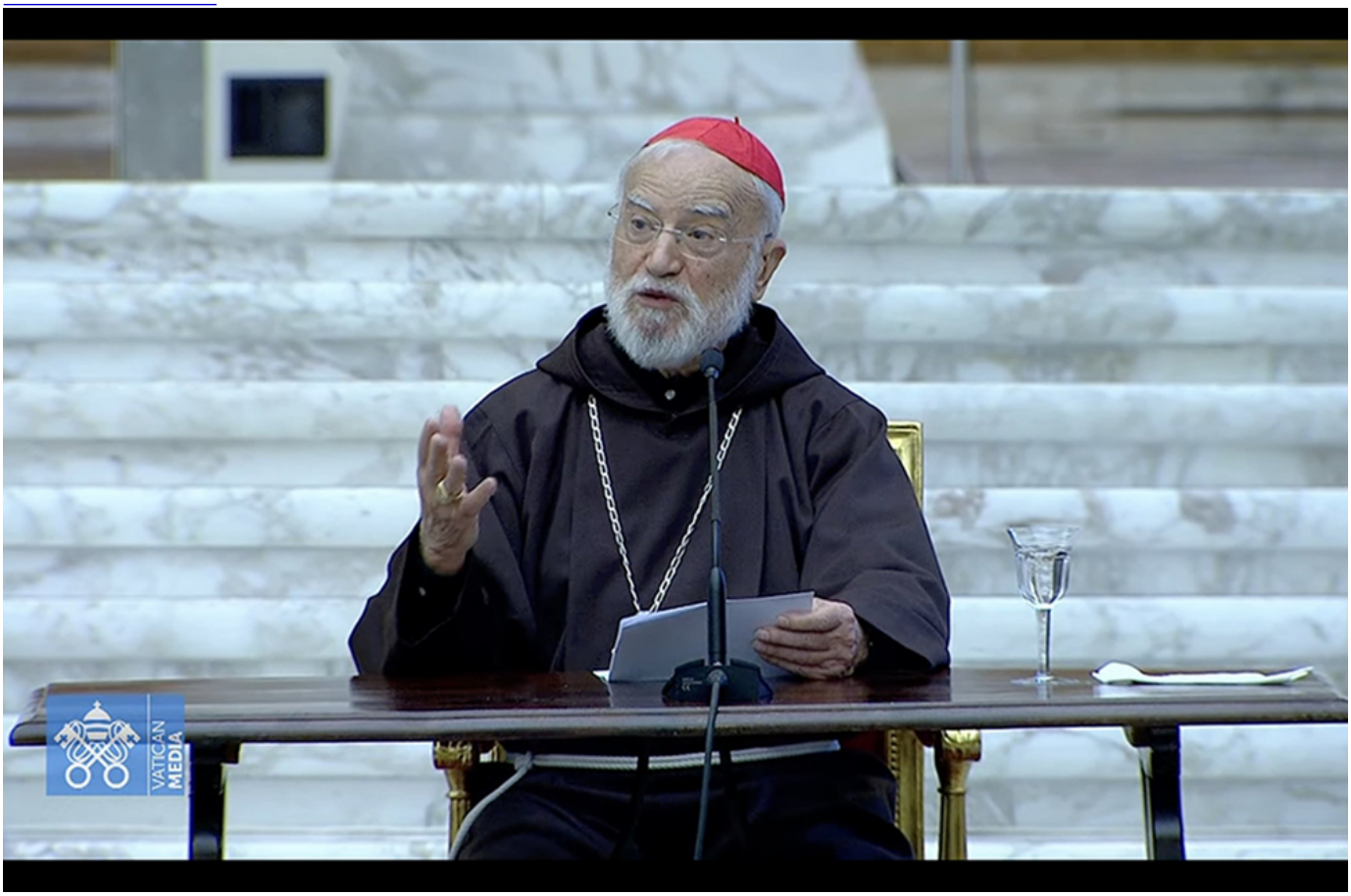
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Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher of the papal household, offers a Lenten meditation for members of the Roman Curia and Vatican employees in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican March 1, 2024. (CNS screengrab/Vatican Media)



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Western theology risks becoming an abstract and rationalized conversation among academics rather than a tool for nourishing the faith of God's people, the papal preacher said.

"Theology, above all in the West, has increasingly moved away from the power of the Spirit to rely on human wisdom," Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, told members of the Roman Curia during a Lenten meditation March 1.

Pope Francis did not attend the meditation, though Cantalmessa told those present that the pope was following his talk remotely. Several other cardinals were in attendance.

Modern rationalism has "demanded that Christianity present its message dialectically," subjecting it to modes of research and discussion that are philosophically acceptable, he said. But "the danger inherent in this approach to theology is that God becomes objectified, he becomes an object which we talk about, not a subject with whom or in whose presence we talk."

A purely rationalistic form of theology makes it become "more and more a dialogue with the academic elite of the moment and less and less nourishment for the faith of God's people," the cardinal said.

"You only get out of this situation by prayer, by talking to God before you even talk about God," he said. Quoting St. Evagrius Ponticus, a fourth-century Christian monk, Cantalamessa said, "If you are a theologian, you will truly pray, and if you truly pray

you will be a theologian." He then cited the example of St. Augustine, who he said produced his "most lasting" theology through speaking with God in his *Confessions*.

Faith, he noted, "does not oppose reason, but supposes reason, just as grace supposes nature."

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Reflecting on Jesus' words from St. John's Gospel — "I am the light of the world" — Cantalamessa said that Jesus is like the sun whose radiance does not reveal itself but rather the things of the world in their proper light.

For this reason, the cardinal said, St. John urged people in his letters not to love the things of the world, since they are the source of lust and pride. Worldliness, he said, "is the equivalent in the religious and spiritual environment to what in the social sphere we call secularization."

"This is the most necessary fast of all today: fasting from the world," Cantalamessa said.

Yet the cardinal was quick to note that the world he referred to is not "the world created and loved by God," nor the people of the world "whom, on the contrary, we must always go meet, especially the poor, the last, the suffering."

In fact, "mixing oneself with this world of suffering and marginalization is paradoxically the best way of separating oneself from the world," since it removes one from the "principle that the world rests on: selfishness."

Cantalamessa said the root cause behind the modern spirit of worldliness is "the crisis of faith," since it is faith that makes Christians "no longer of the world."

"Christ substitutes the worldly model," which he said is governed its own trinity: pleasure, power and money. "But are we sure that in our own small way, we ourselves are immune to it?"

However, the cardinal said Christians can be consoled by Jesus' prayer to his father for his disciples in St. John's Gospel: "I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one," Jesus prayed. "As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world."