

## Not A Great Man

The phenomenon of the mass media praising the recently deceased Pope as an exemplar or demigod is almost as inappropriate as the equivalent frenzy that followed the death of Princess Diana. Yes, the Pope was an opponent of communism – though not in fact an especially significant one. Yes, he deserves credit for taking a stand against antisemitism within his Church – though he did not hesitate to elevate several notorious antisemites to sainthood, and utterly failed to bear witness when President Assad, in his presence, resurrected ancient antisemitic blood libels and hailed the Pope as a fellow enemy of The Jews. Perhaps his most praiseworthy attribute (which is notably under-recognised, even in the current festival of appreciation for him), was his firm defence of the proposition that morality is not arbitrary or relative but objective – though even this great and rare virtue is offset by the embarrassing fact that his actual grasp of right and wrong over many issues of current controversy was ludicrously shaky compared with, say, the average person in an American street.

For as **Christopher Hitchens** points out, Pope John-Paul II opposed contraception that would have saved millions from AIDS, the Iraq war that liberated millions from tyranny, and stem cell research that would advance medical science and save lives, and was likewise a dogmatic and implacable opponent of much that would improve the human condition as well as his own Church. Many people with more deference than sense will continue to claim that he was a moral giant for some time to come, and that is a large part of the Catholic Church's problem. Millions of people follow its advice uncritically because they regard it as a supernaturally certified moral authority. This has given the Catholic Church enormous power but little capacity to improve, and almost none of the checks and balances that could offset the tendency of that power to corrupt.

Sat, 04/16/2005 - 17:47 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

## On the other hand

In order to be a pope, a person must obviously be very devoutly catholic. If you want to end the discussion before it even begins by saying "catholicism is bad, therefore the pope is bad", then theres nothing more to say. On the other hand, I think its more interesting to analyse how good this pope was \*given that he had to be a

devout catholic\*. In other words, how successful was he at balancing secular criticism of church doctrines (not allowing female priests, extreme pro-life views, etc.) while staying true to traditional catholic ideals (which, as pope, he is absolutely required to do). To say simply "the pope ought to be secular" is both unhelpful and uninteresting.

Also, I think the pope's main positive contribution to the world, rather than his philosophical position of moral objectivity, is the "strong spiritual medicine" he is able to dole out to people living in unimaginable poverty and squalor. Such people need a simplistic ideology that makes them feel that it is worthwhile to struggle on, particularly if they live in a failed state which shows no concern for their welfare. The Catholic church, led by the pope, is able to step in to dole out this spritual medicine (as well as often doling out actual medicine where other aid groups cannot), giving people a basic hope and also dissuading them from violence. John Paul seems to have been good at this.

<http://www.danielstrimpel.com>

by **Daniel** on Sat, 04/16/2005 - 19:30 | [reply](#)

## The Iraq war liberated millions from tyranny

in the same sense that World War Two liberated millions from communism. And World War One made the world safe for democracy.

by a reader on Sat, 04/16/2005 - 23:44 | [reply](#)

## Condoms

*For as **Christopher Hitchens** points out, Pope John-Paul II opposed contraception that would have saved millions from AIDS,*

This endlessly repeated claim is utter nonsense. JP II espoused the classic catholic view that sex should be limited within marriage and that contraception should not be used. Now I personally think this is silly advice, but following this advice most definitely does not cause AIDS. In fact following it is a very good way of **preventing** AIDS. Since if you only sleep with the same partner within marriage you are very unlikely to contract AIDS, even if you don't use condoms, which would be logical anyway whatever your religion during at least some period of time if you want to have babies, which most married couples do in fact want. The only way to construe the Pope's position on sex and condoms to cause millions of AIDS deaths is to say that that will happen if people follow only one part of his advice (no condoms) but not the other (no sex outside or marriage). But that's just as absurd as saying that if someone advises getting drunk every saturday evening and advises against driving cars at any time that he's causing millions of deaths on the grounds that if people do indeed get drunk but don't refrain from

driving when they're drunk they're relatively likely to have deadly

accidents.

Now if anybody can come up with a quotation from the pope where he says that if people sin against the no-sex-outside-of-marriage rule then they should **still** be sure to commit their adultery without condoms, then it's a different story.

In the above linked article Hitchens also says:

*By the time the church apologizes for saying that condoms are worse than AIDS,*

OK, if it's true that the church ever said that condoms are worse than AIDS, I agree that's very bad. But I don't believe it and let him give his source for that statement.

## Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sun, 04/17/2005 - 00:40 | [reply](#)

## Re: Condoms

Henry Sturman:

Correct me if I'm wrong here but it seems to me that there's a flaw in that defence of the Pope. It's not the case that the Pope is merely giving advice on how to have sex, so that people who choose to obey half of it and not the other half have only themselves to blame. He is giving advice (or, as devout Catholics see it, commands) to governments on what laws to pass, and to electors on what laws to vote for. That means he is ordering people to interfere by force in the sexual behaviour of others. Some of those others die as a result. OK, they could avoid dying if they too obeyed the Pope's commands in full, but surely that is not a defence, is it?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sun, 04/17/2005 - 11:35 | [reply](#)

## Pope guilty

If the Pope said to get drunk every Saturday night, he would indeed be guilty of many car accidents, no matter how opposed he was to cars at all. Pretending that advising mass drinking will not mean drunk driving, or pretending advising no condom won't mean unprotected sex, is such blatant willful blindness that he is quite culpable anyway.

take a population of unmarried people who he's told to be abstinent, and who have all reconciled this advice with their lives, and most are not abstinent. now have him say no condoms, and have half of them listen. he is totally guilty. advice has consequences, quite apart from the entire set of his intentions.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 04/17/2005 - 21:54 | [reply](#)

## Not a great man

"Many people with more deference than sense will continue to claim that he was a moral giant for some time to come..."

While the president of the U.S. says that attending the pope's funeral was a highlight of his administration so far; an incongruous comment perhaps from a non-catholic, despite good seats.

He must have based that on something, the Pope's opposition to condoms, or the Pope's opposition to the war in Iraq?

Or, deference, it was probably deference.

by a reader on Mon, 04/18/2005 - 03:34 | [reply](#)

## Re: The Iraq war liberated millions from tyranny

A reader thinks that

The Iraq war liberated millions from tyranny in the same sense that World War Two liberated millions from communism. And World War One made the world safe for democracy.

To readers who think it didn't matter who won World War 1, we recommend these articles by [Gary Sheffield](#) and [John J. Reilly](#).

To readers who think that it did not matter whether Iraq was liberated (or doubt that it was) we recommend Ali's [thoughts](#) on the second anniversary of the liberation.

Readers who think it did not matter who won World War 2, should ask themselves why a Soviet state controlling Eastern Europe was a worse outcome than a Nazi state in control of the whole of Europe. Moreover, if the Allies had stood up to Hitler earlier, neither of those would have been a likely outcome. World War 2 really is a bad case to cite if one wants to argue *against* a willingness to go to war to preserve freedom.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 04/18/2005 - 05:58 | [reply](#)

## re: "would have saved million

re: "would have saved millions from AIDS", it seems appropriate to remind that AIDS is diagnosed differently in Africa than elsewhere and as a result not everyone who we count as having "died of AIDS" in Africa may have done so as a result of having unprotected sex.

I'll grant that probably doesn't substantially alter the larger point you/Hitchens are trying to make though. As Elliott says, unprotected sex (and whatever ill effects it causes) was a foreseeable result of his advice.

re: "opposed the Iraq war", are we really certain that he did? I

know, I know, the News has repeatedly told me that he Strenuously Opposed Bush's Iraq War, but in reality I never saw clear evidence that he (as opposed to "The Vatican") issued anything other than the boilerplate (and vague) fence-straddling peace-rhetoric you'd expect of a Pope, on that subject. If I'm wrong lemme know.

Speaking of things you'd expect of a Pope, that hints at the larger issue here. I echo the first commenter above: many of the complaints lodged here are inevitable \*given that he was a Pope\*. It is unreasonable to have expected him to adopt positions that a Pope could never feasibly adopt. It would be much more interesting to analyze how he did in his role \*given that he was a Pope\* than to make the broad banal observation that *The Pope* was not a secular humanist liberal.

by Blixa on Mon, 04/18/2005 - 21:42 | [reply](#)

## **Re: Re: The Iraq war liberated millions from tyranny**

To the editor that thinks the results of WWI were good. Was the introduction of communism into Russia good? Was the "democratization" of Germany and the subsequent election of Hitler good?

