



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II ON THE OCCASION OF THE WORLD LITERACY DAY 1990*

1. On the occasion of International Literacy Year, declared by the United Nations General Assembly and entrusted to UNESCO to be put into effect, I want to express the Holy See's great interest in this initiative and the support which it wants to give.

Unfortunately, we must affirm that, despite the efforts of nations and international organizations, the number of illiterate people is still increasing, because in many regions, education is not keeping pace with the population itself. Furthermore, illiteracy is also present, although in less obvious ways, in the industrialized countries, not only due to the immigration of uneducated persons, but also because the young people have not been able to master reading and writing skills during the ordinary years of instruction.

2. Every person deprived of the possibility of learning to read, write, or count suffers an offence to his or her basic right to education. This person remains in a disadvantaged situation in his or her relations with society. Illiteracy is a great poverty; it is often synonymous with emargination for the men and women deprived of a considerable portion of the cultural heritage of humanity, and prevented from fully developing their personal abilities and professional skills.

It is also with gratitude that I salute the efforts of those men and women who devote a part of their activity to literacy training under the aegis of UNESCO and other public or private organizations. By accenting more and more the quality of basic literacy and more advanced reading skills, they offer a real service to mankind

3. Through its planning and realization of a complete programme of education based on the ability to read and write, UNESCO is responding even more to the needs of our time in which all peoples, even those who have lived until now in an oral culture, are called to live in increased interdependence, marked by the importance of access to science and technology. For the true good of the individual, initiation into elementary knowledge must be accompanied by a quality general education, in order to permit the disadvantaged to accept scientific progress without undermining the specific nature of their culture nor rejecting the positive values of their heritage.

4. If literacy is an urgent duty for humanity, it will truly obtain its objectives only if it is inserted into a programme of total cultural development. It is the point of departure of an educational programme which must be persevering, well-planned and sufficiently lengthy.

Many governments have planned large-scale activities during the International Literacy Year. I heartily encourage them to work in this direction, because an effective campaign against ignorance can proceed only through a policy of cooperation and the generous collaboration of everyone.

5. For her part, the Catholic Church has long been associated with literacy efforts in both the industrialized nations and in developing countries. In her schools, universities, and cultural centres, she desires to be of service to everyone, without distinction of race, colour or religion, in order to share the treasures she has received. During this International Literacy Year, I invite all Catholics to take part in initiatives on behalf of those who are less advantaged in the field of education.

I assure you, Mr. Secretary General, of my support for a task whose urgency the United Nations is emphasizing, and which UNESCO is justly making a priority. I express my fervent wishes that the greatest number possible of men and women will benefit from a better access to culture so as to ceaselessly enrich their fraternal relationships.**IOANNES PAULUS PP.**

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