

Chapter 2

Selecting The Clerical Wife

The most important one piece of equipment the aspiring clergyman will acquire is a wife. So vital is the wife to the success of the minister that the care he should exercise in selecting her cannot be overstressed.

Other authorities have shown how the wrong kind of wife can hamper and inhibit an, otherwise, promising executive career. The harm that the worst imaginable executive wife can do to her husband's career, however, is, but, a negligible annoyance compared to the shattering effect an unsuitable parson,age spouse has on her consort's labors in the Lord's vineyard.

It may be that you are already married. Clergymen, for some reason which needs more research, have an unfortunate tendency to marry quite young. And when a man marries young, he has almost always married for the wrong reasons so far as his future professional success is concerned.

If you find yourself in the difficult position of beginning your ministry equipped with a wife you married because you fancied you were in love, or because you found her charming, or because you were sexually attracted to her, or for any other irrelevant reason, you are up against what will probably turn out to be the most baffling problem of your professional life. Barring the unlikely possibility that by chance and blind luck you picked the right type for the parsonage (which would be the equivalent of breaking the bank at

Monte Carlo or filling an inside straight) about all you can do now is to institute a program of education designed to bring her up to minimum standards of performance (which you should begin by calling her attention to this chapter).

However, you should be cautioned against excessive optimism as to the probable results. Observation of such educational efforts have been depressing; the woman who marries a minister without understanding the nature of the demands his profession places on her usually proving quite intractable when it is suggested; even with considerable tact, that she make over her personality to the satisfaction of her husband's present and anticipated congregations.

However, we will assume that we have caught you in time, that you are reading this while still a bachelor and without any unbreakable alliances entangling you, that you are legally and morally in a position to select a wife in accordance with the principles and the wisdom here offered.

You must begin by fixing in your mind the fact that your chosen work has already determined the qualities you will look for in a wife. She must be selected to fit these specifications.

Now, if you have been corrupted by the silly ideals of romantic love poured over us in a sticky and seemingly-inexhaustible cascade by the movies, television and the popular women's magazines; you may at first recoil from this suggestion. But upon mature and calm reflection, you will see how very right is this principle.

You will not deny, surely, that any reasonably-healthy female is capable of performing all the functions of a wife. She will be able to cook, keep house and bear children. Further, if romantic illusions are necessary to your emotional well-being, you can check with any psychologist and be assured that these depend not on the loved, but on the lover. Or to put it simply, it's all in your head. Therefore, it places no exceptional psychological demands upon you to invest any girl with the aura of romance.

It should be clear to you, by now, that the proper sequence of events is to select a girl who meets the predetermined specifications and then fall in love with her; rather than allow your romantic fancy to light upon just any young female, who happens to appeal to you for irrelevant reasons (some of which were mentioned earlier), and then have to make the best of it if she turns out to be — as she almost surely will — poorly fitted for the role she is expected to assume.

The reasons why you must marry

If by now you are contemplating the advantages of clerical celibacy (which would not be an unreasonable reaction considering the problems involved in your selection), dismiss such thoughts at once. Protestant Christians expect their clergy to marry. The folklore of the trade holds that it is necessary for a minister to marry in order to set an example of Christian family life.

You will want to pretend that this is true, just as you will find it expedient to pretend that you dwell in a state of marital bliss the calm waters of which are never rippled by a cross word, let alone a quarrel. The nervous strain involved in such pretensions is of awesome proportions, and is known to have pushed par-

sonage wives into emotional breakdowns and turned parsonage children into church hating delinquents. However, all good things in this life are bought at a price.

The real reasons why you should marry are, of course, not at all related to the folklore.

First, a clergyman who remains unmarried for more than a year after graduation from seminary is suspected of being abnormal, immoral or chicken.

Second, there will be those who will speculate that he has taken St. Paul on marriage too seriously, and has made a secret vow of celibacy. So far as your parishioners are concerned, you may be as celibate as a Cistercian monk, but they will insist that you practice it within the married state.

Third, somewhat more than half of your congregation will be women, and all women — single, married or widowed (including grass widows) — resent a male eligible for marriage, who chooses to remain unwed.

Fourth — and here is the overriding argument in the mind of the congregation — since the church owns a parsonage and already has arrived at a salary figure below which it cannot go and maintain its conviction, however illusory, that it is a humane institution; it is only sensible to get two employees for the price of one. Therefore, it boils down to a business proposition. It would be damaging and vulgar to admit to this, however, so the tradition and the folklore was manufactured to mask it.

