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## **Catholics and Sport in a Global Context**

Edited by Patrick Kelly, S.J., Seattle University

### **7. Three Approaches to Sport**

#### **The Vatican, the International Olympic Committee, and the United Nations**

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#### **Abstract**

The Vatican, the International Olympic Committee, and the United Nations have in common a vision of sport that is related to personal growth and is able to foster encounters between people, and help to bring about peace and development. Each of these groups have approached sport with different emphases or methods depending on the historical context. But the common vision they have arrived at of the possibilities of sport can help us to address pressing issues facing the world in this new millennium.

Keywords: Vatican, United Nations, International Olympic Committee, sport, human rights

## **Introduction**

Scripture reminds us that the human being is a unity of “spirit, soul, and body” (1 Thessalonians 5:23) and that “the body without the spirit is dead” (James 2:26). It is also true that sports cannot be limited to care for the body alone, because it takes a set of good personal qualities, as well as an ethical code that characterizes and guides a person’s behavior with others, to become a champion in an honorable way.

This premise correlates with the three basic dimensions around which a modern approach to sports is founded: the individual (or personal), social, and international. These three dimensions, progressively wider and chronologically in sequence, characterize attitudes and actions with regard to the sports world which have been shared – albeit at a different pace and in different ways – by the Vatican, the United Nations (UN), and the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

These three actors, so different from one another – a moral authority, the best-known and probably most authoritative international governmental organization, and the international non-governmental organization with the greatest participation<sup>1</sup> – have found a path that has brought them closer together from three distinct points of view. The Vatican initially paid attention to the ethical and moral dimension of sport, the United Nations has seen sport as an instrument of embargo and sanction, and the IOC has emphasized the transnational dimension of sports. These three groups, which started from different contexts and assumptions, have come to converge in recognizing sport as having the capacity to foster personal growth, peace, and development.

## **Pope Pius X and Pierre de Coubertin**

If we acknowledge that the IOC was chronologically the first of the three to have invested in sports with a new perspective, it should be said that Pope Pius X (1903-1914) gradually came to grasp the innovative scope of the revolutionary message of the French baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the IOC. Pius X understood and appreciated this message even before many sports leaders of his time. He was, in fact, the first pope who literally opened the doors of the Vatican to sports, expressing a benevolence towards gymnastics and physical activities that had not been shown by other popes in the modern period.

In his speech on October 8, 1905, at the closing of the first Italian Catholic Sports Conference in the Vatican, he told the youth gathered: “I admire and heartily bless all your games and hobbies” (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 20-21). His thinking was equally clear when he addressed the Federation of Italian Catholic Sporting Associations (Federazione delle Società Sportive Cattoliche Italiana – FASCI) recalling how “physical exercises help to keep those (exercises) of the spirit working in all, and gymnastic competitions are mutual stimulation to compete with the virtues of the best” (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 17-18). He went so far as to say that “if there are still doubts today, then I will simply have to

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<sup>1</sup> The International Olympic Committee is set up as an International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO). The date of its creation (June 23, 1894) places it among the first examples of INGOs and makes it one of the oldest alongside the International Red Cross.

do exercises, so that my example may be followed.” (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 18).

Pius X had great intuition about the potential of sports. Seeing beyond its potential for the individual’s education, he immediately understood its power for striving towards goals in the social and transnational dimensions. This broad vision is precisely what led de Coubertin to renovate the ancient Olympic Games in a modern key.

It was not by chance that de Coubertin came into contact with Pius X – Rome’s candidacy to host the 1908 Olympic Games gave him the opportunity. Although the event did not take place there because the Italian government impeded it, the French baron was able to focus on another goal, namely to obtain from the pope a benevolent gesture toward sporting activity, “a concrete and immediate sign of his approval” (de Coubertin: 65). This sign of openness was made precisely “at a gymnastic festival, the following season, during a pilgrimage of Catholic patrons from France, Belgium, and other countries, presided over by the Pope in the famous courtyard of San Damaso: a truly significant manifestation of this approval, immortalized by photos that are always greatly appreciated during projections of the documentary series of the Olympic Games” (de Coubertin: 65).

