

Fr. Perozich comments —

This article is for my brother priests as much as it is for the laity who deal with those who try to equate their unions with Holy Matrimony.

Faithful Catholics confronting this situation want a hard and fast answer from us priests, often an approval of their decision already made when they come to us.

Dr. Janet Smith gives some insights into how various family members feel and deal with difficult situations.

She also gives an insight into how a homosexual act makes some men, who have delayed psychosexual development, feel masculine and turn them toward continued sexual same sex encounters to give relief from psychosexual deficit through further sexual acts.

The rejection and threats of being ostracized will come to those who do not go along. These are very strong and meant to manipulate a faithful Catholic to do what others demand of him.

Prayer, fasting, approval of all that is good in a person, the expression of love without approval of sex acts are all part of the response.

I am sorry if a hard and fast solution is not presented here the way one would like. Smith recommends the soul searching to remain faithful to God, to one's faith, to one's self, and still be loving as one is able to be toward those who demand a Catholic accept certain choices which are not consistent with God and faith in Jesus Christ.

Attending Sinful Weddings

JANET E. SMITH



Deciding whether or not to attend the weddings of those not living in accord with the Church’s teaching on sexuality is, for many of us, an agonizing matter. People often ask for my advice. (I find it easier to advise them than to make similar decisions in my own life!)

John,* a Catholic father, asked me if his reluctance to attend the “wedding” of his son Paul to Charles was wrong. Anne, his Catholic wife, and his other children told him he was going to do lethal damage to the family if he did not attend. They were afraid that Paul and his “husband” would never come to the family home or invite the family

to their home. He even faced the possibility of his wife leaving him.

Anne and a few of the other children told John they had known for some time that Paul was same-sex attracted and couldn't quite understand how John had not picked it up. It was only two years ago, when Paul was 30, that Anne told John about Paul's same-sex attraction since she knew Paul would be bringing Charles home to meet the family. John was shocked, confused, and hurt, but he knew he had to be very careful how he engaged Paul about the matter. He was grateful that he had time to prepare for a discussion with Paul.

When they met, John told Paul what he had heard from Anne and assured Paul that he loved him and always would. John asked Paul when Paul had discovered that he had such feelings and how he felt about having them. The conversation revealed that Paul had never felt as masculine as his considerably older brothers. He felt there was something wrong with him because he didn't like rough physical activity, hunting, and camping. In addition, his brothers had joined the military, which he couldn't see himself doing. He saw how proud his dad had been in the choices his brothers had made and thought he could never make choices that would win such glowing admiration from his father.

Paul went on to share with John that when he was a sophomore in high school, a senior basketball star had shown attention to him. That was quite unexpected, and **the older boy eventually got Paul to engage in sexual acts. This relationship helped Paul feel**

affirmed in his masculinity. When he went to college, Paul found himself happiest when he was partying with the “gay” crowd.

John had no idea that Paul had felt unadmired by him—he had always thought Paul was a delight—Paul had a great sense of humor and had impressed John with his musical and dramatic skills. John admitted to himself that he had never thought that Paul was as masculine as his other sons and had feared he was too much of a “mama’s boy.” He apologized to Paul for in any way having neglected him or not fully showing him how treasured he was. He asked Paul if they could speak again the next night.

The next night, John reiterated how sorry he was that Paul never felt that he fit in with his brothers. He also said he knew that Paul must have experienced significant loneliness, confusion, and self-doubt and was sorry that Paul had not felt he could come to John with his concerns. John, before he knew that Paul was in a romantic relationship with Charles, had met Charles some weeks before and truly liked him; Charles was a mannerly person capable of lively and interesting conversation and accomplished in his field. John told Paul all this and that he was happy he had found a friend with whom he enjoyed doing things.

With much trepidation, John told Paul what would not be news to Paul: that he couldn’t approve of the sexual dimension of the relationship—it was something that the Catholic Church taught was seriously wrong. Paul flared up for a moment but then said he understood that his dad

was a devout Catholic and knew his choices must be hard for him, but he insisted that he was old enough to make his own choices. He didn't want any lectures about the morality of his choices. He believed he was born gay. Moreover, he had been assured by the Jesuit priest at the parish he had once attended that his and Charles' relationship was blessed by God because it was based on love. As Paul left, John gave him a big hug and said that he hoped they could discuss this further, especially the true meaning of love.

It wasn't much later that Paul announced that he and Charles were getting married in a civil ceremony because Charles did not want a church wedding. When John told Anne he did not believe he could attend the "ceremony" (he could not call it a "wedding"), Anne got very upset and told him that was not a loving thing to do and Paul would certainly conclude that John's protestations of love for him were false. She also said the other children would see their father as judgmental and unloving.

