by maintaining close and trusting relations ever since. Then, too, numerous International Catholic Organizations collaborate with you in the framework of Non-Governmental Organizations and quite recently the International Year on Education gave us the opportunity to make clear the specific contribution of the Church to the great work: "to enable men to fulfil, as men, their marvellous destiny" (Note from the Holy See on the occasion of the International Year of Education, on 8 December 1970).

A deeper conviction, in fact, animates the Church: "It is a fact bearing on the very person man that he can come to an authentic and full humanity only through culture, that is, through the cultivation of natural goods and values" (Gaudium et Spes, n. 53). This ideal implies passing from a society in which education was the appanage of privilege to a world marching towards its universal promotion. This immense enterprise, owing to its very aim, must take place on the international plane, the plane on which you are operating with means that increase continually, but are always insufficient in view of the scope of the task to be carried out.

Partitioned by political frontiers and divided by ideological tensions, the world is nevertheless traversed by a deep desire for unity, which these divisions make even keener. It is the vocation of

UNESCO to meet this aspiration. Education forms man, science provides him with the means to act, culture brings him full development by making him familiar with the past, rooting him in the present and opening him to the future. On these three planes, your means of action are in the service of the great human family.

While culture is not limited to mere possession of a patrimony inherited from the past, yet the great experiences of mankind, in its multimillenary progress, with the testimonies of art, thought, literatures, religions, sciences and technologies, are nevertheless an essential component of it. To deprive oneself of them would be to cut oneself off from one's roots; to renounce them, would be to mutilate oneself gravely. So the action of UNESCO in this field must call for the gratitude of all men worthy of the name. Let us just recall here the chain of solidarity to which the campaign to preserve the works of art of Nubia gave rise. At the moment when the genius of man is beginning to master new spaces, there is no doubt but that the rediscovery of his past will be for him a lesson of life and wisdom, and at the same time a source of legitimate pride.

It is necessary, furthermore, that all men may be able to take part in this development of the spirit. Undoubtedly past centuries had some means of allowing the masses to benefit from the cultural riches of the intellectual elite. But today reading and writing are regarded as indispensable elements of social integration as well as personal enrichment, and therefore necessary to make man capable of fulfilling himself completely. Only this basic education makes it possible to ensure development. We repeat forcefully: "Hunger for education is no less debasing than hunger for food for an illiterate is a person with an undernourished mind" (*Populorum Progressio* n.35).

The declarations of the highest international authorities – Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, art. 26 and 27; Rights of the Child solemnly and unanimously proclaimed on 20 November 1959 by the General Assembly of the United Nations, principles 2 and 7 – and those of the Vatican Council - pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, Chap. II, the proper development of culture, n. 60 – we are glad to stress, agree on this point. But what would be the use "of proclaiming rights, if every effort were not made at the same time to ensure the duty of respecting them, by everyone, everywhere, and for everyone?" [Message to the International Conference on Human Rights at Teheran, on 15 April 1968, in *AAS* 60(1968)]. With what satisfaction, therefore, the Church sees private initiatives and public projects combine in this field, under the active impetus of UNESCO. She herself, moreover, has long been making an effort in this direction, with a conviction all the more firm in that it is rooted in the great certainties that constitute her *raison d'être*.

For, let us be quite clear on this point, such an undertaking, in fact, can be sustained only by an ideal, the humanism that inspired the action of so many of our predecessors: it is not enough to give a taste for knowledge and the means of power, it is also necessary to add reasons for living. You very rightly said so yourself on the occasion of the "Meeting of cultures" organized at the headquarters of your Organization "under the sign of collaboration and peace" immediately after

Vatican II: "There is no organization of collective intellectual work without spirituality ... that is what UNESCO is essentially: both an instrument and a spiritual experience of the universal in mankind" (Closing address by Mr. Rene Maheu). Beyond instruction, this is the aim of education: to form men, teach them to live, bring the young, in search of truth, thirsting for authenticity, more than knowledge in perpetual evolution, a wisdom that is a project of life rooted in a specific civilization; give them at the same time the means of implementing it, fecundate intelligence, forge wills, awaken consciences and prepare for action: in short "to build a fraternal world wherein all the members of the great human family ... will gradually succeed in controlling the forces of nature, in developing harmoniously the possibilities of education, and, respecting the legitimate diversities, will promote a world civilization wherein all men can live as free and responsible person" (Note from the Holy See on the occasion of the International Year of Education).

UNESCO has thus the vocation of working for the complete development of man, who is responsible for his destiny before his brothers and before history, and is called to solve the numerous antinomies with which he is confronted: multiplied cultural exchanges and preserved ancestral wisdom, expansion of a new culture and living faithfulness to the heritage of traditions, harmonization of the old classical culture and the new scientific and technical culture, multiplication of specialized disciplines and synthesis of knowledge, development of the inventive genius and flourishing of contemplation, symbiosis between the masses and the elites, legitimate autonomy of culture and respect for religious values. These fundamental questions (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 56) can be solved only by a common desire to respect and welcome the values that are the honour of cultures brought forth by mankind, in their very diversity: "Between civilizations, as between persons, sincere dialogue indeed creates brotherhood" (*Populorum Progressio*, n. 73).

Our personal representative at the commemorative ceremonies that will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of UNESCO, our dear son Cardinal Jean Danielou, will bring you this wish, which we would have liked to express to you by word of mouth, if circumstances had allowed us to accept your respectful invitation.

It is with these sentiments of deep esteem and trust that we warmly call the abundance of divine blessings upon the tireless efforts you are making to hasten the advent of a more just and more fraternal society.

*The Vatican, 1 November 1971.*

**PAUL VI**

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\*ORa n.46 p.2, 16.

*Paths to Peace* p.119-121.

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