African Churches Split With Pope's Condom Stance

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A firestorm of controversy erupted earlier this week when Pope Benedict XVI told reporters that condom distribution "aggravates the problems" of HIV/AIDS, The Associated Press (AP) reports.

According to the article, 14 South African nuns who work with HIV-positive people have formed the Sisters for Justice to protest the church's long-standing rejection of condoms. Several years ago, bishops in sub-Saharan Africa declared that serodiscordant married couples should use condoms.

Luzia Gaspar, a Catholic and a nurse for 31 years who trains traditional midwives outside Luanda, Angola, hopes Benedict reconsiders. "It's very dangerous. If we do not counsel people to use condoms, we are condemning them to almost certain death," Gaspar said. "I pray for God and for the pope that this doctrine must change."

The pope made the comment while on his first pilgrimage to Africa, where the number of Catholics has skyrocketed over the past century from fewer than 2 million to nearly 140 million. However, many Catholic churches on the continent reject the pope's—and the Vatican's—strict stance against condoms as HIV prevention.

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