

Drama and the SDA Church:

Appendix 11

The Dangers of the Religious Drama

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On the Oakland camp ground recently, after the presentation of the dangers to young and old of attendance at moving picture shows, including Bible characters pictured on the screen, a young woman told me a story I wish every Seventh-day Adventist could hear. I was a stranger to this sister, but she was impressed by the sermon, and came to me to assure me that I was right in the stand I had taken. She said, as nearly as I can remember:

As a child I tried to follow the Lord, but was induced by older friends to attend a moving picture which seemed to be right, as it was of a highly religious character. But the wonderful attractiveness of the theater and the lure of the institution swept me off my feet, and I lost my love for God. Then for ten years I gave myself up to the business of the moving picture theater. Now I have found my way back, and I want to say that what you said is all too true, and there certainly should be warnings sent out to the young and old to keep away from all movies, including the religious drama.

There is much in theatrical plays and especially in religious dramas, which appears to be harmless and even good. But is it not deception under the garb of an angel of light? The origin of evil in this world is recorded in Genesis 3. The woman, when she saw the forbidden fruit, and found it pleasant to the eyes and good for food, and a thing desired to make men wise, yielded. The first sin ministered to fleshly appetites and selfish pleasure and selfish ambition. Today men and women are seeking just what Eve was allured into seeking. Self-improvement is the world's doctrine, and it sounds very sane and wise. Many ministers and religious educators are telling the young that what leads along the path of self-improvement is right and laudable. But it is the doctrine of devils; for to our first parents the enemy said, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." As another writer has truthfully said, "The gospel of self, and particularly of self-improvement, is vigorously promulgated, not only by the leaders of world movements who make no religious profession, but even eminent divines!" Improve yourself, strive ever upward and onward, make something of yourself, rise to your highest possibilities, get knowledge, "*be as gods*"!

But the contradistinction is the gospel of Jesus, which teaches us to "deny self," and not to be as gods, but to "become as little children," and instead of loving pleasure and the world, to love God and the things of God. Today so-called disciples of the Master are selling Jesus for pleasure and for money. The devil is as closely connected with this business as the serpent with Eve, and for the same purpose,—to win, to seduce, to allure, through the attractive screen of what is "pleasant to the eyes," and to lead men along the lines of culture, but not to Christ.

In much of the religious drama it is the old tempter at work today; not now in the garb of a serpent, but dressed as an angel of light. It would seem that he is now come down with great power to picture Christ. It will not be long till he will personate Him, claiming that he himself is the Christ, and this will be the masterpiece of dramatic productions on the life of Christ.

Satan's Archdrama

Never can the work of Christ be fully set forth in drama unless miracles are performed as He wrought them, and the sick are healed. This is a plan of the archenemy in a future great drama.

Satan himself is converted, after the modern order of things. He will appear in the character of an angel of light. Through the agency of Spiritualism, miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and many undeniable wonders will be performed. —*The Great Controversy*, page 599.

As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ... In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation. —*Ibid.*, p. 624.

A play on the life of Christ only makes it all the more deceptive. How can we see men of the world, artists, actors, and often profligate men and women, personate Christ and Bible scenes, and we consent by our presence and with our money? It will not exalt Christ, but man, and Christ is crucified afresh by His professed followers who attend and put Him to an open shame.

But have not our children and some of our older folk been prepared for attendance at theatrical plays by the introduction into our churches and Sabbath schools of plays that are dramatic in character? Let us keep all semblance of this out of our assemblies. All exhibitions of display of a worldly nature, such as drama or theatrical performances, should be kept out of all our religious exercises.

It was by association with idolaters and joining in their festivities that the Hebrews were led to transgress God's law, and bring His judgments upon the nation. So now it is by leading the followers of Christ to associate with the ungodly and unite in their amusements, that Satan is most successful in alluring them into sin. —
Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 458.

Such warnings as these are striking and timely. Let us be instructed. Satan is playing his game. Shall we who are warned be led astray? We fear there is danger, and we suggest that church and institutional leaders, and our workers everywhere, be fully awake to what appears to the writer to be one of the greatest evils and dangers the church has ever known. Shall any of us stand idly by while these agencies of the enemy go forward unrebuked, when we know this form of pleasure is the abetter of pride, the defiler of the soul, the avenue of lust, and the curse of true religion?

