

WHEN A PASTOR VIOLATES THE SEVENTH —

Permitting Adultery in the Ministry

— CHURCH PROTECTION GUARANTEED

When a pastor violates the seventh commandment, he will, under certain conditions, be guaranteed protection by the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

After having committed adultery, he can do it again and again in the same pastorate, until enough brave women are willing to come forward, despite a lack of conference policy governing the matter. Then he will be moved on to a different church, hundreds of miles away—so he can start in again.

Church administration not only provides theological protection for sin, they now provide employment protection as well.

The theological protection is provided by the *new theology*, which was adopted by a great majority of our leaders, in North America, by the late 1980s. This is the teaching that it is all right to sin, and that we will keep sinning until the return of Jesus.

Such a view is in strong contrast with the Bible/Spirit of Prophecy teaching that the wages of sin is death, and that, in the strength of Christ, we can resist temptation, keep from falling, and be preserved harmless and undefiled unto the day of the Lord.

The employment protection is proposed by the recently revised change in the North American Division Working Policy, which governs every denominationally employed worker in the United States and Canada. Thus, our workers in North America can now commit adultery, as long as they do it in a certain manner.

Unbelievable? Read on. Read and weep. But more, read and become irate. Do something about it. Write. Demand that leadership change that revision immediately, if not sooner!

Please, let me appeal to you personally: What are you here for? Why

did God place you in the church in this time in history? How much more of this apostasy will you put up with, before you arouse and demand that it be stopped?

Satan wants you to remain a quiet mouse till the final deluge. But God expects that you be a Christian man or woman—and stand openly for the right and demand that it be obeyed in the church.

Here are some facts to consider:

In January of this year (1995), we documented the case of a pastor of one of California's largest Adventist churches (*The Torres Case—Part 1-4 [WM—583-586]*), who divorced his wife without Biblical grounds—and then remarried on the very day that the divorce became final. As for his former wife, she was promised lifetime sustentation and continuation of the pastor's one-half tuition discount for their child—if she would keep quiet about the matter.

Then, within a year, that pastor was transferred to the position of senior pastor of one of the largest Adventist churches in the world: Sligo Church in Takoma Park, which most of our General Conference leaders attend. He is there today. **The Potomac Conference president says it is not his responsibility, since his third marriage (to his present wife) began in southern California (although it continues today in Maryland). The president of the Southern California Conference maintains that it is not his responsibility, since the pastor is now living on the other side of the continent. Everyone is cozily living in a house of sinful accommodation.**

Then, in February, we published documentation (*Keeping Adulterous Pastors—Part 1-2 [WM—587-588]*) on the revision of the North American Working Policy, which would reinstate

apostate ministers into the ministry—who have been caught and what they have done that is known by the local church—after a wait of only twenty-four months!—**According to the proposed NAD policy, only two years and the adulterous minister would be brought right back into the Adventist ministry!**

In striking contrast is our study, *Adultery, Divorce, and Remarriage [WM—589-591]* (to be released at the same time that this present study is being sent out), which primarily consists of Inspired Statements. **God's Word clearly reveals that, instead of reinstating fallen pastors, they are never again to have church membership! (nor are any church members who continue on in such a state).**

How does this present study relate to the others?

Our earlier study, *Keeping Adulterous Pastors—Part 1-2 [WM—587-588]* refers to the revision of the North American Working Policy, which would reinstate known apostate ministers into the ministry—after a wait of only two years!

But the study you now have in hand involves the NAD Working Policy revision—which would take no action whatever toward those Adventist pastors who had carried out adulterous acts in a certain manner, if there is "mutual consent." Here are the facts on this:

In March 1993, the North American Division set up a *Sexual Ethics Commission*, composed of 25 church leaders and laypersons, men and women. The task assigned to it was to develop guidelines, policies, procedures, and training programs in regard to sexual misconduct.

The impetus spurring this appointment, was the growing problem of litigation in the denomination, including in its business and industry. The General Conference's own insurance company said it would no longer insure our de-

nomination in regard to such cases, unless a working policy was written on this.

