

Pope-posterous, Condom remark warrants an apology

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function goPage(newindex) { currentLocation = getThisPage(); cleanedLocation = ""; // If this is an SHTML request. if
(currentLocation.indexOf(".shtml") > -1) { // Detect if this is a request that already has a page specification. if (currentLocation.indexOf("-page")
> -1) { cleanedLocation = currentLocation.substring(0, currentLocation.indexOf("-page")) + '.shtml'; } else { cleanedLocation = currentLocation;
} // Only add the "-pageX" suffix when the page index is higher than 1. if (newindex != 1) { cleanedLocation = cleanedLocation.substring(0,
cleanedLocation.indexOf(".shtml")) + '-page' + newindex + '.shtml'; } } else { // Only add the "-pageX" suffix when the page index is higher than
1. if (newindex != 1) { cleanedLocation = currentLocation + '&page=' + newindex; } else { cleanedLocation = currentLocation; } }
document.location = cleanedLocation; } function getThisPage() { currentURL = " + window.document.location; thispageresult = ""; if
(currentURL.indexOf("?page=") > -1) { currentURL = currentURL.substring(0, currentURL.indexOf("?page=")); thispageresult = currentURL; }
else if (currentURL.indexOf("&page=") > -1) { currentURL = currentURL.substring(0, currentURL.indexOf("&page=")); thispageresult =
currentURL; } else { thispageresult = currentURL; } // Make sure the URL generated by this fuction is compatible with mirror image.
thispageresult = thispageresult.substring(7, thispageresult.length); thispageresult = thispageresult.substring(thispageresult.indexOf('/')+1,
thispageresult.length); thispageresult = basehref + thispageresult; if (thispageresult.indexOf('sourcedomain') > -1) { thispageresult =
thispageresult.substring(0, thispageresult.indexOf('?')); } return thispageresult; } Science and religion have often had their differences, but
when Pope Benedict XVI said that condoms make the African AIDS epidemic even worse, religious politics hit a whole new level.
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While visiting Africa in March, the pontiff told reporters "you cannot resolve (the spreading of HIV) with distribution of condoms" and "on the contrary, it increases it," according to *The Boston Globe*.

The bold claim garnered a mass of criticism by medical and health organizations. The Associated Press reported the statement was chastised by France, Germany and an AIDS-fighting United Nations agency as "irresponsible and dangerous."

Also, according to CNN, thousands have pledged to send the Vatican condoms in protest.

It is almost understandable why the pope would make such declaration. Condoms cannot be the sole agent in the struggle against HIV.

Besides, the man is Catholic. Obviously, Benedict does not approve of any form of contraception, and the Roman Catholic Church certainly does not condone premarital sex.

But to state that condom use enlarges the rate of infections is utterly absurd.

Regardless, several Catholic figureheads have remained supportive of the pope's remark.

The Vatican felt compelled to step in and say that "Benedict wanted to stress that a reliance on condoms distracted from the need for proper education in sexual conduct," according to The Associated Press.

Then again, if the pontiff really meant to say something to that effect, why didn't he?

After all, Benedict already knew the questions. According to The Associated Press, the Vatican asks reporters to submit questions in advance and then makes a selection, giving Benedict time to prepare a response.

If Benedict wanted to, he could have been as clear and eloquent as possible.

The pope could have said, "Abstinence is the best defense against HIV."

The pope could have said, "A reduction of rape and sexual abuse would severely curb transmission."

Benedict could have made note of how widespread polygamy and intergenerational relationships can make containing the virus difficult.

Instead, the pontiff took his time with the press to demonize man's most practical tool for safe sex.

The British medical journal, *The Lancet*, wrote, "When any influential person, be it a religious or political leader, makes a false scientific statement that could be devastating to the health of millions of people, they should retract or correct the public record."

The pope should repent publicly for his statement. Lord knows he's had to do it in the past.

It isn't wrong to declare that condoms are not the end-all solution to sexually transmitted diseases.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "It should be noted that condom use cannot provide absolute protection against HIV. The surest way to avoid transmission of HIV is to abstain from sexual intercourse or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has tested and you know is uninfected."

However, to pronounce that condoms are making transmission increasingly worse is not fair to those who do not know any better. When the most powerful man in religion makes a blunt and erroneous claim on a matter of health and safety, it becomes appropriate to be more critical.

Science and religion do not have to pose as adversaries, but when the bishop of Rome makes assertions like this, it makes it hard not to notice the discrepancy.

Clint Fullen is a columnist for The Arkansas Traveler. His column appears every other Wednesday.

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