



# The Holy See

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*Address of His Holiness Paul VI  
on awarding the John XXIII International Peace Prize to UNESCO,  
represented by its Director-General Mr. Amadou Mahtar M'Bow\**

*Saturday, 30 November 1974.*

We are all the more happy and honoured by your presence, and appreciative to have you not only as spectators but as participants in the act that we have just performed, inasmuch as this audience takes on for us a particular significance, in our opinion far more valuable than the prize, which in truth is more of a symbolic than economic value. In the memory and spirit of our venerated and lamented Predecessor Pope John XXIII, we have presented this prize, dedicated to the promotion of Peace, to UNESCO, that is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, in the illustrious persons of the two Directors of that now celebrated and worthy world institution, the outgoing Director and his successor. The former is well known to us, Mr. René Maheu. During the twelve years of the exercise of his high office we had the occasion to meet him personally, to listen to him in interesting conversation on themes of common interest, and to admire him for the breadth and noble inspiration of his activity. The latter is most welcome, Mr. M'Bow, former Minister of Public Instruction in his own Country, Senegal. Here then we have a pleasing and not unexpected testimony, in the context of international civilization, of the indigenous originality and already consolidated cultural maturity of the great and young continent of Africa.

The particular significance of the presentation of this prize seems to us to spring from the meeting of two bodies, namely the Apostolic See and UNESCO, along the road to Peace. Each travelling along the path proper to it, here they are, as though at a meeting point, to celebrate together this lofty ideal, which ever more resembles a light-house guiding civilization – Peace.

That this Apostolic See should be in an original, fitting and constitutional way dedicated to the promotion of peace in the world will surprise no one, we think, if one remembers whence the Catholic Church and this centre, "the perpetual and visible principle and foundation" of her unity,

take their origin. They take it from that Christ whose coming into the world was greeted by the heavenly announcement of peace. A new peace this, linked to the fruitful and inexhaustible relationship with a transcendent divine fatherhood; established upon the messianic, paradoxical but henceforth invincible principle of a universal brotherhood, and always actively affirming and regenerating itself in the mysterious and inexpressible but most benign animation of a Spirit that permits the most diverse tongues of men to express themselves and understand one another in a friendly and harmonious colloquy.

This of course is the epiphany of the Catholic Church in the world – an ancient and dynamic reality, which experiences within itself a double stimulus to manifest itself as living and present. In the first place there is the stimulus of its own history. In the recent Ecumenical Council the Church became more urgently aware of her native vocation to be the teacher of universal peace: there must be no delay in proclaiming that peace among men, for they are men, that is, members all of one same family - mankind. In the second place, there is the stimulus of the anxiety that men themselves manifest to solve the dominant problem of their living together in the world in harmonious and organic concord. This living together by men has all the more need of being untiringly actuated to the extent that the maturing of its progress shows how, on one hand, peace is logical and necessary and how war is criminal and absurd, and on the other hand, how always unstable and fragile is that "tranquillity of order" that precisely defines it.

Peace, we said, is necessary; peace is possible; human dogmas these, that finally appear as clearly deriving from that religion which the Church finds the reason for her existence.

Peace, therefore, especially after the Christmas messages of Pope Pius XII and after *Pacem in Terris* of Pope John XXIII, has become the programme of our apostolic presence in the world; and the voice with which we proclaim it intends to be all the more limpid and persuasive to the extent that it is more free and unhampered in its regard, and also in the ever rising, fevered and contrasting play of human interests. Since we are and must be strangers to the temporal and political kingdom, therefore we dare, as humble prophets and persuasive poets, to make peace our customary and cordial greeting, to all of you, the people of the earth: Peace!

And so here is the meeting. It is a meeting at the highest level of ideas. And it is precisely on this level of ideas that we have met UNESCO - met it with our support and with our admiration for the principle on which it is founded and from which it derives its many-sided and provident activity, the principle that "peace must be built on the foundation of the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind". But let us say straight away that when today's meeting was arranged the episode which has recently upset such a large part of the world of culture was not foreseen. We are speaking of certain deliberations of the recent General Conference of UNESCO.

We are hence unexpectedly faced with a fact which upsets in public opinion the serenity of this happy moment. Thus all the more we express the wish that this unforeseen case may find a

speedy solution, trusting as we do in the common desire for justice and peace of the parties concerned. And we hope for this with the thought that the first to rejoice at it will be the illustrious guests whom we have the honour to have present here today, the Directors and exponents, that is, of UNESCO, by reason of the universal and peaceful character and - as it has been said - the spirit of tolerance which characterizes it, extraneous as it is to political rivalries and always consistent in its own educational, scientific and cultural aims, as witness its concern for the values of history, of art and of religion of a territory which is most dear and sacred to all of us.

