

WHAT THEY ASK ABOUT

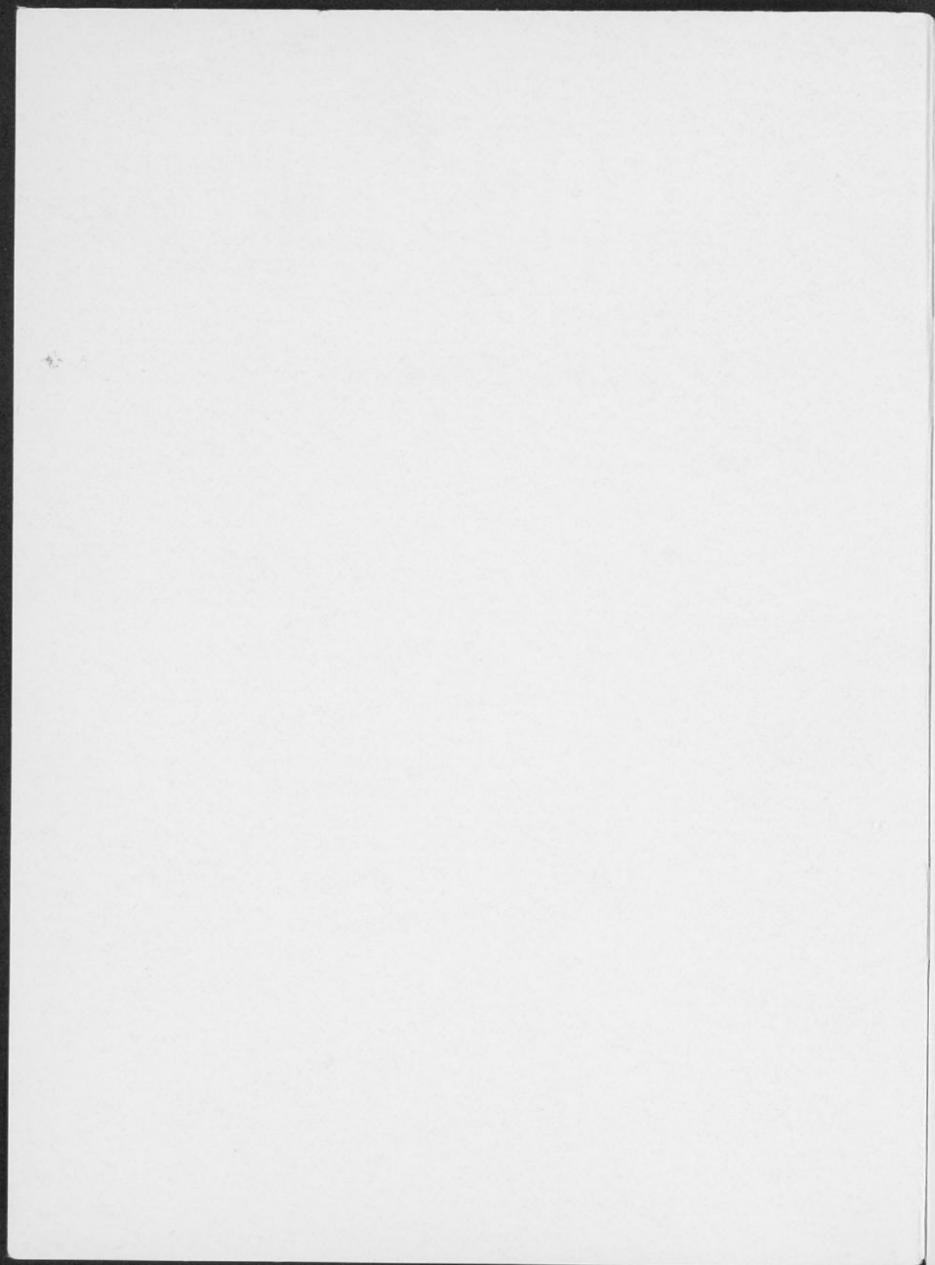
Conway, J. D.  
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# ENGAGEMENT

By Monsignor J. D. Conway



Breaking it off — The date was set — Conduct of engaged couples — Difference in age — Proper age — For a young lady — Putting off marriage — No children — Papers from the Chancery Office — When to consult the pastor — Choice of Church — Qualifications of priest to instruct — What has to be done.



