

Drama and the SDA Church:

Appendix 9

Moral and Spiritual Standards — No. 5
A Warning Against Moving-Picture and Other Theaters
 by F. M. Wilcox
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By every means in his power, Satan is endeavoring to turn the inhabitants of earth away from God. His wiles are varied, his snares are manifold. He cares not what means he employs so long as it accomplishes his deadly purpose. The strife for supremacy, the love of social life and position, the lure of gold, the struggle for competence, the ambition for education, the appeal of pleasure,—these and many other means are employed by the great deceiver to lead men to forget God, and permit their time and energy to become so engrossed and enthralled as to lead to their final destruction at last.

Against some of these great evils the Autumn Council, held recently in Des Moines, Iowa, sounded definite warning to our brethren and sisters. The following resolution was passed regarding moving pictures and commercialized amusements:

Recognizing the need of lifting up a standard against every influence that threatens the life and well-being of the church; and,

WHEREAS, The moving-picture or other theaters are becoming more and more a menace to morality and destructive of spirituality, in many cases leading to a false and lowered standard of life; therefore,

Resolved, That this Council declares its emphatic disapproval of attending moving-picture theaters and other questionable places of amusement, and calls upon our workers, church officers, and lay members, young and old, to refrain from this evil practice.

Realizing that we are living in the last days, when men are “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God,”

Resolved, That we warn our people against the spirit of this pleasure-loving age, and the commercialized amusements so prevalent.

We call the attention of our readers to the report of a sermon by Elder M. E. Kern in this number of the REVIEW. This sermon was delivered before the students of the Washington Missionary College and the nurses of the Washington Sanitarium at a recent Sabbath morning service.

Brother Kern deals specifically with the character of the moving-picture theater, and the great influence which this form of amusement exerts in the world. It is not necessary to reiterate his statements in this article. We are in hearty accord with his conclusions, and we commend the reading of his sermon to old and young.

Sad it is that there needs to be sounded in the columns of our church paper a warning against these great evils. And yet we must believe, from the letters which come to us from different parts of the field, that there are a number of our dear brethren and sisters who are succumbing to these unholy influences. Unfortunately, those thus affected do not belong alone to the younger class of our church membership. Some of our older brethren and sisters have so lost out of their hearts the true spirit of this message, have so lost out of their lives the consciousness of Christ’s presence, that they have become frequenters of these questionable places of amusement. And still more sad is it to learn that occasionally there is found a Seventh-day Adventist preacher who belongs to the class who frequent the movies.

Upon the leadership of this denomination is thrown a great responsibility, whether that leadership is

represented in the work of the minister, of the teachers in our schools, of the physicians in our sanitariums, of the managers in our publishing houses, or of the local officers of the church. Heaven holds us responsible as leaders of the people for what we do, not only for its effect upon our own lives, but for the influence it exerts upon others. Those who stand in the place of leaders must watch for souls as they who must give account in the day of final judgment. There is danger that we as leaders in the church of Christ will fail to distinguish between the holy and the profane. There is danger that the lowering standards of the world around us will becloud our vision, so that we shall not see clearly, and we shall be led to judge questions of vital importance after the standard of the world and not after the standard of God.

We were impressed with this some time ago by a question raised by one of our workers. He inquired if we felt today that we should hold the same standards regarding social life, amusements, etc., that were recognized before the War, or twenty-five or thirty years ago. He expressed the opinion that in his judgment standards had changed, that we were living in a new world, and that we must relate ourselves differently to those questions than did our fathers, that the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the same as some of the great churches of the world, must place a more liberal construction upon these questions.

This is the line of reasoning in which thousands of the great Christian world have indulged, and we know the demoralizing fruit which such reasoning has borne. Little by little the great churches of the world have been drawn away from their old-time standards of simplicity, of Christian belief, and of Christian living.

We said to this brother, God has not changed. Moral principles have not changed; and in all questions of social life, in our relations to the pleasures of the world in which moral principle is involved, in which the formation of character is the product, we must recognize the same standards today that we did ten years ago or fifty years ago. By the same principles of truth and purity and righteousness by which our fathers were judged, we shall be judged.

God has one standard for every age. If the friendship of the world was enmity with God in the days of the apostle Paul, that same friendship is at enmity with God today. If to be the friend of the world was to be the enemy of God ten years ago, or one hundred years ago, or two thousand years ago, to be the friend of the world is to be the enemy of God today.

Too many of the leaders of this church have ignored the honey-combing process which has been going on, and the influence which the pleasures of the world have been exerting upon the church members. It is time for us to lift our voices in protest. It is time for us to call the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, young and old, to a higher standard in Christ Jesus. It is time for every Seventh-day Adventist minister, for every teacher in our schools, for every leader in our institutions, to take his stand firmly but kindly against these influences which would draw away those under his care from the principles of truth and righteousness.

Much might be said on this question, but we refrain from further discussion at this time. We again call attention to the principles set forth in the published sermon of Professor Kern. A little later, in an early issue, we will give the report of a sermon by Elder Meade MacGuire, entitled, "Christ and the Heart," in which he deals with some of the great principles underlying this question of amusements. The instruction he gives is complementary to that given by Brother Kern, and the two sermons should be studied together. May God bless their perusal to the edification of every reader.