All over America, people are suing organizations over sexual harassment or illegal sexual aggression of various types. In order to better protect itself from litigation and expenses, our leaders thought it best to try to fend off such problems before they ended up in court.

You may immediately perceive an underlying difficulty here: The brethren are concerned with avoiding legal problems in courts of law, not in purifying the church or getting rid of adulterers.

From March 1993, onward, the *Sexual Ethics Commission* has met several times. Rosa Taylor Banks, director of the NAD's Office of Human Relations, has been the general supervisor of the commission.

But, from information provided by one of the members of that commission to a mutual friend, we have learned that the commission encountered serious roadblocks from the very beginning. There are those in our denomination who are more concerned with protecting adulterous ministers, than protecting church members and fellow workers that they prey upon. Fortunately, there are those in our church who faithfully keep striving to cast out the evil (1 Corinthians 5; read it).

By the fall of 1993, the commission's report was thought to be complete; and, in November, it was presented to the officers attending the *Year-end Executive Committee meetings* of the North American Division who approved it.

Since then, the commission work, along this line, was indeed completed. When the editors of our church paper heard about it, they published the report in the *Adventist Review* of January 27, 1994 (pages 17-21).

An attempt had been made to include, not only legal requirements for lawsuits, but also basic morality. On page 18, was this statement:

"In this document, sexual misconduct is a comprehensive term that includes child sexual abuse and sexual harassment as earlier defined—rape or sexual contact by force, threat, intimidation, and sexual malfeasance."

The two paragraphs, after the above quotation, appeared to include any and every form of adultery or fornication as proscribed behaviors which the church could not tolerate among its workers.

We will reprint those three paragraphs at the bottom of this page (page two).

Both the commission and the NAD were shocked when they learned that the report had been printed in the *Review*, for they had not released the completed

report for publication. The scheduled plan was, next, to send the report to each union office, which was to send it on to local conferences and institutions.

This was done, **but a reaction set in. There were those who did not want to abide by such restrictions. The document included too much wrongdoing! So the commission was called back to revise it. Pressure on the commission intensified.**

In the fall of 1994, the commission's revised report was presented at the NAD Year-end Meetings. Church leaders from the U.S. and Canada were in attendance. On October 17, 1994, the revised report was accepted and approved by NAD leaders at their *Year-end Meetings*, and sent on to every entity in their divisions' territories.

But this revised document had deftly changed the definition of what constituted "sexual misconduct." This is important, for if an improper activity is excluded, then not the slightest reprimand will be given by supervisory church officers.

We will reprint that crucial definition at the bottom of the next page (page three).

Examining it closely, we find that only illegal actions are included! Sexual misconduct, which is not illegal in the courts of the land—is not

always considered wrong when done by Seventh-day Adventist Church workers to one another or to church members!

Illegal sexual misconduct includes

(1) sexual harassment; (2) actual or attempted sexual contact with a minor; (3) actual or attempted rape or sexual contact by force, threat, or intimidation; and (4) criminal behavior of a sexual nature.

Legal sexual misconduct, which will not be punished or even inquired into when done by church workers, would include sexual activity of any type or degree by two people, as long as it could be proven in a court of law that there was "mutual consent."

Legal sexual immorality, included in the January 27, 1994, printed statement, was omitted from the revised October 27, 1994, printed statement.

Note that the very next paragraph (paragraph 14), in the October revision, makes an important pronouncement:

"Victim—An accuser becomes a victim when the accused is determined, by the Sexual Ethics Committee, to have committed sexual misconduct or sexual harassment" (see reprinted statement in box on this page).

The God of heaven gave us the Seventh Commandment; the North American Division has declared part of it null and void. Only that part is retained, which the civil authorities would frown upon.

Adultery, by mutual consent, is no longer a sin in the ministry of our church.

Women in the church, beware.

Pastors can lead souls into sin, and then, if the beguiled victims cannot prove that the secret act involved force, she has no recourse under church law.

The church will not hear her, and the pastor is free to attempt it again.

"Malfeasance" was included in the January statement, but omitted from the October statement.

