



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICATHE FIFTIETH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF

THE UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II\***

*United Nations Headquarters (New York)*

*Thursday, 5 October 1995*

*Mr. President,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,* 1. It is an honour for me to have the opportunity to address this international Assembly and to join the men and women of every country, race, language and culture in celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations Organization. In coming before this distinguished Assembly, I am vividly aware that through you I am in some way addressing *the whole family of peoples living on the face of the earth*. My words are meant as a sign of the interest and esteem of the Apostolic See and of the Catholic Church for this Institution. They echo the voices of all those who see in the United Nations the hope of a better future for human society. I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude in the first place to the Secretary General, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for having warmly encouraged this visit. And I thank you, Mr. President, for your cordial welcome. I greet all of you, the members of this General Assembly: I am grateful for your presence and for your kind attention. I come before you today with the desire to be able to contribute to that thoughtful meditation on the history and role of this Organization which should accompany and give substance to the anniversary celebrations. The Holy See, in virtue of its specifically spiritual mission, which makes it concerned for the integral good of every human being, has supported the ideals and goals of the United Nations Organization from the very beginning. Although their respective purposes and operative approaches are obviously different, the Church and the United Nations constantly find wide areas of cooperation on the basis of their common concern for the human family. It is this awareness which inspires my thoughts today; they will not dwell on any particular social, political, or economic question; rather, I would like to reflect with you on what the extraordinary changes of the last few years imply, not simply for the present, but for the future of the whole human family. ***A Common Human Patrimony*** 2. Ladies and Gentlemen! On the threshold of a new millennium we are witnessing an extraordinary global acceleration of that quest for freedom which is one of the great dynamics of human history. This phenomenon is not limited to any one part of the world; nor is it the expression of any single culture. Men and women throughout the world, even when threatened by violence, *have taken the risk of freedom*, asking to be given a place in social, political, and economic life which is commensurate with their dignity as free human beings. This universal longing for freedom is truly one of the distinguishing marks of our time. During my previous Visit to the United Nations on 2 October 1979, I noted that the quest for freedom in our time has its basis in those *universal rights* which human beings enjoy by the very fact of their humanity. It was precisely outrages against human dignity which led

