

BENEDICT XVI AND THE UNITED NATIONS

[T]he empire of our Redeemer embraces all men. To use the words of Our immortal predecessor, Pope Leo XIII: 'His empire includes not only Catholic nations, not only baptized persons who, though of right belonging to the Church, have been led astray by error, or have been cut off from her by schism, but also all those who are outside the Christian faith; so that truly the whole of mankind is subject to Jesus Christ.'

Pius XI, *Quas Primas*, 11.12.1925

October 2005 marks the 60th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. On three previous occasions have Popes attended and addressed the General Assembly of the UN; Pope Paul VI, on 5th October 1965, and Pope John Paul II on 2nd October 1979, and again on 5th October 1995. It is entirely likely that an invitation was extended to Pope Benedict XVI to attend the 60th anniversary celebrations next month. Yet there is no indication from Rome that he will attend. Significantly, on 18th September, the Cardinal Secretary of State, Angelo Sodano, addressed the participants at the Summit of Heads of State and Government at the United Nations General Assembly.

The tone of Cardinal Sodano's Address leaves the impression that a sea change has occurred in the attitude of the papacy towards the UN.

When, on its 20th anniversary (5th October 1965), Pope Paul VI addressed the United Nations General Assembly, he said this, *inter alia*—

Our message desires to be, above all, a solemn, moral ratification of this lofty organization... This message is born from our historic experience. It is as a specialist in humanity that we bring to this organization the approval of our more recent predecessors, the entire Catholic episcopate, and our own, convinced as we are that this organization represents the obligatory pathway for modern civilization and world peace.¹

Twenty four years later, on 2nd October 1979, Pope John Paul II told the General Assembly that the United Nations—*will never cease to be the forum, the high tribune, from which all man's problems are appraised in truth and justice.* He described the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 as *a milestone on the long and difficult path of the human race.²*

The concessions by Paul VI and John Paul II, each the elected representative of Almighty God, the Vicar of Christ on earth, that so secular a body could have the moral authority referred to in these speeches were extraordinary, to say the least. No Pope before them in the whole history of Christendom, save perhaps John XXIII, would have attended such a body, or have made such concessions. Indeed, when one looks at their writings, it seems inevitable that every Pope from Pius IX to Pius

¹ <http://www.christusrex.org/www1/pope/UN-1965.html>

² http://www.saint-mike.org/Library/Papal_Library/John_PaulII/Addresses/UN1979.html

XII would have condemned such a course³. This lack of support from these Popes is, doubtless, the reason Paul VI limited the approval he said he was bringing to the UN General Assembly in 1965 to that of *our more recent predecessors*.

The approach of Paul VI and John Paul II was, in the view of this commentator, remarkable for its forgetfulness of the unique place held by God's holy Church in the world, and of the dignity of the supreme office of Pope. There was in each of their attendances at the UN, moreover, an element of apparent submission of the authority of the one Divine and infallible institution on earth, the Catholic Church, to that only too human and fallible institution.

The United Nations is known to be a haven for those of Masonic inclinations and affiliations. Its colours as such have become increasingly evident with the passage of time. Its anti-religious bias, and that of its satellites, has been a continuing cause of concern to the Church and to Catholic commentators. Little wonder, then, that when, on 5th October 1995, on its 50th anniversary, and thirty years to the day from the attendance by Paul VI, John Paul II again addressed the General Assembly, he was more circumspect. He said—

*My words are meant as a sign of the interest and esteem of the Apostolic See and of the Catholic Church for this Institution... 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... 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.*⁴

This was a step back from *the solemn moral ratification of this lofty organisation* of Pope Paul VI and from his assurance that the United Nations represented *the obligatory pathway for modern civilization and world peace*. But, with respect, it still left much to be desired.

Conscious of her Divine provenance, the Catholic Church has, with good reason, ever been distrustful of merely human institutions. While extending due respect to the authority of those charged with the care of each society (the state) to govern its citizens, the Church has not made a practice of endorsing human organisations, let

³ Cf. Pius IX, *Qui Pluribus* (On Faith and Religion) 9.11.1846; Leo XIII, *Sapientiae Christianae* (On Christians as Citizens) 10.1.1890, nn. 4, 7, 17, 27 Pius X, *E Supremi* (On the Restoration of all things in Christ), 4.10.1903, n. 15; Benedict XV, *Pacem, Dei Munus Pulcherrimum*, (On Peace and Christian Reconciliation), 23.5.1920, n. 15; Pius XI, *Mortalium Animos* (On Christian Unity), 6.1.1928, nn. 2, 4; Pius XII, *Summi Pontificatus* (On the Unity of Human Society), 20.10.1939, n. 52

⁴ <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/JP2US95D.htm>

alone an organisation which, when all is said, is only a collective of the governments of such states with regimes that range from the good to the downright evil.

Address Of 18.9.2005

The Address of Pope Benedict XVI's Secretary of State, Cardinal Sodano, to the UN Summit breaks new ground. Absent is any reflection of the adulatory comments of Paul VI or John Paul II. In contrast, there is this more sober analysis. *[T]he United Nations is not a super-government... [but] the result of the political will of individual member countries.* He goes on to say *...time has taken its toll upon this agency, as upon every human undertaking. It is now widely believed that the United Nations needs to be renewed, in response to the great challenges of the present day.*

The Cardinal reduces the collective to its component parts, and highlights its fallibility—*[O]rdinary men and women... are saying to the leaders of the nations: Give us a modern institution, capable of taking resolutions and then enforcing them. This is an insistent appeal issued to us by men and women who are disheartened by promises made and not kept, resolutions adopted and not enforced.*

He deprecates the view of man seen as a unit of the state. *In essence, [the UN's Responsibility to Protect] refers to the pre-eminent dignity of every single man and woman over the state and over every ideological system.* Towards the end of his Address, he is more trenchant still—*[W]ould it not be better to speak clearly of the 'health of women and children' instead of using the term 'reproductive health'? Could there be [in such a euphemism] a desire to return to the language of a 'right to abortion?'*

The Place Of Christ Among The Nations

In his encyclical *On The Kingship Of Christ, Quas Primas* (25.12.1925), Pope Pius XI said this—

Christ is the author of happiness and true prosperity for every man and for every nation. For a nation is happy when its citizens are happy. What else is a nation but a number of men living in concord? If therefore, the rulers of nations wish to preserve their authority, to promote and increase the prosperity of their people, they will not neglect the public duty of reverence and obedience to the rule of Christ. With God and Jesus Christ excluded from political life, with authority derived not from God but from man, the very basis of that authority has been taken away, because the chief reason of the distinction between ruler and subject has been eliminated.

The reminder by the Church's Secretary of State that the United Nations is no more than another human institution, limited and fallible, is a welcome return to reality. While it is a long way short of the reassertion by the Pope or his representative of the Lordship of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, over the nations, it is a step in the right direction.

Michael Baker

29th September 2005—*Sts Michael, Gabriel & Raphael*