

Divorce, Remarriage and Adultery

by Gerald Winslow

Mr. Brown has been married for several years. Both he and his wife have been members of the SDA church in good and regular standing. Eventually, Mr. Brown "falls in love" with a younger, single SDA woman with whom he works. Mr. Brown divorces his wife and marries the second woman.

In 1973, just over 200 ministers responded to questions about this case.¹ Here are their answers tabulated in terms of percentages:

Would you ordinarily advise the local congregation to disfellowship Mr. Brown and his second wife?

95% Yes
4% No
1% no answer

Would you consider Mr. Brown and his second wife to be living in adultery as long as they continue living together?

72% Yes
20% No
8% no answer

Would you advise Mr. Brown to divorce his

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second wife and attempt reconciliation with his first wife?

43% Yes
42% No
15% no answer

If Mr. Brown and his second wife are disfellowshipped, can you envision a time when you might advise the local congregation to readmit them?

75% Yes
18% No
7% no answer

None of these questions is new. Problems of divorce and remarriage have always been an issue for Seventh-day Adventists. The presentation of a "Study Document on Divorce and Remarriage" at the last Annual Council² not only revealed substantial areas of agreement but also disclosed a number of unresolved problems.

My purpose here is to focus on an issue the "Study Document" does not discuss directly. It can be put in its starkest form by asking: When one has become divorced and remarried without "biblical grounds," is the second marriage a continual state of adultery as long as the first spouse remains alive, chaste and unmarried? I shall maintain that this question has been debated throughout the history of the denomination, and that it has never been adequately resolved. The article is *not* about church discipline (although it may have implications for

discipline). It discusses only the arguments for and against considering some second marriages to be in a state of "continual adultery."

The question of divorce has created severe disagreements during the history of the Christian faith.³ Hardly a teaching on divorce can be mentioned that has not been thoroughly disputed. And yet within Adventism, the degree of *concord* on several points has been remarkable. At least four of these deserve mention because of their relationship to the doctrine of continual adultery:

1. Divorce is sometimes necessary. The current denominational policy recognizes that "there may be conditions that make it unsafe or impossible for husband and wife to continue to live together."⁴

2. In those cases where divorce seems necessary but adultery is not involved, the divorced parties have no moral right to remarry. Even the so-called "Pauline privilege" (based on 1 Corinthians 7:15), which permits the Christian who has been divorced by an unbelieving spouse to remarry, is rejected by early Adventist leaders,⁵ by Ellen White⁶ and by the official denominational policy.⁷

3. Only the sin of adultery can dissolve the marriage and thus permit remarriage. This teaching is based on the words of Jesus: "Whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery." (Matthew 19:9; see also Matthew 5:32) This view was consistently expressed by early leaders,⁸ and it was often upheld by Ellen White.⁹

What in fact constitutes "unchastity" (*porneia* in Greek) has been discussed only rarely and superficially. For the sake of church discipline, Adventists have generally interpreted "unchastity" to mean only proven cases of physical adultery.¹⁰ (The "Study Document" notes that *porneia* has a broader meaning than adultery in the New Testament, and seems to argue for a view of "unchastity" that would, for example, include homosexuality.¹¹ Nevertheless, as the current policy stands, it would seem that only a proven case of adultery constitutes justifiable grounds for a divorce and remarriage.¹²)

4. In the case of a divorce obtained because of adultery, only the "innocent party" has the

moral right to remarry. Actually, as the official policy is stated, the "guilty party" has no moral right to remarry as long as the "innocent party" is alive and "remains unmarried and chaste."¹³ So the rule might be more accurately stated: Only the "innocent party" has the right to remarry *first*.

Other generally accepted teachings could also be mentioned, but these four should provide the necessary background for the discussion that follows.

