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New Foundations  
*for*  
Marriage and the  
Family

*By*

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APRIL, 1946  
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*Published jointly by*

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FAMILY RELATIONS  
1126 East 59th Street, Chicago 37, Illinois

THE RUSSELL H. CONWELL BREAKFAST CLUB  
Room 200, 311 South Juniper Street, Philadelphia 7, Pa.

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## NEW FOUNDATIONS for MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY\*

The National Conference on Family Relations is part of a larger movement that is rapidly developing in America. This movement, in which many lay organizations, professional groups, governmental bureaus and individual citizens are interested and active, is concerned with the conservation of the family and the protection and development of family values.

### Four Conference Objectives

*The first objective* of the National Conference on Family Relations is to emphasize the place and the importance of the family in the social order. Those who are acquainted with the history of social thought and action realize that during the nineteenth century we were largely interested in stressing the individual and individual rights, the political independence, the economic freedom, the religious liberty of the individual man and woman. In the twentieth century we have been largely interested in the study of the social system, social organization, social maladjustments, and the preparation of social programs. Both the individual and society are important. But in stressing first the emancipation and development of the individual and then the structure and reorganization of society we have somewhat neglected and even forgotten the family. Now we recognize the fact that it is the family into which the individual is born and the equally important fact that it is the family that serves as the basic unit in the social order. If the family is weakened through inward change or outward impact the individual suffers and the entire social system is in danger. Disorganization within the family unit means inevitable disturbances in the individuals that compose the family and likewise disintegration in the very foundations upon which the social order rests. It is therefore necessary to emphasize the fundamental place of the family in the social order and to stress the importance of the family in the achievement of social stabilization and social progress.

*The second objective* is to democratize the knowledge of the family that we now possess. Social scientists for many years have been studying the family as a social institution. They have accumulated a vast amount of material on the history, the structure, the organization, the function of the family and the foundations upon

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\*Presidential Address delivered at the Joint Meeting of the National Conference on Family Relations and the Russell H. Conwell Breakfast Club, April 8, 1946, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

which the family must rest if it is to develop in a normal manner. They have discovered the major problems that arise in family organization. They have diagnosed many of the disturbances that develop in family relationships. They have at least outlined the therapeutic programs that are needed in order to anticipate and to prevent the disturbances and to solve the problems. But all this knowledge is now limited to small groups in colleges, in social laboratories, and in selected areas of society.

What the social scientists have learned must now be made available to larger and larger circles of men and women, through educational institutions, through churches and synagogues, through community centers and neighborhood houses, through the press, the radio, and other media of communication. In a democracy it would be undemocratic to limit this knowledge to any section of society. In order that this knowledge may become the common property of all it may be necessary to expand the new programs of adult education and encourage the development of social agencies such as the consultation center for marriage and family counseling.

*The third objective* is to reinterpret and, if necessary, to reorganize social programs and social movements in terms of family needs. A generation ago the health movement was based largely on the study and treatment of the individual. When a tuberculosis patient appeared in the clinics the clinic addressed itself and its service solely to the individual patient. Today when a patient with tuberculosis appears in the clinic every effort is made to include the entire family and to examine each member of the family of which the individual is a part. We now recognize that trouble in one member of the family is a danger signal of trouble in other members of the family. We have come to see also that the family is the unit of suffering and therefore must be the unit of concern and of care.

What is true of the health movement is becoming increasingly true also of housing programs. The home is the place in which the family meets and lives and develops itself. If the home is overcrowded, inadequate, unsanitary, there is not only the danger of disease and delinquency, there is also the danger of disruption of family life. The breaking down of the barriers of privacy makes impossible the development of standards that we associate with the higher types of family organization. A woman deeply interested in housing with a high regard for family development recently closed her housing report with these words: "We as mothers ought to know that it is utterly impossible to develop the right kind of a family in the wrong kind of a home." The reinterpretation and reorganization that is needed in health and in housing is equally

needed in the field of education, recreation, physical and mental health, the minimum wage program, and other social movements.

