

## Pope calls on lay Africans to evangelize their continent



Pope Benedict XVI has called upon lay Catholics to evangelize Africa, the “continent of hope.”

“In this transformation of the whole society, which is so urgent for Africa today, the lay faithful have an irreplaceable role,” the Pope said in a Sept. 5 message to the Pan-African Congress of Catholic Laity.

“Women and men, young people, the elderly and children, families and entire societies, all of Africa today looks to the ‘ambassadors’ of the Good News, the lay faithful,” he wrote.

The Pan-African Congress of Catholic Laity is taking place Sept. 4-9 in Yaoundé, the capital city of Cameroon. Organized by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, it brings together Africans from all walks of life, along with the continent’s bishops to “reflect on various challenges and share experiences.”

The Pope hailed the new lay Catholic movements that have arisen in recent decades as “brave peacemakers and heralds of true hope” who are “in love with Christ and the Church, filled with joy and gratitude for the baptism they have received.”

Pope Benedict XVI has visited the continent of Africa twice during his seven-year pontificate. His first trip in 2009 was a pastoral visit to Cameroon and Angola. In 2011 he made his second trip, this time going to Benin, where he signed the blueprint for the future of the Church in Africa, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Africae Munus.” In the document, the Pope dubbed Africa the “Continent of hope.”

“Of course, at first sight, Africa’s problems appear serious and not easy to solve,” the Pope remarked in his message to the lay congress. He also observed that even “valuable traditional values of African culture” are now being threatened by a “secularism which causes disorientation” that “tears in the personal and social fabric, exasperates tribalism, violence, corruption in public life, humiliation and exploitation of women and children, growth of poverty and hunger.”

However, he countered, at the “heart of the African people” we soon discover “a wealth of spiritual resources” which are “precious for our times.”

“The love for life and for the family, a sense of joy and sharing, the enthusiasm of living the faith, are all values that I have seen during my travels in Africa, and that are still etched in my heart,” he said.

Pope Benedict prayed that the “dark and nihilistic relativist mentality that affects various parts of the world” may never “open a breach” in the reality of African life.

He then praised the gathering in Yaoundé for paving the way for the October opening in Rome of the Synod of Bishops on New Evangelization and the Church’s 2012-13 “Year of Faith.”

The role of the lay faithful, the Pope stated, is key to all of the Church’s efforts because they have received a “divine gift” in their baptism.

“In fact, the acceptance of this divine gift goes hand in hand with the enthusiasm for the proclamation of the Gospel in a kind of a ‘virtuous circle’ where faith moves the announcement and the announcement strengthens the faith.”

The Pope finished his message by entrusting the congress to the care and intercession of “Our Lady of Africa, Queen of Peace and Star of New Evangelization,” before imparting his apostolic blessing.

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