

Should Frank Marriage Preparation Classes Be Given High Schoolers?

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Isn't the Church "missing the boat" in regard to teenage marriage? Why do priests and teaching sisters close their eyes to the problem and just hope that it will pass? Believe me, Father, these kids are serious! They're going to marry young, so why not prepare them? It's useless to tell senior girls they shouldn't kiss a boy on a date, but it might help to tell them what it takes to be a good wife and mother. It might also help to explain God's teachings on marriage. Instead of telling high school girls they're too young to ask such questions.



No doubt the rather sudden increase of early marriages since World War II has caught some high school teachers off guard. It is rather difficult to realize, for example, that of all the girls entering a first marriage in the period 1947-54, one out of four married before her 19th birthday, and three out of four before the age of 24 years; or that one out of four husbands marrying for the first time and who married first-married spouses did so before their 22nd birthday, and three out of four, by their 27th birthday.

In other words, for the average woman in the United States, the age at first marriage is now around 20; for the average man, 22.5. Or if you like comparative statistics, the proportion of men 18 to 24 years of age who married was 75 per cent greater in 1953 than it was in 1940.

As the implications of these changes become apparent, however, more and more high school teachers are currently concerned with what steps they should take to meet the needs of their students. They are caught in something of a dilemma at this point.

On the one hand, they feel that early marriages should be discouraged for various reasons, on the other, they recognize that many factors in the current social system are geared to promote such marriages. Hence, they ask themselves whether special courses in marriage preparation will not only focus unwarranted attention on marriage but will also further distract student interest from the pursuit of more important scholastic aims.

Some bishops have already made the decision for the schools in their dioceses, ordering that all high school seniors should be given marriage instruction courses. The increase of early marriages, however, was not the only reason that promoted their decision.

Since the majority of students would receive no further formal Catholic education, it was recognized that they must be given such courses in high school if they were to receive them at all. In some dioceses, however, it is felt that the traditional religious instruction courses meet current needs adequately, while more specific premarital preparation can be handled by parents or similar organizations.

At any rate, I feel that the majority of religious leaders are now aware of the problem, though they may not agree on the best way to meet it. You are quite correct in insisting on a positive, religious approach.

Students have a right to receive a clear, realistic, adequate explanation of God's teaching on marriage and the family. This implies that they understand the meaning of the marital contract, the purposes of marriage, the excellence of the sacrament, the Church's laws related to marriage, and the obligations of parenthood.

Logically accompanying this teaching should be some instruction on how to select a partner, that is, the qualities to look for in choosing a mate. It is assumed, of course, that all students at the freshman or sophomore level receive basic instruction in the meaning of chastity and the problem of dating.

Under no circumstances should marriage courses either in high school or college include the detailed instructions and explanations normally included in immediate premarital preparation talks. What students need is an understanding and appreciation of the vocation of marriage as God designed it, together with adequate knowledge of the moral principles that should guide their conduct throughout life.

Doesn't it seem a defeatist attitude in regard to early marriages? Not at all. An adequate preparation for the marriage vocation is more likely to induce caution than will ignorance or lack of preparation.

If the Church allows young people to marry, they must receive adequate instruction, and there is nothing to be gained by trying to ignore

the fact that they do enter marriage early.

But early marriages should be discouraged? As a general principle, that is correct, but if we are realists, we must admit that the school can do very little about the age at which students enter marriage. As long as Catholic parents continue to follow the crowd and allow their youngsters to engage in early and frequent dating, we are bound to have early marriages.

Perhaps what is most sorely needed is a course of instruction for parents. Unless they are willing to guide, supervise, and control the social life of their teen agers, there is little that religious leaders or teachers can do. Of course this will require effort, patience, time, and cooperation with other like-minded parents, but there are no alternatives, and it is already later than most parents think.

Lurid Details

Publicity Spurs Juvenile Crime

St. Louis — (NC) — Too much publicity may be a major cause for the increase in juvenile crime, a widely known philosopher has contended.

Dr. Vernon J. Bourke, St. Louis University philosophy professor and author of the book "Ethics" used in many American Catholic colleges, acknowledged that the number of American youths involved in serious crimes "has increased at an alarming rate."

But he also pointed out that in the same period, news accounts of these offenses have grown more lurid and more detailed. He charged that some news stories were "how-to-do-it" lessons in crime.

"Are we actually teaching our boys and girls how to break the

law, when we print carefully detailed accounts of the methods of the clever criminal; how the poison was obtained; where the little girl was taken by the next pervert; at what sort of store the switch-blade was bought, or even how artificial courage was obtained from beer or marijuana?" he asked.

Dr. Bourke said 740,000 youths under 18 years were arrested for crimes last year. During the last five years, juvenile arrests went up 85 per cent, or more than twice as fast as the juvenile population, he added.

Inadequate home supervision, laxity of discipline in school, glorification of crime by entertainment media, too much freedom with automobiles and other luxuries, and availability of intoxicants and narcotics were listed by the philosopher as among the factors contributing to teenage crime.

