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Elfred L. Roschke

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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Youth Guidance in Marriage Problems

(A Conference Paper)

"Youth Guidance in Marriage Problems" is the topic of this article. Before we begin the actual consideration of the topic, it may be well to get our bearings and to give some definitions. What do we mean by guidance? We believe that this term designates, or should designate, any effort by means of example and by means of precept, by direct or indirect instruction, to show people, especially young people, the true and right way, the best course to follow. Since this guidance, according to the topic, is to be a guidance of youth regarding the problems of one of life's greatest experiences, courtship and marriage, we believe that the scope of this article should be to show them the divine origin and the Scriptural purpose of a Christian marriage on the basis of God's own Word, and to help them not only to enter the holy estate of matrimony in the proper way, but to live in marriage as sensible, Christian people. We are convinced that such guidance should be a systematic and planned effort rather than a haphazard, hit-and-miss fumbling about, something carried out in one instance, in one year, only to be forgotten in other cases. It is also our opinion that such guidance should be given over a period of years and that it should not be something that is foisted upon the young people or thrust upon them at a rather inopportune time, when it may be the source of much embarrassment and even be the cause of much heartache and untold harm. Considering the circumstances of our day and age concerning marriage and the home, many pastors, parents, and youth leaders have reached the conclusion that there is real need for the guidance of youth in marriage problems. But since there are also such as hold a contrary opinion, it may be well to consider first of all the need of such guidance.

I. The Need of Such Guidance

When the sincere pastor takes a serious look at the homes and families of his church, he sees many homes in which there is unhappiness; he sees many homes that are childless; he sees many homes in which there is strife and contention. The average pastor, especially in urban congregations, does not have to look long for homes in which there has been a separation of husband and wife, and in many cases even a divorce. Recently, in about six months, the writer had to deal with eight cases of marital trouble involving divorce, divorce suits pending and questions of remarriage of divorced people. A recent issue of the *Walther League Messenger* brought the news that in one New Jersey court more than 5,000 suits for divorce were filed in 1941. This sad situation regarding marriage and the home, which prevails in our country and which deeply affects also our own people, shows the need for more and better guidance in marriage problems. We live in a day and age of very confused and complex marriage situations. During the last decade we have seen many marriages delayed one year, two years, perhaps even as long as five years, because of the economic situation. During the last year, especially the last few months, we have seen just the opposite take place. Hundreds of young couples have rushed to the altar of marriage because of the war scare, because of the defense program, because of the Selective Service Act. In St. Louis alone more than 18,000 marriage licenses were issued in 1941. Both situations, the delayed marriage and the hastily contracted marriage, produce special situations which necessitate guidance and direction.

Another factor which shows the need of marriage guidance is the fact that our own people, influenced by the movies, by modern literature, and by the world as such, by the loose moral standards of America, frequently assume utterly wrong attitudes toward marriage. The average pastor in Synod could undoubtedly duplicate situations similar to the ones which have confronted the writer during recent years, demonstrating so fully the warped conception concerning Christian marriage which is found in the minds of many of our people. Just recently a Lutheran woman complained about the unfaithfulness of her husband, but it was not so much the sin of adultery that she complained about, but the fact that he had picked a girl of low morals and shady character. She said, "If he had only associated with a respectable girl, I would not have considered it so bad." Again and again in our day and age one observes collusion in securing a divorce. So frequently the innocent party, or should we say the one having at least the better side of the argument, especially if it is the husband, will nevertheless permit the wife to secure a divorce on fictitious,

trumped-up charges, and even pay the bill for securing this divorce. They do not seem to realize the fact that they are doing anything wrong. The common statement is, "This is the suggestion of the lawyer and the more gentlemanly thing to do." Frequently one finds today that people, both married and unmarried, feel that it is perfectly proper, an innocent pastime, to keep company with a married man or a married woman, provided you do not stoop to physical intimacy. In this connection we are thinking of the case of a minister's daughter, who married a non-Lutheran, contrary to the counsel and advice of her father, who does not hesitate to accept flowers and calls from a former suitor. We are thinking of the case of a married Lutheran with sound Lutheran training who could not see that it was wrong for him to take his sister-in-law to outings, dinners, and shows during a period of unemployment until both his home and the home of his in-laws were wrecked by separation and divorce. We are thinking of the case of an active Walther Leaguer, a Sunday school teacher, who readily admitted that she was going out on dates with former boy friends who are now married. She could not see the danger of offense or of sin in the situation. Such warped attitudes on the part of our own young people, married and unmarried, certainly need correction. Scriptural guidance in marriage problems is a definite need.