Adventists have been struggling with the problem of second marriages for a long time. The first delegated business meeting of the first state conference of Seventh-day Adventists resulted in the following report:

Brother Sanborn brought before the meeting the following items, upon which he and the brethren in Illinois and Wisconsin wished the opinion of the Conference:

1. How shall we treat divorced marriages?

Bro. White calls for a full and clear definition of the expression "divorced marriages." Bro. Sanborn explains that he means by it, those who have been divorced from their former husbands or wives for other causes

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than mentioned by the Savior in Matthew xix, and under that divorce have married again. Shall such persons subsequently embracing present truth, be received among us?

1. Resolved, That the matter of divorced marriages be referred to the Conference committee.¹⁴

It is not unusual to refer questions to committees. But it may be some indication of the difficulty of this issue that no direct action was taken during the business meeting. Did the

conference committee later establish guidelines for cases of “divorced marriages?” Did the committee consider the cases of those who were already church members as well as those seeking to become members? Unfortunately, the actions of the committee are no longer extant, so far as I know. But apparently the issue was not definitively resolved.

Over 20 years later, G. I. Butler, then General Conference president, raised the issue of second marriages again.¹⁵ “In some instances,” he wrote, “husband and wife present themselves for membership both of whom have been divorced and entered new relations. Some of these cases involve great hardship, as they have children by second marriages and are living happily together. Shall such be received or rejected? Where shall the line be drawn?” After raising these questions, Butler decided not to answer them. He concluded that “each case must be considered on its own merits . . .” And he cautioned the church against being brought into disrepute by having overly lax membership requirements.

Later, it became commonplace to advocate that new members be accepted and given a “new start” without insisting on changes in marital status. For example, Uriah Smith wrote: “Take them [i.e. those in second marriages] as they are found, leaving these things that cannot be undone to the past . . .”¹⁶ To the present, this has remained the most prevalent stance toward candidates for membership in the denomination.¹⁷

But what about divorce and remarriage *within* the ranks? It might seem that acceptance of new members with second marriages would deny the doctrine of continual adultery. Surely, no one would favor accepting a candidate who is living in a “state of adultery!” Yet, curiously, many have held the doctrine of continual adultery and still have argued for admitting new members regardless of former marital irregularities.¹⁸ Does this mean that a first marriage established prior to church membership is not considered a valid marriage? Or does it mean that divorce and remarriage without biblical warrant can be forgiven those who were not church members at the time but cannot be forgiven those who were? Or is the

central concern not actually continual adultery but rather the reputation of the church? I must leave these questions unanswered—mostly because any attempt by me to answer them would be mainly guesswork. What is quite certain is that the divorce and remarriage of a member has always been the more problematic case. And it is in such cases that the doctrine of continual adultery has generally been applied.

Those who hold the doctrine of continual adultery usually argue that unbiblical second marriages are really not marriages at all: the first marriage is still in force, the second is nothing more than an adulterous relationship. Of course, if the “innocent spouse” of the first marriage loses innocence, or remarries, or dies, the first marriage can no longer be considered binding.

Paul’s use of divorce and remarriage to illustrate “being dead to the law” often figures importantly in the arguments for the teaching of continual adultery. “A married woman,” Paul writes, “is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive.” (Romans 7:2, 3 RSV) This text is interpreted as direct proof that Paul considers second marriages to be adulterous by definition. Additional support is also usually derived from 1 Corinthians 7, especially verses 10 and 11, and from Jesus’ words (Mark 10:11, 12; Luke 16:18; Matthew 5:32 and 19:9). These passages are understood to indicate that the Christian who has been divorced for reasons other than adultery has no moral right to remarry and that any second marriage without the grounds of adultery is itself adulterous.

Proponents of this view are likely to ask: If the Bible teaches that second marriages without proper warrant begin as adulterous relationships, when do such “marriages” cease to be adulterous? How can the passage of time, or the birth of children, or the apparent sincerity of repentance turn a continuing, adulterous relationship into a valid marriage? From this perspective, the obvious answer to these questions is that such adulterous “marriages” remain sinful until they are dissolved or the first spouse dies, commits adultery, or remarries.

