



The Holy See

*Message of His Holiness Paul VI
to Mr. Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the 11th International Literacy day**

In the effort for the liberation as well as for the complete and united development of men and peoples, literacy remains a very special task. Thanks to the initiative and persevering efforts of UNESCO, it has now its annual Day. The celebration of its success and of the personal and social values which it promotes, contributes to deepening convictions and to awakening new energies, which will bring forth new progress. We share in this celebration wholeheartedly, aware of the service which, in the name of the Lord Jesus and of his inexhaustible goodness for all the needs of men, we owe to the whole human family.

It is right to celebrate, first of all, these innumerable men and women who, at the cost of particularly meritorious efforts, wish to learn to read and write. In this way they open up for themselves irreplaceable opportunities to become more clearly aware of what they are living and of what they are; to communicate among themselves and take a more active part in social life and their changes; to discover other cultures and to make their presence more felt in the venture of the whole human family. Stress is legitimately laid nowadays on the necessity of constructing a new world order on the foundation of the responsible participation of all. Literacy, not only by its results, but already by the experience it constitutes, sets in motion the immense crowd of the underprivileged and prepares them to bring precious reserves of creativity to the common work.

It is right too, to celebrate those who, within each people and among peoples, undertake to help this effort of their Brothers. The highlighting of their example becomes an appeal to all men of goodwill, in favour of the increasingly wide and better supported action against the great misery of illiteracy, which, in spite of the progress made, remains a very worrying problem. How many men and women, young people and adults could, in fact, join this vast movement, though with modest means and actuated by simple motivations. But remaining faithful to these motivations, they will understand by themselves that through the communication of knowledge they undergo a human experience, capable of transforming them, in their turn, on contact with those whom they help and

who very often manifest astonishing riches of courage and wonder. In this way they acquire a new sensitivity which teaches them to respect, with the tact that arises from friendship, personalities eager to study their own identity, at the very moment when they discover unsuspected horizons.

UNESCO is concerned to gather these spontaneous experiences, to invite them to confront one another, to improve pedagogical methods which will make them more efficient and guard them against discouragement and deviations. It endeavours to call new forces unceasingly to the service of the task, the scope of which increases from year to year. It endeavours also to bring in the indispensable financial means.

Not long ago we ourselves asked, in our address to journalists in Bombay, for a world fund to be set up, supplied by part of the military expenses, in order to assist the most underprivileged: such a fund should serve especially the priority task of achieving literacy. The centuries-old experience of the Church has not ceased to stimulate access to reading and writing in order to enable the masses to develop their personality and their culture, as well as to make them fruitful by opening them to the common heritage of mankind.

It falls to us to call especially upon Catholics to join all men in celebrating International Literacy Day, in thanksgiving and in amazement at the progress already made. And we pray God that UNESCO's initiative, to which you, Mr. Director-General, bring tenacious and inventive dedication, may release new energies for an enterprise particularly in keeping with the advancement of man and with brotherhood among men.

The Vatican, 30 August 1977.

PAULUS PP. VI

*ORa n.38 p.11.

Paths to Peace p.135-136.
