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THE SERVICE OF THE DIVORCED AND REMARRIED

Introduction

After months of study, reflection, counseling and wishing I had never consented to write this paper, I concluded the appropriate response might be akin to that of Albert Einstein on one occasion. He was invited to be the guest of honor and speaker at a banquet where distinguished intellectuals were present. When called upon to speak, he approached the podium slowly amidst generous applause, and said quietly: "Ladies and gentlemen, I'm sorry, but I have nothing to say." After allowing a stifling silence to sweep over the audience, he added: "But when I do, I'll come back." But not confident of having more to say later, I dare to venture out on a virtually uncharted course.

The bookshelves and magazine racks are replete with treatises on the problems of marriage and the rightness and/or wrongness of divorce and remarriage. There is a remarkable paucity, however, of literature that speaks to the question assigned to me: what service can the divorced and remarried perform in the church? Most recent literature does not even address that question.

In a recent survey of eleven major denominations in the United States, divorce and remarriage among clergymen were studied. Not one of the denominations indicated that, generally speaking, a divorced pastor would be forced to leave the pastoral ministry. Not even one denomination suggested a divorced pastor would have to leave his local congregation, though the survey suggested that such pastors usually do change pastorates immediately or shortly after the divorce. On the question of remarriage, only one denomination (Assemblies of God) reported that a divorced and remarried clergyman loses his pastoral credentials.

The survey report cited above is intended only to show that, even within the ministry, more divorces are occurring, such actions do not disqualify the preacher (let alone laypersons), and denominations generally have either become very silent

or incapable of dealing with the issue. An Episcopal priest said that "the canons of the Episcopal Church made it almost impossible for Episcopal clergy to divorce and remarry. But the church's taking a hard line didn't make much of a difference. It was happening anyway . . . even though excommunication was the response in some instances. In 1973 the church changed its stance."¹

My assignment assumes divorce, remarriage and church membership and asks the question about what service opportunities should be available to such members. Previous Mennonite Brethren conference resolutions have established the fact that we acknowledge the reality of divorce and the acceptance of the divorced into our congregations. With less unanimity we have also conceded that remarriage by believers does not necessarily disqualify those persons from church membership.

We have given far less study and probably will find significantly less consensus on the degree to which the divorced and remarried can serve in the church. I accept the hazard of taking a position on the assigned subject. My views arise out of honest conviction, but also with enough humility to concede that, given better evidence than I have gathered, I stand ready to consider alternative approaches. The beginning of any good discussion is when someone offers a statement which he or she believes has some validity. Subsequent discussion may move in different directions from that statement, but the stimulation and basis for conversation is at least present.

I. The Biblical View of Divorce and Remarriage

While the subject assigned deals with service, two things are rather evident: (1) the scriptures hardly address the question of service and (2) the view of service depends largely on our biblical view of divorce and remarriage. Any conclusions, therefore, have to be made on the basis of principles derived from the Bible as the Word speaks to divorce and remarriage. For that reason I will review the

major scriptural principles on divorce and remarriage in the Old and New Testaments.

I am prepared to contend that the Old Testament, Jesus and Paul basically agree on the matter of divorce and remarriage to the following extent:

- 1) The Old Testament, Jesus and Paul maintain the ideal of permanence in marriage.
- 2) The Old Testament, Jesus and Paul recognize people's failure to live up to the ideals of marriage.
- 3) Matthew, Paul and Jesus (at least by actions) allow for redemptive acceptance of divorce in spite of the creative idealism espoused by both the Old and New Testaments.

A. Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament

Divorce was a common experience in the Hebraic society of the Old Testament. Nowhere in the Pentateuch is there a law where God prohibits divorce. It seems, rather, that He tolerated and permitted it, and also gave permission for remarriage once a woman received a bill of divorcement. The Deuteronomic code says that the woman to whom a bill of divorcement has been written is free to remarry.

