

Drama and the SDA Church:

Appendix 18

Seventh-day Adventists and the Theater

Part II

(F. M. Wilcox, Review and Herald, March 25, 1937)

Is there coming into the Seventh-day Adventist Church a gradual lowering of the standards for which we have stood throughout our denominational history? Are we losing our simplicity of Christian faith and experience? Is there a growing tendency on the part of many in the church to reach out and join hands with the world?

These, in my mind, are questions which need serious consideration at the present time. I believe that there is a growing spirit of worldliness in the lives of many of our church members. And I believe the time has fully come when the voice of warning should be sounded against this danger.

I know that many of our earnest ministers are sounding this warning, and it should be sounded in the columns of our church paper. Indeed, if the REVIEW AND HERALD cannot stand for the advent spirit which has characterized this movement through the years, if it cannot uphold the principles of simplicity in Christian faith and experience, and throw its influence against the growing tendency to worldliness, then our church paper has no right to exist; it has missed the way, and should obtain a new vision of the call of God to His people today, a new vision of eternal values, or it is undeserving of the support of the Adventist people.

The Lord has told His watchmen to cry aloud and spare not, to lift up their voice like a trumpet, and show His people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. Isa. 58:1. If the watchmen on the walls of Zion see danger approaching and do not sound the warning of that danger, then God will hold them responsible for their neglect of duty.

I wrote last week of the danger of bringing into our churches and institutions theatrical plays. These plays are bringing confusion to some of our brethren and sisters. They cannot understand why such amusements should be permitted in any of our institutions.

From one of our readers who is anxious to know the right comes this inquiry:

There are a few questions I should like to ask you. I am asking them in a humble attempt to get right and to do what is right in the sight of God. First, just what is right in regard to Seventh-day Adventists' attending pictures? I am sixty years old, and have been brought up in this message. I have always been told it was wrong to attend theaters, moving pictures, and other worldly amusements. But now I am told that while it may not be best, it is not a sin, so one can attend if he desires. I cannot understand that sort of reasoning. Will you make this plain to me?

Another question: If I know men and women who are attending the movies, can I conscientiously vote them into office in the church? I am a Sabbath school superintendent here, and there are some who might be good teachers, but every member knows that they attend the movies, and I have not felt free to put them in the position of teachers. Am I too old-fashioned, and should I let down on the beliefs that I have been holding for a long time? I do not want to be fanatical, but I do want to do what is right.

What answer would you give to these inquiries? Do you think that in standing against our people's attending theaters and the movies, this reader is too old-fashioned? Do you think that times have changed, and that what was sinful twenty years ago is right today?

The apostle John gave this instruction to the church in his day:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. 1 John 2:15-17.

Do you think this instruction was applicable to the apostolic church, but is not applicable to the remnant church? I cannot so regard it. The eternal truth of God remains unchanged, and what was written aforetime was written for our instruction today. I believe that the old-time standard of the Seventh-day Adventist Church should be upheld, even though some in the church have lowered that standard into the dust.

And what would you reply in answer to the question as to whether men and women who attend theaters and the movies should occupy official positions in the church? Should they be appointed as Sabbath school teachers? In my judgment this would be most inconsistent. The men and women who occupy positions of leadership in the church of Christ should represent in their lives the principles of the gospel message. Standing as the representatives of the church, they should represent the principles of the church.

Indeed, rather than being made leaders, such church members should rather become subjects of missionary labor for evil which these misguided ones are exerting. This was the recommendation of the Autumn Council of 1935 at Louisville, Kentucky. I quote as follows from the report of that meeting, which appeared in the REVIEW of December 5, 1935:

We appeal to our ministers, our workers, our people everywhere, to keep their feet in the "old paths," and not to remove the "ancient landmarks" of this message.

In cases where members of the churches hold bridge or similar card parties in their homes, or frequent such gatherings in other places; or have dances in their homes or attend them elsewhere; or frequent shows in theaters or movie houses, we recommend that faithful labor be put forth to reclaim such individuals from the errors of their way; but if this proves unsuccessful, that they be dismissed from church membership.

I believe that this instruction should be carried out in all our churches. I recognize that some of our dear brethren and sisters are confused regarding these things. They have unconsciously been following wrong paths. They have lost their spiritual discernment. They need to be awakened to a new sense of their duties as followers of the Master. Such missionary labor should be done in a spirit to save and not condemn.

I shall present next week another letter received from another part of the field regarding this vital question.