

Drama and the SDA Church:

Appendix 13

*Has the Time Come for Us to Alter Our Standards and Rebuild Our Platform?**

by Carlyle B. Haynes

(*Review and Herald*, March 1, 1934)

The text for this morning's sermon contains a word of important counsel from the world's wisest man. You will find it recorded in Proverbs 22:28, and it reads: "Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set."

This informs us that our ancestors have set landmarks. It admonishes us not to remove them. It leads us to believe that these boundary lines are of value to us. They were set where they were because of the knowledge and understanding and experience our fathers had. They are not to be changed by us.

We catch the picture at once. All of us have had some experience with the annoyance caused by inaccurate signposts or boundary lines. We know something of what it means in loss of time and positive exasperation when we are misdirected and get on the wrong road and go a long way out of our course. This may be due either to wrong markings or to the absence of markings.

The text leads us to believe that the generations of the past learned some things, and came to assured knowledge, before we arrived on the scene of action. They learned them from experience. If we could only bring ourselves to accept their findings, we should be saved many a sad experience.

Worldly Amusements

Our views about separating from the world and belonging to God have led us to be careful with reference to worldly amusements. Just as the early Methodists did, so we discountenance dancing, theater going, card playing, competitive sports, and everything of like nature that would lead away from God and prevent our leading consistent Christian lives.

These have been our standards from the beginning. They are our standards now. They are going to remain our standards.

But, as in the case of others, so in ours, when a denomination becomes established, and develops size, and creates large church, and the early rigors of opposition subside, there is always a tendency to lay aside or modify these standards. A greater indulgence is shown toward their violation.

In every large church there are always two classes of believers. One class is determined that these standards of the faith shall be maintained. The other class believes these standards are unnecessarily high, and should be modified or discarded altogether.

It sometimes happens this second class enlarges its numbers and influence until its representatives come to occupy places of prestige and power in the church. Then church standards come to be violated and overridden with impunity. They are not enforced. When members are known to be doing to dances, or card parties, or shows, a quiet and indulgent smile is about all that follows.

I desire to emphasize, my brethren, that when that time comes and church standards are dealt with in that way, the church is in serious danger. I would have you remember that God places His mark of approval and acceptance on those who sigh and cry for the abominations that are done in the

church. (See Ezekiel 9.)

When such laxness becomes prevalent, then the opinion begins to be expressed that these old church standards are too rigid, that the landmarks of the fathers should be removed, that in order to win the rising generation we must soft pedal these things, and permit the youth to adopt lower standards. I assure you with all earnestness that such a course wins no respect for the church or its divine Head.

Think of the anomaly of a leader in the church, an officer, a Sabbath school teacher, teaching these church standards on the Sabbath, and being discovered at other times violating them. It is not unknown among us for leaders of the church to smugly and complacently dress in accordance with church standards on the Sabbath and at church affairs, but when invited to some worldly banquet or social occasion to dress like worldlings.

Pageantry in Services

But there is another matter in which our standards are endangered. One cannot help observing that many pageants and shows are being given in our services, in both the Sabbath school and the church, and at the young people's meetings. At these it is noticeable that rouge and make-up and paint and costuming are being more and more used. Some of our young people are asked to do a bit of acting. Little playlets with definite plots are being put on. Theatricals are pressing their way into the church. Our thirteenth Sabbath programs, our Christmas and New Year's celebrations, our graduation and commencement celebrations, and other programs of the church are witnessing more and more of this kind of questionable thing.

I raise the question, Where are we going? What are we heading for? Are our church standards to be altogether ignored? Are we to remain silent while these things are being forced upon us? And if we remain silent and let these things grow, what will become of our church standards? I notice that there is always some one who will carry these affairs on to the very verge of the questionable, and then sit back and see if anything is said about it. If nothing is said about it, then the next time the affair becomes a little more daring. If still nothing is said and no opposition is expressed, these things are pressed to the point where there is outright acting, make-up, and dramatic portrayal of character parts.

For myself I have come to the place where I can be silent no longer. I want it known by every one that I deplore the laxity that leads to this abandonment of our church standards. I want to be on record, so that my influence may be most positively against the theatrical, the make-believe, and against acting in the church. I propose to introduce into the next meeting of the executive board of the Tabernacle the following resolution, and press its adoption. I read it to you now, so that all may know what it contains:

WHEREAS, The Seventh-day Adventist movement and teaching are essentially Biblical, placing emphasis on the basic, the fundamental, and the actual in Christian living and experience, leading to simplicity, plainness, and earnestness in our daily walk with God; and,

WHEREAS, This naturally results in the individual believer's cultivating the attributes of candor, sincerity, and reality in dealing with the essential facts of daily life; and,

WHEREAS, In literature the very genius and spirit of our message lead to an abandonment of all that is imaginary, fanciful, and fictional, and the study and reading of that only which is true, solid, and real; and,

WHEREAS, In entertainment we discountenance all that is theatrical, and turn

away from the dangerous fascination and glitter of the world of unreality and make-believe, and encourage only the informative, the educational, the wholesome, and the character and body building; and,

WHEREAS, There is need of sounding a warning in the interests of safeguarding our members, and particularly our youth, from the evils inherent in theatricals, and with the desire to avoid all pretense, sham, unreality, artificiality, and make-believe in the activities of the Tabernacle, and to have all our work in every department of the church represent only that which is genuine, sincere, real, and true; therefore,

We recommend, That all our officers, leaders, teachers, and helpers cooperate with us, both in the Tabernacle and in Battle Creek Academy, in discountenancing and eliminating from all programs, exercises, and celebrations, any pageant, play, show, performance, or representation of any kind whatsoever which requires or employs any acting, make-up, costuming, or taking of character parts, even of Biblical and religious incidents, scenes, and characters; it being understood that this is not designed to prevent children in the Sabbath school from using a costume or reciting a part which may represent the native dress or speak in the name of a foreign or home mission field.*

I want to know whether you think we have come in this church to the time when we should discard or enforce the old standards? Do you want your pastor and your board to wink at violations of these old and established standards? Shall we modify our standards to meet lowered ideals? or shall we uphold them and insist on their observance? My own position in this matter you will find stated clearly and emphatically in the text for today, "Remove not the ancient landmarks, which thy fathers have set."

* Unanimously adopted by the Tabernacle Executive Board, January 8, 1934.