Actually it is very good business from the church's point of view. Most girls are piano players of sorts, and anyone can

learn to operate a typewriter or mimeograph. Add to these accomplishments the intellectually-untaxing duties of Sunday School teaching, choir singing, ladies' aid work and a miscellany of other small parish chores all of which your wife will be expected in your first small churches to perform (it's part of the tradition), and you have a job analysis which, were it filled by a salaried employee, would require no small addition to the annual budget. Hence the tradition of a married clergy.

Let us assume that you are now convinced that you have no choice but to marry — and not because, as St. Paul so delicately put it, your only alternative is to burn. The exhausting life of the parish ministry and cold showers eliminate or greatly-minimize this problem. The frightening alternative to marriage for you is the unappetizing prospect of a career in back-country or run-down city parishes.

To be sure Phillips Brooks, and a few others, made it big in the ministry without taking unto themselves wives. But they were the rarest of exceptions. If you want to be a preacher and a bachelor, be prepared for a dismal future and renounce now — the hope for status, prestige, emolument, luxury and all of the spiritual joys which accompany a plush suburban pastorate. The author does not question the preacher's right to take a vow of chastity, but he'd better darn well understand that a vow of poverty goes along with it. However, it is unlikely that anyone who has read this far is uncommitted to the ideal of advancement in his chosen profession. So let us proceed to the rules for selecting the suitable clerical wife.

We are immediately-struck by the realization that it is far easier to describe what the suitable wife for the ambitious clergyman is not, than to delineate the

precise qualities and characteristics which make her suitable.

The Stylish, Sexy And Other Types Of Girls To Avoid

Since the one thing the congregation will notice first and most often, about her is her appearance, special attention must be paid to this facet of her personality. To cover the rule in a sentence, she must not be beautiful, stylish or sexy.

This does not mean that she should be homely and frumpy. The smallest rural circuit will appreciate a presentable preacher's wife. And when pulpit committees from larger churches come looking you over, they will take a good look at her, too. More than one clerical career has been nipped in the bud when a committee thought they had their man but, finding that taking him meant taking a shabby-looking wife too, decided to look elsewhere.

Nor does this rule prohibit you from marrying a real stunner. Any woman, even if she won the Miss America contest in a walk and brings on attacks of pop-eyes and shortness of breath among the males present when she strolls through a hotel lobby, can learn to tone down these assets to a level acceptable to most congregations. She can go easy on the make-up, wear serviceable, but not overly stylish, dresses and sensible shoes, and go to a hairdresser of indifferent skill. This will do wonders; in reverse, for her appearance, without rendering her in any way unattractive.

If she asks why she must submit to this sort of thing, remind her that the women of the congregation actually run the church, either by getting a stranglehold on the key committees or by telling their husbands how to run it, or both. So a preacher really has to please the women if he expects to keep a pulpit, and give the

distinct impression that he knows how to please the women if he expects to get a better one.

There is no possibility of pleasing the ladies if he flaunts a knockout of a wife, for she is a constant threat to their peace of mind, and he will have nothing but trouble. If she is so lovely as to make the ladies of the church feel homely, and so stylish as to make them feel dowdy, his prospects for a shining career in the church, which may be otherwise quite bright, are dimmed by several thousand candlepower. The ladies simply will not put up with such a woman in the parsonage.

And for a clergyman to marry a woman who possesses an abundance of sex appeal is absolutely fatal to his career. The men of the congregation will appreciate her, of course, which is the first reason that their wives won't.

Remember, too, that your image depends in part on the inability of the congregation to imagine you engaging in sexual intercourse. That you have children, and that practically nobody nowadays believes the stork brings babies might be thought to destroy this part of the image. But it is not as serious as you might suppose, although there is something to be said for the childless clergyman (including the economic facts of parsonage life).

But children in the parsonage do not confuse-overmuch the image of the preacher as a member of a third sex. If they think about it at all, the congregation will imagine that the accouchements were accomplished through immaculate conception or parthenogenesis or artificial insemination. At the very worst they should be able to believe that their pastor was only fulfilling his social responsibility of fathering children, and that he really

didn't enjoy the procedure essential to this end very much. It is not easy to believe this, of course, if the pastor's wife has a highvoltage look about her.

From your own point of view, an overly attractive wife can be a millstone around the neck of progress in your profession. She will be a constant distraction to you, and you will be tempted to spend time with her, much better invested in getting on with your career.

Such an eminent authority on executive success as Vance Packard has pointed out that in the world of big business, the man who is entirely happy with his home life is not a good bet for heavy responsibility. One way to spot a real comer in the corporation is to find the fellow who is a bit discontented with his marriage.