# What They Ask About

## ENGAGEMENT

By Monsignor J. D. Conway

(Author of: *What They Ask About Marriage*)



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## ENGAGEMENT . . .

Breaking it off—The date was set—Conduct of engaged couples.

*Q. Two people were engaged to be married, one a Catholic, one not. Due to urgent pressure of the Catholic, the other person reluctantly decided to take instructions. Then after a while the Catholic broke the engagement. This Catholic is very conscientious, and did not make light of the engagement, and now feels responsible that the non-Catholic may not join the Church. I think it is a grace from God that has given the Catholic the ability to break the engagement now. The Catholic feels that a great injustice is being done, but would it not be a greater injustice to go ahead and marry? Would there be any guilt on the Catholic's part if the other person did not continue the instructions? Would not the non-Catholic party if interested, or believing the Catholic Church to be the true Church, go ahead and continue the instructions and join the Church, regardless of the engagement?*

*A. I do not want to offend you, because you say nice things about the Question Box in your letter. But you do make your*

questions long and complicated; whereas these characteristics are supposed to belong to the answers. By careful avoidance of pronouns you have successfully confused us as to whether male or female broke the engagement. But you do not conceal a certain personal bias in favor of the status quo. I hope you did not exert undue influence on the Catholic party to produce said status. Said party seems a bit nostalgic.

Of course no Catholic party, male or female, should continue an engagement to get the other party to continue instructions. I would be a bit wary of this conversion anyway. There seems, according to your story, to have been too much urgent pressure on one side and too much reluctance on the other side. It is true that instructions begun under such circumstances often lead to interest and conviction and faith. But if they are not continued when the "urgent pressure" is removed, then the pressure-exerter should have no regrets or qualms.

In other words, unless your daughter is convinced that she really wants to marry this man, that she really loves him, and that he will make her an ideal husband, then she should maintain the status quo, and let him follow his unpressured conscience about the instructions. (There I go, using personal pronouns and making presumptions, by reading between lines.)

*Q. Is a Catholic girl doing wrong if she decides not to marry a Catholic young man after plans had been made and the date set for their marriage?*

A. That depends on her motives. If she is honest with herself and the young man, she is not doing wrong. If she now finds her engagement was a mistake, she is obliged to break it. She can change her mind up to the moment of marriage; but not after that moment. She must be fair with the young man, but she must not let herself be influenced by what the neighbors may say.

The Church law recognizes that an engagement to marry

involves a certain obligation in conscience; it is a mutual promise, solemnly made, about a serious matter. However, changed circumstances can relieve the engaged person of his moral obligation. Marriage is infinitely more serious than the promises he made. The Church wants people to be entirely free up to the moment of marriage. So she will not permit a person to be forced into a marriage merely because of an engagement.

*Q. I am twenty years old and for a year and a half I have been going steady with a man seven years older than myself. We plan to marry just as soon as all arrangements are complete. We love each other very much and have deep respect for each other.*

*I know from religious teachings that "petting," passionate embracing and kissing, are sinful and should not be done. But I would like to ask this question: How can two people in love see one another two or three times a week and not find themselves passionate towards each other? If I never kissed the man I am going to marry, how would I know I loved him? When I do embrace him it doesn't seem cheap and sinful to me. If these things seemed really wrong, I wouldn't do them. An impure touch or thought seems wrong (and I know they are), so we make every effort to keep from doing them. We never kissed one another for over a year. But I love him now, and it doesn't seem wrong.*

*Please tell me the attitude to take on these matters, as it is important to both of us. I want to live and act as my God wants me.*

*A. No answer of mine could possibly be as inspiring as your question. No counsel of mine could possibly improve on your attitude toward your courtship, love and future marriage. No statement of moral principles could provide a better practical*

solution of love's problems, than that which you have conscientiously found for yourself.

My only advice to you is to forget your worries and fears. Certainly, at this stage of your courtship, not every kiss or embrace means sin or impurity. They are honest signs of your affection, which properly demonstrate and increase your love. They are a legitimate test of temper and attraction, a sane preparation for marriage.

You are normal, decent people in love; not bloodless spirits. You have instincts and emotions and you will soon use them properly to establish a family and give glory to God. Meanwhile you realize that these instincts must be guided by reason; and that these emotions must be kept under restraint. Your intentions are perfect, but you know that good intentions are no proof against indiscretion, without reason and will, and prayer and grace.