If the above were not true, there would have been no need for passages such as Leviticus 22:13, 21:14, Numbers 30:9, Deuteronomy 22:19, 28-29 and 24:1-4. Prophetic passages such as Malachi 2:13-16 imply that divorce was all too common. The metaphorical passages (Jeremiah 3:1-8; Isaiah 50:1; Hosea) would lead us to believe that divorce was common. Divorce seems to be taken for granted. This is not to say that it was looked upon with favor, but it was prevalent among the Hebrews.

Careful study indicates that while God never forsook his creation-stance on the sanctity of marriage, the legislation in the Old Testament regarding divorce was

an attempt to control divorce in such a way as to humanize the practice. Some contend that nowhere in the Old Testament do we find legislation that prohibits divorce for laypersons. Even the chief Old Testament passage on divorce (Dt. 24), when viewed properly, does not establish a general law regarding divorce, but rather forbids a person returning to a first spouse after having been divorced from a second. Curiously enough, even that law finds little support elsewhere in the Old Testament. No reference to that law is made when David asks that his former wife be restored to him (2 Sam. 3:14-16) and she had been married to another. Nor is there any hint of the application of this law in the story of Hosea, where he is asked to go and reunite himself with the adulterous Gomer, though she is loved by another man now.

The Deuteronomy passage does not make divorce mandatory, nor does it give official sanction to the practice. It does recognize divorce to be a permissible action on the part of the husband. Divorce was practiced; custom dictated that only the husband had the right to initiate divorce; there had to be some grounds for the dissolution; and the woman was free to remarry after having been divorced.

It is startling to learn for instance, that the Old Testament lays down regulations concerning diet, but fails either to institute divorce or forbid it. It needs to be said again that the practice of divorce is nowhere officially instituted. The right to remarry is nowhere officially granted. But such legislation as there was is an attempt to humanize divorce and remarriage practices. God was, as He always is, eager to protect the dignity of the powerless. The legislation about divorce was basically for the protection of the woman.

In summary, the Hebrews held a very high view of marriage, and in so doing they were faithful to God. In practice, divorce and remarriage occurred repeatedly, and God was not pleased. In short, a separation of the oneness of the married couple was not only allowable but apparently frequent.

B. Divorce and Remarriage As Seen by Jesus

In passages such as Mark 10:2-9 and Matthew 19:3-8 we find Jesus emphasizing God's intention in creation for the institution of marriage. Jesus replies to the summary of the Old Testament view of divorce, in His conversation with the Pharisees, with a powerful assertion of the divine intent for marriage. He brazenly explains the Old Testament reason for granting divorces by saying it was a compromising action, based in the inability of humans to fulfill the true intent of God.

As in the Old Testament, Jesus in the New leaves no doubt about the sanctity of marriage. But again, as does the Old Testament, Jesus is concerned with the human values that were being ignored in the first century divorce practices. He was concerned with the dignity of the woman as well as with the law of God. The divorce regulations of Moses dealt the women of the society a terrible injustice.

More importantly, however, Jesus directs attention away from the question of whether or not divorce is justifiable and focuses rather on God's purposes expressed in creation. Jesus insisted that people remember the nature of true marriage---that it is an intimate relationship in which two individuals are so united as to become a single entity. Jesus left no doubt that marriage was to be an inviolable unity.

But Jesus also closed this conversation with the Pharisees by saying: "What God has joined together, man must not separate." With that statement He recognized the power of human error. He knew that because of human confusion and failures (sin) there is always the possibility of the separation of the divinely intended unity. The prohibition against divorce is a call to fulfill the divine will, but He acknowledges the possibility of failure.

Why was Jesus so silent (except for the "exception clause" in Matthew) about what to do when people fail to keep the divine law? Why no more counsel about remarriage? We don't find the Bible commanding or legislating on subideal behavior. The God who

pronounces the highest and noblest ideals cannot legislate lower and lesser ideals. He may well allow people to operate on subideal levels, but we ought never to expect Him to give us directions based on standards below His ideals.

Jesus never lowered His ideals. Nor were those idealistic teachings merely descriptions of an ethic for a utopian world of the future. Those ideals were meant to be actualized by us in our time. To realize the full sovereignty of God means, for instance, to love not just your friends but also your enemies. And when it came to marriage, Jesus maintained that if we live faithfully under His rule, divorce will be out of the question.

