

Pope Benedict XVI to Visit Cameroon in March 2009

Pope Benedict XVI is scheduled to visit Cameroon in March, 2009, according to information published on October 26 by the Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano. According to the Vatican newspaper, the pontiff's maiden visit to Africa will also take him to Angola in the same month.

The 81-year-old prelate made the surprise announcement at St. Peter's Basilica, during a ceremony closing three weeks of discussions by Bishops from around the world, about the Bible's importance in the life of the Church.

"It is my intention to go next March to Cameroon as part of preparations for an October 2009 Bishops' meeting at the Vatican dealing with Africa," the Pope said at the end of his homily.

"God willing, I will also go to Angola, to solemnly celebrate the 500th anniversary of the evangelisation of that country," Benedict said. The Apostolic Nuncio to Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, resident in Yaounde, Eliseo Ariotti, in a press briefing after the Pope's declaration said Pope Benedict XVI will be coming to Cameroon at the invitation of President Paul Biya.

"That is a gift to Cameroon because the Catholic Church has demonstrated that they are very dynamic in the country. It will also be a moment when the Holy Father will be holding the Episcopal Conference of Africa to begin the struggle for justice, peace and reconciliation in the continent," he said.

Commentary by L'Effort Camerounais, the official newspaper and website of the National Conference of Bishops of Cameroon

Shortly after the Pope made the announcement, the State run media in Cameroon announced that the Pope will be coming to Cameroon at the invitation of Cameroon's Head of State, Paul Biya. A communiqué from the Civil Cabinet of the Presidency of the Republic described the Pope's imminent visit as "official" and "pastoral". Officials of national Churches traditionally announce impending Papal visits, but the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon has not yet officially announced the visit.

Pope Benedict XVI's March visit to Africa will be his 11th international trip, but the first to Africa since he became Pope in April 2005. His predecessor, Pope Paul II, visited Cameroon twice, precisely in 1985 and 1995. During Pope John Paul's second trip he proclaimed the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, a publication considered as a road map for the modern Catholic Church on the African continent.

Many are anxiously looking forward to the trip as Pope Benedict XVI has, on several occasions, expressed his concern over the disturbing socio-political situation in Africa, a continent, which he says, "Europe has not only exported evangelisation to, but all sorts of vices, corruption and violence." While receiving Cameroon's Ambassador to the Holy See last June, Pope Benedict XVI called on the Cameroonian government to fight against corruption, a vice that has attained endemic levels in the country.

He also urged political leaders in Cameroon to defend the country's public good and to protect the lives and property of people living in Cameroon. Several priests and religious have been killed in Cameroon in the last two decades. Although Pope Benedict XVI and

John Paul II have requested that investigations be carried out to bring those behind these killings to book, all the probes ordered after these gruesome murders appear deadlocked.

The Pope, it is expected, could make an umpteenth appeal that investigations into the killings be reordered, a request the Cameroonian government, though eager to make political gains from the announced visit, will certainly not be comfortable with.

Africa is a continent of prime concern to the Catholic Church, for while vocations and the number of Catholic Christians are dwindling in Europe and America, the number of vocations and Catholic Faithful are on the rise in Africa. The Pope's visit to Cameroon and Angola will indisputably be an extra booster to the Church that is in Africa.