How Young Is Too Young To Marry?

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How young is too young for marriage? Several of the girls in my senior class are already engaged, and most of us feel we'll be ready for marriage by the time we graduate. Our parents and teachers keep telling us to wait, but why should we? We've been dating for years and feel we're old enough to know what we want. If a couple are in love, why shouldn't they marry?

That's a question many young couples are asking, Ruth, and it appears that most of them aren't waiting for an answer. Although statistics since 1956 are somewhat sketchy, there is sufficient evidence to show that the average age at first marriage is still dropping.

THE EARLY marriage spurt started some twenty years ago. Between 1940 and 1965, the average age at first marriage for men dropped 1.6 years, or nearly as much as in the preceding half century, while the average first marriage age of women declined 1.3 years, that is, about twice as much as in the preceding fifty years. During the past decade by far the largest single age group of girls entering their first marriage have been eighteen-year olds.

In addition, more than one out of every seven brides was under eighteen.

Why have Americans started marrying younger than any one else in the Western world? There are several reasons. Economic conditions during and since World War II have been booming. As the politicians say, "You've never had it so good!" In this rosy economic situation people cease to worry about the future.

There is less stress on work, and greater attention is paid to enjoying life. To quote the experts, popular interest is shifting from production to consumption and the affective aspects of living. As a result, marriage and the enjoyment of family life are increasingly regarded as primary, indispensable sources of happiness for everybody.

More important, though closely related to this relaxed, present-centered attitude, is the active promotion or widespread toleration of early dating. For example, Ruth, although you are only a senior in high school, you state that you and many of your classmates have been dating "for years."

THIS PATTERN has become rather general in the past two decades. In other words, it seems taken for granted that teen agers should seek to satisfy a good part of their social needs outside the family circle, and in forms that require participation as a couple, or dating.

Since the majority of American teen agers reach puberty, or the physical beginnings of sexual maturity, roughly between the ages of 12 and 14, it is not surprising that our current dating patterns result in many of them becoming emotionally involved at relatively early ages, as our recent marriage statistics show so clearly. After all, teen age marriage was the rule during a major part of man's history, and still is in a good part of the world today.

How young is too young? Well, Ruth, it depends on your maturity and the social situation within which you must lead your married life. Marriage involves more than the enjoyment of friendship or companionship.

For the Christian it represents the dedication of two persons who are in love to the service of new life and all that bearing and rearing children under modern conditions require. In simpler, less developed countries, people may marry young because they have fewer needs and require much less formal education and training to maintain a family.

Life in our complex, highly developed society requires much longer preparation. Young men must be capable of supporting a family under modern conditions, while young women should remember that their social and economic welfare for the rest of their lives depends primarily on the men they marry.

Hence love is not enough to determine the age of marriage. You are ready for marriage only when you are prepared to settle down to the routine domestic task of bearing and rearing children, and have found a man who is fully capable of sharing this dedication with you.

Spiritual Starvation

Chile Indians Regain Faith

Newark — Some 500 miles south of the capital city of Santiago, Chile, deep in the heart of Indian country, lies the little Maryknoll mission of Chol Chol.

For the past several years it has been the home of Father Frederick J. Hegarty, M.M., of East Orange, N.J., who is presently back on his first U.S. furlough.

Father Hegarty's frontier mission parish, Our Lady of Carmen, comprises numerous tiny villages scattered around Chol Chol. Approximately 11,000 people inhabit the villages in his mission territory. Over 80 per cent of them are Araucanian Indians.

The Araucanians are a tall, sturdy, proud people who boast of never being conquered by either the Conquistadors or neighboring Indian tribes.

When the Maryknoll Fathers first rode into this "Wild West" setting in 1943 they found an area suffering from spiritual starvation because of long years without priests.

Through years of patient kindness and medical work the Maryknollers built up respect and esteem for the Church and its priests. Today, progress in Chol Chol is remarkable. In this remote frontierland—it was only opened to foreign settlers within the last century — the parish plant boasts of a church, rectory, convent, clinic, grammar and high school.

Happily, Father Hegarty reports that a young Dutch couple—a medical doctor and an agricultural expert—are scheduled to arrive this week to take up work at the Chol Chol mission.

The present "clinic" located in the rectory is one of only two medical facilities available to the 11,000 people in the area. The other is an Anglican hospital with one British nurse, says Father Hegarty.