*The fourth objective* is to indicate and to encourage the contribution of the family to the new social order. The family is the cradle into which the future is born; it is the nursery in which the new social order is nourished and reared during its early and most plastic period. The new social order, we must remember, will not be composed of men and women who come out of the void. It will be composed of the children who grow up in the families of today. The family is not only the threshold of democracy, as has often been emphasized; it is the very matrix in which democracy must develop during its embryonic period. An autocratic form of family organization can never prepare children for the new democratic social order. Not only the environment, but the very atmosphere that we create in the family circle shapes and conditions the child as truly as the soil and the sunshine and the dew shape and condition the plant and the flower, the tree and the fruit. To the degree that we educate and train and discipline our children in the principles that are to govern the new social organization, to that degree they will expand the boundaries of human knowledge, deepen the ranges of human experience, enrich the reservoirs of spiritual strength upon which the future must draw for its own sustenance, and establish the new social order of which men now dream. Through their own innate talents and acquired skills our children will greatness and refine the heritage of the past, transmute the possessions of the present, and fulfill the promise of the family, which at its highest is a covenant with posterity.

## Why NEW Foundations?

The question naturally arises: Why is it necessary to discuss *new foundations* for marriage and the family?

*Old Foundations Give Way*—One answer is that the old foundations are crumbling and disappearing in our time. At one stage in the development of the family a man who wanted to found a household went out and captured a woman from his own or from another tribe, as he would capture any other animal, and brought her home to serve as his mate and as the mother of his children. This method has disappeared, as far as the man is concerned. At another stage when a man wanted to establish a family he went forth to purchase a woman as he would any other piece of property and brought her home to supervise his household and to rear his children. This method is also obsolete. In the third stage of the family the parents, usually the



father, founded the family for the children. The father or the mother selected the wife for the son or the husband for the daughter. This, they assumed to be not only their right but their duty. In a few social groups this custom still persists, but in most of the groups in America this method of establishing a family is rapidly disappearing. The young people insist upon the right to establish their own homes. They go to their parents occasionally for counsel, but they do not regard it as necessary to secure their consent.

It is also evident that religion, once an indispensable foundation, is not regarded with the same sanctity as it was even a generation ago. An increasingly large number of marriages are being performed not by clergymen or by representatives of religion, but by civil officers or representatives of the state. In some sections of the country nearly one-half of the marriage ceremonies are performed without the benefit of the clergy and the sacrament of religion.

*New Foundations Needed*—Studies of the social scientists show that new foundations for marriage and the family are beginning to emerge with increasing clearness and definiteness. The contract sanctioned by the state, upon which marriage legally rests, needs to be revised and increasingly strengthened. In some states the marriage law is being amended from time to time, but in not one state of the forty-eight in the country does the marriage law embody the knowledge that we now possess. A marriage law reconstructed in accordance with new concepts would do much to prevent a number of marriages that should never be contracted.

It is also evident that the economic basis of marriage needs to be better understood and more wisely established. It is impossible for marriage and the family to develop on a normal level of self-reliance and self-respect if the income is insufficient to make a normal level possible. A study of the income of families during the years 1935 and 1936 revealed the almost incredible fact that fourteen per cent of the families in America had an income of less than \$500 a year; and that forty-two per cent of the families had an income of less than \$1,000 a year. Not more than twenty per cent of the families in the United States at that time had an income sufficient to maintain themselves upon a decent and self-sustaining level of life.

The biological foundation of marriage also needs to be restudied and restated. It has been definitely proved that discord and dissension in marriage and family life frequently develop not only because of bad heredity and because of ill health, but also because of ignorance of the elementary knowledge that should be the possession of every man and woman. Ignorance and misin-

formation of the simplest biological facts are at the root of many misunderstandings and much misery in married life.

Even more important than the legal, the economic, and the biological are the psychological factors in marriage and family relations. In every study thus far made it is proved that psychological difficulties and differences account for disturbances and disruptions in many marriages. Differences in social background, racial, religious, national; divergences in educational development and in outlooks upon life; deviations in temperament and interests and aspirations; deep-seated distinctions in group prejudices and group preferences—all these lead to irritation and friction, to antagonisms and hostilities, that corrode and destroy the very foundations on which marriage and the family must rest.

What is true of the psychological factors is becoming increasingly certain in regard to the ethical and spiritual element in marriage. In fact we are only now beginning to realize how essential the ethical and spiritual element is in all marriage and family relationships. Every counselor who has an appreciation of the ethical element in life discovers that many problems which on the surface seem to be legal, economic, biological, or psychological in character are fundamentally ethical or spiritual. No matter how adequate the legal, the economic, the biological, and the psychological foundations are, no marriage can survive for any great length of time unless it is based upon truth and trust, upon cooperation and mutual accommodation, upon a full realization of the sacredness of the marriage relationship and the sanctity of the home. These are some of the new foundations that students of marriage and family life must now commend to those who contemplate marriage and the establishment of a family.