Those who argue against the idea of continual

adultery generally begin with one major premise: Adultery *does* dissolve the original marriage. The main support comes from Jesus' prohibition of divorce "except on the ground of unchastity" (Matthew 19:9 and 5:32 RSV). Advocates of this view are likely to ask: How can a second marriage go on being a continual state of adultery when the first marriage has been disestablished by the act of adultery? From this viewpoint, the branding of a second marriage as being continually adulterous is tantamount to equating adultery with the unpardonable sin.

Long before the publication of any official guidelines on divorce and remarriage, church leaders were expressing their viewpoints. As with many other issues, Uriah Smith was one of the most influential. Early in his career, Smith spoke out against "extreme views" based on Romans 7:2, 3. Smith argued that Paul was "only giving us an illustration, and not laying down rules in regard to the marriage relation."¹⁹ In the same article Smith claimed that "the parties" who divorced because of adultery were "as free as if the marriage contract had never existed between them."

But as the years passed, Smith began to move toward what appears to have been the mainstream of Adventist opinion at that time. In his later writings, he consistently taught that only the "innocent party" has the right to remarry²⁰—a position shared by other Adventists.²¹ He also became a strong advocate for the doctrine of continual adultery. Answering one divorced and remarried correspondent, Smith said that only the "innocent party" could remarry without "living in adultery."²² If the questioner had remarried without having been the "innocent party" in a divorce caused by adultery, then "no church could receive him as a member while living in that condition."

Smith's answer must have stimulated some controversy. A month later, he wrote a second article.²³ He retreated from the position of rejecting prospective members because of second marriages. But he retained the doctrine of continual adultery. Referring to a woman who had remarried without biblical reasons, Smith wrote: "A marriage on her part is always, and ever after, an adulterous relation, so long as her first

husband is living." This statement seems to be representative of the prevalent thinking in the denomination during its early years.

In the following decades, articles on divorce continued to appear.²⁴ But little or nothing new was added to the earlier discussions.

To my knowledge, the first official action of the General Conference on divorce came in 1925. After noting the alarming rate of divorce in society and warning of the possibility that church members might become lax in their attitudes toward divorce, the following resolution was passed:

Resolved. That we greatly deplore the evil of divorce, and place our emphatic disapproval upon any legal action for the separation of those once married, on any grounds other than that given in Matthew 5:32.²⁵

The resolution obviously does not institute much in the way of a working policy. Most importantly, it says nothing about what should be done with offenders. But, in any event, it is unlikely that the denomination could be accused of being too "soft" on adultery. For example, the *Manual for Ministers* published in the same year indicates that a minister who commits adultery must be disfellowshipped and never again restored to the ministry.²⁶

In 1932, when the first *Church Manual* was published, it included the resolution from the

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1925 Annual Council.²⁷ The manual added that the church should always work for the reconciliation of a couple with marital difficulties—and cautioned against failing to reprove sin and disfellowship offenders. No doubt, the disfellowshipping of culprits was generally practiced during earlier years, but, so far as I know, this is the first official action requiring this procedure. The manual also forbade Adventist ministers to conduct weddings for any divorced person except the "innocent party" in a divorce for adultery.

The 1941 General Conference saw the need

for a clearer divorce policy. The executive committee of the General Conference was authorized to appoint a commission with the charge to study the issue of divorce and report to the Autumn Council.²⁸

Between the time when the commission was established and the Autumn Council, C. B. Haynes published an important article reaffirming the view that only adultery could break the marriage contract and that only the “innocent party” had the right to remarry.²⁹ He then made the following statement—a significant precursor for later policy:

In the case of the divorce of church members who have been separated by a decree which the church cannot recognize and who plan remarriage, this church must hold that they cannot properly remarry . . . They [i.e. those who do remarry after an unscriptural divorce] cannot be admitted to church membership unless they can find some way to regularize their status. There must be no compromise here.