the United Nations Organization to formulate, barely three years after its establishment, that Universal Declaration of Human Rights which remains one of the highest expressions of the human conscience of our time. In Asia and Africa, in the Americas, in Oceania and Europe, men and women of conviction and courage have appealed to this Declaration in support of their claims for a fuller share in the life of society.<sup>3</sup> It is important for us to grasp what might be called the *inner structure* of this worldwide movement. It is precisely its global character which offers us its first and fundamental "key" and confirms that there are indeed universal human rights, rooted in the nature of the person, rights which reflect the objective and inviolable demands of a *universal moral law*. These are not abstract points; rather, these rights tell us something important about the actual life of every individual and of every social group. *They also remind us that we do not live in an irrational or meaningless world*. On the contrary, there is a *moral logic* which is built into human life and which makes possible dialogue between individuals and peoples. If we want a *century of violent coercion* to be succeeded by a *century of persuasion*, we must find a way to discuss the human future intelligibly. The universal moral law written on the human heart is precisely that kind of "grammar" which is needed if the world is to engage this discussion of its future. In this sense, it is a matter for serious concern that some people today deny the universality of human rights, just as they deny that there is a human nature shared by everyone. To be sure, there is no single model for organizing the politics and economics of human freedom; different cultures and different historical experiences give rise to different institutional forms of public life in a free and responsible society. But it is one thing to affirm a legitimate pluralism of "forms of freedom", and another to deny any universality or intelligibility to the nature of man or to the human experience. The latter makes the international politics of persuasion extremely difficult, if not impossible. ***Taking the Risk of Freedom***<sup>4</sup>. The moral dynamics of this universal quest for freedom clearly appeared in Central and Eastern Europe during the non-violent revolutions of 1989. Unfolding in specific times and places, those historical events nonetheless taught a lesson which goes far beyond a specific geographical location. For the non-violent revolutions of 1989 demonstrated that *the quest for freedom cannot be suppressed. It arises from a recognition of the inestimable dignity and value of the human person*, and it cannot fail to be accompanied by a commitment on behalf of the human person. Modern totalitarianism has been, first and foremost, an assault on the dignity of the person, an assault which has gone even to the point of denying the inalienable value of the individual's life. The revolutions of 1989 were made possible by the commitment of brave men and women inspired by a different, and ultimately more profound and powerful, vision: the vision of man as a creature of intelligence and free will, immersed in a mystery which transcends his own being and endowed with the ability to reflect and the ability to choose — and thus capable of wisdom and virtue. A decisive factor in the success of those non-violent revolutions was the experience of *social solidarity*: in the face of regimes backed by the power of propaganda and terror, that solidarity was the moral core of the "power of the powerless", a beacon of hope and an enduring reminder that it is possible for man's historical journey to follow a path which is true to the finest aspirations of the human spirit. Viewing those events from this privileged international forum, one cannot fail to grasp the connection between the values which inspired those people's liberation movements and many of the moral commitments inscribed in the United Nations Charter: I am thinking for example of the commitment to "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights (and) in the dignity and worth of the human person"; and also the commitment "to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom" (Preamble). The fifty-one States which founded this Organization in 1945 truly lit a lamp whose light can scatter the darkness caused by tyranny — a light which can show the way to freedom, peace, and solidarity. ***The Rights of Nations***<sup>5</sup>. The quest for freedom in the second half of the twentieth century has engaged not only individuals but nations as well. Fifty years after the end of the Second World War, it is important to remember that *that war was fought because of violations of the rights of nations*. Many of those nations suffered grievously for no other reason than that they were deemed "other". Terrible crimes were committed in the name of lethal doctrines which taught

the "inferiority" of some nations and cultures. In a certain sense, the United Nations Organization was born from a conviction that such doctrines were antithetical to peace; and the *Charter's* commitment to "save future generations from the scourge of war" (Preamble) surely implied a moral commitment to defend every nation and culture from unjust and violent aggression. Unfortunately, even after the end of the Second World War, the rights of nations continued to be violated. To take but one set of examples, the Baltic States and extensive territories in Ukraine and Belarus were absorbed into the Soviet Union, as had already happened to Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in the Caucasus. At the same time the so-called "People's Democracies" of Central and Eastern Europe effectively lost their sovereignty and were required to submit to the will dominating the entire bloc. The result of this artificial division of Europe was the "cold war", a situation of international tension in which the threat of a nuclear holocaust hung over humanity. It was only when freedom was restored to the nations of Central and Eastern Europe that the promise of the peace which should have come with the end of the war began to be realized for many of the victims of that conflict.<sup>6</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, spoke eloquently of the rights of persons; but *no similar international agreement has yet adequately addressed the rights of nations*. This situation must be carefully pondered, for it raises urgent questions about justice and freedom in the world today. In reality the problem of the full recognition of the rights of peoples and nations has presented itself repeatedly to the conscience of humanity, and has also given rise to considerable ethical and juridical reflection. I am reminded of the debate which took place at the Council of Constance in the fifteenth century, when the representatives of the Academy of Krakow, headed by Pawel Wlodkowic, courageously defended the right of certain European peoples to existence and independence. Still better known is the discussion which went on in that same period at the University of Salamanca with regard to the peoples of the New World. And in our own century, how can I fail to mention the prophetic words of my predecessor, Pope Benedict XV, who in the midst of the First World War reminded everyone that "*nations do not die*", and invited them "to ponder with serene conscience the rights and the just aspirations of peoples" (Benedict XV, *To the Peoples at War and their Leaders*, 28 July 1915)?<sup>7</sup> Today the problem of nationalities forms part of a new world horizon marked by a great "mobility" which has blurred the ethnic and cultural frontiers of the different peoples, as a result of a variety of processes such as migrations, mass-media and the globalization of the economy. And yet, precisely against this horizon of universality we see the powerful re-emergence of a certain ethnic and cultural consciousness, as it were an explosive need for identity and survival, a sort of counterweight to the tendency toward uniformity. This is a phenomenon which must not be underestimated or regarded as a simple left-over of the past. It demands serious interpretation, and a closer examination on the levels of anthropology, ethics and law. This tension between the particular and the universal can be considered immanent in human beings. By virtue of sharing in the same human nature, people automatically feel that they are members of one great family, as is in fact the case. But as a result of the concrete historical conditioning of this same nature, they are necessarily bound in a *more intense* way to particular human groups, beginning with the family and going on to the various groups to which they belong and up to the whole of their ethnic and cultural group, which is called, not by accident, a "nation", from the Latin word "nasci": "to be born". This term, enriched with another one, "patria" (fatherland/motherland), evokes the reality of the family. The human condition thus finds itself between these two poles — universality and particularity — with a vital tension between them; an inevitable tension, but singularly fruitful if they are lived in a calm and balanced way.<sup>8</sup> Upon this anthropological foundation there also rest the "rights of nations", which are nothing but "human rights" fostered at the specific level of community life. A study of these rights is certainly not easy, if we consider the difficulty of defining the very concept of "nation", which cannot be identified a priori and necessarily with the State. Such a study must nonetheless be made, if we wish to avoid the errors of the past and ensure a just world order. A presupposition of a nation's rights is certainly its right to exist: therefore no one — neither a State nor another nation, nor an international organization — is ever justified in