To the editor that thinks Iraq has been liberated I refer you to these links <http://riverbendblog.blogspot.com/> <http://www.sistani.org/> <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,7374-1537512,00.html>

The editor and readers who think the results of WWII were good should ask themselves why Communist regimes in Europe and Asia were better than a Nazi and fascist regimes controlling Europe and a Japanese regime controlling Asia. BTW, didn't Britain and France declare war in defence of Poland? Was Poland liberated after the war? Did the Polish fighters return home and live out their remaining years in peace, freedom and prosperity? The allies expelled the Nazis from Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Libya and Egypt. Did they become free and prosperous nations? Of course, allies liberated France. And France became, and remains to this day, our staunchest ally.

by a reader on Tue, 04/19/2005 - 06:45 | [reply](#)

## **Re: condoms**

David Deutsch responded to my previous post:

*Correct me if I'm wrong here but it seems to me that there's a flaw in that defence of the Pope. It's not the case that the Pope is merely giving advice on how to have sex, so that people who choose to obey half of it and not the other half have only themselves to blame. He is giving advice (or, as devout Catholics see it, commands) to governments on what laws to pass, and to electors on what laws to vote for. That means he is ordering people to interfere by force in the sexual behaviour of others. Some of those others die as a result. OK, they could avoid dying if they too obeyed the Pope's commands in full, but surely that is not a*

*defence, is it?*

You are right if the Pope has been doing things such as advising nations to enact laws to forbid the sale of condoms. I am not aware though that he did that, but would be interested in a source. Certainly if that were the case, and if it were the case that there are countries that actually implemented that advice (which to my knowledge is not so), then I agree the Pope would be responsible for AIDS deaths. I would maintain though that my critique would still be correct within the context in which it was given. The above world article and the Hitchens article do not mention the Pope's advice concerning law. They mention only that he opposes contraception, which I took to mean advises people against using them.

## Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Tue, 04/19/2005 - 09:13 | [reply](#)

## Elliot, Wouldn't your crit

Elliot,

Wouldn't your criticism of the Pope make it difficult for anyone to offer any advice with more than one part? And if advice must be very simple, won't we pass up opportunities for useful change?

SUVs may make their owners safer, but their popularity is likely to make all other road users less safe because they have greater mass and so cannot stop quickly and hit harder. If we cannot give advice like, "Buy an SUV, but drive carefully," I suppose we will have to support a static mix of vehicles or further safety regulations.

by romr on Tue, 04/19/2005 - 17:54 | [reply](#)

## laws

Following Henry's post above, I would imagine that the only "laws" David could possibly be speaking about are "laws" such as: Whether to distribute condoms to people for free (or at a subsidized cost), or: Whether to allow the UN or similar outside agency to do so. When and where the answer is "no", and that answer is plausibly informed by Catholic doctrine, I gather this is what David would refer to as the Pope "ordering people to interfere by force in the sexual behaviour of others".

I'm struck by how weak that criticism really is, if that's all it amounts to. (If that's not all it amounts to, let me know.) Is Failing To Buy Someone A Condom (or Not Allowing Outsiders To Bring Someone A Condom) *really* the same as "interfering by force in their sexual behavior"? One could certainly criticize this position, but there's a lot less to the criticism than meets the eye.

Especially since this insidious Papal Anti-Condom Effect we all deplore so much, if/where it's operative, can really *\*only\** be

operative at the state/distribution/subsidy level anyway. Sometimes

it seems as if we are meant to believe that the Effect also operates at the \*individual choice\* level, but I find that highly dubious to begin with. It stretches the imagination to envision a Catholic Third Worlder who is on the verge of committing the sin of *fornication* that is condemned by the Pope, and yet decides that when sinning in this manner he mustn't use a condom because, why, the Pope said it was a sin. At the very least, if moralistic anti-condom sentiment \*does\* influence any people in this (bizarre) way I would imagine it would have to be part of a larger and more complex, deeply-rooted social taboo/pattern against condom use, and is \*not\* dictated solely by the word of one guy in the Vatican, a notion which seems ridiculously simplistic and caricaturesque.

by Blixa on Tue, 04/19/2005 - 18:59 | [reply](#)

## The Catholic Church teaches a

The Catholic Church teaches abstinence and celibacy to its followers (the majority of which are from the developing world) and argues, rightly, that if these were practiced the AIDS pandemic would not exist. But abstinence and celibacy are not the human condition. By promulgating an extreme and unrealistic ideology, as well as the utter falsehood that HIV particles can pass through latex condoms, the Catholic Church must have contributed to the AIDS pandemic. It is almost not worth arguing with anyone so obtuse as to not agree with this.

