

Put people at center of economic policies, pope says

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI said the current economic crisis has highlighted the need for European financial institutions to place people at the center of their policies and practices.

“Economics and finance do not exist for themselves, but are mere instruments or means. Their end is solely the human person and his full realization in dignity. This is the only capital worth saving,” the pope said June 12 to members of the Council of Europe Development Bank.

The bank was established in 1956 as a development tool with a special focus on helping refugees and later expanded its efforts to include other social areas. The pope praised the bank’s work and said members must keep in mind that it exists primarily to promote solidarity – a goal that goes beyond economic profit and that includes a “space for gratuity.”

The pope encouraged the rediscovery of Europe’s rich tradition of “economic experiences based on brotherhood.”

“There are enterprises that have a social purpose or are mutual benefit institutions. They have suffered under the laws of the market but wish to rediscover their original strength of generosity,” he said.

He said such initiatives are in line with the church’s traditional teaching on social justice, as reflected most recently in his own encyclical, “Charity in Truth.”

Pope Benedict questioned whether the economic reintegration of Europe after the fall of communist regimes has left people better off.

“The economic and financial exchanges between Eastern and Western Europe have undoubtedly been developed, but has there been real human progress?” he said.

“Hasn’t the liberation from totalitarian ideologies been used unilaterally for

economic development alone, to the detriment of a more human development that respects the dignity and nobility of the human being?" he said.

The pope said the development of a unified Europe has also sometimes ignored the "spiritual richness that has modeled the European identity." Christianity, he said, is at the root of the continent's social and moral values and has allowed Europeans to understand the concepts of freedom, responsibility and ethics.

"To marginalize Christianity - even through the exclusion of the symbols that represent it - would contribute to depriving our continent of the fundamental source that steadily nourishes it and contributes to its true identity," he said.