

# Questions Young People Ask Before Marriage

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Published by

Liguorian Pamphlet Office  
Redemptorist Fathers  
Liguori, Missouri

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Second Printing 1955

Reprinted from  
THE LIGUORIAN  
A Catholic Monthly Magazine  
Published with Ecclesiastical Approval

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## **Is Love Necessary for a Happy Marriage?**

**Question:** Is love necessary for a happy marriage?

**Answer:** It depends on what you mean by "love". I might add that it also depends on what you mean by marriage, but we shall take for granted that you mean what the Lord meant, viz., an indissoluble sacramental partnership between a man and a woman who pledge themselves to help each other toward happiness on earth and in heaven, and to beget and rear children for the kingdom of God.

What do you mean by "love"? Do you mean that violent feeling of attraction, that all-suffering sense of helpless infatuation, that overpowering "can't-think-of-anything-else" emotion, which the pulps, true story magazines and masy novels describe as love? If you do, my answer is a quick "no". This kind of love is not necessary because there have been thousands of happy marriages without it, from those in which the bridegroom was chosen for the bride (or vice versa) by elders, as was customary for centuries, down to the latest marriage of two young people who kept their wits about them all through their company-keeping and engagement. The wild infatuation that some mistake for love is a minor form of hysteria, and hysteria is not only not necessary for, but a positive drawback to, a happy marriage.

But if you define love correctly, I say that it is absolutely necessary for a happy marriage. Love is an intelligent willingness to surrender self-will, to make sacrifices, to place fidelity, charity and duty above feelings, in behalf of a person whom one has found to be a good companion, a sturdy character, and a believer in the same purposes of life and marriage as oneself. The degree of physical and

emotional attraction behind this determination of the free will may vary greatly, but it is never the essence of love. Too many young people have thought otherwise, to the effect that, with the inevitable lessening of infatuation after a year or two of married life, they have considered themselves no longer in love. Love is a function of the free will, and it can last as long as the free will exercises itself according to the above definition. Therefore, to say "I am in love" should mean "I am willing to surrender my will, to sacrifice my desires, to place duty and fidelity above all else, in behalf of one person whom I have found suitable for a successful marriage."

## **Is Love Sufficient for a Happy Marriage?**

**Problem:** If one is deeply in love with a certain person, is not that sufficient for a happy marriage, even though others advise against the marriage? I am in love with a young man, and want to marry him, but everybody tells me he won't make me happy. I am so happy just being in love with him that I know I'll be happy in marriage.

**Solution:** It has been set down as one of the most futile things in life to argue with a young person already in love, who believes that the happiness of being in love is a true measure of the happiness that will be found in marriage. However, those of us who are interested in the happiness of married folk will still go on trying to convince young people of the danger of this mistake.

You say that everybody tells you that the young man you love cannot make you happy in marriage. I presume that this means your parents, your pastor or confessor, your close friends. Such unanimity can hardly be a result of conspiracy against you, or unfounded on good reasons. With eyes undimmed by the infatuation that makes you a poor judge of your boy friend, they must see something in his character that makes him unfit for the responsibilities of marriage. Perhaps he is shiftless and undependable; perhaps a drunkard; perhaps unprincipled or irreligious. After all, there are thousands of divorces in America each year, and tens of thousands of broken hearted wives. Can't you see that most of the latter married because they were breathlessly in love, and only afterward, too late, found out that love is not sufficient for a happy marriage?

You did not tell me on what ground everybody opposes your marriage to this boy, and therefore I do not say for certain that their opposition is justified. There is a good presumption that it is, however, from the fact that it is unanimous. I do say firmly, however, that you are clinging to a false principle when you say that "because you are happy just being in love with your boy friend, you know you'll be happy in marriage." It takes more than love, I assure you, to make a marriage happy, and sometimes it is only your parents, pastor, and good friends, who can tell you whether that something is present or absent.

## **On Love at First Sight**

**Problem:** "Do you believe in love at first sight? I recently met a man and fell head over heels in love with him on our first date. He seemed to feel the same way about me. If he asks me to marry him even after only three dates, I feel that I will just have to say Yes. Is not such a love sufficient to make marriage very happy?"

**Solution:** No, it isn't, and if you look around, you will see hundreds of proofs of this fact. Love at first sight may be the preliminary to a happy marriage, but there is no guarantee that it will be. I should say that the chances are definitely against a happy marriage, if love at first sight and three dates are the only

preliminaries.

The reason should be clear: as a rational creature you are expected to use your head as well as your heart in all the important actions of your life. There are few things more important than getting married, and once married, you are married till the death of either yourself or your partner. This love at first sight that you talk about is an emotional reaction to someone who seems to have many fine qualities on the surface. It cannot possibly see into the heart, into the conscience, into the will, into the past. It is easily possible that a man for whom a girl would feel love at first sight would be able to present a very lovable appearance for a time, while under the surface he was harboring any number of vices and evils. It takes time to find out whether a man has the interior qualities necessary to make a good husband and a happy marriage. And it takes common sense on your part not to say such things as that "you would have to say Yes at once if he asked you to marry him on your third date together." By that time you might not even have found out whether he was married before; whether he had an ungovernable temper; whether he was subject to epilepsy, melancholia or alcoholism.

Most of the divorces result from short courtships and so-called love at first sight. Don't be like the foolish ones of your generation. If you like this man at first sight, remember that you must use second sight and third sight and twentieth sight to know whether you can have reasonable assurance that he won't be giving you black eyes in the second month of your marriage. Love at first sight is all right if after six months of going with the person you find that he is as good inside as he is outside, and that you won't offend God or renounce God by marrying him.

## Can This Be Love?

**Problem:** Some weeks ago I had a date with a young man and I fell very much in love with him. But he has never asked me for another date. I am 21 years old and feel that he is the only one for me. How can I get him to fall in love with me? I see him at various parties and affairs, but he is always with some other girl. This makes me just crazy with jealousy.

**Solution:** Very probably your determination to snare a husband, and your setting your cap for the individual with whom you had a single date, became so clear in your conduct that this particular man lost interest in you. Men of character do not as a rule care for this "love-at-first-sight" business, whether it be actually put into words or whether it be only manifest in the looks, actions and eagerness of a girl. No matter how much you may be attracted to a man at first acquaintance, prudence dictates that you exercise a certain amount of reserve. This adds to your attractiveness and at the same time shows that you have common sense enough not to permit first feelings to rule your conduct and even to sponsor decisions that must last a lifetime.

When you go out with a man, you should remember that, while company-keeping is essentially a proving-ground for marriage, the man does not want to find that the only thing you are interested in is marriage. He wants to find out what some of your other interests, capabilities, ideals and enjoyments are. If he catches you mooning over him from the very start, "putting on" in an effort to impress him, acting as if you have not a thought in the world other than that of leading him to the altar, you must not be surprised if he does not ask you for a second date. If, on the other hand, he finds that you have a rounded personality, that you are a pretty happy sort of person and would be such whether you knew him or not, he is very apt to decide in due time that you are the type of girl he would like to go through life with, and that your love is worth making an effort to win.

Another thing: you are showing signs of great immaturity by stating that this one man is the only one

for you, and that you will be forever miserable without him. You may be miserable, but not because this one man gave you the cold shoulder. It will be because you have cultivated so few interests in life other than the determination to get married, that no man will give you a second or serious thought. Take your mind off marriage for a while and try to be natural, to be contented, to be self-sufficient, and you will not be left alone with your dreams.

## How to Escape from "Love"

**Problem:** Is it possible for one who has fallen madly in love with another to fall out of love? I am terribly in love with a man. But I know that my family and friends are right when they tell me that he would not make a good husband because of his obvious character defects and his past. But what can I do? I love him so much that nothing seems to matter except being with him and marrying him any time he says the word. Is there any cure for this at all?

**Solution:** Yes, there is a cure for this unfortunate situation, if you will permit the intelligence God gave you to take command over your feelings. Most of the cases in which girls talk about being madly in love, contrary to their own better judgment, are due to too much reading of romantic magazine stories and novels, and too much indulgence in movies that represent love as a flame that cannot be extinguished. Such stories and movies are an insult to the God-given intelligence of every human being. They are based on the false principle that a person can do nothing about his feelings except give in to them. If this were true, we would all be worse off than brute animals, because the latter have instincts to preserve them from harm which we do not possess. Human intelligence is supposed to save us from harm.

These are the steps you must take to overcome the attraction you feel for a man whom you know to be unfit for marriage:

1. Convince yourself that you don't have to let your feelings lead you around like a donkey on a halter. Cultivate a sense of shame for the very idea that you are helpless because of your feelings.
2. Use the special power, that is a part of your intelligence, of looking into the future. Visualize the unhappiness that will be yours in a very short time if you marry one who lacks decent character and virtue. Think of the shame that will be yours when your own conscience and everybody else will say: "I told you so."
3. Make yourself acutely aware of the sinfulness of giving in to your feelings in this matter. It is wrong to wreck your life by acting on your feelings when you know this will end in tragedy for you, and will even endanger your immortal soul. Ask daily for God's help in following your reason rather than your feelings.
4. Make the sharp and final decision not to see the person any more. Don't torture yourself by accepting a single date with him after you have made your decision. Don't act on the delusion that you can enjoy his company with no intention of marrying him.
5. Don't pity yourself as if you were terribly abused because this had to happen to you. Everybody has to choose between feelings and common sense at some time or other in life. Make the choice proudly, as befits one who is the image and likeness of God.

## Can Love Be Acquired?

**Problem:** For several years I have wanted to get married and have a home of my own. Now at last a man of good character has asked me to marry him, but I do not feel that I am in love with him. Yet I am afraid that if I do not accept him, I won't have another chance to marry. Tell me, is it possible to fall in love with a man after you have married him? Or is it possible to have a happy marriage without being very much in love with your partner?

**Solution:** The answer to this question depends entirely on the character, training and spiritual maturity of the girl involved. If a girl has a false, movie-inspired ideal of the glamor and excitement of being wildly in love, if she is of the immature type that day-dreams of being swept off her feet by love, there is reason to fear that she would be dissatisfied with a marriage in which her feelings were more or less commonplace. It is very probable that the lack of romantic feeling on her part, in conjunction with the ordinary disillusionments that arise in married life, would make her think she had been cheated out of something. She would still be foolishly day-dreaming of romance after marriage. However, it may be remarked that a girl with excessively romantic ideas about love is usually a poor bet for happiness in any marriage.