*A New Social Discovery*—The third reason and a dominant one for making new foundations the theme of this Conference is the social discovery that we have made within the last generation. A generation ago those who were interested in marriage and family life concerned themselves chiefly with the evil of divorce. The rapid and almost incredible increase in the number of divorces granted in the United States led men and women to focus their energies upon the formulation of programs that they believed would curb and control the evil. In spite of every effort we have made, however, legislative, religious, and social, the number of estrangements, separations, and divorces has continued to increase from decade to decade. While the population of the United States within the last seventy-five years has increased a little more than 300 per cent and marriages have increased a little more than 400 per

cent the number of divorces has increased by over 2,000 per cent. After the first World War the number of breakdowns in marriage reached alarming proportions. In the aftermath of the second World War the number of breakdowns is even more ominous and distressing. Instead of one divorce to every five marriages as before the War, it is probable that the statistics of the current years will prove that there is now one divorce to three or four marriages performed. In some communities the number of divorces granted is as great as the number of marriages performed.

After studying the problem for many years, social scientists have now come to the conclusion that a generation ago we began at the wrong end. Instead of beginning with the evil of divorce we now see that it is necessary to begin with the marriage contract and the conditions of marriage. It is now conceded, in other words, that the principal cause of divorce is marriage itself, that is, the wrong kind of marriage, the marriage that rests upon weak foundations.

### Education of Youth for Marriage

Until young people share in this discovery of the social scientists and translate their knowledge into social practice there will be no curtailment in the number of estrangements, separations and divorces. Many of the marriages that have taken place within the last five years have been doomed to disaster from the very outset. Some of these marriages have been contracted during the adolescent period when the young people were too immature to know the meaning of marriage. Not long ago many of us believed that early marriages contained the richest promise. But we know now that marriage in our time must assume not only a physical but a mental and emotional and a spiritual maturity. The tremendous changes that take place in the development of young people, and especially of young women, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two or twenty-three means that teen-age young people are actually too immature to marry.

Many of the marriages of our time have also been contracted in haste and even in hysteria. The young people have not given themselves time to become acquainted with each other, to understand enough of each other to know whether they have sufficient in common to make marriage advisable and wise. They have been moved too much by impulse within and by the pressure of social turmoil without. As the turmoil of the war years recedes and the impulses of the young people subside they discover that they have made a tragic mistake.

In many instances, marriage has been contracted in a state of unwarranted and shameful ignorance of the

very foundations on which marriage must rest. The conditions that hinder marriage and the conditions that help marriage are now fairly well established, on the basis of experience, observation and analysis. Knowing these conditions it is possible to predict success or failure with a reasonable degree of reliability, but in only a limited number of marriages is an attempt made to determine the conditions that are needed if marriage is to survive the stress of current social life and the tensions that are inevitable in a society as complicated as our own.

### Who Shall Be Responsible?

The principal problem that we face at the present time is this: Who is to lay the new foundations for marriage and the family? It is not enough to know that the old foundations are crumbling and that new foundations are being discovered. Unless the new foundations are made the basis on which marriages and families are to rest, the knowledge we possess will be of little service.

*Normal Schools. Teachers Must Be Taught*—First of all we have the right to look to the teachers in our schools and colleges. It is true that the number of courses in home economics and in family relations is increasing from year to year; but the teachers cannot aid us to solve our problem until the teachers themselves are taught how to teach children and young men and women. In very few normal schools are courses required that would equip teachers to understand and to instruct young people in what they need to know. In fact one would suppose from the curricula in most normal schools that students in our high schools and colleges are either destined for a celibate life or that it is assumed that they should marry in a state of ignorance. We must learn that the training and experience that young people formerly received in their homes are utterly ineffective because the home itself is changing so rapidly. We therefore advocate a reorganization of the curricula of normal schools so that every teacher will be required to take courses that will acquaint her or him with the kinds and development of American families, the problems that arise in family relationships, and the resources that must be focused to meet family needs. There is no other way in which to assure ourselves that young people will be trained in schools and colleges for the life they are to lead as husbands and wives and parents.

