

What might Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta say about the use of condoms to protect another person from AIDS? What would she say in the case of two homosexuals? Or in the case of a married couple where one spouse has AIDS? Or in the case of a heterosexual couple who are not married?

Some years back a friend of mine wrote to Mother Teresa for the answers to some questions about condom use. She received the following reply from a Priest who had answered at Mother Teresa's request, Fr Lawrence Abello S.J., a Jesuit who was at that time writing from St Xavier's College in Calcutta. His powerful reply was also signed at the bottom, with a little message offering prayers, by Mother Teresa. It's not short but it's very clear and worth a read for anyone struggling with this issue.

31/8/93

Dear....

The Peace of Christ

Mother Theresa requested me to reply to your letter, dated 9/6/93

Your first question is the following: "What is the teaching of the Catholic Church for a married couple when one partner is H.I.V.+?" You add that "The Catholic Church allows natural family planning, i.e., sexual intercourse that will not lead to conception. Is it therefore wrong to use a condom in order to try to prevent harm to one's partner?"

The Catholic Church teaches that contraception is an inherent moral evil because contraception falsifies the very meaning of the marital act which **MUST EXPRESS THE LOVE OF THE SPOUSES**. By the very nature of contraception, at least one of the spouses must manipulate self to destroy the power to conceive. This self-manipulation necessarily turns attention to self (i.e. is narcissistic), whereas, to be an expression of love, the marital act should turn attention to the spouse. To posit any act which, in its very nature, turns attention to self, falsifies the marital act and is, therefore, an abuse of a gift of God, which can never be morally justified.

In other words, the marital act can be an unreserved, total self-giving only if there is no deliberate manipulation of self to destroy the power to conceive – as happens in contraception. Being a self-manipulation to destroy the power to conceive, contraception necessarily is a narcissistic act which falsifies the expression of conjugal love by the marital act. Thereby, contraception is inherently evil. Pope John Paul II expresses this narcissistic element of contraception as follows: "When couples, by means of recourse to contraception, separate these two meanings (i.e. the unitive and pro-creative), they manipulate and degrade human sexuality by altering the value of total self-giving. Thus the innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality. When, instead, by means of recourse to phases of infertility, the couple respect the inseparable connection between the unitive and procreative meaning of human sexuality, they are acting as ministers of God's plan and they benefit from their sexuality according to the original dynamism of total self-giving, without manipulation or alteration." (Familiaris Consortio, by Pope John Paul II, No 32.)

Note that the reason why contraception is wrong is not that conception does not take place, but that a **SELF-MANIPULATION** is deliberately posited to destroy the power to conceive. Obviously, even when the married couple know that conception is not possible, they may perform an infertile marital act, as happens, not only during the infertile phases in cases of natural family planning, but also during pregnancy and in old age.

Note also that, even though a couple could not conceive a child for other reasons, such as old age, they may not use a condom or any other device to prevent the spread of AIDS. Being a self-manipulation, the use of any such device necessarily is a narcissistic act which falsifies the expression of conjugal love by the marital act. Thereby, the use of any such device is inherently evil and may never be morally justified for any reason whatsoever.

In short, the reason why contraception is wrong, i.e., self-manipulation in connection with the sexual act, applies equally to the use of a condom which merely "prevents" the spread of AIDS and is not strictly a contraceptive because the couple can not conceive for other reasons. When the "couple" are both men, there is not only the inherent evil of self-manipulation in using the condom; there is also the inherent evil of homosexual relations.

In the case of the married couple, it must be pointed out that marriage does not confer an unlimited right to sexual relations. Far from it. There is a right to the marital act only when it is an expression of love. For an H.I.V.+ person to have sexual relations with his or her spouse can never be an expression of love because – condom or no condom – such relations always have a certain risk of transmitting the lethal

AIDS virus. The only loving and moral solution for the couple, when one spouse is H.I.V.+, is to live like brother and sister.