But for a girl who is well aware that the movies, romantic novels, and love story magazines present a false picture of the importance of being madly in love, for one who knows how often marriages built on this kind of love collapse after a short time, for one who has learned to make her feelings subordinate to her will, there can be a very happy and successful marriage without the wild kind of romantic love. History is full of examples of such. If a girl wants to marry, and knows what marriage entails, and has character enough to do her part to make her marriage happy, come what may, she is an excellent prospect for a successful marriage to a man whom she respects, and whose principles are as high as her own.

We make only one reservation. A girl should not marry a man for whom she feels some real dislike or antipathy. The intimacy of married life intensifies such dislikes or antipathies if they are present from the beginning. We are speaking above of the case in which there is a real liking for a man, community of interests, union in principles, and readiness to do God's will, no matter what it demands. If what the world calls romantic love is not present, in such a case, it will not matter too greatly.

## When Is Kissing a Sin?

**Problem:** Is kissing a sin?

**Solution:** Almost wherever there are young people who go out on dates, this question is posed to those who take an interest in their welfare both spiritual and temporal. It is obvious that the customs and fashions of the world in which they live have made it a serious problem that must be faced.

In answering it, we shall consider the moral angle first, and then add considerations of prudence and common sense. There are two different kinds of kissing that can be referred to in the question. The first is the ordinary kiss of greeting and farewell, the kiss that people are not ashamed to give in public or in the presence of others, the kind of kiss exchanged between a mother and son, brother and sister, relative and relative. It is a salutation, a symbol, a sign of love and respect for a person to whom one is bound by the more sacred ties of human relationship. Clearly this kind of kissing is not sinful, not sinful even between a boy and girl in love.

Usually when this much has been explained, young people answer rather scornfully: "Oh, we don't

mean that kind of kissing." Or they will cry out with still greater scorn: "How can you expect us to kiss like a brother and sister if we are in love?" This is very revealing. It means that what such young people have in mind when they ask "Is kissing a sin?" is not the mere symbol or salutation of affection, but something inspired by and bound up in some way with passion. They are referring to close and protracted embraces; the kisses that gratify, in some way, the yearning for bodily union with another that can lawfully be fulfilled only in marriage. Sometimes they do not realize that this is the origin of their desire for protracted kissing experiences, but the fact remains that it is just that, and in many cases it leads them straight into the great sins that beforehand they would have said they abhorred. That is why such kissing, prolonged, passionate, exciting, is a sin in itself. It is a sin in so far as it springs from and leads to indulgence in sinful passion.

On the prudential side, even the kisses that are merely symbols of affection should not be made common, cheap and promiscuous. Kisses should be reserved for the more strong and sacred relationships in life. The boy and girl who make them cheap will almost invariably cheapen even nobler and more important things.

## To Kiss or Not to Kiss?

**Problem:** Most boys expect to be permitted to kiss a girl at least after one or two dates. Is it permissible or advisable to go along with their wishes? Some girls with whom I have talked say that if you don't permit it you will lose every boy-friend.

**Solution:** Let's bring this question down to some fundamental principles and reasoning, leaving out of consideration for the moment whether "most boys expect it" or "all girls advise it." Little of value for one's happiness is ever learned from what "everybody happens to be doing."

The purpose of dates between marriageable young people is that they may become acquainted with each other's characters and so find out whether, when the question comes up as it should eventually, there is a good chance of their being happily married. Let it be noted that the purpose of dates is not primarily and exclusively "a good time"-with no further implications. Of course, every boy and girl want to have a good time on a date, but this should be subjected, in their minds, to the more serious purposes that justify company-keeping and its dangers. It is because so many young people think of dating as just a means of "having a good time" that so many fall into sin on their dates. A decent boy and girl will never think of a good time as permitting anything contrary to God's law; nor will they be unmindful that on their dates they are making a test of each other.

Passionate kissing, it has been shown in this column, is forbidden to unmarried people. There are different kinds of kissing, and the above problem can only be considered as pertaining to that kind which is not gravely sinful. There is no question about the other. Even that, however, we say, indulged in on a first or second or third date, is a serious obstacle to the fulfillment of the purpose of company-keeping. Kissing, even though it be quite modest, stimulates physical attraction to another. In proportion as it does so, it lessens the ability of intelligence to judge the fitness of a companion for marriage. Many a girl who permitted a boy to kiss her on short acquaintance has been swept into marriage by her feelings, only to find that he was anything but the person to make her happy. Many a girl who permitted kissing to a near stranger has been swept into sin and into a forced marriage.

The above principles are so true that even if all boys expected a girl to consent to kissing, and all girls advised it, (which is not true), they should still be followed by an intelligent, self-respecting, God-fearing girl. Following them is the only known way of finding an intelligent, self-respecting, virtuous

boy for a partner in marriage.

## Different Views on Kissing

**Problem:** Why is there so much difference in the advice given by different priests in regard to kissing on dates? Some say it is all right if we don't go too far; others warn us against it under any circumstances; others make us feel that it is seriously wrong. If we girls tell the boys we don't think it is right, they almost always answer that some priest told them that it is not wrong. We are confused and want to know what stand we should take on this matter.

**Solution:** The subject of kissing on dates is an involved one, and different statements of different priests regarding it are almost always due to the different ways in which the questions are presented by young people themselves.

The priest who says it is not wrong is usually answering a question put somewhat like this: "Is it wrong to let a boy friend kiss you goodnight?" The assumption in the question is that the kiss is but a brief affair, registering affection and even respect, but without passion-stimulating side-actions or prolonged and dangerous embracing. Of course the answer to this question, on strictly moral grounds, is that it is not sinful any more than an affectionate kiss between mother and son or brother and sister is sinful.

The priest who tells you that kissing on dates is sinful has properly gathered from the way the question is put to him, that he is being asked about prolonged kissing, kissing "for the sake of a thrill," kissing and embracing as a pastime in which ordinarily there are thoughts, desires and inclinations toward indulgence in bodily pleasures that are sinful for the unmarried. Such kissing is not merely an expression of affection, no matter how much young people may protest that it is. It is an unnecessary and highly provocative occasion of sin. No priest can say otherwise than that to thrust oneself into an unnecessary and extremely dangerous occasion of sin is a sin in itself. If a boy ever quotes a priest as saying that this is lawful, you may be sure he is either misquoting or deliberately lying.

The priest who warns you against too much freedom in regard to kissing is aware of the fact that the first kind of kissing here spoken of often leads to the second among young people keeping company. He wants you to know that there is a tendency in your nature and in your boy friend's nature to carry kissing too far, and that you must be aware of that tendency, must discipline it in yourself and be watchful to resist any weakness with regard to it in your boy friend.

It is not, therefore, the moral law that is confusing in this matter. It is the fact that, while you want to be good, there is a strong inclination within you toward what is dangerous and bad. It is your lower nature that suggests that you make the law of God seem confusing, so that it will be free to do what it pleases.

## On Resisting Advances

**Problem:** "I am a high school senior, 17 years old, and I find that I hardly ever go out with a boy but that he makes some kind of evil advances. It seems, to me, and most of my girl friends will tell you the same thing, that all the boys want on a date nowadays is to indulge in kissing, petting, and even worse things. How can a girl stay decent when everybody she goes out with seems to be interested only in doing the wrong thing?"

**Solution:** It is not easy, we readily admit, but we quickly add that it is supremely important and worthwhile. There are two reasons why so many girls find that "all the boys they go out with" seem to want to engage them in sinful kissing, petting, etc. One reason is that there are so many boys in the

United States who have been brought up without any real religion, certainly with no powerful religious motives for resisting the strong inclinations of their lower nature. Public grade and high school education has no way of providing such religious motives, and without them it is difficult for anyone to be chaste and pure. Even Catholic high school and college youths who received no solid religious and moral training at home, will often appear just as unprincipled as those who never went to a Catholic school. This only proves that the best of schools cannot accomplish much without the cooperation of the home.

The second reason why sinful petting and kissing and worse things are taken for granted by so many boys is that so many girls are unprincipled enough to give in easily to such practices. No matter how bad many of the boys are, it is certain that they would not be so bad if they did not meet with cooperation in their evil instincts by the majority of girls.

A girl of 17 surely has little reason to complain that it is too hard to be good. She is too young to think that it is necessary to get married in the immediate future; even if she is in a position to marry soon, she still has plenty of time in which to choose a good partner. She should be willing to give the gate to a dozen boy friends, one after the other, if she finds that each one in turn demands privileges that come under the heading of impurity. And despite the pessimism of our correspondent, it is certain that a girl who is herself devoted to purity will be able to make some of the boys she meets as devoted to it as she is. Girls have more power in this regard than they realize.

## **Too Young to Keep Company?**

**Problem:** I am 14 years old, a sophomore in high school, and I have a boy friend who is 16. We go out together twice a week, sometimes more often. My mother tells me I'm too young to be keeping company like that, but all the kids are doing it. I can't see that there is anything wrong with it. Is there?

**Solution:** Our answer to the above question must be directed chiefly to 14, 15, and 16 year-old high school girls who have not yet gone in for company keeping. (There are many such, despite our correspondent's statement about "all the kids.") It is our sad experience that there is little use in talking to very young girls who already have their "steady" boy friends. Keeping company makes them feel wise beyond their years. Because they are acting as if they were adults by this practice, they usually feel that they have a right to talk back to adults who tell them it is unwise, dangerous, and harmful to their later lives. We hope our correspondent is an exception, though the way she tosses aside her mother's advice would indicate otherwise.

Steady company keeping is only for those who have a right to think about marrying within a reasonable time; who are free from responsibilities that company keeping would interfere with; and who are mature enough to recognize and resist the dangers that go with company keeping. A 14 or 15 year-old girl in high school fulfills none of these conditions. She shouldn't and ordinarily doesn't want to think of getting married for a good number of years. She should be occupied with the business of getting an education, and nothing can so thoroughly nullify her efforts in that regard as the excitement of puppy love and the time wasted on frequent dates. Above all, she is too young to be aware of the danger of sin that is inherent in her own nature and that may be presented by her equally immature boy friend in the close associations of adolescent company keeping.

There is great need of a corps of young people of high school age who will resist the all too common practice of regular dating and steady company keeping. Such young people must be humble enough to realize that their elders are not talking through their hats nor adopting the roll of kill-joys when they

advise against the practice. They must know that while again America makes light of it, true Christian principle condemns it.