An international perspective allied Pius X and de Coubertin. The pope, with foresight that many sports leaders of the time lacked, welcomed gymnasts from different parts of Europe several times in the Vatican. That is what de Coubertin had dreamed of in founding the modern Olympic Games, to make sports an instrument for bringing the nations closer together. His aim was not so much to renovate the Olympic Games as a sports festival to be held every four years, but rather to use the event as a means to improve the world and make it more peaceful. Hence, the creation of the IOC was, first and foremost, an attempt to assert a new philosophy, a state of mind (IOC 1983: 9), an “*école de noblesse et de pureté morales*” (“school of nobility and moral purity”) (Messerli: 87), uniting sports with universal, panhuman values (Papisca: 14).<sup>2</sup> At the turn of the century that had just seen the establishment of the first permanent forms of international association, de Coubertin founded the International Olympic Committee, one of the first and longest standing international organizations. De Coubertin’s deeply internationalist inspiration permeates the organization’s activity since its birth. The IOC, in fact, did not represent individual national realities but somehow rose above them, proposing a unifying intellectual and philosophical model in which sports was called to play a socially recognized and universal role.

De Coubertin had great confidence that sport can educate the body and elevate the mind. If all athletes share a core set of values expressed through a code that we can refer to succinctly as the code of fair play, then this becomes the model par excellence to be promoted on the path towards the objectives of civic coexistence, brotherhood, and peace. De Coubertin was so strongly convinced of his internationalist and pacifist vision that, when the League of Nations was created, he sent a telegram to President Wilson, remarking that the IOC (created thirty-six years earlier) had the same ideals and purposes as the newly founded organization. De Coubertin wrote to Wilson that the IOC had already introduced “the very principles upon

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<sup>2</sup> The adjective panhuman is used to emphasize “the vast global sharing of values and goals” in reference to Olympism.

which the League was organized and by means of their Olympiads they brought into existence an international collaboration which is getting closer and more effective.” The conclusion of the message is also significant: “You must be personally aware, Mr. President, of the power attained by the Olympic Movement and you know how much it is bringing together the youth of every country” (Kanin: 45).

The IOC was, therefore, the forerunner of the ends and goals of the League of Nations, making use of sport in the pursuit of highly humanitarian goals. Its originality resided in the new means employed to reach its goal: international sporting exchange. Yet, it was necessary to await the birth of the United Nations to see sports officially enter the scene of activities aimed at promoting human rights, peace, and development.

### **An Interlude: Sport for Personal Growth through Education**

In the meantime, after Pius X, this international vision of sports had been a bit forgotten in the Vatican. His successor on the Seat of St. Peter, the mountain climber Achille Ratti, Pius XI, recognized that “good pedagogy requires physical culture” (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 54) He supported an idea of sports closely connected with the education of the individual, recalling that “while perfecting the body as an instrument of the mind, sport also makes the mind a more refined instrument for the service and glory of God and for reaching the highest goals” (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 39). Likewise, his successor Pius XII was convinced of this, when he asked: “What is sports if not a form of education of the body? – This education is closely related to morality. How then could the Church not care about it?” (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 55).

### **A return to an intercultural, international vision**

After the Second World War and having seen sports used for nationalistic purposes, and the deterioration of international relations linked to the Cold War climate, Pius XII laid the foundations for a moral reconstruction of the world of sports, with the recognition of its potential for also making a valuable contribution to peaceful coexistence. He developed this theme on May 16, 1953, in his address at the inauguration of the Olympic Stadium in Rome (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 55). He pointed out that the name Olympic “reminds us, to the honor of those who devote themselves to sports activities, of the sense of universality between different peoples, that the renowned Olympics promoted, and later, with the advent of Christianity . . . developed within the Christian truth of the single human family and, consequently, of the duty of practicing mutual charity among peoples. Thus your stadium, by which Catholic Rome, teacher and animator of universalism is enriched, finds here its natural climate and a higher justification of its name.”

In 1960, John XXIII had the opportunity to address athletes from around the world gathered in Rome for the Olympic Games. In his speech in St. Peter’s Square on August 24, he said: “All of you, although you come from different nations, are joined in brotherhood in accordance with the spirit of the Games” (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 114-15). Two years later, on May 22 1962, in his message to the archbishop of Santiago de Chile on the occasion of the World Cup soccer tournament, John XXIII emphasized the need for sport to “contribute to the higher ideals of interior beauty and perfection, of self-control and discipline, in the spirit of mutual competition which contributes in a peaceful and joyful way to universal

brotherhood and concord among the nations” (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 118-19).

