

# The Torres Case

## — A TALE OF TWO CONFERENCES

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In 1984 an Adventist pastor visited us. I had known him for several years; and, since he and his family were on their summer vacation, they stopped by for an hour. In the course of the conversation, he told us of a conversation he had a few months earlier, with an older conference pastor.

He mentioned to that older pastor that he had heard that a certain minister, whom he named, was having an affair with another woman. With a little laugh, the older pastor recognized it was time to educate the young man in the ways of conference work, so he would learn the church policy of silence in the face of sin.

So, in an offhand manner, he said to the younger minister, “Oh, don’t worry about it; this happens all the time.” Startled, the young man, who has a very sharp mind, quickly responded, “Names, places?”

To that, the older minister replied, “*Don’t you worry yourself. Just know it happens all the time—and it is our job to keep our noses out of it.*”

Over the past thirteen years of active publication, a number of incidents have come to our attention. But we have said little.

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Born on March 3, 1939, Arthur R. (“Rudy”) Torres grew up in New Mexico, the son of a successful businessman. While attending La Sierra College, Rudy married and then obtained a quick separation. Then, in 1965, he married Meredith. In the 1970s, after obtaining a baccalaureate at the La Sierra undergraduate division of Loma Linda University, Torres completed a master’s degree (M. Div.) at Andrews University. He then went into pastoral work in the Potomac Conference, where he served for a time as associate pastor of Capitol Memorial Church in Washington, D.C.

For several years, Rudy Torres pastored the Potomac Conference church. This position required much travel about the state, visiting shut-ins and collecting their tithe. He was then transferred to

pastor one of the largest churches in the Northwest: the Green Lake Church, in Seattle, Washington.

In 1980, Torres received a call to pastor the Glendale Church, in California. (This congregation is known locally as the Glendale City Church, to distinguish it from the Vallejo Drive Church, also in Glendale; hereinafter, all references to the Glendale Church will be to this Glendale City Church).

In September 1979, Rudy and Meredith adopted their first and only child, Alison.

But, with the passing of time, Rudy wanted to change wives, even though Meredith had been his wife for a quarter of a century, and the divorce would irreparably hurt his daughter. The little girl needed her father, and Meredith needed her husband. There were no Biblical

grounds for Rudy to divorce Meredith. She had been faithful to him.

Although they need to be exposed so the church can be cleaned up, it is difficult to gather information on such problems so it can be done.

However, in the incident discussed in this report, two factors are different: (1) The documentation is available, the witnesses are available and willing to talk, and (2) the minister involved was afterward promoted to the position of senior pastor of one of our largest churches in North America.

We could give far more details about that, which we will not cite here. But do know that Meredith had been true to Rudy. There had been no adultery on her part.

When there is a problem, an experienced pastor knows the conference president can help him solve it. So Torres went to see G. Charles Dart, the president of the Southern California Conference. Rudy explained the situation to him, and Dart sympathized. Apparently Dart tried, at first, to deter him from his objective; but, as Dart later explained, he decided it was better to help Torres remarry—“instead of losing a good minister.” It was clear to Dart that Torres was going to re-

marry. Rudy had already selected his second wife and was well-acquainted with her.

In their wedding announcement, published by the Glendale Adventist Church in the June 1990 issue of their church newsletter, the following paragraph was included:

"Arthur (Rudy) and Linda have actively worked on church projects for community outreach over the past few years. They have now chosen to combine their ministries in further service to the members of the Glendale Church."—"Wedding announcement," *City Lights*, Issue 5, June 1990.

Rudy discussed the forthcoming divorce, in advance, with his wife, Meredith. After conferring with Charles Dart, Rudy explained some interesting details to Meredith. **You are now going to learn the secret compact which the wife must**

**agree to.** By doing so, she implicates herself in the wicked plan offered to pastors by their conference presidents—to help them succeed in their adulterous intention of divorcing their innocent wives and remarrying someone else that they are attracted to.

**It seems that, when one of our pastors wants to leave his wife and remarry without Biblical grounds, the forsaken wife is quieted with the assurance that, if she will remain silent thereafter,—she will receive her share of her divorced pastor-husband's retirement sustentation immediately—and for the rest of her life. She will also be able to keep the children and continue putting all his children through church school, academy, and college at the usual one-half price of that which the rest of**

**us pay.**

**So now you have learned the method used to silence forsaken wives of Seventh-day Adventist pastors. They are woven into the plot, and it is all made possible through the willingness of the conference leaders to aid and abet this violation of the Seventh Commandment of the Decalogue.**

Meredith agreed to this arrangement. Recognizing that Rudy was going to remarry anyway, she told her friends that she did not want to see his life work (as a pastor) ruined—for she still loved him deeply,—and she needed the financial help in schooling his daughter, who was only 11 years old at the time he divorced his wife and left the home. (Not only had Torres left his wife, he had left his daughter also.) In addition, the sustentation payments would greatly help in

***Should sin in the church be rebuked? Should we expose sin, which has gone beyond the private level,—and tell it to the church?***

For over a year, others pled with the individuals and officials involved, both before and after the divorce and remarriage. Now it is time to tell it to the church (Matthew 18:17). Will the church care, or will it go back to sleep? The sin is on the church if it does nothing. But, in most cases, all it does is to blame the reprover as being the one at fault.

"Times have changed [they say]. These words strengthen their unbelief, and they say: The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil. He is too merciful to visit His people in judgment. Thus 'peace and safety' is the cry from men who will never again lift up their voice like a trumpet to show God's people their transgressions and the house of Jacob their sins. These dumb dogs that would not bark are the ones who feel the just

vengeance of an offended God . . .

"The abominations for which the faithful ones were sighing and crying were all that could be discerned by finite eyes, but by far the worst sins, those which provoked the jealousy of the pure and holy God, were unrevealed.

"The great Searcher of hearts knoweth every sin committed in secret by the workers of iniquity. These persons come to feel secure in their deceptions and, because of His long-suffering, say that the Lord seeth not, and then act as though He had forsaken the earth. But He will detect their hypocrisy and will open before others those sins which they were so careful to hide. No superiority of rank, dignity, or worldly wisdom, no position in sacred office, will preserve men from sacrificing principle when left to their own deceitful hearts. Those who have been regarded as worthy and righteous prove to be ringleaders in apostasy and examples in indifference and in the abuse of God's mercies. Their wicked course He will tolerate no longer, and in His wrath He deals

later years. Meredith felt she deserved financial help, since, at the time of the divorce, they had been married 25 years. From her divorce file, it is known that she got the conference to put this financial commitment into writing. She also got Rudy to promise to pay this amount if the church ever defaulted.

