

Divorce and Remarriage

How — and when — did the Worldwide Church of God come to its teaching on this important subject?

By Herman L. Hoeh

Thousands have been converted and added to God's Church in just the last five years. They have had little instruction on the history of the doctrine of divorce and remarriage — and its administration in the Worldwide Church of God.

To update us all, *The Worldwide News* editorial staff asked me to condense this important subject in this brief article.

Why divorce?

World War I precipitated a major breakdown in moral values. But it was World War II that rocked the foundations of marriage. Working wives, sexual promiscuity, the rush to quick financial and social success led to immense unhappiness. Divorces skyrocketed.

To make plain God's spiritual law regulating marriage, Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong wrote the booklet *Marriage and Divorce*. It was published in 1950, and revised in 1972. It made plain the purpose and meaning of marriage.

Marriage is a God-plane relationship, bestowed on no other form of life. Animals do not have the blessing of marriage with home and family relationship. Angels do not have it.

God's Church for more than 30 years has had the understanding that God is a family; that man is formed in the shape and image of God; that human beings can be born into the Family of God, being changed by a resurrection from mortal to immortal — from human to divine — from flesh and blood to spirit composition.

When the Church — *this Church* — is born of God at Christ's coming and the resurrection, it will be the Bride of Christ and become married to Christ. The Kingdom of God then will be composed of God the Father, Christ the Son and Christ's wife — a family relationship. No other church, as far as we know, has this wonderful knowledge!

In contrast, we find today a deceived and sinning world. It does not know the true God, nor His laws, nor does it understand the meaning and purpose of marriage. It is a world plagued with broken marriages and broken families.

Of prospective Church members — those applying for baptism — somewhere near one in three or four have been divorced. Many have remarried. To qualify to be baptized and accepted into God's Church MANY were required by the Church, knowing God's teaching against adultery in Matthew 5:32 and 19:18, to separate from a second marriage — in many cases a happy marriage with children.

Divorce question plagued Church

The necessity, as we understood it, of telling an increasing number of applicants for baptism that they could not be baptized or received into the Church contrary to God's law of

marriage, was becoming a heavy concern to us all. Yet God's law seemed plain!

We began to realize, in early 1974, that in the first century divorce and remarriage problems were rampant. Paul was encountering these problems continually, just as we are today.

Why, then, did we not read of these problems and Paul's heartache in having to tell such happily married people they had to break up their second marriage?

This triggered a NEW APPROACH in our research. We were all reminded of how many times error results from an assumed premise taken for granted because it seemed too self-evident to question.

WHAT did we take for granted? WHAT was the premise on which everything was based?

Assumed erroneous premise

Greater in-depth study of I Corinthians 7 brought to light the premise on which our whole conception of marriage and divorce had been based: We assumed that God personally looked down from heaven and witnessed and Himself bound every marriage, even of a heathen couple, who have *no religion* — in short, all marriages of all human beings on earth.

God had revealed His law of marriage — His truth about marriage — its purpose, its sanctity, its permanency — to His Church.

And we applied that truth to all marriages, assuming that God entered into every marriage, even though God had not entered into the lives of those we supposed He had bound.

You see, God ordained the marriage institution prior to man's rejection of God's laws and God's institutions.

After the first man cut himself off from God, and from God's laws (including His marriage law mentioned in Romans 7:1-3), Adam's human descendants no longer took God into such relationships as marriage, or business relationships, or government, or education.

This world's institutions — government, science, commerce, industry, society, religion, education — all exclude the revealed truth of God.

What happened in April, 1974 — not in 1976 as some news reporters have recently erroneously stated — was not a change in the Church's definition of God's law, but the addition of a new situation for divorce and remarriage. We should have seen it, but did not see it before.

The ministry assembled in May, 1974, to receive and study this new understanding.

The one chapter Paul wrote on the subject of marriage is I Corinthians 7. Verses 12 through 17 had never seemed completely clear. Verses 8 to 11 were perfectly clear — and in perfect harmony with Romans 7:1-3.

Paul wrote: "To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate

from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) — and that the husband should not divorce his wife" (verses 10 and 11, Revised Standard Version).

This is addressed to "the married" who are bound to each other for life and who have no grounds for divorce. If a divorce occurs, each must remain single. A second marriage makes one an adulterer or adulteress, just as in Romans 7:1-3.

In verse 12 Paul directly addressed the question we had not clearly understood until April, 1974.

Paul's expression, "I say, not the Lord," simply means there had heretofore been no precedent. When Paul writes, "I give charge, not I but the Lord," he is quoting what the Lord already said in Scripture. But what he is going to say in verse 12 is something new, without precedent.

