

# The Pope's critics are in the grip of dogma

Condoms are not the only way to combat Aids in Africa, says Anthony McCarthy, and the Pope is right to focus on abstinence and monogamy.

By Anthony McCarthy

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The Pope has, again, [made a “controversial” statement](#) that has provoked “outrage”. He spoke of humanising sexuality, i.e. treating sexual activity as an expression of fully human and committed love. That message certainly is controversial to modern ears - as was Christ’s own upholding of the sanctity of marriage and condemnation of sexual activity damaging of commitment to it.

Researchers at the Harvard AIDS Prevention Research Project recently reminded us that in every African country in which HIV infections have declined, this decline has been associated with a decrease in multiple partners and often premarital sex as well. This is not true of use of condoms.

Many countries that have seen marked increases in condom use have not seen any decline in HIV prevalence, whereas in every country in which HIV has declined there have been increased levels of faithfulness and usually abstinence as well. Moreover, it was found, according to the Journal of International Development, that “the promotion of condoms at an early stage proved to be counter-productive in Botswana , whereas the lack of condom promotion during the 1980s and early 1990s contributed to the relative success of behaviour change strategies in Uganda” . Two leading experts (neither in principle opposed to condom usage) had this to say, writing in the journal Science, of the extraordinary changes in Uganda: “the government communicated a clear warning and prevention recommendation: AIDS or ‘slim’ was fatal and required immediate population responses based on...faithfulness to one partner. Condoms were a minor component of the original strategy.”

The Church opposes condom use because she believes that a truly marital act is one of total self-giving, with a love- and life-giving meaning that should always be respected. Her teaching, unsurprisingly, leads to stronger families and safer and healthier communities. The Church

does not tell people that there is no hope when it comes to sex, that they are sexual automatons incapable of resisting sexual pressure and promiscuity. The sight of cynical westerners handing out rubber compassion to prostitutes, including child prostitutes, is only one way in which certain aid agencies perpetuate the very evils that rob so many Africans of help and hope. Those who wish to promote condom usage, regardless of what the evidence suggests, are in the grip of an undeclared dogma. The Pope is preaching a dogma of love and liberation.

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