

# **Thoughts On Dramatic Presentations**

In the Light of the Inspired Writings and Experience

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# Thoughts on Dramatic Presentations

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## Introduction

The material shared here is in one sense a chapter out of my life journal. For as long as I can remember I have been easily captivated by "theatrics." Such performances readily carried me into an imaginary world that was exciting and stimulating. As others who seem to be very visually oriented, whose imaginations are very active, I find any form of stories appealing, and the more sight and sound provided, the greater the lure.

In spite of this powerful attraction, I have had two clear witnesses that long have spoken to me against the make-believe and play-acted form of stories. One is the written words the Spirit has given, warning against the theater and the theatrical, the fictional and make-believe. As I sensed these particularly were for me, that they met a need I had, I have attempted to collect these, to reflect upon them, to apply them to my own situation. The other voice I have heard has been the still, small voice of the Spirit speaking to my spirit, especially after times of indulging my imagination in such forms of stories. Even though part of me enjoyed it, my spirit would always be troubled. And I have attempted to understand why the conflict existed.

My search has led me to reflect at length on the function of the human imagination, its proper, sanctified use according to the reason God endowed mankind with it, and its abuse, its prostitution for purposes that are destructive to mind, spirit, and body. Currently I would summarize these contrasting activities of the imagination in this way: God intended that we use the imagination to perceive past or unseen realities that reinforce our multifaceted, God-given, individual identities, and not to behold the make-believe, the unrealities that only confuse who we are. These summary understandings are further developed at various places in this study.

I have become powerfully convinced that God has a genuine form of drama that is rooted in reality and that functions as a very effective teaching method, if not the most effective. We should hear God's clear call to use these techniques to convey spiritual truth to curious and searching minds. The reflections in these pages will be an attempt to clarify how God has used these approaches throughout sacred history. But at the same time, the counterfeit drama forms must be clearly identified, and the core elements that differentiate the two must be outlined.

An important note to make here is that the two contrasting forms of drama (drama in this general sense being the dramatic or visual) both use terms that in themselves are neutral, as they can rightfully describe either. These words (in addition to the ones we have already used—imagination, drama, and dramatic) include acted, actor, character, exhibit, figure, role, and symbol. As these can have dual meaning, to use them other than in a general sense that covers both forms of drama, or in a specifically clear setting, is confusing rather than clarifying. The other terms we have used so far (play-acted and make-believe) refer to the form of drama in which one enters the realm of the unreal where one must portray someone other than himself.

As one becomes familiar with the adjectives, nouns, and verbs the inspired writings use in discussing this general topic, the ways will become clear in which the two contrasting forms of drama are described. We will let the inspired statements define our terms, and then the section on "Key Summary Words and Ideas" will outline these descriptive words at length.

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While the entire issue of both forms of drama will be addressed by the counsels and concepts included here, of particular and current interest and importance is the question of whether the play-acting form of drama is a long-lost method of teaching the gospel and of worshipping God. The church is being confronted with this question in a pervasive manner, from individual ministries and professions, to family and congregational worship and devotions, from school courses and programs, to church outreach and evangelism.

Our gracious God, who does not change, in whose presence sin cannot exist, while giving us clear and unequivocal guidance for our life on this earth, still works with what He has in honoring our often immature, sin-confused, and sometimes hard-hearted choices. So Paul could say that when Christ was preached, "whether in pretense, or in truth" (Phil. 1:15-20), God could reach the honest in heart. But He is ever calling us to higher ground, to something better. Let us commit ourselves to the best He has for us. In this context we have this pointed counsel:

Men will recognize the truth when it is  
brought to them in a way that is in harmony  
with God's purposes.

—GW383

## Biblical Reflections — Use of Symbols

Typical and symbolic activity was used frequently by God in Scripture to teach truth. Three different channels by which He did this come to mind:

1. **Priest:**

The most obvious of this methodology is that of the *sanctuary* system that prefigured the work of Christ as Sacrifice and Priest. Much *activity* of a symbolic nature was found here.

2. **Prophet:**

Elsewhere the *prophets* were at times instructed to carry out certain *actions* that were symbolic of a message or of a future event, and at other times were given visions which were in symbols.

3. **Teacher:**

Yet another example was the parables and allegories used at times in *teaching*, sometimes even being *acted*, but more often spoken. (The preacher combines some of prophet and teacher.)

The following three actions have been involved in all three methods of giving truth in symbolism:

- a. **Seen** (function of receiving the message)
- b. **Spoken / Written** (function of giving the message)
- c. **Acted** (also function of giving the message): symbolic or real use of action combined with visual and verbal messages

These can be seen by examples in a table on the next page.

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**Examples of the Three Actions used by the Three Channels**

	<b>Seen</b>	<b>Spoken / Written</b>	<b>Acted</b>
<b>1. Priest</b>	Moses was shown the pattern in the mount	Written instruction was given as to what to do and why (Exodus and Leviticus)	Most of the activity of this service was in doing symbolic acts; the <b>Priest</b> area employs this activity as its major function (the drama of salvation)
<b>2. Prophet</b>	Daniel's visions were full of elaborate symbols; the <b>Prophet</b> area employs this activity as its major function (the seer of prophecy).	The symbolic visions were at times spoken, though most were written.	Ezekiel once lay on his side in an acted prophecy; Jeremiah used "acted parables" (PK423:1).
<b>3. Teacher</b>	Christ the consummate Teacher learned the lessons He gave from what He saw in the symbols of the sanctuary, in the prophets, and in nature.	Christ's parables were spoken to multitudes, giving truth in figures of everyday life; the <b>Teacher</b> area employs this activity as its major function (the spoken word)	Christ at least once acted a parable: the cursing of the fig tree, "an acted parable" (DA 582)

In channels 1 & 2 and at times 3 God clearly gave instructions for not only the message but also the medium. That is, He gave both *what* should be said and *how* it should be said. All methods were to teach unseen, or poorly seen, or easy-to-be-forgotten realities.

Though these uses of symbols can very well be spoken of in one sense as dramatic, one cannot say they had any affinity with the theatrical, for reasons which are shown by the characteristics of the theater (see the section "Characteristics of the Theater"). *In other words, while they may have been dramatic in the sense of vivid and visual, they were not dramatic in the sense of being theatrical and play-acted.*

## Biblical Reflections — Key Words

### *Theater*

"**Theater**" is from the Greek "theatron" (θεατρον), meaning "a place for public show," by implication "a show itself." It is translated both "spectacle" and "theater." The related verb form is "theatrizo" (θεατριζω), meaning "to expose as a spectacle." It is translated "make a gazing stock."

The only real acting is real life in the drama of the great controversy.

**For we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels and to men.** (spectacle = "theatron"; by implication, "we are the show itself") 1 Cor. 4:9

Paul here was referring to the witness of a Christian's life who willingly goes through deprivation and conflict, and whatever other struggles are part of being a Christian and spreading the good news about Christ. It is significant that it is also in this same context that he used the verb form of the same word:

**Ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions.** Heb. 10:33

It is this theater stage upon which the "**mystery**" that Paul preached, the "**unsearchable riches of Christ**" and "**the manifold wisdom of God**," will be made "**known**" to the universe "**by the church**":

**... that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God....** (Eph. 3:8-10)

The question is, do we want to devote our time and energies to the real drama, or do we want to spend time developing make-believe dramas about the real drama? If we spend little time, our make-believe plays will obviously be amateurish. If we spend a lot of time to be "professional," would it not better be spent in real-life Christian living? In other words, for example, rather than spending hours to prepare for a theatrical presentation on how to feed and care for our needy brothers and sisters, why not go out and do it, and come and report the blessings of real-life drama to those who are yet afraid to act (in the real sense)? It is in this way (and it seems this alone) that we are made the "**spectacles**" that Paul referred to.

