

Papal social encyclical should be published in May, says cardinal

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI's first social encyclical is already completed and should be ready for release in early May, said a top Vatican official.

The original aim had been to have the encyclical on social justice issues ready for publication in 2007 to coincide with the 40th anniversary of Pope Paul VI's encyclical on human development, "Populorum Progressio" ("The Progress of Peoples"), said Cardinal Renato Martino, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

"Naturally, however, with the research and revisions necessary to create and have a text that would respond to today's current situation, well, it got behind schedule a little bit," he told reporters March 20.

"The encyclical is already ready and we hope it will be published in early May," he said.

He said the new papal encyclical will offer "a beautiful response" to the new realities and the changes that have occurred since the last papal encyclical on Catholic social teaching, "Centesimus Annus" ("The Hundredth Year"), was published in 1991 by Pope John Paul II.

Pope Benedict's social encyclical was tentatively titled "Caritas in Veritate" ("Love in Truth") and will be his third encyclical in four years.

Flying to Cameroon March 17, the pope said one reason for the encyclical's delay was the need to thoroughly deal with the current global economic crisis.

"We were almost ready to publish it when this crisis erupted and we went back to the text in order to give a more adequate response" and to examine what the church sees as being the real problems underlying the financial crisis, he told reporters on the papal plane.

He said he hoped the encyclical could play a part in helping the world overcome its economic woes.