The commission reported to the Autumn Council in 1942, and a six-point policy was enacted.³⁰ The policy repeats the long estab-

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lished denominational position of divorce and remarriage only on the grounds of adultery. A number of procedures, however, are more clearly delineated than in earlier statements. The fourth point is of particular interest here:

. . . A church member who is a guilty party to the divorce forfeits the right to marry another and the church does not recognize the right of the minister to officiate at such a marriage. Should such a person marry another, he must not be readmitted to church membership so long as the unscriptural relationship continues.

This point states officially for the first time the notion that the second marriage of the offender is a continual state of sin. It may seem

strange that a view which was obviously held by many in the church would take so long to become a part of official policy. Perhaps the view was so widely held that it was simply taken for granted. Or maybe official action was prevented in earlier years by those who disagreed with the position. What is certain is that this official formulation of the doctrine of continual adultery was relatively short-lived.

By the late 1940s, it is evident that a revision of the official policy was again being contemplated. In an editorial, F. M. Wilcox asked: Is there the danger that the standards of the church will be lowered to the level of the usages of the world around us? We believe this danger exists, and the church should be warned of it.³¹

Wilcox then included in his editorial the 1942 policy in total, and encouraged church members to uphold the standards. He emphatically stated that one who “continues to live in adultery” should not be readmitted to church membership. He said that the church would be condoning the “state of adultery” if it reinstated the offender who continued to live with a second spouse. As far as I know, this editorial is the last strong defense of the doctrine of continual adultery to appear in official denominational publications.

In 1949, A. V. Olson, then a vice president of the General Conference, began to research the issues of divorce and remarriage. His work resulted in a paper presented to a group of denominational leaders prior to the 1949 Spring Council.³² Olson argued that not only death but also adultery breaks the marriage union. If the marriage has thus been broken, Olson contended, it is inconsistent to say that the parties are not free to remarry. He asked rhetorically:

Does a chain that has been broken still bind?
Is a contract that has been annulled still in force?
Does a tie that has been dissolved still exist?

The inference from these questions seems to be that both parties are free to remarry—a position not often advocated in Adventism.

Olson then devoted a large portion of the paper to the issue of reinstating former members who had been disfellowshipped for divorce and remarriage. He said that the fact that the church

had at times readmitted such offenders was proof that the church did not really believe in the idea of continual adultery. He claimed that in all his research he had not found any support for the contention that a second marriage must be dissolved before the parties could demonstrate repentance and be restored to church membership. He also argued that the church must be consistent, and that if it lets new converts come into membership without breaking second marriages, then it must also allow the same right to former members. Olson then offered some suggestions for formulating a new

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policy on readmission of former members. The main points can be summarized as follows:

1. That a period of five years elapse after the remarriage before the application can be considered.
2. That the offenders acknowledge their former sins as grievous and a great disgrace to the church.
3. That they give evidence of genuine repentance.
4. That admittance be by rebaptism.
5. That where reinstatement might cause dissension in the church, the offender must wait indefinitely.

In 1950, the divorce policy in the *Church Manual* was revised.³³ (The policy then adopted is still in force.) The effect of Olson’s work is clearly in evidence. The key element of change is found in point number eight. It recognizes that for the “offender” to “bring his marital status into line with the divine ideal” may present “insuperable problems.” The policy then indicates a procedure which seems to allow for the readmission of former members who are truly repentant even though their second marriages are still intact. At least, it has been widely interpreted in this way. But does the policy actually relinquish the doctrine of continual adultery? Or are former members to be reinstated in spite of

the belief that they are “living in adultery?”

It seems clear that Olson won only part of his case. The door was opened (however slightly) for the readmission of offenders who continue in second marriages. But Olson’s rejection of the doctrine of continual adultery is not included. In fact, in a somewhat softer way than before, the present policy still seems to ask the offender to *try* to bring his or her marital status into harmony with the “divine ideal.” Does this mean leaving the second spouse and remaining single or returning to the first spouse? The present policy does not say. It is no exaggeration to say that the 1950 policy has perpetuated considerable confusion on these questions. For example, of the ministers who participated in the survey mentioned at the beginning of this article, only 51 percent thought that the present policy is “clear” or “understandable.”