In his Encyclical 'Humanae Vitae,' Pope Paul VI teaches that "any action is prohibited which has, as its purpose, to impede procreation regardless of whether such an action is posited before, during or after the conjugal act. Nor may one adduce as valid arguments (to justify contraceptive acts) either that one must choose what appears to be a lesser evil or that these (contraceptive) acts participate in the moral goodness of fertile acts already posited or to be posited" – cf. 'Humanae Vitae' No.14.

Those who propose the "lesser evil" argument, i.e., that the use of a condom is a "lesser evil" than the spread of AIDS, never distinguish moral evil from physical evil. The use of a condom for whatever reason is a moral evil, i.e., the violation of the Sixth Commandment, whereas, death as such, even from AIDS, is a physical evil. The Catholic will accept the Church's official teaching that, knowingly and willingly, to violate any of the Ten Commandments always involves personal sin. Basing herself on the true sense of the infinite evil of sin inasmuch as it is an offense against the Infinite God, and also basing herself on the witnessing of the martyrs, the Church teaches that no good end can ever morally justify the violation of any of the Ten Commandments.

Moreover, quite apart from the morality, on the purely practical level distributing condoms as a protection from AIDS gives false hopes. The use of the condom is not at all a complete protection against AIDS. The condom has a significant failure rate even as a contraceptive and, from recent literature which did not give reference to the scientific sources, the AIDS virus is 450 times smaller than a sperm!

Whatever be the accuracy of this figure, distributing condoms to stop the spread of AIDS involves implicit approval of deviant sexual behaviour because one is formally cooperating to overcome the problems to practice such behaviour. Hence by distributing condoms one is promoting the addictive use of sex, i.e., contraception, and the other perversions which turn the attention inwards to self, reduce sexual relations to a habit which, like narcotic-drug habit, has to be fed. Cf. The literature of 'Sexaholics Anonymous'. Consequently, although the use of a sterilized syringe to inject oneself with a narcotic drug, or the use of a condom, may prevent the spread of AIDS in concrete acts to feed the drug or sex habit, promoting such practices promotes the behavior patterns which led to the AIDS problem in the first place. After all, addicts will feed the drug or sex habit even when a sterilized needle or a condom is not available. Hence, even from a purely practical point of view, distributing condoms as a protection from AIDS gives false hopes. Such an approach to control the spread of AIDS is based on an erroneous position, i.e., that one can control the diseases spread by addictions by means of protective devices which promote the addictive behaviour.

From all that has been stated above, it follows that a person working in an AIDS Center may not formally cooperate in the evil of homosexual relations, or of contraception-type heterosexual acts (e.g., between spouses) by having anything to do with the distribution of condoms. Likewise, the person working in such a Center may not formally cooperate in the evil of drug abuse by distributing sterilized syringes to drug addicts to avoid the spread of AIDS. Such an AIDS worker must SUFFER the AIDS-related deaths that addicts inflict upon themselves instead of FORMALLY COOPERATING in the moral evil of degrading the addict further by helping him to solve his problems in practising the addictive behaviour. In this connection, we must remind ourselves that God permits or suffers evil but never commits it, and we are called to be God-like. We must also remind ourselves that the highest value of a person is to reach eternal life. Cooperating in degrading the addict further, by formally cooperating in fostering "safe sex" or "safe drugs", jeopardizes the addict's eternal life and is a much greater evil than death – such cooperation is not true compassion.

You may reproduce and pass on this letter to whomever you wish. I shall be happy to answer any further questions you may have.

Sincerely in Christ,

The letter is then signed by Fr Lawrence Abello, S.J.

Below this is added in handwriting: I will pray for you God bless you M Teresa MC

To support the pro-life work of [The Good Counsel Network](http://www.goodcounselnet.co.uk/) through prayer, or donation please go to <http://www.goodcounselnet.co.uk/>.

Clare McCullough

This letter first appeared on the good counsel network's blog which is <http://www.mariastopsabortion.blogspot.com/>