This type of drama was that in which Christ engaged. "**There was no falsity, no acting, in what He did.**" (Ev266:3 to 267:1) The medical missionary worker of today is told "**he can act sermons**" in this context: "**The truth expressed in living, unselfish deeds is the strongest argument for Christianity.**" (CH537:1)

### *Hypocrite*

"**Hypocrite**" is from the Greek word "hupocrites" (ὑποκριτής) which means "actor," specifically "an actor under an assumed character," "stage-player," figuratively a "dissembler." Related words include the Greek "hupocrisis" (ὑποκρισις) which means "acting under a feigned part," figuratively "deceit," and translated variously as "**condemnation**," "**dissimulation**," "**hypocrisy**"; and also the Greek "hupocrinomai" (ὑποκρίνομαι), literally "to decide (speak or act) under" that is, under a false part, figuratively, "dissemble," "pretend," and translated "**feign**."

Let us look at some ways these words are used in Scripture and the key concepts behind them. Think of "acting," and see how these texts describe the core essence of play-acting. (If the word had been translated and not transliterated, we might be reading "actor" everywhere "hypocrite" occurs.) It should be noted that the Scripture is not addressing the actor as a person who performs in the literal theater, though such existed in the Greek culture of the New Testament time. But it seems significant that it uses the word for that actor in describing people whose character problems are rooted in that which the actor constantly demonstrated and had come to symbolize.

Matt. 6:2

**When thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men.** (see also vs. 5)

They like public settings to be seen by and receive glory from men.

Matt. 6:16

**Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.**

They put on appearances that are false faces, again "unto men."

Matt. 7:5

**Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye....**

His falsity confuses his perception of reality, particularly about himself. He sees others faults more easily than own.

Matt. 15:7, 8

**Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.**

They are double, split persons, mouth and heart not in agreement.

Matt. 16:3

**O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?**

They are physically oriented, discerning physical but not spiritual things.

Matt. 22:18

**Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?**

They act presumptuously in coming to Christ under false pretense.

Matt. 23:27, 28

**Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.** ("hypocrite" occurs 6 other times in this chapter)

They suffer a disruption of internal and external, with a falsity of action and a pretense, claiming to be one thing and actually being another.

Matt. 24:51

**And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites....**

The false and disrupted have their end in destruction.

Luke 12:1

**Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.**

Falsity acts as leaven, unseen at first, subtle, permeating gradually; it is extremely dangerous because it is *self*-deception.

Luke 20:20

**And they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words....**

The spies had to put on an act to appear just, because their mission was not just.

Rom. 12:9

**Let love be without dissimulation.**

*Agape* love must be genuine, without pretense, unfeigned, solid, not played but evidenced in reality. Otherwise it is not *agape*.

Gal. 2:13

**And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.**

Here Peter, Barnabas, and other Jews fell into the trap of putting on a different face in a pressure situation; the concept is that of acting one character role in this setting, another role in another, thereby being at least two-faced.

James 3:17

**But that wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.**

There is no play-acting in the divine wisdom. (It is good to note here also that the chief two characteristics of the blatantly worldly dramas, that of sensuality and violence, is clearly contrasted here by James to this wisdom: sensuality: 3:15; 4:2-4; violence: 3:16; 4:1, 2).

*Alam*

Of interest also is at least one Hebrew word (Old Testament) which is translated "dissembler." "*Alam*," meaning "veil," "conceal," is used in this verse from David:

Psa. 26:4,5

**I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evildoers; and will not sit with the wicked.**

The concealed one, who is not open and honest, is classed with the vain, the evildoers, and the wicked.

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**Biblical Reflections — Proverbs**

The wisdom of the Proverbs has much to say about the major themes of life. Having noted some of the elements of falsity and deceit in the witness of theatrical performances, let us observe what Proverbs shows us about the use of these concepts in a general sense, and what is stated about imaginations. Reflect on the following verses.

***Deceit, Lying***

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Prov. 6:17

(vs. 16 the Lord hates..., an abomination unto Him) **A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood**

Prov. 10:18

**He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool.**

Prov. 11:18

**The wicked worketh a deceitful work: but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward.**

Prov. 12:5

**The thoughts of the righteous are right: but the counsels of the wicked are deceit.**

Prov. 12:17

**He that speaketh truth showeth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit.**

Many are promoting the "witness" of "theatrics" in teaching truth. See the other texts from Proverbs on "witness."

Prov. 12:19

**The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment.**

Prov. 12:20

**Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counselors of peace is joy.**

Prov. 12:22

**Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight.**

Prov. 13:5

**A righteous man hateth lying: but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame.**

Prov. 14:8

**The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way: but the folly of fools is deceit.**

Prov. 14:25

**A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies.**

Prov. 17:7

**Excellent speech becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince.**

Prov. 20:17

**Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.**

Prov. 21:6

**The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death.**

Prov. 23:3

**Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat.**

Just as there is junk food for the body, food that tastes good but is worse than no food, so there is junk food for the mind, the intellect, the imagination, the soul. It also tastes good but is as damaging.

Prov. 26:18, 19

**As a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, So is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport?**

Could we paraphrase these verses from the neighbor's perspective this way:

"It is a mad man who loves firebrands, arrows, and death,  
who enjoys his neighbor's deceiving him in sport,  
or pays his neighbor to deceive him in sport."

Prov. 26:24

**He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him;**

Prov. 26:26

**Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be showed before the whole congregation.**

Prov. 26:28

**A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.**

Prov. 27:6

**Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.**

Prov. 30:8

**Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me:**

Prov. 31:30

**Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.**

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***Imagination***


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Prov. 6:18

(vs. 16 the Lord hates..., an abomination unto Him...) **a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations.**

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***Hypocrite***


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Prov. 11:9

**A hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbor; but through knowledge shall the just be delivered.**

The hypocrite is an actor. Those who justify acting by saying truth can be taught by pretense fail to see that while attempting to *teach* truth by pretense, my *imagination* is deceived, and thereby poisoned, even though my knowledge may not be deceived. That is, I *know* the actor is not who he says he is and who he acts like his is, but I *imagine* him to be so. But deceiving and poisoning of the imagination is no worse or better than doing the same to my knowledge. It is a perversion of that God-given faculty. Rather than imagining falsehood, I should use my imagination to see unseen realities. If I let my knowledge (educated by God) guide, I will be *delivered* from the *destruction* that the actor is delivering.

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***Witness***


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Prov. 6:19

(vs. 16 the Lord hates..., an abomination unto Him...) **A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.**

Is not play-acting a "false witness"? And would not in this context a true witness be my personal testimony, that is, what I have actually seen and experienced?

Prov. 12:17

**He that speaketh truth showeth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit.**

Prov. 14:5

**A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies.**

Prov. 14:25

**A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies.**

Prov. 19:5

**A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.**

Prov. 19:9

**A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish.**

Prov. 19:28

**An ungodly witness scorneth judgment: and the mouth of the wicked devoureth iniquity.**

Prov. 21:28

**A false witness shall perish: but the man that heareth speaketh constantly.**

Prov. 24:28

**Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause; and deceive not with thy lips.**

Prov. 25:18

**A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow.**

### ***Reality***

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Prov. 23:5

**Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not?**

Contrast this question about what we set our eyes upon with a verse later in the same chapter:

Prov. 23:26

**My son, give Me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.**

### ***Glory vs. Hiding***

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Prov. 28:12

**"When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory,..."**

Glory is character, the qualities of Christ developed in real life. If every deed is brought into judgment, how will feigning someone else be judged? Will I be judged the same as the one whose deeds and identity I am copying?