He continued, "If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever..." This is speaking of a man converted, but already married while he and his wife both were unbelievers.

Under the covenant made at Sinai — which we now call the Old Covenant — marital and other contracts between Israel and other nations were forbidden.

Ezra 10:14-17 illustrates the necessity of legal divorce proceedings whenever such marital contracts had been wrongly entered into.

Marriages with the heathen were voidable, that is subject to divorce procedures, because the civil law of Israel forbade them (see Exodus 34:11-12, 16; Deuteronomy 7:1-3).

But under the guidance of the Spirit of God, Paul explained to the Church a new truth. Whereas marriage with one who is unconverted was legally voidable, under the terms of the covenant made at Sinai, the converted mate now is not to initiate proceedings as was once required in Ezra's day.

As long as both can live at peace, Christians are now to live with their unconverted mates. But if the unbelieving depart, the marriage is voidable because the law says so (Deuteronomy 7:3-4).

In this case the converted partner is not forbidden to remarry (contrast I Corinthians 7:15 with verse 11) as the marriage was voidable on religious grounds.

Likewise the woman in God's Church, if she has an unbelieving husband, and he is willing to live with her despite her religion,

she should not leave him.

But if the unbelieving one leaves — cuts off the marriage because of the Church member's religion — let him or her depart. In this case the believer is free to remarry.

In 1974 the Worldwide Church of God ruled through Christ's apostle, Mr. Armstrong, that this decision of the apostle Paul may be applied in two ways:

(1) If the believing Church member has been newly converted and the mate refuses to live with him or her because of the religion; and (2) if both had been in the Church, but one falls away, or turns bitter against the Church or refuses to live as husband and wife with the still loyal member.

In this second case the embittered one is to be officially considered a nonmember or unbeliever. "A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace" (I Corinthians 7:15). And the member may divorce.

This then-new light on marriage and divorce, announced eight years ago, in 1974, is proof that the Worldwide Church of God is willing to grow in spiritual understanding as Jesus Christ leads it.

College chorales give concerts

PASADENA — The Ambassador Chorales of the Pasadena and Big Sandy campuses of Ambassador College presented their spring concerts May 5 and April 25. Chancellor Herbert W. Armstrong attended the Pasadena concert in the Auditorium, after stating in a May 4 forum here that chorale concerts are "one of the most enjoyable events" in his life.

The Pasadena chorale, directed by John Daneri Schroeder, head of the Ambassador College Music Department, performed two interludes and 10 selections by composers Aaron Copland, Randall Thompson and Kirke Mechem.

Accompanied by Allen Andrews on piano, the chorale also performed a condensed version of *HMS Pinafore* by Gilbert and Sullivan that featured nine Ambassador soloists. Junior Jeremy Rapson was narrator.

John Beaver, English instructor, and Gerald Bieritz, music instructor, sang "Mille Vite" by Verdi.

Before intermission, the chorale dedicated "You'll Never Walk Alone" by Rogers and Hammerstein to Mr. Armstrong. After the number, Mr. Armstrong said he is quite pleased with the chorale this year, a larger chorale than in previous years, he noted.

"The students performed splendidly — I love working with them," said Mr. Schroeder. He noted that William Wiemhoff, concert manager for the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation, was very helpful in staging the concert.

"The clarity and harmony of the singers are improved," remarked evangelist Roderick C. Meredith, an Ambassador theology instructor. Church treasurer Leroy Neff also praised the chorale.

The Big Sandy Ambassador Chorale presented their concert in the dining hall, according to director Roger Bryant. The chorale was accompa-

nied on piano by his wife Lyna Jane.

Big Sandy Church members, Ambassador faculty and students enjoyed an Italian-style dinner before the performance. Attendance was 360, said Mr. Bryant, who sang an aria from the Italian opera *I Pagliacci* by Leoncavallo to conclude dinner music. Singing waiters (chorale

members) served the guests.

Other selections included show tunes from *Bye Bye Birdie*, *Funny Girl* and *My Fair Lady*.

"I thought the concert was a great success," noted Mr. Bryant, "though we were practicing down to the last minute, and we performed quite a bit of music from memory."



SPRING CONCERTS — Above, the Pasadena Ambassador College Chorale performs *HMS Pinafore*, a British operetta, May 5. Below, the Big Sandy Ambassador Chorale, directed by Roger Bryant, in concert April 25. [Photos by Warren Watson and Dominic Furlano]