At the time, Charles Dart also interviewed Meredith. In his office, at 1535 East Chevy Chase Drive, in Glendale, California, he told her that, if this went through according to the plan, she would be suspected of having committed adultery as the reason for Rudy's divorce. But, knowing that Rudy loved the other woman so much that he intended to divorce her soon, no matter what the conference president decided,—Meredith agreed to the covenant of silence, believing it was the best of the sorry alternatives for her child, herself, and Rudy. At least, this way she would receive financial help for the rest of her life.

Rudy filed for divorce on November 21, 1988. (A copy of the divorce application is reprinted on a nearby page.) Rudy and Meredith lived together that last Christmas. The last day of cohabitation was December 31, 1988. It takes one year, from the last day of cohabitation, to get a divorce in California. That effectively delayed the proceedings for a year.

At the termination of that time, a sixty-day waiting period would be required, but, during that time, either spouse could file an appeal. This would effectively stop the divorce proceedings. On January 4, 1990, Meredith appealed the divorce decree, thus blocking the divorce action. She did this to force the conference office to provide her with more than a verbal statement of assurance that she and her child would receive financial support, and that the daughter would be able to receive an Adventist grade school-to-college education at

one-half the usual price. She wanted it in writing. In response, the conference office provided her with that written statement, clarifying the financial and educational help, so she withdrew her appeal.

Thus the divorce decree finally occurred on February 26, 1990. After the 60 days passed without further appeal, a full divorce occurred on April 27, 1990. It was a Friday.

On the divorce application, this was written:

"If no appeal [by the other party] is filed, the court may order the exhibits destroyed or otherwise disposed of after 60 days from the expiration of the appeal time."—*Los Angeles County judgment application, February 26, 1990.*

In other words, Meredith was given sixty days in which to contest it, and then the divorce would become final. Just below that statement, in a box, was this information:

"Effective date of termination of marital status (specify): 2-26-90. Warning: Neither party may remarry until the effective date of the termination of marital status is shown in this box."—*Ibid.*

(To clarify this: Although the divorce actually went into effect on February 26, 1990, there was a sixty-day interlocutory waiting period after that. During that period, if a spouse appeals a settlement, it will annul any marriage, thus most people will not dare risk a remarriage in the interlocutory period.)

So Rudy could not remarry until just after 60 days from the date this divorce paper was filed. February 26, the date of the divorce filing, fell on a Monday in 1990, and it was not a leap year. Dating from Tuesday, February 27, the first day; Friday, April 27, would be the sixtieth day. On the evening of the sixtieth day, Rudy remarried.

There can be no doubt that Rudy selected an outstanding bride: Linda Mae Nelson. With a master's degree in nursing, she had worked successfully in various capacities

and finally, after rising to the position of director of nursing at Glendale Adventist Medical Center, had started her own hospital management consulting firm with contacts nationwide.

Although the divorce and remarriage was in accord with the laws of the state of California, it was not Biblical.

**Our concern here is not with the worthiness or unworthiness of all these people. They are probably very fine individuals. The problem we face is that the pastor of one of our largest churches in southern California made arrangements, through his conference president, to divorce his wife without Biblical grounds, remarry as soon as possible afterward, and then be retained and even greatly advanced in the ministry. We are also concerned that a number of false statements were made by church officials, in order to cover up what happened.**

The wedding ceremony was held on Friday, April 27, 1990, in the home of the bride's married sister. The associate pastor of the Glendale Church, Mitch Henson, performed the ceremony. So this unbiblical wedding was not only approved by the conference president, but presided over by a conference pastor. (Mitch Henson was not afterward censured for this, but instead promoted to the position of Glendale Church senior pastor when, six months later, Torres was transferred to another church.)

Neither Rudy's mother nor his brothers attended his wedding to Linda. The bride's parents did not attend either.

The next morning (Sabbath), Rudy was at church as usual. After preaching a rousing sermon, he paused, and then said to the congregation, "Hold onto your pew. I want to introduce you to my new wife. She has made me so happy." And then, as Linda stood beside



him, the Glendale Church learned that he had remarried.

Although Meredith had agreed to silence, weeping was not part of the deal. Meredith arose from her place in the audience and, weeping, went through the door into the choir room—where she wept in the arms of lady friends who soon after crowded about her. The tears could not be hidden, and she said, “This is the way we both wanted it; I just didn’t know he’d remarry so soon.” (Meredith had gone to the choir room because she is a regular choir member. She occasionally gives a solo, for she has an unusually beautiful voice.)

Conference leadership recognized the possibility of questions if Meredith were to remain at the Glendale Church after the remarriage. So Meredith had been strongly urged to transfer her membership to some other Los Angeles area church. But she refused to do so, declaring that the Glendale area had been her home for several years. The conference had taken her husband from her; now they were trying to take away the friends in her local church.

Rudy, Meredith, and Linda were all well-liked at the church, and everyone wondered what had happened. *But it was assumed, by most everyone, that the entire divorce/remarriage must somehow have had Biblical grounds.* All inquiries were met by the response that, prior to the divorce, the matter had been taken to the conference office and the Committee on the Pastorate had reviewed the case and approved of the divorce and remarriage. Because of that ap-

proval, it was assumed that, surely, Meredith must have done something wrong, and Rudy therefore had a right to remarry. So, although bewildered somewhat because Meredith was respected by all, the local church thought best to rejoice at the marriage of the other two, whom they also thought highly of: Rudy and Linda. On Sunday, June 24, the entire church held a wedding reception for Rudy and Linda at the home of one of the church members.

As might be expected, the rumor spread that Meredith had committed adultery. It was intensified by local church officers who clearly said so. Who told those church officers that? For her part, Meredith did not dare speak, and she remained silent through it all. To close friends, she confided that she was glad that Rudy lived nearby, so he could visit his daughter from time to time. Meredith felt the girl needed a father as well as a mother.

