

Speech given by H. E. Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch, President of the International Olympic Committee, before awarding the Gold Medal of the Olympic Order to His Holiness, Pope John Paul II

Your Holiness,

You have kindly accepted to receive in audience today the International Olympic Committee over which I have been honoured to preside for nearly two years, and we thank you most humbly.

We are aware of your untiring work and follow closely the trips and declarations Your Holiness carries out throughout the world, spreading the word of the Church. peace, understanding and brotherhood between men.

However, we are not surprised.

Your Holiness, do you not have a great personal experience of physical activity and sport ?

You know therefore better than anyone else what sport can represent for Man.

Allow me, Your Holiness, to quote one of your phrases. You stated when addressing the participants of a world championship in Rome :

“Sport, practised at international level, contributes considerably to breaking down numerous barriers and can help people to rediscover and strengthen the unity of the human family, going beyond all distinction between race and culture.”

Admirable words, which unite so well the ideals preached by our founder Pierre de Coubertin nearly a century ago, and which we try to spread throughout the whole world.



The principal organisers of the Session took part in the prize-giving of the exhibition "Romolympih 82" (See page 383) : from right to left, Mr. Mario Pescante (SG, CONI). Mr. Giorgio de Stefani (IOC, ITA), Mr. Franco Carraro (PT, CONI and new member of the IOC), Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch and, on the extreme left, Mr. Primo Nebiolo (PT, IAAF).

Yes, Your Holiness, in the world as it is today, characterised by deep concerns relating to peace, sport offers for Man a valuable instrument in fighting against alienation in our society. It represents a means of uniting the youth of the world by encouraging awareness and respect of all others, and thus finally peace and fraternity. Great international sports gatherings represent in the first place an occasion to contribute to the promotion of peace and brotherhood amongst men. The only place in the world where the youth of all countries must match their strength in fraternal contests and not fratricides should be the sports ring.

The sympathy and paternal consideration which Your Holiness has always accorded the Olympic Movement represent an extremely powerful stimulus for all International sports organisations. The message you sent to us on the occasion of the XIth Olympic Congress in Baden-Baden in September last was a clear example of this.

It is for these reasons, Your Holiness, that the members of the International Olympic Committee meeting in Session after the Congress decided unanimously to award you with the Gold Medal of the Olympic Order, the most prestigious homage we can pay you.

Your Holiness, in recognition of your eminent merits in the cause of world sport and your faithfulness to the Olympic ideal once illustrated by Pierre de Coubertin, renovator of the Olympic Games, I have the great honour of presenting you with the gold medal of the Olympic Order.

J. A. S.

