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Condomania & Conservatives

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 24, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

The New York Times story [1]about Pope Benedict's comments on condoms features commentary from Dr. John Haas. Read this passage carefully and see what jumps out at you:

Catholic conservatives who believed Catholic teaching against contraception to be inviolable were reeling. ?This is really shaking things up big time,? said Dr. John M. Haas, the president of the National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia, who serves on the governing council of the Vatican?s Pontifical Academy for Life.

Dr. Haas, a moral theologian, said he had seen an embargoed copy of a new book in which the pope conceded there might be extreme cases in which there were grounds for the use of condoms. ?I told the publisher, ?Don?t publish this; it?s going to create such a mess,? ? he added.

Ah, yes, the old burn the book solution! Later in the article, Dr. Haas is quoted as saying that the Pope is wrong. I am waiting to hear the outcry from the Catholic right, insisting that the adjective "Catholic" be removed from Dr. Haas's organization seeing as he has "publicly dissented" from the Pope. I suspect I will be waiting a long time.

On a serious note, what no one is commenting on in this whole condomania is this. The Pope is a teacher of the faith. He is also a pastor. The two roles are related but they are not always the same. A pastor has to help the people in his care *apply* the teachings of the Church to the circumstances of their lives. Sound teaching is necessary to that task, of course, but the Pope's comments about condoms shows that the moral law must be understood in the context of a lived life, not in the abstract, or else we end up violating one of the Master's most important scriptural insights: The Law is made for man, not man for the Law. In his own life, the Master showed how this more foundational teaching plays out time and again, even while he was mum on the subject of condoms. The Pope is teaching something very important here, something more important than any particular nuances on the subject of condoms.

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[1] http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/24/world/europe/24pope.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&ref=vaticancity