## Secret Company-keeping

**Problem:** Is it wrong to continue to see a certain boy secretly when your parents have forbidden you to go out with him? I am 21 years old and my father is quite wealthy. The boy I have been going with comes from an ordinary family and he is working his way through business college, hoping to obtain a good job when he finishes. My mother and father argue that he will probably never be able to provide for me as they have done all my life so far. That is why they have forbidden me to see him. But I think I am in love with him, and I don't care if we do have to live on a „small income after he graduates. Of course I wouldn't marry him until then, but if I don't see him in the meantime once in a while I shall probably lose him. I've been having lunch with him now -and then when I've gone shopping, and I want to continue to do so.

**Solution:** Even though you are 21, with some right to decide your own vocation in life, there is a presumption in favor of the wisdom of your parents' requests and commands. That presumption will yield only to clear indications that they are unreasonably interfering with the happiness of your future and the will of God for you.

On the side of the wisdom of your parents is the fact that ordinarily it is not easy for a girl who has had all the conveniences and luxuries that wealth can provide to adjust her mode of living to a much lower standard. Nor, ordinarily, can a girl be very happy if, in order to marry, she has had to incur the displeasure and lasting opposition of her family, especially if she has had a pleasant and easy life with her family.

Only if a girl has a strong, spiritual character, a proven capacity for mortification and sacrifice, and a great earnestness about her task in life, should she consider a marriage that will mean giving up much that she is accustomed to. Since it is pretty hard for you to judge whether you have all these qualities, I suggest that you obey your parents to this extent: tell the boy of your parents' wishes and commands; tell him that in obedience to them you will not see him for three months; during the three months test yourself, by rather rigorous mortification, to learn how many of the luxuries of your home you can do without; and at the same time try to convince your parents, in all kindness, that they should permit you to see the boy at least once in a while, on condition that you will make no decision to marry him without talking it over thoroughly with them.

## High School Company-Keeping

**Problem:** I am 16 years old, and in my last year of high school. My parents permit me to go out with boys only once a week, and then they insist that I go out in the company of my older brother. All the other girls of my age have dates as often as they like, and I feel that I am old enough to go out like that too. I know the dangers of going out, but I feel that I have to face them sometime. Don't you think my parents are too strict?

**Solution:** The chief reason you give for demanding that your parents permit you to go out freely, viz., because other parents let their daughters have all the dates they like, is not a good one. I realize that it makes a young girl like yourself feel persecuted when she cannot do what other girls are permitted to do; at the same time, you must remember that if your parents were content just to follow the example of

other parents, they could let you find your way into all kinds of trouble. There are too many weak and foolish parents in the world today; too many whose example would be the worst possible thing for your parents to follow.

Your question is, then, apart from what the other girls are permitted to do, this: Should a high school girl of 16 be permitted to go out with a boy (or boys) more than once a week, and should she be permitted to do so without having a protective older brother tagging along? To the first part of the question I would say that once a week is a generous quota of dates for a high school girl who wants to get some lasting good out of her high school studies. If you go out two or three times a week, it is almost certain that you won't do very well in your studies, and never in your whole life will you be able to make up for that. Furthermore, I would say that it would be very imprudent for you to go out even as often as once a week if it were always with the same boy. That would add greatly to the danger of sin and to the wasting of time in high school. I know you will tell me that there are dozens of girls who do this, and I will answer that by telling you that there are dozens of high school girls who fall into sin and wreck their characters and waste their education by steady company-keeping.

As to having your older brother with you on your dates, there is much to commend this safeguard. High school girls and boys are best off in crowds or, at least, groups of four or six. When young people insist on their right to be alone with their dates, there is a suspicion that they want to be free to do things that are wrong, such as kissing, petting, etc. Your parents are pretty wise, but I feel sure that if you convince them that you are not going to permit any evil actions by any boy, they will let you go out once in a while on your own.

## Is Sixteen Too Young for Dates?

**Problem:** "In the December Liguorian a girl of 16 complains about being permitted to have only one date a week. I too am 16, but I am not permitted by my parents to go with boys at all, nor even to talk to them on a telephone. They will not let me go with boys till I am 18. I hope to marry some day and have children, but to do that I have to have boy friends. There are six in my family already married and they are all happy except one, who has nobody to blame but herself . . ."

**Solution:** The last statement in your letter indicates that the 18-year old rule your parents have laid down has worked out pretty well for your brothers and sisters. If five of them are happy in marriage, and the 6th one having a tough time only through her own fault, the chances are all in your favor for a happy marriage under the parental plan.

You are too young, at 16, to be thinking of looking over the crop of boys, on regular dates, in order to pick a partner for marriage. At 16, your inexperienced emotions are liable to run away with your reason, and before you know it you could find yourself madly in love with somebody at whom, if you were 18, you would take a second and a third and a tenth look before permitting yourself to be madly in love. You might even feel that you had to marry a particular boy at 17 (in fact, you might have to marry him at 17 to keep out of sin), and then by the time you were 18 you could be wishing you still had your freedom to choose a partner more wisely.

If you answer that I seemed to O.K. the weekly dates of my December correspondent, you should recall that I said that these should be in company with other couples, and the dates should not be with the same person continuously. In other words, a girl of 16 should not take a chance on becoming too attached to any boy because young love has its dangers and early marriage its drawbacks. This is easier said than done if she goes in for dating; it is easier done than said if she does no dating.

I should add, however, that you can spoil the value of your parents' ruling entirely by letting it make you bitter or rebellious. There is an old saying that only an obedient girl can become a wise and prudent mother. You could ruin your character for any vocation by pouting, talking back, feeling aggrieved and persecuted. Forget marriage and boys for a while, and work on your character and education, and I'll prophesy a happier marriage for you than for any of your dating and courting classmates.

## **Dates with Married Employers**

**Problem:** "I have a job as private secretary of an executive in a large company. It is a wonderful position and pays good wages. My boss is a married man in his late thirties and I am 25. My problem is that he is constantly asking me to go out to dinner with him, which usually means going to a show afterwards and spending the evening with him. I have done this once or twice, but have not felt right about it. He has told me that he does not get along too well with his wife, and that, therefore a little innocent recreation with a girl like me cannot do any harm. He has all but hinted lately that it is a part of my job to go out with him, making me feel that if I don't, he may look for somebody else to work for him. Just what is my duty in this situation?"

**Solution:** You are face to face with a set of circumstances that have been the occasion of the moral downfall of many a previously decent girl. The pattern is much the same in these cases. It starts with the hackneyed dodge of the married man that "his wife does not understand him." Then comes the devil's suggestion that dating somebody else is a perfectly innocent pastime. If this is not sufficient to break a girl down, economic pressure is used: "It is part of your job-your pay-envelope depends on it." The end of the story is usually the same, no matter how upright, trustworthy, "decent-minded", the employer seemed to be in the beginning. The end is adultery in one form or another.

You are in danger not only from the obvious weakness of your employer, but from your own. Your own heart can become involved; his position of authority, his flattering attention to you, his "pathetic" confidence in your ability to make up for his wife's shortcomings, can make you think you are in love with him. If you don't resist that, and all occasions that may lead to it, you are lost.

For the sake of your soul, your peace of mind, your future, I beg you not to be deceived. There is no such thing as a married man "innocently" dating and running around with a girl other than his wife. It is not innocent at the start, even when it has not as yet led to outright sins of sensuality, because he owes his companionship to his wife alone. And it will not be "innocent" of sinful actions very long. Even if you may have to lose your good job, as a price of your integrity, let him know that you cannot be bought, as a companion for his wayward affections, at any price

## **Company-Keeping in the Late Thirties**

**Problem:** I am thirty-eight years old and am keeping company with a man who is a little past forty. We seem to get along wonderfully well, in fact are in love, and he has spoken to me about getting married. One thing has made me hesitate. If I marry at my age, must I do so with the thought of possibly having a family? I have heard and read that bearing children for the first time in the late thirties is very dangerous. Must I face that danger? If so, would it be wiser not to marry at all, or at least to wait for several years?

**Solution:** One thing should be ruled out very clearly from the start, and that is the thought of continuing your steady company-keeping with the intention of not marrying at least for several years.

To do that, while being, as you say, in love, would be to remain deliberately in a very proximate occasion of sin without necessity. If for any reason you decide that marriage is out of the question for eight to ten years, the only prudent thing to do is to decide that close company-keeping should also be put off for close to eight or ten years.

If you think about marrying, you must do so with the consideration of the possibility that you may have children. It would be gravely wrong to enter marriage with the idea of taking measures to prevent yourself from ever having children; indeed, the marriage would be an invalid one if you excluded from the contract the very right to such actions as might result in your having children.

We do not think there is sufficient reason for you to be over-fearful of the danger of child-bearing at your age. If a thorough physical checkup reveals that you are in sound health, and if you are sufficiently stable of mind not to permit imaginary fears to make you panicky, you should be able to face marriage and its responsibilities with calmness and joy. This should be especially easy if you possess solid religious principles and childlike confidence in God. God's interest in your welfare and His care of your future may be counted on to balance any special difficulties that may arise if you have a family. And remember always that only God knows whether you will ever have a child. I would say: Get married, but do so with unreserved acceptance of all the responsibilities of marriage, and with unshakable confidence in God.

## Is Mixed Company-Keeping a Mortal Sin?

**Problem:** I am a Catholic nineteen years old and have a non-Catholic boy-friend whom I like very much. Recently my father told me that I must give this boy up because it is a mortal sin for a Catholic to keep steady company with a non-Catholic. I am sure that this cannot be true because if it is there are surely hundreds of Catholics committing this mortal sin. My father reads *The Liguorian* and I beg you to write the truth about this question so that he will understand.

**Solution:** Your father is considerably nearer the truth than the many young Catholics who are endangering their happiness and their souls by mixed company-keeping, even though there are some distinctions to be made in the matter.

Your father no doubt bases his statements on a principle that is clearly set down in the Canon Law of the Catholic Church, according to which Catholics are seriously forbidden to enter into mixed marriages. The law goes on to state that this prohibition arises from the divine law whenever there is danger of loss or lessening of the faith of the Catholic, whenever there is danger that the children of such a marriage will be deprived of a full Catholic upbringing, and whenever there is danger of scandal or weakening of the faith of others. (Experience proves that in most mixed marriages some of these dangers are to be found.) But even apart from these dangers which one may not deliberately encounter without breaking the divine law, mixed marriages are forbidden to Catholics by the universal ecclesiastical law.