Jesus' teachings on marriage and divorce were part of His insistence that people should not smugly equate human practices with divine will. On the other hand, His words reveal a gracious acceptance and love of the prodigal. What we find in Jesus' words is a pronouncement of the radical demands of God on the one hand, and the radical acceptance of God on the other. Jesus painted the will of God concerning marriage vividly. But along with that vivid portrait of the will of God is an equally brilliant presentation of the limitless, unending love of God. We must never read His words blind to either of those two aspects.

The words of Jesus about divorce and remarriage stress the divine intention for humanity. We have tended to make law out of those words. Jesus did not do that. We must be holy, as God is holy. That is His goal for us. We must not divorce and remarry. His goal for us is that marriage is indissoluble. But let it never be forgotten that divine forgiveness and acceptance are available for marriage failures. When we become angry or hate, we do not simply settle for the fact that we are guilty of murder. We think rather that God understands our failure and offers us His forgiveness. So with divorce---it is sin, but forgiveable. And with forgive-

ness comes the opportunity for a new beginning. That new beginning sometimes means the opportunity to remarry.

C. Divorce and Remarriage As Seen by Paul

Paul was neither a systematic theologian nor a systematic expositor of Christian ethics. Above all else he was a practical missionary. As a practical theologian he dealt with divorce and remarriage on a pastoral level. He has three passages in which he speaks to divorce and remarriage. In Romans 7:2-3 Paul speaks of the obligation of a married woman to her husband. By implication Paul suggests that marriage is a lifetime obligation. He recognizes death as freeing the woman to remarry. His silence in this text regarding divorce suggests it is not a means by which such an obligation is terminated. But keeping this passage in context, Paul is plainly discussing the freedom of the Christian from the law, and simply uses the marriage picture as an illustration of his major point. It can hardly then become a proof text regarding divorce and remarriage.

The second teaching of Paul regarding divorce and remarriage is found in I Tim. 3:2 and 12 and Titus 1:6. He suggests one of the qualities of bishops, elders and deacons to be "faithful to one wife." Obviously the phrase suggests that these leaders not be guilty of adultery. But that the phrase prohibits having been married twice, either because of death or remarriage after divorce, is not at all clear. Surely it does not prevent an unmarried person to serve. Too many assumptions, perhaps even outright guesses, have to be made to infer anything absolute about the Apostle's attitude toward divorce and remarriage from these words.

This leaves us with I Corinthians 7, and particularly vv. 10-16. Myrna and Robert Kysar² suggest that to read and attempt to understand a few verses (like vv. 10-16) ripped out of the page is like trying to ride a bicycle wheel that has been removed from the bike! It is to miss the whole meaning that was intended in the creation

of the passage. I Corinthians is a problem-centered letter. Chapter 7 in general deals with the broad question of the relationship of the sexes in the light of Christian convictions regarding the final days.

We may wish to discuss these words in more detail, but let me suggest what I believe are the major concerns of Paul in the passage. It is obvious he wants to forbid divorce. Paul feels divorce is not desirable for the Christian. "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives." Marriage is a permanent relationship. Moreover, Paul desires to eliminate the possibility of remarriage. If divorce occurs, the woman should remain single. Divorce does not free one to marry. On the other hand, the Apostle recognizes one exception to his own prohibition: if the unbelieving partner desires divorce, the Christian spouse should allow it. Like Matthew, Paul has an exception---but the exception is different!

Paul, along with Matthew (who also wrote from a pastoral view), shows us that the Early Church did not take the words of Jesus as absolute, legalistic regulation. They practiced what some have called "interpretative freedom." They did so not out of disregard for Jesus' words, but out of concern for the human lives of the Christians of their time.

