

# Guest Columnist: Cohabitation's Curse

*The following column, by Monsignor Owen F. Campion, first appeared in a recent edition of Our Sunday Visitor. It is reprinted with the permission of Monsignor Campion, the Associate Publisher of that publication.*

A few weeks ago, a reader of Our Sunday Visitor called me, not to complain about something that we had published but to state her great indignation that apparently Britain's Prince William and his fiancée, Kate Middleton, have been intimate already, and for a time now, since they are living together and have lived together in the past.

She thought that this was an outrage, because of the prince's status as a superstar in many places in the world, but also because that if one day he becomes King William V, he will be head of the Church of England.

"Doesn't the Church of England have any rules?" she demanded. I had to put my best ecumenical ingenuity to work to answer this one without being sarcastic and harsh. The Church of England, sadly, has abandoned many of its once-cherished teachings regarding morality, either by precisely negating what was taught in the past as Christian tradition, or by compromising and in the end holding nothing.

The call raises a point involving many more people than the heir to the British throne. It involves more than the Church of England.

Throughout Western society, so traditionally and historically Christian, cohabitation, the circumstance that this caller mentioned in reference to the prince, is rampant. It is a sign of how far respect for religion and religious values has slipped in our own country that sexual intimacy before, or outside, marriage is commonplace.

We Catholics cannot cast many stones. Every priest knows that a high percentage of couples whom he sees to prepare for marriage already are sexually active with each other. Of course, the general impression is that most priests would be offended by this fact, so couples avoid the issue, or if confronted, they lie.

(Priests are on the spot in such circumstances. They can criticize, even denounce, such conduct, but pre-marital sex does not give a priest grounds under Church law to deny Catholic marriage to the couple involved.)

It is a greater problem than how to manage marriage plans for a couple already living together. It is the cultural acceptance of the practice, Catholics being guilty of this acceptance as often as not. Catholics live together without marriage. Catholic parents tolerate this among their children.

Years ago, before his death, TV reporter Barbara Walters, famous for her questioning the great and famous, interviewed Bing Crosby, the legendary singer, admittedly a man with faults, but also a committed Irish-Catholic, especially in his later years.

She asked him what would he do if one of his adult children who might be in an intimate relationship with a person outside marriage came home for Christmas with the "significant other?" Would Crosby allow them to occupy the same room if they stayed overnight?

Quite calmly, Crosby simply said, "No." Aghast, considering the way things are now in America, Walters asked, why?

Crosby said that, as a Catholic, he believed what the Church taught about marriage and the dignity of sex. If he allowed such a situation under his roof, he was failing, as a father, to teach his children what was right and for their own good.

God bless him. However, the reaction of Barbara Walters, utterly incredulous at his position, shows how far things have gone in our society.

This is one point from this story. Cohabitation, simply speaking from sociology and psychology, is problematic. No one does anyone a service by simply condoning this particular behavior. (Remember the story in the Bible of the father who gives a child a snake when asked for a fish?) Warn youths, and indeed others, of the sin involved but also of the other problems so often associated with cohabitation.

Secondly, the Church has the truth about how we are to live. It is vastly more reliable than social conventions or how individually we feel.