

## The pope's intervention for Africa

John L. Allen Jr. | Aug. 4, 2006 All Things Catholic

Speaking of Africa, Fr. J. M. Pérez Charlin of the Missionary Society of Africa, the erstwhile "White Fathers," has recently penned an essay examining the messages of Benedict XVI to bishops from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Congo, Senegal, Mauritania, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Cape Verde, Cameroon and Ghana making *ad limina* visits during the last year. Collectively, Pérez suggests, they amount to a papal "State of the Union" assessment of Africa.

The pope's most direct appeal came in an address to the bishops of Congo: "I invite the international community not to forget Africa."

It's worth noting that over his first year and a half in office, Pope Benedict has spoken about Africa roughly four times more often than he has about sexual morality, though one wouldn't know it from disproportionate Western interest in the sexual topics.

Pérez found 10 themes in Benedict's meditations on Africa: peace and reconciliation, inculturation, formation, unity and diversity, the family, inter-religious dialogue and ecumenism, youth, social inequality, pastoral solidarity, and the upcoming anniversaries of several African churches.

Over the years, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger had expressed reservations about "inculturation," worrying about a sort of relativism in which core Christian ideals or practices are set aside in the name of cultural diversity. Indeed, Benedict picked up this concern with the African bishops, warning that despite widespread polygamy in African cultures, spouses are called to "radical fidelity to the new life" in Christ. He told bishops from Ghana that the church must strive to "purify practices opposed to the gospel."

In general, however, Benedict endorsed efforts to preserve local African cultures threatened by the onslaught of globalization. In particular, he called on Africans to defend their spiritual and moral heritage in the face of an aggressively secularizing, Western-dominated global culture.

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