

Global financial crisis contributes to delay of encyclical, pope says

VATICAN CITY - The global economic crisis has contributed to the delay in the publication of Pope Benedict XVI's new social encyclical, not for financial reasons, but because the crisis has demonstrated how important and how complicated the topic is.

If the encyclical "does not deal competently with the economic reality, it cannot be credible," Pope Benedict said Feb. 26 in response to a question from a priest of the Diocese of Rome.

During the pope's annual question-and-answer session with more than 400 priests ministering in Rome, a pastor from a poor neighborhood asked how church members could do more to push for a real reform of the global economic system.

Pope Benedict said he did not want to give a simplistic answer to a complicated question about the reality of global finance and said that, in fact, the complexity of the current situation is what has delayed the publication of his social encyclical, tentatively titled "Caritas in Veritate" ("Love in Truth").

"As you know, for a long time we have been preparing an encyclical on these points, and on its long journey one can see how difficult it is to speak competently about it," the pope said.

On the level of global economic systems, the pope said almost every person in every country is feeling the consequences of "these fundamental errors that have been revealed in the failure of the large American banks; the error at the basis of it is human greed."

"We must denounce this (system) with courage, but also with concreteness because moralizing will not help if it is not supported by an understanding of reality, which also will help us understand what can be done concretely to change the situation," he said.

Pope Benedict said the crisis demonstrates that “original sin really exists. If it did not exist, we could appeal to reason, lucidly, with arguments that are accessible to all and incontestable and to the good will of everyone.”

But the force of reason and good will are not strong enough to overcome the sins of greed and selfishness and the temptation to put one’s own interests first, he said.

While the global financial system must be reformed, the pope said, individuals also must accept the fact that they will have to make some sacrifices in order to help the poor and move the world toward justice.

“Justice cannot be created only with economic reforms, which are necessary, but it also requires the presence of just people,” he said.

“As long as original sin exists, we will never have a radical and total correction” of unjust systems, “but we must do all that we can to achieve at least a provisional, sufficient correction that would permit humanity to live and would be an obstacle to selfishness,” Pope Benedict said.

The economy was just one of the topics discussed when the pope met the priests, spending more than 90 minutes listening and responding to questions posed by eight of them.

Pope Benedict told the priests that it was important for him to know the life, experiences, challenges and joys facing the priests in his diocese.

“I want to learn, to draw closer to the daily reality from which someone in the Apostolic Palace risks being a bit too distant,” the pope said, in a reference to his residence.

The pope said the high-level contacts he has, especially with bishops from around the world, is very helpful for getting an overview of the life of the universal church, but he cannot know the hopes and sufferings of individual Catholics in the way a parish priest can.

The gathering included lighthearted moments when a priest read a poem he wrote in the Roman dialect and when the pope teased some of the priests for asking long,

complicated questions or basically answering their own questions.