**"... but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden."**

Feigning hides the man. Play-acting is a mask. God wants a man revealed. God wants my *personal* testimony, not for me to tell another's. "Theatrics" in this light borders on plagiarism. Let the other person give his own testimony in the first person. If he is:

- a) A person in the past: he can do so through his writings or through an eyewitness' account of him. To portray him in feigning will be strained because I do not look like him or think like him (nor would God want me to try to merge myself into that). Such an attempt is the reason for the intense practice and the make up actors undergo to seem like someone they are not.
- b) A real, living person: he should speak for himself; otherwise my sharing his testimony should be as a third party, for the reasons noted under (a).
- c) A fictional person: what vanity! Such a one *does not exist*, has no personal testimony, and thus will not be judged by God. (The only proper thing remotely approaching this is the corporate testimony built into a character in a written allegory such as *Pilgrim's Progress*. Such is beneficial in written form, but becomes distracting and strained when theatricalized.

## Biblical Reflections — The Sanctuary System as Symbols

The sanctuary system in its entirety was a God-given, amazingly detailed corollary to the actual way in which He was saving mankind. For example:

Symbol	Limitation	Real
Lamb, bull, goat	Blood of these could not redeem	Jesus Christ: His life
Priest	He himself needed a mediator	Jesus Christ: only Mediator

So the symbolic has meaning in what it represents. And while the sanctuary was symbolic and in the above sense not the real things, it was nonetheless serious, sacred, awesome. One has just to reflect on the experience of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10) and of Uzzah (2 Sam. 6) to realize that God's presence in the symbolic was real.

The goal God had was not to get the people to see the symbolic as reality. Those who did that had a problem with formalism; to them the forms had become everything. (See the RH 05/23/99 quote.) God's goal was to get humanity to see the real behind the symbolic. That is, in our examples above, the lamb didn't die for them; Messiah would! And the priest isn't the go-between with God; the Messiah is!

We must note that the theatrical, play-acting mind is the basis of the hypocrite who could go through the ritual and experience nothing real inside. Such is still a possibility with the God-given symbols we have as Christians, such as the Lord's supper. We have various ways that we can turn these godly forms into something God never intended. The ultimate perversion with the Lord's supper is making its symbolism so real in itself (rather than what it points to) that you end up with the abomination of the mass.

The sanctuary was *painstaking* in its detail, but God had ordained it, in contrast to the painstaking "theatrics" of our day. In a sense God says, "The symbolic characters are Mine to detail; you stay out of it and stick to the real."

Consider the four faces of Jesus Christ seen in the sanctuary in both the Old and New Testaments:

1. Man (Rev. 1:13)
2. Lamb (Rev. 5:6)
3. Angel (Rev. 8:3)
4. Lion (Rev. 5:5 cf. 11:15)

### 1. Man

The priest was a symbol (character) of Christ (see PP356:0). But no other human character representation of Him has ever been authorized. The Levitical priesthood passed away (though various Christian religious groups have preserved in perverted form some type of priesthood). No other human actors have ever been sanctioned by God to portray Jesus Christ in play-acting.

### 2. Lamb

The lambs in the sanctuary pictured Jesus Christ, but there was no human sacrifice, even make-believe. And the reality of the symbol God gave was that the lambs really died.

### 3. Angel

The gold cherubim typified the angels of whom the chief was Michael, but there were no humans play-acting as angels.

### 4. Lion

The Shekinah glory was real; there was no need even for the symbol of a lion as king.

The only authorized characters, the priests, still retained their own identities (names, etc.) while functioning as priests. Perhaps their rotating turns as priests was in part to prevent them from getting caught up in a full-time role which might have fed their imaginations falsely. And as they performed their priestly activities, they were not to pick up just anything their imaginations came up with. There was a God-ordained character role of typifying what Christ was to do in saving us.

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**Biblical Reflections — Miscellaneous**

1. Matt. 7 speaks of the danger of falsity. A three-part view of a person's experience with God could be outlined like this:

I believe	vs.	Play-belief ("say, Lord, Lord" vs. 21; see James 2:19)
I teach	vs.	Play-teach ("false prophets" vs. 15)
I do	vs.	Play-do ("have we not ...done" vs. 22)

2. Is pretense identified in the Scriptures as a "lie"? Examine the following texts:

Prov. 14:5 A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies.

John 8:44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

Rom. 1:25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

Col. 3:9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

2Ths. 2:11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

James 3:14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

1 John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

1 John 2:21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

1 John 2:27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

Rev. 21:27 And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Rev. 22:15 For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

## **Spirit of Prophecy Counsel — Methods Recommended**

(Statements are listed alphabetically by reference.)

CG19

**God commanded the Hebrews to teach their children His requirements, and to make them acquainted with all His dealings with their people. The home and the school were one. In the place of stranger lips, the loving hearts of the father and mother were to give instruction to their children. Thoughts of God were associated with all the events of daily life in the home dwelling. The mighty works of God in the deliverance of His people were recounted with eloquence and reverential awe. The great truths of God's providence and of the future life were impressed on the young mind. It became acquainted with the true, the good, the beautiful.**

**By the use of figures and symbols the lessons given were illustrated, and thus more firmly fixed in the memory. Through this animated imagery the child was, almost from infancy, initiated into the mysteries, the wisdom, and the hopes of his fathers, and guided in a way of thinking and feeling and anticipating, that reached beyond things seen and transitory, to the unseen and eternal.**

Note that "figures and symbols" were used to "illustrate" the truth and have it "more firmly fixed in the memory." Note also that "this animated imagery" consisted of having the principles of truth "associated with all the events of daily life in the home dwelling" through the "figures and symbols" found therein. It is thereby obvious that such imagery was not make-believe, but firmly rooted in real life activities. It is highly significant that Christ used identical methods in His teaching, tying truth to everyday events for the purpose of reinforcement and recall. (See COL26:1.)

CH537:1

**The Lord sanctions the efforts of the consecrated worker, the true shepherd. He may have little time to preach discourses, but he can act sermons which will be far more powerful. The truth expressed in living, unselfish deeds is the strongest argument for Christianity.**

Here the true acting is real life, "doing" rather than "playing."

COL26:1

**Christ has linked His teaching, not only with the day of rest, but also with the week of toil. He has wisdom for him who drives the plow and sows the seed. In the plowing and sowing, the tilling and reaping, He teaches us to see an illustration of His work of grace in the heart. So in every line of useful labor and every association of life, He desires us to find a lesson of divine truth. Then our daily toil will no longer absorb our attention and lead us to forget God; it will continually remind us of our Creator and Redeemer. The thought of God will run like a thread of gold through all our homely cares and occupations. For us the glory of His face will again rest upon the face of nature. We shall ever be learning new lessons of heavenly truth, and growing into the image of His purity. Thus shall we "be taught of the Lord"; and in the lot wherein we are called, we shall "abide with God." Isa. 54:13; 1 Cor. 7:24.**

The majority of Christ's parables were clearly rooted in real life experiences. Had Christ play-acted any of these, the reality of His human mission would have been suspect, since "in Christ's parable teaching the same principle is seen as in His own mission to the world" (COL17:1), that of clothing divinity with humanity. There was no make-believe in either. What He taught and did was as real as who He was. So we see the weighty issues with which our subject deals.

DA582:4

**The cursing of the fig tree was an acted parable. That barren tree flaunting its pretentious foliage in the very face of Christ, was a symbol of the Jewish nation. The Saviour desired to make plain to His disciples the cause and the certainty of Israel's doom. For this purpose He invested the tree with moral qualities, and made it the expositor of divine truth.**

Christ here used real-life drama, with His remaining who He was (not assuming another's role), and the tree really dying (no Hollywood "special effects"). And He acted out *in a genuine way* this awesome parable to expose the self-delusion of the pretense the Jewish nation was acting out *in a false way*.