asserting that *an individual nation is not worthy of existence*. This fundamental right to existence does not necessarily call for sovereignty as a state, since various forms of juridical aggregation between different nations are possible, as for example occurs in Federal States, in Confederations or in States characterized by broad regional autonomies. There can be historical circumstances in which aggregations different from single state sovereignty can even prove advisable, but only on condition that this takes place in a climate of true freedom, guaranteed by the exercise of the self-determination of the peoples concerned. Its right to exist naturally implies that every nation also enjoys the right to its own language and culture, through which a people expresses and promotes that which I would call its fundamental spiritual "sovereignty". History shows that in extreme circumstances (such as those which occurred in the land where I was born) it is precisely its culture that enables a nation to survive the loss of political and economic independence. Every nation therefore has also the right to shape its life according to its own traditions, excluding, of course, every abuse of basic human rights and in particular the oppression of minorities. Every nation has the right to build its future by providing an appropriate education for the younger generation. But while the "rights of the nation" express the vital requirements of "particularity", it is no less important to emphasize the requirements of universality, expressed through a clear awareness of the *duties* which nations have vis-à-vis other nations and humanity as a whole. Foremost among these duties is certainly that of living in *a spirit of peace, respect and solidarity* with other nations. Thus the exercise of the rights of nations, balanced by the acknowledgement and the practice of duties, promotes a fruitful "exchange of gifts", which strengthens the unity of all mankind. **Respect for Differences**<sup>9</sup>. During my pastoral pilgrimages to the communities of the Catholic Church over the past seventeen years, I have been able to enter into dialogue with the rich diversity of nations and cultures in every part of the world. Unhappily, the world has yet to learn how to live with diversity, as recent events in the Balkans and Central Africa have painfully reminded us. The fact of "difference", and the reality of "the other", can sometimes be felt as a burden, or even as a threat. Amplified by historic grievances and exacerbated by the manipulations of the unscrupulous, the fear of "difference" can lead to a denial of the very humanity of "the other": with the result that people fall into a cycle of violence in which no one is spared, not even the children. We are all very familiar today with such situations; at this moment my heart and my prayers turn in a special way to the sufferings of the sorely tried peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina. From bitter experience, then, we know that the fear of "difference", especially when it expresses itself in a narrow and exclusive nationalism which denies any rights to "the other", can lead to a true nightmare of violence and terror. And yet if we make the effort to look at matters objectively, we can see that, transcending all the differences which distinguish individuals and peoples, there is a *fundamental commonality*. For different cultures are but different ways of facing the question of the meaning of personal existence. And it is precisely here that we find one source of the respect which is due to every culture and every nation: *every culture is an effort to ponder the mystery of the world and in particular of the human person: it is a way of giving expression to the transcendent dimension of human life*. The heart of every culture is its approach to the greatest of all mysteries: the mystery of God.<sup>10</sup> Our respect for the culture of others is therefore rooted in our respect for each community's attempt to answer the question of human life. And here we can see how important it is to safeguard *the fundamental right to freedom of religion and freedom of conscience*, as the cornerstones of the structure of human rights and the foundation of every truly free society. No one is permitted to suppress those rights by using coercive power to *impose an answer* to the mystery of man. To cut oneself off from the reality of difference — or, worse, to attempt to stamp out that difference — is to cut oneself off from the possibility of sounding the depths of the mystery of human life. *The truth about man* is the unchangeable standard by which all cultures are judged; but every culture has something to teach us about one or other dimension of that complex truth. Thus the "difference" which some find so threatening can, through respectful dialogue, become the source of a deeper understanding of the mystery of human existence.<sup>11</sup> In this context, we need to clarify the essential difference between