Surely God loves you, and is pleased with your love for each other. That love has developed normally, honestly, and properly. You can be proud of your courtship, and thank God for His grace which has guided it. You have laid the best possible foundation for married happiness.

Courtship and engagement are right and necessary. They provide the soil for love's growth. They give you a deeper knowledge and understanding of each other. You learn to be at ease with each other. You come to know each other's likes and aversions, faculties and foibles, aims and ambitions, hopes and habits. You began with a surface attraction, maybe a bit of infatuation. You came to know and appreciate spiritual qualities, to evaluate properties of intellect, to develop mutual interests; and you have found much in common in your social and cultural backgrounds and religious convictions. You have developed deep respect for each other. You are solidly and sincerely in love. You have contemplated life's problems together. You know that you are suited to each other, and can be happy together through the years.

Your courtship has been normal, frank, and honest. You laid the foundation of love first, in beautiful, steady compan-



ionship, and then let it develop naturally. You did not rush it or anticipate it. You did not use courtship as an excuse for thrill and passion. You did not resort to seduction. Your first kiss and embrace were not false or deceptive, but full of meaning, honest, sincere; not artificially sought, but naturally responsive.

Courtship without physical thrill or emotion offers no promise of married happiness. It is more decent, certainly, but hardly more hopeful than the vulgar and venereal wrestling of the wastrel wolf and his limousine louse.

Purity is an attitude toward sex. It is not an insensibility. It avoids selfish seeking of sensation. But it is not fearful. Purity is perfectly concordant with true love, as you have kept it in concord. It recognizes that physical expressions of love have their proper place and proportion. They sometimes present danger, but danger is not sin; and in your love and plans for marriage, you have ample reason to face the danger.

Nothing I have here written applies to juvenile dates, or offers excuse for libidinous liberties. Kissing and caressing on the first date are not matter of courtship; they pertain to the art of seduction. Seeking a sexual sensation is seriously sinful. Petting, defined as physical contact for pleasure, is simply fooling with frustrated fornication. Its aim is sensation and stimulation of desire. It is seldom honest; usually selfish; generally artificial. It may be serious, absorbing, fascinating and compelling. It may breed infatuation and beget a marriage ceremony. But it seldom fosters true love or sane mating, and never develops virtue.

*Q. I have been hearing frequently about solemn engagements and formal betrothals. Are these something new? I never saw either of them, and did not hear about them until recently.*

*A. A solemn engagement is a sincere and formal promise of marriage mutually exchanged between a man and woman — or a boy and girl. In order to be valid in Church law it must*

be made in writing and signed by both parties and by the pastor, or bishop — or by two witnesses.

These requirements for a valid engagement are set forth in Canon 1017 of the Code of Canon Law, and there are special provisions for the engagement of those parties who cannot write.

A valid engagement creates a certain obligation in the conscience of the parties to fulfill the promises they have made in honesty and good faith. However the Church law does not permit any legal action for the enforcement of this obligation; it does permit a "breach of promise" suit however for the collection of damages — in cases where real damages result from one party's failure to keep the promises made in solemn engagement.

At first glance it may seem strange that Church law does not permit a person to be forced into marriage even though he has solemnly obligated himself by formal contract to enter that marriage. However, when we stop and think we realize that such force might make the marriage contract invalid, because free consent is required to make a real marriage. And even if the marriage were valid, it might turn out to be very unfortunate, because coercion would surely create resentment, which might degenerate into hatred.

Marriage is such a sacred and important thing, involving such tremendous obligations, and decisions so critical for the happiness of this life and eternity that it is highly desirable for the contracting parties to have all the freedom possible. So the Church recognizes that an engagement — no matter how solemn and sincere — can be broken at any time by mutual agreement of the parties, without any other reason than their own wishes, and that with sufficient justifying reason it can properly be broken by one party in spite of the unwillingness of the other.

Neither the Canon Law nor the Ritual of the Church provides for any religious ceremonies to accompany a solemn engagement. However it is most fitting that the promises be made more sacred by pronouncing them in Church, before the

altar, and that the engaged couple receive the blessing of the priest and join him in fervent prayer for God's grace and assistance that their period of engagement may be a sound and holy preparation for happy married life. The engagement ring would usually be blessed as part of such a ceremony, and the parties might then assist at Mass and receive Holy Communion.

