



The Holy See

***LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr. PAUL KAGAME
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF RWANDA****

*To His Excellency
Mr Paul Kagame
President of the Republic of Rwanda*

The 13th anniversary of the beginning of the genocide in your beloved Country, Rwanda, which is to be honoured on 7 April by a day of national mourning, coincides with Holy Saturday, according to the calendar of the Catholic Church and of other Christian denominations.

For believers, this Saturday is not a Saturday like others but one of the most important liturgical days. After the tragedy of Golgotha, when the pagans crucified the Innocent One, believers are awaiting the complete fulfilment of the words of Christ who said: "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11: 25).

For Rwandans, this Saturday evening will also be a very important day, different from other days because they will be commemorating hundreds of thousands of innocent people who, 13 years ago, were victims of the terrible genocide massacres. Caught in this tide of hatred and revenge, many religious and ecclesiastics also lost their lives.

The Church knows the effects of "the mystery of lawlessness" (II Thes 2: 7), but she also knows that death does not have the last word because it was conquered by the victorious death of the Son of God and in his death every person possesses sufficient qualities and energy to triumph over evil through good, especially if they are supported by the power of Christ the Redeemer.

As a sign of consideration for, and of communion with, their fellow citizens, the Bishops of Rwanda decided to postpone the celebration of certain sacraments of the Church - baptisms and marriages - because such celebrations are generally accompanied by festivities in the family and with friends which are incompatible with national mourning.

I would also like to join in your national mourning and, in particular, in the prayers for all the victims of this dreadful carnage without any distinction of religious belief, ethnic origin or political affiliation. I ardently hope that all Rwandans, guided by the civil and religious Authorities, will more generously and effectively engage in national reconciliation to build a new country, in truth and justice, in fraternal unity and peace.

The religious motivation behind the commitment of Catholics in daily life, in the family and in society and the moral principles which derive from them constitute "a point of encounter between Christians and all people of good will" (cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 579).

The Christian faith which is shared by the majority of the Rwandan People, if lived consistently and to the full, constitutes an effective help in recovering from a past of errors and death, which culminated in the genocide of 1994; at the same time, this faith stimulates trust in the possibility available to all Rwandans, reconciled with one another, to build a better future together, rediscovering the newness of love which "is the only force that can lead to personal and social perfection, allowing society to make progress towards the good" (*ibid.*, n. 580).

With these hopes, I invoke the Blessing of Almighty God upon you, Mr President, and upon all the Rwandan People.

From the Vatican, 3 April 2007

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