

What is happening in the Church?

This column strives to keep the reader up to date with some of the more important statements, events, challenges that confront the Church in Canada, Rome and the world. Keeping in mind the fact that the Church militant does not just consist in the works of Tradition, but in all those who keep the true Faith, even if they do not love and defend it as they ought, it hopes to keep Catholics aware of good and positive developments, as well as the betrayals of modernism, in order to understand the situation of the Church in all the complexity of its reality.

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..... Note on the remarks of Benedict XVI concerning condom use

In a book-length interview entitled *Light of the World*, which was released in German, Italian and English on November 23, 2010, Benedict XVI admits, for the first time, the use of condoms “in certain cases” “to reduce the risks of infection” by the AIDS virus. These erroneous remarks require clarification and correction, for their disastrous effects—which a media campaign has not failed to exploit—cause scandal and disarray among the faithful.

I. What Benedict XVI said

To the question, “Are you saying, then, that the Catholic Church is actually not opposed in principle to the use of condoms?” the pope answered, according to the authorized English translation of the original German version, “She of course does not regard it as a real or moral solution, but, in this or that case, there can be nonetheless, in the intention of reducing the risk of infection, a first step in a movement toward a different way, a more human way, of living sexuality.”

To illustrate his statement, the pope gives only one example, that of a “male prostitute”. He considers that, in this particular case, it “can be a first step in the direction of a moralization, a first assumption of responsibility, on the way toward recovering an awareness that not everything is allowed and that one cannot do whatever one wants.”

The case in question, therefore, concerns someone who, while already committing an act contrary to nature, for mercenary reasons, would take care not to infect his client fatally in addition.

2. What Benedict XVI intended to say

These remarks by the pope have been perceived by the media and by militant movements in favor of contraception, as a “revolution”, a “turning point”, or at the very least a “break” in the constant moral teaching of the Church on the use of contraceptives. That is why the spokesman for the

Vatican, Fr. Federico Lombardi, issued an explanatory note on November 21 in which we read: “the Pope considers an exceptional circumstance in which the exercise of sexuality represents a real threat for the life of another. In that case, the Pope does not morally justify the disordered exercise of sexuality but maintains that the use of a condom to reduce the danger of infection may be ‘a first act of responsibility,’ ‘a first step on the road toward a more human sexuality,’ rather than not using it and exposing the other to risking his life.”



It is appropriate to note here, to be exact, that the pope speaks not only about “a first act of responsibility” but also about “a first step in the direction of a moralization”. Along these same lines, Cardinal Georges Cottier, who was the theologian of the papal residence under John Paul II and at the beginning of the pontificate of Benedict XVI, had declared during an interview with the news agency Apcom on January 31, 2005: “In some particular situations—and I am thinking about environments where drugs are circulated or where great human promiscuity and great poverty prevail, as in certain regions of Africa and Asia—in those cases, the use of condoms can be considered legitimate.”

Legitimacy of condom use, regarded as a step toward moralization, in certain cases: that is the problem posed by the pope's remarks in *Light of the World*.

3. What Benedict XVI did not say

To the journalist's clear question, "'Are you saying, then, that the Catholic Church is actually not opposed in principle to the use of condoms?' the pope answers by citing an exceptional situation, and he does not recall that the Church is always fundamentally opposed to condom use.

Now the fact that condom use is an intrinsically immoral action, and matter for mortal sin, is a constant point in the traditional teaching of the Church, for example in the writings of Pius XI and Pius XII, and even in the thought of Benedict XVI when he says to the journalist who is questioning him, "[The Church] of course does not regard [the condom] as a real or moral solution," but nevertheless the pope allows it "in certain cases". But that is inadmissible from the perspective of the faith. "No reason," Pius XI teaches in *Casti Connubii*, 54, "however grave, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good." Pius XII recalls this in his *Address to Midwives* (October 29, 1951): "No 'indication' or necessity can turn an intrinsically immoral action into a moral and licit act." Saint Paul condemned the opinion that evil may be done so that good may come of it (see *Romans 3:8*).

Benedict XVI seems to consider the case of the male prostitute according to the principles of "gradual morality" which claims to allow certain less serious crimes so as to lead delinquents progressively from extremely serious crimes to harmless behavior. These lesser crimes would not be moral, no doubt, but the fact that they are part of a path toward virtue would render them licit. Now this idea is a serious error because a lesser evil remains an evil, whatever improvement it may indicate. As Paul VI teaches in *Humanae vitae* (no. 14), "Though it is true that sometimes it is lawful to tolerate a lesser moral evil in order to avoid a greater evil or in order to promote a greater good, it is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil that good may come of it (cf. *Romans 3:8*)—in other words, to intend directly something which of its very nature contradicts the moral order, and which must therefore be judged unworthy of man, even though the intention is to protect or promote the welfare of an individual, of a family or of society in general."

Tolerating a lesser evil is not the same as making that evil "legitimate", nor including it in a process of "moralization". *Humanae vitae* (no. 14) recalls that "it is a serious error to think that a whole married life of otherwise normal relations can justify sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive and so intrinsically wrong," just as one must say that it is an error to propose the idea that a condom, which in itself is wrong, could be made right by the hoped-for path toward virtue of a male prostitute who uses it.

As opposed to a weaning process that would lead from a sin that is "more mortal" to one that is "less mortal", evangelical teaching clearly affirms: "Go and now sin no more" (*John 8:11*) and not "go and sin less".

4. What Catholics need to hear

Certainly, a book-length interview cannot be considered an act of the Magisterium [i.e. of the Church's official teaching authority], a fortiori when it departs from what has been taught in a definitive, unchangeable way. Nonetheless the fact remains that the doctors and pharmacists who courageously refuse to prescribe and deliver condoms and contraceptives out of fidelity to their Catholic faith and morality, and in general all the many families devoted to

Tradition, have an urgent and overriding need to hear that the perennial teaching of the Church could not change over time. They all await the firm reminder that the natural law, like human nature upon which it is engraved, is universal.

Now in *Light of the World* we find a statement that relativizes the teaching of *Humanae vitae* by describing those who follow it faithfully as "deeply convinced minorities" who offer the others "a fascinating model to follow". As if the Encyclical by Paul VI set an ideal almost out of reach, which is what the great majority of bishops had already persuaded themselves of, so as to slip that teaching more readily under the bushel basket—precisely where Christ forbids us to place "the light of the world" (*Matthew 5:14*).

Should the demands of the Gospel become, unfortunately, the exception destined to confirm the general rule of the hedonistic world in which we live? The Christian must not be conformed to this world (see *Romans 12:2*), but rather must transform it as "the leaven in the dough" (see *Matthew 13:33*) and give it the taste of Divine Wisdom as "the salt of the earth" (*Matthew 5:13*).

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"No 'indication' or necessity can turn an intrinsically immoral action into a moral and licit act"
(Pius XII, *Address to the Italian Catholic Union of Midwives*, October 29, 1951).

"No reason, however grave, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good"
(Pius XI, *Encyclical Casti Connubii*, 54).

Now the use of condoms is contrary to nature inasmuch as it deflects a human act from its natural end. Their use therefore remains immoral always.