Since mixed marriage itself is thus forbidden, the conclusion can surely be drawn that, since company-keeping is only lawful when it may be a preparation for a good marriage, mixed company-keeping is unlawful for Catholics. There may be exceptions to this general rule, but the exceptions can be based only on definite reasons for which the Church grants dispensations for Catholics to marry non-Catholics. Some of the exceptions would be based on the following circumstances: 1) If a Catholic lives in an area in which there are very few Catholics, so that there is little chance of marriage except with a non-Catholic. 2) If a Catholic is well past the ordinary years in which marriage is thought about,

and thus has greatly lessened chances of finding a partner for marriage. 3) If a Catholic starts going with a non-Catholic who almost at once shows a sincere interest in the Catholic faith and thus gives solid hope that he (or she) will become a Catholic, preferably before marriage or even engagement. In any case the company-keeping is forbidden if there is obvious danger to the faith or morals or future children of the Catholic.

As a girl of nineteen, living in a city with a large Catholic population, you cannot defend your mixed company-keeping on either of the first two counts. If you are on the sure way to making your boyfriend a Catholic, you need only convince your father of that and all will be well.

## Wrong Company-Keeping

**Problem:** If you are in love and cannot possibly marry for a number of years, is it better to give up the person you love or to continue keeping company in the hope of eventual marriage? My case is this. I got married during the first World War, and a few years later my wife ran away and divorced me. Now I have met a girl who, I believe, would make an excellent wife. I want to be married as a good Catholic, by a priest, but have been told I cannot because my first wife is still alive. I am 42 years old. I am still determined to be married only by a priest. The girl wants to wait until I am free. Should we continue to keep company until something happens to make it possible for us to be married. or should we separate?

**Solution:** There is a principle of Christian ethics that must be applied directly to your case. The principle is this: Only they are permitted to keep close and continuous company who are free to marry within a reasonable and foreseeable time. The reason for this is that company-keeping between a man and woman who are attracted to each other ordinarily becomes a greater and greater danger to their souls the longer it goes on. It is intended by nature to lead, not to sin, but to marriage. If it cannot lead to marriage, as in your case, it will almost surely lead to sin of one kind or another. You are not permitted to risk so great a danger to yourself when you can escape it by giving up the company-keeping.

Having a lawful wife, even though divorced, you are not free to marry within a reasonable or foreseeable time, and therefore, the security of your soul demands that you forego company-keeping till such time as you are free to marry again.

A second reason why you should not continue to keep company with the girl is that, despite her expressed willingness to wait for you, you are doing her an injustice by limiting her freedom to go out with someone whom she could marry. It is also a sin of scandal to keep her in the circumstances that can so easily lead to sin, and of bad example to others in the same situation as you are.

It must be remembered that the evil of adulterous thoughts, intentions and actions is not changed by the fact that a married man does not happen to be living with his wife. His marriage vow binds him till death breaks it, and in the meantime he may not think of another marriage or those things that led to marriage.

## Sinful Company-Keeping

**Problem:** I cannot see the justice of your statement that company-keeping is lawful only when there is some prospect and intention of marrying. I have a boy friend with whom I have been keeping company for ten years. Neither of us cares to get married. He does not want to be tied down to marriage and I do not want to give up my job because I have no taste for house work or bearing children. I suppose I should admit that we fall into sin now and then, but we always go to confession afterward. Certainly we

have a right to each other's companionship even though we do not plan on ever getting married.

**Solution:** I am afraid I must be blunt in contradicting you. Under the circumstances you describe you have no moral right to keep company. Two things make it sinful. The first is the fact that you have actually excluded the prospect of marriage from that which is lawful only as a possible preparation for marriage. The second thing only multiplies the guilt you incur under the first head; it is the fact that your company-keeping has become an occasion of habitual sin.

It is practically certain, moreover, that your confessions are bad, because a confession cannot be good unless there be sincere and practical sorrow for sins confessed. Such sorrow is impossible unless there be a determination to give up unnecessary occasions of sin. It is obvious that when you confess the sins committed with your boy friend you have no intention of giving up the unnecessary occasion of those sins, which is keeping steady company with the deliberate intention of never marrying.

It is one of the moral monstrosities of our day that there are people who keep company for years, take to themselves the pleasures that are lawful only in marriage, and yet exclude marriage and its responsibilities from their thoughts and intentions. That it is a monstrosity is evident in the fact that your own conscience has become so dull to so fundamental a moral principle. I beg you to pray hard for light and courage to see and do what is right; to talk things over with your boy friend, and then, for the sake of your immortal soul, to decide to give up company-keeping or to plan on marriage soon.

## On Blind Dates

**Problem:** What is your opinion of blind dates? My parents refuse to let me go out with anybody unless I know something about him beforehand. Some of my girl friends can go out with anybody, whether they know the person or not. And often they call me up and tell me they have a date for me, but I'm never allowed to go out on such parties. How is a girl ever going to meet someone she might have a chance to marry, if she can never get acquainted with new people?

**Solution:** Experience proves that there is a great deal of danger in blind dates, and that there is much wisdom in the policy pursued by your parents. In these times it is difficult enough for a girl to avoid dangerous and sometimes morally fatal entanglements even when she does not take chances on dating with unknown and possibly designing characters.

You should be aware of some of the dangers that have always been found to be connected with accepting blind dates. The utter freedom that is permitted to your girl friends by their parents makes it very possible that the source of their contacts with strangers may be suspect. They probably meet such men hanging around taverns, or public dance halls, or cocktail bars. This does not infallibly mean that the men they meet are bad, but the chances are high enough to render it foolhardy for a girl to rush out to spend an evening with one of them.

Oftentimes such men are already married, are in town for a few days, and are looking for girl companions with whom they can have what they call "a good time". And it is not uncommon for such to lie about their marital status when looking for girls to take out in a strange city. Often, too, they are divorced men, or men who have made their own home life unhappy, who frequent the taverns in quest of consolation or excitement through chance contacts with girls who don't care much what they do.

There are some blind dates that are not especially dangerous, and I am sure that your parents would recognize such. If a reputable friend, from a good family, has out-of-town relatives to entertain, about whose background she knows something, it would not be too imprudent to accept a date with one of

them and to make one of a party for the evening. The one thing that is important is that a girl have some positive knowledge that she is not going out with a married man, a divorced man, or an unprincipled man. She cannot know that if she accepts stone-blind dates with strangers.

## On Exclusive Dates

**Problem:** I am 17 years old, just graduated from high school., and in my first year at college. I don't want to get married until I am at least 20, if then. I would like to go out with different boys now and then, but I don't want to be tied down to steady company-keeping. This seems to be all but impossible today. If I am seen at a party with a certain young man, no one else will ask me for a date unless it becomes publicly known that I have broken up with that particular boy. In other words, if you go out once or twice with a certain boy, everybody else seems to think you are already bound to that person for good. Do I have to either give up dating boys entirely, or else stick to one during my whole college career?

**Solution:** We have heard complaints about this unfortunate social condition repeatedly. It is not a healthy thing at all. It is even responsible for some unhappy marriages because the young people involved had little chance to become acquainted with anybody but the first partner they happened to take out.

The responsibility for this situation may be traced to the fact that there is so much exclusive dating and regular company-keeping among the very young, even in the early years of high school. Some school authorities and even parents seem to think nothing of permitting freshmen and sophomore high school students to have their "steady dates." Since that is so common, it is natural that many young people should feel that by the time a person reaches college, he or she must have a "steady", or must want to make a "steady" of the first partner that comes along.

If you really are serious about not wanting to get married for several years, and about making the most of your chance at education, the best thing by all odds would be to do very little dating. If you go out often, even with different persons, you may find yourself in love before you know it, no matter what different plans you have laid. Giving up dates, which should not be too difficult for a 17 year old freshman, would obviate all your worries about people taking it for granted that you are all but engaged when you go out with a boy. If you do accept a few dates, you should courageously "buck" the tradition that you have to stick to one partner. Let each boy know that you are not starting anything by going out with him; that you shall remain free to accept dates from others; and that you are not going to let anyone "rush" you.

## Should Engaged Girls Accept Dates?

**Problem:** I am engaged to be married to a good Catholic girl and she has accepted my ring. However I am signed up for three years in the Navy and will be away from home most of the time. Now my fiancée has asked my permission to accept dates with other men for special parties, dances, etc., while I am gone. I don't like the idea at all, but would like to know what you think of it, and whether I should grant the permission.

**Solution:** There is something in your girl's favor in the fact that she asks you for the permission at all. The world is full of scatterbrained, disloyal, unprincipled girls who would not even think of asking their fiance about such a matter at all. They just go ahead accepting dates, in the absence of their fiance,

with anybody who comes along. You may thank God you are not engaged to one of these.

There is something against your girl's character, however, in the fact that she should want such a permission. Good Catholic girls, of whom there are many in the world, simply would not think of doing any dating with others once they have been definitely engaged. They realize that dating is for those who are free to marry; that it is always a danger, even in the best of circumstances; that it can lead to many complications for a girl who has already promised her hand and heart to a certain man. To the girl of high character, therefore, it is no problem and no too great sacrifice to accept no dates while her fiance is absent. Only the most extraordinary circumstances, such as would readily be understood by her partner, should make for an exception to this rule.

Of course, the expectation of a boy that his fiancee will not accept dates must be accompanied by the promise that he will do no dating either. If the boy intends to date while he is away from home, or if he finds the opportunities to do so irresistible, he should be consistent and not merely give the girl permission to date other boys, but actually call the whole engagement off. Strictly speaking, we can say that engagement means that two people say to each other: "We are all through dating-except with each other."

## Waiting for a Proposal

**Problem:** I am 27 years old and have been going with the same man for four years. He has never done any serious talking about our getting married, and yet he resents it very much if I even think of going out with anybody but himself. He leaves me with the impression that some day he will talk about marriage but at the same time that that day will not be for a long time. I do not see any serious obstacles to his settling down, but am at a loss to know whether I should wait for him to get good and ready to speak about marriage or give him up. Can you advise me?

**Solution:** This is far too common a problem in the world today, even among Catholics. Let me tell you frankly a hidden factor that is often present in the problem, though it would be very wrong to assume that this factor is present in yours.

Very often experience proves that dilly-dallying with the idea of marriage on the part of a man is due to the fact that he has managed to induce a girl-friend into a more or less continuous habit of sin, with the effect that he is sinfully living as if he were married and yet retaining his independence and freedom from lasting responsibility. As time goes on, he becomes more and more enamored with his state, entirely content to indulge in forbidden privileges and to put off any serious idea of marriage. This, of course, represents the acme of selfishness and evil, but all sin is selfishness, and selfishness grows incredibly with frequently repeated sins.