"Mal-fea-sance (*mal-fe'zens*) n. *Law.* The performance of some act which is unlawful or wrongful **or which one has specifically contracted not to perform:** said usually of official misconduct."—*Funk and Wagnalls' New Comprehensive International Dictionary of the English Language.*

Thus we find that "malfeasance" includes both illegal actions, as well as those which violate written or unwritten contractual employment obligations and duties.

We would expect that a Seventh-day Adventist minister would not have sex with any women, other than his wife! It is an unwritten contractual obligation of his employment. We are supposed to be the People upholding the Ten Commandments! "Malfeasance" would be the violation of that obligation.

But "sexual malfeasance" has been removed from the revised statement of wrongdoing. Once again, carefully read the box on the bottom of page two of this sheet. It lists far more than is in the reprint box on the bottom of page three! A variety of sexual wrongdoings were omitted from the revised statement.

Our church is really changing fast. That which church leaders once did secretly, they now bravely place in writing! But the written statement is only made to meet legal responsibilities and insurance requirements, in case of litigation.

We appeal to you to do some writing also. WRITE church leaders on all levels, and demand that pastors who engage in any kind of adultery or per-

version be held accountable!

In those letters, also demand that all allegations be heard,—and not ignored if they cannot prove a criminal or civil court case against the man.

At this point, someone will say, "Vance, you are making an issue about a matter which never occurs." Read this and think what it means:

"In questionnaires distributed by Len McMillan, director of church ministries for the Potomac Conference, 12.5 percent of the 586 respondents, consisting primarily of Adventist pastors, indicated that they had had an affair."—*Adventist Review, September 2, 1993, p. 14.*

Adultery does indeed occur in our church,—and often enough that this October 1994 revision was considered necessary in order to better protect wrongdoers!

As I write, I have before me a one-inch thick stack of legal papers. It begins with a lawsuit filed on November 18, 1988, by a woman in California. She was suing a Seventh-day Adventist pastor. He had led her into sin and, in order to hold onto her church job, she went along with it for a time.

Then she confessed to her husband, and they sued the pastor. For doing so, she was fired. Her husband, also a church worker, was also fired. And what happened to the pastor? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Church leadership resolutely worked to protect him.

The problem was that the woman, had tried to get several other women whom the pastor had also led into sin, to come forward. But they refused to speak up.

The attorneys for the conference office, which defended the pastor, contended that no criminal conduct had occurred—since mutual consent occurred, in spite of the fact that she only did it to protect her job.

So the lawsuit, which resulted in that one-inch stack of legal papers, was finally settled with an undisclosed payment to the woman, and a gag order that it not be discussed.

Then the pastor was transferred to adjacent conference, and placed as associate pastor of one of the largest churches in the state. He is still there, now the senior pastor of that church.

Why was he retained in the ministry? The case had been settled because the judge agreed with the defense that he had not done anything legally wrong, since mutual consent was involved. So he had not done wrong, had he?

Not by the laws of the land, but by

the law of God he stands as an adulterer.

Keep in mind that the conference lawyers successfully used, in his defense, the fact that the adultery had been done with the woman's consent.—**But it was still adultery, in the Bible sense! That was part of their defense!**

Mutual consent or no, he had committed adultery. He was the active agent bringing it about. He had done it several times, and probably would continue looking for opportunities to do so in the future.

And the conference protected him. Instead of firing him, he was retained in the ministry and quietly transferred to another conference, where he was given an important ministerial assignment.

This is new theology in action. It is evil, and the evil should be put away.

Before concluding this study, we should mention two points:

1 - The NAD only wanted the commission's report for insurance purposes; it was never to be published for the church to read. The January 1994 release through the *Review* was a mistake, and the NAD does not intend to let the revised statement be printed—unless enough write in demanding it.

The reason is simple enough: Leadership does not want to let the membership know there is a means by which errant ministers can be brought into a hearing or expelled from the ministry.

2 - Why did the commission make that 1994 revision, which so greatly reduced the scope of what is "sexual misconduct"? This is what happened:

An attorney was sent in to instruct them that they must make the change, in order to protect the church from litigation.—But you can see that such reasoning is transparently wrong.

Here is a statement by Elizabeth Iskander, M.D., discussing the entire problem.

