Preaching to the Seroconverted

Is the Vatican inching toward latex love?

July 1, 2006 By Bob Ickes

On April 23, the Vatican announced a scenario that many of the world's 1.1 billion Catholics might consider as unorthodox as, say, *The Da Vinci Code*. After two millennia of demonizing contraception, the Holy See said it would undertake a "moral study" of whether condoms might be a "lesser evil" in the fight against AIDS and other illnesses. Pope Benedict XVI himself demanded the inquiry, all the more surprising given that the pontiff, in his former life as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, personally policed Pope John Paul II's anticondom agenda. AIDS killed more than 30 million people during John Paul's 27-year reign—ravaging, as *POZ* noted last year, the developing nations he embraced.

Vatican health czar Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragan declared: "Soon, the Vatican will issue a document about the use of condoms by persons who have grave diseases, starting with AIDS. My department is carefully studying it, along with scientists and theologians." A Harris Poll last year disclosed that most U.S. Catholics require no further proof: 90% support condoms and other contraceptives.

Former papal contender Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini unleashed the lesser-evil spin, drawing upon the ancient Catholic Doctrine of Double Effect. It stipulates, basically, that an action with an unintended evil result (e.g., blocking procreation) may be tolerated along with a morally desirable result (preserving health). Vatican officials would not comment to *POZ* on the specific nature of the study or its due date. Hence the speculation: (1) Is it a sop to the undeveloped countries that are so key to church growth?; (2) Will it spur a blanket endorsement of rubbers and other contraception? To which the answers are (1) "probably"; and (2) "get real." Amid all the hoo-ha greeting the announcement, many media accounts somehow forgot that the church was "studying" condom morality only among serodiscordant married couples, where AIDS could "imperil" the "sanctity of marriage." Critics noted that globally, the vast majority of AIDS infections occur outside of marriage. In developing nations, however, husbands are indeed the leading source of female infection. Perhaps, while stretching ancient dogma into the 21st century, the study should also analyze *this* greater evil.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Preaching-to-the-Seroconverted-7001-2263