As a pastor you should never even entertain the thought that you are discontented with your marriage. The same end can be achieved by refusing to become too much absorbed in it. A good, plain-looking wife whom you like and about whom you can think with affection, but without passion is an inestimable aid in directing your primary devotion to your church and its duties. If it is no hardship to stay away from home, you will not have to fight frequent spiritual battles over the choice between one more pastoral call or that important committee meeting and an evening at home. Any pro will tell you it is that extra effort, that last push, which wins the game. So if getting home to the wife is not a prospect which is irresistibly attractive, then no great sacrifice is entailed in absenting yourself in order to get in a few more licks on the job.

It will not occur to the members of your flock that you are working hard and putting in long hours because you would just as soon work as to hang around the house.

They will conclude that you are driven by devotion to your calling and an acute sense of responsibility toward the welfare of your church. There is no need to rectify their thinking on this matter, of course, and it is well if you think along the same lines.

Perhaps the best possible approach to the problem of clerical mate selection is to imagine that you are planning to employ an assistant pastor and are scouting the prospects. This will focus your attention on the genuine issues at stake and compensate for the normal male irrelevancies which becloud the true values we should seek. Never forget that you are a clergyman first and a man second.

The advantages of marrying a girl who wants to marry a minister

Another excellent rule to follow as you make your selection is "look for a girl who is looking for you." By this we mean that you can hardly go wrong if you choose a young lady who has set out to marry a preacher.

Be assured that there exists at any given moment a fair number of nubile females, who actually have marriage to a clergyman as their goal in life. The advantages, for you, of an alliance with a young lady in this category cannot be dismissed lightly and should be sufficient to stimulate you to a diligent search for her.

For one thing, she will be likely to understand what she is getting into better than a girl who would find a registered pharmacist as acceptable to her as a clergyman. Further, it can be asserted that she will really enjoy the role of minister's wife, and will not find it tedious, boring and artificial as many girls do. She will accept without complaint the economic

restrictions imposed on her by your profession, and won't swear at the good matrons of the Women's Society even in private.

Also, psychologists who have done research on the subject report that girls who want to marry preachers generally have a low sex drive, and convinced by the pious, Protestant image of the clergy, believe that an ordained husband will be modest in the carnal demands he makes of her. (It is inevitable, of course, that it won't always work out this way for the girl since a few lusty characters do manage to find their way into the ministry, but the odds are very probably in her favor.) You can readily see that if you choose such a girl, you will be gaining a dividend of time and energy in amounts nearly beyond calculation, which can be applied to your professional duties. It gives you an advantage over your clerical competitors whose marital situation is less fortunate, which seems almost unfair.

The tremendous; advantage of marrying a girl who has money

The author hesitated long before including the following final word of counsel, knowing that he risks misunderstanding and that to some it will seem indelicate. However, be that as it may, he decided to run these risks because of the joy it may bring to those who heed it. The counsel is this: When choosing a wife, make every effort to locate one who has some money of her own.

It is not so difficult to bring off as you might think. The population has a glut of marriageable females and some of them have already, or will in time, come into an inheritance. Why should not you, too, the Lord's faithful and self-sacrificing servant, share in this bonanza?

You will be gratified, should you carry out this counsel, to discover how even a few hundred extra a year will palliate the hardships, the meager income of your early pastorates. And even in your later and better-salaried days, your wife's remittance will mean the difference between relaxing in comfort in an air-conditioned hotel, and dining in the better restaurants or sweating it out in some flea-bag, while you subsist on hamburgers and beans during the frequent conferences and conventions you will be expected to attend. And if you are careful enough or fortunate enough to marry a girl who is really loaded, you will take trips to the Holy Land and vacation in Florida while your ministerial brethren who are forced to live on their own income will curse their grocery bills and envy you.

And if you consider this suggestion to be crass and revolting materialism, keep in mind the fact that your larger income means a larger tithe (10 per cent of income after taxes) which you can devote to the Lord's work. This thought should be sufficient to tranquillize any fears that you are succumbing to the lures of this present world.

If you can manage to marry a bit of money, the esteem in which your congregation will hold you is bound to be quite

high. The one thing all Americans respect, without qualification, is money. And the classic Protestant ethic holds that when a man is blessed with material rewards, it is a sign that he has found favor in the eyes of Jehovah. Since you are theologically sophisticated, you may have your doubts about the validity of such an ethic, but your congregation won't.

Marriage is always fraught with uncertainties and incalculables. No one can ever be certain, in advance, that a marriage will work out along the lines planned and for which they hoped. Everyone should enter it rationally, realistically; and only after the suitability of the intended partner has been scrutinized as carefully as possible. And what everyone should do (but not very many do do, or the divorce rate in our country would be much lower than it is) the clergyman must do if he has expectations of advancement in his profession as well as a felicitous atmosphere in his home.

With the counsel here given, you will be able to reduce the hazards in this extremely-hazardous enterprise, and choose a mate who not only will grace your parsonage but be a co-worker in and an ornament to your holy calling.