Ev131:1

**Explain the truth, as did Christ, in many ways, by figures and parables. And Elder — —'s striking presentation of the truth by the means of charts may be followed to advantage. Let these things speak to the senses of the people. Do not encourage anything like a fanatical movement.**

Note that figures are recommended, to be used "as did Christ"—ones that "speak to the senses." Do "theatrics" and make-believe acting appeal to the senses or to the emotions? Do they encourage anything fanatical? (See Ev127:1 in the section Spirit of Prophecy Counsel — Methods Not Recommended.)

Ev208:3

**Through the imagination He reached the heart. His illustrations were taken from the things of daily life, and although they were simple, they had in them a wonderful depth of meaning.**

The words of interest here are "imagination" and "simple." Again, the spiritual realities ("depth of meaning") was clothed with the physical realities ("the things of daily life"). The passage continues to list the "things of nature" used in Christ's illustrations.

GC420:2

**Such was the service performed "unto the example and shadow of heavenly things." And what was done in type in the ministration of the earthly sanctuary, is done in reality in the ministration of the heavenly sanctuary.**

The God-ordained type was to point to the reality of the anti-type. The type could not be said to be unreal, rather symbolic. All of the services actually happened and the participants were being themselves in this symbolic activity. (See the section Biblical Reflections — The Sanctuary System as Symbols.)

GW355:4GW356:1

**By the use of charts, symbols, and representations of various kinds, the minister can make the truth stand out clearly and distinctly. This is a help, and in harmony with the word of God....**

**The work in the large cities is to be done after Christ's order, not after the order of a theatrical performance. It is not a theatrical performance that glorifies God, but the presentation of the truth in the love of Christ.**

"Christ's order": "charts, symbols, and representations"  
—>to present "the truth in the love of Christ"  
—>help truth to "stand out clearly and distinctly"  
—>"in harmony with the word of God"  
—>"glorifies God"

Contrast the above with the counterfeit mentioned:

"Theatrical" order: "performance"  
—>to work the cities  
—>(by contrast: hide the truth)  
—>(by contrast: not in harmony with the word)  
—>not glorify God

PK423:1

**Those times of change, so fraught with peril to the Israelitish nation, were marked with many messages from Heaven through Jeremiah.... As the threatened danger came closer, he taught the people by means of a series of acted parables, hoping thus to arouse them to a sense of their obligation to God....**

At least four acted parables are given: Rechabites' obedience revealed: 423:2 (Jer. 35); potter's earthen bottle dashed: 431:2 (Jer. 19); yoke worn: 443:0 & 444:1 (Jer. 27); ancestral field purchased: 466:2 (Jer. 32). A couple of items are of interest in this use of acted parables:

1. They were used in a time of coming judgment and dealt with the spiritual principles involved therein (as did Christ's acted parable—see DA582:4—in cursing the fig tree).
2. They were clearly illustrations which were dramatic and vivid in that they were visual and visible, but they were not theatrical in the sense that one had to play a false role in play-acting. Rather, all were real-life things that were done, much like the vivid illustrations often used very well in children stories (and at times in sermons) in when an actual object is shown and acted on in some way, or an actual event is conducted in which a transaction or other interaction is carried out between two or more people. Again, the emphasis is on the *actual*, the *real* rather than on the *acting*, the *play*.

PK448:1

**The prophet Ezekiel was raised up from among the captives in Babylon, to warn and to comfort the exiles....He was also instructed to foretell, by means of a variety of symbols and solemn messages, the siege and utter destruction of Jerusalem.**

The various messages: tongue cleave: Ezek. 3:26; portray Jerusalem, lie on left side then right side, eat defiled bread: chapter 4; shave head and beard and divide hair: chapter 5; speak a parable of eagle: chapter 17; utter a parable of a pot: chapter 24:1-14; death of his wife: chapter 24:15-27.

Again, Ezekiel did not have to act anyone other than Ezekiel to give these messages. The words were none but his and the Lord's. The lessons involved visual, vivid images, some "sandbox"-like in symbolism, but others tragically real in their symbolism (namely, his wife's death).

PP349:2

**Thus in the work of Christ for our redemption, symbolized by the sanctuary service, "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."**

The sanctuary service is symbolism.

PP354:2

**The most important part of the daily ministration was the service performed in behalf of individuals. The repentant sinner brought his offering to the door of the tabernacle, and placing his hand upon the victim's head, confessed his sins, thus in figure transferring them from himself to the innocent sacrifice. By his own hand the animal was then slain, and the blood was carried by the priest into the holy place and sprinkled before the vail, behind which was the ark containing the law that the sinner had transgressed. By this ceremony the sin was, through the blood, transferred in figure to the sanctuary.... Both ceremonies alike symbolized the transfer of the sin from the penitent to the sanctuary.**

Note both uses of "in figure," and again the concept of something "symbolized."

PP356:0

**Then in his character of mediator the priest took the sins upon himself, and leaving the sanctuary, he bore with him the burden of Israel's guilt. At the door of the tabernacle he laid his hands upon the head of the scape-goat....**

The priest in one sense is said to be functioning in a "character" role in this drama. But realize that the symbolism was directly given by God, that these priests were priests in real life, that God was present in reality in the Shekinah, and that the role of the priest as mediator was a sacredly real symbol of the only Mediator in a way that play-acting can never approach. (See the additional thoughts on "The Sanctuary System as Symbols.")

2SM319:4

**God Himself employed pictures and symbols to represent to His prophets lessons which He would have them give to the people, and which could thus be better understood than if given in any other way. He appealed to the understanding through the sense of sight. Prophetic history was presented to Daniel and John in symbols, and these were to be represented plainly upon tables, that he who reads might understand.**

(The context of this quote was in regard to picturemaking.) It seems in general that pictures and symbols were used to represent the real, but that in so doing they were not required to make-believe, or to submit to a need for them (whether thing or person) to be made to appear as something or someone that they were not. The thing could be itself and the person himself while fulfilling a role as a symbol of something or someone else, to teach a lesson about that other, greater thing or person.

## Spirit of Prophecy Counsel — Methods Not Recommended

CS134:2

**Card playing, betting, gambling, horse racing, and theatrical performances are all of his [Satan's] inventing, and he has led men to carry forward these amusements as zealously as though they were winning for themselves the precious boon of eternal life.**

It is of interest that "theatrical performances" is listed with all the other activities above. No mention is made of this referring only to "secular" or "worldly" or "non religious" theater.

CT274:3CT275:3

**The public feeling is that manual labor is degrading.... Satan is delighted when he sees human beings using their physical and mental powers in that which does not educate, which is not useful, which does not help them to be a blessing to those who need their help.... He does not wish people to have a knowledge of their Maker, and he is well pleased if he can set in operation games and theatrical performances that will so confuse the senses of the youth that God and heaven will be forgotten.**

**In God's plan for Israel every family had a home on the land with sufficient ground for tilling. Thus were provided both the means and the incentive for a useful, industrious, and self-supporting life. And no devising of men has ever improved upon that plan. To the world's departure from it is owing, to a large degree, the poverty and wretchedness that exist today.**

The Hebrew culture's God-given elements were tied to nature and reality, not to the artificial and play. Reality is a guard against fallen human nature leading to the "poverty and wretchedness" (physical and spiritual bankruptcy) that come from unreality, from any and all of Satan's lies. Note that the result of these "games and theatrical performances" is to "confuse the senses of the youth."