"The revised, October 27, 1994, statement, #543-94N *Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in Church Relationships Involving Denominational Employees and Volunteers—Guidelines—Policy Revision*, presents a radical change from the policy published in the *Adventist Review*, its revised definition of what is 'sexual misconduct,'—the conduct about which church leaders will hear complaints and punish offending ministers has been greatly altered.

Sexual malfeasance has been

dropped from the policy. The North American Division has decided not to offer the victims of mutually consensual sexual misconduct any method or means of being heard by an official church body. I sense that your journal is the only avenue left. If you can get your readership to do so, *please* urge them to phone, write, or speak to leadership on various levels. Insist that they develop a policy that addresses pastoral sexual malfeasance. If enough of our people are aroused to the urgency and importance of this matter, changes can be made! God has said He will purify His people at the end of time. Purified lives must inevitably result in purified policies. How can God accept our church when it has sin written into its policy books?

A properly worded policy on sexual misconduct should clearly state the problem. Women, when in a state of crisis, seek counseling and spiritual leadership from pastors. When the church entrusts a man with a pulpit, the church also gives him an aura of power and prestige which emotionally attracts many women. The stamp of approval the church places on him gives women a feeling of safety, causing them to lower their guard. Women may become involved in prolonged affairs with such pastors. Eventually they are cast aside for multiple reasons. Currently the church offers such a woman nothing but disbelief and ridicule if she comes forward. If she is a church employee, raising such allegations will cost her job.

"Many church administrators feel that airing such cases causes great harm. If such a woman is given a hearing, the bottom line is that it is her word against his word. The case must be dropped.

"(1) What is needed, first, is a definition of sexual misconduct—that does not omit or ignore fornication or adultery. (2) Next, a policy needs to be put in place which offers a hearing to such women. (3) If, for lack of enough evidence, the case has insufficient evidence for conviction—yet she appears to be a credible witness—the church should create a permanent, confidential file of the proceedings. (4) If this pastor moves to another locality, and another woman comes forward with a tale of sexual malfeasance, the church should reinvestigate both witnesses, even though separated by time and location. (5) As a result, pastors will soon learn that a string of credible witnesses can lead to the end of their ministry. (6) Victims would soon learn that they and their story will be treated with respect and confidentiality,

and can at least contribute to the end result of justice. (7) The creation of such policies tells victims that the church acknowledges that such crimes occur and has prepared a procedure for handling the victims' allegations. (8) Such policies encourage victims to come forward, because the church is clearly serious about removing fornicators and adulterers from the ministry. (9) When they see such a policy in place, the church, at large, will see that the Adventist Church is serious about cleansing the ministry from impurity. (10) Such a policy, consistently carried out, would restore confidence in the church and the integrity of church administrators.

You will recall the case of _____. He initially had only one accuser. Many said he was innocent. Then the story got into the local press. Because of this exposure, two other very credible women—who saw the first woman was disbelieved—came forward with similar testimony to the court. This was also publicized. The church could be spared such public humiliation if procedures, on the order of the above suggested ones, were adhered to."—*Elizabeth Iskander, M.D., letter dated February 7, 1995.*

OUR HISTORIC STANDARDS ON ADULTERY, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE [WM-589-591]—A brief, three-part collection of quotations from the Bible, Spirit of Prophecy, and other sources. The important changes in the Church Manual are carefully explained.

VIOLATION OF THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT AND CHURCH RELATIONSHIP [WM-602]—How should we relate ourselves to adulterous church members and pastors? There are answers here.

KEEPING ADULTEROUS PASTORS [WM-587-588]—A two-part report on a proposed change in the North American Division Working Policy, to be presented for approval to the 1995 General Conference Session. It would officially permit adulterous ministers to be placed back in the ministry after a two-year waiting period.

PERMITTING ADULTERY IN THE MINISTRY [WM-601]—How should relate ourselves to adulterous church members and pastors? There are answers here.

THE TORRES CASE [WM-583-586]—A four-part report on the problem of rehiring ministers who have divorced their wives and remarried. Discussion of the case of a very prominent local NAD pastor.

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