

Drama and the SDA Church:

Appendix 31 - D Gleaner Editor's Response to the Above Letter

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Dear Brother Dr. Hawkins:

You've put a lot of effort into the letter of Jan. 4, which I just finished reading. I appreciate the sincerity and high quality of that effort, but I must say with equal candor that I am not threatened by this divergence of opinion regarding drama. I believe sincerely that the evidence from Ellen White's writings portrays the dangers of a significant portion of the dramatic palate, but not a wholesale indictment of historical and gospel enactments. To take this position, even in the face of the severe criticism Sister White metes out against some types of drama, is truly to run in the face of the clear evidence of Scripture.

Some feel that the yearly Hebrew/Jewish services WERE NOT dramatizations. That's incorrect; they were. The gathering around the Passover table and the service of reliving the Passover event, standing and eating bitter herbs and unleavened bread, is CLEARLY an "entering in" of the people (actors) into the "characters" of those who left Egypt. In these enactments, the Jewish children clearly assumed the "voices" of people centuries dead. Ditto for the feast of tabernacles, and so on and so forth. The ancient Judean faith (which Jesus by and large observed, except for its skewed values and hypocrisy) was filled with drama for educational purposes.

The position that all drama is inherently ungodly is akin to the ultra-orthodox Hebrew position that all photography, all statuary, all man-made depictions of created life, are a breaking of the second commandment. The problem is that those who hold to this view disregard the fact that the tabernacle of the Most High was filled with depictions of created beings. Does God instruct people to break His own commandments? Certainly not. The Bible explains itself, and the second commandment is clearly contextualized by the rest of Exodus, that explicitly MANDATES artistic recreations of created life.

Likewise with drama. If the God of Our Fathers had ordained that NO DRAMA should exist in His remnant camp, (1) Why is yearly dramatic-style memorialization of Hebrew history mandated by Scripture; (2) Why is there no specific condemnation of dramatic arts in Scripture; (3) Why does Ellen White confine her derogatory statements on drama-related topics to "the stage," and "theatrics," rather than explicitly stating, "Never shall a follower of Jesus portray, or observe the portrayal, of another human being in a dramatic setting," or words even approaching such a blanket disavowal. The point is, no such statement exists, because Ellen White and Scripture remain in intricate harmony.

My recent article presents this view as its thesis statement, and holds to that view in the response to the letter writer. Ditto for Arthur White and the General Conference. I cannot imagine that Arthur White would have the effrontery to "mince" or "bias" his grandmother's words--to twist her intent to make her say diametrically the opposite of what she truly meant. The tenor of Arthur's life was not to distort, but to dignify the teachings of his grandmother.

Where you and I find KEEN AGREEMENT is in our overwhelming distaste for contemporary drama, current Hollywood programming, and the tawdry, sensual messages portrayed so expertly by the craft of the day. Our disagreement comes when I say, on the one hand, that good drama can and should be employed to counteract amoral and immoral drama; you stand fast in your view that danger lies in using drama of any kind.

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David J. Lee, in his allusion to Ezekiel 20:25, 26, I believe does us all an injustice in suggesting that God literally subjected His people to "statutes that are not good."

Read with me in the Adventist Bible Commentary what learned, conservative theologians have to say, "The statutes the people had adopted, which were not good, came from the heathen round about them. But how can it be said that God gave these to them? In Bible figure, many acts are attributed to God, not with the idea that He actually performs them, but from the point of view that in His omnipotence and omniscience He does not prevent them. An understanding of this principle helps to explain many apparently contradictory statements, which, like the one here under consideration, seem to contradict flatly the Bible teaching that God's character is pure and holy."

So I would implore you to hold true to what you have. Perhaps for you, complete abstinence from drama is the only sure course. That's great! The Lord works in mysterious ways. And your emphasis upon the problems associated with drama are right to the point. We NEED folks like you who can step forward and say, "Yes, this is morally wrong. We must repent. We must change course."

You and I are equally distressed by the moral turpitude of the theater and the liberal leanings through the ages of professional stage actors. And it's tempting to say, "The history of drama is so sordid, and the admonitions against it by the Prophet so stringent, to be on the safe side, we as Adventists should not even touch this unclean thing."

We differ, but in our love for the Lord and in our desire to be with Him soon, we are brothers. We need not alienate ourselves from one another on this issue. The Holy Spirit will lead us. Let us not become overwrought because of these questions of methodology and prescriptive righteousness. Complete abstinence from worldly drama is a wonderful goal; complete dedication to drama that lifts of Jesus can certainly be an equal blessing, in this end time.

Yes, I would entertain an article on the dangers of drama, but I feel convicted that it would be

inappropriate to go that extra step and advocate complete removal of drama from the gospel tool chest. The Bible clearly does not prohibit drama, and in fact in places mandates it. When in doubt about Ellen White's statements, we must turn to Scripture to interpret her sayings. I have done that, and find her less than entirely prohibitionist toward Christian drama.

I wish you well in this new year. Please feel free to write me at any time. I will be diligent and prayerful in my responses, as I have been here.

Schwisow, Editor
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