Since 1950 some in the church have vigorously challenged the policy and called for a return to a clear-cut teaching on continual adultery.³⁴ Others have presented views akin to Olson’s and against the doctrine of continual adultery.³⁵

The “Study Document” currently being discussed moves further toward establishing procedures for readmitting offenders. It says, for example, that the applicant should reveal true repentance, confess wrongdoing and make “such restitution as lies within his power.”³⁶ But it is recognized that the reunion of the first marriage may be “inadvisable or impracticable.”³⁷ A number of similarities could be noted between Olson’s 1949 paper and the present document. For example, an applicant must wait a minimum of five years after his or her offense before being considered for readmission. According to the document, this time is needed so that the offender can reveal “the reality of a renewed Christian experience, the healing of wounds caused by the dissolution of the former marriage, and for demonstrating the stability of a new home, in the case of remarriage.”³⁸ If the “Study Document” points the way for the future, it does not appear that the doctrine of continual adultery will soon be revived.

But what should be the way for the future? No good purpose is served either by ignoring the issues associated with the doctrine

of continual adultery or pretending they do not exist. Many church members (perhaps even a majority) firmly believe in the doctrine of continual adultery. Continuing to develop guidelines for readmitting persons involved in second marriages without carefully addressing the issue of continual adultery seems likely to perpetuate misunderstanding. The widest possible study and discussion should be sought within the church. Toward that end, I will briefly (and rather tentatively) state and show the basis for my own conclusions.

I am convinced that the weight of the inspired evidence is against the doctrine of continual adultery. The Old Testament clearly does not have such a teaching. The adulterers among the Hebrews did not “continue”; they were put to death (Leviticus 20:10)! When the main Old Testament statement about divorce (Deuteronomy 24: 1-4) is properly translated, as it is in the Revised Standard Version, it serves primarily to condemn the practice of a husband’s taking back a former wife if she had remarried.

Jesus went beyond the Mosaic law of divorce and restated the divine ideal of monogamous marriage for life (Mark 10:11, 12). But, according to Matthew’s version of the teaching, Jesus also recognized that unchastity (*porneia*) disrupts human relationships and shatters the bond of marriage (Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 RSV). Jesus makes it clear that the remarriage of any who have divorced for causes other than unchastity constitutes adultery. But if unchastity breaks the marriage union, then the doctrine of continual adultery is inconsistent and untrue. Adultery is a sin against an existing marriage. If a former marriage has been destroyed, it makes no sense to speak of the continual adultery of the second marriage. This is *not* to say that Jesus condones second marriages any more than He condones adultery! But I believe that no doctrine of *continual* adultery can be found in the words of Jesus.

The early Uriah Smith was right when he said that some have held “extreme views” based on Romans 7. ³⁹ Paul had no intention of establishing a prescriptive teaching about divorce and remarriage. He used existing marriage law to illustrate the truth about the Christian’s “death to the law.” It is as erroneous to interpret Paul’s illustration normatively as it is to understand Jesus’ story about the rich man and Lazarus

(Luke 16:19-31) as a statement about the human condition in death.

Ellen White consistently maintained that “there is only one sin, which is adultery, which can place the husband or wife in a position where they can be free from the marriage vow in the sight of God.”⁴⁰ But at no time did she endorse the doctrine of continual adultery.

In 1891 Ellen White sent a letter to an Adventist minister which aids in understanding the position which she taught. The minister had advised a couple to separate because one had formerly been divorced for reasons other than

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adultery. Here is a portion of Ellen White’s counsel:

You have asked my counsel in regard to this case; I would say that unless those who are burdened in reference to the matter have carefully studied a better arrangement, and can find places for those where they can be comfortable, they better not carry out their ideas of a separation. I hope to learn that this matter is not pressed and sympathy will not be withdrawn from the two whose interests have been united.

