

## Irreplaceable Role of the Lay Faithful In Making Africa the Continent of Hope



Africa is called to be the "continent of hope" says Benedict XVI in a letter written to Cardinal Stanislaw Rylko, president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, for the occasion of the Pan African Congress for Catholic Laity. The congress is taking place in Yaounde, Cameroon, from 4 to 9 September on the theme: "Being witnesses of Jesus Christ in Africa today. 'Salt of the earth ... light of the World'".

Hope, the Holy Father writes, "indicates the bright horizon which opens up before the eyes of faith" despite the many spiritual and material problems facing the African continent and the African Church. "Even the best traditional values of African culture are today threatened by secularisation, which gives rise to disorientation, rends the fibre of personal and social life, exacerbates tribalism, violence and corruption in public life, leads to the humiliation and exploitation of women and children, and increases poverty and hunger. To this must be added the threat of fundamentalist terrorism which has recently targeted Christian communities in a number of African countries".

In spite of all this, the people of Africa possess "a great wealth of spiritual resources, which are very valuable in our time: love for life and the family, a sense of joy and of sharing, enthusiasm in living their faith in the Lord. ... Never let the dark mentality of relativism and nihilism, which affects various parts of your world, open a breach in your lives", the Pope says. "With renewed energy accept and spread the message of joy and of hope which Christ brings, a message capable of purifying and strengthening the great values of your culture. ... Making Africa the 'continent of hope' must be the goal that guides the mission of African lay faithful today, just as it must guide the congress you are celebrating".

This mission "arises from the faith, a gift of God which must be welcomed, nourished and developed, because 'we cannot accept that salt should become tasteless or the light be kept hidden'. ... In this transformation of all society, which is so urgent for Africa today, the lay faithful have an irreplaceable role to play. ... Women and men, young and old, children, families and all of society: today all of Africa awaits the 'ambassadors' of the Good News". These ambassadors are "the lay faithful in parishes, ... ecclesial movements and new communities, enamoured of Christ and the Church, full of joy and gratitude for the Baptism they have received, courageous workers for peace and announcers of authentic hope".

