



# The Holy See

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***MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO H.E. MR AMADOU MAHTAR M'BOW, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF UNESCO,  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON POLITICAL CULTURE\****

1. The Conference on cultural policies, an international gathering organized by UNESCO and about to open in Mexico City, is an event of great importance. It will be an excellent opportunity to make an assessment of the experience gained regarding policies and practices in the field of culture since the Intergovernmental Conference on the Institutional, Administrative and Financial Aspects of Cultural Policies organized by UNESCO in 1970.

And it must, in fact, be plain to all. The decade which has passed since the Venice Conference has seen important changes take place in the life of mankind. And the time has come to initiate some careful reflection on the basic problems of culture in today's world. Let me simply emphasize the need to strengthen cultural cooperation on an international scale, and also the cultural dimension of development. For it is becoming more and more obvious that cultural progress is closely connected with the construction of a more just and more fraternal world.

Knowing what your Conference may mean for the future, and because of the close ties which unite the Catholic Church to the Organization which you head with such competence and devotion, the Holy See will be represented at the Mexico Conference by a team of Observers, desiring thereby to express its interest, its esteem, and also its warmest good wishes for a wholly successful meeting.

2. Ever since the birth of UNESCO, the Catholic Church has always followed its programmes with close attention, particularly in the field of culture, and has constantly shown its willingness to cooperate in every possible way. It intends to continue to behave in the same way in the future, ungrudgingly, without reservations, with great open-mindedness, and with the certainty that it will continue to find the same attitudes on the Part of UNESCO.

3. To reflect on the Church and its relations with culture means to discover in its thousand-year past reason to be justly proud, to find in its present activities important evidence of the value - f its mission, and to involve all its sons in the exciting task of preparing and formulating its programme for the future. To think about UNESCO's work in support of culture means to see the nations of the world shaking hands across their frontiers and, recognizing the immense value of

every culture, wishing to encourage the development of mutual understanding together with joint and fruitful progress aimed at the integral betterment of mankind.

4 The relations between the Church and UNESCO quite rightly find their place amidst the vast network of relations which the Church maintains with the world and the international organizations. This network, which you know well, involves not only the Holy See but also the living grass-roots of the Church itself

It is the needs of mankind, seen in the light of God, which are appealing to the intelligence and charity of Christians for a worldwide initiative involving the responsibility of the Church vis-à-vis men, and more specifically the responsibility of Christians in whatever sectors they work. And these Christians will be in evidence in all their richness of soul; they will make an exceptionally valuable contribution to the construction of the future, by acting in accordance with their Christian conscience, knowing that organization is not everything but that there must be an absolute respect for the innermost law of life.

5. Man is the centre, the focal point, to which all observations about culture refer and are addressed. It is impossible to set up a dividing line between the concept of man and the promotion of culture. And it is impossible to have this concept of man without coming back to the spiritual and moral dimension of man himself. It is precisely this spiritual dimension, intrinsic in the human individual in all his depth, which can make it possible to avoid biased and incomplete definitions of culture and enable culture to serve the real good of men and of society, and the promotion of ever higher standards in life, in the individual, and in society.

All this helps us to understand that a valid cultural policy must be concerned with man and his entirety, that is to say, in all his personal dimensions - not forgetting the ethical and religious aspects - and in his social dimensions. From this it follows that cultural policies cannot leave out of account the spiritual vision of man, in promoting culture. In future years, therefore, they should pursue the following aims in a more decisive manner:

- a more marked orientation of culture towards a disinterested search for truth and human values; rediscovery of those values as an answer to modes of life which are more advanced in appearance only;

- promotion of a type of culture which puts increasing emphasis on the dignity of the individual, of human life, on respecting it and defending it, that is to say, a culture which actually conduces to the promotion of human life and not to its destruction;

- putting technology back into its proper place, making it quite clear that it exists to serve mankind. There is an urgent need for people to embark on reflection on the ethics involved in this subject. Any scientific and technological development which was bent on dispensing with ethical values would gradually turn against the destiny of man himself.

6. To end this message I should like, Mr. Director-General, to send my respectful and cordial greetings to you yourself and to all your colleagues in UNESCO, and also my very best wishes for the work of the Mexico City

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Conference.

*\*Paths to Peace* p.129-130.

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