an unhealthy form of *nationalism*, which teaches contempt for other nations or cultures, and *patriotism*, which is a proper love of one's country. True patriotism never seeks to advance the well-being of one's own nation at the expense of others. For in the end this would harm one's own nation as well: doing wrong damages both aggressor and victim. Nationalism, particularly in its most radical forms, is thus the antithesis of true patriotism, and today we must ensure that extreme nationalism does not continue to give rise to new forms of the aberrations of totalitarianism. This is a commitment which also holds true, obviously, in cases where religion itself is made the basis of nationalism, as unfortunately happens in certain manifestations of so-called "fundamentalism".

***Freedom and Moral Truth***<sup>12</sup>. Ladies and Gentlemen! Freedom is *the measure of man's dignity and greatness*. Living the freedom sought by individuals and peoples is a great challenge to man's spiritual growth and to the moral vitality of nations. The basic question which we must all face today is the *responsible use of freedom*, in both its personal and social dimensions. Our reflection must turn then to the question of the *moral structure of freedom*, which is the inner architecture of the *culture of freedom*. Freedom is not simply the absence of tyranny or oppression. Nor is freedom a licence to do whatever we like. Freedom has an inner "logic" which distinguishes it and ennobles it: *freedom is ordered to the truth*, and is fulfilled in man's quest for truth and in man's living in the truth. Detached from the truth about the human person, freedom deteriorates into license in the lives of individuals, and, in political life, it becomes the caprice of the most powerful and the arrogance of power. Far from being a limitation upon freedom or a threat to it, reference to the truth about the human person — a truth universally knowable through the moral law written on the hearts of all — is, in fact, the guarantor of freedom's future.<sup>13</sup> In the light of what has been said we understand how *utilitarianism*, the doctrine which defines morality not in terms of what is good but of what is advantageous, threatens the freedom of individuals and nations and obstructs the building of a true culture of freedom. Utilitarianism often has devastating *political* consequences, because it inspires an aggressive nationalism on the basis of which the subjugation, for example, of a smaller or weaker nation is claimed to be a good thing solely because it corresponds to the national interest. No less grave are the results of *economic* utilitarianism, which drives more powerful countries to manipulate and exploit weaker ones. Nationalistic and economic utilitarianism are sometimes combined, a phenomenon which has too often characterized relations between the "North" and the "South". For the emerging countries, the achievement of political independence has too frequently been accompanied by a situation of de facto economic dependence on other countries; indeed, in some cases, the developing world has suffered a regression, such that some countries lack the means of satisfying the essential needs of their people. Such situations offend the conscience of humanity and pose a formidable moral challenge to the human family. Meeting this challenge will obviously require changes in both developing and developed countries. If developing countries are able to offer sure guarantees of the proper management of resources and of assistance received, as well as respect for human rights, by replacing where necessary unjust, corrupt, or authoritarian forms of government with participatory and democratic ones, will they not in this way unleash the best civil and economic energies of their people? And must not the developed countries, for their part, come to renounce strictly utilitarian approaches and develop new approaches inspired by greater justice and solidarity? Yes, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen! The international economic scene needs an *ethic of solidarity*, if participation, economic growth, and a just distribution of goods are to characterize the future of humanity. The international cooperation called for by the Charter of the United Nations for "solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character" (art. 1.3) cannot be conceived exclusively in terms of help and assistance, or even by considering the eventual returns on the resources provided. When millions of people are suffering from a poverty which means hunger, malnutrition, sickness, illiteracy, and degradation, we must not only remind ourselves that no one has a right to exploit another for his own advantage, but also and above all we must recommit ourselves to that solidarity which enables others to live out, in the actual circumstances of their economic and political

