

We debate the issue of creationism and evolution ... then we debate the issue of whether either (or both) of these should be taught in school ... We debate the issue of sex education in school ... and should we educate students regarding abstinence or safety (or both) ... And now, we have another "debate" - between Pope Benedict XVI and the Cochrane Collaboration. I guess I don't need to tell you who the Pope is - that goes without saying. As for the [Cochrane Collaboration](http://www.cochrane.org/docs/descrip.htm "Cochrane Collaboration") , let's just go to their website for who they are: *"The Cochrane Collaboration is an international not-for-profit and independent organization, dedicated to making up-to-date, accurate information about the effects of healthcare readily available worldwide. It produces and disseminates systematic reviews of healthcare interventions and promotes the search for evidence in the form of clinical trials and other studies of interventions."* This group is one of the world leaders, if not the foremost authority, on evidence-based medicine. Their systematic reviews of what currently exist in the scientific and medical literature provide a solid evidence-based foundation upon which health care providers build. In essence, they are not some "fly by night" organization - far from it. Over the past week, Pope Benedict XVI went so far as to say that distribution of condoms would not resolve the AIDS problem but, on the contrary, would [aggravate or increase it](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/18/opinion/18wed2.html??r=2 "The Pope on condoms and AIDS") . And in the opposite corner, the Cochrane Collaboration (along with none other than our own Center For Disease Control) state that "this [review](http://www.cochrane.org/reviews/en/ab003255.html "Cochrane review") indicates that consistent use of condoms results in 80% reduction in HIV incidence". Throw everything aside for a moment. This isn't a post about AIDS, or HIV. It is but a display of how beliefs can crash headlong into good science in what happens to be a very important sociomedical issue in the world today. It seems to me that there is a huge chasm between "aggravate or increase" the problem and "80% reduction in incidence". But here's the question that begs to be asked: Is it morally acceptable to make a statement to millions of people that has been well-refuted by science? And to do so with the added responsibility of being the leader of one of the world's largest religions - knowing that you have so many people hanging on every word you speak? You be the judge.