



The Holy See

***LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. MSGR FRANÇOIS MAUPU, BISHOP OF VERDUN
FOR THE 90TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF VERDUN***

To Bishop François Maupu of Verdun, France

On the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Verdun which you are celebrating this 11 November together with Bishop Leo Schwarz, Auxiliary emeritus of Trier, who is presiding at Mass, I willingly join in prayer all the people gathered and I implore from God the gift of peace and the courage for a harmonious and ever deeper brotherhood between France and Germany.

The Eucharist, through which we celebrate Christ's victory over death, shows us that God is stronger than all the dark powers of history, that love is stronger than hate and, as St Paul said, that Christ by his Crucifixion has broken down the dividing wall of hostility to reconcile men and women with one another (cf. Eph 2: 14-17).

We must give thanks for the ground covered since the great World Wars that stained Europe with blood and took a heavy toll of victims. It is up to us today to ensure that the sacrifice of the men who fell on the battlefields through patriotic love was not in vain.

The mortal remains of all the fallen, regardless of their nationality, now rest in the ossuary at Douaumont, thanks to your predecessor, Bishop Ginisty, who took the initiative to have them laid to rest there and had engraved on the pediment of the building the word that sums it all up: Pax.

In a Note of 1 August 1917, sent to the leaders of the belligerents, my Predecessor Pope Benedict XV proposed lasting peace, and at the same time launched a pressing appeal to put an end to what he called a "senseless massacre".

[The Battle of] Verdun, a sombre moment in the history of the Continent, must live on in peoples' memory as an event never to be either forgotten or repeated, inviting the French and the Germans and, more broadly, all Europeans, to turn to the future and to base their relations on brotherhood,

solidarity and friendship between peoples.

May our contemporaries, particularly the young generation, draw on all that history can teach us and, relying on the Christian roots and values that largely contributed to shaping the Europe of the nations and the Europe of the peoples, undertake to forge ties of brotherhood and charity with one another for the good of all and for the development of countries, helping the poorer and smaller ones.

Verdun is also one of the symbols of reconciliation between two great European nations, former enemies; it appeals to all countries at war to take such steps that will bring people joy, since reconciliation alone makes it possible to build the future and allows for hope.

Only reconciliation and mutual forgiveness can pave the way to true peace. Coming from a Christian spirit, they also form part of the criteria for political action. Today, this is the responsibility of the leaders and peoples of Europe and of all nations.

As I entrust you to the intercession of Our Lady, honoured in all European nations under many names, and of St Martin, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and Bishop Schwarz, to the priests, deacons, Religious and faithful present, and to all the members of your Diocese.

From the Vatican, 21 October 2006

BENEDICT XVI

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