lives, the creativity which is a distinguishing mark of the human person and the true source of the wealth of nations in today's world. ***The United Nations and the Future of Freedom***<sup>14</sup>. As we face these enormous challenges, how can we fail to acknowledge the role of the United Nations Organization? Fifty years after its founding, the need for such an Organization is even more obvious, but we also have a better understanding, on the basis of experience, that the effectiveness of this great instrument for harmonizing and coordinating international life depends on the international culture and ethic which it supports and expresses. The United Nations Organization needs to rise more and more above the cold status of an administrative institution and to become a moral centre where all the nations of the world feel at home and develop a shared awareness of being, as it were, a "family of nations". The idea of "family" immediately evokes something more than simple functional relations or a mere convergence of interests. The family is by nature a community based on mutual trust, mutual support and sincere respect. In an authentic family the strong do not dominate; instead, the weaker members, because of their very weakness, are all the more welcomed and served. Raised to the level of the "*family of nations*", these sentiments ought to be, even before law itself, the very fabric of relations between peoples. The United Nations has the historic, even momentous, task of promoting this *qualitative leap* in international life, not only by serving as a centre of effective mediation for the resolution of conflicts but also by fostering values, attitudes and concrete initiatives of solidarity which prove capable of raising the level of relations between nations from the "organizational" to a more "organic" level, from simple "existence with" others to "existence for" others, in a fruitful exchange of gifts, primarily for the good of the weaker nations but even so, a clear harbinger of greater good for everyone.<sup>15</sup> Only on this condition shall we attain an end not only to "wars of combat" but also to "cold wars". It will ensure not only the legal equality of all peoples but also their active participation in the building of a better future, and not only respect for individual cultural identities, but full esteem for them as a *common treasure belonging to the cultural patrimony of mankind*. Is this not the ideal held up by the Charter of the United Nations when it sets as the basis of the Organization "the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members" (art. 2.1), or when it commits it to "develop friendly relations between nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and of self-determination" (art. 1.2)? This is the *high road* which must be followed to the end, even if this involves, when necessary, appropriate modifications in the operating model of the United Nations, so as to take into account everything that has happened in this half century, with so many new peoples experiencing freedom and legitimately aspiring to "be" and to "count for" more. None of this should appear an unattainable utopia. Now is the time for *new hope*, which calls us to expel the paralyzing burden of cynicism from the future of politics and of human life. The anniversary which we are celebrating invites us to do this by reminding us of the *idea* of "united nations", an idea which bespeaks mutual trust, security and solidarity. Inspired by the example of all those who have taken the *risk of freedom*, can we not recommit ourselves also to taking the *risk of solidarity* — and thus the *risk of peace*? ***Beyond Fear: the Civilization of Love***<sup>16</sup>. It is one of the great paradoxes of our time that man, who began the period we call "modernity" with a self-confident assertion of his "coming of age" and "autonomy", approaches the end of the twentieth century fearful of himself, fearful of what he might be capable of, fearful for the future. Indeed, the second half of the twentieth century has seen the unprecedented phenomenon of a humanity uncertain about the *very likelihood of a future*, given the threat of nuclear war. That danger, mercifully, appears to have receded — and everything that might make it return needs to be rejected firmly and universally; all the same, fear *for* the future and *of* the future remains. In order to ensure that the new millennium now approaching will witness a new flourishing of the human spirit, mediated through an authentic culture of freedom, men and women must learn to conquer fear. *We must learn not to be afraid*, we must rediscover a spirit of hope and a spirit of trust. Hope is not empty optimism springing from a naive confidence that the future will necessarily be better than the past. Hope and trust are the premise of responsible activity and are nurtured in that inner sanctuary of conscience where "man is alone with God" (*Gaudium et*