Yet, with Paul VI, sharing this intent with the IOC became even more explicit. In his address to members of the IOC assembled in Rome in 1966, the pope spoke of three ways in which sport can be linked to education in the modern world: “as physical education, as moral and social education, or as international education” (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 149-53). In other words, he identifies three functions: cultivating oneself, improving relationships with the community, and helping to make relationships with communities other than our own more peaceful and friendlier. According to Paul VI, this triple mission reveals values shared by sports participants and organizations and the Catholic Church, while he recognized in the IOC the most qualified representative of the global sports world: “For are you not, in fact, its most eminent and qualified authority? What more valid exponent could We desire than the International Olympic Committee?” (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 149). This is an important step because it expresses clear, direct, and friendly support of a well-identified sports organization that is characterized as the guardian of the world constitution of sports.

The idea that sportsmen and women are messengers of peace recurs in many other of this pope’s speeches. For example, in the message addressed to the athletes participating in the Mexico City Olympic Games, Paul VI said: “You come from many countries, different milieus and cultures but you are gathered around the same ideal: to unite all people in friendship, understanding, and mutual esteem. This shows that your final goal is something higher: Universal Peace” (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 124). Sport as a harbinger of peace is at the center of many appeals that John Paul II made whenever he had the opportunity to meet athletes and leaders. The subject is so important that, when reading the numerous speeches and messages on the sports that he left us, one becomes aware that peace, brotherhood, peaceful coexistence, and borderless collaboration are among the most recurring words.

Addressing the young participants at the International Jubilee of Sports on April 12, 1984, John Paul II said: “Sport can make a valid and fruitful contribution to the peaceful co-existence of all peoples, above and beyond every discrimination of race, language, and nations. According to the Olympic Charter, which sees sport as the occasion of ‘a better mutual understanding and friendship for the building of a better and more peaceful world,’ let your meetings be a symbolic sign for the whole of society and a prelude to that new age in which nations ‘shall not lift up sword against nation.’ Society looks to you with confidence and is grateful to you for your witness to the ideals of peaceful civil and social living together for the building up of a new civilization founded on love, solidarity, and peace” (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 185).

Even if we have trouble imagining Joseph Ratzinger as a sportsman like John Paul II, we can, however, assert that Benedict XVI is a great supporter of the Olympic values that emphasize respect for the human person, the principle of non-discrimination, and the promotion of peace. In the greeting at the Copenhagen Olympic Congress – the first such congress to which the Vatican sent its own official representative – this shared commitment was made clear when he expressed the readiness of the Holy See to collaborate with the IOC

and its affiliated associations for the defense of the inherent values in sports, so that physical activity may be, especially for young people, a means for promoting peace and unity in the world (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 286).

Benedict XVI on many occasions spoke of sports in this way. In the message for the 2006 Winter Olympic Games in Turin, he expressed the hope that this event would be an eloquent sign of friendship and help to strengthen between peoples relations characterized by understanding and solidarity (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 300-301). In his message for the Vancouver Winter Olympics, dated December 30, 2009, he reiterates that sport is a precious foundation on which to build peace and friendship between peoples and nations (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 287). The Vatican and the IOC are united, then, by a vision of sports as an instrument for peace. This approach is clear in Benedict XVI's call, on March 19, 2008, to resolve the conflicts in Tibet and Darfur (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 288). This appeal was immediately reiterated by IOC president Jacques Rogge, who recalled the pope's words to express the will of the sports world to work for peace and a peaceful settlement of the conflicts in Tibet (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 300-301). Sports is, therefore, an activity capable of conveying through global events universal messages in favor of peace and concord. This is possible because of the commitment and example of sportsmen and women and leaders who, although differing by race, sex, religion, and political ideas, are all united by the same unifying and pacifying vision.

On December 17, 2012, Benedict XVI met with a delegation of the Italian National Olympic Committee. In his greeting, he underlined that sports can be considered a modern "Courtyard of the Gentiles," that is, a precious opportunity of encounter open to all believers and non-believers, where they can experience the joy and also the challenges of encountering people of different cultures, languages, and religious orientations (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 310-11). The sports of the third millennium introduced new elements and potentials hitherto unknown. We have in mind the issues of ecology and the environment, which spark the attention of the media, especially on the eve of great sporting events, when a site is profoundly transformed to accommodate large venues for competition. Benedict XVI met with representatives of events focused on ecological issues and on the custody of creation and emphasized that respect for the environment as a value must be always kept in mind (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 306). The same risks of use/abuse also affect the human body. On September 27, 2012, Benedict XVI recalled the dangers of doping related to the abuse or misuse of the means which modern medicine makes available, and urged athletes not to take shortcuts (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 308-10).

