

Pope urges professors to find solutions to ‘crisis of modernity’

VATICAN CITY - Pope Benedict XVI urged university professors to create solutions for “the crisis of modernity” as well as investigate Christianity’s contribution to the study of human nature.

“Europe is presently experiencing a certain social instability and diffidence in the face of traditional values,” but its history and universities “have much to contribute to shaping a future of hope,” he told participants in the first European meeting of university professors. The participants came to the Vatican to meet the pope June 23.

Representatives from around the world came to Rome for the June 21-24 meeting, “A New Humanism for Europe: the Role of Universities,” sponsored by the Council of European Bishops’ Conferences.

The current cultural shift “is often seen as a challenge to the culture of the university and Christianity itself rather than as a horizon against which creative solutions can and must be found,” Pope Benedict said.

“A false dichotomy between theism and authentic humanism, taken to the extreme of positing an irreconcilable conflict between divine law and human freedom, has led to a situation in which humanity, for all its economic and technical advances, feels deeply threatened,” said the pope.

The question of people and modernity “challenges the church to devise effective ways of proclaiming to contemporary culture” the realism of Christianity in the work of Jesus, said the pope.

“Christianity must not be relegated to the world of myth and emotion, but respected for its claim to shed light on the truth about man, to be able to transform men and women spiritually, and thus to enable them to carry out their vocation in history,” Pope Benedict said.

The pope said that “knowledge can never be limited to the purely intellectual realm; it also includes a renewed ability to look at things in a way free of prejudices and preconceptions and to allow ourselves to be amazed by reality, whose truth can be discovered by uniting understanding with love.”

Only God “can prevent us from truncating reality at the very moment when it demands ever new and more complex levels of understanding,” he said.

The pope called on university lecturers to study modernity and to broaden the understanding of reason “to explore and embrace those aspects of reality which go beyond the purely empirical” for “a more fruitful, complementary approach to the relationship between faith and reason.”

Society needs “the practical aspects of directing research and activity to the promotion of human dignity and to the daunting task of building the civilization of love,” he said. “University professors in particular are called to embody the virtue of intellectual charity, recovering their primordial vocation to train future generations not only by imparting knowledge but by the prophetic witness of their own lives.”

Pope Benedict also called for a “unity of knowledge” to counter “the tendency to fragmentation and lack of communicability that is all too often the case in our schools.”

He said unity of knowledge “can encourage the growth of European unity.”

“Only a Europe conscious of its own cultural identity can make a specific contribution to other cultures, while remaining open to the contribution of other peoples,” the pope said.