Another reason for more guidance of youth in marriage problems is the fact that so many of our young people, constantly in touch with the world at work, at play, at school, in their social relations, meet so many people outside their own religious group, outside their own Church, and thus many mixed marriages are the result. A mixed marriage usually brings with it some very specific problems, and young people about to enter such a union need special guidance and special direction. Where both the husband and wife are members of the same Church, have the same religious convictions, and also the same attitude toward the divine institution of matrimony, it is natural that many adjustments are made quite naturally and quite simply, but this is not the case when ideas and ideals concerning marriage are very different, which is the case so frequently in mixed marriages.

The need of greater guidance for youth in marriage problems is recognized by many of our pastors. Before writing this article, the writer consulted with fifteen pastors of our Church in various parts of the country and everyone of them felt the need of such guidance for our youth. We take the liberty to quote two of these pastors, one a pastor in a larger city and the other a pastor in a rural congregation. The city pastor writes: "Yes, I believe that there is need for such guidance. In the first place, in spite of

everything which you tried to intimate to the children during the catechetical instruction, there is in so many cases a lack of Christian consciousness with reference to the marriage problems. In those cases, of course, where both parties are loyal and devoted Christians, many of the problems are solved in the spirit of love and forbearance. But in so many other cases in which the Christian consciousness does not obtain, or in which persons of another faith or of no faith are involved, it is essential that these problems be studied and solved from the positive Christian standpoint. In the second place, there is a matter of sheer ignorance. In spite of the supposed enlightenment of our day there is often the crassest sort of ignorance among our young folks with regard to the marriage problems. Then, so far as the physical side of the marriage problems are concerned, it is a fact that so much of the information that our young people, especially the young men have, has been gathered under the most unfavorable circumstances, in the taverns, in the saloons, on the dance floor, in the movies, so that many of them have a warped conception of the marriage problems, which often makes for much of the unhappiness of their married life."

The pastor in a rural area has this to say: "Yes, I believe that there is a need for youth guidance in marriage problems. My reasons are: a. The unwillingness or inability of many parents to be of any real assistance to their children in guiding them in the problems of courtship and marriage. b. Our youth is in constant contact with false ideals for marriage and the wrong solutions for marriage problems, such as given in movies, magazines, books, bureaus, universities, associates in work and society. c. Misconception of the ideals on marriage in the Bible, as, for example, on the word *obey*; the claim that the Bible does not solve the sex problems in marriage, etc. d. Ignorance on the part of our parents and youth on the real and lasting guidance which the Bible has to offer in marriage problems."

The need of such guidance is also recognized by many of our young people. Especially the more serious-minded of our young people are definitely disturbed by the sad conditions concerning marriage and divorce in our own country. Young people are usually very eager to discuss such matters at Walther League meetings and at Walther League Summer Conference Camps. Where the relationship is the proper relationship between the pastor and his young people, they will not hesitate to discuss such matters with their own pastor. They will seek his counsel and advice, not only in matters of the head, their educational problems, but also in matters of the heart, their love and courtship problems. In a recent meeting of a Senior Walther League the entire group,

without exception, stated in writing the need of such guidance in marriage problems. One young man wrote, "Because a person's married life consists of about two-thirds of their normal life, certainly something should be done to enable people to live their married life in the best way possible. It would serve to keep people from marrying unwisely and at the same time help to make existing marriages more happy." Anyone who has served our young people at Walther League Summer Conference Camps knows how eager many of them are to discuss such personal problems with the dean of their camp or with one of the discussion leaders. Camp workers have frequently had the personal experience to have individual campers or little groups of two or three stay for an hour or more after discussion periods with questions pertaining to their own personal life and their own personal courtship problem. All of this seems to indicate that there is a distinct need for guidance of our youth in the problems of marriage.

