NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Don't surrender to laws of market, pope says

John L. Allen Jr. | Nov. 18, 2011 NCR Today

Cotonou, Benin

On the heels of a controversial Vatican document blasting free-market ideologies and calling for a global authority to regulate the economy, Benedict XVI today warned the continent of Africa against an ?unconditional surrender to the law of the market or that of finance,? in a speech opening his second African journey as pope.

Benedict XVI is visiting Benin, a West African nation of eight million, Nov. 18-20.

The pontiff was greeted this afternoon at the airport in the national capital of Cotonou by Benin?s president, Thomas Boni Yayi, a Muslim convert to Evangelical Christianity. In brief remarks to a crowd on hand, Benedict encouraged Africans not to fear modernity, but to avoid what he identified as some of its ?pitfalls.?

Those pitfalls include, according to the pope:

- ?An unconditional surrender to the law of the market or that of finance?
- ?Nationalism?
- ?An exaggerated and sterile tribalism?
- ?Politicization of interreligious tensions?
- ?Erosion of human, cultural, ethical and religious values?

The transition to modernity, the pope said, must instead be rooted in values such as ?the dignity of the person, the importance of the family and respect for life.?

Benedict?s reference to the market is of particular interest in light of a recent document on reform of global economic systems from the Vatican?s Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, issued in advance of a meeting of G-20 nations. The text made headlines for its unstinting rejection of ?neo-liberal? economic theories, its support for global regulatory authorities such as a world central bank, and its endorsement of the Tobin Tax.

Critics of the document have tended to downplay its authority, and some have openly asked if Pope Benedict XVI stands behind it. In that context, the brief reference from Benedict in today?s speech will strike many observers as an oblique confirmation that, at least at the big-picture level, the Justice and Peace text indeed reflects his thinking.

As a footnote, the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana, is a member of the papal party accompanying Benedict XVI to Benin. He joins two other African cardinals, as well as two other African prelates who serve in different Vatican offices.

Later today, Benedict is scheduled to visit the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mercy in Cotonou, a structure famed for its distinctive burgundy and white striped tile architecture, where he will pay tribute to two former

archbishops of Cotonou and deliver a spiritual meditation on Mary and divine mercy.

NCR senior correspondent is traveling with the pope in Benin. Below are a list of stories he has filed so far. Watch the NCR website for updates throughout the weekend.

- **Benedict?s Africa plan: Stay spiritual, and stay Catholic** [1], Saturday, November 19, 2001
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