

Theologians' task is to reflect on truth taught by church, pope says

VATICAN CITY - While theologians can make valuable contributions to society's reflections on justice, peace and ecology, their main task is to reflect on the truth of Christian revelation and not simply its practical applications, Pope Benedict XVI said.

"The essential and inescapable characteristic of theology is to ask questions concerning the truth of faith and not simply to ask questions about its practical and social effectiveness," the pope said Dec. 5 during a meeting with the International Theological Commission.

The 30 members of the commission, appointed by the pope, were concluding their five-year terms on the board that investigates theological questions in coordination with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

During their Dec. 1-5 meeting, the theologians concluded work on a document titled "In Search of a Universal Ethics: A New Look at Natural Law," and continued work on a document on "The Meaning and Method of Theology."

Archbishop Luis Ladaria Ferrer, secretary of the doctrinal congregation and secretary-general of the theological commission, told the pope that the natural law document would be reviewed by the doctrinal congregation prior to publication and that work on the document on the role of theology would continue.

Pope Benedict told commission members the meaning and role of theology was an especially important topic in today's world.

"In a planetary society like the one being formed today, theologians often are challenged by public opinion to promote dialogue among religions and cultures (and) to contribute to the development of an ethics that has peace, justice and the defense of the natural environment as its basic coordinates," the pope said.

"Obviously," the pope said, "these are legitimate concerns that certainly must be

given careful consideration. Yet one cannot deny that the identity of theology is not found on this level of problems and needs.”

Theology must focus on the truth revealed in Jesus Christ and taught by the church, Pope Benedict said.

“The basic virtue of the theologian is to seek obedience in faith, which makes him a collaborator in the truth” and ensures that the theologian is not talking about himself, but about God, the pope said.

“Obedience to the truth does not mean renouncing research and the effort of reflection,” he said, but rather it means allowing questions to stimulate deeper faith.

Pope Benedict also spoke briefly about the new document on natural law, the sense of moral right and wrong which the church teaches is present naturally in each human being.

If each person and each society recognized the tenets of natural law, he said, it would guarantee that everyone’s freedom and dignity would be recognized and it would protect them from “ideological manipulation and exploitation” by those who happen to have more power.