Hierarchy

Anniversary

Quebec — (NC) — The 300th anniversary of the establishment of the Catholic hierarchy in Canada will be observed here October 5 to 9 by religious and civil ceremonies in which high dignitaries of Church and State will take part.

Crime Probes Labelled Inquisition

Chicago — (RNS) — Roman Catholic Auxiliary Archbishop Bernard J. Shell of Chicago assailed here what he labelled "inquisitorial methods" of such Congressional investigating groups as the Senate Rackets Committee, and called for "a little rebellion" against their tactics.

"It is time for the whole question of investigating bodies to be given an airing," he declared. Archbishop Shell addressed delegates to the annual convention of the Illinois State AFL-CIO.

Congressional committees have gone far beyond their original purpose," he asserted. By assuming to act "as prosecutor, jury and judge," they abdicate the fundamental constitutional right to "a legal trial based on due process of law," he charged.

Warning that under such tactics "the fifth amendment is losing its meaning, purpose and dignity," he urged weighing the value of the probes to prevent the U.S. from "becoming a nation looking guiltily over our shoulders to see if we are being watched."

New Church Construction Soars Higher

Washington — (RNS) — Church construction in August, totalling \$99,000,000, set an all-time high, topping the previous record high set in July, the Department of Commerce and Labor announced here.

The August total was an increase of \$4,000,000 over July and exceeded August, 1952, by \$10,000,000. It was the largest volume of church construction in a single month in U.S. history.

Total construction for the first eight months of 1953 is now estimated at \$801,000,000, an increase of 11 per cent over the same period last year.

Construction by non-public schools and colleges, many of which are church-related, totalled \$48,000,000 in August, an increase of \$2,000,000 over July, but \$7,000,000 less than the same month a year ago. Building activity by private schools and colleges is four per cent below the level for the first eight months of last year.

Oriental Languages

South Orange, N. J. — (RNS) — Seton Hall University, a Catholic institution here, will offer 12 courses in the Chinese and Japanese languages this fall.

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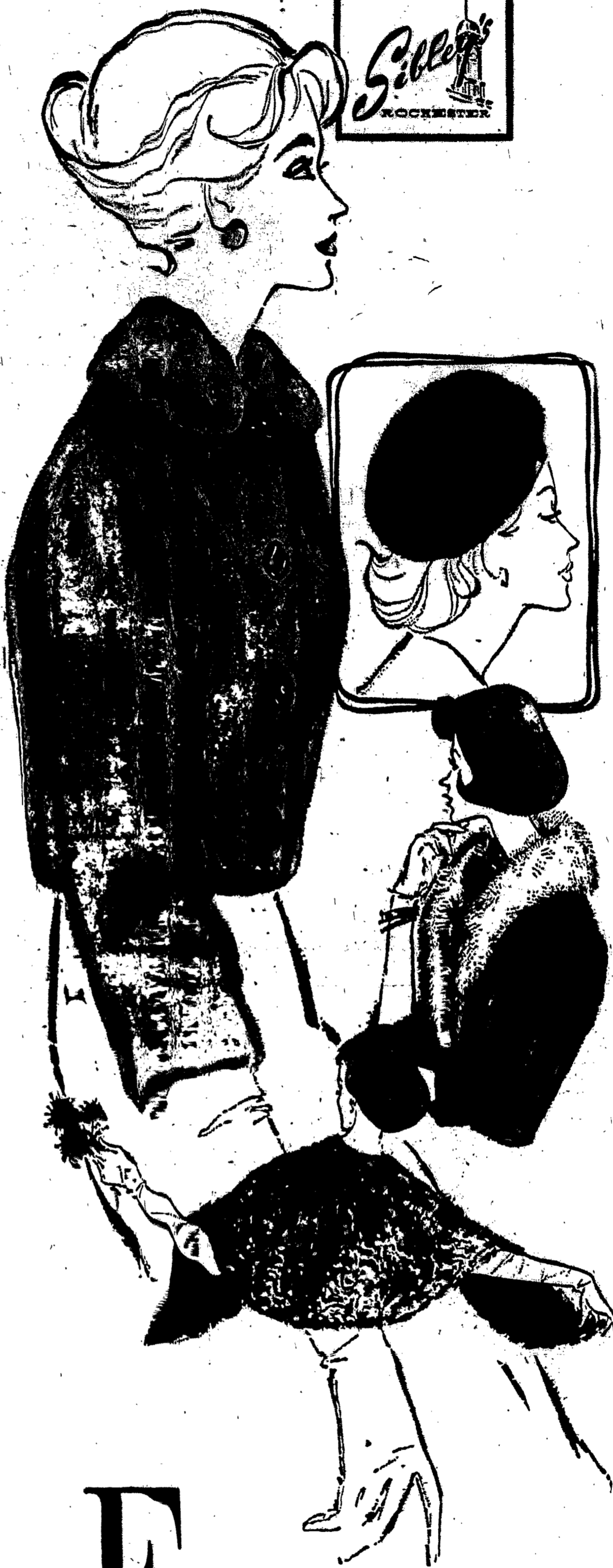


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