

Bob,

I appreciate your September issue editorial but I fear it speaks to a status quo that no longer exists. It is a fact that today's young people are having sex before marrying. Your editorial of 'just say no, leaves that practice theologically unprotected. It ignores the sad fact that more than half of church wedding sanctioned, legally solemnized marriages end in divorce today. It has nothing to say other than 'don't do it' to today's young people, who for all kinds of historically grown, good reasons have to postpone getting married for a decade longer than you and I did.

I also wonder whether your view of marriage is not more R C than CRC. The Catholics elevate marriage to a sacrament on par with baptism and Lord Supper. The Reformation clearly rejected that view. Historically speaking couples who came to love one another simply moved in together at a certain time and only later solemnized their union with a church wedding. Initially Reformed churches sided with this practice but stressed the importance of a formal engagement before the decision to live together was made. Thus, they considered the engagement more important than the wedding.

However, this practice proved to be unsatisfactory. Too many men felt free to leave their spouses without obligation to care for their children on grounds that their union had not been solemnized. This is why over time the churches began to emphasize the importance of the wedding rather than the engagement.

Today we know that there is no longer any guarantee that a marriage begun with a church wedding will last.

All of us, on both sides of the issue of cohabitation subscribe to the importance of the notion that romantic relationships, before and after the wedding must be characterized by truth, intimacy and commitment. That is the norm. The norm is abiding, the form that norm takes over time is culturally-historically changeable.