

Vatican newspaper article says condom campaigns increase AIDS risk

VATICAN CITY - An article in the Vatican newspaper said that, on a practical level, condom campaigns increase the possibility of AIDS infection by promoting a false sense of security.

On a moral level, the article said, condom use by married couples goes against the church's teaching about responsible procreation because it "deforms" the conjugal act.

The article was written by Father Juan Perez-Soba, a moral theologian who teaches in Rome at the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family. It appeared in *L'Osservatore Romano* May 24, three days before the start of a major Vatican conference that was expected to clarify church teaching on AIDS.

Father Perez-Soba said that although use of a condom may have some effectiveness against HIV/AIDS contagion in single acts, it cannot guarantee safety - especially throughout the sexual life of a couple. It is wrong, therefore, to say that condom use can prevent infection, he said.

"The numerous campaigns that invite people to use the condom indiscriminately have instead demonstrated the contrary: By feeding the false belief that there is no danger, they have increased the possibility of infection," he said.

"To present the condom as a solution to the problem is a grave error; to choose it simply as a habitual practice is to show a lack of responsibility in regard to the other person," he said.

Turning to moral aspects, Father Perez-Soba said condom use clearly violates the church's vision of conjugal love as presented in the 1968 encyclical "*Humanae Vitae*."

“A sexual act carried out with a condom cannot be considered a fully conjugal act” because it deprives the act of its unitive sense and procreative sense, he said.

“An act is not truly unitive when it intentionally impedes the communication of the sperm and excludes the possibility of its reception in the mutual gift of the bodies of the spouses,” he said.

Father Perez-Soba said this was a “general ethical judgment” about condom use by married couples, “without entering into the prudential consideration about the risk of infection.”

He went on to suggest, however, that for a married couple in which one spouse is infected with HIV, sexual abstinence is the proper response.

“Faced with the insuperable possibility of infection, they can agree to adopt the decision to abstain from having sexual relations for reasons of health, as happens with other pathologies,” he said.

He said the church teaches that a couple’s marriage promise brings with it the commitment to respond to difficult situations “with generosity.” In such difficult situations, he said, a couple needs to “find the necessary strength to live the truth of their vocation, trusting in the grace of God and seeking the accompaniment of the church, which assists them on their path.”

The question of condom use by married couples to prevent AIDS has been quietly debated for years by Vatican officials, theologians and pastors. Some bishops and cardinals have argued that a married couple in which one spouse has AIDS may reasonably be expected to use condoms to prevent transmission of the deadly disease.

Others, citing “*Humanae Vitae*,” have said the church can never approve a practice that goes against the understanding of the conjugal act in marriage as a complete form of self-giving that is open to life.