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Archbishop sympathises on condom use

LONDON: The most senior Catholic in England and Wales said he could understand the attraction of arguments for the use of condoms in poor countries, in comments released Thursday.

Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster, stressed the Catholic Church's opposition to contraception, which saw Pope Benedict XVI say condoms could even worsen the AIDS crisis during a visit to Africa last year.

But Nichols' comments to BBC radio take a softer tone on the issue.

"I think when it comes to Third World poverty and the great pressure under which many women are put by men, I can see the arguments why, in the short term, means that give women protection are attractive," he said.

In the interview, Nichols added that the use of condoms "doesn't lack for champions" but it was not "the church's role simply to add its voice to that".

"Unless we have a vision of the beauty of sexuality and of the openness of sexuality to one of its fundamental purposes, which is the creation of new life, then we run the risk of reducing it to an entertainment or a pastime or simply a pleasure," he said.

He also touched on recent clerical abuse scandals in the church, saying that priests who had abused children were "tiny exceptions" in England and Wales.

The Pope is due to visit Britain in September and over 10,000 people have signed a petition calling for Prime Minister Gordon Brown to disassociate himself from his "intolerant views" including opposition to the use of condoms. - AFP