The need for guidance of youth in marriage problems, I believe, is also indicated by the flood of literature that has been published on the subject of marriage and the home in recent years. The library of Concordia Seminary will show you books with titles such as these: *Education for Christian Marriage* by Nash, an Episcopalian (1939); *Modern Marriage, a Handbook for Men* by Popenoe, General Director of the American Institute of Family Relations of Los Angeles (1940); *An Introductory Study of the Family* by Schmiedeler, a Catholic, with a special chapter on "Pre-marital Preparation" (1930); *Youth's Problem No. 1* by Alfred L. Murray; *The Modern Family* by Myers, head of the Department of Parent Education at Cleveland College (1935). There are many other books in the Concordia Seminary library in which whole chapters are devoted to the subject of marriage, marriage problems, and the home. Not only the flood of literature indicates a definite need in this matter, but the fact that churches have created commissions on marriage and the home, that schools and colleges have added courses on the subject, that the Y. M. C. A. and similar groups offer training courses intended to prepare especially the young people for marriage, all definitely point to a distinct need of such guidance and training.

In our own circles the need has been recognized, for the Fort Wayne Convention of the last year instructed the President of Synod to appoint a committee of pastors and laymen to study "the entire subject of Christian marriage and the family and other problems of Christian life arising out of the changing social order." This new committee is to work with the Board of Education, Board for Higher Education, and the Young People's Board.

II. Who is to Give Youth Guidance in Marriage Problems?

Parents have the God-given obligation to train children for the future, also for marriage. They can do this very naturally, without creating artificial situations. They are deeply interested in the welfare and the future happiness of their children. Parents, however, are often handicapped by ignorance in this matter. The State may also give such guidance. The State is interested in the future homes and the future citizens of the country. Much marriage guidance of the wrong sort has been given by the State in Russia and also in Germany. Read the January, 1942, *Readers Digest*, pages 140 and 141, and you will see what is done in Germany. State and schools usually stress the physical, sex side of marriage. The Church has an obligation. The Church must present the Biblical view concerning this divine institution. The Church must warn against sins so frequently connected with this estate. The Church may also, in connection with Biblical guidance, give common sense directions to help young people avoid some common pitfalls of courtship and marriage.

III. What has been Done to Give Our Young People Such Guidance?

One certainly dare not overlook the fact that many parents in our circles have given to their growing sons and daughters guidance and training for marriage. Very frequently this guidance may not have been anything formal, but the fine example of a Christian marriage demonstrated in a Christian home by Christian parents is a powerful influence and a wonderful training for young people. But many of our parents have gone no farther than to give their young people the example of a Christian marriage. Often they have neglected to give to their growing sons and daughters even the basic facts of sex and of marriage. We believe that there has been improvement, but much more could and should be done by Christian parents for their sons and daughters in this matter.

Certainly in our circles our pastors have sought to give the members of their confirmation class instruction concerning the Sixth Commandment, both regarding the positive and the negative side of the Commandment. They have told their classes about marriage, about engagement, and about divorce. They have undoubtedly sought to make such instruction as clear as possible, but I fear that many have thought such instruction in confirmation classes would be sufficient for life. Just a little clear thinking in this matter should show us that this cannot be the case. At the time of confirmation instruction our children are still children, immature boys and girls, who really do not get the full import of

the message when the pastor discusses marriage and the problems of marriage. Soon after confirmation the counter-influence is nearly overwhelming. Confronted by ungodly associates in high school, confronted by the influence of modern literature, confronted by the loose morals and false marital standards of the movies, the instruction concerning marriage in the light of Scripture is frequently dulled and often completely wiped out. If no serious and systematic effort is made to reinforce and strengthen the teachings of the Bible concerning marriage, many of the young people will go into this institution, which is to mean so much for their future happiness, with the ideas and ideals of Hollywood and the columns for the lovelorn in the newspapers, instead of Christian, Biblical ideas and ideals of marriage and the home.

Most of the pastors of our circles have sought to re-emphasize the teachings of confirmation days concerning marriage, the obligations of marriage, and of the Christian home by occasional sermons on marriage and the home, or at least by references to such matters in some sermon or address. Pastors whose young people are connected with the Walther League and who utilize the program the Walther League promotes in its topic discussions, have frequently used such topic discussions to deal with their young people in matters of courtship, engagement, and marriage. A number of pastors have also used the occasion when a young couple made arrangements for the wedding ceremony to discuss with them not only the ceremony as such, the music and the solo, the flowers and the rehearsal, but they have spoken to such young couples on the real purpose, the real aims of Christian marriage. But if we view all that has been done in our circles in the matter of youth guidance for marriage, we must confess that comparatively little has been done, and even that which has been done was not done regularly, was not done systematically, and certainly not generally throughout the length and breadth of Synod. In this opinion the writer is not alone, but a number of active, consecrated pastors in various cities of our country, to whom letters were addressed recently in this matter, have without hesitation admitted that very little has been done by them and by the brethren to give real Christian, pastoral guidance to the young people in one of the greatest and most enduring experiences of life. It is our sincere conviction that much more should be done and much more could be done.