Consider further a central issue common to both of these activities: the false system of *comparison*::

	<u>Comparison</u>	<u>Goal</u>	<u>Result too Often</u>
"Games":	Score <i>over</i> another—>	Win	False win

"Theatrical performances":	Copy, feign <i>under</i> another—>	Convince	False conviction
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Again:

"Games":	By comparison with another—>	I want to <i>win</i>
	by scoring <i>over</i>	
	their performance:	
	"better than they"	
	—> <i>they</i> are the standard by which I measure myself	

"Theatrical performances":	By comparison with another—>	I want to <i>convince</i>
	by feigning <i>under</i>	
	their performance:	
	"as much like them"	
	—> <i>they</i> are the standard by which I measure myself	
	(regardless if "they" are real or fictional)	

The falsity of both of these worldly activities is what serves to "confuse the senses," leading the reality, "God and heaven," to be forgotten.

CT541:1,2CT542:1CT544:2

**It is often asked, Are literary societies a benefit to our youth? To answer this question properly, we should consider not only the avowed purpose of such societies, but the influence which they have actually exerted, as proved by experience....**

**Literary societies are almost universally exerting an influence contrary to that which the name indicates.... The mind is drawn away from serious reflection, away from God, away from the real and substantial, to the imaginary and the superficial. Literary societies—would that the name expressed their true character! What is the chaff to the wheat?**

**...The followers of Jesus enjoy sober, sensible, ennobling themes, while those who have no love for sacred things cannot take pleasure in these gatherings, unless the superficial and unreal constitute a prominent feature of the exercises....**

**In order to understand this matter aright, we must remember that our hearts are naturally depraved, and we are unable of ourselves to pursue a right course. It is only by the grace of God, combined with the most earnest effort on our part, that we can gain the victory.**

The core characteristics of real versus unreal are clearly brought out here.

CWE23

**The message is to be proclaimed with sanctified ability. The word of the Lord has been spoken. God calls for sanctified hearts and lips. The messages of warning are to be given in the large cities, and also in the towns and villages. The men of God's appointment are to be zealously at work, disposing of our books, and disseminating light. The articles in our papers are not to present the truth in the style of a romance; for this weakens the impression that should be made by the most solemn truth ever committed to mortals. They are to contain a plan, "Thus saith the Lord." The message must be repeated, and Bible reasons given, not in the style of a romance, but in the style of the Bible. There are many who are watching for the evidence of true religion.**

The giving of truth must be "in the style of the Bible." This phrase speaks volumes about the true drama, the visual methods used in Scripture. But it also excludes all false drama, one form of which is "romance."

Ev127:1

**God is not pleased by your large outlay of means to advertise your meetings, and by the display made in other features of your work. The display is out of harmony with the principles of the Word of God. He is dishonored by your expensive preparations.... Man is exalted. The truth is not advanced, but hindered. Sensible men and women can see that the theatrical performances are not in harmony with the solemn message that you bear.**

Note in this case the characteristics of what to avoid:

1. "your large outlay of means," "your expensive preparations"
2. "display"
3. "theatrical performances"

Note the reasons to avoid them:

1. "the truth is ... hindered"
2. not appeal to "sensible men and women"
3. "not in harmony with solemn message"

Ev137:2,3

**Not one jot or tittle of anything theatrical is to be brought into our work.... In my very first labors the message was given that all theatrical performances in connection with the preaching of present truth were to be discouraged and forbidden. Men who thought they had a wonderful work to do sought to adopt a strange deportment and manifested oddities in bodily exercise. The light given me was, "Give this no sanction." These performances, which savored of the theatrical, were to have no place in the proclamation of the solemn messages entrusted to us.**

The "theatrical performances" mentioned here seem to be those methods of preaching some men used. But it is a logical impossibility how such can be "forbidden" and theatrical plays "in connection with the preaching of present truth" not be forbidden. "The theatrical" inherently conflicts with "the solemn" messages of present truth.

Ev139:3

**We are handling subjects which involve eternal interests, and we are not to ape the world in any respect. We are to follow closely the footsteps of Christ. He is a satisfying portion and can meet all our wants and necessities.**

"In any respect" must mean that neither our message nor our methods are "to ape the world." Using the counterfeit drama is of the world and not of Christ.

Ev207:2

**Ministers are not to preach men's opinions, not to relate anecdotes, get up theatrical performances, not to exhibit self; but as though they were in the presence of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, they are to preach the Word. Let them not bring levity into the work of the ministry, but let them preach the Word in a manner that will leave a most solemn impression upon those who hear.**

These things seem to be in the same class: opinions of men, stories for stories sake ("which have a tendency to amuse and remove from the mind of the hearer the sacredness of the word" 208:3), theatrical plays, self-centered exhibitions, and levity. These are contrasted with solemn preaching of the Word (which can be done with visual methods).

Ev211:1

**Amusement is not to be interwoven with instruction in the Scriptures. When this is done, the hearers, amused by some cheap nonsense, lose the burden of conviction. The opportunity passes away, and no one is drawn by the cords of love to the Saviour.**

An almost ever-present element of the theatrical is the amusement spirit (see section "Characteristics of the Theater"). And again, our fallen natures so quickly latch onto the cheap part and lose whatever serious intent there may have been.

Ev266:3Ev267:1

**Satan's ruling passion is to pervert the intellect and cause men to long for shows and theatrical performances. The experience and character of all who engage in this work will be in accordance with the food given to the mind.**

**The Lord has given evidence of His love for the world. There was no falsity, no acting, in what He did.**

Here is the contrast of the unreal and the real.

Ev279:1

**He who in his preaching makes eloquence his highest aim, causes the people to forget the truth that is mingled with his oratory.... They may speak in terms of admiration of the minister's eloquence, but they are not brought any nearer to the point of decision. They speak of the sermon as they would of a play, and of the minister as they would of an actor. They may come again to listen to the same kind of discourse, but they will go away unimpressed and unfed.**

If such is true of a minister who focuses on "eloquence," what must be the case of those who are actors in a play, even a "religious" play?

Ev396:2

**The truth must be proclaimed in the highways and the byways, and this work is to be done by sensible, rational methods.... The work that Christ did in our world is to be our example, as far as display is concerned. We are to keep as far from the theatrical and the extraordinary as Christ kept in His work. Sensation is not religion, although religion will exert its own pure, sacred, uplifting, sanctifying influence, bringing spiritual life and salvation.**

It seems that all theatrical performances are "sensational" in the negative sense, while the parables of Christ dealt with the senses in a very positive way, even His acted parable. The acting He did was a real-life action to make a point, not play-acting.

Ev640:3

**Ministers should not make a practice of relating anecdotes in the desk; it detracts from the force and solemnity of the truth presented. The relation of anecdotes or incidents which create a laugh or a light thought in the minds of the hearers is severely censurable. The truths should be clothed in chaste and dignified language; and the illustrations should be of a like character.**

Note the medium here is spoken of as clothing, which is to be "chaste and dignified." It is amazing how frequently the methods of the theater are interwoven with "a laugh or a light thought."

Ev644:1

**What is the object of the ministry? Is it to mix the comical with the religious? The theater is the place for such exhibitions. If Christ is formed within, if the truth with its sanctifying power is brought into the inner sanctuary of the soul, you will not have jolly men, neither will you have sour, cross, crabbed men to teach the precious lessons of Christ to perishing souls.**

The connection of the comical and theatrical is here made, as well as pointing out the extremes of jolly and sour. Note that "the theater is the place" "to mix the comical with the religious." And such an observation endorses neither the theater nor the mixture.

FE229:2

**I have not been able to find one instance where He educated His disciples to engage in amusement of football or pugilistic games, to obtain physical exercise, or in theatrical performances, and yet Christ was our pattern in all things.**

The context here is lifting up to teachers and students the ideal in education. The statement is made on the previous page, "Diligent study is essential, and diligent hard work. Play is not essential." (228:3) At least two points should be made.