Apart from this angle, which always demands as a first and elementary condition of solving the problem the complete renunciation of sin on the part of the girl, there may be obstacles to marriage in the mind of the man that must be overcome. He may think he has not enough money, or that he has not a good enough job, or that he owes it to his parents not to leave them for a long time to come. A girl has a right, after going with a man for even less than four years, to draw such objections out into the open and to insist on their being discussed freely. She is in a good position if she finds her friend jealous of her companionship, and should use any expression of this as an occasion for discussing the future. If he refuses to be definite about plans for the future, the odds are that he won't ever want to get married. In that case it would be good to drop him.

# Should an Engaged Girl Reveal Her Past?

## PART I

**Problem:** I am engaged and looking forward to a very happy marriage. But there is one doubt in my mind that seems to cast a shadow over my happiness. Long before I met my fiance, I fell into sin with another person. This has long since been confessed and deeply repented. The doubt in my mind is whether I should tell my husband-to-be about this previous fall]. Is such a confession necessary or even advisable for persons about to be married? I dread the thought of it; but do not want anything to stand in the way of our happiness.

**Solution:** It is neither necessary nor advisable to make a confession of your past life to the man you are about to marry. You made your confession through the priest to God, and your sin was forgiven. The only lasting effect the sin should have on your life is to keep you humble, grateful for the forgiveness you received, and more and more dependent on God's help to remain good. But there is no reason for your revealing the past to anyone.

Sometimes a man who wants to marry a girl tries to insist that she tell him whether she had ever in her life lapsed from virtue. This is an unjust demand, an uncalled for probing into the secret and sacred conscience of another. A girl has no obligation of making a personal confession even in the face of such demands. Indeed, she may even recognize in such demands a danger sign: they may be motivated by an excessively jealous spirit that would cause her great sorrow after marriage. Even in the case that a boy or girl in love might suggest that they make mutual confessions to each other, the idea should be resisted and rejected. Lovers and engaged couples should be content to be able to say to each other that they cherish the grace of God and freedom from sin above all other goods, and that they will be loyal to each other for the whole of their lives. Moreover, it is more important that they help each other to avoid sin in their own pre-marriage association than that they worry about their own or their partner's repented past.

# Should an Engaged Girl Reveal Her Past?

## PART II

**Problem:** We are several girls in our late teens who would like to disagree with an opinion you expressed several months ago. You said that a man had no right to ask a girl whom he wanted to marry whether she had previously fallen from virtue, and that the girl had no obligation of admitting anything about her past to her fiance. We think that if a man wants to know what kind of girl he is marrying he should be allowed to ask her about her past, and that she should honestly tell him. After all, it is important to a man to know that he is marrying a good girl.

**Solution:** We are in perfect agreement with the statement that it is important for a man to know that he is marrying a good girl. It is the purpose of the period of company-keeping to provide a man with assurance on this point, and equally so to provide the girl with assurance that he is a good man. By going together for several months, a man and woman can learn all they need to know about the ideals and moral characters of each other, if both are interested enough in this matter to look for and draw out from the other the spiritual and moral principles that are considered of greatest importance. A girl who lacks character and sound moral principles will not be able to hide her lack from a man who really considers such things necessary for a happy marriage. And a man who has not acquired solid virtue will clearly manifest his weakness to a girl who realizes that without it a happy marriage could not be hoped

for.

This testing of each other's characters on the part of a boy and girl keeping company does not require open and complete revelations of each one's past. We have set it down, and we repeat, that it is a general presumption that it is not wise for two people preparing for marriage to make full confessions to each other. It is not good for a man to demand of a girl whom he might ask to marry him that she tell him whether or how she ever fell into sin in the past. In our experience, we have found that most men who insist on being told such things have had rather chequered careers themselves, and have a leaning toward an unhealthy, not to say morbid, kind of jealousy. There are exceptions, of course, and our presumption, that in general it is best to leave the past buried, leaves room for them.

It still remains possible, we believe, for a man to learn all he needs to know about a girl, even up to whether she has ever been a sinner or not, without asking direct questions or demanding revelations. And it is possible for a girl to learn through company-keeping whether the man she is going with hates sin, loves virtue, and is willing to face the sacrifices and responsibilities involved. The sad thing is that so many are not interested in these supremely important matters.

## Sex Experience before Marriage

**Problem:** I recently attended some lectures given at a secular university on the subject of preparation for a happy marriage. In one lecture it was stated that some sex experience before marriage is necessary for happiness in marriage, on the ground that by experiment one learns whether married life will be happy. Is there any truth in this? I am not a Catholic, though I read your column, and I feel that this sort of teaching can do an immense amount of harm. Do you agree?

**Solution:** This sort of teaching has frequently crept into marriage courses given to young people in secular colleges and universities today, and you are right about its being very damaging to all who take it even half seriously. Both on religious and on practical grounds it can be proved that any sort of sex-experimentation before marriage is bound to result in unhappiness.

This should certainly be clear to every God-fearing, Christian boy and girl. Impurity, the right name for "sex-experimentation" before marriage, is a violation of nature and a transgression of God's law. It is an inexorable law of nature and a demand of the justice of God that every sin must be atoned for, and most sins are atoned for not only in the next world, but also in this. "The wages of sin is death." There are many forms of death by which such sins are atoned for, and one of them is the death of that true happiness, built on the love of God and obedience to His law, that is looked for in marriage.

This religious truth is forcefully confirmed by experience. We recall a statement made by the head of a modern marriage problem clinic, who professed no particularly strong religious convictions. He said that his experience with the problems of married people forced on him the conclusion that not one in a thousand marriages that had been preceded by sex indulgence turned out to be really happy; none turned out to be as happy as marriage should be. It stands to reason that this should be so; the law of chastity is so deeply engraved in the conscience that it cannot be violated without major repercussions on the whole personality, nor without spoiling the whole relationship of marriage.

Marriages do suffer, sometimes, from ignorance on the part of husband or wife. Even before marriage, all ignorance about marriage should be removed by proper instruction. But sin is never a good or prudent preparation for anything.

## Second Marriage

**Problem:** I am a widow, thirty-one years old, with two children. Before my husband died two years ago I promised him that I would never marry again. I did that of my own accord because I loved him so much and we had been so happy together. He never asked me to make the promise, and only smiled when I did so. Now in the past few months I have been going out with a single man of 35, and I already know that if I continue to go with him, he will ask me to marry him. I want to keep my promise to my husband because I feel bound by it, but at the same time I find it awfully difficult to think of giving up this new friendship. Can you advise me?

**Solution:** There are two things to be considered in solving this problem for yourself. The first one is this, that if you were unequivocally determined to carry out your promise and to remain single, it would be obligatory upon you not to enter into company-keeping at all. The reason is that you would be in danger of falling into serious sin if, on the one hand, you were prepared to resist all inclinations and invitations to marry again, and at the same time you were making it possible for yourself to fall deeply in love. It has been said here frequently that regular company-keeping is lawful only if there be a possibility of its ending in lawful marriage. If you yourself exclude the possibility of marriage from your future, you must go the whole way and exclude regular company-keeping as well. If you do not, you shall suffer mentally, physically, and probably morally.

The second thing to be considered is the fact that adherence to your promise, under the changed circumstances of the present, may prove to be very foolhardy and imprudent, because of your relative youth and evident inclination toward male companionship. Unless you are motivated by deep spiritual principles, fortified by strong spiritual habits, and are willing to live a more or less secluded life for the love of God and for the sake of your children, the next ten years may be very difficult ones for you, unless you accept an invitation to marry again.

If you are a Catholic, the best thing to do is to lay your case before a confessor and permit him to decide for you. After questioning your motives and studying your character for a while, he will be able to tell you whether you may be freed from the promise you made, and whether to marry again may not be the will of God for you.

## Age Differences for Marriage

**Problem:** "Does ten years' difference in age make happiness in marriage difficult? I am twenty years old and I have been going with a man who is thirty. My parents are furious about this, saying that I cannot possibly be happy with a man so much older than myself. He wants to marry me, and I am in love with him, but I am all confused because of my parents' attitude. They read The Liguorian like I do, and if you answer my question in it, maybe it will do some good. I know I will surely consider what you have to say.

**Solution:** All other things being favorable to a happy marriage, ten years of difference in age, especially at your particular ages and when the man is the older person need not be an obstacle to your happiness in marriage. We know of many happy marriages with as much and more difference in age between the man and the woman.

Note the condition, however, that all other things must be favorable to a happy marriage. Are you quite sure that the only objection your parents have to this marriage is based on age? I can think of some circumstances that could make the age difference important.

For example, if the man is not of your faith, I would be very slow to tell you that age makes no difference. You are young enough not to need to rush into this marriage as if it were your last chance; indeed, if the age difference were even less, I could give you many arguments against the possibility of happiness in such a marriage. If this man is ten years older than you are, he will almost certainly be very uninclined to take seriously your religion, as you must want any prospective husband to take your religion seriously; he may even be inclined to dictate to you about religion. If there were any evidence of such a possibility, and your parents may be able to see that better than you can, I know that any responsible Catholic would advise you against the marriage.

Another example: If your thirty year old friend has succeeded in drawing you into habits of sin, you have a very poor chance of happiness in marriage with him. This would be a sign that he has grown to thirty without acquiring habits of virtue and self-control, and it is not likely that he will acquire these things after you marry him.

But if you are both Catholics, truly in love, and both eager to avoid sin and aware of the serious responsibilities of marriage, I would say that you may, with excellent prospects of happiness, think of marriage. May this statement convince your parents of what their attitude should be.

## **Approval of Divorce Before Marriage**

**Problem:** "I am engaged to a non-Catholic man, and the other day he mentioned (for the first time) the fact that he believes in divorce. He said that he did not expect our marriage ever to break up, but that he was convinced that when any marriage did not turn out to be happy, the persons should be allowed to separate and made free to try marriage with someone else. As a Catholic, I know that true marriage has to be permanent, and that there can be no such thing as a valid marriage after a divorce. My question is: Do you think I can take a chance on marrying a man with the views expressed above?"

**Solution:** The chance you take in marrying such a man is very great. As a matter of fact, if he were to apply his thought about divorce directly to your own marriage, and expressly to state that he was not entering into a permanent and indissoluble union, but into one that could be dissolved by divorce if and when he wished to have it dissolved, your very marriage would be invalid. His very consent to marriage in that case would be vitiated. However, if he did not expressly apply his approval of divorce to your marriage, but actually consented to take you as his wife "till death", the marriage would be valid. But it would still be one in which your chances of happiness and security would be very meagre.