... I advise that these unfortunate ones be left to God and their own consciences, and that the church shall not treat them as sinners until they have evidence that they are such in the sight of Holy God. He reads the hearts as an open book. He will not judge as man judgeth. ⁴¹

It seems quite incredible to say that Ellen White could advise the church *not* to urge the couple to separate, *not* to withdraw its sympathy, and *not* to “treat them as sinners,” and still hold that the couple was living in adultery.

Another case that deserves mention concerns a young Adventist minister whose first marriage

developed difficulties. The man, referred to as M,⁴² attended Battle Creek College and then entered the ministry. He held ministerial credentials in 1890 and 1891. By 1891, M was having serious marital problems with his first wife who has been described as “domineering.” M became infatuated with another woman, divorced his first wife and married the second woman. M then lost his ministerial credentials and was disfellowshipped.

For several years, M and his second wife continued to drift away from Adventism. Then, about 1900, they apparently repented and sought reinstatement in the church. During this entire time, M’s first wife remained unmarried.

It was M’s own father and brother (both ministers, I have been told) who tried to convince M that he should not continue to live with his second wife. The father began to stir up trouble for M and his second wife who by now had both been readmitted to church membership. It was this situation that made it necessary for Ellen White to write the following letter in 1901:

I have just read your letter concerning M. I regard the matter in the same light that you do, and think it a cruel, wicked thing that the father of M should take the course that he is taking . . . I would say that his [i.e. M’s] case cannot be improved by leaving the present wife. It would not better the case to go to the other woman in the question.

I consider the case of the father one that is singular, and his record is one that he will not be pleased to meet in the day of God. He needs to repent, before God, of his spirit and his works. The best thing for him to do is to cease to stir up strife . . . Let the father and brother make diligent work for themselves. They both need the converting power of God. May the Lord help these poor souls to remove spot and stain from their own characters, and repent of their wrongs, and leave M with the Lord.

I am sorry for this man; for his course is in such a shape that it will not answer to be meddled with, for there are difficulties upon difficulties. I would say that the Lord understands the situation, and if M will seek Him with all his heart, He will be found of him. If he will do his best, God will pardon and receive him.

M may hope in God and do the best he can to serve God in all humility of mind, casting his helpless soul upon the great Sin Bearer . . . I would gladly do something to help poor M to make things right, but this cannot be done as matters are now situated, without someone’s being wronged.⁴³

Ellen White certainly saw that M’s case could not be made fully “right.” But she also saw that if M “will do his best, God will pardon and receive him . . .” And in the words of the first paragraph, M’s “best” would be to remain with his second wife. M’s “case cannot be improved by leaving the present wife,” according to Ellen White. Even though such a second marriage is seen to be tragically short of God’s ideal, no support can be found in this counsel for the doctrine of continual adultery.

Apparently, the church accepted the repentance of M and his second wife as genuine. M is listed as an Adventist minister in the 1904 edition of the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*.⁴⁴ Other evidence indicates that M was a very effective laborer for souls and that he was instrumental in establishing some large churches in the locale where he worked.

M’s problems, however, were not yet over. Eventually, dissension arose over M’s reinstatement to the church. After 1905, M’s name never again appears in the yearbook as a minister. M did, however, continue a highly successful work as a lay evangelist and colporteur. The problem of M’s status finally reached such a point that it caused the local conference president to write to W. C. White asking if his mother, Ellen White, had any counsel on the case.⁴⁵ The president explained that M had demonstrated “wonderful ability” and had given evidence of “deep consecration.” The problem which the conference officers found most perplexing was whether or not M should be restored to the ministry.

