



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE CATHOLIC BIBLICAL FEDERATION**

To the Most Reverend
Vincenzo Paglia
President of the Catholic
Biblical Federation

"Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace" (Eph 6: 14-15). With these words of the Apostle Paul, I am pleased to greet the delegates and all those attending the Seventh General Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation taking place in Dar-es-Salaam from 24 June to 3 July 2008, dedicated to the theme: Word of God - Source of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace. The General Assembly is always a privileged opportunity for the members of the Catholic Biblical Federation to listen together to the word of God and renew their service to the Church, called to proclaim the gospel of peace.

The fact that your meeting is being held in Dar-es-Salaam is an important gesture of solidarity with the Church in Africa, more so in view of next year's special Synod for Africa. "The Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 4). The message you bring to Dar-es-Salaam is clearly a message of love of the Bible and love of Africa. The theme of your General Assembly draws attention to how God's word can restore humanity in reconciliation, justice and peace. This is the word of life that the Church has to offer to a broken world. "So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5: 19-20). May the African Continent set the context for the *lectio divina* which will assist you in these days and may your efforts help the Church in Africa to "pursue its evangelizing mission, in order to bring the peoples of the Continent to the Lord, teaching them to observe all that he has commanded [cf. Mt 28: 20]" (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 6).

Christianity is the Religion of the Word of God, "not a written and mute word, but incarnate and living" (Saint Bernard, *S. Missus est* 4, 11 PL 183, 86). It is only Christ, the eternal Word of the

living God, who through the Holy Spirit, can open our minds to understand the Scriptures (cf. Lk 24: 15, *Catechism*, 108). I warmly encourage you therefore not only to continue to make known the profound relevance of the Scriptures to the contemporary experience of Catholics and particularly to the younger generations, but also to lead them to interpret them from the central perspective of Christ and his Paschal mystery. The community of believers can be the leaven of reconciliation, but only if "she remains docile to the Spirit and bears witness to the Gospel, only if she carries the Cross like Jesus and with Jesus" (*Homily, Solemnity of Pentecost*, 11 May 2008). In this regard, I wish to make my own a reflection from the Servant of God, Pope John Paul ii, who observed: "How indeed can we proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation without at the same time being committed to working for reconciliation between Christians?" (*Ut Unum Sint*, 98). Let this observation also find its way into your undertakings these days. May your hearts be guided always by the Holy Spirit in the unifying power of the word of God.

All Christians are called to imitate the openness of Mary who received the Word of God "in her heart and in her body and gave Life to the world" (*Lumen Gentium*, 53). May the peoples of Africa receive this Word as the life-giving source of reconciliation and justice, and especially of the true peace that comes only from the Risen Lord. Commending to the same Virgin Mary, the Seat of Wisdom, all those gathered for this General Assembly, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 12 June 2008

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