

Cardinal says Church in Europe is 'suffering from fatigue'



Look to Africa for inspiration, says Cardinal

Ravasi

Christianity throughout Europe is "suffering from fatigue" and must look to the example of Christian churches in Africa for inspiration, a cardinal and one of the heads of the Vatican's councils said Thursday.

"We Europeans represent a form of Christianity that sometimes seems to be tired, suffering from fatigue," said Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, the head of the Pontifical Council for Culture.

African Christianity, on the other hand, "shines as a beacon, as an example for other continents," he said.

Ravasi spoke Thursday at a two-day event hosted by the pan-African bishops' conference -- known as the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of African and Madagascar (SECAM) -- in celebration of the ceremonies Sunday at the Vatican canonizing Popes John XXIII and John Paul II.

The event, held at the Pontifical Urban University, is dedicated both as an homage to the role of the two popes on the African continent and a look-ahead to the role Africa will play in the church in the coming years. It is titled, "The Church in Africa: From the Second Vatican Council to the Third Millennium."

As the event opened Thursday, several speakers went to lengths to thank the two 20th-century pontiffs for their work to include Africans more prominently in the global church and wider society.

As one speaker at the conference put it: "These two popes decided to pull down the wall of racism."

"At a time when we were being marginalized, when racism was not even permitting us to breed ... [these popes] said we are good," said Fr. John Egbulefu, a Nigerian theologian at the university.

Mentioning that John XXIII, who headed the church from 1958 to 1963, was the first pope to make an African prelate a cardinal, Egbulefu said, "To admit a man into the cardinals' college, that means to say he is capable of being pope."

"That was not a cheap action to undertake," Egbulefu said.

Likewise, Egbulefu said, John Paul II spoke out in the 1980s against the apartheid regime in South Africa, even refusing to kiss the country's ground when the papal plane was forced by weather to land there in 1988.

Archbishop Gabriel Mbilingi, who heads the archdiocese of Lubango in Angola and is SECAM's president, said the canonizations are a "great event" for the church.

"If we are allowed to express in the African way the canonizations, we would say ... that we are at the eve of a celebration of a great event of our church, the family of God, in which two fathers will be given as a model for our life of faith," Mbilingi said.

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