

WORLD & NATION

Vatican chief addresses 'need for moral absolutes'

By Dan Morris-Young
Catholic News Service

MENLO PARK, Calif. — Meeting with reporters Feb. 12 after a multinational Catholic doctrinal consultation, Vatican doctrine chief Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger warned against moral relativism, saying there is a "need for moral absolutes."

Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, one of the meeting's U.S. participants, said the fact that some people don't follow church teaching does not mean the teaching is wrong. Rather, he said, it challenges church leaders to "find new ways" to get the teaching across.

The Feb. 9-12 consultation was held at the Vallombrosa Center, a San Francisco archdiocesan retreat and conference center in Menlo Park. It brought together Catholic doctrinal officials from the Vatican, United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Is-



Reuters/CNS

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, addresses a press conference in Menlo Park, Calif., Feb. 12.

lands, New Caledonia and Tonga.

Archbishop Pilarczyk, who chairs the U.S. bishops' Committee on Doctrine, described the four-day gathering as an op-

portunity for "people with similar responsibilities" to "talk shop."

A press release said that among topics discussed were church teaching authority, the ecclesial role of the theologian, dialogue between bishops and theologians, feminism, pastoral care of homosexuals, the doctrinal situations in the various countries represented, and ways of effective collaboration on doctrinal issues. Cardinal Ratzinger, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, opened the consultation with a presentation on "Subjectivity, Christology and the Church."

In comments at the press conference, he:

- Said concern about academic freedom and Catholic theologians raised by Pope John Paul II's 1990 document on Catholic higher education, (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*), should be viewed in terms of the church's obligation to assure its members that theologians teaching Catholic theology are, in

fact, teaching in accord with doctrine.

- Acknowledged tension between some segments of the theological community and the Vatican, but added that "tensions can be a good thing" and that "it is certainly our intention to have good relations between the theological community and the magisterium," the teaching authority.

- Responded to a question about moral issues in President Clinton's impeachment trial by warning against "moral relativism" and underscoring the "need for moral absolutes" — but added a caution against "being too quick to make absolutes."

- Indicated that judging a Catholic politician's vote on abortion legislation as sinful must take into account circumstances, freedom, intention and informed conscience, and that ultimately the question lies between the person and his or her confessor.

- Answered a question about church latitude in "blessing same-sex relationships that are monogamous with a life-long commitment" by referring reporters to a press release that said, "The church teaches that homosexual acts cannot contribute to the authentic good of the human person, and consistently condemns any violence against homosexual persons."

Cardinal calls crisis a lesson

PHILADELPHIA (CNS) — Now that the presidential impeachment process is over, Cardinal Anthony J. Bevilacqua of Philadelphia expressed hope that Americans have "a new respect for absolute moral truth."

"Truth is not relevant to one's own situation. Truth is unequivocal, unchanging and absolute," the cardinal said in a Feb. 12 statement after the U.S. Senate acquitted President Clinton on two counts in his impeachment trial.

"This crisis has brought truth and morality to the forefront of the American people," Cardinal Bevilacqua added. "I hope, as well, that this impeachment process has prompted more people to think about the value of living moral lives."

Clinton had been charged with lying to the grand jury and obstructing justice in the Paula Jones case in an attempt to conceal his relationship with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

Cardinal Bevilacqua, who has taken no position on presidential impeachment or censure, urged Americans to "move forward from a presidential crisis that has torn at the moral fiber of this country."

"We will fail as a people if we do not recognize the lessons which must be learned from our country's moral and spiritual climate over the past year," he said, calling for "a new appreciation for issues of truth, personal responsibility and moral conscience."



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