The custom of entering solemn legal engagements has never been common in our country — as it has in others — but in recent years a formal betrothal, with religious ceremonies or blessings, has become more frequent. Grailville Publications of Loveland, Ohio, has a pamphlet of such ceremonies, *Promised in Christ*. It is taken from the translation of "The Roman Ritual," Volume 1, by Father Philip J. Weller (Bruce, Milwaukee). It also has a ceremony for the coronation of a bride on the eve of her marriage.

after, and then the engaged couple receive the blessing of the priest and join him in fervent prayer for God's grace and assistance that their period of engagement may be a sound and holy preparation for happy married life. The engagement ring would usually be blessed as part of such a ceremony, and the parties might then assist at Mass and receive Holy Com-

munion. The custom of entering solemn legal engagements has never been common in our country -- as it has in others -- but in recent years a natural parallel with religious customs of blessing has become more frequent. Localists of the Diocese of Cleveland Ohio, has a paragraph of such customs, translated in French. It is taken from the translation of "The Roman Ritual" Volume I, by Father Billig & Weller (Paris, Milleval). It also has a ceremony for the coronation of a bride on the eve of her marriage.

The text continues with a detailed description of the coronation ceremony, mentioning the use of a crown and veil, and the presence of witnesses. It describes the priest's actions and the couple's participation in the rite.

The text concludes with a final paragraph, likely a note or a reference, providing additional context or instructions related to the ceremony.

## THE AGE FOR MARRIAGE...

Difference in age — Proper  
age — For a young lady —  
Putting off marriage — No  
children.

*Q. I am in love with a man 25 years my senior. I am assured that he loves me, too, but my parents object. I am in my early twenties. Don't tell me to forget him, as this is not an infatuation; it has endured several years. It is love beyond the ordinary, and I doubt that I could be happy with anyone my own age after being with him.*

A. Being a Question Box editor has its thrills. Opening the morning mail becomes exciting. You can never tell what people will ask.

In answering your question, I am inclined to address you as "my dear little girl," but then I wonder if it might not be more appropriate to call you "my crazy mixed-up kid." When we Catholics speak of mixed marriage, we usually refer to difference of religion. But great difference of age makes a mixed marriage, and you have to be a bit mixed up already to want to get mixed up in one.

Great differences of religion, age, size, nationality, wealth, interests, education, or social position present special problems in marriage; and just ordinary normal marriage usually has enough problems of its own.

Minor age differences are negligible. It is quite the usual thing for the husband to be three or four years older than the wife, and differences up to ten years or so might be encountered without much fear. But 25 years is a quarter of a century. Where were you while he was flirting with the flappers of the 29's? Why didn't one of them nab him? How old will you be when he becomes a senile old codger in his 70's? Who will do the bunny-hop with you then?

I think you need to psychoanalyze yourself a bit. Ask yourself some blunt questions, and give yourself plain, honest answers. Just why do you want to marry this old gentleman? Are your reasons emotional or economic? Or both? Are you looking for social position? Are you, maybe, infatuated with the thrill of conquest, where assorted others failed? What part does flattery play; he has known many women, of two generations; but he has chosen you. Do you have any measure of pity for the poor old fellow? Is there an element of gratitude mixed in your emotions? Do you possibly have a "parent attachment" to him? Is he a sort of parent substitute? How much of "hero worship" enters the picture? How much "rationalizing" have you done, emphasizing to yourself the reasons why a husband should be older than the wife?

Then you might psychoanalyze him a little. Why does he want to marry you? Of course, you are young and beautiful and lively and desirable. He couldn't help loving you. But why does he want to marry you? I take it that he is not just a silly old fool who has an emotional fixation for teen-agers. He could hardly have reached that senile regression in which he seeks to regain his own lost youth and to re-live his early loves. If he were these things, would you love him so much? Ask yourself seriously, anyway; such things are entirely possible. Is he, maybe, moved by flattery? Your choice of him assures him of virility and strength and mature attractiveness.

He is no callow youth; but his middle-aged manliness attracts, wins, and holds. It's a delightful illusion. And finally, ask yourself: Why did he not get married before? Is there something wrong with him? Was he not desirable? What kind of bachelor life has he led? (In all this I am presuming that he is eligible to marry — and also that he is not a widower.)

