



4.23 If the Church wants to protect life, why is it against distributing condoms in Africa?



A few years ago, Pope Benedict XVI was on a plane to Cameroon when he told the media that distributing condoms was not the solution to the AIDS epidemic in Africa, that it even makes the problem worse. This caused an immense uproar of criticism, and most media completely ignored the rest of his seven-day visit to Africa. The pope later explained that “the sheer fixation on the condom implies a banalization of sexuality, which, after all, is precisely the dangerous source of the attitude of no longer seeing sexuality as the expression of love (SEE TWEET 4.20), but only a sort of drug that people administer to themselves” (SEEWALD, LIGHT OF THE WORLD, p. 118). The focus should be on love – not the condom!

Condoms are no solution

It is often said that the best solution for Africa’s AIDS problem is to distribute condoms. There are scientific studies, however, that cast doubt on the results of such a policy. Therefore, many official help

organizations encourage the abc method: Abstinence, Be Faithful, Condom Use. Abstinence before marriage and faithfulness in marriage remain the ideal way to avoid sexually transmitted diseases, which is a deeply Christian approach. Increasingly, the use of condoms is seen even by secular experts as a last resort. It will not solve the underlying cause of AIDS, in which a distorted vision of human sexuality plays an important role.

The beauty of sexuality

The use of condoms, to prevent either the spread of disease or pregnancy, goes against what God intended for human sexuality (SEE BOX). The Church works hard to fight AIDS all over the world. In many countries, Catholic hospitals are the ones treating patients and helping them to prevent further spread of HIV. But the best way to fight AIDS is to rediscover the beautiful meaning and purpose of human sexuality (SEE TWEET 4.20). In this sense, the C of the ABC method could stand for “chastity” (SEE TWEET 4.22).

Is there also a good way to avoid pregnancy?

Artificial birth control methods such as the pill and condoms prevent the conception or the implantation of a new human being (SEE TWEET 4.26). By suppressing fertility during the sexual act, these artificial means prevent a couple not only from being open to the possibility of life but also from giving and receiving each other totally. Both are in contradiction with the Christian view of sexuality.

Natural Family Planning (NFP) (SEE TWEET 4.25), on the other hand, is very different. As a method of fertility awareness, it helps couples to know when to have sex based on whether they want to avoid or to achieve pregnancy. NFP does not suppress a person’s fertility. Women who use NFP report that they are healthier than they would be if they were using chemical contraceptives.

The big problem with condoms, and with all artificial methods of birth control, is the trivialization of sex their use presupposes. They also give a false sense of safety, that is, that by using condoms we can completely prevent the natural consequences of our sexual behavior. Condoms don’t always succeed in

Read more

Birth control: CCC 2370, 2391; CCCC 498; YOUCAT 421. Condoms and HIV: YOUCAT 414.

preventing pregnancy or the spread of terrible diseases. Given the facts about sex, the Church reasonably concludes that sexual intimacy ought to be a profound expression of both committed love and openness to the possibility of new human life.

As John Paul II wrote: “When couples, by means of recourse to contraception separate these two meanings that God the Creator has inscribed in the being of man and woman . . . they ‘manipulate’ and degrade human sexuality – and with it themselves” (FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO, 32).

Avoiding conception

Nevertheless, there could be times when it would be responsible for a couple to avoid having a child. For example, when one of the spouses is ill, when the spouses are struggling to make ends meet or to raise the children they already have, when the family is fleeing war or oppression. But you do not need contraceptives to avoid pregnancy for a period of time. Married people can choose not to have sex for a while or at least not during times of fertility (SEE BOX).



Condoms don’t solve the problem of sexually transmitted diseases. What would help is a different understanding of sexuality!