

Pope says condoms can be justified for male prostitutes

Pope Benedict says condom use may be justified in some specific cases, such as when a male prostitute is trying to prevent HIV infection, in a new interview that has the pontiff deviating from the Catholic Church's line on contraception.

The Pope's comments are published in a new book, scheduled to be published next week, entitled "Light of the World: The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times." The Vatican's newspaper published excerpts from the book on Saturday.

While the Catholic Church is staunchly against artificial contraception, Benedict said condoms for male prostitutes may be justifiable "in the intention of reducing the risk of infection."

He also pointed out that condom use among prostitutes is "a first step toward moralization," and said condoms are "not really the way to deal with the evil of HIV infection."

Benedict has long been known as a conservative interpreter of Church doctrine. He drew sharp rebukes from world leaders and health experts alike in 2009, when he told reporters while on a trip to Africa that condoms would only worsen the AIDS crisis on the continent.

The Vatican was forced to issue a statement saying that the Pope's comments reflected his concern that talk of contraception prevented discussions about responsible sexual behaviour.

Before becoming Pope, when he was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger of Germany, many of his countrymen considered him responsible for Vatican declarations prohibiting priests from counselling pregnant teenagers about their options.

Christian Weisner, of the German pro church-reform group We Are Church, said Saturday that Benedict's comments were "surprising. And if that's the case one can be happy about the pope's ability to learn."

In the wide-ranging interview, the 78-year-old pontiff also said that a pope is in any way incapable of performing his job, then he has "the right and, under some circumstances, also an obligation to resign."

With files from The Associated Press

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