

The New Adventist No-fault Divorce

Members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church can now divorce one another for any reason. And worse is coming. They are now protected from any censure or discipline a godly church might attempt to give them, due to a deletion in the Church Manual voted at Utrecht.

As the doctrinal apostasy in our denomination increases, the moral standards continue to be lowered.

It should be understood that these changes have frequently been prompted by an interest in keeping wealthy members in the church.

But there is also a very definite concern to protect adulterous-minded ministers, who want to have their transgressions overlooked. More liberal changes in church policies tend to protect church pastors and executives who are involved in extramarital relationships or who want to leave their spouses and remarry.

Several times this year, we have discussed official attempts to lower moral standards. The liberalizing occurred on July 4, 1995, at the General Conference Session in Utrecht.

Officials went to the Utrecht Session with plans in mind to liberalize the Church Manual. The sentence they disliked has been in that guide book for decades, and is found on pages 172 and 173 of the current edition:

“6. When a divorce is secured by either spouse, or when both mutually secure a divorce on any ground other than that of ‘unfaithfulness to the marriage vow,’ the party or parties securing the divorce shall come under the censure of the church.”—*Church Manual, 1990 edition, pp. 172-173; 1986 edition, pp. 174-175; 1951 edition, p. 242.*

1 - NOT DISCIPLINING ANY DIVORCE

Mario Veloso introduced the motion (*Review, July 6, p. 26*). That which he asked for was a radical change in the *Church Manual*. He wanted the church to henceforth no longer censure for any type of divorce! (This is equivalent to approving them all!)

Prior to this time, in fact, throughout our denominational history, separation has been accepted, but not divorce. There is only one reason to divorce a spouse and that is sexual infidelity. The Greek word used in Matthew 5:32 is *porneia*. This word referred to any form of sexual contact out of

marriage and would include: (1) Adultery/fornication, (2) sexual perversions that are acted out, such as homosexuality, bestiality, pedophilia, and incest. (See page 3 for further discussion.)

Veloso was requesting the elimination of the above-quoted key sentence **in paragraph 6 of the Church Manual.**

This motion by Veloso was made without any advance notification to the rank and file church members throughout the world! **Not even the Biblical Research Institute was informed about this, or asked whether it was Biblical.**

Unfortunately, after some discussion, the motion was pushed through to approval by the delegates.

“Divorce and Remarriage, Our Position—Church Manual Amendment. *Voted.* To amend the *Church Manual* pages 172 to 173, paragraph 6, Divorce and Remarriage, Our Position, to read as follows:

“6. It is recognized that sometimes marriage relations deteriorate to the point where it is better for a husband and wife to separate . . . [1 Cor 7:11, RSV, quoted] . . . In many such cases the custody of the children, adjustment of property rights, or even personal protection may make necessary a change in marriage status. In such cases it may be permissible to secure what is known in some countries as a legal separation. However, in some civil jurisdictions such a separation can be secured only by divorce.”—“*Session Actions, Review, July 7.*”

The second part of the above paragraph (“In many such cases . . . only by divorce”) was the reason cited by Veloso for the recommended change. However, a careful reading of paragraph 6, in the Divorce and Remarriage section of the 1990 edition of the Church Manual, reveals that this difficulty was already noted and cared for. That entire “paragraph 6,” in the 1990 edition, was in the 1986 and 1951 editions, with the exception of the last sentence, “except as provided later in this paragraph.”

That sentence was added to alert the reader that exceptions were listed in the subsequent paragraphs.

Because delegates were not informed prior to the presentation of this requested change at Utrecht, and because the delegates did not have a copy of the *Church Manual* in hand,—they voted in ignorance, all the while trusting that their lead-

ers would not lead them astray.

At this point, let us restate the matter so you can see it more clearly:

The previous *Church Manual* statements said that separation was permissible, but (except for fornication) not divorce. But, when legal requirements in certain parts of the world made it necessary, the abused party could obtain a divorce.

Veloso asked that divorce henceforth be permissible in all cases, and not reprovved by the church for any cause. He gave as the reason for this, the fact that legal requirements in certain parts of the world made divorce necessary.

But that loophole had already been covered in the 1951, 1986, and 1990 editions of the *Church Manual*. **Veloso's request was a decoy.**

There was obviously another reason, which Veloso did not wish to state. That reason, of course, would be to make it easy for any member, worker, or pastor to divorce his spouse!

Why would no-fault divorces be desired? Because local churches have become so liberalized that they frequently accept anyone who remarries!

By getting rid of disciplining for divorce, the way is prepared for members and ministers to more easily divorce and remarry.

It is as simple as that.

Now, let us return to the Veloso motion:

As soon as Veloso made this motion, Meremoth E. Weir stood up and asked this:

"Does this mean to say that if individuals are divorced on nonbiblical grounds, there is no discipline that the church imposes unless an individual remarries? We need clarification."—*Review*, July 6, p. 26.