(Later, when he accepted a call out-of-state, Meredith confided to a friend that she did consider it fair for Rudy to selfishly move away to raise their daughter, Alison, by herself. She had counted on him visiting his daughter from time to time. As she remarked in 1992, it made her a single parent, because, instead of visiting the 13-year-old daughter twice a week, he would now only see her a few times a year.

Shortly after the remarriage, Alison’s reaction was becoming visible. She was seen to be very angry and telling her friends how she felt it was all Linda’s fault. She was ob-

served to refuse to speak with Linda during a church potluck. Refusing to eat, she sat in a stairwell with her head buried in her hands.

When asked pointedly, Lloyd Wyman, the conference ministerial secretary, said, “Meredith had committed adultery.” But some church members, knowing well the personal integrity of Meredith, did further checking.

One church member, Elizabeth Iskander, M.D., who had personally known Maradith for several years, called Meredith and told her about the rumor that she had committed adultery. When she heard that, she stated very clearly that she had not committed adultery, no one had accused her of it, and that, if the conference was going to slander her reputation, she would consider suing them.

One church member, who had been asking questions and digging out facts, was called in Rudy Torres pastoral office at the church on June 9, 1990. Torres and an associate pastor, Casey Bahr, were there, and immediately began threatening this church member.

“We will disfellowship you, if you continue what you are doing!”

“What am I doing?” was the reply.

Their only answer was, “You know what you are doing!”

The question was then asked, “Please put it in words.”

They refused, saying, “You know what you are doing!” Then they said that they had a small group of elders who were in agreement with them, and that they would disfellowship this church member if things did not change.

The question was asked, “Will I be able to attend this little meeting?”

They cried, “No!”

“What about due process?”

#### AS IT WAS IN THE DAYS OF NOAH

“But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the Flood, they were

eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark. And knew not until the Flood came, and took them all away.”—*Matthew 24:37-39.*

Continued on the next tract

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# The Torres Case

## — A TALE OF TWO CONFERENCES

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

“The Glendale City Church has its own process!”

When the meeting was finished, that church member refused to give up. Thank God for church members who protest sin! A letter was sent to Charles Dart, the conference president about the threats, but he refused to answer it.

Then that member went to Bob Peterson, a conference attorney and Elder Paytee, conference vice president, and they gave the assurance that Torres would not dare carry out his threat.

That church member then went to several conference leaders. When prodded, local church officials said that they had nothing to do with the prior investigation and determination that the divorce was acceptable. It was all handled by the conference office’s *Committee on the*

*Pastorate*.

Elder Lloyd Wyman said that Rudy’s divorce was handled by the Committee on the Pastorate, and that they had found Meredith guilty of adultery. Elder Palmer Wick, vice-president of personnel for the conference, and Elder Dan Robles said the same. Don Sullivan, treasurer, said that he had heard that Meredith kept going out with someone on weekends, and Rudy got tired of it. He also understood that the Committee on the Pastorate had investigated the matter and had approved the divorce based on that information, and that Charles Dart, had assented to the committee’s decision. Charles Dart told one inquiring church member that everything had been done according to the *Church Manual*.

What is this “*Committee on the Pastorate*”? It is a conference-ap-

pointed committee, composed entirely of men, all of whom are church ministers of one kind or another. The conference president personally decides about each person who will be on the committee. It is their duty to study cases brought to their attention and render decisions which the president can accept or reject. We are told that each conference is supposed to have such a committee—but, whether or not they all do, is not certain. There are so many immorality problems which arise from time to time in our ministry, that the need for such a committee is obvious. The problem is that there are few standards by which it operates:

*Who selects the committee members?* It should NOT be the conference president! It should be the conference constituency.

*Who does the committee an-*

### THE POSITION OF THE CHURCH IN 1948

[Mark 5:31-32; Luke 16:8; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11; and Luke 17:26-30] Is there danger that the standards of the church will be lowered to the level of the usage of the world around us? We believe this danger exists, and that the church should be warned of it . . .

“Has the church any responsibility or duty to take account of the experience of a member who has secured a divorce on other than the conditions stated by Christ, and then formed a new marriage relation? Indeed, the church has a bounded and solemn duty to fully follow the actions that have been

passed in regard to such a situation.

“[1942 *Church Manual* statement:] ‘4. That a church member who is the guilty party to the divorced forfeits the right to remarry another, and . . . that **should such a person marry another, he be not readmitted to church membership so long as the unscriptural relationship continues**’ . . .

“Here is a sister in the church who secures a divorce on other than Bible grounds. She then proceeds to marry another man. The church to which she belongs then withdraws from her the status of fellowship. After this, she with the man move to another church and upon

baptism unite with that church. **But the baptism does not absolve her from her state of adultery. She is continuing in this state as long as she lives with her second so-called husband, and the church in receiving her and her husband into membership is condoning her state of adultery.**”—F.M. Wilcox, *Review* editor, “*The Question of Divorce*,” *Review*, January

### THE POSITION OF THE CHURCH NOW

According to the 1976 edition of the *Church Manual* (pages 286 ff.), those who have remarried without Biblical grounds may be readmitted into the church by repentance and rebaptism.

swer to? It should include both men and women, laymen and workers, and representatives of various minorities.

Women should be included, just because conference presidents tend to favor and protect the men pastors. The poor, maligned wives need women on the committee who will view, with sympathy, their side as well.

*What are the standards governing the committee?* At the present, these vary from conference to conference, when they exist. There is no clear pattern.

*Is the conference required to submit all cases to the committee? Is it required to adhere to their decisions?* We will find that the answers to both are a farce. The Torres case illustrates problems with this and the other points mentioned above.

The conference president selects whomever he wants to be on the committee, he calls it whenever he wants,—and makes decisions

without it whenever he wants.

As noted earlier, inquirers into the Torres case were told that the committee had considered the matter, and that their decision had been adhered to. Surely, everything had been done properly and Biblically.

But, within the committee on the Pastorate, feelings were different. Several of the Committee members were distraught over various earlier incidents, and the Torres case was especially flagrant, since Rudy had no Biblical grounds for divorce, had remarried as soon as legally possible, and was then retained in the pastorate. And where was his pastorate? It was one of the largest churches in that immense conference, and it was the home church for the conference, in a sense,—since the Southern California Conference office is headquartered in Glendale, California.

