

Voices From Catholic Africa: Church Modernization Is a Mistake

Over the past century, the **Catholic Church** has been growing fastest in one of the regions other **Catholics** know least. Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for only one percent of the world Catholic population in 1910. By 2010, that had jumped to 16 percent.

The faith here has a strength and exuberance that reminds some of early Christians. "These people are living a kind of New Testament experience," says U.S. theologian George Weigel.

It is also highly **conservative**. Interviews in Luwero, a town in central Uganda, elicited moral stands so strict they would surprise Catholics in the West, as well as deep concern about poverty and justice.

"Modernization has spoiled Catholics a little bit and they think they have to do whatever they want," said Joseph Lwevuze, 58, who grows pineapples, coffee and other crops in a nearby village and teaches catechism at his local church. "**Homosexuality** is a globalization issue," he said to illustrate his point. "It's a virus, if I can use today's computer language. It's a computer virus that's spreading. Even animals do not do it."

Demands from Europe or the United States for **reform** of Church attitudes meet stiff opposition here. "The new pope needs to maintain and even tighten traditional Church teaching," said brick maker Frederick Lule, 25, who struggles to feed his wife and two children, but honors the Catholic ban on artificial **birth control** and **abortion**.

"I think those pills they give women bring diseases," said Joanina Nansubuga, a 35-year-old mother of seven, one of few who did not object to the idea of married priests.

“If you allow priests to marry, then the Catholic Church will start to crumble,” objected Edward Sindamanya, 64, who walked from his hamlet to Our Lady Queen of Peace Cathedral to pay his tithe and say a rosary. “I’ve also heard women want to be allowed to be priests. That can’t be.”

What these Catholics wanted most from the next **pope** was more help to fight **poverty** and provide better education and health facilities.

“The gospel should be translated into action so there are equal opportunities for the African farmer to sell coffee to Europe and get better prices,” said Rev. Gerald Wamala, 36, a local priest and head of the local church AIDS program. “It would be great for the new pope to speak out on equity in international trade.”

Edited by Tom Heneghan and Sara Ledwith.

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