The Breath of Hell

A breath of hell's miasma floats up amid the perfumes of the fashionably dressed and careless theater goers, and death and destruction is the end. What will become of these who work all day and play all night? Those who have given up their midnights to pleasures of sight and late feasting and automobile rides, are certainly not in the narrow way, but are rushing along the broad way to death.

The theater has incurred the disapproval and even the condemnation of the good and wise of all ages. At its first appearance 500 years before Christ, it received the censure of God's people, and also of leaders in the pagan world. Historians tell us that one cause of the decadence in Greece and Rome was the madness of the world for shows. The early Christians pledged themselves to uphold their rulers by any proper service, but they signified their emphatic disapproval of the popular

shows. If at a time when there was far more simplicity in the world, it was thought so necessary to separate from the world in its pleasures, what shall be our attitude today? And not only did Jewish, pagan, and Christian leaders condemn the theater, but even men of the stage themselves. Macready, a man known throughout the world in theatrical circles, said as he retired from the stage, "None of my children, with my consent, under any pretense, shall even enter the theater, nor shall they have any visiting connection with play actors or actresses."

An authority outside our own church ranks speaks as follows:

Never has there been a generation so much in revolt against their elders. In my judgment this psychic revolt springs chiefly from the motion films, with some aid from the automobile. We have a generation sex-excited, self-assertive, self-confident, and parental-critical. There can be no doubt that the arrival of overmastering sex desire in the boy's life has been antedated by at least two or three years, through stimulation from the films. —*Quoted by William Sheafe Chase, D. D., Superintendent, International Reform Federation.*

The Illustration of the Ship

The Christian, while in the world, is not to be "of the world," and so the particular joys of the world are not to be his, for he is to separate from the world, and to love God and make heavenly things his delight. The writer often illustrates separation from the world by the ship in the water. A ship is made to float upon the water. But it is a disastrous thing when water gets into the ship. It is right enough for the Christian to be in the world, but he will be sure to make shipwreck when the world gets into him. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." John 17:16.

The movies are the worldly plan and device for the satisfaction and pleasure of worldly people. It is not a place for the Christian. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." This scripture forbids the Christian to seek such associations as are found in the theater. As another has written:

We doubt not there are many moral and Christian people that attend the theater for one reason and another, but the larger percent, by far, are loose in morals. There you find the man who has lost all love for his home, the careless, the profane, the spendthrift, the drunkard, and the lowest prostitute of the street. They are found in all parts of the house; they crowd the gallery, and together shout aloud in the applause greeting that which caricatures religion, sneers at virtue, or hints at indecency.

That is the reason we are asked by the Lord not to "stand in the way of sinners" nor to "sit in the seat of the scornful." One of the chief avenues through which sin enters the soul is the eye, and against "the lust of the eyes" John warns. 1 John 2:16. Thousands are losing their love for God through the lust of the eyes, and many have thereby lost that priceless jewel, modesty.

In regard to the lawfulness of going to questionable places of amusement, Dr. Guthrie gives the following excellent advice:

We may confidentially say that whatever is found to unfit you for religious duties, or to interfere with the performance of them, whatever dissipates your mind or cools the fervor of your devotions, whatever indisposes you to read your Bibles or to engage in prayer, wherever the thought of a bleeding Saviour or a holy God, of the hour of death, or of the day of judgment, falls like a cold shadow on your enjoyment, the pleasures which you cannot thank God for, on which you cannot ask His

blessing, whose recollections will haunt a dying bed, and plant sharp thorns in its uneasy pillow,—these are not for you. These eschew; in these be not conformed to the world, but transformed by the renewing of your minds — “Touch not, taste not, handle not.” Never go where you cannot ask God to go with you; never be found where you would not like death to find you; never indulge in any pleasure which will not bear the morning’s reflection. Keep yourselves unspotted from the world; not from its spots only, but even from its suspicions.