**Last but not least, the committee members knew what the other church members did not know: They knew they had never**

**investigated the case—even though it had been reported that they had!** One committee member, an older pastor, was finally told to stop trying to change the situation, or he would be fired. So he joined the conspiracy of silence. Is that the way to run our church?

Another member went directly to Charles Dart, the conference president, and discussed it with him. He asked him pointedly, “Why did you let Rudy Torres remarry?” That particular questioner was in a position to get answers. **Dart admitted he made the decision entirely on his own, without first presenting it to the Committee on the Pastorate, or any other committee or church authority.** We have the name of the man Dart told that to.

Consider these facts, extracted from a letter later written by a southern California physician to a different conference president:

“At the time you wrote me the let-

## MATTHEW 18 AND THE REPROOF OF SIN

There will be those who, upon seeing this report, will wrap their righteous coats of silence about them and sniff, “It is wrong to discuss such situations. The church should give it no attention.”

Such individuals need to read 1 Corinthians 5, Joshua 7, and the clear comment on it in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 495-498. Our denomination needs solutions; it needs victories; it needs purity and obedience. It does not need to be laden down with responsibility for sins it has conveniently avoided re-proving.

Others will say that we should first have gone to the offending party, in agreement with Matthew 18 (Matthew 18:15-17). But consider these facts:

First, in regard to those sins

which are of a private nature:

Pilgrims Rest never discusses, by name, any issue which has not already passed beyond the boundaries of Matthew 18. *By the time we report it, it has already reached the “tell it to the church” level.* According to Matthew 18, the final step is to tell the church—after it has passed the stage of being a private matter. Others have already appealed to the individual. Now it is time to tell the church.

Lower levels of contact and appeal to Torres and church agencies have been made for over two years, without effect. Both the pastor and the offices of two conferences have been pled with, all to no avail. The appeals of laymen were ignored; those workers who plead for adherence to our Bible/Spirit of Prophecy standards in this matter were, in some instances, threatened with

firing or disfellowship.

It is now time to bring the matter to the church.

Pilgrims Rest does not deal with private sins, but with those which affect an entire local church, conference, division, etc.

Carefully read *2 Testimonies*, 15-16. In that passage, the difference between a private and public sin is defined,—and we are definitely told that (1) a “public sin” is one which affects, at the very least, an entire local church, and that (2) Matthew 18:15-17 does not apply to public sins.

In this present report, as is usual in other Pilgrims Rest reports, pleading with our people to put away the Achan sins among us, we are dealing with a public sin.

(For more information on this, see our tract, *Matthew 18 and Open Sin in the Church* [PG—41].)



ter, included, I was under the impression that the Committee on the Pastorate (C.O.P.) had handled the case of Rudy Torres because that is what our ministerial director, treasurer, and two other vice presidents told me.

“Those conference leaders all said, unequivocally and without the slightest hesitancy, that they understood that the C.O.P. found Meredith guilty of adultery.

**“I then learned the truth when I spoke with a member of the C.O.P., who told me they had never handled the Torres case. They were told, by President Dart, that, because Torres was their chairman, he had a different committee in the conference decide his case.**

**“When I told this C.O.P. member the widespread rumor above, this C.O.P. member went directly to President Dart and asked him, ‘What committee handled the Torres case?’ President Dart then admitted that he alone approved of Torres’ remarriage.**

**“The C.O.P. then requested President Dart to meet with them at their next meeting. At this meeting, Dart admitted he had no evidence that Meredith has committed adultery, but felt his ‘judgment call’ was within his authority and was past history now—and should stand. Dart also felt the job description of the C.O.P. was to advise the president only if he asked their advice.**

“The C.O.P., over the next few months, created the document that is included (entitled *C.O.P. Recommendations on Divorce and Remarriage*). They asked Dart for a written response to item 1, on page 2 (please read it carefully at this time). President Dart refused and said he was about to retire. This document is to be sent to the next Southern California Conference executive board meeting for approval.”—*Dr. Elizabeth Iskander, letter dated May 31, 1993, to Ralph Martin, president, Potomac Conference.*

**Thus we have a situation in which an unbiblical divorce and remarriage, by a denominational pastor, was countenanced, pro-**

**motod, and afterward protected with untruths. Several different men were brought into the matter, and required to give incorrect statements in order to retain their own jobs.**

**It is of interest that Rudy Torres was the chairman of the Committee on the Pastorate. But that fact does not really matter—because the Torres case was never brought before the that committee! Yet that is the very committee which was set up to handle such cases.**

Great is the power of a conference president, when he decides to do something. Fearful is that power, when he is determined to hide his complicity in a wrong action.

As noted above, Dart wanted to retire and get out of there, before the situation got too hot. He well-knew his successor would be careful to cover over the matter as something in the past which should be not brought up later,—which was exactly what was done.

Because Moses is no longer alive, the church in the valley of Achor lulls the people to sleep with false reports, and then threatens the few who would seek to rouse the others.

Elsewhere in this study, we will overview the document, mentioned in the above-quoted letter, which was prepared by the Committee on the Pastorate. Their document was entitled *Committee on the Pastorate Recommendations on Divorce and Remarriage*.

Rudy continued on as senior pastor of Glendale Church throughout the rest of 1990 until December, when Dart had him transferred to one of the southernmost churches in the conference: the Rolling Hills Church (no relation to the one in Florida). A cooling-off period was needed, during which memories would grow hazy. His first Sabbath there was in January 1991.

One might think that would be the end of the matter. But there was more to come. Men in high places who countenance sin are becoming more bold in our denomination.

*Astoundingly, the decision was made to transfer Torres to, what is generally considered to be, the second largest Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America. Why did our leaders do that?*

At any rate, because of that decision to send Torres to the second largest Adventist church in America, we now write and send out this report.

**Rudy Torres was transferred, from the Rolling Hills Church in southern California, to the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church in Takoma Park, Maryland, to be its senior pastor. Within the North American Division, only the Loma Linda University Church is larger. In addition, Sligo Church is home to more of our General Conference and North American Division leaders than any other church in the Greater Washington, D.C., area.**

**At the time that transfer (made in the Fall of 1992) was made, Charles Dart was still president of the Southern California Conference, and Ralph Martin was president of the Potomac Conference. (Dart retired in May 1993; Martin continues on as president of the Potomac Conference.)**

Two questions stand out:

First, in view of what had happened, why was Torres transferred to be senior pastor of one of our two most influential churches on the North American continent?