And then having studied yourself and him, you should look into the future discerningly. What problems are you likely to face? Parental opposition you have indicated. Public opinion will be critical and comments stinging. Can you take it? Who will be your friends and companions? Veterans of the first world war, or those of the Korean conflict? Dowdy bridge-club dowagers, or your recent college classmates? What is common in your tastes and interests? What will be your recreations? Dancing will tax his heart; you will find dominoes dull. Can you enjoy acting as old as he? Can he stand being as young as you?

He will probably patronize you lovingly. In many ways you will be a daughter instead of a wife. He will hardly trust a mere child like you to manage the household, or make decisions. And he might get impatient of your youthful vagaries and inexperience. You can never become a full partner with him in all of his life; half of it was lived before you were born. Even the more intimate phases of your life together may be unsatisfactory. Physical and emotional adjustments could be a problem. Maybe now you want to escape some of the physical realities of marriage. How will you feel about senile ineffectiveness fifteen years from now?

Women live longer than men, you know. So prospects are that after years of caring for a grumpy old man, you will end up a youthful widow. Too young to be content with a dog and a parrot; too old to start a new life. And in case there should be any children, how will you provide for their care?

To sum it up: We have only one life to live; he has already lived most of his.

*Q. What is the proper age for marriage?*

A. I imagine Adam and Eve debated that question as their sons and daughters were growing up. Cain and Abel probably had their own ideas, too, not quite in agreement with the old folks. The debate still goes on.

The law of the Church absolutely forbids a young man to marry before he is 16 and a young lady before she is 14. That is the minimum and it applies to everyone from Fiji to Eskimo. There is no upper age-limits. So the proper age must be somewhere between 14 and 93.

The ancient philosophers were fond of a Latin phrase which might be literally translated as "Virtue stands in the middle." Neither too young nor too old. Not at 16 or 17; such marriages keep our diocesan matrimonial courts busy. Usually not at such advanced ages as 31 or 35, because the field of choice is narrower, and selfishness has become congealed.

Accordingly, Church law, while allowing marriages to be valid after the minimum ages of 14 and 16, directs the pastors of souls that they keep young people from marrying until they reach the age sanctioned by the customs of each country.

What is the age sanctioned by our customs here in the U.S.? Certainly not 16 or 17. Some marriages are contracted at that age, but they are usually runaway affairs, frowned upon by parents and neighbors.

Our American way of life, our educational standards, our economic requirements, and our social habits demand a greater maturity from both man and woman before they enter marriage. If they ignore these demands, their marriage may be wrecked by emotional instability, domestic insecurity and financial worries and wants.

Finally, the law of the Church, in Canon 1034, directs pastors to try to keep young people from marrying before they are 21, without the knowledge or consent of their parents. This can probably be taken as a good norm of the Church's attitude. She does not FORBID the marriage of minors, but she is very careful about it and wants the counsel and advice of their parents.



Q. *At what age should a young lady marry?*

A. A definite answer to this question is so nearly impossible that I recur to the popular refuge of all answer-men. It depends upon personalities and circumstances. If routed there, I can safely resort to truism: It should be neither too early, nor yet too late.

Yet must I scorn timorous evasion? So, fortified by prayer, and appealing to Canon Law to support me, I fare forth with fellow fools and bid the angels bide.

Canon Law can give no absolute answer applicable to the entire world; but it does provide a clue and a directive. Canon 1067 establishes the minimum ages at which marriage is legally possible anywhere: 14 years for the female of the species, 16 for her counterpart. These ages seem scandalously low to us, but not so to the dusky native of the Congo, or the premature maiden of Melanesia.

The second paragraph of the same canon shows the mind of the Church: "Even though marriage may be validly contracted after these specified ages, the pastors of souls shall take care to divert young people from marriage *before the age sanctioned by the accepted customs of their own country.*"

### CUSTOM

The law is clear. But what is the age sanctioned by the accepted customs of our country? The average age of marriage has gone down sharply since the war; the Kiplinger Washington Letter for Dec. 23, 1949, indicates the present average ages as 22 for the women, and 24 for the men.

We do not conclude from this that pastors are required by law to try to keep all the young women of their parishes from marrying until they are 22 years old. Average age is not minimum age, but it does provide a norm for judgment. And the pastor is definitely obliged by law to try to keep his young teen-agers from marrying before the age which our society approves.

The Church law furnishes another indication of attitude in Canon 1034. Again the legislation is directed at the pastor.