Here we are thus brought back again by this memory - to which similar ones should be associated by special mention, such as those for instance of the interventions of UNESCO in favour of Nubia and of Venice - brought back again, we say, to the proven merits of the peacemaking activity of UNESCO itself, activities linked not only with geographical places but even more to moral situations, where the needs of humanity hail and greet as wise and providential the work of this great institution, dedicated, as we know, to the advancement of education, of science and of culture. It suffices to recall the worldwide campaign in favour of literacy.

But an ample account of these merits of UNESCO, which typify it also in our eyes, eager as they are to find in the human panorama signs of forces working for peace, has already been given by our diligent collaborator, Archbishop Giovanni Benelli, a former Observer of the Holy See to UNESCO, who a short time ago went to Paris to announce to the General Conference of UNESCO, meeting in plenary session, the awarding of the peace prize named after Pope John to UNESCO in recognition of its work. You will certainly all have heard the echoes of this.

One could therefore think that, at least for the chief leaders, everything that suffices to justify this friendly gesture of ours has already been said: what you are in regard to peace, illustrious and valiant members of UNESCO, and what you are doing and have already accomplished for its cause deserves from the recognition represented by the prize named after our great and venerated Predecessor, Pope John XXIII. But it is precisely his name that authorizes us not only to look at your past and your present to find it worthy of this significant award, but likewise this blessed name impels us to look forward to your future, which for us and for all who know you is a promise no less meritorious of applause and encouragement than the years already passed. You are a hope for peace in the future of mankind and civilization; this is said in the charter setting up your Organization. You are sent forward, as harbingers of peace, into future history. You make of education, science and culture powerful and wonderful factors for the universal spiritual fusion of peoples. Politics, which you leave to other bodies to promote, especially the United Nations Organization, from which you take inspiration and strength, will succeed, we trust, in establishing a peaceful cohesion, an organic juridical and economic relationship, a balanced and ordered harmony between the Nations; yes, but you work to form a communion, you strive for the brotherhood of the peoples of the earth. You seek to give mankind a common thought; you promote a uniform sociology of culture; you render possible an identical civil language among men.

"UNESCO", writes Mr. Maheu, "is an understanding for the organization of international relationships concerning the activities of the mind with a view to promoting human rights of man and collaborating for the establishment of a regime of just and lasting peace" (cf. *Dans l'Esprit des hommes*, UNESCO, 1971, p. 313). In doing this, you carry out a work of silent but prodigious mobilization of minds, which on the contrary seem by the very progress of civilization to be arming themselves psychologically and technically for a terrible and apocalyptic war, which should never happen, but, alas becomes still possible and horribly easier. For your part you dissipate the nightmare of such a deplorable and unthinkable fate. You make once more serene the horizon of future history; today you restore Peace once more to the world, making it safe for tomorrow.

Is there anything at all more deserving among the community of peoples? And is there any better title for bringing your Organization close to ours, which is called the assembly of men who are brothers? Such in fact is the name "Church" etymologically, and we trust and strive to our utmost that it may be so in reality. Is the road we travel parallel to yours? Yes, on different levels, at this moment we see that it is. Parallel in the sense of reciprocal independence, of the respective common end, and we can also say, in the happy possibility of being associated with one another in certain times, without losing our individual identities. Ours is a religion of peace. Yours is a work on behalf of Peace.

And may this concluding observation serve to explain the reason for this prize, which despite its smallness in comparison with the cause for which it is destined aims to take on a deep significance, as it were a Biblical echo, that of the celebration of an idea which is a light, of an idea which is strength - peace; that of the proclamation of an urgent and universal duty - peace; that of the announcement of a positive and inexpressible hope - peace.

Allow us then to leave the last word to him whose good and prophetic name this prize bears. Pope John XXIII, who in his Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, as though in his last testament, thus admonishes us: "There is an immense task incumbent on all men of good will, namely the task of restoring the relations of the human family in truth, in justice, in love and in freedom; the relations between citizens and their respective political Communities; between political Communities themselves; between individuals, families, intermediate associations and political Communities on the one hand and the world Community on the other, for it is the task of bringing about true peace in the order established by God" (AAS, 1963, pp. 301-301).

\*ORa n.50 p.6, 7;

*Paths to Peace* p.125-128.