Perhaps even more significant in interpreting this passage is the reason for Paul's sometimes strange advice. Please be aware that most of us would be single if we followed this text strictly. Paul's words about marriage, divorce and remarriage were given because of some radical change already prevailing or expected soon. It is quite possible that the special circumstances causing Paul to give advice on marriage here was his expectation of the Lord's return very soon. So he felt no one should marry who was single. Nor should anyone unhappily married divorce because it wouldn't be long until he was delivered by Christ's appearance. Remove that eschatological view of history and we might have some different words from Paul.

Paul maintained that marriage was sacred and inviolable. His other teachings would indicate, however, that observance of the divorce and remarriage regulations *was* not a matter of salvation. Paul believed that sin was pardoned by God's grace alone. To become entangled in a destructive marital relationship and seek release from it by divorce is sin. It violates God's intention for marriage. But Paul, I believe, would say that like all sin, the sin of marital failure and divorce is pardonable.

Some of his words indicate that sexual sins may have a note of seriousness about them that other sins do not (I Cor. 6:18), but Paul would say that such sins are another expression of the human inclination to distort God's creative will and misdirect one's own life. The tenor of Paul's message would lead me to believe that he saw the gospel as good news of an open future---a future shaped not by what has been but by what can be. That message logically implies that failure of a past marriage can be buried in God's forgiveness and I venture to say it implies even the promise of a new beginning through a second marriage.

So in Paul we find what we discovered in the Old Testament and in Jesus' words. All stress that divorce and remarriage are never the original desire of God. All view divorce as a violation of God's intention for marriage. But all contend that where God's creation is distorted by human sin, that sin can be pardoned by a just but loving God. Everywhere we find the realism that divorce is a violation of God's intention, but it will occur.

What have we heard the Bible say? Marriage is sacred. It is not to be put asunder. But sin distorts God's original intention for life. Divorce is a part of that total human fallenness. What is sin is that the unity for which marriage was created has not been accomplished. That, in turn, means that the couple that lives together without progress toward spiritual union, but struggles on in a destructive relationship afraid of the act of divorce, is as guilty of sin as the divorced. They, too, have failed to realize God's purpose for marriage and that is sin. Hiding behind a

marital failure does not excuse a couple from having failed to achieve the purpose of God for marriage.

I trust we have also heard the Bible say that marriage was made for humans, not humans for marriage. The divorce regulation was made for human well-being. Those regulations were intended to protect and nurture marriage as a spiritual union. Humans must not be enslaved to the letter of that regulation. Jesus wasn't nor was Paul.

II. The Practical Applications of the Scriptures to the Service of the Divorced and Remarried

The crux of the matter is this: how can the church proclaim on the one hand that the will of God for marriage is permanence, and at the same time extend the forgiving grace of God to those who have experienced the dissolution of marriage? How can the church offer forgiveness and the opportunity for service without implying approval of the wrong that has been committed?

The Kysars have suggested that the intent of God for creation and the intent of God for redemption may be viewed as the two wings of a bird which work together to allow the bird to soar above the earth. The Church's attitude, they suggest, toward the divorced and remarried too often reminds one of the bird that tries to fly with only one wing. It flaps its one wing vigorously, but can succeed only in hopping along on the ground. If we utilize the wing of regulations and legalism concerning divorce and remarriage, but do not apply the forgiveness of a gracious God and allow membership and service, are we grounding the "bird" that was meant to fly?

I like the analogy suggested by someone---the two truths of the intention of God in creation (permanence in marriage) and the intention of God in redemption (forgiveness even for divorce and remarriage, and opportunity for service) function like the two tracks of a stereo sound system. Each produces its legitimate theme,

coming at the individual from two different directions, but together blending into one full and complete production.

I am not confident that the Mennonite Brethren Church nor I have found the courage and the grace to allow both tracks of the stereo to produce its legitimate theme. We have historically taken a position similar to that of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, stated as follows in the 1975 Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance:

We express our unalterable opposition to divorce on any other than positive Scriptural grounds.

Divorced persons who are remarried should not be elected or appointed to national offices or be given The Christian and Missionary Alliance credentials or Christian workers' certificates.

