



The Holy See

***LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS PAUL VI
TO MR. RENÉ MAHEU, DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF UNESCO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 8th INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY****

At the moment when UNESCO, at the end of its ten years' world programme, is starting a new phase of its struggle against illiteracy, we wish to repeat how interested the Church and the Holy See are in this world problem, thus confirming the action pursued in the course of the centuries and in many regions for the cultural promotion of peoples, among adults as well as young people.

Man naturally desires to know: knowledge gives him access to a new relationship with nature; above all, it offers him renewed possibilities of dialogue with his fellow men. The general diffusion of a basic education aims, therefore, at putting right inequalities and social discriminations, at opening up access to responsibilities in private and collective life, at encouraging better understanding between the generations, thus contributing to establishing conditions of real communication among men.

In spite of the efforts already made, the problem is a grave and urgent one, owing to the population growth and the increased burdens that the requirements of a more thorough effort to ensure literacy imposes on all nations. Certainly, the important work carried out by UNESCO in the course of the last few years provides a solid basis of research and experimentation. Taking advantage of the experience acquired, it is now opportune to promote a wider action, aimed without discrimination at all categories of peoples. The responsibility for these enterprises then belongs especially to the national authorities. It is for them to direct investments and educational priorities, while remaining wide open to the collaboration of initiatives which offer to contribute, in a disinterested way, to the joint effort. The Church has long taken her part in this service of the underprivileged, particularly where poverty prevails, where there is no hope of material profit, but where the joy of seeing man, with his head erect, become a participant in his own education, and himself improve the quality of his life and finally discover its ultimate meaning, is the only reward for those who recognize, in every human being, an image of the creator.

In this privileged field of human collaboration, needs are immense. Their satisfaction should be a priority aim of national policy and of international cooperation. How, then, can we fail to be astonished when we consider the importance that so many countries – even among the developing ones – attach one-sidedly to the pursuit of purely material economic growth, or to an even greater extent, disastrously, to military expenses which so often contribute to making peace and security precarious? How can we fail to recall, above all, the serious moral obligation, for the rulers of rich nations, to make their fellow countrymen become aware of their important duty of solidarity with the underprivileged peoples, to help them in a disinterested way and include this aid in their economic programmes instead of trying constantly, on the national or international plane, to get the most profit for the investments?

International cooperation must therefore be carried out in a spirit of sincerity and disinterested service, with respect for the cultural differences of every people, with the determination to avoid everything that would be undue attempt at influencing or a subtle form of domination. That is why we hail and encourage the proposed creation of an "International Literacy Fund". We hope it will make it possible to bring to the underprivileged, in the framework of the Second Development Decade, the disinterested help they need, while giving the richest countries a means of acting that avoids, as much as possible, the spirit of rivalry or domination.

In these perspectives, we take the opportunity of the celebration of the International Literacy Day to renew our best wishes for the development of this great work of human brotherhood on which we invoke, as well as on all its workers, the abundance of the divine blessings.

The Vatican, 7 September 1974.

*ORa n.39 p.2;

Paths to Peace p.131-132.
