



TODAY, IN 1976

Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser announced that "Waltzing Matilda" would serve as Australia's national anthem at the upcoming Olympic Games.

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THURSDAY

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Vatican at crossroads on contraception ban

By Brian Murphy
Associated Press

A study by the Vatican on whether it could permit condoms to battle AIDS has a narrow scope: married Roman Catholic couples in which one partner has the virus. But its theological underpinnings are centuries old, and could provide the basis for ending the church's blanket ban on contraception.

The principle of "double effect" entered Catholic debate more than 300 years ago and draws on questions about the

"lesser of two evils" raised by theologians such as St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. The broad query is: Can a questionable act be morally justified when the good effect outweighs a bad consequence?

Answering with an empathic "yes" are scholars, health professionals and others who want the Vatican to change its stance that abstinence is the only acceptable way to prevent the spread of AIDS. They argue that condom use as a defense against infection, under specific circumstances, does not contra-

dict the Catholic ban on artificial birth control.

Some groups, including the Southern Africa Catholic Bishops Conference, have even given a tacit nod to condoms for married couples with one partner infected. The Vatican could be moving to formally recognize that position.

"It's a reality that's finally moving into a wider arena," said Sister Alison Munro, coordinator of the AIDS project for those bishops.

There's no chance the Vatican would fundamentally revise

its opposition to contraception, which has been reaffirmed and reinforced since the 1968 encyclical "Humanae Vitae."

But even the current discussions are evidence Pope Benedict XVI is shedding his reputation for being tradition-bound.

"The Vatican is like a submarine. On this one, it has put up its periscope, looked around and submerged again," said the Rev. James Keenan, a moral theologian at Boston College. "It's still not clear at all what — if anything — the Vatican will eventually say on the subject."