In local churches divorced persons who are remarried should not be elected or appointed to the position of elder or deacon.³

While reserving judgment at this point in the paper on the service of divorced and remarried persons on pastoral staffs, I am inclined to propose that without relenting at all on our commitment to the sanctity of marriage, and in view of the Bible's relative silence on the service of those who have not been able to live up to the ideal, we need to consider seriously extending the forgiveness of God more often than we have in the past. I accept R. V. G. Tasker's remarks as follows rather perceptively:

"No fixed rules therefore about divorce could possibly have been given which were equally capable of being applied to Christians in the first and in the twentieth centuries. The only static factors are, first, that the divine ideal for the relationship of men and woman remain the same, and secondly, that men and women remain the same frail creatures who often find it extremely difficult to achieve in a particular marriage relationship the unity which could alone be truthfully described as 'a joining together by God!' Jesus, we may surely believe, expects His followers, far from perfect themselves, to recognize this frailty, and to treat it with sympathy; and it may well be that all who fail to do so have not yet fully learned the lesson of the story of Jesus and the woman taken in adultery found in John 8:1-11."⁴

We must not accept words such as these to imply that the church bows to whatever is convenient. The church can accept no law but the law of Christ. We dare not be found witnessing to anything less than the highest divine intention for people in every area of life. And yet, while we carry that idealism in our witness to a sinful world, the church must deal with the human situation here and now. This, in my mind, means sympathizing and dealing realistically with those who have been overtaken in faults and caught in the depths of despair because of sin.

Henry Poettcker has expressed this belief in these words:

"As with many areas, be they race, or alcoholism . . . so also with marriage, the church is constantly called upon to face the question of how far she must adjust her action to the failures of sinful men to attain the divine intention. Every time we say that we need to get back to the principles of the Early Church, we are acknowledging that we have adjusted through past failures, or that we have slipped from the higher ideal."⁵

We need to instill in the minds of God's people that God is not only a sovereign, holy God who reenacts Mt. Sinai dramas causing people to be fearful and trembling; they need also to know that He is the God of Calvary who bids all men to come just as they are. Perhaps the words of C. S. Lovett are a bit strong, but they speak to our question:

"What a horrible inconsistency to say, 'Come,' and then throw up a barricade of thorns in the path of those with unfortunate marriage records. How many families have suffered hurt because of this ungracious procedure . . . The story is even more unlovely when the divorced person shares an equal status with the gossipers, the hot-tempered deacons and elders, and the critical church gatherers . . ."⁶

A strong possibility exists that divorced and remarried people in the church, prohibited from service, can never sense the forgiveness that ought to be transmitted through the family of believers. One person said: "I began feeling human again when I began doing work in the church, even though it was menial work. When I was forced to be with people, it was then I felt a part of the congregation. It is important to do things with people." Few or none of us would separate ourselves in friendship and

On the other hand, Jesus met people where they were. He met you and me "while we were yet sinners." Are we prepared to maintain that He refuses to meet people where they are in their marital failures when He acted so graciously to an admittedly adulterous woman? I am prepared to say that Christ accepts the genuinely repentant for service in the church, even when divorce and remarriage have occurred.

One further question eventually will be asked: does this principle of acceptance pertain to ordained ministers as well as laypersons? Can a divorced and remarried person continue in or enter the ministry in the Mennonite Brethren Church? Could a pastor who divorces and is remarried while serving one of our congregations ever be allowed to remain in the pastoral ministry? I have to confess that my emotions cause me to answer negatively to such questions. Moreover, I cannot escape the fact that in principle, in the Old Testament, God at times demanded forfeiture of service because of sins. David, because of much shedding of blood, was not allowed to build the temple. Moses, because he struck the rock instead of speaking to it, was prevented from entering the Promised Land.

I accept those examples as bases for a principle concerning forfeiture of service. There is, however, another issue we must face. If we draw a line between laypersons and the clergy with reference to service of the divorced and remarried, (as I am inclined to do) what are we saying about our view of the priesthood of all believers? Are we contradicting one aspect of our theology that maintains that we do not place those designated as leaders on a different plain than non-leaders or laypersons? Are we saying something about "authority" that is not really consistent with our theological moorings? Is one rule for the clergy and a different rule for laypersons on the matter of service for the divorced and remarriage a violation of a basic doctrine of our church? On the other hand, Paul obviously sets specific ethical requirements for pastors and deacons. Perhaps a previous paper and discussion at this conference ("Leadership Styles for Our Churches") will have helped clarified this dilemma for us.