The query was answered by W. C. White on behalf of his mother who was in poor health at the time. One portion of his reply is particularly instructive:

Mother says that those who have dealt with the perplexities arising from his many transgressions in the past, should take the responsibility of advising regarding our present duty toward him. Mother does not

wish to take large responsibility in this matter; but she says regarding M as she has said regarding other men in a somewhat similar position; if they have thoroughly repented, if they are living such lives as convince their brethren that they are thoroughly in earnest, do not cut them off from fellowship, do not forbid their working for Christ in a humble capacity, but do not elevate them to positions of responsibility.⁴⁶

At a later time, Ellen White wrote at the bottom of a copy of this letter: "This is correct advice in such cases. Let him walk humbly before God. I see no light in giving him responsibilities."⁴⁷

It is clear that Ellen White followed the progress of this case for many years. On at least two occasions, she offered counsel. She was certainly aware of the fact that M and his second wife had been readmitted to membership. If ever there was a case in which the doctrine of continual adultery could be applied, it would seem to be this one. M's father and brother made just such an application. But it is quite obvious that Ellen White did not.

Other examples could be cited and other points made in establishing the case against the doctrine of continual adultery. But perhaps enough has been said in one article. It should be apparent to anyone who has had the tenacity to read this far that neither quick nor facile solutions will be forthcoming for many of the problems which have been discussed here. If I have succeeded in sharpening the discussion about the doctrine of continual adultery, then the effort will not have been fruitless.

Numerous unanswered questions remain. How broadly should Jesus' phrase, "except for unchastity," be interpreted? For example, is homosexuality included? Is "incurable" insanity justifiable grounds for divorce and remarriage? Is desertion? Much scholarly labor is needed in order to even begin answering these and many other questions.

Finally, I must add that nothing I have written should be interpreted as a call to "liberalize" attitudes toward divorce and remarriage. There is no evidence for such "liberalization." The sin of adultery is committed by many who divorce and remarry. And if they fail to repent and confess their sin, they go on "living in sin." In its personal and social destructiveness, adultery can

be compared with the most heinous of sins. But we must never forget that the Good News offers forgiveness for *all* sins—even adultery. Although God is willing to forgive all sins, for some reason (which I will let others explain) it seems to be especially difficult for humans to forgive adultery. Many find even murder easier to forgive than adultery. (In fact, some repentant murderers have nearly been made folk heroes!) No one would think of asking a murderer to resurrect the victim in order to make restitution. And yet to ask a person to revive a "dead" marriage, especially after another marriage has been established, would seem equally unthinking. How much better it would be in many cases if we would repeat the words of Ellen White to one who had made the mistake of divorce and remarriage: "... the Lord understands the situation, and if M will seek Him with all his heart, He will be found of him. If he will do his best, God will pardon and receive him."⁴⁸

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. This survey was conducted by Robert W. Gardner and the writer in 1973. Questionnaires were mailed to 324 ministers who represent the total number of ministers in the union where the study was done; 204 ministers returned the questionnaires—a response rate of 63%. No inferences should be drawn from these data for the general population of Adventist ministers. The data represent only the responses of one group of ministers in one union in the spring of 1973.
2. This meeting was held at Loma Linda University, October 9-17, 1974. The "Study Document on Divorce and Remarriage: North America" (hereinafter cited as "Study Document") was presented and then referred to the President's Executive Advisory for further study. A report of the action may be found in the "1974 Annual Council Actions Pertaining to the North American Division" printed by the General Conference, p. 15.
3. For an excellent presentation of the discussions on divorce during the Reformation, see V. Norskov Olsen, *The New Testament Logia on Divorce: A Study of Their Interpretation from Erasmus to Milton*, Vol. X: *Beiträge zur Geschichte Der Biblischen Exegese* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1971).
4. *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1967), p. 254. Hereinafter cited as *Church Manual*.
5. For example, see G. C. Tenney, "Marriage and Divorce," *Review and Herald*, LXXI (October 30, 1894), 681.
6. Ellen White, Letter 4a, 1863 in *The Adventist Home* (Nashville, Tennessee: Southern Publishing Association, 1952), p. 344.
7. *Church Manual*, pp. 253-56. For a discussion by a conservative scholar on the "Pauline privilege," see G. W. Peters, *Divorce and Remarriage* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), pp. 14-18.