Anne tried to convince John that Paul and Charles were not getting married in a church so he should not be objecting to the event—they were not violating the practices of the Catholic Church. John, of course, argued that they were involved in a sexual relationship not at all in accord with God's will and were engaged in a ceremony that simulated a marriage—a relationship not possible between individuals of the same sex. **Anne could only see John as insensitive and judgmental and putting his own opinions above Paul's well-being and above harmony in the family.** She feared the

other children would come to hate their father and the Catholic faith.

John believed that his role as a loving father required him not to signal approval of the immoral life that Paul had chosen and thought attending the “wedding” would undermine his witness. He had no trouble speaking of his love for Paul, and even for Charles, but he could not be present to celebrate their commitment to a lifelong sexual relationship.

In the course of our conversation, we realized that **prayer and sacrifice were key to moving forward.** John needed to intensify his prayer life and make some major sacrifice, such as giving up watching sporting events or his favorite TV show for the year. John wisely said he needed to be careful that his sacrifice was not perceived by the family as coercive and grandstanding.

He also saw that Anne not telling him earlier about Paul’s sexual preferences and her threatening to leave him indicated deeper problems in the marriage. He realized he needed to assure Anne that he would be devastated if anything should come between them. He would ask her to go to counseling with him so they could improve communication and come to a deeper understanding of each other, thereby strengthening their bonds and hopefully making them better able to weather such disagreements.

I recommended that John speak to all members of the family about the need to be true to their values no matter what the consequences. **He should ask all of them to respect his decision, and although they didn’t**

agree with it, it would help if they would come to accept that he was not making the decision out of pride or being judgmental. Rather, **his decision came from his deepest commitments—his commitment to live in accord with God’s plan for reality—a commitment that guided all his decisions:** his decision to marry whom he married; his decision to weather the storms of marriage; his decision to have children and to raise them as Catholics. Indeed, he would not be the man he was, nor the husband and father he was, were he not Catholic. He should tell them he believed and was living by the truth **that sexuality was a gift from God meant to create a union between the sexes that enabled them to raise a family together.**

He should tell them that he loved Paul and Charles and wanted both of them to be in a close relationship with God and to be with God for eternity.

He was also going to collect good pamphlets, articles, and even books to give to his wife, children, and others that explained the Church’s understanding of sexuality (I recommended [*Living the Truth in Love*](#), edited by myself and Fr. Paul Check [Ignatius, 2016]) and would offer to read anything they wanted to share with him—and then to discuss the issues.

John said he was going to try to impress upon his family that **it was as much their reaction to his decision that would determine the future harmony of the family as it was the decision itself.** He was going to pray that Paul would take the lead and tell Anne and other family members that he understood and

respected his father's decision and would ask them not to let it be a reason for conflict in the family. John would also speak to Anne and ask her to support his decision in front of their other children—he was not asking her not to attend the ceremony; he would not speak against her decision and would ask her not to speak against his.

Decades ago, for reasons related to an annulment mess, I (chosen to be the maid of honor) could not attend the wedding of my beloved sister since the ceremony, for various reasons, was basically going to be sacrilegious. Family members reacted variously—my father thought I should respect the priest “who was only doing what he thought was right”; my mother generally thought all her loved ones were right and refused to make any judgments; one brother didn't speak to me for over a year. The one who understood best was my sister who was getting married, and, thankfully, there was barely a hiccup in our relationship. My father eventually came to see that I, too, was only doing what I thought was right—and perhaps I was in the right and the priest in the wrong.

My friends and I have struggled over the years with whether or not to go to the wedding ceremonies of loved ones (heterosexuals) who are living together before marriage, some of whom are marrying in a Catholic ceremony and others who are not. We used to think it was a black and white issue—basically, we should not attend; we could not witness what seemed to us more or less a mockery of the sacrament.

We have come to think there are times when we should attend, though we do so after agonizing over all the

elements—the most important ones being: if our action is more or less likely to bring those getting married closer to Jesus and His Church, and how it will affect the other children in the family. **It is not easy to make the decision to go and we wonder if it is a rationalizing compromise.** We always make sure the couple and other parties close to the situation understand that we believe they are making decisions very much in conflict with God’s plan for sexuality and that does not bode well for the future of their relationship.

Sometimes we mention mortal sin and endangerment of salvation, but usually we speak more vaguely—we do so in hopes that we can keep the door open for future conversation on just such matters. In one such situation I made the offer to attend the wedding if the couple would go through a marriage preparation program, which I would give them as a gift.

People who make brave stands on controversial matters must expect to be misunderstood, to be the object of anger, and even to be rejected or “exiled” for some time. We must be very patient with others and not let our own hurt govern our responses to them. We need to keep reminding the couple that we love them; that we wish we could celebrate with them but that it is precisely our love for them that makes us reluctant to attend. And we need to hope and pray that someday they will discover that their love for each other with God in the picture is infinitely better than living in accord with their own lights.

*All names are fictitious.
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