There is nothing more essential to happiness in marriage than an exclusion of even a theoretical approval of divorce. The man who approves of divorce for unhappy marriages can, after a few years of married life, think of a hundred reasons for saying that his marriage is unhappy. He can be attracted to a new face. He can rebel against the expense of raising his own children. He can accuse his wife of having faults he never knew of before marriage. He can get into a rage over some fancied grievance and stalk out of the house forever. Also, a man who approves in general of divorce, will almost surely approve of other things (birth-control, for example) that are contrary to God's laws and to the conscience of a Catholic.

My advice would, therefore, be that if you cannot succeed in changing his general attitude about divorce, you should not take a chance on marrying this man. The natural law concerning divorce and remarriage, and concerning other crimes against marriage, is not too difficult to explain, and many non-Catholics accept the explanation and agree with it once it is given. But if your boy friend does not accept the explanation or refuses to agree with it, don't take a chance with him. It is the wife who pays

most, in a marriage in which the husband has doubts about indissolubility.

## On Drinking on Dates

**Problem:** "I go around with a group of young people (we are all in our late teens), and most of them like to take a drink. So far I have held out against this because my mother doesn't want me to drink. But my boy friend, and the other couples we go with, keep urging me to join them. They say that they don't over-do it, and that there is no danger of my over-doing it in their company. They tell me that if I am afraid of it, I am just the one who may become an alcoholic some day. What do you think of drinking on dates? Most of the time they drink beer, but sometimes one of the boys brings a pint of whiskey along when we go out together."

**Solution:** You could do nothing better than to continue to solve this problem for yourself on the basis of the wishes and commands of your mother. Certainly, apart from everything else, you are right in thinking more of the importance of your mother's wishes than of the arguments offered you by your drinking friends.

Apart from the angle of obedience, there is no doubt that it is exceedingly dangerous for teen-agers to drink on their dates. First of all, because you are at an age when such stimulants to good feeling and a good time are least necessary. If you acquire the habit of drinking now, when you could have such a wonderful time without it, you may find that a little later in life, when problems and responsibilities face you, you may not be able to get along without it. It is not necessary to over-do drinking in your youth to become dependent on it. And the chances of your becoming an alcoholic are far greater if you drink in your teen-s than if you were to wait until you reached a greater degree of maturity.

It is also dangerous to make drinking a part of your dates because there is a definite connection between the effects of alcohol even in moderate quantities, and the relaxing of your moral convictions. By usually going out with other couples, you are warding off some of the dangers that attend company-keeping. But you will not always go out with a group. If you drink with the group you will probably drink with your boy-friend when you are on a date alone with him. On every date you need clear vision of , good and evil and undeviating control of your will. Drink lessens both. It has been responsible for many a girl's grief in the past. Don't let it hurt you, by not letting it touch you.

## Marriage Without Children

**Problem:** I am 20 years of age, and am to be married in June I have a very serious problem. My fiance is making about \$130 a month and I am making about the same. You can see that after we are married we shall both have to work to make ends meet. I have heard so much about birth-control that it has been worrying me terribly. We are both Catholics and do not want to practice birth-control. We want to have children, but I can't see how we can for at least two years. How could my future husband support any children, let alone myself, on \$130 a month? As to putting off our marriage, we have been going together for two years, and recognize the danger of waiting any longer.

**Solution:** This problem has worried many a young couple about to be married. Some it has led into habits of sin against marriage from the very beginning. It is for all such couples that this answer is given.

The issue is very clear. On the one hand you have an opportunity to obey a grave law of God when this is difficult, and in so doing to trust yourselves to His loving and provident care, to rely on the

friendship with Him that you will thereby win. On the other hand you may foolishly decide on a certain period of serious disobedience to God, thereby renouncing any help that God could give, inviting His punishments, and trusting only in yourselves and your sins to provide for your future.

The folly of the latter course becomes clear from many angles. A couple about to be married do not know whether God will let them have children. They do not know whether they will live long enough to have children. They do not know in what strange and unusual ways God might raise their economic status before a baby could be born. They should know, if they are Christian, that God is all powerful, infinitely loving toward His friends, intensely interested in their marriages, incapable of permitting any cross or trial to afflict them without a wise reason. They should know that without God they are helpless, and that they choose to do without God by adopting practices of birth-control.

Together the couple in our case is making about \$260 a month. Even if she becomes pregnant at once, the wife ordinarily would be able to continue working for four or five months. Before a baby comes, the husband should be able to get a raise or two in salary, or to find a better paying job. They should be able to save something out of their combined salaries. For any uncertainty that remains, they should have a fund of confidence in God that leaves sin out of the question. To start married life with sin is to make a failure out of marriage from the beginning.

## Catholic Girl's Quandary

**Problem:** "I am engaged to be married. My boy friend is Dot a Catholic, but he consented to go with me to my pastor to make arrangements for our wedding. When he found out from the priest that he would have to promise that all our children would be brought up as Catholics, he told me that he would never sincerely make such a promise. Now he wants me to marry him before a justice of the peace. I love him dearly and cannot give him up. Isn't there something I can do about this?"

**Solution:** What should be done to meet a situation of this kind should have been done long before the impasse arose, long before any promises of marriage were given. The very fact that you don't know what to do indicates quite clearly that you entered upon company-keeping and permitted yourself to be propelled towards marriage without any clear, Catholic sense of proportionate values. Now the fact that you are in love makes you want to find some way out of the duty you owe to God.

For either of two reasons a courageous and well-informed Catholic girl would tell the boy in your case that she could not marry him. The first reason is that he insists that she abandon a principle that must be rooted in the conscience of every Catholic girl, viz., that she must transmit her faith to her children. The second reason is that he wants her to enter what would be an invalid marriage for her. To give in to a fiance on either of these points is fatal to the soul of a Catholic.

A truly Catholic girl has such dangers as these in mind from the outset of her friendship with any man. She does not easily enter into company-keeping with a non-Catholic because of them. If she does start going with a non-Catholic, having a good reason for so doing that is stronger than the advice of the Church, she lets him know from the outset how firm is her own faith and how impossible for her is any compromise of its principles. She tries to transmit some of her convictions, and their logical foundations, to her boy friend. If she finds him indifferent to all religion, or opposed to her religion, she becomes aware at once that marriage to him would be most unhappy.

The great tragedies of life begin with statements like yours. What you are really saying is this: "I am in love with a man. I must abandon God to possess him. Can't you suggest something that will let me have this man anyway?"

## On Stealing Another Man's Girl

**Problem:** "Very briefly, my difficulty is this: I am very much enthralled by a girl who is engaged to another young man. I am currently trying to convince her that she has made a mistake and should break her engagement. I met her, after having known her in high school several years ago without paying any attention to her, at a recent reunion. I asked her for a date the following Monday. Before Monday came she informed me that she had just accepted an engagement ring from another fellow. Despite that fact, I started a routine of courtship-roses, telephone calls, visits at her home, etc. I think she is confused and not too sure of herself about marrying this other man. I also think I could do better for her than he could. I badly need advice, and I think she does too. I am 23 years old, and she is 20."

**Solution:** Most people would roundly condemn you for "poaching", i.e., trying to take a girl away from the man to whom she is engaged. Indeed, a first glance at your problem indicates that you are doing a moral injustice to the man who has already courted the girl and won from her a promise of her hand and heart in marriage.

Only two circumstances could mitigate your brashness in some degree. The first would be if you had real, objective, almost certain evidence of the fact that the girl is not happy in her engagement or would really be unhappy in marriage to the man to whom she is promised. There is danger that your own infatuation may make you invent such evidence. Furthermore, your own favors may have been the only thing responsible for making her begin to doubt the wisdom of accepting a ring from someone else. In either case you haven't a leg to stand on.

The other circumstances that might lessen the degree of injustice in your conduct is if the girl herself were directly and expressly to open the field to candidates for her hand once more. For a sound and solid reason a girl may break an engagement, or insist that she and a boy friend go back to the status quo that existed before they agreed on future marriage. Only if the girl in question does this, may you continue to pursue her. As long as she is willing to remain bound by her engagement, you have to smother, under your sense of honor and fair play, your infatuation. At 23, you need not fear that the loss of this girl will make you a bachelor for life.

## On Eloping

**Problem:** My boy-friend, whom I have promised to marry, wants me to elope with him because of the opposition of our families to our getting married in the near future. I am 17, have just finished high school, and my family tells me I'm too young to get married. My boy-friend's family tells him that he is not making enough money to get married. He is 20, and he works in a factory where he is paid \$1.25 an hour, which brings him \$50 a week and more when he works overtime. I am terribly in love with him, and am almost agreed that the best thing for us to do is to leave our homes without saying anything to anybody and get married at once. What do you think?

**Solution:** Experience is heavily weighted against your having a happy marriage with such a start as you contemplate. Even secular marriage counseling agencies, which keep statistics on such things, will tell you that marriages that be-in with elopement have the least chance of success.

Elopement is a bad beginning for married life for many reasons. First of all, it means a sharp and bitter break with your family, and no matter how much you may think you don't need your family now, you will, as time goes on, feel deeply the separation you have caused. At your age especially, an elopement would be a combination of selfish mistrust of your parents, of meanness in depriving them of a chance

to share in your wedding joy, and of an element of disobedience because you are so young. Even if they were to forgive you later on, they could never feel quite the same toward you as they did before.

As a Catholic, you should know that an elopement, with speedy marriage following, is out of the question. (I hate to think that you may be contemplating a civil marriage, with all its disastrous consequences for your soul.) As a Catholic, you have to go to your pastor in good time, have to be instructed in the duties of marriage, have to permit the banns of marriage to be published, etc. Of course there is provision made for special cases in which there is an important reason for secrecy or haste. But so often this reason has to do with sin that a young girl who marries hastily and in secret gives grounds for the suspicion that "she had to get married."

From this distance, it would appear that your parents and your boy-friend's parents are advising you wisely. You can check this with your pastor or confessor, who will be influenced by no personal motives in advising you, and who will help you to get married before too long if that turns out to be the prudent thing to do. But put out of your mind any thought of an elopement.

## On Reluctant Mothers

**Problem:** I am just over 21, and am engaged to be married to a good Catholic young man. We have been going together for eight months. We would like to be married in a month or so, but my mother begs me with tears to put it off for a couple of years, so that she will have me with her that much longer. She tells me that I owe this to her for all that she has done for me. Can you tell me if I do have any obligation to put off our marriage for two years because of my mother's feelings?

**Solution:** It could be a grave mistake to put off your marriage for even a year merely because your mother wants your companionship. Common sense and experience lay down very definite principles regarding the length of time young people should wait before marrying, once they have become engaged. There are some cases in which a wait is necessary for serious reasons, such as the actual material dependence of others on the man or woman, or the lack of even a modest income on which to start a home. These exceptions do not change the universal principle that long engagements are to be avoided whenever possible. The longer two people who are in love with each other put off their marriage, the greater is the danger of their falling into sin. To be in love and engaged and yet to have to wait two years or so before marrying places a great strain on young people's ability to resist manifestations of affection that of their nature endanger the virtue of chastity.