Kieren

by a reader on Tue, 04/19/2005 - 21:20 | [reply](#)

## multi part advice

giving multi part advice where one part is very bad without the rest, \*is\* difficult. you must be extra careful.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 04/20/2005 - 05:14 | [reply](#)

## The Pope and the Iraq War

Blixa,

I think that [these links](#) make the Pope's anti-Iraq-war position pretty clear.

**Gil**

by [Gil](#) on Wed, 04/20/2005 - 16:09 | [reply](#)

**Indeed. Thanks,**

Indeed. Thanks,

by Blixa on Wed, 04/20/2005 - 18:01 | [reply](#)

## Re: The Pope and the Iraq War

Gil and Blixa:

That article in The Independent says "John Paul has said there is no legal or moral justification for military action". For what it's worth, I recently saw a Catholic pro-war blogger categorically deny that the Pope ever said this. I'm afraid I can't locate the link now, but I think he was saying that the press simply made it up, and that in fact the Pope always confined himself to generalised statements that did not specifically take a position on whether Iraq should be liberated. If you search for that phrase, you'll see countless references to it, but no actual quotes.

Having said that, I have to say that your first reference is quite hard to interpret as not taking a position.

I guess, with sufficient faith, one could do it, though.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 04/20/2005 - 20:11 | [reply](#)

## Re: The Catholic Church teaches a

*By promulgating an extreme and unrealistic ideology, as well as the utter falsehood that HIV particles can pass through latex condoms, the Catholic Church must have contributed to the AIDS pandemic.*

It is in fact true that HIV particles can pass through latex condoms (when they break). The **failure rate of condoms** is between 1 and 10%.

**Henry Sturman**

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Wed, 04/20/2005 - 20:55 | [reply](#)

## "Legal or Moral Justification"

According to [this](#), it was actually top Vatican officials, and not the Pope himself, who said that a preventive US-led attack would have no legal or moral justification.

I guess it depends on whether or not you believe that top Vatican officials' speak for the Pope or not. I don't think he contradicted this particular sentiment.

**Gil**

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 04/21/2005 - 15:44 | [reply](#)

## Hmm. Now I'm confused again.

Hmm. Now I'm confused again. Whatever the source of the "no justification" sentiment, in any event, Gil's first link alone had already convinced me that I stood corrected. "NO TO WAR", in a speech given by the Pope himself, and referencing Iraq specifically

and almost exclusively, seemed pretty unequivocal. :) Although I admit that the more I turn over and over the phrasing of the passage in question the more it seems to crumble away to nothingness in my hands. I think it's enough to say that even if it was, as I had heard, lesser officials who had the largest role in crafting the Vatican Iraq war position, the Pope did nothing significant to dispel the idea that they spoke for him as well.

by Blixa on Thu, 04/21/2005 - 21:37 | [reply](#)

## re: Pope and Iraq War, it is

re: Pope and Iraq War, it is plain and simple to me: the Vatican is headed by the Pope. Of course, like any other political entity there are different people responsible for making the announcements etc. than the Pope himself, but if there is an official statement made by the Vatican regarding \*any\* issue, it is natural to assume it reflects Pope's personal stance. If it was otherwise he had to make that clear, just like any other head of state/political part/etc has to.

re: Pope and Aids, the more important issue is that he could greatly boost the prevention efforts by speaking in favour of condoms. The fact that he did not, and that numerous examples to the exact opposite are attached to the his and the Vatican's stance regarding AIDS is a liability.

I don't think that one should talk about the Pope given that he was "the Pope," so as to justify what he did and said or not. Well, what is a "Pope" anyway? What does a Pope have to do, being a "Pope"? That is the crux of the debate here, and hopefully the answers to these questions change during the time and converge to a more humanistic limit.

--Babak

by a reader on Sat, 04/23/2005 - 03:03 | [reply](#)

## static

The Pope commands a large amount of power and you don't like how that one used it. You wish that he had done Y instead of X. But the Pope's authority is all "moral". So, question: If the Pope had indeed done Y would he still have had the same power necessary to achieve the results you imagine Y having achieved if done by someone with that power?

