



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO REPRESENTATIVES OF
THE JOHN PAUL II FOUNDATION FOR THE SAHEL**

*Hall of the Popes
Friday, 10 February 2012*

Dear Friends,

It gives me joy to greet you and to welcome you. I thank Cardinal Sarah, the legal representative of the [John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel](#), as President of the [Pontifical Council “Cor Unum”](#), for the beautiful words he has just addressed to me. I greet Bishop Bassène, President of the Administrative Council, and all of you who cooperate in this great work of charity. I also address my greetings and gratitude to the representatives of the German and Italian Bishops’ Conferences for their contributions, which go a long way to making the Foundation work.

God took flesh. Has there ever been any greater act of love? Everything that is happening today and that has continued to happen since the day when God was made man is certainly a sign of this. God never ceases to love us and to be incarnate through his Church in all the parts of the world.

Nor has the [John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel](#), which came into being almost 30 years ago and was desired by [my Blessed Predecessor](#), ceased to pursue this goal: to be a sign of Christian charity which is embodied and becomes witnessing to Christ.

The Foundation likewise wishes to express the Pope’s presence to our African brothers and sisters who live in the Sahel. This is the Institution’s spirit! For years it has implemented countless projects to counter desertification. This Foundation’s existence demonstrates the great humanity of my Blessed Predecessor whose idea it was.

However, this work will not be fully effective unless it is watered by prayer. For God alone is the source and power of life. He is the Creator of the waters (cf. Gen 1:6-9). Unfortunately, the Sahel has been seriously threatened once again in recent months by a major reduction of food resources and by a famine, caused by the shortage of rain and the resulting relentless encroachment of the desert.

I urge the international community to take serious action to relieve the extreme poverty of these peoples whose living conditions are deteriorating. I would also like to encourage and support the efforts of the ecclesial bodies working in this field. Charity must motivate all our actions. It is not a question of wanting to create a “made to measure” world but, rather, is a matter of loving. For this reason the Church’s priority vocation is not to transform the political order or to change the social fabric. She wants to contribute Christ’s light. It is he who will transform all things and all people. It is because of and for Jesus Christ that the Christian contribution is so specific. Islam exists in some of the countries that you represent. I know that you have good relations with the Muslims and I rejoice in this. Witnessing that Christ is alive and that his love goes beyond all religions, races and cultures, is also important in their regard.

Africa is often described in a belittling and humiliating way as the continent of infinite and insoluble wars and problems. On the contrary, the Africa which today accepts the Good News is the continent of hope for the Church. For us, for you, Africa is the continent of the future. I repeat the exhortation I made during [my recent Visit to Benin](#): “Africa, Good News for the Church, become Good News for the entire world!”.

In order to carry out this task and after 28 years of activity, the Foundation needs to be brought up to date and to be renewed. In this it is assisted by the [Pontifical Council “Cor Unum”](#). This renewal must concern in the first place the Christian and professional formation of people who are working on the spot, in a certain way they are the Holy Father’s tools in these regions. I consider as a priority the Christian education and formation of all who — in one way or another — cooperate in making more visible this great sign of charity, the [John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel](#).

If it is to be effective, this renewal must begin with personal prayer and conversion. May the Virgin Mary and [Blessed John Paul II](#) help us! Many thanks!