He must make strenuous effort to keep minors (under 21 years of age) from contracting marriage without their parents' knowledge or consent.

### *MATURITY*

All serious students of marriage problems are agreed that children should not marry before they are grown up. Marriage is for adults. It presents life's most serious obligations. Reasonable maturity is required for their responsible acceptance and fulfillment.

What is maturity? Age is a factor in it, and a general norm for measuring it; but age is not maturity. We can distinguish various aspects of human development. Most obvious is the physical. Next in ease of measurement is mental growth. Obvious, but rather imponderable, is emotional maturity. And hardly inseparable are those numerous traits which make up personality, and adapt the individual to adult life in modern society.

With due reverence for the Grace of God, and proper respect for true love, there is probably no single factor so important to a successful marriage as *MATURITY*. Marriage by its essential nature demands physical maturity; but that generally comes early. Mental growth in modern children is rapid, but modern marriage requires higher mental development than formerly; so mental maturity still lags behind the physical. But the emotional elements are usually last to ripen; and they are supremely important. Childish emotional reactions probably ruin more marriages than any other factor.

### *SACRIFICE*

The married person is supposed to give up all the attitudes, habits, and reactions of childhood, and to live a grown-up life of love and procreation and adaptation, of sacrifice and self-control and persistent industry. Life must be faced frankly and resolutely, with neither papa's purse nor mama's arms as childish refuge.

Married people must adapt themselves to each other, to

their children, to society, and to the intransigent realities of the economic world. Only grownups can do so.

The mature woman has a reasonable view of life, and of the world and her position in it. She knows her place in society and adapts herself to it, conforming herself to law and convention. She faces a reality devoid of fairies and fancies. She is willing and able to cooperate in the economic role of life, and to be a homemaker. She does not expect something for nothing, or believe that the world owes her a living — or that her husband will provide it without her help. She is reasonably independent of her parents, and weaned from pouting and tantrums.

### **PLAYING HOUSE?**

The earlier a girl marries the more likely it is that sex and physical attraction have swept her off her infantile feet, to suspend her perilously above the jagged rocks of reality. She has hardly had time to make careful choice of mate. She may have simply launched herself to the first overwhelming surge of romance. The true object of her love may well be love itself.

If a girl marries too early, her only readiness to bear children may be biological. Emotionally her child replaces her doll. As a homemaker she is still playing house. And the callow youth who shares her kindergarten may well blanch and falter before the sudden realities of rent and grocery bills and obstetric fees.

The demands of modern society are complex; but they cannot be ignored or flaunted. Are youngsters able to maintain acceptable standards of living, provide education and opportunities for children, and avoid despair of future security?

Youngsters are easily adaptable. Since they are not yet grown, they may grow together. But they may also grow apart.

### **LATER REGRETS**

It sounds slightly pagan, but emotionally the youngster is

not monogamous. Maturity brings constancy, fidelity and stability.

Too early marriages provide fertile opportunity for later regrets and recriminations over lost opportunities, sacrificed education, and restricted horizons.

Postponing marriage proposes problems, certainly. But any goal worth achieving requires time and planning and sacrifice. To advocate marriage as an easy solution of juvenile temptations is a myopic reversal of values, substituting permanent problems for temporary ones, and dragging children into the midst of the turmoil. At best, marriage may defer the temptations until the second or third child is born into stern economic exigency.

### *FORTITUDE VITAL*

Adolescent problems must be faced with such fortitude as youth may receive from the Grace of God. Marriage is not a fire escape. It is for life, and for future generations, and it must be planned as such, long and prayerfully.

We all like to cite our own experience. My years as judge of the matrimonial court have provided me no ready statistics, but constant observation has produced a firm conviction that the earliest marriages break up the earliest. If no girls married at 16 or 17, our total of marriage cases would be appreciably lowered.

HOWEVER — don't wait too long to marry. After your early twenties your field of choice narrows, you begin to get set in your solitary ways, and you tend to develop the attitude, temperament and status of an old maid.

### *EDUCATION*

If you have the opportunity of college, plan to finish your studies, by all means. It may delay your career as wife and mother, but it will greatly enhance your proficiency in that career, which seeks happiness for life and for eternity, for yourself and your husband and your children.

