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Southern Christianity in Motion

The last three *Prophecy Watch* columns by Charles F. Whitaker have described a trend known as "Southern Christianity." While Europe has become increasingly secular and North American Christianity has become extremely liberal, a morally conservative, Pentecostal-type Christianity is growing in the Southern Hemisphere and beginning to make its presence known.

The Episcopal Church's recent decision to elect unrepentant homosexual Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire is a prime example of the trend to liberalize. Even before the fateful vote was cast, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams—the leader of the Anglican Communion, of which the Episcopal Church is a part—issued a thinly veiled warning against the appointment. His major concern, though, was organizational unity rather than morality or biblical truth.

Others, however, were much more bold in their statements. "It's wrong, and it's against the Bible," said the Reverend Joseph Mutie Kanuku, the bishop of the Machakos diocese east of Nairobi. "How can we go against God's words? Two men being joined is contrary to nature and contrary to the Bible." African homosexuals remain closeted in all but South Africa, where there is somewhat more openness toward them. African leaders regularly condemn homosexuality as a Western lifestyle choice being exported abroad. Anglican bishops across Kenya, where there are more than three million church members, signed a letter of protest following the appointment of Robinson. One signatory said, "You in the West may not consider it a sin, but we in Africa do. We stand with the Bible. When we are wrong, those in the West should tell us. We are telling them this is wrong."

The opposition was just as fierce in Asia, where bishops are considering cutting ties with the 3.2 million members of the Episcopal Church USA. "Practicing homosexuality is culturally and legally not acceptable here," Bishop Lim Cheng Ean, leader of the Anglican Church of West Malaysia, told the Associated Press. In addition, the Right Reverend Dr. Mouneer Anis, Bishop in Egypt, said: "We cannot comprehend a decision to elect as bishop a man who has forsaken his wife and the vows he made to her to live in a sexual relationship with another man outside the bonds of his marriage."

Even though the Anglican Communion as a whole has been struggling with the issue of homosexuality for the last three decades, earlier this year bishops from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, representing more than a third of Anglican Communion members worldwide, severed relations with the Diocese of New Westminster, based in Vancouver, British Columbia, because it authorizes same-sex "blessings."

Roman Catholicism and Homosexuality

The American branch of the Roman Church is still battling the scandals caused by sexual abuse of children by priests, and almost 60% of Canadian Catholics are in favor of same-sex "marriages." Even so, the Vatican is vehemently opposed to homosexual unions, issuing a strongly worded statement urging Roman Catholic lawmakers and others to fight back on this issue. "There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely

analogous to God's plan for marriage and family," the document says, asserting repeatedly that marriage should be reserved for heterosexual couples. "Marriage is holy, while homosexual acts go against the natural moral law." The conservatism of the Catholics on this issue seems to be right in line with the moral stance of Southern Christianity.

Zenit, the official news agency of the Vatican, recently released a study of laws around the world that favor the homosexual lifestyle. All of the countries in the study were in North America and Europe, and most of them are nations descended from ancient Israel.

AIDS Devastation

» The Associated Press reports that South Africa is entering the "death" phase of its AIDS epidemic, meaning there are more deaths than new infections each year. While adult HIV/AIDS prevalence in the country is starting to plateau at around 33% of the population, sickness and death are on the increase as the disease kills off workers in Africa's strongest economy. Scientists say South Africa's real AIDS death toll is hard to quantify because government statistics list many probable AIDS fatalities as deaths due to tuberculosis and other common HIV-related opportunistic infections. But activists say AIDS kills about 600 South Africans each day—or over 200,000 per year.

» South Africa certainly is not alone in facing this epidemic. According to the *Washington Post*, the number of Americans developing AIDS appears to be rising again for the first time in ten years. The number of *new* AIDS cases increased 2.2% in 2002, the first apparent rise since 1993. In that year, 80,010 new cases were diagnosed. The number of new infections has declined since then, but the number of new AIDS diagnoses increased from 41,227 cases in 2001 to 42,136 cases in 2002. In the past few years, there has been evidence that unprotected sex, sex with multiple partners, and other risky sexual behaviors has been increasing among gay men, particularly younger ones, causing the number of new HIV infections to begin to rise again in that group. According to the CDC, an estimated 850,000 to 950,000 Americans are infected with HIV, but only about a quarter of them are aware that they are HIV-positive. The *New York Times* says almost 10%—80,000—of HIV-infected Americans live in New York City.