

From the *Catholic Civil Rights League* . . .

The *Martlet* has published a cartoon of Pope Benedict XVI demonstrating “proper condom use” and an accompanying editorial that calls him a “jackass” and “irresponsible, ignorant. . . a blithering idiot . . . stupid.” (“Pope Benedict XVI is a Jackass.” *Martlet*, 27 March, 2009)

This attempt at journalism is compromised by paternalism, inaccuracy and incoherence.

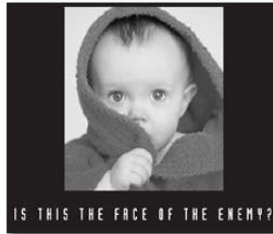
“Though many people in the world think that the Pope is just a creepy-looking old man,” says the *Martlet*, “Africans actually take what he says seriously.” The clear implication is that truly civilized countries must take up the white man’s burden and convince those benighted “Africans” to ignore the creepy-looking old man. One wonders whether Africans would find such paternalism insulting or merely amusing.

Contrary to the editorial, Pope Benedict did not declare “that Muhammed brought ‘things only evil and inhuman’” into the world. That statement was made by a Byzantine Emperor in 1391. The Pope did not agree with it, and has repeatedly said so. He quoted it only because it introduced the Emperor’s argument against religious conversion by violence. This argument - not the Emperor’s accusation - served as a starting point for the Pope’s extended reflection on faith and reason.¹

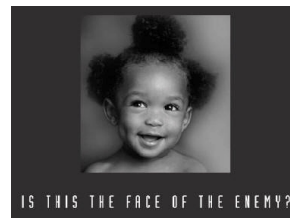
According to the *Martlet*, people who take what the Pope says seriously will not use condoms and are likely to get AIDS. In other words, people simultaneously ignore the Pope’s preaching on abstinence, adultery and fornication and obey the Pope’s preaching against condoms. This is simply incoherent. In fact, couples who really have taken the Pope seriously are sexually abstinent before marriage, permanently faithful thereafter, and never have to worry about STDs.

Despite these lapses (and the ridiculous accusation that the Pope caused the death of two young girls), the editorial and cartoon are a welcome indication that freedoms Canadians enjoy off-campus are beginning to penetrate Ring Road defences.

Not long ago, UVic drew fire from the Civil Liberties Association because of the student society’s *de facto* policy of suppressing freedom of expression. The UVSS Board used the absurd excuse that pictures of happy infants and a solemn



man in a wheelchair were “offensive,” “poisoned the atmosphere” on campus, and even promoted “ambient violence” - whatever that is. In vain did the pro-lifers argue that the UVSS should extend to their club the same tolerance and benefits granted to those more closely allied with establishment power



and privilege.

The good news is that the *Martlet* has smashed the barriers to freedom of expression that UVSS has been struggling to erect. In the light of this editorial and cartoon, it is impossible to see how any self-appointed guardians of public discourse can credibly continue the oppressive treatment of Youth Protecting Youth, or of other groups with messages they do not want people to hear.

The *Martlet* has set the standard for freedom of expression at the University of Victoria. It is now time to demand that same freedom for all students and student groups, and to refuse to settle for anything less.

Of course, the standards for responsible journalism and civil discourse are higher than what ought to be tolerated in deference to freedom of expression, and the Catholic Civil Rights League will welcome an apology from the *Martlet* for its insulting personal attack on Pope Benedict XVI.

On the subject of condoms and STD prevention, consider the following:

“When Pope Benedict XVI commented this month that condom distribution isn’t helping, and may be worsening, the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa, he set off a firestorm of protest. . . Yet, in truth, current empirical evidence supports him.”
Edward C. Green, Senior Research Scientist, Harvard School of Public Health
“The Pope May be Right.” *Washington Post*, 2009-03-29.

●Condoms are not 100% effective in preventing transmission HIV/AIDS. Estimated rates run from 60% to 95%. A frequently cited paper puts it at 85%.²

●Effectiveness depends on the infectivity of the disease and the frequency of exposure, *even when wearing a condom*. The more infectious the disease and the more frequent the contact, *even with a condom*, the more likely it is that infection will be transmitted.³

●Risks increase/failures accumulate over time. “[A]n intervention that is 99.8% effective for a single episode of intercourse can yield an 18% cumulative failure rate with 100 exposures.”⁴

●Premarital abstinence, monogamous marriage and mutual fidelity are fully consistent with the recommended *safest* strategy to avoid HIV/AIDS and STDs.⁵

●Research indicates that the generalized African epidemics are driven by multiple sexual partnerships. Where these are eliminated or significantly reduced, (as they were, for a time, in Uganda) rates of new infections drop dramatically.⁶

Notes:

1. Benedict XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections*. Meeting with the Representatives of Science, Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg, 12 September, 2006. (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html) Accessed 2009-03-29

2. Vera EG, Orozco HH, Soto SS, Aburto EL., [Condom effectiveness to prevent sexually transmitted diseases] *Ginecol Obstet Mex.* 2008 Feb;76(2):88-96; Chen and Hearst reported 90% (Chen S., Hearst N, *Stud Fam Plann.* 2004 Mar;35(1):39-47.

