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Vatican's pop culture guru Gianfranco Ravasi backpedals his tribute to rocker Lou Reed

by Eric J. Lyman by Religion News Service

Rome — The Vatican's pop culture guru, Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, says his Twitter message paying homage to hard-partying rocker Lou Reed was meant to praise his music, not his drug-influenced lifestyle.

Ravasi, an Italian cardinal and the head of the Pontifical Council for Culture, reacted to Reed's death Monday with a tweet made up of some of the lyrics from "Perfect Day," Reed's 1972 cult classic. Given Reed's provocative lifestyle, the tweet shocked many Vatican watchers.

But Ravasi made it clear -- with a tweet six hours later -- that he did not condone drug references in the song, or Reed's lifestyle. That tweet warned, "Don't fool yourselves," before closing with another quote from the song (translated into Italian): "You're going to reap just what you sow."

Ravasi and Reed were nearly the same age, born seven months apart in 1942.

Ravasi, who was considered a leading candidate to become pope in the March conclave that selected Pope Francis, is no stranger to pop music-related controversy. In January, he expressed admiration for the music of another controversial rocker: Amy Winehouse, who died 18 months earlier from alcohol poisoning.

"To understand youth, I listen to Amy Winehouse," he told surprised observers at the time.

The message from Ravasi is not the first time Reed and the Vatican crossed paths: In 2000, Reed performed at a church jubilee celebration for an audience that included Pope John Paul II, earning negative reviews from religious media who weren't pleased with the songs he chose for the event, including "Perfect Day."

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