Sports is also at the center of many messages that Pope Francis has addressed to athletes and in particular – but not only – to the young. This pope, who does not hide that he is a fan of San Lorenzo de Almagro, readily uses sports metaphors in his discourses. Speaking to the thousands of young people gathered in St. Peter's Square on June 7, 2014, for the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the Italian Sports Center, he said that "Sport is an educational road" and indicated three paths for young people: "The path of education, the path of sports and the path of work . . . Why? Because school leads you forward, sports leads you forward and work leads you forward. Don't forget this. To you, sportsmen, to you, managers, and also to you, men and women working in politics: education, sports and job opportunities!" (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 330-32). Francis asks the young to do their best, both in life and

in sports, and encourages them: “Don’t settle for a mediocre ‘tie,’ give it your best, spend your life on what really matters and lasts forever. Don’t settle for lukewarm lives, ‘mediocre even-scored’ lives: no, no! Go forward, seek victory, always!” (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 331).

This quest for victory is not an end in itself but the result of a commitment through which the athlete grows and cultivates valuable qualities and virtues, while respecting the opponent. This is the principle that de Coubertin recognized in sports. This is a sport that encourages athletes to take part not only with the sterile exhortation “It’s important to participate,” a phrase that continues to be erroneously attributed to the founder of the modern Olympic Games,<sup>3</sup> but also it urges them to participate only with full awareness of having prepared themselves to do their best, ready for the encounter and to honestly accept the outcome of the match, whatever it may be. Only then is sports educational and able to help us to become better and treat one another with respect.

Pope Francis highlighted the views shared with the Olympic message in the words he addressed to IOC delegates during an audience on November 23, 2013:

[S]ports promote human and religious values which form the foundation of a just and fraternal society. This is possible because the language of sports is universal; it extends across borders, language, race, religion, and ideology; it possesses the capacity to unite people, together, by fostering dialogue and acceptance. This is a very valuable resource! . . . Sporting events are characterized by unity and not division! Build bridges, not walls. The five interlocking rings, the symbol and standard of the Olympic Games, are meant precisely to represent the spirit of brotherhood that must characterize the Olympics and competitive sports in general (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 328-29).

Undoubtedly, a synthesis of this path can be seen in the talk Pope Francis gave on December 19, 2014, to athletes gathered in St. Peter’s Basilica on the occasion of the Italian National Olympic Committee’s centenary. He pointed out on this day that the work of INOC draws “inspiration from the fundamental principles of the Olympic Charter, which, among its main principles, poses the centrality of the person, the harmonious development of humankind, the defense of human dignity, and also that of contributing ‘to building a peaceful and better world, without war or tension, by educating youth through sport practiced without discrimination of any kind... with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play’” (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 337-38). He also said that “sport has always favored universality characterized by fraternity and friendship among peoples, understanding, and peace among nations,” and “can become a channel of an ideal force capable of opening new and sometimes unexpected paths in the resolution of conflicts arising from human rights violations” (Stelitano, Dieguez, and Bortolato 2015: 337-38).

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<sup>3</sup> The most famous phrase attributed to Coubertin – “It is important to participate” – was not uttered by him but by the bishop of Pennsylvania during the religious service held at Saint Paul’s Cathedral before the beginning of the London Olympic Games in 1908.

De Coubertin's utopian outcry, immediately perceived by Pius X, is now officially shared by the Church in a vision of sports that is a manifesto of intercultural dialogue. In this vision, which directly addresses the international and planetary context, sport proposes to serve human development and to promote a peaceful society and human dignity (IOC 2012: 2).<sup>4</sup>

### The United Nations Joins the Game

While the paths of the Vatican and the IOC almost immediately crossed, the United Nations, following its own itinerary, came to join them some years later. Even in this case, the starting point was the consideration of sports as an activity that has to do firstly with the education of the individual. The UN, in fact, initially adopted a concept of the protection of human rights within sport itself and only later began using athletics as a means to promote and protect the rights of all people. The first traces of this new orientation appear in the 1970s. In the previous decades, the UN had only engaged in sporting activities in a casual way, without a project or long-term goals and without coordinating its efforts in this direction with others. For example, the word "sports" does not appear in the *United Nations Charter*, although it has recently been recognized that "a right-based understanding of sports and physical activity has been present since the founding of the United Nations" (UN 2007: 3). The value system linked to sport was also in some ways implied in the affirmation that "the fundamental principles of sport, respect for opponents and for rules, teamwork and fair play, are consistent with the principles of the UN Charter" (UN 2005).