Veloso's reply was clear-cut. He was asking for a complete repudiation of the divorce discipline. **Veloso said:**

"It means that there would be discipline only in case of remarriage after a nonbiblical divorce."—*Ibid.*

Well, there you have it: a no-fault Adventist divorce!

This entire motion was staged by the General Conference. Kloosterhuis was the chair, Veloso made the motion, and Kenneth J. Mittleider was quick to the podium with a ready reply to any objections. All three are highly placed GC workers (*Review*, July 6, pp. 26-27).

On page three, we will provide you with a more detailed study on this matter of grounds for divorce and remarriage, and God's concern that His church defend its purity.

Let us now turn our attention to the second significant divorce and remarriage item at the Utrecht Session:

2 - DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE STUDY COMMISSION SETUP

The rapidity of the official changes in our standards on morals is breathtaking. **We have reported on them several times.**

Gerald R. Winslow, head of the Religion Department at Loma Linda University, made the following motion:

"It seems to me that now it is time to have a more comprehensive approach to the problems of divorce and remarriage than the changes that we are seeing here . . . I move that . . . we establish a churchwide, worldwide study commission . . . to work during this next quinquennium [five years] and to bring back a more comprehensive report to the next General Conference Session."—*Review*, July 6, p. 26.

Because a motion was already on the floor, the chair (Kloosterhuis), while declaring it to be an excellent idea, postponed it until after Veloso's item had been considered (*op. cit.*, pp. 26-27).

Gerald Winslow then made his motion, and it was accepted and voted (*op. cit.*, p. 27).

He may have meant well, but appointments to this commission have been left to the General Conference to fill. That leaves us with several concerns:

First, past history has revealed that the General Conference leaders are able and willing to bypass and override a commission appointed to do a certain work:

Someone might ask whether it would be possible for General Conference leaders to decide such matters in advance, especially when such a wide representation of workers would be involved.

From our earlier analysis of the "Governance Commission," we can know that most of the decisions will be made by leaders at the General Conference—and not by the commission! The commission will be presented with agendas and position papers which it will be asked to rubberstamp. If it does not do so, as occurred with the Governance Commission, the papers will simply be presented to the Annual Council as having been approved by the Governance Commission—when they had not approved them! That is fraudulent, but it is done anyway.

Second, as soon as this motion to enact a study commission on divorce and remarriage was placed before the delegates, another worker, close to the General Conference, arose to present it with its first assignment.

In order to help get the forthcoming commission on the right track, Richard C. Osborn, a Columbia Union Conference leader, recommended the key item of business which the commission should take up! No shyness here. In the hearing of all the delegates—which doubtless included most of those who would later be appointed to the new commission—Osborn said this:

“Perhaps for the next General Conference Session, we try to develop some different strategies, so that the committees could begin taking into account the feedback from the local fields. Then revisions could be made by the Annual Council, and it could come here perhaps in a more edited form.”—*Ibid.*

Osborn’s recommendation was clear enough: He stated his hope that the forthcoming commission would channel its recommendations through the Annual Councils, which in turn would “edit” them before presenting them to the Toronto Session in 2000. In fact, he asked that his recommendation be placed as an important item on its agenda.

So there will be a continual tinkering with morality standards for years to come. It is hoped that this Divorce and Remarriage Commission can withstand the demands of General Conference leadership, better than the Governance Commission could.

At the present time, there have been local di-

vorce and remarriage commissions in Southern California, the Pacific Union, Australia, and Southern Africa. Will a single, unified one—representing the entire world field—be able to improve the morality standards of our denomination?

It is the prayer of many that God will bless this worldwide committee, and enable it to maintain and clarify Biblical standards as solidly as the world delegates, gathered at Utrecht, stood by Biblical principles regarding women’s ordination.

Jesus declared that divorce was not to be for just “any reason,” but only for *porneia*; that is, sexual infidelity. That which the Utrecht delegates were enticed to approve was the silencing of the voice of stern rebuke by the church. It has become a dumb dog which will not bark on this matter.

The practical result is a no-fault divorce. As far as the church of Revelation 14:6-12 is concerned, its members can now divorce for any or no reason.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

The removal of church censure for divorce is a covert form of wholesale approval. It is wrong and unbiblical.

“And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.”—*Matthew 19:9.*

Conservatives recognize that *porneia* (translated “fornication” here) is sexual immorality (adultery, homosexuality, etc.). But liberals try to make Matthew 19:9 read that adultery does not take place until both *porneia* and remarriage have taken place! But Jesus said that adultery begins before remarriage. Therefore it should be disciplined before remarriage (*Matt 5:28:30*).

(It should be noted here that, unless there is clear evidence of a sexual crime, if a local church disfellowships a member for “adultery,” it can be sued. Because of this legal complication, it may be better to discipline the member for “unbiblically leaving one’s spouse, while not showing a just reason for divorce.”)