1. Theater and sports are linked in the Spirit of Prophecy. And here the philosophical, common root is revealed. It is that of "play," obviously in contrast to "real."

2. This would have been the ideal place to relate that Christ could have had His disciples engage in plays that depicted His parables. The absence of such in "our pattern in all things" speaks strongly against it, especially since the theatrical existed in the Greek culture of His day. Note also that the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, had no place for play-acting in his medical missionary program of duplicating Christ's ministry, though Paul's labors deeply involved the geographical heart of Greek culture.

FE253:1

**It is not for the workers to seek for methods by which they can make a show, consuming time in theatrical performances and musical display, for this benefits no one. It does no good to train the children to make speeches for special occasions. They should be won to Christ, and instead of spending time, money, and effort to make a display, let the whole effort be made to gather sheaves for the harvest.**

The context is that of formality in Sabbath School work. Again, if there was an appropriate form of "theatrical performances" it seems the Lord would have suggested it. The terms "performances" and "display" seem to be used in parallel meaning.

GW132:1

**The minister of Christ should be a man of prayer, a man of piety; cheerful, but never coarse and rough, jesting or frivolous. A spirit of frivolity may be in keeping with the profession of clowns and theatrical performers, but it is altogether beneath the dignity of a man who is chosen to stand between the living and the dead, and to be a mouthpiece for God.**

In contrast to the minister of Christ, who is prayerful, pious, cheerful, and dignified, are the performers and clowns who are jesting, and who often are coarse, rough, and frivolous.

GW172:1

**Ministers have no license to behave in the desk like theatrical performers, assuming attitudes and making expressions merely for effect. They are not actors, but teachers of truth. Undignified, boisterous actions lend no force to the truth uttered; on the contrary, they disgust men and women of calm judgment and right views.**

Teaching the truth is not to be mixed with acting for effect. Play-acting has falsehood inherently within it, and that contradicts truth.

GW383:2

**Some minister make the mistake of supposing that success depends on drawing a large congregation by outward display, and then delivering the message of truth in a theatrical style. But this is using common fire instead of the sacred fire of God's kindling. The Lord is not glorified by this manner of working. Not by startling notices and expensive display is His work to be carried to completion, but by following Christlike methods. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." It is the naked truth which, like a sharp, two-edged sword, cuts both ways, arousing to spiritual life those who are dead in trespasses and sins. Men will recognize the gospel when it is brought to them in a way that is in harmony with God's purposes.**

Note clearly that the method or way in which truth is presented is critical. God's "manner of working" is "by following Christlike methods," "a way that is in harmony with God's purposes." This approach is "sacred fire of God's kindling" (i.e., "Christlike") in contrast to "common fire" (e.g., "startling" and "theatrical"). Here is "naked truth" in contrast to clouded truth, the mixture of good and evil.

Letter 5, 1888

**I was pleased with the lighthouse, and the scene which had required so much painstaking effort was one which could have been made most impressive, but failed to be made as forcible and striking as it might have been when it cost so much time and labor in preparing it. The part acted by the children was good. The reading was appropriate. Then if there has been good solid talk on that occasion in regard to children and teachers in the sabbath schools laboring earnestly for the salvation of the souls of the children ..., would it not have been in keeping with the work we have been trying to do in the church?...**

**The singing was after the order we would expect it to be in any theatrical performance, but not one word to be distinguished. Certainly the tempest-tossed ship would be wrecked upon the rocks, if there were no more light coming from the lighthouse than was seen in the exercises. I must say I was pained at these things, so out of order with the very work of reformation we were trying to carry forward in the church and with our institutions that I should have felt better if I had not been present....**

**While these painstaking efforts were being made to get up the performances, meetings were being held of the deepest interest which should have engaged the attention and which called for the presence of every soul....**

**We hope, now that the Christmas is in the past, that those who have put forth so much painstaking effort will now manifest a decided zeal and earnest, disinterested effort for the salvation of the souls of the teachers in the Sabbath school, that in their turn they may each labor for the salvation of the souls in their classes to give them personal instruction as to what they must do to be saved. We hope that they will find time to labor in simplicity and in sincerity....**

**Will all who acted an interested part in the program of last evening work as zealously and interestedly to show themselves approved unto God in doing their work for the Master...?**

These are excerpts from a letter (see Appendix A) about a Christmas program put on December 25, 1888 in the Battle Creek that included a lighthouse, costumed children (EGW's 6 year old granddaughter was an angel), speeches, poems, singing. Whether there was an enacted plot is not clear.

Though she did not totally condemn the program, and noted what she felt was pleasing, "good," "appropriate," the problems with the theatrical order of singing, the weakly-lit lighthouse, and the "painstaking effort" (a description she used 4 times), lead her to speak of such things being "out of order with the very work of reformation we were trying to carry forward." There is no evidence in the rest of her writings that this "work of reformation" was to improve the quality of the theatrical performances some were getting up.

The bottom line in the letter was a call to copy Christ, "to imitate Him in their manner of instruction." The specifics that were given earlier in the letter included, (a) "simplicity," (b) "sincerity," (c) "make literally true the symbol" used, (d) "good, solid talk." Her call clearly was a call to something better, better in another line.

When one compares this 1888 letter with the instruction in FE253 given in 1893, more insight comes in what to exclude from Sabbath School programs: "methods"

that "make a show," "theatrical performances," "musical display," also "speeches for special occasions."

MS 41, 1900

**If your lyceums and literary societies would be made an opportunity for searching the Bible, it would be far more an intellectual society than it can ever become through the attention being turned to theatrical performances. What high and noble truths the mind may fasten upon and explore in God's Word....**

**Those who compose these societies, who profess to love and reverence sacred things, and yet allow the mind to come down to the superficial, to the unreal, to the simple, cheap, fictitious acting, are doing the devil's work just as surely as they look upon and unite with these scenes.**

It appears these societies were secular. The Lord was calling them to use their minds in "searching the Bible" for "truths," and not to lower their minds to the "unreal." If "acting the Bible," as in dramatic presentations of Bible scenes, was an appropriate alternative for what was happening, why did not the Lord suggest it?

MS 42, 1898

**Can you glorify God by being educated to represent characters in plays, and to amuse the audience with fables? Has not the Lord given you intellect to be used to His name's glory in proclaiming the gospel of Christ. If you desire a public career, there is a work you may do. Help the class you represent in plays. Come to the reality.... The Lord has given evidence of His love for the world. There was no falsity, no acting, in what He did.**

Clearly the call here is for real living, rather than time in plays. The option of engaging in moral plays, plays based not on fables but on Scripture and real life, is not mentioned. It appears that even that option would have the counsel "come to the reality." That is, go out and *do* it. Contrast this appeal to "reality" with the "unreal" of MS41, 1900.

PP459:3

**Many of the amusements popular in the world today, even with those who claim to be Christians, tend to the same end as did those of the heathen. There are indeed few among them that Satan does not turn to account in destroying souls. Through the drama he has worked for ages to excite the passion and glorify vice.**

The context of this passage was the apostasy that Israel experienced at Jordan. While it is clearly referring to secular amusements, at least one thought needs to be extracted for consideration with religious theatrical performances. Since a converted sinner is counseled against vividly relating his life of sin in his personal testimony to others, why would not the enacting of the role of the sinner in whatever form in the drama also tend "to excite the passion and glorify vice," at least with some of the audience?