Our answer to the question would be that it is obvious that Biblical rules no longer apply. What other answer can there be? Are we to say that an Adventist pastor is free to divorce his wife, leave his young children, and remarry? Is

that Biblical?

Second, why did the Sligo Church accept him?

On October 27, 1992, in response to a letter from a Glendale church member, Ralph Martin, the Potomac Conference president, wrote this:

**"I explained to the large search committee—about 30 leading members of Sligo—the charges against Elder Torres; and they voted, unanimously, to ask him to be their pastor . . . [They asked] Elder Torres to accept their call even after being informed of the issues."**—*Ralph Martin, president, Potomac Conference, letter dated October 27, 1992 to Elizabeth Iskander, M.D.*

"Even after being informed of the issues!" That is what the Potomac Conference president wrote!

Let us consider the ramifications of this: In the above-quoted letter (reprinted in its entirety elsewhere in this report), **Martin's position was that further discussion of the Torres case should be dropped, since Torres no longer lives where the problem occurred, and the Sligo Church has already accepted him.** The implications of Martin's logical points, in this letter, break down into five facets:

(1) The action occurred in California and Torres is no longer there,

so the Southern California Conference can no longer do anything about it. (2) The action did not occur in Maryland, but across the continent, so no investigation can now be conducted by the Sligo Church (and the Potomac Conference office refuses to touch the matter). (3) The Sligo Church has already hired him, therefore it would be inappropriate for anyone to reopen the matter. (4) Because the Sligo Church accepted him, if an error had been made on the East Coast, it is the responsibility of Sligo Church—and not the Potomac Conference office. (5) One thing stands out: Everything is past—the divorce and remarriage, the transfer, and the hiring. Because it happened so long ago (several months earlier, at the time when Martin wrote), we now need to forget it. (6) **"That which is right is to let things rest in the Lord's hands rather than trying to take them into our own."**

*We are here viewing present reality in our denomination.* But it is a most terrible reality. **Any action by a denominational worker, which does not violate the laws of the state, can be forgiven and passed over by church leaders. All it takes is the transfer of the worker to a distant place! Because then the sending conference "can do nothing about it," the receiving conference "can do nothing about it," and anyone**

**who tries to bring up the subject is not doing right—because he should "let the matter rest in the hands of the Lord."**

Church leaders are placing a lot in the hands of the Lord. In the judgment He will speak.

This is the same method used by the Vatican. When a priest errs, he is moved on; he is never rejected from the priesthood unless the civil authorities move in. Unfortunately, such policies are now being followed in our denomination. **Yet almost no one will arise and rebuke the men doing these things. Instead, the rebuke is aimed at the few whistle blowers who plead for the troublers of Israel to be dealt with (Joshua 7). My friend, God will judge for these things.**

Let us now focus the situation even closer. The pivotal point in Martin's letter is this: **Why did the Sligo Church accept Torres as their senior pastor, when they were told the situation in advance?**

WHAT were they told in advance? By far the largest church in the conference was searching for a replacement pastor. Surely, the conference president was either on that committee or regularly advised of its findings. In his letter, he said:

"I explained to the large search committee—about 30 leading members of Sligo—the charges against Elder Torres; and they voted, unanimously, to ask him to be their pastor . . . [They asked] Elder Torres to accept their call even after being informed of the issues."—*Ralph Martin, president, Potomac Conference, letter dated October 27, 1992 to Elizabeth Iskander, M.D.*

That is a clear statement.

In his written reply to the Glendale Church member, Martin said that he read the information sent,

### WHICH SHEPHERDS ARE FEEDING YOU?

"I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, no be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the Lord . . .

"For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourneth; the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course is evil, and their force is not right.

"For both prophet and priest

are profane; yea, in My house have I found their wickedness, saith the Lord . . .

**"I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto Me as Gomorrah . . .**

**"In the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly."**—*Jeremiah 23:4, 10-11, 14, 20.*



# The Torres Case

## — A TALE OF TWO CONFERENCES

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

appreciated the “quality scholarship,” in all the details included, the strong Christian concern for moral uprightness” which was shown, “and the effort . . . to see that things are done properly.” All the facts were before him, yet his letter indicated that he intended to do nothing about the case. It is of interest that his letter of reply did not seek to deny any of those facts. Not once did he intimate that any of it was new to him, but instead he pled that the one who wrote him also become an accomplice in the cover-up—by henceforth remaining silent.

Either the Sligo Church leaders were told the truth, and they hired Torres in spite of it, or they were not told the truth. If they were told the truth, what will they now do about the matter? If they do nothing, then

they retain Torres in spite of the situation.

Read again the above quoted statement by Martin, in that October 27, 1992, letter. It reveals that the Sligo search committee was very large—with about thirty of the leading church members on it. That committee undoubtedly included a sizeable number of our leading General Conference and North American Division officers!

According to Martin’s letter—which he wrote after having read that which had been sent to him about the case,—he was able to say the Sligo committee “voted unanimously to ask him to be their pastor . . . even after being informed of the issues.” It is hardly likely that Martin was not a prominent figure in this search and verification process. So he should know what they

were told.

But, if it is possible that Ralph Martin knew nothing about the matter earlier, his responsibility clearly began as soon as he was notified of the truth of the situation. **In his letter of reply to those facts, he indicated that, although current actions may be sinful, past ones should only be covered over.** But, contrary to what he wrote, **sin is sin—whether or not it is present or past; whether or not it happened in Potomac Conference or someplace else.** Learning the issues, it was Martin’s responsibility, in October 1992, to do something about the matter. Not to do so, was to add his hands to the ongoing process of sweeping it under the rug. And, unfortunately, that is what he did.

“I have read the materials that you sent and have a deep appreciation for the quality of your scholarship and your strong Christian con-

### SPIRIT OF PROPHECY COUNSEL

“A woman may be legally divorced from her husband by the laws of the land and yet not divorced in the sight of God and according to the higher law. **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.** Although the laws of the land may grant divorce, yet they are husband and wife still in the Bible light, according to the laws of God.”—*Adventist Home*, 344.