8. For example, see G. W. Morse, "Scripture Questions," *Review and Herald*, LXIII (August 17, 1886), 531.
9. Ellen White, *loc. cit.*
10. Uriah Smith, "To Correspondents," *Review and Herald*, LIV (September 4, 1879), 84.
11. "Study Document," p. 12.
12. The *Church Manual* (p. 253, ff.) consistently uses the phrase "unfaithfulness to the marriage vow." Although the manual does not define precisely what constitutes such "unfaithfulness," the context seems clearly to indicate that adultery is the intended meaning.
13. *Church Manual*, p. 254.
14. Joseph Bates, "Business Proceedings of the Michigan State Conference," *Review and Herald*, XX (October 14, 1862), 157.
15. George I. Butler, "Marriage and Divorce," *Review and Herald*, LX (December 18, 1883), p. 785, 786.
16. Uriah Smith, "Divorce and Marriage," *Review and Herald*, LXIV (February 8, 1887), 89.
17. For example, see "Study Document," p. 5.
18. For example, see Uriah Smith, *loc. cit.*
19. Uriah Smith, "Divorce," *Review and Herald*, XIX (April 15, 1862), 160.
20. Uriah Smith, "To Correspondents," *Review and Herald*, LIV (September 4, 1879), 84.
21. For example, see G. W. Morse, *loc. cit.*
22. Uriah Smith, "Divorce and Marriage," *Review and Herald*, LXIV (January 11, 1887), 32.
23. Uriah Smith, "Divorce and Marriage," *Review and Herald*, LXIV (February 8, 1887), 89.
24. For example, see F. M. Wilcox, "The Divorce Evil," *Review and Herald*, XCIII (January 2, 1916), 5, 6.
25. "On Divorce," *Review and Herald*, CII (November 26, 1925), 14.
26. *Manual for Ministers* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1925), p. 8.
27. *Church Manual* (Washington, D.C., General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1932), p. 175, 176.
28. "Proceedings of the General Conference," *Review and Herald*, CXVIII (June 12, 1941), 261.
29. C. B. Haynes, "Divorce," *Review and Herald*, CXIX (January 8, 1942), 6.
30. "Divorce," *Review and Herald*, CXIX (December 3, 1942), 10.
31. F. M. Wilcox, "The Question of Divorce," *Review and Herald*, CXXV (January 15, 1948), 3.
32. A. V. Olsen, "The Divorce Question," a paper presented on April 5, 1949, at a meeting of the General Conference officers and the North American union presidents.
33. This revised policy first appeared as "Divorce and Remarriage in Relation to Church Membership," *Review and Herald*, CXXVII (July 23, 1950), 228, 29. The policy has subsequently been incorporated in the various editions of the *Church Manual*.
34. Marguirite Williams and Roy O. Williams, *Unscriptural Divorce and Social Relationships* (4th ed. rev.; Tucson, Arizona: by the authors, 1956).
35. For example, see R. R. Bietz, "The Minister's Calling, Work and Responsibility," *Ministry Magazine*, XXVII (September 1954), 17.
36. "Study Document," p. 4.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
39. *Supra*, p. 5.
40. Ellen White, Letter 4a, 1863, in *The Adventist Home*, p. 344.
41. Ellen White, Letter 5, 1891.
42. Some of the information about this individual's life comes from his obituary which was written by H. H. Hamilton, "Asleep in Jesus," *Review and Herald*, CXI (September 27, 1934), 21. Some additional information has come to me from people who were acquainted with this person.
43. Ellen White, Letter 175, 1901, in *Selected Messages*, Vol. II, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), p. 341, 342.
44. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1904), p. 134.
45. C. F. McVagh, Letter written August 15, 1911 from Nashville, Tennessee.
46. W. C. White, Letter written September 15, 1911 from Sanitarium, California.
47. See document file 294 of the E. G. White Estate's vault at Andrews University.
48. Ellen White, Letter 175, 1901, in *Selected Messages*, Vol. II, p. 341, 342.