IV. What Should be Done to Give Better Guidance?

In the first place, it is necessary to give to our people, both old and young, repeated instruction in the Christian ethics of matrimony. This should not only be done during the years of childhood and immaturity, but it should also be done during the

years of early adolescence, the late teens and early twenties, and even later when people are about to be married. It is necessary, absolutely necessary, to tell our people just what the Bible teaches concerning marriage and divorce and that this teaching is based upon the solid truth of the Word of God and not upon the guesswork and often fallacious findings of sinful men, learned educators, and college professors. As Reu says in *Christian Ethics*, our people must learn anew "that marriage is that divine institution which consists of the legal and voluntary union of two persons of the opposite sex for an exclusive, continuous, and lifelong communion of all interests in the physical and intellectual sphere." This instruction should not only be given in the form of sermons and lectures, but opportunity should also be given for discussion, for questions, for an exchange of opinion. Our people must learn again and again that marriage is more than a civil contract, a purely human agreement between two parties. It is a divine institution, in fact, the oldest in existence, dating back to the days before the Fall (Gen. 1 and 2). On the basis of the Bible we must point out to our young people that the three chief objects of marriage are: mutual aid (Gen. 2:18; Eph. 5:29), sex communion, and procreation. Sex communion is the chief distinguishing characteristic, but not the chief purpose, of marriage. "The twain shall be one flesh." It involves much more than mere physical union; it is a highly personal relationship. Anything less than that is bestial. Procreation is, of course, one of the big objectives of marriage (Gen. 1: 28), and, in fact, it is limited to that relationship by divine will in spite of everything which the proponents of free love in Russia, in our own country, or elsewhere, may say. According to Ps. 127:3, God has reserved for Himself the decision whether or not He will grant this happy fruition of the marital union. Our people, both old and young, must learn anew that marriage is a lifelong union, indissoluble except by death or divorce on Scriptural grounds: adultery (Matt. 5:32) and malicious desertion (1 Cor. 7:15). As prerequisites of marriage our people should consider physical and mental fitness, and the presence of conjugal love, something far different from mere sex attraction or mere "puppy love." Compatibility of personality is a further important requisite. Too great a difference in education, refinement, and general culture, too great a racial difference and too great a difference of religious conviction will cause difficulty. It is true today what the old Germans used to say: "Zwei Glauben auf einem Kissen, da ist der Teufel dazwischen." Statistics made in the Maryland youth survey show that the number of mixed marriages which go on the rocks of marital disagreement are only a fraction less than those where both parties were unchurched. Since the burden of maintaining

a home will fall upon the shoulders of the husband, no young man should offer himself to a young woman in marriage unless he has reasonable prospects of being able to carry that burden. Economic stability includes more than just that. It means that the young man has found a definite place in life, has a definite calling or vocation. Marriage means the beginning of a new family, the addition of a new social unit to the community, a new family altar to the Church. Not until the young man is able to assume the responsibilities of being the head of a house and the representative of the family group should he bind a young woman to himself for life.

Very little will be done in this field of guidance unless we make available for our pastors and teachers and youth leaders information on this subject covering the economic, the social, the physical, and the spiritual side of marriage. Information is available, but it is largely in such a shape and form that our pastors must spend much time and even study to gather it for use in discussion groups. We believe, therefore, that it would be well that a series of outlines, rather complete, be prepared for our pastors for discussions or talks to young men and to young women, similar to the series prepared by the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the booklet *Looking Forward to Marriage*. This booklet contains six studies: 1) Marriage Ordained of God (Gen. 1:26-28; Mark 10:2-12). 2) Marrying the Right Person (Gen. 29:15-20; Matt. 19:3-6). 3) Premarriage Ideals (Matt. 7:1-5; Luke 14:28-30; Gal. 5:13-25). 4) The Christian Home in a Changing World (Heb. 12:27). 5) Achieving a Real Home (Matt. 7:24-27; 13:44-46; 1 Cor. 13:4-7). 6) "Christianity and Sex" (Gen. 1:27; 2:24; Mark 10:6-9).