Having ventured to say that we should, assuming repentance has taken place, make it possible for the divorced and remarried to serve in the church, and, suggesting with some hesitation that consistency might force us to extend that privilege of service even to those in the pastoral ministry, I want to make one further suggestion.

I would like to propose that we encourage people and congregations not to make final, definitive decisions regarding service of the divorced and remarried too soon in individual cases. I would like to see us encourage those persons entangled in the obviously sinful process of divorce and remarriage to retreat or withdraw voluntarily from active service for a period of time. The time period would vary with the individual case. This suggestion comes because experience teaches me that no one (neither the people involved in divorce nor the congregation having to deal with them) is emotionally prepared to handle the matter objectively at the time of the traumatic event. I have seen how divorced persons (who also remarried) began to see the sinfulness of their past actions much more clearly after some time had elapsed.

The best arguments against divorce's sinfulness and desperate consequences, in my experience, have come from people who, with time, were able to reflect on what had happened. Too often such insights are not possible in the heat of the problem. I would therefore plead for a self-imposed period of non-service that gives both couple and congregation the possibility of more objective, insightful decisions. This obviously calls for different time periods for different cases, but I would want to keep the service opportunities open for all after some testing of the spirit of those involved, both the couple and the community of believers.

← Perhaps this would be something akin to the Lord's command regarding examination for the Lord's Supper: "let a man examine himself, and then let him eat."

caring for the divorced and remarried. It remains highly unlikely, however, that our caring would effectively nurture the already guilt-ridden person if he or she is forever barred from service in the church.

In suggesting that we extend forgiveness and the opportunity for service to the divorced and remarried, I am not unaware of the tensions and inconsistencies that lie in that step. I was stopped in my thoughts recently when I read the words of Joyce Gladwell in HIS magazine: "It is never right to violate scriptural principle and therefore marriage after divorce is always wrong. But in individual lives, to re-marry may well be God's redemptive will in a sinful situation."⁷ It is difficult to bring those two ideas together, but I am becoming more persuaded that this is the tension under which we will always work when trying both to uphold principles and extend forgiveness.

We must acknowledge the dangers of grace. The remarried often take their problems with them into a second marriage. Moreover, extending grace makes us vulnerable. Bernard Ramm has said that "any concession for a worthy cause is capitalized upon by an endless number of unworthy persons. The special concession for an aggravated case is turned into an excuse by people whose situation is not aggravated."⁸

We may well expect people to object to extending grace to the divorced and remarried. There are those who will campaign for a pure church. More importantly, some will sincerely feel that forgiving, accepting and allowing divorced and remarried persons to serve in the church will encourage others to follow in the same manner.

Guy Duty has responded to such charges of "accommodation" with the following answer:

"If we let down the bars, will there not be much abuse of the remarriage privilege? This objection falsely assumes that it is scriptural to have bars up in the first place. The scriptures should be dealt with on the basis of what they mean, and not on whether they will be abused. What Bible doctrine or privilege has not been abused?"

The privilege of the Fifth Amendment to the U. S. Constitution has been much abused by gangsters . . . but there isn't a court or legislature in America that would abolish it.