RH 01/04/81

**In every case where a literary society has been established among our people, its influence has proved to be unfavorable to religious life, and has led to backsliding from God. This has been tried at Battle Creek and in other places, and the result has ever been the same....**

**Many literary societies are in reality young theaters on a cheap scale, and they create in the youth a taste for the stage.**

The concept of literary societies needs to be better understood historically (refer to the chapter on such in CT541-4), but the trends noted, that is, "backsliding from

God" and "a taste for the stage," raise serious questions about any activity that might have such an effect.

RH 05/23/99

**The religious teachers of the day had treated eternal realities as if they were trifles, and had exalted their own sayings and inventions, which had no place in God's law, as the only religion. In presenting their sacrificial offerings in their temple worship, they were as actors in a play. Christ condemned their corruption....**

Note the results of formalism: the "eternal realities" and "the only true religion" was treated as "trifles" and replaced with "their own sayings and inventions," "as actors in a play" of their own making. Note especially that the God-given drama of the sanctuary service was never intended to degenerate into the make-believe of "actors in a play." Those godly symbols were invested with a reality that contradicted any play-acting. One needs only to recall Uzzah, Nadah, Abihu, and the literal blood of thousands of animals to see the reality of the life and death issues there portrayed.

2SM23:3

**Let there be no oddities or eccentricities of movement on the part of those who speak the word of truth, for such things will weaken the impression that should be made by the Word. We must be guarded, for Satan is determined, if possible, to intermingle with religious services his evil influence. Let there be no theatrical display, for this will not help to strengthen belief in the word of God. Rather, it will divert attention to the human instrument.**

This is the entire quote as it appears; that is, there is no further context given (from Letter 352, 1908).

Note two points about this counsel:

1. If this is directed to *one* person (as many of these type of quotes seem to be) who may be proclaiming the truth through preaching, how can it not be true for *many* people, thus counseling against an acting troupe, though leaving room for other group type presentations of truth?
2. Is not the above denied reason the one people use for supporting theatrical presentations ("help to strengthen belief in the word of God"), while the effect in actuality is the opposite ("weaken the impression," because "it will divert attention to the human instrument")?

2SM45:2

**If God had given you a special message for His people, you would walk and work in all humility—not as if you were on the stage of a theater, but in the meekness of a follower of the lowly Jesus of Nazareth.**

(This was written to a couple involved in false exorcism.) Is there any theater or drama that can be conducted outside of the spirit of the theater, which above is contrasted with humility and meekness?

4T578:0,1,34T579:2

**Worldly or theatrical entertainments are not essential for the prosperity of the sanitarium or for the health of the patients....**

**As soon as these entertainments are introduced, the objections to theatergoing are removed from many minds, and the plea that moral and high-toned scenes are to be acted at the theater breaks down the last barrier. Those who would permit this class of amusements at the sanitarium would better be seeking wisdom from God to lead these poor, hungry, thirsting souls to the Fountain of joy, and peace, and happiness....**

**The managers of the sanitarium may as well conclude at once that they will never be able to satisfy that class of minds that can find happiness only in something new and exciting. To many persons this has been the intellectual diet during their lifetime; they are mental as well as physical dyspeptics.**

**The most exalted spiritual truths may be brought home to the heart by the things of nature.... The imagination has here a fruitful field in which to range.**

Three observations can be made here:

1. "Moral and high-toned scenes" do not justify theater going, and it seems thereby that they would not justify theatrical performances.
2. "Something new and exciting" and the concept of "mental ... dyspeptics" seem to speak to the idea of a restlessness and a hyperactive imagination that the theatrical in any form readily fosters.
3. "The things of nature" were obviously Christ's major way of teaching. Here we are told that this is the "something better" for the imagination, not the stimulation of theatrical items.

4T652:3

**Among the most dangerous resorts for pleasure is the theater. Instead of being a school of morality and virtue, as is so often claimed, it is the very hotbed of immorality. Viscious habits and sinful propensities are strengthened and confirmed by these entertainments. Low songs, lewd gestures, expressions, and attitudes, deprave the imagination and debase the morals. Every youth who habitually attends such exhibitions will be corrupted in principle. There is no influence in our land more powerful to poison the imagination, to destroy religious impressions, and to blunt the relish for the tranquil pleasures and sober realities of life than theatrical amusements.**

Again this is referring to the clearly secular, but the enacting in religious theatrical performances of evil roles might well have the same effect to strengthen "sinful propensities" and to "deprave" and "poison the imagination," which the proper telling of stories would not. Note again how the theatrical is contrasted to "tranquil pleasures and sober realities."

9T110:0

**...God's chosen messengers are to show the fallacy of spending means needlessly for effect. As they labor with simplicity, humility, and graceful dignity, avoiding everything of a theatrical nature, their work will make a lasting impression for good.**

"Everything" seems to mean just that.

## Spirit of Prophecy Counsel — Miscellaneous

CT544:3

The intellect, as well as the heart, must be consecrated to the service of God. He has claims upon all there is of us. The follower of Christ should not indulge in any gratification, or engage in any enterprise, however innocent or laudable it may appear, which an enlightened conscience tells him would abate his ardor or lessen his spirituality. Every Christian should labor to press back the tide of evil and save our youth from the influences that would sweep them down to ruin. May God help us to press our way against the current.

COL297:1 (the real basis of pretense)

The Jewish leaders looked with pride upon their magnificent temple, and the imposing rites of their religious service; but justice, mercy, and the love of God were lacking. The glory of the temple, the splendor of their service, could not recommend them to God; for that which alone is of value in His sight they did not offer. They did not bring Him the sacrifice of a humble and contrite spirit. It is when the vital principles of the kingdom of God are lost that ceremonies become multitudinous and extravagant. It is when the character building is neglected, when the adornment of the soul is lacking, when the simplicity of godliness is lost sight of, that pride and love of display demand magnificent church edifices, splendid adornings, and imposing ceremonials. In all this God is not honored. A fashionable religion that consists of ceremonies, pretense, and display, is not acceptable to Him. Its services call forth no response from the heavenly messengers.

The church is very precious in God's sight. He values it, not for its external advantages, but for the sincere piety which distinguished it from the world. He estimates it according to the growth of the members in the knowledge of Christ, according to their progress in spiritual experience.

Christ hungers to receive from His vineyard the fruit of holiness and unselfishness.

GC663, 664

[During millennium while Satan was] cut off from his work of deception, the prince of evil was miserable and dejected; but as the wicked dead are raised ... his hopes revive.... They are ready to receive his suggestions and to do his bidding. Yet, true to his early cunning he does not acknowledge himself to be Satan. He claims to be the prince who is the rightful owner of the world..., a redeemer.... Satan works wonders to support his claims.

Note the role here of deception. The consistency of Satan's character is seen in his role described elsewhere as the "master actor" (ST 05/18/82). This archrebel in his last acting role as the "mightiest of warriors" (GC664) goes out to *deceive* the nations (Rev. 20:8) for the final time.

MB68

These words ["swear not at all"] ... teach that no one who tries to appear what he is not, or whose words do not convey the real sentiment of his heart, can be called truthful.

How can we not apply this commentary on Christ's counsel, to one who is trying to be "what he is not," "whose words do not convey the real sentiment of his heart" in play-acting?

4T522

**Put away all pretense and affectation. Act your simple, natural self. Be truthful in every thought and word and deed, and "in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Ever remember that the moral nature needs to be braced with constant watchfulness and prayer.**

Where do we find evidence that this plain and simple instruction is not pertinent to one who puts on a player's mask?

5T50

**The life of the Christian will be divested of all pretense, free from all affectation, artifice, and falsehood. It is earnest, true, sublime. Christ speaks in every word. He is seen in every deed. The light is radiant with the light of an indwelling Saviour.**

Can one be a play-actor and be "free from all affectation"?