The Sermon on the Mount contains a related passage:

“It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a bill of divorcement.

“But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.”—*Matthew 5:31-32.*

It is clear from the above passages that neither a bill of divorce nor a license of marriage is proper, when the cause is other than *porneia*. The church should intervene with censure at the point of filing for divorce, in order to give the parties time to repent. It is too late

to repair a family, by the time of remarriage. That is why God gave us church discipline.

We all agree that there are times when separation may be necessary. Separation is not the same as a divorce. It does not empower one to remarry.

Also, we certainly agree that separation is not best if it can be avoided. But our people should draw the line at permitting wholesale divorces for any reason.

“And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband. But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband, and let not the husband put away his wife.

“But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.

“And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.

“For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.

“But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

“For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?”—*1 Corinthians 7:10-16.*

God never created the faultless “irreconcilable differences,” used by Israel’s heathen neighbors and by moderns today. Instead, He said that “uncleanness” must exist (Deuteronomy 24:1). The Scriptures specify the types of faults which are acceptable for divorce. By the time of Christ, the Jews had changed this into a no-fault divorce (“for any reason,” Matthew 19:3-8). But Jesus declared that divorce was not to be for just

“any reason,” but only for *porneia*; that is, sexual infidelity.

It was God’s plan that when the pair married, they were to become “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Throughout life, each was to care for the other. Yet, as noted above, the Bible plan was that no-fault divorces were not right and not approved by the God of heaven; nor should they be by the church on earth. Judgment, based on fault, with documents to attest the church’s decisions (Deuteronomy 24:1; Matthew 5:31) remains church duty for every divorce by members of the church.

Not only Jesus but Paul sees divorce and remarriage as separate entities. In 1 Corinthians 7:11, Paul expects a woman who separated from her husband to remain single or be reconciled. Thus Jesus, Paul, and our civil laws give three marital states which God has given to the church to administer:

1 - **Separation only:** Some separations may be necessary for reasons varying from efforts to save the children to personal protection against further violence. Unfortunately, the laxness of our times tempts many to thereafter commit adultery. Separation may at times be necessary, but it should be in accordance with 1 Corinthians 7:11.

2 - **Divorce without remarriage:** The grounds should agree with the principles in 1 Corinthians 7:11.

3 - **Remarriage:** Sexual infidelity (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:9) and death of the spouse (Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39) are the only Biblical grounds for

remarriage.

The others have already been quoted; here are the latter two verses:

“For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth.”—*Romans 7:2*.

“The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.”—*1 Corinthians 7:39*.

“In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared plainly that there could be no dissolution of the marriage tie, except for unfaithfulness to the marriage vow.”—*Mount of Blessing, p. 63*.

Additional passages which should be read are Ephesians 5:3 and 1 Corinthians 5 and 6. It is clear that God wants His church to purify itself of those guilty of *porneia*.

How can we expect to cross over Jordan, if we are excusing *porneia*? We are supposed to be warning the world that the Third Angel’s Message is soon to take effect! It is a call to obedience to the law of God. It is a call to purity and holiness. Yet here we are tearing down the standards and removing the landmarks which identify us as the special people of God.

God’s plan is always the best. Every other way leads to unhappiness. Our members and church workers should plead with our church leaders to return to the Scriptural pattern.

THE DAR COMMITTEE REPORT

After completing the above update on continuing efforts to lower our denominational standards, we have obtained a copy of the DAR Report.

Under immense pressure from liberals for more lax standards, many months ago the Pacific Union Conference Executive Committee appointed a *Divorce, Adultery, and Remarriage Committee*. West Coast leaders refer to it as the “DAR Committee.” Its assignment was to investigate ways and means to revamp these sections of the *Church Manual*, with the plan in mind that its recommendations be presented to some type of higher-level committee.

A special subcommittee was then appointed to rewrite chapter 15 of the *Church Manual*. John Jones, chairman of that 22-member subcommittee, wrote the final report. It is 16 pages long in large print, but is basically about the same size as the marriage and divorce chapter in the *Church Manual*. However, its objective is to provide for divorce and remarriage for whomever might desire it—without fear of church censure.

Here are some of the recommendations:

Divorce can occur for any reason. In a postscript at the back of the report, it was stated that it would be “relying in part on human wisdom” to have mentioned any reasons for divorce.

Neither party is to divulge to others the marital infidelity of his or her mate. This item will protect adulterous ministers who leave their wives, remarry, and are later taken back into the ministry.

The plan is for each party, during and after divorce, to remain in the church and in active church work, without church censure. After a period of time, during which it is recommended that each may receive some “counseling” by “a professional,” each party may remarry with the church’s blessing.

Thus we find that continued progress is being made toward an ultimate goal: to make sin easy to come by in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

There is the very real possibility that, in this forthcoming commission and at the next Session, a simple, quick vote will radically change chapter 15 of the *Church Manual*—as was done at Utrecht.

Pray that our people will stand by principle.