

THE TRUTH ABOUT CONDOMS—RESPONSE TO RHONHEIMER’S ARTICLE IN *THE TABLET*

A condom is an instrument. In the order of causality, it falls into the category of instrumental cause. The morality of an instrument is generally indeterminate. Whether it is used for good or for ill is dependent upon the moral choices of the one using it, the principal. Thus a knife may be used to cut food or to kill an innocent man. However, an instrument may be so designed that its very ordination is immoral. Its end, that is, its finality as instrument, and its form, that which makes it be the peculiar instrument that it is, are built into the condom. Its end is the prevention of transmission of the natural emission of semen and bodily fluids during intercourse and its form satisfies that end.

It is difficult to think of any setting in which the use of a condom as a condom (not as a kiddies’ balloon, or a container, etc) could ever be licit. The thing has an inbuilt ordination to immoral activity. It can only be used in a situation of sexual excitement which, by definition, can only occur licitly between husband and wife in marriage and in such a setting can never be used licitly.

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The only licit setting for intercourse is between husband and wife. Any use of such an instrument between them is morally illicit (*Humanae Vitae*), even if either should seek by means of such instrument to avoid the parallel transmission of infection. The sin is single 1) contraception.

The use of a condom in extra marital natural intercourse is illicit, in an intercourse which is itself illicit. There are two sins—

- 1) fornication, and
- 2) contraception.

There is added malice in the second sin in the prevention of the natural consequences of the first.

The use of a condom in homosexual activity is illicit, in intercourse which is not only illicit but unnatural. There are three sins, or rather, three grievous elements in the one sin which add to the heinousness of what is done—

- 1) sexual activity for the sake of pleasure alone;
- 2) conducted against the order of nature;
- 3) using an instrument designed to circumvent the natural consequences of the first and second.

There is malice in the unnatural way in which the sin is committed. There is added malice in the use of a condom in the endeavour to avoid the consequences of the unnatural way in which the sin is committed.

An age which has become hardened to self disfigurement and blinded to its malice will have difficulty accepting that a condom is something whose ordination (as condom) is intrinsically evil. Our bodies are not our own to do with as we please. They may only be used licitly and we will be called to account for the uses we have

made of them. Pope Pius XII said: *[T]he principle is inviolable. God alone is the lord of man's life and bodily integrity, his organs and members and faculties, those in particular which are instruments associated in the work of creation.*¹

A prosthesis is an artificial part designed to assist the body to perform its natural functions, or to supply for a defect in the body. Its licitness is guaranteed by its ordination for the good of the body. Of such sort are false teeth, spectacles, and artificial limbs. A condom is a sort of anti-prosthesis, designed to interfere with the way God has made our bodies. In that very interference lies its illicitness. The very use of such a thing as it is designed, without more, is sinful.

Once these distinctions are made, the shortcomings in the article by Martin Rhonheimer in the edition of 10th July 2004 of *The Tablet*, entitled *The Truth about Condoms*, become manifest.

The principle according to which he proceeds is the subsidiary principle of harm minimisation. That principle has no place in the Church's moral lexicon when it conflicts with the principles of the moral law and of theology. The first theological principle is that of charity—*Love God first above all things, and love your neighbour as yourself*. The first moral principle, in the form of its first corollary, is—*It is not licit to do evil that good may come of it*.

Any use of a condom, as condom, is immoral and against the law of God. It offends against both these principles. It follows that Rhonheimer's conclusion—*the Church [cannot] possibly teach that people engaged in immoral lifestyles should avoid [condoms]*—is in error.

Good Intention

Rhonheimer fails to judge of the various issues from the point of view of principle at a number of levels. Among them is the implication that a good intention on the part of the condom user justifies the use of the device. This arises from a failure to understand the essential distinction between *finis operis* (the end contained in the thing itself) and *finis operantis* (the end of the agent using it). A good end can never justify the use of an instrument whose very use is in breach of the law of God.

Hence, when Church leaders teach that the HIV-infected should never use condoms, their teaching accords with the mind of the Church.

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¹ *Allocution to the Fourth International Congress of Surgeons*, May 20, 1948.