An underlying reference can be seen in Article 24 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (promulgated in 1948), which states that everyone has the right to rest and leisure, a dimension of the sports phenomenon that is not always present today.<sup>5</sup> It is also worth considering Articles 25 and 26, which introduce the theme of the rights to health and to education for the individual. The UN's path with regard to sports reaches from the individual to the social to the universal dimension, in this chronological order (Stelitano 2009). Thus, in 1959, the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* states that "The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purpose as education" (UN 1959: Article 7). Here, it is recognized that playful physical activity, characteristic of childhood, is naturally linked to sports, in the broad sense of the term, which privileges educational content and makes it a tool for the healthy growth of the individual. In 1962, in a lecture given at Johns Hopkins University on East-West Relations and the United Nations, the UN secretary-general U Thant emphasized how useful sports is for promoting, among young people as well as among adults, the ideals of peace, respect, and mutual understanding. In this lecture, he asserted "I believe that the exchange of visits by celebrities in the field of culture, art, and sport may help to create mutual respect and greater understanding." (UN 1962: 21)

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<sup>4</sup> In 1894, it was impossible to imagine the international sporting dimension as we conceive it today. There were only four international sports federations, and sporting exchanges between nations were limited to bilateral meetings or, in any case, reserved for a small, predominantly European, group of countries.

<sup>5</sup> The word sport comes from the Latin *deportare*, which, among other things, means to "go out" to engage in leisure activities. This is the root of the French *desporter* (fun, entertainment) and of the English *disport* of which today's *sport* is an abbreviation. In Italian, too, the term refers to leisure and recreation.



Only in 1965 did a resolution directly address the topic of sports. Resolution 2037 (XX), dated December 7, 1965, and entitled *Declaration on the Promotion Among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding Between Peoples*, after recalling the UN's objectives and its willingness to contribute to the education of young people in a spirit of peace, cooperation, and fraternity, states in that: "exchanges, travel, tourism, meetings, the study of foreign languages, the twinning of towns and universities without discrimination and similar activities should be encouraged and facilitated among young people of all countries in order to bring them together in educational, cultural and sporting activities in the spirit of the Declaration" (UN 1965: Article 4). In this document, sports are still considered in the limited scope of activities typical of the youngest segment of the population. A wider formulation came only the following year. In 1966, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, in fact, states that "All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development" (UN 1966: Article 1). Article 12 then refers to the "the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health . . . and the healthy development of the child" (UN 1966: Article 12).<sup>6</sup>

From the joint reading of these references, we can conclude that sport is also included in this type of activity and begins to be seen in a dimension that goes beyond the concept of *mens sana in corpore sano* and the initial vision of a simple meeting place for the younger generations. Sports is beginning to be seen as an opportunity to reap benefits for every person, starting with health and education and extending their positive effects throughout the entire society.

The condemnation of the apartheid regime in South Africa, and the resulting sanctions adopted, led officially to the inclusion of sports among the matters that the UN treats with a certain methodology and consistency. In the period 1968-1985, the UN General Assembly adopted a series of Resolutions addressing specifically the issue of apartheid in sports. The *International Declaration Against Apartheid in Sports*, annexed to the Resolution 32/105 of the General Assembly (December 14, 1977), and the subsequent *International Convention Against Apartheid in Sports*, annexed to the Resolution 40/64 of the General Assembly (December 10, 1985), condemned the apartheid policy of the South African government, highlighting its dangers with regard to the violation of human rights and the threat to international peace and security. These documents called "all States and organizations to suspend cultural, educational, sporting and other exchanges with the racist regime and with organizations or institutions in South Africa which practice apartheid" (Stelitano 2012: 36; and also UN 1977, 1985).