*Professional Schools, Training Doctors, Lawyers, Social Workers, Clergymen*—Another group of men and women to whom we must turn to lay the new foundations is composed of the members of the professions, clergymen, lawyers, doctors, social workers. Few



of these men and women in the professions have had any training or preparation for the work that needs to be done. Law schools, medical schools, schools of social work, and even seminaries do not always include within their curricula the specific courses that are needed to equip men and women for education in marriage and family life and for expert and authoritative counseling service. It would be gratuitous on my part to comment upon law schools and medical schools and even schools of social work, but I may speak with some understanding of seminaries, for I have been a member of the faculty of one seminary for twenty-four years, and I have visited many seminaries of different denominations as lecturer and preacher in the course of my ministry and teaching work.

It may seem ungracious to make this criticism, but truth compels me to say that many, if not most, of the seminaries in America are little more than antiquarian institutions. The only difference between the museum and the seminary is that in the seminary the fossils still have a semblance of life. It seems utterly impossible to convince the majority of the faculties or the majority of the members of any one faculty that the minister today must spend the larger part of his time and energy and strength in wrestling with current problems and with current conceptions and philosophies of life. Even in those seminaries in which courses on marriage and the family and current social problems are given, these courses constitute a very minor part of the curriculum; sometimes not more than five per cent of the courses required of the graduates! This fact accounts for the comment of a committee on marriage and divorce of one of the largest denominations in America: "Our priests spend a whole year in preparing our children for the sacrament of confirmation, but no time whatever in preparing our young people for the far more important sacrament of marriage." The minister in every religious organization performs many marriages and officiates at many family functions. He is in a strategic position in regard to marriage and family development, and this position imposes upon him a responsibility, but a responsibility that his seminary training does not equip him to meet.

*Government. The State Has Obligations*—The officers of the state must recognize that they are charged with the responsibility of laying the new foundations of which we speak. The state assumes jurisdiction over marriage laws and the laws of domestic relations. The state authorizes and sanctions marriage through the marriage license that the state issues, but the state does little or nothing to protect marriage and to conserve the family until the family breakdown appears in the children's court, the family court or the divorce court.

The state fails at the very outset and in the initial action that it takes. The marriage license, for example, is issued by an official of the state who is seldom qualified to determine whether the marriage is wise or unwise and who seldom even confirms the statements that are made in the affidavit by the applicants for a marriage license. The license bureaus in our larger cities are staffed by men and women whose sole qualification for the positions they occupy is the service that they have rendered the party in power. What a radical change would be achieved if we were to demand that the staff of the license bureau be composed of men and women who have taken a civil service examination that would insure their competency to advise and to direct those who apply for a marriage license! We are audacious enough to advocate that everyone who is authorized by the state to issue a marriage license should be required to take courses and to prepare himself or herself adequately for an understanding of the meaning of marriage and the problems that are involved in the marriage relationship. But we go even further than this. The state has established mental hygiene clinics and child guidance clinics in many communities. We do not advocate the establishment of a "marriage clinic," for marriage is not a disease that requires a clinic, but we do advocate the establishment of consultation centers in every community to which men and women can go for guidance and counsel when marital and family problems develop. What is now a limited service for small groups must become a community program sanctioned and supported by the local, state, or federal government.

*The Home. Parents Are Important*—In addition to teachers, clergymen, the members of other professions, and the officers of the state, the new foundations must be laid likewise by the parents in every family. Every study thus far confirms common observation and general experience, namely, that children who come out of unhappy homes have less chance for happiness in their marriage than children who come out of homes that are happy and harmonious. It is therefore most important that mothers and fathers do their utmost to create an environment that will condition their children for a happy married life. Every counselor in the field of marriage and the family can cite instance after instance in which hesitation and reluctance, in which friction and hostility, in which misunderstanding and misery can be traced directly to distortions and perversions in the relationships of the father and mother of either one or both the young people. It is true that the present increase in estrangements, separations, and divorces is due in part to the confusions and the convulsions of the age in which we live, to the political conflicts, the economic collapse, and the moral disintegration that accompany and follow every war. But the



tragedies we are witnessing in the younger generation today, we must confess, are due in large part to the failure of parents to adequately educate and train and discipline their children to meet the crises in life. Children succumb to outward assaults because they possess no inward strength, no principles, no high ideals, that would sustain them in time of trial and save them in the hour of tragic decision. Mothers and fathers must learn to think of their children not in terms of their own interests and advantage, but in terms of their children's happiness and the future. In the changing dream of parenthood we have at last come to understand that children are entrusted to our care not in order that they might serve us in life or even worship at our grave, but in order that we may train them to translate into reality the ideals and the visions toward which we, their elders, merely grope and stumble through a mist of agony and tears.