To assume so is a static analysis that is surely incorrect. This is why it "makes sense" to evaluate how a Pope did given that he was a Pope. It is all well and good to fantasize about there either being no Pope or the Pope being some other kind of office. But reality is reality.

p.s. I still can't for the life of me envision this bizarre Third-world fornicator who when fornicating against the command of the Pope decided not to use a condom based on the pivotal say-so of the Pope. I am not convinced that any such people exist, in fact, let

alone millions of them.

by Blixa on Sun, 04/24/2005 - 17:53 | [reply](#)

### 3rd world fornicator

blixa,

imagine poor town in africa. there is some kind of official or chief, who makes various policies. public opinion is against both sex outside marriage and against condoms, and the pope is partly to thank for this. so the guy makes public policies against condoms. thus they are harder to get. banned sex is also harder to get. so anyway, many people want sex and get it anyway, but many of them find condoms too inconvenient to get under these circumstances, and don't. (this inconvenience includes lack of education about why to wear them, etc, so the person may not realise he should seek them out, as well as them actually being difficult to physically get). thus both of the Pope's views, together, cause more sex without condoms.

btw another arg:

take condoms away from half of ppl. take sex away from half of people. but don't make them all the same people. more unprotected sex. the point is if the Pope's policies don't have 100% success rate, and they don't always both succeed or both fail with a single person... (this *\*is\** realistic, in that there would be some people who still have access to condoms but don't want sex, and others who want sex but no easy condom access)

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 04/25/2005 - 04:15 | [reply](#)

### 3rd world fornicator

He might not be choosing. He might not be obeying the Pope. He might not know what he's risking because it's against the law for teachers to tell him. His parents might not know either, or might not tell him because they are Catholic. Or he might not have parents. He might not be Catholic. He might be dirt poor and the government has driven up the price of condoms and harasses people who try to give them out free. And uses government money to fund campaigns telling lies about condoms and AIDS (lies prepared and spread and endorsed by the Catholic Church):  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/panorama/3180236.stm>

Philippines: police regard condoms as evidence of prostitution. Also confiscate them. Also beat up people who have them:  
<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/05/03/philip8522.htm>

We're not just talking about high-flown theological theories by some academic theologian in Rome. This is a massive world wide political campaign with real effects on people.

## Good answers

Good answers, both. They have helped me to envision in more detail how the condom-effect could be operating in practice.

I note that you've both basically conceded my point however (that whatever the effect is, it's probably not operating on what I called the "individual choice" level). Maybe it was just a boring/obvious point... but I felt it worth making because quite often people who raise this problem do seem to be talking about, or think they're talking about, some millions of marginal 3rd world fornicators who decide not to use condoms while fornicating cuz the Pope says condoms are sin.

My next question perhaps is whether there is some subtle bigotry working here. For example why does the Pope get all of the ire about this, rather than perhaps Elliot's hypothetical "African chief", or the Phillipine authorities? Is it that we can't expect any better of such people? The response might be (probably will be) "um what are you talking about? there's enough ire to go around, it's just that this thread was about the Pope", though, and if so then nevermind.

by Blix on Mon, 04/25/2005 - 18:53 | [reply](#)

## the ire

Well, the ire must be mostly about the Pope, when we, here in Canada, or England, or anywhere but that poor village in Africa with the little evil "African chief", talk about the issue. The people in that village, or in that African country must and I bet indeed do make their ire about that and many more such "African chiefs". I mean, it is not just this thread being about the Pope, but that from this distance, and from a more world-wide angle, the issue *\*is\** the Pope and other such international public figures. And only when you are in that village, the issue is (first and foremost) the "African chief".

--Babak

by a reader on Thu, 04/28/2005 - 16:55 | [reply](#)

## Moral Responsibility

Blix wrote:

So, question: If the Pope had indeed done Y would he still have had the same power necessary to achieve the results you imagine Y having achieved if done by someone with that power?

To assume so is a static analysis that is surely incorrect.

Just to make sure I understand: What you are saying is that if the

Pope had done Y instead of X, which I would have liked, the Papacy would have been different from what we know it is today. In particular, the Pope might not have had the same power, or the same kind of power, he has today. So, I must make my analysis of the Pope's statements conform to the "fact" that he is the "Pope" and as such will not do anything that changes the Papacy.

I grant that you are right in thinking that analysis is static. But it seems to me that your argument against static analyses (the way I understand it) is an overkill: "The Pope will not change," you seem to me to be saying, "so you must abandon all analyses that make demands to that effect." Looks to me like a vicious circle blocking any hope for and \*any\* analysis, static or dynamic, directed at change.

Can't the Pope change the Papacy at all, and still enjoy the same order of power, though perhaps different in sort?

