



# The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE SYMPOSIUM  
OF THE BISHOPS OF AFRICA AND EUROPE***

*Clementine Hall*

*Thursday, 16 February 2012*

*Dear Cardinals,*

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am glad to receive you at the end of the Symposium of the Bishops of Africa and Europe and I greet you all with great affection, in particular Cardinal Péter Erdö, President of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences, and Cardinal Polycarp Pengo, President of the Symposium of the Bishops' Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, thanking them for their courteous greeting with which they opened our meeting. I express my heartfelt appreciation to all those who promoted the study days during which you have addressed the topic of evangelization today in your countries, in the light of the reciprocal communion and pastoral collaboration that was established during the First Symposium in the year 2004.

With you, I thank God for the spiritual fruits that have flowed from the relationships of friendship and cooperation among the ecclesial communities of your Continents in the course of these years. Beginning from different cultural, social and economic environments, you have made the most of the common apostolic elan to proclaim Jesus Christ and his Gospel to your people in the context of an "exchange of gifts". Continue on this fruitful path of active brotherhood and joint intentions, widening ever more the horizons of evangelization. For the Church in Europe, in fact, the meeting with the Church in Africa is always a moment of grace because of the hope and joy with which the African ecclesial communities live and communicate the faith, as I have been able to note on my Apostolic Journeys. Moreover, it is wonderful to see how the Church in Africa, though living amid so many difficulties and in need of peace and reconciliation, is willing to share her faith.

In the relations between the Church in Africa and the Church in Europe, you must take care to remember the fundamental bond between faith and charity, so that they may illumine one another in their truth. Charity fosters openness and encounter with the people of today, in their concrete reality, to take to them Christ and his love for every person and every family, especially for those who are the poorest and loneliest. “*Caritas Christi urget nos*” (2 Cor 5:14); it is in fact the love of Christ that fills hearts and impels us to evangelize. The divine Teacher, today as then, sends his disciples on the highways of the world to proclaim his message of salvation to all the peoples of the earth (cf. Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, n. 7).

The challenges you have before you today are demanding. I am thinking, in the first place, of religious indifference, which leads many people to live as if God did not exist or to be content with a vague sense of religion, incapable of contending with the question of truth and the duty of coherence. Today, especially in Europe, but also in some parts of Africa, one feels the weight of the secularized environment, often hostile to the Christian faith. Another challenge to Gospel proclamation is hedonism, which has contributed to making the crisis of values penetrate daily life, the structure of the family, and the very way of interpreting the meaning of life. Symptomatic of a situation of grave social unease is also the spread of phenomena such as pornography and prostitution. You are well aware of these challenges, which stir your pastoral awareness and your sense of responsibility. They must not discourage you but, rather, must be an opportunity to renew your commitment and hope, the hope that is born from the awareness that the night is far gone and the day is at hand (cf. Rom 13:12), because the Risen Christ is always with us. In the societies of Africa and Europe there are numerous good forces, many of whom are active in the parishes and are outstanding for their commitment to personal holiness and to the apostolate. I hope that, with your help, they will be able to become increasingly the living and vital cells of the New Evangelization.

May the family be the centre of your attention as Pastors: the domestic Church is also the best guarantee for the renewal of society. The family, which preserves customs, traditions, habits, rites permeated by faith, is the most appropriate terrain for the flowering of vocations. Today's consumerist mentality may have negative repercussions on the awakening and care of vocations; hence the need to pay particular attention to the promotion of priestly vocations and special consecrations. The family is also the formative fulcrum of youth. Europe and Africa need generous young people, who can take their future in a responsible way, and all the Institutions must be well aware that these young people represent the future and that it is important to do everything possible to ensure that their path is not marked by uncertainty and darkness. Dear Brothers, follow with special care their human and spiritual growth, also by encouraging initiatives to do volunteer work that can have educational value.

The cultural dimension plays an important role in the formation of the new generations. You know well how highly the Church esteems and promotes every genuine form of culture, to which she offers the richness of the Word of God and of the grace that flows from the Paschal Mystery of

Christ. The Church respects every discovery of truth, because all truth comes from God, but she knows that the gaze of faith fixed on Christ opens human minds and hearts to the First Truth, which is God. Thus culture nourished by faith leads to true humanization, whereas false cultures lead to de-humanization: we have had sad examples in Europe and Africa. Culture, therefore, must be a constant concern in your pastoral action, always remembering that the light of the Gospel, inserted in the cultural fabric, raises it and multiplies its riches.

Dear friends, your Symposium has offered you the occasion to reflect on the problems of the Church on the two Continents. They are certainly never lacking and at times are considerable; but, on the other hand, they are also the proof that the Church is alive, that she is growing, and is not afraid to fulfil her evangelizing mission. Because of this, she is in need of prayer and of the commitment of all the faithful; in fact, evangelization is an integral part of the vocation of all the baptized, which is a vocation to holiness. Christians who have a lively faith and are open to the action of the Holy Spirit become witnesses with the word and life of the Gospel of Christ. However Pastors are entrusted with a special responsibility. Hence, “your own holiness must be outstanding, to the benefit of those entrusted to your pastoral care, those whom you must serve. Your life of prayer will nourish your apostolate from within. The bishop must be someone in love with Christ. The moral authority and the prestige that uphold the exercise of your juridical power can only come from the holiness of your life” (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*, n. 100).

I entrust your spiritual resolutions and your pastoral projects to the intercession of Mary, Star of Evangelization, while imparting to you, to the Bishops' Conferences of Africa and Europe and to all your priests and faithful, a special, heartfelt Apostolic Blessing.