

Catholic beliefs are not open to popular vote, pope says

Cindy Wooden | Dec. 18, 2012
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When the Catholic church affirms the importance of how all the faithful understand matters of faith and morals, it is not saying Catholic beliefs are open to a popular vote, Pope Benedict XVI said.

An authentic *sensus fidei*, which literally means "sense of faith," can come only when Catholics actively participate in the life of the church and follow the teaching of the pope and bishops, he said Dec. 7 during a meeting with members of the International Theological Commission.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church quotes the Second Vatican Council's teaching that "the whole body of the faithful ? cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of faith (*sensus fidei*) on the part of the whole people, when, 'from the bishops to the last of the faithful,' they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals."

Benedict praised the theological commission members for including a discussion of the *sensus fidei* in "Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria," a document they released in March and which affirms the primacy of bishops over theologians as interpreters of church teaching.

"Today it is particularly important to clarify the criteria which make it possible to distinguish the authentic *sensus fidei* from its counterfeits," the pope said. "In reality, it is not some kind of ecclesial public opinion, and it is unthinkable to use it to contest the teaching of the magisterium because the *sensus fidei* cannot develop authentically in a believer except to the extent in which he or she fully participates in the life of the church, and this requires a responsible adherence to the magisterium."

The *sensus fidei* is a kind of "supernatural instinct" that helps Catholics recognize what does and does not belong to the faith of the church, he said, and it is a sign that "the Holy Spirit does not cease to speak to the churches and lead them to the whole truth."

Referring to another document the commission is working on, about the Catholic belief in one God, Benedict said the *sensus fidei* is what helps believers rightly react against "the prejudice that says religions, especially monotheistic religions, would inherently be bearers of violence, mainly because of the claim that they advance about the existence of a universal truth."

Some people, he said, insist relativism is the only way to guarantee tolerance and peace and that it best conforms to the ideals of a democratic society where everything should be open to a vote.

When people are denied the possibility of referring to objective truths, he said, "dialogue is rendered impossible and violence, whether declared or hidden, becomes the rule of law of human relationships."

The life and death of Jesus, Benedict said, demonstrates "a radical rejection of all forms of hatred and violence"

in favor of the absolute primacy of love.

"If, therefore, in history there have been or are forms of violence carried out in the name of God, these are not to be attributed to monotheism, but historical causes, mainly the result of human errors," he said.

In fact, the pope said, "it is forgetting God that immerses human societies in a form of relativism, which inevitably generates violence."

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