--Babak

by a reader on Thu, 04/28/2005 - 17:24 | [reply](#)

## Re: ire, I don't think I a

Re: ire,

I don't think I agree. why is it valid for you to criticize the Pope (a faraway guy in the Vatican, in Europe) but not to criticize the African chief (a faraway guy in a village, in Africa)? why "only" when you are in the village can you criticize the village chief? Doesn't this mean you have to be a Vatican resident, or at least a *Catholic*, to criticize the Pope?

Perhaps you simply mean it's *easier* to point at/single out the Pope because he's a Worldwide Figure, whereas it's *hard* to speak to/criticize all those African chiefs. Well yeah. Pointing at the Pope alone *is* the easier/shortcut way of lodging these complaints.

Re: X,

i think you've misunderstood me. it's not that doing X will "change the Papacy", about which I care not. it's that if he does X he himself risks ceasing to be the Pope! Then some other guy gets in there (more "reactionary") and now where does that leave you and your criticisms?

Another possibility is that he loses a good chunk of the "moral authority" that gives the Pope his magical sinister worldwide voodoo powers. you (as I recall) lament that people don't use condoms cuz the Pope says not to, and they listen to the Pope. (Yes we all worked out that it's a more complicated mechanism than that, i'm just trying to be quick). you want the Pope to say "use condoms". But *if he does this* will those same people even listen to him? if not, then the benefit you imagine (people starting to use condoms a lot) simply isn't there. Just because people obey the Pope on Not Using Condoms doesn't necessarily mean they'd obey him on Using Them. These people (more to the point - states, and "African chiefs")

aren't a bunch of automatons who are given instructions and carry them out. They're humans and have natural human motives.

It would be very natural and typical for a lot of pious/religious people to hear a Pope saying "use condoms" and start to think of him as less "holy", and adjust their attitude to his statements accordingly. This mental model of 3rd World Catholics as automatons carrying out instructions, whatever they are, is rather lazy.

by Blixa on Wed, 05/04/2005 - 18:01 | [reply](#)

## re: ire and X

re: ire,

Well, I did not mean to take the *distance* as a measure of whom to make the ire about. It's the international *weight*, or power if you will, that crosses over that distance, which is the measure. The african chief does not command any moral authority, in your own words, on the people in Europe or Americas, but the Pope does. And as it turns out, this is an international issue, since it is rather important what the people in such faraway countries as in Europe or Americas think about the issue as well as those in the village, at least because the people in the poor african village need their financial help.

re: X and Y,

Of course nobody (even me!) expects the Pope to come out one day and say "use condoms!" out of the blue. If he is going to say so, he must believe in its use and benefits in the first place, and if a Pope sees that light, he sure must have a lot of supportive argument for his new resolution, which he will also give. This moral baggage, if you will, is such that it does not, so directly as you seem to suggest, lead to a decline of his moral authority. I've seen a lot of such reversals in religious rulings of the religious references, in Islam for instance, (just specifying my experience, nothing special about Islam here) and the new ruling always is accepted, with a little adjustment, by the followers. It's complex but by no means impossible.

I do not expect the villagers to follow mindlessly the statements of their Pope, but surely that will ease the way greatly.

In brief, what I care about is the new paradigm that will result from such a ruling; I'm sure the Vatican knows how to take care of their moral authority. I do not expect this to be done overnight either, but it's important to voice criticism (on the right basis, of course). It may take decades, or centuries as it did for Galilleo, for the Vatican to change, but that's another story.

--Babak

by a reader on Sat, 05/07/2005 - 19:27 | [reply](#)

## The Vatican, IVF, and stem cell research

It is going to **campaign to have them banned**:

The Roman Catholic church is liable to launch a global offensive against infertility treatment following its victory in an Italian referendum last week, a leading expert said on Sunday.

[...]

"Since this is obviously one of the key issues for the new Pope, he will try to say the same thing in other countries where the Catholic Church has influence," he told Reuters ahead of the start of a European fertility meeting.

"When the Vatican throws its weight and political influence, infertility (treatment) is one of the things that could be sacrificed."

[...]

Sunde believes fertility treatment is just the start. The real showdown will be over embryonic stem cells - master cells that have the potential to form into any other cell type or tissue and which have the potential to cure a range of diseases.

"What we are heading toward is the battle around stem cells. The issue is the moral status of the early embryo. That is what it is all about," he added.

by **Editor** on Mon, 06/20/2005 - 19:43 | [reply](#)