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Vatican broadens condom comments

VATICAN CITY: Pope Benedict's landmark acknowledgement that condoms are sometimes morally justifiable to stop AIDS can apply to anyone — gays, heterosexuals and transsexuals — if that is the only option to avoid transmitting the HIV virus to others, the Vatican said.

The clarification, which some moral theologians called "groundbreaking", was the latest step in what is already seen as a significant shift in Catholic Church policy.

It came at a news conference to launch the pope's new book, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Sign of the Times*.

In the book, a long interview with German Catholic journalist Peter Seewald, the pope made clear he was not changing the Catholic ban on contraception, but, using the example of a male prostitute, said there were cases

where using a condom to avoid transmitting the HIV virus could be justified.

Vatican spokesman Father Federico Lombardi made the clarification because the German, English and French versions of the book used the male article when referring to a prostitute, but the Italian version used the female form.

"I asked the pope personally if there was a serious distinction in the choice of male instead of female and he said 'No'," Lombardi said.

"The point is it (condom use) should be a first step towards responsibility in being aware of the risk of the life of the other person one has relations with," he said on Tuesday.

Theologians, AIDS activists and liberal Catholics said the developments marked a highly significant, perhaps even historic, change in the Church's attitude to condoms. — Reuters