Condom promotion for AIDS prevention in the developing world: is it working?). Weller and Davis, a frequently cited study, reported 80% (Weller S, Davis K, *Condom effectiveness in reducing heterosexual HIV transmission.* Cochrane Database Syst Rev. 2002;(1):CD003255

3. Mann JR, Stine CC, Vessey J. *The role of disease-specific infectivity and number of disease exposures on the long-term effectiveness of the latex condom.* *Sex Transm Dis* 2002; 29: 344-349. (<http://www.stdjournal.com/pt/re/std/fulltext.00007435-20020600-0-00006.htm;jsessionid=JRNJcZGxdBpH1TIGyTTVJdRHryG7hFP2vI09cs8fjDL2QkryVNYg!728623284!181195629!8091!-1?na>

v=reference) Accessed 2009-03-31); Shelton, James D. “Ten myths and one truth about generalised HIV epidemics.” *The Lancet*, 1 December, 2007. (<http://download.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140673607617553.pdf?id=aeaa5a245ca1fdbb:-59201b60:1205b7c2705:1fc41238491899404>)

4. Thomas Fitch, MD, Curtis Sine, MD, W. David Hager, MD, Joshua Mann, MD, MPH, Mary B. Adam, MD and Joe McIlhaney, MD, “Condom Effectiveness: Factors that Influence Risk Reduction.” *Sexually Transmitted Diseases* (29 December, 2002) 12:811-817. (<http://www.stdjournal.com/pt/re/std/fulltext.00007435-200212000-00013.htm;jsessionid=JRNJcZGxdBpH1TIGyTTVJdRHryG7hFP2vI09cs8fjDL2QkryVNYg!728623284!181195629!8091!-1>) Accessed 2009-03-31)

5. US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Male Latex Condoms and Sexually Transmitted Diseases - Condoms and STDs Fact Sheet for Public Health Personnel*, 16 December, 2008 (<http://www.cdc.gov/condomeffectiveness/latex.htm>); Halperin, Daniel, Steiner, Markus J., Cassell, Michael M., Green, Edward C., Hearst, Norman, Kirby, Douglas, Gayle, Helene D., Cates, Willard, “The time has come for common ground on preventing sexual transmission of HIV.” *The Lancet*, Vol. 364, 27 November, 2004 (http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140673604174874/fulltext?_eventId=login) Accessed 2009-03-31

6. Shelton, James D. “Ten myths and one truth about generalised HIV epidemics.” *The Lancet*, 1 December, 2007. (<http://download.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140673607617553.pdf?id=aeaa5a245ca1fdbb:-59201b60:1205b7c2705:1fc41238491899404>); Shelton, James D. “Confession of a condom lover.” *The Lancet*, Vol. 368, 2 December, 2006. ([http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(06\)69787-0/fulltext#article_upsell](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(06)69787-0/fulltext#article_upsell)); Wilson, David, Halperin, Daniel, ““Know your epidemic, know your response’: a useful approach, if we get it right.” *The Lancet*, Vol. 372, 9 August, 2008. (<http://download.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140673608608831.pdf?id=aeaa5a245ca1fdbb:-59201b60:1205b7c2705:6d111238494343732>); Green, Edward C., “The Pope May be Right.” *Washington Post*, 29 March, 2009.

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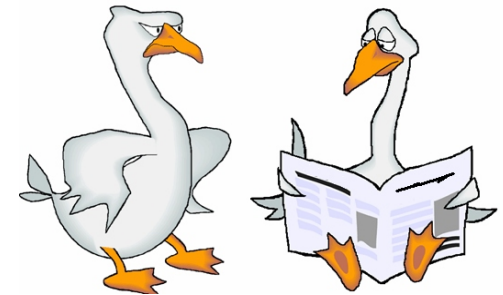
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Smashing the Barriers to Freedom of Expression

Responding to the *Martlet*
“Pope Benedict XVI is a Jackass”



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