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## Pope urged to lift condom ban

More than 50 dissident Catholic groups published an unusually frank open letter to Pope Benedict on Friday saying the Church's ban on contraception has been "catastrophic" and urging him to lift it.

The letter was published as a paid half-page advertisement in Corriere della Sera, Italy's largest newspaper, on the 40th anniversary of the late Pope Paul VI's controversial encyclical "Humanae Vitae," which enshrined the ban.

While criticism of the Vatican and its views is fairly common in articles and editorials in Italian newspapers, it is unusual for a group to take out paid advertising against the pope, particularly in a large-circulation mainstream newspaper.

The letter, written in Italian, said the Church's anti-contraception policy "has had a catastrophic impact on the poor and powerless around the world, endangering women's lives and leaving millions at risk of HIV."

Many feel policy has been 'utter failure' It also said that 40 years on, the encyclical continued to be "a source of great conflict and division in the Church" and because most Catholics use contraception and feel they are not sinning, the policy has been "an utter failure."

Pope Paul's encyclical, written in 1968, has been defended by his successors John Paul and Benedict.

The Church teaches that nothing should block the possible transmission of life and approves only natural methods of birth control such as the rhythm method, in which a couple abstain from intercourse during a woman's fertile time.

Paul's encyclical, written at the height of the 1960s sexual revolution, is perhaps the most controversial and divisive in modern Church history.

As recently as last May, Benedict defended the encyclical as far-sighted and said it was "all too often misunderstood and misinterpreted."

At the time, Benedict said love between a married couple could not "remain closed to the gift of life."

Vatican still to issue response

**The letter was signed by groups such as Catholics for Choice, which is US based, We Are Church, which has branches in numerous countries, and New Ways Ministry, which helps minister to gay Catholics.**

"We thought the establishment in Rome and the Vatican pay close attention to the Italian media and the letter would be seen by the people to whom we want to deliver this message," Jon O'Brien, president of Catholics for Choice, told Reuters by telephone from Washington.

The Vatican said it would likely issue a statement on the letter later on Friday.

"It is clear to us that the Catholic Church cannot move forward until it honestly confronts the paradox of

Humanae Vitae," the letter said.

Plead for Pope to allow safe family planning for Catholics

"Most Catholics use modern contraceptives, believe it is a moral choice to do so and consider themselves Catholics in good standing, yet the Catholic hierarchy completely denies this reality, forcing the clergy into silence on this and most other issues related to sexuality," it said.

The letter concluded: "Pope Benedict, we call on you to use to use this anniversary as an opportunity to start the process of healing by being true to the positive aspects of Catholic teachings on sexuality and lifting the ban on contraception to allow Catholics to plan their families safely and in good conscience." – (Reuters Health, July 2008)

<http://www.health24.com/news/Contraception/1-900,47336.asp>

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