Pope wrong on condoms

by Roland_S_Martin

The African-American religious community deserves considerable praise for taking leadership of the civil rights movement during the first half of the 20th century. But there is no doubt that toward the end of the 20th century, the black church, primarily because of its opposition to homosexuality, abdicated its responsibility and totally disregarded the human toll that AIDS has had on the members it largely serves. It only has been recently that pastors have opted not to turn a blind eye to what is clearly a state of emergency.

Unfortunately, we are seeing the same kind of ignorance of reality from the Catholic Church and its leader, Pope Benedict XVI.

The church has long been opposed to the use of condoms and other forms of birth control because it strongly believes that sex is for procreation and enriching the unions of married couples. But for the church to continue to ignore the definitive research that has concluded that condoms play a huge role in decreasing the spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases is mind-boggling.

Pope Benedict is in Africa this week on a six-day tour, his first trip to the continent since his ascension to the papacy, and he made some remarks that have sparked outrage in the motherland, where Catholicism is spreading like wildfire. In response to written questions from reporters, the pope said this about AIDS: "You can't resolve it with the distribution of condoms. On the contrary, it increases the problem."

He is absolutely correct that condoms are not the solution to stopping the spread of AIDS. He is also 100 percent correct that the only surefire way of stopping AIDS, when it comes to sex, is to practice abstinence. That is clearly within the teachings of the Bible and the Catholic Church, and he will find no disagreement from me.

Now the reality.

People are having sex. Catholics are having sex. Heck, some Catholic priests have abandoned their oaths and had sex.

As a layman and the husband of a pastor, I know the difference between Utopia and reality, and it is the responsibility of the faith community to deal with the real world. And frankly, Pope Benedict clearly shows he doesn't get it.

We need church leaders to preach, teach and implore their members not to go to bed with anyone and everyone. We also need church leaders who are willing to stand up and tell folks that if they do choose to sin â€” that's what the church and other faith leaders consider sex outside of marriage â€” then they better take the necessary precautions to protect themselves.

Folks, there is nothing in the Bible about wearing a seat belt. But pastors would be foolish not to tell their members to use the safety device when driving. Churches all across the country trust and love their fellow members, but you can bet that accountants are employed by many churches to ensure that no one is stealing the tithes and offerings.

Pope Benedict surely loves God and sees him as his protector and provider, but he goes nowhere without armed bodyguards. The pope has to know that murder is against God's will. He has to believe that every person has the choice to be a moral and upstanding person. Yet not everyone abides by those religious views, and his security personnel are there to prevent him from being harmed.

So how are condoms any different?

As Catholicism expands in Africa, we are seeing the expansion of AIDS, as well. Sub-Saharan Africa has 22 million people infected with HIV.

The refusal of the Catholic Church and other religious denominations to accept the reality of the situation on the ground is doing nothing for the issue. If the church used its powerful voice â€” while continuing to speak out against sex outside of marriage â€” to implore people to practice safe sex, it could have a major impact on slowing the spread of the disease.

This is one time when silence is not golden.

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