



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE BISHOPS OF TOGO ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Friday, 22 June 2007*

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

I am happy to receive you while you are making your *ad limina* visit. Your pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles is a visible sign of your communion with the Successor of Peter and of the bonds that unite your particular Churches with the universal Church.

I thank Bishop Ambroise Djoliba of Sokodé, President of the Bishops' Conference of Togo, for his kind words on your behalf.

Through you, I address an affectionate greeting to the members of your Dioceses, the priests, men and women religious, seminarians, catechists and all the lay faithful. May they be faithful in all circumstances to the Lord's commandment: "Even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (Jn 13: 34)!

Likewise, please express to the entire Togolese People the Pope's cordial greetings and fervent good wishes that they may persevere ceaselessly in the endeavour to build a just and reconciled society in which each person may live in dignity.

Dear Brothers, I would like to express my gratitude to you for your perseverance and courage amid the numerous difficulties that your Country has experienced in these recent years. You have contributed on many occasions to the dialogue for national reconciliation, reminding everyone of the requirements of the common good, in fidelity to the truth of God and of man. I ask the Lord to bring these efforts to fruition so that your Country may know a prosperous life in fraternal harmony.

Nor has the life of the Church been exempt from distressing situations.

Your constant efforts to encourage the unity of your Bishops' Conference are the sign that in all circumstances charity must continue to be ever stronger, and that the visible communion of Christ's disciples is an essential reality to be preserved if the Church's witness is to be credible.

In this same perspective, an authentic brotherhood between the Bishops and priests, as well as among the priests themselves, is the hallmark of their full communion, indispensable for the fruitful accomplishment of their ministry. They then will all be able to work in truth for reconciliation within the Church and among the Togolese in general.

May all your diocesan priests, with whose generosity I am well acquainted, be faithful to their vocation in the total gift of themselves to their mission and in full communion with their Bishop (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 97)!

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, you have the opportunity to carry out your pastoral ministry by participating in your own capacity in the life of the people entrusted to your care.

In fact, "as a body organized within the community and the nation, the Church has both the right and the duty to participate fully in building a just and peaceful society with all the means at her disposal" (*ibid.*, n. 107).

I praise in particular your commitment to the protection of and respect for life which you have had the opportunity to express on numerous occasions, and quite recently demonstrating it once again in detail by your opposition to abortion.

Moreover, the promotion of the truth and dignity of marriage as well as the preservation of essential family values must feature among your principal priorities.

Pastoral care of the family is an essential element for evangelization and enables young people to discover what a commitment that is unique and faithful entails. I therefore urge you to pay special attention to the formation of couples and families.

Through her work of social assistance and her action in the health-care sector in which numerous competent men and women religious and lay people are involved, the Church also expresses God's loving presence to people suffering or in distress and contributes to the progress of justice and respect for human dignity.

In this same perspective, I encourage you to continue your efforts to promote Catholic schools, which provide an integral education at the service of families and of the transmission of faith. Their role, despite the great difficulties they can encounter, is essential to enabling young people to acquire a sound human, cultural and religious formation.

May educators and teachers themselves be models of Christian life for the young!

To succeed in establishing a fully reconciled society, it is of the utmost importance to start out afresh from Christ, who alone can definitively grant this grace to humankind. The work of evangelization is therefore urgently necessary.

Here, I would particularly like to greet with affection the catechists: in your Country, together with the priests and other pastoral workers, they make an effective and generous contribution to proclaiming the Word of God to their brothers and sisters.

In the face of the challenges to the Church's evangelizing mission posed by the contemporary world, the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* continues to be a precious guide for your Dioceses and gives them the possibility of strengthening the faithful in the faith and helping them "to persevere in the hope which the Risen Christ gives, overcoming every temptation to discouragement" (n. 7).

The inculturation of the Gospel message, carried out in fidelity to the Church's teaching, contributes to rooting the faith effectively in your people, enabling them to accept the figure of Jesus Christ in all dimensions of their lives. Indeed, the faithful must allow themselves to be transformed by the grace of God who sets them free, banishing all fear from their hearts for "there is no fear in love" (1 Jn 4: 18).

While respecting the rich traditions that are the vibrant expression of their people's soul, Christians must adamantly reject all that is in opposition to the liberating message of Christ and which encloses the human being and society in alienation. This requires that the formation of priests and of consecrated and lay people must have priority in the pastoral care of your Dioceses.

"People who have never had the chance to learn cannot really know the truths of faith, nor can they perform actions which they have never been taught" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 75).

The formation offered to Christians must give them the means to deepen their faith so that they can face the difficult situations they encounter and transmit the content of the faith through their witness of life, sustained by firm personal convictions.

Moreover, this formation must also help the lay faithful to acquire skills that permit them to be committed to working for the common good in the life of society.

The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* is henceforth a precious instrument at the service of the formation of all and of lay people in particular. Their involvement in public life, through respect for life, the promotion of justice, the defence of human rights and the integral development of the human person, is a witness borne to Christ. In this way the faithful take part in

the construction and development of the nation, as well as in the task of the world's evangelization.

Lastly, I would like to stress the need to pursue and to deepen the cordial relations with Muslims that exist in your Country. Indeed, such relations are indispensable for concord and harmony among all citizens and the promotion of values common to humanity.

By training competent people in the ecclesial institutions founded with a view to interreligious dialogue, you foster a better mutual knowledge, in charity and in truth, for an effective collaboration in the area of the development of individuals and of society.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, at the end of this meeting, I ask you to persevere with courage and determination in your ministry at the service of the people entrusted to you. May the Lord accompany you with his power and light.

I entrust each one of your Dioceses to the motherly intercession of the Virgin Mary, and I willingly impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing to you as well as to the priests, men and women religious, seminarians, catechists and all the lay faithful of your Dioceses.

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