Why do non-dissolution churches let down the bars and receive divorced and remarried people into their membership when a minister of another denomination performs the ceremony? And why do they let down the bars to receive the tithes and offerings of divorced-remarried persons? Why do they let down the bars to give them the right to Holy Communion. 'Consistency is not only a jewel---it is a rare gem.'"⁹

I confess I find it difficult to accept such words without qualification. However, since the church consists not only of the pure but of those being purified, is there not a place for service for those caught in the web of divorce? Or must their gifts lie idle and waste away? William L. Coleman contends that God's program is big enough to accommodate both the divorced and non-divorced person. He says: "The divorced person is very unlikely to corrupt the people in the church by his conduct or his doctrine. Often he is far more tender and caring because of the tragedy he has experienced. He is a member of the body of Christ---one of those eyes, ears, feet, or hands that Paul told us about."¹⁰

When considering my suggestion that opportunities for service ought to be given the divorced and remarried, let it be clear that such privileges are extended to repentant people who have failed and sinned in marriage. William Barclay says it well: "The church is the place for sinners but not for sinners who are determined to remain sinners and not for obstinate sinners who have no regret for their sins and no intention other than to remain in them."¹¹

I am suggesting, then, that our imperative in the church is to combine a view of marriage that is consistent with God's radical creative intent with a radical forgiveness that is also consistent with Christ's dealing with failing, sinful persons. I want to maintain that marriage is intended to be indissoluble. It is such a thorough merging of two personalities that severance of the relationship is unimaginable. It is like the union of cake ingredients. Once mixed into the cake dough, it is inconceivable that they may once again be separated into their respective parts.

Another way of saying what I have just suggested is this: the divorced and remarried should not consider themselves as having a "right" to demand the privilege of service. They must recognize the seriousness of their offense against God and His community. They must also allow the community of believers sufficient time to accept their repentance. They must realize that local congregations sometimes find it difficult to bring together God's radical position against divorce and the radical forgiveness I have suggested as incumbent upon the church. In other words, the sinning, repentant and forgiven members need to recognize that the church may be much slower in receiving the couple's repentance and desire to serve in the church than those having experienced alienation from the body. That may be unfortunate but it should be recognized and should temper any demands for acceptance and the right to serve. Ultimately it is the spirit and day-to-day life of the repentant that authenticates the sincerity of those who have admitted their sin and desire to live by the laws of God.

What I have written I have written; I have done so with considerable fear and discomfort. I do not want to be "divorced" from any of my brothers and sisters. I have spoken honestly at least and openly and provided an arena for discussion. I ask not for agreement with the views presented; I only ask to be loved by those who agree and disagree. Perhaps the words of Dwight Hervey Small summarize appropriately the position I have taken:

"Let the Church be bold in grace! Let the divorced and remarried feel fully accepted in the community of sinners saved by grace! Let the remarried find places of service in the Church alongside those whose experiences of the forgiving grace of God concerns less conspicuous areas of life. Let there be no penalties in the Church where God disallows such penalties. Let there be a recognition of the necessity for the tragic moral choice in this world, the necessity, at times, of choosing the lesser of two evils. Let us rejoice that the absolute will of God is not compromised, but that He conditions the exercise of His will to our imperfect faith and obedience, to our sins and our failures. And may the knowledge of such great grace fill our minds and hearts with such responding love as will motivate us to attempt in every way to fulfill His highest will in the power of the enabling grace!"¹²

FOOTNOTES

1. Article in The Wichita Eagle, March, 1980.
2. Kysar, Myrna and Robert, The Asundered (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978), p. 63.
3. Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, 1975 Edition (Nyack, N.Y.: The Christian and Missionary Alliance, 1976), p. 17.
4. Small, Dwight Hervey, The Right to Remarry (Old Tappan, N. J.: Revell, 1975), p. 153
5. Maynard Shelly, Editor, Studies in Church Discipline (Newton, Ks.: Mennonite Publication Office, 1958), p. 149.
6. Lovett, C. S., The Compassionate Side of Divorce (Baldwin Park, Calif.: Personal Christianity, 1975), pp. 142-143.
7. Gladwell, Joyce, Letter to the Editor of HIS magazine, February, 1980.
8. Ramm, Bernard, The Right, the Good, and the Happy (Waco, Texas: Word, 1971), p. 89.
9. Duty, Guy, Divorce and Remarriage (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1967), pp. 126-127.
10. Coleman, William L., "Ministering to the Divorced," Christianity Today, June 20, 1975, p. 137.
11. Barclay, William, Quoted in Pulpit Digest, January-February, 1980, p. 38.
12. Small, op. cit., p. 186.