

# Cardinal Turkson says African Catholics have numbers, but faith must mature

While the Catholic Church in Africa is experiencing rapid growth and large numbers of religious vocations, Cardinal Peter Turkson of Cape Coast, Ghana, said he worries about the nature of the growth.

In an interview with The Catholic Review during a visit to Baltimore May 18- 19, Cardinal Turkson said it is not enough to have large numbers of people on parish registries and in Catholic schools. The church must also encourage genuine conversion, he said.

“It is true that the church in Africa is thriving,” Cardinal Turkson said. “But we also have had a certain type of catechesis that is not too deep. Traditional cultures and values are not too radically transformed by the values of the Gospel. We need a more deeply rooted experience of conversion.”

Cardinal Turkson pointed to the genocide and war that has plagued Rwanda as an example of how some Catholics on his continent have not fully embraced the Gospel message.

“It was supposed to be 80 percent Catholic, but they forgot they were Catholic and they forgot they were Christian,” Cardinal Turkson said. “There was terrible loss of life. Evangelization needs to be radical so that traditional values are challenged and transformed.”

Cardinal Turkson said he is saddened to see the church struggling in Europe. It was European missionaries who brought the Catholic faith to Africa. Catholics of his continent look to Europeans as their spiritual parents, he said.

“It’s indispensable that we see Christianity come back to Europe,” said Cardinal Turkson. “If Europe should become less Christian, it gives us a sense of being orphans, of having an experience of faith without parents.”

Cardinal Turkson said it hurts evangelization efforts in Africa when people look at Europe and see that those who encouraged Africans to embrace the faith are now abandoning it.

“I’m glad the new pope is from the north again,” said Cardinal Turkson, who celebrated a May 19 Mass of Thanksgiving for Pope Benedict XVI at the Shrine of St. Anthony in Ellicott City. “I pray that the fact that he comes from Europe will provide a new springtime of faith for Europe.”

In a diocese made up of about 300,000 Catholics, Cardinal Turkson said he is encouraged that many men and women respond to the call to religious life. Two years ago, 17 men were ordained to the priesthood in Cape Coast. Religious formation must ensure that candidates “embrace the sacrifices that are involved,” he said.

Because of the high number of vocations, Cardinal Turkson sends some of his priests to other parts of the world where few are available. There are currently four of his Cape Coast priests in Canada, two in Seattle and several in New York and Europe. The cardinal is studying sending clerics to South Africa, he said.

Cardinal Turkson visited Baltimore on his way to Connecticut for the ordination of a Franciscan friar.

In addition to meeting with Cardinal William H. Keeler and Washington Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Ghana’s first cardinal also celebrated a Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington.

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