*Q. Is it a sin for a woman to put off marriage so that she will be up in years and not able to bear children?*

A. There might be some sin of selfishness or shirking involved, but it is a bit hard to pin it down. If she leads a good, virtuous life up to the time of her marriage, she can hardly be accused of serious sin. Maybe it isn't a choice with her anyway. Maybe she just couldn't hook her man sooner. Maybe she has good reason for not having children: physical difficulties, hereditary defects, or the fear of not being able to raise children properly.

If she has no good reason, she is very unwise to thus deprive herself of woman's greatest privileges: The hopeful, youthful love of an ardent husband, the joys of married life while they still have meaning and ecstasy in them, the souls of her own children whom she would help God create for eternity, and the security of their filial love in her old age.

In place of these genuine joys she has courted frustration through her fruitful years, developed her selfishness and artificial self-sufficiency, run the danger of being left to a lonely and senile maidenhood, and chosen too late for complete adjustment the flaccid companionship of some graying, arthritic bachelor.

I am not even considering the possibility that she has been engaged, or stringing along some doddering dolt all her youthful years. That situation offers too many possibilities of sins of various kinds.

*Q. Do you think a girl of 18 should marry a college boy who is not working? They would not be able to have children for three years.*

A. Permit me to phrase your question differently: Do I think that a girl of 18 should agree to live in sin with a boy for three years? The answer is no.

## PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE...

Papers from the Chancery Office—When to consult the pastor—Choice of Church—Qualifications of priest to instruct—What has to be done.

*Q. How long does it take to get arrangements completed for a marriage? Our papers haven't come back from the Chancery Office. What shall we do?*

A. Our diocesan regulations instruct those planning marriage to call on their pastor at least ONE MONTH before the proposed date of the ceremony.

In Catholic marriages the banns must be published. That takes three weeks of the month.

In mixed marriages the non-Catholic party must take six instructions, the promises must be signed, and a dispensation sought from the bishop. That will require the whole month.

No dispensation should be taken for granted — until it IS granted. Where there is any impediment to marriage no definite plans should be made. Any arrangements must be tentative — contingent on the dispensation.

This ONE MONTH period is required for marriages without unusual COMPLICATIONS. Your statement that your papers haven't come back from the Chancery Office makes me suspect that there is a marriage case involved. Usually a dispensation is either granted or refused within a few days after it is requested. But marriage cases! They may take YEARS.

Have one of you been previously married? Then you should be making no plans whatsoever for your marriage. On all probability you can never marry. Remember, that first marriage was *until death*.

"Oh yes, but that first marriage was invalid," I seem to hear you say, or, "But they were never baptized, Father."

All right, maybe there is an outside chance! But it must be investigated. Documents, testimony, and various kinds of proof must be obtained. People must be traced and found. Courts must be convened. Formalities of law must be observed. There may be appeals. The case might have to be sent to Rome. All that takes TIME.

In marriage cases, beware of anyone who gives you any assurance of favorable results before the final decision. Meanwhile make NO plans. When these papers do come back from the Chancery Office they may say NO.

*Q. I plan to be married this Fall. How long is it necessary to consult the priest previous to our marriage? Can a dispensation from the banns be obtained? Could it be possible for us to marry in Advent?*

A. You should see the priest at least a month before your marriage, if you wish to avoid disappointment and trouble.

It is possible to obtain a dispensation from the banns if there is good reason for such dispensation. Your pastor, after having made his investigations, will forward your request to the bishop, stating the circumstances and reasons.

Canon 1108, §2, states that the solemn nuptial blessing is forbidden during Advent. The third paragraph of the same

Canon says that the bishop may permit it, however, for a good reason — a “just cause.” But he will restrict the solemnity.

Try to arrange your marriage for some other time than Advent. If you simply must have it in Advent let the bishop know the reason, through your pastor. He will decide if your reasons are sufficient.

Of course if you just want to get married, without any nuptial blessing, you can do it any time of the year. GOOD Catholics don't.

*Q. Is a Catholic couple free to choose the church in which to be married?*

A. No. The Church law requires that they be married in their own parish church by their own pastor — unless their pastor gives them permission to be married elsewhere, or grave necessity intervenes.

If bride and groom are from different parishes, they should be married in the bride's parish — unless there is a good reason to have the marriage in the groom's parish.

Any pastor can *validly* assist at any marriage in his own parish. But he has no right to marry people from outside his parish — unless he has permission from their own pastor.

Catholics who plan to be married outside their own parish must see their pastor and obtain his permission, usually in writing. See him in plenty of time; there will be many formalities.

