



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO Mr HORST KÖHLER,
PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY
ON THE CONTENT OF HIS APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO AFRICA***

Dear President Köhler,

On the eve of my [Apostolic Visit to Africa](#) I received your most informative letter in which you told me of your numerous meetings with people of the continent we feel close to, sharing with me your ideas on the development of Africa and your views on the future of that continent. I reflected on your thoughts during my Journey. Now, after my return, I can confirm your experiences with full conviction: Africa is a young continent, full of the joy of life and trust with an enormous potential of creativity. Of course, foreign interests and the tensions of its own history are still incumbent on the present and threaten the future. Yet lively faith, fresh moral strength and increasing intellectual competence create an atmosphere of hope that is proof against the challenges and makes it possible to overcome them.

Thanks to the *ad limina* visits, in the past four years I have been able to have personal conversations with the majority of the African Bishops about the condition of their respective dioceses and so form an idea of their situation. This autumn, in Rome, the Synod of the African Bishops on the theme "*The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: 'You are the Salt of the Earth... You are the Light of the World' (Mt 5: 13-14)*" will afford an opportunity for a broad exchange of ideas and the creation of a common pastoral programme.

Faith can make a crucial contribution to the essential interior human formation. Concerning this, when I was in Yaoundé I quoted a saying of Lactantius, a fourth-century African ecclesiastical writer: "The first duty of justice is to recognize others as brothers and sisters. Indeed, if the same God created us and gave us birth in the same condition, in view of righteousness and life eternal, we are surely united by bonds of brotherhood: whoever does not acknowledge those bonds is unjust" (Apostolic Nunciature, [Meeting with the Special Council of the Synod for Africa](#), 19 March

2009). In this regard the Church seeks to form consciences to work, as it were, from within so that as protagonists of the development of their own countries Africans may use their numerous gifts for building society and peace. Honest and supportive behaviour that does not give way to the law of the strongest and does not only seek its own interests is in fact like hope that acts, like a seed that already bears a better future within it. In this context the support of the international community is also requested, not in spite of but rather because of the current financial and economic crisis which is affecting Africa and the poorest countries in particular.

Each one of us is thought of, desired and loved by God. On this basis I have also been able to encourage the Church in Africa to continue to assist the victims of violence and diseases such as AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, and fight effectively against these terrible scourges. In the future too, inspired by authentic humanism, whose perfect measure is Jesus Christ, Christians will offer their service to hospitals and schools and will have beside them numerous people of good will. On this subject I was able to say that by inspiring in human hearts love for people who are suffering and readiness to help, the Church does far more to combat these devastating diseases than many other institutions.

The meeting with our African brothers and sisters, and, in particular, with the children and youth, did me good. I hope and pray that the interpersonal exchange and international collaboration may continue to grow and to bring an abundance of Blessings to people on all the continents, especially in Africa.

With the expression of my highest esteem, an abundance of blessings and my best wishes for you and for your family,

From the Vatican, 4 May 2009

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