*Spes*, 16) and he thus perceives that he *is not alone* amid the enigmas of existence, for he is surrounded by the love of the Creator! Hope and trust: these may seem matters beyond the purview of the United Nations. But they are not. The politics of nations, with which your Organization is principally concerned, can never ignore the transcendent, spiritual dimension of the human experience, and could never ignore it without harming the cause of man and the cause of human freedom. Whatever diminishes man — whatever shortens the horizon of man's aspiration to goodness — harms the cause of freedom. In order to recover our hope and our trust at the end of this century of sorrows, we must regain sight of that transcendent horizon of possibility to which the soul of man aspires.<sup>17</sup> As a Christian, my hope and trust are centered on Jesus Christ, the two thousandth anniversary of whose birth will be celebrated at the coming of the new millennium. We Christians believe that in his Death and Resurrection were fully revealed God's love and his care for all creation. *Jesus Christ is for us God made man, and made a part of the history of humanity. Precisely for this reason, Christian hope for the world and its future extends to every human person.* Because of the radiant humanity of Christ, nothing genuinely human fails to touch the hearts of Christians. Faith in Christ does not impel us to intolerance. On the contrary, it obliges us to engage others in a respectful dialogue. Love of Christ does not distract us from interest in others, but rather invites us to responsibility for them, to the exclusion of no one and indeed, if anything, with a special concern for the weakest and the suffering. Thus, as we approach the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Christ, the Church asks only to be able to propose respectfully this message of salvation, and to be able to promote, in charity and service, the solidarity of the entire human family. Ladies and Gentlemen! I come before you, as did my predecessor Pope Paul VI exactly thirty years ago, not as one who exercises temporal power — these are his words — nor as a religious leader seeking special privileges for his community. I come before you as a witness: a witness to human dignity, a witness to hope, a witness to the conviction that the destiny of all nations lies in the hands of a merciful Providence.<sup>18</sup> *We must overcome our fear of the future. But we will not be able to overcome it completely unless we do so together.* The "answer" to that fear is neither coercion nor repression, nor the imposition of one social "model" on the entire world. The answer to the fear which darkens human existence at the end of the twentieth century is the common effort *to build the civilization of love*, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice, and liberty. And the "soul" of the civilization of love is the culture of freedom: the freedom of individuals and the freedom of nations, lived in self-giving solidarity and responsibility. *We must not be afraid of the future. We must not be afraid of man.* It is no accident that we are here. Each and every human person has been created in the "image and likeness" of the One who is the origin of all that is. We have within us the capacities for wisdom and virtue. With these gifts, and with the help of God's grace, we can build in the next century and the next millennium a civilization worthy of the human person, a true culture of freedom. *We can and must do so!* And in doing so, we shall see that the tears of this century have prepared the ground for a new springtime of the human

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spirit.

\**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n. 41 p. 8-10.