“Your ideas in regard to the marriage relation have been erroneous. **Nothing but the violation of the marriage bed can either break or annul the marriage vow . . .** God gave only one cause why a wife should leave her husband, or the husband leave his wife, which was adultery.”—*Adventist Home*, 341-342.

“I saw that the seventh commandment has been violated by some who are now

held in fellowship by the church. **This has brought God’s frown upon them. This sin is awful in these last days,** but the church has brought God’s frown and curse upon it by regarding the sin so lightly. **I saw it was an enormous sin** and there have not been as vigilant efforts made as there should have been to satisfy the displeasure of God and remove His frown by taking a strict, thorough course with the offender.

“It is an awful corrupting influence upon the young. They see how lightly the sin of breaking the seventh commandment is regarded, and **the one who commits this horrible sin thinks that all he has to do is to confess that he was wrong and is sorry,** and he is then to have all the privileges of the house of God and held in embrace of fellowship of the church.

“They have thought it was not so great a sin, but have lightly esteemed the breaking of the seventh commandment. **This**

**has been sufficient to remove the ark of God from the camp,** if there were no other sins to cause the ark to be taken away and weaken Israel.

**“Those who break the seventh commandment should be suspended from the church and not have its fellowship or the privileges of the house of God.”**—*Manuscript 3, 1854, quoted in Review, February 17, 1977.*

“She [Ellen White] left these people [those who had committed adultery and remarried] with the Lord. She gave them hope when they had done their best under the circumstances. In this she has set us an example to follow. **We find, however, no record of a single instance where she suggested that one living in an adulterous marriage who had had their membership withdrawn, should have it restored.** This point is often overlooked.”—*R.O. and M.S. Williams, God’s Seventh Commandment, p. ix.*

cern for moral rightness. Only those who love their church deeply make the effort that you have to see that things are done properly.

“However, I believe that you have carried your concerns to those who have been involved in such a strong way that there is little that can be added by continuing to press them . . .

“I hope we do not have to go through a series of charges here in the Potomac Conference.”—*Ralph Martin, Op. cit.*

The last sentence said it all. Our church is plagued with time-servers who twist policy—sometimes by a hideous distortion of Bible/Spirit of Prophecy principles—in order to keep peace within their borders, so they can hold unto their jobs and move into higher positions. This is not the *will of God* as revealed in His Word, but *upward mobility* is the goal of far too many of our leaders.

On July 22, 1993, after months of trying to do so, Dr. Iskander was finally able to speak with Ralph Martin, the Potomac Conference president.

He stated that he had read all the information sent him, including the recommendations by the Committee on the Pastorate. He said that Charles Dart had not told him anything about the process nor the grounds by which Rudy Torres was cleared to remarry,—but only that he had been cleared. Martin felt that Rudy should not be placed in “double jeopardy.” He emphasized that Rudy had established himself at Sligo, preaches to 1,500 each week, and that it would hurt the congregation if he were removed. His exact words were, “Two wrongs don’t make a right.” He also said that letting this decision stand would be the “lesser of two evils.” He said he felt sure that Rudy had repented and asked God for forgiveness. In any event, he felt that he, Martin, was under no obligation to do anything until he had received official word from Southern California Conference.

As for the Committee on the Pastorate, back in the Southern California Conference, they stated in writing that they did not have the authority to retry a case that was not within their jurisdiction.

#### **ON THE NEXT SIX PAGES**

**We would not have discussed this case, if it had not been such a flagrant instance in which a minister divorced his wife of 25 years, left their 11-year-old daughter, married again as soon as legally possible, was retained as pastor of the same large city church, and then, within a relatively short time, was made senior pastor of the second largest Adventist Church in North America.**

*On this and the next six pages you will find:*

**PAGE 10** - The Ralph Martin letter, urging that the matter be forgotten, so no one will be disturbed.

**PAGE 11** - The divorce paper itself, finalized on February 26, 1990, forbidding remarriage before the termination of the interlocutory period, which would be Friday, April 27—the date on which Rudy remarried.

**PAGE 12** - The front page of the June 1990 newslet-

ter of the Glendale City Seventh-day Adventist Church, the church where all this took place.

**PAGES 13-14** - The two-page “*Recommendations*” of the Southern California Conference Committee on the Pastorate, which they prepared after the Torres remarriage, in the hope that somehow conference presidents would stop secretly approving such divorces, remarriages, and retentions in the ministry.

**PAGE 15** - “*Will Anything Be Done?*” A brief overview of Dr. Iskander’s attempts to get the Pacific Union Conference and the General Conference to put a halt to practices, such as the Torres case—which prompted her to begin her appeals.

**PAGES 15-16** - “*A Statement by Elizabeth Iskander, M.D.*” This is an appeal to church members by a respected southern California physician, urging them to make sure their pastor is not an adulterer, to arouse others, and demand that such violations of church standards no longer occur.

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MATERIALS NOT AVAILABLE IN  
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# The Torres Case

PART FOUR OF FOUR

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Although southern California Adventists are quite used to lowered standards, the Torres case came as a shock to a number of workers and laymen. The *Committee on the Pastorate*, composed of several ministers in the Southern Conference, prepared the following two pages of “*recommendations*,” after Rudy Torres remarried.

The first seven points stated the reasons underlying their concerns; the second seven points listed their recommendations for strengthening the committee and providing it with efficient standards and principles of operation—instead of the secret dealings carried on by conference presidents with adulterous pastors.

***Carefully read this statement. It is discussing the problem and pleading for the solutions—which are dealt with in this present tract set! If such problems did not exist, these “Recommendations” would not have been written!***



After researching into this case, the present writer found several more West Coast adulteries by ministers, which were covered up; at least two of which have an unique relationship to the Torres case, although not in any way his responsibility. Witnesses and paperwork are available. But the Torres case, because of his rapid elevation to one of our largest churches, will illustrate the problem. Pray for reformation. It is urgently needed. How much longer will the mercy of God be extended to our world? It cannot continue much longer. May Jesus come soon and put an end to this corruption.

**WILL ANYTHING BE DONE?**

One of the individuals concerned about the Torres case was Dr. Elizabeth Iskander, of La Canada, California. In view of the Torres and other cases, this woman physician appealed to the two southern California confer-

ences and to the Pacific Union to prepare definitive guidelines, governing all conference "policies on ministerial divorce and remarriage."