Mothers who hate to lose their daughters do not think of these things. But a daughter must think of them and must decide the matter according to the best interests of her soul and the soul of her fiance. In a situation such as is presented here, a girl would do well to place the decision in the hands of her confessor. He will be able to judge objectively both the reasons for the mother's reluctance to give up her daughter for a while, and the degree of spiritual danger that will be involved for the engaged couple. If he decides that the marriage should not be put off for another year or two, his authority should be quoted to the mother, and should be followed even though the latter bitterly resents it.

## Does Religion Matter in Marriage?

**Problem:** I am keeping company with a non-Catholic boy, and cannot understand why everybody is making a fuss about it. He is better morally than many a Catholic boy I have gone out with. He says he is not interested in my religion, nor in any religion, 41 but he is perfectly respectful toward what I

believe. I like him and he likes me, and we have talked informally about getting married. And no matter what anyone says, I feel certain that ours would be a happy marriage. Wouldn't you agree that a man's character, his respect, his love for a girl, are more important than religion? I am 21 years old, old *enough*, I think, to judge these things. Solution: A 21 year old girl is far from being a capable judge of what makes a happy marriage from all the angles that must be considered in this matter.

There are two phases to marriage. The first is the phase of love, courtship, physical and mental attraction, etc. In this phase, nothing seems important to young people other than their sentiments and emotions toward each other. They have no way of knowing what they will feel like ten years later, and no way of knowing what moral and personal problems will arise in the course of time.

The second phase of marriage starts within a year or two years or five years after the wedding, when sentiment and emotion have simmered down, and the couple have to rely on a deeper sense of unity than feeling. Only the experience of older people can tell youngsters just getting married what problems will arise after this second phase has set in. Perhaps by that time there are two or three children. The non-Catholic husband believes that birth-control is now called for. The Catholic wife knows that it is wrong. She will do one of two things: either compromise her conscience and give in to evil; or keep up a running battle with him over this serious moral issue. Either course means friction and sorrow. This one example is symbolic of a hundred impasses that can arise, and that have arisen in multitudes of marriages.

Above all, the 21 year old girl who sees no harm in marrying a man who has no interest in religion is potentially forfeiting the faith of her potential children. She may do everything possible herself to mold her children in her faith; yet the example of her husband will be a standing and powerful example against her teaching.

## Doubtful Freedom to Marry

**Problem:** I am keeping company with a man who was married before and is now divorced. At the time of his marriage and divorce he was not a Catholic, but now he wants to become one. We feel that there may be hope of having his first marriage declared invalid. Is it wrong to go out with such a person, in the hope that we may get married in the *Church* some day? Solution: Clear thinking and firm action are required in all cases of this kind, which are not few in number today. Here are the principles that must govern your whole attitude in this matter.

1. It is wrong to continue close company-keeping with a man whose freedom to marry you is in doubt. The reason is this: company-keeping can lead to love-a love so strong that eventually you might find yourself not caring whether your friend is free to marry or not, and willing to pretend marriage to him even at the cost of your immortal soul. Or, if you retain faith and courage enough to resist an attempted marriage, it will very probably lead you into serious and frequent sin.

2. Therefore, as soon as you learn that a man who seeks your company has been married and divorced, you are bound at once to find out certainly whether there are solid grounds for his being declared free to marry by the Catholic Church. You may not dawdle along with your company-keeping on the probability that he might be declared free, or with a doubt in your mind about his freedom. By so doing you would be throwing yourself into an occasion of casting aside your faith, your soul, and heaven. That is why you must get all the facts about his previous marriage and go to a priest at once and find out whether the facts warrant the assumption that you can validly marry him in the future.

3. A Catholic girl who is being courted by a divorced man must, as she loves God and desires to save her soul, bolster her will to a complete readiness to give him up immediately if she learns that there is little or no chance of marrying him validly. This is another reason why she is bound to get the facts, and a priest's judgment about the facts, early in her acquaintanceship with him. The earlier she ascertains his standing as to marriage, the easier it will be to give him up if that proves necessary.

It is difficult to be sympathetic with Catholic girls who have kept company with a divorced man for a year or two, fallen deeply in love, and who then come to a priest begging that he do something to help them get married. The investigation should have been made at the very start of the friendship and a decision made then.

## **In Love With a Divorced Man**

**Problem:** In the April issue of last year you stated that a Catholic girl is obliged to find out as quickly as possible whether a man who asks her for dates is free to marry. That statement made me angry. Find out! Great! But how? Three years ago I met a very nice young man. The second time I saw him, he told me he had been married and divorced. I discovered that I liked him very much, so I went to our pastor to see whether the man could be declared free to marry me. He took instructions and has become a Catholic. Since then (three years ago), though we have filled out innumerable papers, no decision has been given by the Church. Surely this is no fault of ours. The Church preaches against the danger of long courtships and then leaves us right in the midst of that danger. And the idea that the final answer to our petition may be "No" leaves me panic-stricken. What am I to do? We both have gone through much sorrow and trouble before we met, and we wonder why we are not entitled to a little happiness.

**Solution:** This is going to hurt, but it should be like the hurt of a necessary operation. When I said that a girl should find out whether a man who wants to keep company with her is free to marry, I neither said nor implied that all she has to do, in the case of going with a divorced man, is to drop the problem in a priest's lap; that she might then let herself become deeply involved and practically committed to marriage.

When I said "find out whether a divorced man is, for some valid reason, free to marry" I meant "get the answer to the question," not merely present the question to a priest and act as if it's all settled in your favor.

This is a matter on which too many Catholics need instruction and frequent reminders. The Catholic Church presumes every marriage to be a valid marriage unless objective proof is available that it was invalid. The Church is the protector of the marriage bond. Her whole history and organization have been geared to uphold the indissolubility of marriage. She will not be rushed into declaring a marriage invalid so that the person involved can marry again if the evidence for invalidity is not compelling. Cases run on for years just because such evidence is lacking.

Your argument that, because you have suffered a great deal, you are now entitled to some happiness, has nothing to do with the case. The Church was founded by Christ to lead you to the happiness of heaven, and to fortify you for suffering loneliness, hardships, even martyrdom in behalf of that goal. Sure, she wants you also to have as much happiness as possible in this world, but only within the framework of obedience to God's laws. She has no power to set aside or treat lightly those laws for the sake of your temporal happiness.

## On Marrying a Relative

**Problem:** Several years ago I fell in love with my second cousin. We had planned to be married by my parish priest (with a dispensation), but my mother was so violently opposed to the idea that I could not even talk to her about it. Finally I called off the engagement. Several months ago I met a young man in the armed forces, and we started going together until he was sent overseas. I am very fond of him and we correspond regularly. Meanwhile I see my cousin now and then and I know he is still in love with me. I feel guilty about having hurt him. Do you think I am still in love with him, or did I do the right thing in breaking off our engagement?

**Solution:** It is always good to escape from a situation in which you have to apply for a dispensation from the general laws governing marriage. There are serious reasons behind the law that prohibits relatives (second cousins or closer) to marry. A wedding between cousins is not quite a normal wedding, and though the Church does grant a dispensation for such in exceptional cases and for grave reasons, she does so with reluctance, preferring to see her children marry without seeking exceptions to the natural and ecclesiastical law.

Things have turned out so well for you that you have reason to be grateful that obstacles prevented your marriage to a cousin. Your feeling for the latter is now more one of sympathy and pity than of real love. You should not accept any dates with him, because that would only make things difficult both for him and you. You are bound to see him when there is a gathering of relatives, but on such occasions you should avoid as much as possible, *tete-a-tetes* and sad reminiscences. You need have no fear that his life will be ruined as a result of your broken engagement. Just as you have been fortunate enough to find a new boy friend, so he, in time, will find someone whom he can love and will want to marry. Neither of you will then have to go through life with the thought that you broke through the barriers that nature has set up to prevent close relatives from marrying each other.

## Choice of Loves

**Problem:** I am in love. The man I love is wonderful. I have never met anybody like him. Other men with whom I have gone out have almost invariably made indecent advances; this man never has. He respects my religion and would do nothing to lessen my regard for it. He even says he would like to become a Catholic. There is only one drawback to my happiness. He was married before in the Protestant Church in which he was baptized. I promised to marry him because surely God will not condemn us when we need each other so badly.

**Solution:** It is good that you have written to me so that I can answer shortly before Christmas. You say you have already made your decision. This means that Christmas is not for you. You have renounced it and rejected it, and none of its beauty or joy can have any meaning for your soul.

You say that "God will not condemn you because you need each other so badly." Despite your feelings, God has already condemned you. He who left heaven and gave up warm houses, soft clothing, even honor and respectability, and ultimately His life, to save you for heaven, has already pronounced sentence on a decision like yours. He called marriages such as the one you have promised to attempt "adulterous". And He said that there will be no unrepentant adulterer in heaven.

Therefore, take, if you will, the benefits of this attractive invalid marriage. But know what you are taking. You will never, so long as you live with this forbidden partner, be able to go to confession and receive God's forgiveness for this or any other sin. You will never be permitted to kneel at the altar

railing and receive the Son of God into your heart. You will never be able to look at a crucifix and say: "He died for me; therefore I will love Him and He will save me," because you are rejecting Him by your bad marriage. And there will be no "good tidings of great joy" for you on any Christmas, because what Christ came to give to those of good will, you will have exchanged for a home in which God cannot dwell.

It is not worth it, child. I know it is hard for a girl to give up a man whom she loves greatly. But so was the stable hard, and the manger and the cross. You don't need any particular man in all the world. You do need God--the God-Man--and you will need Him forever. Don't give Him up for any love.

## On Reading Books about Sex

**Problem:** Is it lawful or advisable for engaged couples to read one or the other of the many books that are published about sex and the details of married life before they are married? My boy friend and I have heard our non-Catholic friends talking about such books, and have even been offered one by a friend. He thinks we should read it because so much is said nowadays about the harm done by ignorance in the married. I have held off because I had my doubts about such books, and wanted first to ask you to discuss the matter in your column.

**Solution:** This much can be said as certain: It would be exceedingly dangerous, so much so as to be wrong, for an engaged couple to read any books on sex that might be offered to them by a friend. On no type of writing must more caution and discrimination be exercised than on books dealing with matters of sex. There are too many bad books of this kind, books that teach immoral practices, books that stress the importance of the physical aspects of sex far out of proportion to their real place and purpose in human lives, to make it lawful for even engaged couples to pick up and read any book about sex.