*Young People Themselves. It's Their Responsibility*—Most important of all are the young people themselves. We have a right to turn to these young men and women who mean to marry and to ask them to assume the responsibility, solemn and sacred as it is, of building their marriage and their family life upon foundations that we now know will insure, as far as is humanly possible, security, permanency, and happiness. It is necessary for them to know the legal implications of the marriage contract they sign, that the marriage contract does confer upon them certain rights and also imposes upon them responsibilities. It is even more necessary for them to be concerned as much with their responsibilities as with their rights, for too often marriages fail for the simple reason that young people in these days think too much of what they believe to be their rights and too little of what are their responsibilities to each other and to their marriage and to the future.

Young men and women must learn that they cannot establish and maintain a home without knowing something of housekeeping and homemaking and all that is involved in the preparation and maintenance of a reasonable budget. Too many young people completely misunderstand the point at which they should begin to construct their economic life together. Too many, especially too many young women, want to begin where their parents left off or even beyond. They must not miss the joy of creating their own life together and this they may miss unless they agree to begin their life on a simple and unpretentious level. It is also essential for them to learn that the home and the family are joint responsibilities in which both the man and the woman must share, the woman as well as the man and the man as much as the woman.

Young people must study the biological basis of marriage, the anatomy and physiology, the structure and the functioning of the human body, both male and female, and the mystery of the reproductive process. Even more, they must understand the manner in which the man and woman should conduct themselves in their marriage relationship. Many a marriage is marred at the very beginning because the man does not know or fails to remember that a woman must not only be wed but wooed, that on every occasion and repeatedly she must be approached with tenderness, with delicacy, and even with reverence. They must also learn to appreciate and evaluate more adequately the psychological factors in marriage, compatibility of temperament, community of interests and aspirations, and the cultivation of high ideals.

## Two Circles of Life

Men and women we may describe in terms of circles, to use an Emersonian symbol. Here is the circle of the man in which he lives and moves and has his being. Here is the circle of the woman in which she lives and moves and has her being. If these two circles never touch even at the circumference they will inevitably drift apart and the end of marriage is already in sight. The two circles of life should not only touch, they should intercept; and the greater the degree of interception the broader the basis upon which a comradeship in marriage can be built. In the finer types of marriage the two circles not only touch and intercept, they coincide, as in the marriage of Madame Curie and her husband. Out of this companionship there came one of the marvels of modern science and one of the miracles of medicine. In rare and classic relationships the two circles not only touch and intercept and coincide, they even coalesce, as in the marriage of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning. Here are two great poets, two great personalities, two great spiritual beings who have so much in common that they merge into each other and give us the classic romance in married life. It was because of this relationship that Elizabeth Barrett could write the exquisite "Sonnet to the Portuguese," dedicated to her husband. And it was because of this relationship that Robert Browning could write one of the rarest and most precious of all his poems, the one entitled "One Word More," dedicated to his wife. This poem he prefaced to a volume of fifty compositions entitled "Men and Women," alive or dead or fashioned by his fancy. Those who have read the poem will not forget the opening stanza:

"There they are, my fifty men and women,  
Naming me the fifty poems finished!  
Take them, Love, the book and me together:  
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also."

This was the secret of their romance, "where the heart lies, let the brain lie also."

### Marriage at Its Highest

But in addition to learning something of the legal implications, the economic basis, the biological foundation, and the psychological factors of marriage, the young people must also understand the ethical concept and spiritual content of marriage. Marriage means a oneness of mind and of the spirit even more than of the flesh. They must therefore learn to live with each other in a spirit of perfect frankness and sincerity and truth. Every deviation from this ethical level, every deception, no matter how slight, builds up a barrier that will shut them out from each other. They must also come to recognize that marriage is something more than a legal contract, something more than an economic enterprise, something more than a biological adventure, something more even than a psychological companionship. Marriage at its highest is a spiritual relationship sanctioned by the state and sanctified by religion. When young people lift their marriage to this high level they will discover that it conjures up glories and splendors that come at the call of no other mystic invocation; that it clothes the man and woman it touches with a garment of golden light; that it is the one miracle that can turn every heart into an altar of holy fire and every soul into a sacred shrine.



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