Finally, Charles Dart stated that he would send a paper she had prepared (an in-depth Bible-Spirit of Prophecy study on the grounds for divorce and remarriage) to the Committee

on the Pastorate.

She later learned that only two people on that committee (one of which was Rudy Torres) had ever read the paper. The official response "from the committee," consisted of nebulous, but basically negative, comments.

After additional urging, the conference of-

fice sent it on to the Pacific Union Conference, which set up an ad hoc committee composed mainly of Union vice presidents, plus only one scholar, John Jones, dean of Religion at La Sierra University.

After reading her paper, they could not refute her points, so, in a written communication on March 10, 1992, they agreed to send this on to the Biblical Research Institute, in Silver Spring, Maryland. In addition, that same month the Union set up a special 20-member committee, appropriately called the Divorce, Adultery and Remarriage Committee.

On May 7, 1992, the working committee of Biblical Research Institute (which they call BRI-COM) met at Andrews University. At her request, that day, Dr. Iskander was given an hour to present her concerns to the committee. Then she left the room and the twenty-two scholars on the committee discussed her presentation.

A two-page letter, dated June 1, 1992, was later sent to Dr. Iskander by a director of BRI. In it, he stated that the committee had concluded that they dared not give any attention to specific cases, such as the Torres case which was brought to their attention. "The committee felt it was not their proper work to address these personal cases."

The committee was divided on some points and united on others. Some items pertaining to our present study would be these:

"Adultery" involves a betrayal of trust, as shown by one or more of certain acts. Dr. Iskander asked that adultery be defined by the church in such a way as to protect innocent wives of pastors and laymen.

The BRI decision in this matter was that (1) the definition of "adultery" could not be ascertained without extensive, time-consuming study and, since BRI already had "long-range prior commitments," it "could not undertake such a study project in the immediate future." Instead, it recommended that such a study be carried out by a review committee, to be established by the Pacific Union.

That took care of that one. So the church still has no normative basis for what "adultery" is. (You probably thought the Bible told us.)

BRI also stated that, since the Pacific Union had set up a study committee (the Divorce, Adultery, and Remarriage Committee), they should continue on with the study.

Dr. Iskander presented several problems which could arise. Her objective was to crystalize the grounds for divorce and remarriage, so pastors and others in the church could no longer, through church-approved divorce and remarriage, avoid their responsibilities to their mates and children.

"Finally, Dr. Iskander's concerns about sexually impaired persons and what constitutes grounds for dissolution of marriage, as well as sexual deviations among church members, are important matters for Adventists. We encourage you to have quali-

fied persons consider them seriously . . . We hope the questions raised by Dr. Iskander will not be allowed to lapse."—*Biblical Research Institute to Pacific Union Conference, letter dated June 1, 1992.*

So the Pacific Union headquarters has been given the responsibility for setting up a committee and developing standardized guidelines. Will it be done? Will they be Biblical?

Meanwhile the Committee on the Pastorate, in the Southern California Conference, was for a time trying to get the conference executive committee to clarify their role: Are they merely a rubber stamp to make the president's decisions look like committee process? The Committee on the Pastorate wanted to clarify all possible paths by which a minister could get permission to remarry. They wanted to ascertain whether any of those paths could be determined solely by the conference president. They wanted to know whether they were to follow the *Church Manual* in all such cases, or were they to be given other guidelines.

Perhaps someone might eventually consider opening the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, and seeing what those books have to say.

### PRESENT STATUS

G. Charles Dart retired from the presidency of the Southern California Conference on May 16, 1993. On that date, the conference constituency voted to elect Bjarne Christensen. (*Pacific Union Recorder, June 21, 1993*).

Christensen has afterward consistently assured inquirers that he will not permit another incident like the Torres case, and that, henceforth, all such incidents will be referred to the Committee on the Pastorate.

As for the Committee on the Pastorate, it has with slight revision, officially adopted the "Recommendations" (reprinted on pages 13 and 14 of this report).

In addition, the Pacific Union Conference's *Divorce, Adultery, and Remarriage Committee* has promised to give the "Recommendations" its careful scrutiny, with the possibility of adopting them.

The 1976 Annual Council had approved actions on conciliation, divorce, and remarriage. But it concerned members, not pastors. However, in reaction to an increasing amount of litigation against the church, in November 1993, the North American Division's *Year-end Executive Committee* meeting adopted a two-part set of *Guidelines on Sexual Misconduct*, which outlined policies concerning church employees. This document was the result of seven months work by the Sexual Ethics Commission, comprised of 25 workers and laymen, under the chairmanship of Rosa Taylor Banks, director of the division's Office of Human Relations (*Review, January 27, 1994*).

But, approval of such a document by division headquarters, does not mean that union and conference presidents and their committees will adopt it. What is needed is, first, an official statement by each union and conference that they have adopted the docu-

ment, and will enforce it. Second, that statement should include a requirement that each union, conference, and institutional president must refer all such cases to the special committee. Third, that each president actually refer all such cases to the committee—instead of dealing secretly with certain men, hiding their adultery, and retaining them in the work.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Arouse others to take hold of this good work, to purify our ministry. Go alone or with others to your conference leaders and ask them some questions:

1 - What committee is allowed to give a minister permission to divorce and remarry?

2 - How many members are on this committee?

3 - What is considered a quorum for doing business on this committee?

4 - Is this committee composed of ministers only?

5 - Are there any women on this committee?

6 - Is there an attempt to make this committee ethnically balanced?

7 - Is there an attempt to make this committee age balanced?

8 - How long a term may the members on this committee serve?

9 - Are the members of this committee elected or appointed? By whom or what nominating committee did they join this committee?

10 - Does the president of your conference have the right to bypass this committee and grant permission for a minister to remarry?

11 - If your regular standing committee, which usually deals with these matters, was not the committee desired, do you have any alternate committees which could handle an adultery and/or remarriage case? If the answer is yes, please answer the above questions about this committee.

12 - Do you have any required minimum time which must elapse between the divorce decree and remarriage?

13 - How many ministerial remarriages have been granted to ministers, who remain in a pulpit in the last ten years?