We know, of course, that there is a wide difference of opinion in our circles as to the value or place of sex instruction by the Church. Some maintain that this is absolutely the sphere and duty of the parental home, but many others believe that the Church has also an obligation in this matter. The pastor should at least have full knowledge of the physical and sex functions of marriage. He should be able to discuss such matters frankly with his parishioners, especially in private interviews, but it may be best to utilize the help of a Christian doctor for group instruction in the field of biology and sex. Such a man can speak on such subjects with much more authority than the pastor, and in most cases his advice will not be objected to as readily as when it comes from a theologian, who is supposed to know the Bible but not the secrets of sex life. In this connection we may state that a number of pastors have made use of doctors and nurses for such instruction of their young people. Other pastors, just a few to my knowledge, have personally gathered their young men and their young women

in separate groups for frank and open discussions on all marriage problems.

We also believe that series of sermons on marriage and the home are not out of place for youth guidance in marriage problems; especially evening and midweek services can be utilized for such work. Though sermons are good, discussions on the basis of a definite outline, which the young people can take home, are usually more fruitful.

Guidance of this nature can also be given in Bible classes. The study material must, of course, be arranged so that it fits the particular age group with which the pastor is dealing. It is not out of place to consider these matters rather frankly even in the years of early adolescence, when the first storms of love sweep over our boys and girls.

Instruction can and should be given when young couples announce for the wedding. Many of our more progressive pastors have been doing this on the basis of a simple questionnaire. Samples of such questionnaires appeared in the *American Lutheran* some years ago and in the *Religious Digest*, June, 1937. Most pastors using a questionnaire for their young couples use a simple questionnaire, which emphasizes the arrangements for the ceremony, but which gives one the opportunity to speak to the young couple about many things pertaining to their impending marriage.

One of the finest opportunities for guidance of our youth in marriage problems presents itself to the pastor when he goes through the marriage ceremony with the young couple present for the purpose of making arrangements for the wedding. On the basis of Form No. 1 in our *Agenda* the pastor can well point out that marriage is a divine institution, that the relation of husband and wife is really a wonderful relation of love, as exemplified by the love of the Savior for His church, that there will be crosses and afflictions especially in connection with the duties of the woman as a wife and mother and of those of the husband as the father and provider. The purpose of a Christian marriage in relation to the future of the human race can well be mentioned on the basis of the Bible passage found in the Form. One can study the marriage vow, consider the beauty of such a vow, its importance and dignity. The prayer can lead to a discussion of family worship and the need of God's blessing for marriage in all its phases. For such guidance of our young people the old form for marriages lends itself much better than the second and shorter form, much better also than some of the home-made forms which pass as wedding forms in some of our churches.

More importance could be attached to the marriage ceremony. In the opinion of the writer no pastor should perform a Christian

marriage ceremony without giving the couple some Christian, pastoral advice in the shape of a well-prepared address. In many places the address has been dropped because "The people will not listen anyhow," or "because it takes too long." In many cases the form has been cut, the section concerning the troubles of the married estate has been deleted in order not to shock the sensibilities of the blushing bride, the "obey" often is omitted, and so it happens that the parade of the bridal party to and from the altar frequently takes longer than the ceremony itself. This is a mistake and constitutes a lack of pastoral guidance.

It may be well to mention that one of our pastors tries to solve the problem by offering courses of instruction on marital matters to the parents of his church, so that they may be better qualified to deal with their young people at home. Another pastor makes it a practice to write to all young couples on the occasion of their first wedding anniversary reminding them of their marriage vows, marriage obligations, and marital blessings. One of our Sunday schools gives the book *Why Was I Not Told* by Marquardt to all high school graduates in that Sunday school. Other pastors have sought to solve the problem of postwedding adjustment by clubs for the newly married where marriage problems could be rather freely discussed.

In conclusion it may be said that it does not make much difference whether the pastor uses one form of guidance or another, whether he deals with the young people in groups or whether he would rather deal with them as individuals, but all evidence points to the fact that all Christian parents, pastors, and teachers should give more regular, more systematic, more planned guidance to our youth in this important matter which so definitely affects their whole life, both physical and spiritual, and at times, because of abuse or sinful misuse, even jeopardizes their soul's salvation.

St. Louis, Mo.

ELFRED L. ROSCHKE

Verbal Inspiration — a Stumbling-Block to the Jews and Foolishness to the Greeks

(Continued)

VI

The indignation of the moderns reaches white heat when they are asked to receive every word of Scripture as inerrant and authoritative. If Verbal Inspiration means that every word of Scripture must be received as God's word, with unquestioning faith and obedience—and it means just that—they will have