*Q. A priest is married to the Church. Am I right on that? I realize that he knows the spiritual side of life but how can he be an authority on the physical side of life, such as marriage and the emotions thereof?*

A. He isn't an authority on such matters and he doesn't pretend to be.

Your question is probably inspired by the fact that the



priest teaches you God's law on married life and relationships. When he does that he is teaching you what God knows and has revealed, and what God's Church teaches. His personal knowledge, authority, or experience does not enter into the question.

You will surely admit that God knows something about the man and woman He created and the emotions He gave them. Marriage obligations are from God's law, not the priest's.

Your priest has spent years studying philosophy and psychology and social and marital problems. He has probably spent many years in observing and listening, in sympathy and understanding. You might be surprised how much he has learned. But above all he has learned about God's law — and heaven and hell.

*Q. You insist that people who plan to be married should see their pastor a month ahead of time. Why is so much time necessary? Can't we get a dispensation from the banns? Besides it only takes two weeks to have the banns published three times, and if there should be a holy day between Sundays it can all be done in one week.*

A. The law of the Church requires that the banns be published. The bishop can dispense from this law; but whether he should do so or not is a question left to his prudent judgment. You may be sure that he will not dispense unless there is a good reason for it. You cannot presume it.

There are many preliminaries to something as important as a marriage. First of all, you will probably want the ceremony on a certain day and at a certain hour. You will require the services of a priest, and probably of sacristan and altar boys, and organist and choir. Arrangements must be made for all these things. Maybe the priest, and the church, and the altar are already engaged for that day and hour. In some big parishes you might have to make reservations many months ahead of time to get a choice day for a nuptial Mass.

Then there are investigations to be made. The law requires that the pastor who is to assist at a marriage be certain beforehand that there is nothing to prevent its valid and licit celebration. He must investigate diligently. He must question the parties, and very often he must question other people, as witnesses, to be sure that there is no impediment, that the parties marry freely, etc. Often this questioning must be done by other priests in various parts of the country, and the results sent through Chancery Offices, which give appropriate endorsements. All this takes time; and you will have trouble and frustrations if you try to hurry it.

Then there are documents required. The most important is a baptismal certificate — a new one, not just any old one you have had for months or years. Then there should also be certificate of Confirmation. Or if the parties have not been confirmed, the Church law advises that they should receive this sacrament before marriage — if it can be done without serious inconvenience.

Then if any doubts should arise about the freedom of the parties to marry the matter must be referred to the bishop. The same is true if the parties are without permanent residence; or if minors want to get married without their parents' knowledge or consent. And the bishop's office usually becomes involved when the parties are from different parishes, or especially if they are from different dioceses. His office is always prompt and efficient, but the mails are apt to be slow. And maybe no quick decision is possible.

And there are instructions. Even if both parties are Catholics, the law requires that the pastor make sure that they are sufficiently instructed in their Faith. And besides that he must actually teach them about the sanctity of the sacrament of marriage, about their mutual obligations as husband and wife, and about the obligations of parents toward their children. He will need time to fit all that into his schedule.

A month may be too short, if you want everything to go smoothly.

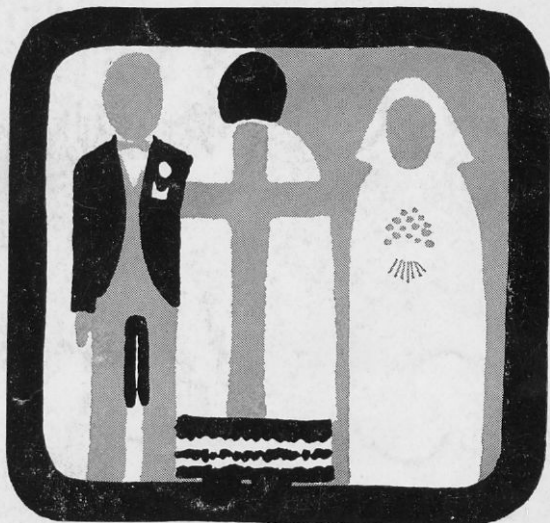
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# TWO HUNDRED ANSWERS

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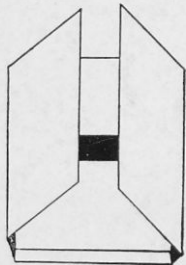
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