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Vatican official says not to expect papal encyclical on poverty

by Caroline Hroncich by Catholic News Service

Vatican City — An official at the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace said despite widespread news reports and the statement of an Italian bishop, he does not expect Pope Francis to write an encyclical on the subject of poverty.

"If you asked [the pope] he would probably say to you, 'Why do we need an encyclical? What is the encyclical supposed to tell us that we don't already know?' " said Jesuit Fr. Michael Czerny.

In May, Bishop Luigi Martella of Molfetta, Italy, wrote that the pope had recently told him and other bishops of Italy's Puglia region that he was planning an encyclical on poverty, "understood not in an ideological and political sense, but in an evangelical sense." The bishop said the encyclical would be called *Beati Pauperes* ("Blessed Are the Poor").

But Czerny told Catholic News Service the church is still digesting retired Pope Benedict XVI's major contribution to the church's teaching on the subject.

"Less than five years ago, we had a superb social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, and I'm sure that Pope Francis agrees with every word of it. There is an amount of material in it that we could work on," Czerny said. "It would keep us busy for 20 years."

"Obviously, there will be efforts made to understand forms of poverty or new phenomena," said Czerny, who serves as assistant to the council's president, Ghanaian Cardinal Peter Turkson. "These are all efforts to fill little gaps, holes that we have. I would expect Pope Francis to use much simpler opportunities for clarification than teaching, rather than a huge encyclical."

The Jesuit granted more weight to reports that Pope Francis is contemplating an encyclical about the environment.

"He's been talking about an ecological encyclical," Czerny said. "That's an area perhaps where there's been less church teaching than there has on poverty and development. So maybe something like that might come. But even there I would expect parts and pieces to come out as we go along, eventually maybe to have it pulled together."

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