This is, in short, a call to boycott, also extended to sporting events, a new form of embargo and sanction aimed at defending the right to sports for all. Sport was officially recognized as a right in 1978, when the General Assembly of the UNESCO approved the *International Charter of Physical Education and Sport*. The document is composed of a preamble and ten articles. The most important aspect appears in Article 1, which states that "Every human being has a fundamental right of access to physical education and sport," and identifies a number of important goals to be pursued through sports, including education, physical

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<sup>6</sup> This covenant was adopted by the General Assembly on December 16, 1966 and entered into force on January 3, 1976.

development, and health. The right to participation in physical education and sport includes all people, including those with disabilities and the elderly. The charter emphasizes that physical education and sport make an effective contribution in the field of human rights as they promote encounters, peaceful confrontation, solidarity, brotherhood, and “full respect for the integrity and dignity of human beings” (UNESCO).

### **The United Nations and International Olympic Committee join forces**

Yet, 1993 is the year that marks the turning point in the UN’s approach to sports. From this moment on, sports will no longer be dealt with in occasional resolutions or allusions but becomes an established element on the agenda of the General Assembly, which identifies the IOC as the ideal *partner* on this path, so much so that the organization obtained the status of Permanent Observer in 2009. The Vatican and the United Nations converge, then, in choosing the International Olympic Committee as a privileged partner when dealing with sports issues. This acknowledgment by both the Vatican and the UN is due not only to the fact that the IOC is considered the world’s highest sports authority but also to the fact that it is the guardian of the international constitution of sports and a common, universal code of ethics. In fact, the Olympic Charter contains not only the rules that govern the functioning of entities responsible for the management of the Olympic Games, but it also enshrines fundamental points of sports ethics. This ethics system is shared by such a great percentage of the members that it overshadows even the United Nations System. While 193 countries have offices in the United Nations headquarters, 204 accept the Olympic Charter (Stelitano 2008: 21). The Olympic message, which speaks of rights, non-discrimination, and peace and identifies sport as the means to pursue them, is universally shared by all those who feel part of the Olympic family. Now, this “all” coincides with the entire world to a greater extent than the UN system. Sports and religion in some ways share this cultural “universal.” This universal vocation is also fundamental in the UN’s action in the field of sports, however, when it recalls the ideals of peace and the Olympic Truce.<sup>7</sup>

The resolutions adopted by the General Assembly in 1993 are entitled “Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal” (see Stelitano 2012: 59-63). This is de Coubertin’s utopia progressing after a century and doing so powerfully because the resolutions, which the UN endeavor to approve every two years to launch the Olympic Truce anew at the Summer and Winter Games, are, in fact, manifestly those that obtain the greatest percentage (if not unanimity) of adhesion in the great hall. Now, it does not matter that the high percentages stem from the fact that the opposing countries prefer to leave the hall before the vote, since this gesture of abandonment would confirm the fact that no one really wants to impede the message of peace that the sports world intends to launch.

The importance of sports for the pursuit of the goals of peace reached its highpoint at the UN on September 8, 2000, when the *United Nations Millennium Declaration* was passed

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<sup>7</sup> The Greek tradition of Olympic Truce, was born in the eighth century BCE, serving as a hallowed principle of the Olympic Games. Before every Olympiad, heralds from Olympia moved around Greece inviting participants and spectators and announcing the truce. In 1992, the International Olympic Committee renewed this tradition by calling upon all nations to observe the Truce. The United Nations General Assembly, through its Resolution 48/11 of October 25, 1993, urged Member States to observe the Olympic Truce from the seventh day before the opening to the seventh day following the closing of each Olympic Games.

(2000). With this document, 191 member states set eight ambitious and fundamental goals, that they have striven to reach: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and global partnership for development.

Sports is called to play its part in the realization of each of these goals but, above all, as Section II explicitly indicates, it is dedicated to “Peace, Security and Disarmament.” Article 10 states: “We urge Member States to observe the Olympic Truce, individually and collectively, now and in the future, and to support the International Olympic Committee in its efforts to promote peace and human understanding through sport and the Olympic Ideal.”

Here, then, de Coubertin’s vision of peace ceases to be a utopia and becomes a project. This is the project that Pius X had immediately intuited and that his successors have supported. It is a project that, when supported by a set of virtues, truly serves as a means to improve each person and, through persons, societies and the world.

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