Another thing that is certain: There should be no thought of any sort of special study, or reading or discussion of sex science until very shortly before actual marriage. This is assuming that a young man and woman have the ordinary, general knowledge of the purpose of sex and of sex morality that is a part of any decent education. If, as happens once in a while, that much is lacking, a general briefing on the subject should be sought from a priest. But to read detailed, or so-called "scientific" books before marriage would be foolhardy and wrong.

It is not wrong, but rather reasonable and even necessary, for an engaged couple to seek clear knowledge of the privileges and duties, the rights and wrongs, of married life, shortly before their marriage. The priest who prepares them for marriage has an obligation to impart such instruction. If he fails to offer it, a couple should ask for it, or go to another priest to receive it. He may direct them to sound and good reading matter that will supplement the instruction he gives and help to prepare them for happy married life.

## On Caring for Aged Parents

**Problem:** Is there any obligation that one member of a large family sacrifice his or her life to the care of the parents in their old age? I am thinking of the case in which the parents are financially independent, but partially, not totally, disabled by old age. Some parents insist that one son or daughter stay with them, giving up any thought of marriage or a vocation of their own. Others whom I have known are willing to make any sacrifice to have all their children follow some vocation, even though it

leaves them entirely alone. The question has been raised in our own family and I wish to know what is right.

**Solution:** In the case as given, in which the parents are financially independent, thus presumably able to provide whatever care they need themselves, the true Christian attitude is that of those who want to see every one of their children established in their own vocation, even though it means sacrifice and something of loneliness for themselves. It would not be wrong, of course, for one of the children to choose to make a vocation out of staying with the parents, thus freely sacrificing opportunities for marriage and a home of their own. This would be a form of charity and sacrifice worthy of high praise, so long as the one who adopted it based it on spiritual motives, accepted the sacrifice without later grumbling and complaining, and cultivated a solidly spiritual life. But such a sacrifice would not be of obligation in the case mentioned, and parents should be most highly commended who would urge that it be not made.

There are frequent examples of selfishness and even interference with God's evident plans on the part of parents. Thus, those who, in no great physical need and financially secure, refuse to permit a son or daughter to follow a priestly or religious vocation because they won't give up their companionship, would even do wrong. The same would be true of parents not in need who would, prevent the marriage of a son or daughter in love and desiring to marry, just because they don't want to be left alone.

The case is different entirely if the parents are destitute and helplessly ill. In that case some kind of an obligation arises among the children to take care of the parents. Even in this case, however, it can sometimes be arranged that, through the cooperation of all, the parents can be taken care of and none of the children prevented from following an evident vocation.

## **Should a Girl Marry for her Reputation?**

**Problem:** Should a girl who has fallen into sin and thus become pregnant insist on marrying the man who was her companion in sin? Should those who have influence over her insist that this be done to salvage her good name and to provide both a mother and a father for the child? I am a social worker, and come into contact with these cases every now and then. Is there any general rule to be followed?

**Solution:** The one general rule that can be set down is that the decision to marry or not to marry should not be made by such a girl solely on the ground that the marriage would (doubtfully) save her good name and provide a home for the expected baby. The preservation of her good name would be little comfort to a girl if this were effected by entrance into a marriage that could be foreseen to have little chance of success. Moreover the providing of a home for an expected baby would be of little advantage if there were little possibility that it would be a good and happy home.

Therefore each case of this kind must be decided according to the circumstances connected with it. If the circumstances reveal that there are good prospects of the marriage turning out successfully, it should be recommended. This would require, of course, that the man in the case show some solidity of character, true repentance for his lapse into sin, readiness to assume the responsibilities of marriage, etc. It would also require that the couple love each other sufficiently to be good companions and help-mates. It need hardly be added that both must be free to marry validly.

If the circumstances make it clear that a marriage between the two would have little chance of success, because of the weak character of the man, his lack of sound morals, his obvious inability to support a family, or because, as quite often happens, the girl has come to feel an antipathy for him, or is herself too immature to take up the duties of marriage, then there should be no thought of urging marriage.

Even though the ideal thing is that every child born into the world have a real home with a mother and father, the ideal must yield to the practical and prudent judgment that a particular couple could not establish a good home. Surely a girl who has had the misfortune of falling into sin should not be coerced nor even strongly urged against her wishes to marry the man involved. The tasks of protecting her good name in so far as possible, and of providing for the child, can be taken care of in other ways.

## **Is Plastic Surgery Lawful?**

**Problem:** Is it wrong for a girl in her middle twenties to try to have her facial appearance improved by plastic surgery? Is it a sin against humility or the fifth commandment or any other law of God? I am not an introvert, I like people, and I would like to get married. But I have had no prospects of marriage, and I feel that the correction of certain defects in my appearance would give me more confidence and even perhaps an opportunity of marriage. Your advice would be greatly appreciated.

**Solution:** In itself, and if it is advised and executed by a reputable and experienced surgeon, the improving of one's appearance through plastic surgery would not be wrong. If men may shave to improve their appearance, and women may use cosmetics and wrinkle-removing massages, etc. to improve their appearance, so one whose features are somewhat defective or irregular may have them corrected by means of an operation for the sake of appearance. It must be assumed, of course, that the operation is not a dangerous one, nor one that might do greater harm than good. Reputable surgeons are the ones to decide that.

However, one who is interested in the spiritual aspect of things should be reminded of the danger of unworthy motives in trying to acquire a more attractive appearance. There is, first of all, the danger of being motivated only by vanity, which is an inordinate desire to be admired, to be praised, to be considered beautiful. An ordinate or praiseworthy care of one's appearance is motivated by charity, i.e., by the desire to be pleasing to others, not to bring honor to oneself. Thus a person should dress neatly, and take proper care of the hair and even have defective features improved, primarily to make others happy. It is an old saying that our appearance belongs to others, not ourselves, and we should be concerned with making it a source of joy to them.

A second danger to be avoided is that of undergoing plastic surgery with the idea that this will be an infallible means of insuring a happy marriage. God's will must be taken into account here, and it may be His will that a certain individual will not be directed into the state of marriage. To pin all one's hopes in life on marriage is to render oneself an easy victim of the wrong kind of marriage; it has led too many girls into marriage with a divorced man, or a man without character. Having her features improved by plastic surgery should make a girl determined more strongly than ever that she will never sacrifice God's love and friendship for a bad marriage, no matter how many opportunities of so doing may arise.

## **How to Judge a Boy Friend's Conversion**

**Problem:** How is it possible to be sure that a boy friend, in becoming a convert to the Catholic Church, is truly sincere in his conversion and not merely "going through the motions" for the sake of marriage? I went out with this boy for a while, liked him quite a lot, but finally told him I would have to stop seeing him because I was determined never to marry anyone but a Catholic. Almost at once he said: "Then I'll become a Catholic." I have seen similar cases in which the converted person turned out to be anything but a decent Catholic after marriage. I don't want that to happen in my case. My boy friend is

taking instructions, but how can I be sure he is sincere?

**Solution:** This is a very practical and important problem because there have indeed been many cases in which a boy went through all the requirements for becoming a Catholic, but turned out later to have done so only for the sake of "getting the girl." On the other hand it must be remembered that sincere converts make the best Catholics of all, and a Catholic girl should be very happy over the prospect of marrying such a man.

There are certain signs of sincerity in one who is taking instructions to become a Catholic that the girl should look for. She should, if at all possible, accompany him to the instructions he receives from the priest, both to give him confidence and to watch their effect on him. If he is sincere in his study of the faith, he will show it in three ways: 1) By asking questions both of the priest who instructs him and of his girl friend. A man who goes through a whole course of instructions without ever asking a question or raising a doubt, is probably not really interested in the faith at all. 2) By commenting to his girl friend on the new things he is learning and on their wonderful appeal to his mind. If a man takes instructions to become a Catholic and never has a word to say about their effect on him, he cannot be very sincere. 3) By showing a new interest in prayer and church services within a short time after beginning to take instructions. True conversions are always marked by sincere prayers and a quickening desire to enter into the life of the Church. A man who would go through an entire course of instructions and never of his own accord go to Mass or any other Catholic church service until after his reception into the church, would offer evidence of indifference to the whole thing. One final thing that a girl should do: she should bring up moral problems that being a Catholic raises in one's life and see how her boy friend would solve them. If he balks, for instance, at the Catholic principle concerning birth-control, and holds out against it, he is not sincerely converted.

## The Fruits of an Invalid Marriage

**Problem:** If a Catholic girl falls in love with a married and divorced Catholic man, and consents to attempt marriage with him before a justice of the peace, are the two of them guilty of just one sin when they attempt this marriage, or do they live in constant sin after it? if the true wife of the divorced Catholic man dies after he has attempted the second marriage, does the latter immediately become valid, or do certain steps have to be taken to make it valid?

**Solution:** It is a mortal sin for any two Catholics to attempt marriage before a justice of the peace, whether either of them is already validly married or not. Another mortal sin is added if either one is already validly married, viz., that of infidelity on the part of the married person and of cooperation in it on the part of the unmarried one.

After an attempt to marry before a justice of the peace, two Catholics continue to live in sin so long as they live as if married to each other. First of all, they are living in the mortal sin of public scandal by living together as if married when they are not truly married at all. On top of that they commit a mortal sin every time they make use of the privilege of marriage to which no one is entitled except the validly married. If one of the partners has a living spouse, every such use of the marriage privilege is also sin of adultery for both.

If the lawful wife of the married man dies after he has attempted marriage with another woman, his sinful attempted marriage by no means becomes automatically valid. In fact, by his serious infidelity to his true wife, he has raised up a grave and diriment impediment against his lawfully marrying the second woman. He must take the case to a priest; he must show deep and sincere sorrow for the many

sins he has committed-, he must show good reasons for applying for a dispensation from the impediment he incurred by his infidelity; and he must take measures to offset the scandal he has given by his publicly un-Christian conduct. When all this has been done, and a dispensation been obtained, a true marriage ceremony must be held before a priest and two witnesses.

All this goes to show once more what a terribly evil and foolish thing any Catholic girl would do by entering into an invalid marriage with a divorced man. She thereby binds herself to a complicated chain of continuing sins, each of which lessens the chance that God will ever grant her the extraordinary grace that would be necessary if she is to extricate herself from such a net of evil and ever reach heaven.

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*diriment impediment*

one that renders marriage null and void from the beginning.