Tell your conference officers, "Perhaps thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this." Urge them to take hold of the good work of purifying the conference, and returning it to obedience to the law of God. Thank them for their time and effort in doing this.

*So what if you fail in your efforts? It is better to try and fail, than to succeed at doing nothing.*

### A STATEMENT BY ELIZABETH ISKANDER, M.D.

If you, as a member, are concerned about adultery in the pulpit and church policies that approve remarriages, let your voice be heard. Discover if this scenario of Rudy Torres could happen in your conference.

Tell your leaders you want every possible path for approval of a ministerial remarriage clarified. Tell your leaders you want all possible Biblical grounds that could be used to approve a ministerial divorce and remarriage clarified. Tell your leaders you want women to participate in the judgment process of ministerial remarriage. I have found that both sides of the ordination of women controversy agree that women should sit with an equal vote over the matter of ministerial remarriage. Tell your leaders you want all points of potential bribery, such as the divorce settlement or any financial benefits the church might give an x-minister's wife, dealt with openly.

Many professional societies have developed ethical standards and a board to judge those who break such standards. As a physician, I am acquainted with the Board of Medical Quality Assurance in California. If a physician breeches the ethical codes of his or her profession, complaints can be registered with this board. The board has a separate investigative arm which will visit with the participants of the case and review records.

These investigators are not private detectives. They submit a written record of their work to an administrative law judge employed by the board. Then the case is judged by a seven-member board. Four of those on this board are physicians. Three are consumers from any profession other than medical doctors. This is because the Department of Consumer Affairs governs the Board of Medical Quality Assurance. It was found that purely peer review frequently does not work and that physicians are usually more lenient with their colleagues than with the public. Thus the presence of consumers on the board.

I believe the same problem exists when the judgment board which judges ministerial remarriage is composed entirely of clergy. Purely peer review in many professional organizations leads to cover-ups. I believe such a judgment board should include men and women who are not employed by the church and are not clergy, such as loyal Adventist lawyers, psychologists, and physicians.

These are the principles which prevent what Amos and other prophets decried as the injustice, bribery, and deception which existed in the courts of Israel. Our God hates injustice and, when the leaders of Israel allowed such injustice to exist, the whole nation suffered and was taken into captivity.

The response of our leaders to my suggestions is that the structure of our church is

not a representative government. It is structured like a family. The administrators are the father of the family. The difference between this and the hierarchical form of church government, such as in the Catholic Church, is unclear.

The bottom line is that the administrators of our church do not want to lose the power to control the judgment of ministerial remarriage. They either want to control the decision alone, such as Dart did, or they want a committee who will act as a rubber stamp to do whatever they tell them to do. They also want to be the sole investigators of any case so they can tell their committee what decisions to make. They are also doing the best they can to suppress me from presenting my information and ideas.

A parallel situation is taking place in the Catholic Church. The victims of pedophilic priests are coming forward and attempting to find justice from the administration of the church. They are only finding double talk and further cover-up. These victims and others knowledgeable about the great sin within the church are having to take their case to the highest court in our land: the press. The cover-up of such sins is increasingly presented in print and on television, and the public is outraged. The Catholic Church has set up a review board to look at the decisions on pedophilic priests, only because of such public pressure.

What I am seeing in our church is that, even if there is hard evidence that a minister is adulterous, administration is still unconcerned—unless the Adventist public becomes concerned. Unfortunately the only court left is the press. Thus if you want clear principles and policies and just courts to judge adultery, it will only happen when you, the people, demand it. *If you want to be protected from adulterous pastors, you must make your voice heard.* I believe that the best way for this to happen is for a statement, similar to the following, to be placed in the *Church Manual*:

"All cases of ministerial divorce and remarriage shall be judged by a standing committee of no less than ten (10) members. There shall be at least four (4) women on such a committee. At least two (2) of the committee members shall not be employees of the church. The term of the members of this committee should not exceed three (3) years, and the members shall be elected by the entire conference. Attempts to make this committee ethnically balanced should be made. This committee shall not form policy on divorce and remarriage, but merely apply previously formed policies that have been approved by the entire conference."

If there are church representatives in agreement with my words, then I pray you will use whatever powers you have to cause such thoughts to be placed in the *Church Manual*. I pray you will also help the church develop the Godly policies and a clear definition of adultery that should then be applied to individual

cases.

I leave the reader to study carefully Jeremiah 23:4, 10-11, 14, 20. I believe God is warning each member of the church, especially Sligo, that God wants shepherds who are the husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:2). *If the church does not have a clear method of proving fitness to remarry, then the flocks are in danger of being pastored by adulterous shepherds.* The devil will have certain powers to affect the lives of the sheep under that shepherd. The rain of the Holy Spirit will be dried and the sheep will be scattered and lost. You must remove yourself and your family from such a blight. Many have the mistaken concept that, even if they sense a moral problem with their shepherd, that they will just wait it out, expecting him to eventually move on. Jeremiah 23 is warning such sleeping members to flee to the safety of a church where you know your shepherd has God's fullest blessing in his own home and is not separated from his children. Find a pastor whose wife is an example of modesty—where the purity of their marriage shines forth like sunlight as an example for your youth.

When troubled couples in your flock come to his office for counseling, they will not see before them the divorce solution, a man who has left the wife or wives of his youth and created a broken and distant family. *There is no spiritual safety under such a pastor, no matter how intelligent and talented he is.* Not even if he fills the church, conducts two services, and fills the coffers. Refuse to place yourself under such leadership. Demand, from your administrators, laws that make policy on remarriage perfectly clear and protect you from the adulterous shepherd.

Carefully scrutinize a pastor that has been cleared in another conference and may be—or is being—transferred to your church. If you are not sure, then I believe the evidence is clear: You cannot trust many church leaders to properly defend God's seventh commandment.

*If you are not sure of your pastor's purity, then err on the side of being overly zealous to protect the spiritual welfare of your family.* Find a shepherd where you feel secure in his purity and the purity of his marriage before God. When you find such a pastor, do not even let your church membership lag behind you under the shadow of an adulterous pastor. *Move yourself, your family, and your membership away from the curse of such leadership.* If God's people express themselves in such pure actions, it will have a purifying effect on the entire church.

—Elizabeth Iskander, M.D.