More than 50 people line up daily outside the clinic, the young Jersey priest points out. With the help of several large American pharmaceutical companies, who have generously donated drugs, and the newly arrived Dutch doctor, he expects to expand his medical facilities.

One of the prime problems facing the young pastor—something that is affecting most of Latin America today — is a mushrooming industrial revolution which is drawing many rural people from the simple farm life they now enjoy into the hectic and hustling life of the city, for which they are not prepared.

To offset this rapid migration and to properly prepare the people for life great changes they must face in a move from country to city living, Father Hegarty's parish is taking part in a nationwide program called "Institute of Rural Education."

"Our basic problem is to try and keep the people down on the farm," says the soft-spoken young priest. "Through the Institute program we hope to educate the people to the advantages of rural living and show them how they can improve their way of life.

"This is a real 'plan ahead' program of the Church here. We are anticipating problems and looking for immediate solutions. It is a long-range, continuous program employing the best men and women from each village and educating them in month-long courses on Christian formation. Like for like is our formula. We try to have the same kind of people working with people from their own station in life."

In addition, the Institute has a radio program of 15 minutes on the air twice a week featuring courses in home economics, manual arts, religion and other subjects.

The 32-year-old priest is optimistic about the future of the Institute in Chile. He sees it as one important way of educating the people for the eventual break-up of the huge plantations and preparing them for independent land ownership.

On the credit side of the ledger, Father Hegarty points to the native Chilean clergy. "They are excellent," he says. "Among the finest priest in all of South America."

Lent Collection To Aid Needy

New York — Monsignor John E. Maney (right) chancellor of the Rochester Diocese, met with Cardinal Spellman and Monsignor Edward Swanstrom to plan annual Bishops' Relief Fund collection set for March 27. U.S. bishops seek to raise five million dollars to "help the homeless and hungry overseas." Monsignor Maney will direct Rochester Diocese phase of the appeal.

Tolerance With Integrity

New York — (RNS) — Leading Protestant, Catholic and Jewish religious educators hailed current studies of racial and religious bias in lesson materials of the three groups as a means of reducing intergroup tensions.

They participated in a day-long conference on "Religious Education and Intergroup Responsibility" sponsored by the American Jewish Committee's Institute of Human Relations.

THE EDUCATORS agreed that while "images" of prejudice exist to some degree in practically all curricula, both Christianity and Judaism have built-in remedies, which, if applied by adherents of each, can materially advance appreciation and respect of "out-groups" without sacrificing religious convictions.

Reading papers presenting their respective viewpoints of the educational curricula self-studies were Dean John C. Bennett of Union Theological Seminary here; the Rev. Donald R. Campion, S.J., associate editor of America, national Jesuit weekly; and Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg of Temple Emanuel, Englewood, N.J.

Dr. Bennett, commenting on Protestant text elements "which stimulate anti-Jewish prejudice," said that even where not explicit they "condition" Christians . . . for "a negative attitude toward Jews."

He stressed, however, that while Christian teaching materials contain these elements, Christianity provides "powerful antidotes to anti-Semitism."

FATHER CAMPION, citing a "widely felt need for an elaborated theology of tolerance," urged Catholics to strive for an "active intellectual interest in both the new and old ideas of others," and to eschew both "fanaticism" and "indifferentism." The Church's doctrinal integrity, he stressed, must be preserved within the framework of America's culturally plural society.

Rabbi Hertzberg said that Jewish religious textbooks reveal "practically no negative portraitures of Christianity, mainly because they say little about Christianity." He noted that while "for Christianity its relationship to Judaism is of fundamental doctrinal concern," Judaism's concern is with "works" rather than "faith," primarily with attitudes and behavior instead of creed.

The three papers were based on current independent research projects by Protestant, Catholic and Jewish religious educators at Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Conn., St. Louis (Mo.) University, and Dropsie College, Philadelphia, respectively.

Arthritis Clinic Set

Jersey City — (NC) — A treatment center for children with rheumatoid arthritis will be established at the Jersey City Medical Center in collaboration with the Seton Hall University college of medicine.

Described as the first of its kind in the country, the treatment center will open Feb. 1 with funds provided by chapters of the National Foundation (March of Dimes) in Hudson, Essex and Bergen Counties.

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