5T235

**Christian faith will never harmonize with worldly principles; Christian integrity is opposed to all deception and pretense. The man who cherishes the most of Christ's love in the soul, who reflects the Saviour's image most perfectly, is in the sight of God the truest, most noble, most honorable man upon earth.**

Can a Christian practice long at "theatrics" and be "opposed to *all* deception and pretense"? (Emphasis supplied in question.)

## Key Summary Words and Ideas

These words are used for both the genuine and counterfeit:

Acted, Actor, Character, Drama, Exhibit, Figure, Imagination, Role, Symbol

The following are words that in general contrast the true and the false in drama (referenced to Scriptural and E. G. White quotes):

### Areas of Distinct Contrast

TRUE		COUNTERFEIT	REFERENCE
REAL, REALITY =something or someone you really are	vs.	FEIGNED, IMAGINARY, UNREAL =something or someone you are not	Matt. 6:16; Luke 20:20; Rom. 12:9; James 3:17; CT541:2; 542:1; MS42,1898; 4T652:3
SUBSTANTIAL	vs.	SUPERFICIAL	CT541:2; 542:1
ONE-FACED, INTEGRATED — in regard to self- identity	vs.	MULTIFACED, DISRUPTED	Matt. 6:16; 15:17,18; 23:27,28; Gal. 2:13
SPIRITUAL — in regards to: (1) imagination of audience and actors (2) reflex influence on actor in role of bad (3) own personal discernment (this is very clear for hypocrite; by implication also for actor?)	vs.	CARNAL, PHYSICAL	Matt. 7:5; 16:3
TEACH	vs.	ENTERTAIN	GW172:1
SENSIBLE, THOUGHTFUL, CONVICTING	vs.	SENSATIONAL, EMOTIONAL, ELOQUENT, AMUSING (A + MUSE = WITHOUT THOUGHT)	CT542:1; Ev127:1; 279:1; 396:2; MS42, 1888; PP459:3; 4T652:3
CONTENTMENT, TRANQUIL	vs.	EXCITEMENT (false)	PP459:3; 4T578:3; 4T652:3

MEEKNESS, SIMPLICITY, HUMILITY, DIGNITY, CLOTHED TRUTH   	vs.	SHOW, DISPLAY, PAINSTAKING       	Matt. 6:2; Ev127:1; 208: 3; 396:2; 640:3; FE253:1; Letter 5, 1888; 2SM23:3; 2SM45:2; 9T110:0
OPEN, CLEAR, REVEALING, DISTINCT, NAKED TRUTH	vs.	COVERED, MASKED, CONCEALING, DETRACTING	Luke 12:1; Ps. 26:4,5; Ev640:3; GW354:4; 355:4; 383:2
CHRIST'S METHOD	vs.	WORLD'S METHOD	Ev139:3; GW356:1; 383:2
STRENGTHEN BELIEF IN WORD, IN TRUTH	vs.	WEAKEN BELIEF, IN WORD, IN TRUTH	GW172:1; 2SM23:3
TRUTH ADVANCED	vs.	TRUTH HINDERED	Ev127:1
LIVE: FAITH, BELIEF, ACTIVITY (SYMBOLIC) — Any good actor can "act out" the Christian belief (it only leads to presumption), but only the real Christian can live it: Sequences: Faith ->Real life ->More faith	vs.	PLAY: PRESUMPTION, PRETENSE, MAKE- BELIEVE, ASSUME, (SYMBOLIC)  Pretense ->Play ->Presumption	Matt. 22:18; CH537:1; DA582:4; Ev279:1; GC420:2; GW172:2; MS42,1898; PK423:1; 448:1; PP349:2; 354:2
REFORM, REFORMER, REFORMATION	vs.	PERFORM, PERFORMER, PERFORMANCE	CS134:2; CT274:3; 275:3; Ev127:1; 137:2,3; Ev137:2,3; FE229:2; FE253:1; GW132:1; GW172:1; Letter 5,1888; MS41, 1900
CONFESS	vs.	PROFESS	MS41, 1900
JOYFUL, SOLEMN, SOBER, DIGNIFIED, CHASTE	vs.	JESTING, LEVITY, FRIVOLOUS, COMICAL, JOLLY, LIGHT	CT542:1; Ev127:1; 207:2; 640:3; 644:1; GW132:1; PK448:1; 4T652:3
GOD, OTHERS	vs.	SELF — applause, bowing	Matt. 6:2; Ev207:2
GLORIFY GOD, SACRED FIRE	vs.	DISHONOR GOD, COMMON FIRE	GW356:1; 383:2

HEBREW CULTURE	vs.	GREEK CULTURE	CT275:3
NATURAL — compare: Physiological, good effects	vs.	ARTIFICIAL  Pharmacological, mixture of good and bad	
TRUE, TRUTH	vs.	FALSE, LIES	Matt. 24:51; Ev267:1; GW172:1; GW354:4; MS42,1898

### Areas of More Subtle Difference on the Surface

VISUAL, VIVID	vs.	THEATRICAL	Ev131:1; (see ref. under "PERFORMANCE" also); GW354:4; 355:1; 383:2; 2SM23:3; 319:4; 4T578:0,1; 652:3; 9T110:0
ONE COMBINATION OF MEDIUMS — in regards to: (1) combining basic senses of sight, hearing (2) in words, songs, action (3) using appeal to common experience, emotions (i.e., recognition, identification) (4) with purpose of message, application	vs.	ANOTHER COMBINATION OF MEDIUMS	
TELLING AND ACTING (IN REAL LIFE) THE GOOD; ONLY TELLING THE BAD — the way the Bible does it; as Christ did it	vs.	TELLING AND ACTING (IN PRETENSE) THE GOOD AND BAD	
CERTAIN	vs.	UNCERTAIN	DA582:4

## Areas of Intelligence and Learning

Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner (USA Today, 7D, 11/3/87)

Seven kinds of human intelligence:

1. Linguistic
2. Logical-mathematical
3. Spatial
4. Musical
5. Kinesthetic
6. Interpersonal
7. Intrapersonal

What are the implications of using or educating or appealing to these areas in a positive way, one in tune with real life as much as possible even in story telling (i.e., when real life experience is not possible), rather than another way that has elements of fantasy and make-believe? For example, when I want to tell about the elephant and I don't have one and my listeners have never seen one, what is the best way to do it? Could I show pictures, tell how tall one is compared to something nearby, show a piece of ivory, play a recording of their sounds, etc., rather than trying to act like one (humans are not elephants), showing cartoons of ones (invariable caricatured, possible even talking like humans), etc. In other words, it seems each area of intelligence, having its own learning style, may be developed in clearly specific ways that are based in reality. And on the other hand there seems to be clearly counterfeit, at best less-than-best, ways in which each could be stimulated, based more in fantasy, more out of touch with real life.

Consider these suggested contrasting methods:

	<b>TRUE</b>	<b>COUNTERFEIT</b>
1. Linguistic	Read true stories that meet criteria of "whatsoever..."	Read fiction, true and detailed stories of war, other evil
2. Logical-mathematical	Explore science of natural world	Solve crime mysteries, battle games
3. Spatial	Build objects, draw things in nature, geography	Hours in jigsaw puzzles, daydreaming
4. Musical	Identify bird calls, songs; play instruments, sing	Imbalanced music—>noise (rock, etc.): make or listen
5. Kinesthetic	Crafts, gardening	Sports
6. Interpersonal	Write letters, give talks, good projects with/for friends	Puppets fantasy, hang around with wrong friends, no supervision or aim
7. Intrapersonal	Personal devotions, study, analysis, diary	Self-centered activities, introversion/not reaching out, use time alone for self only

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## Characteristics of the Theater

Observations I have made, particularly to "religious" drama:

1. Jest and joking is used, involving serious, eternal-life-weighted themes, and Scripture texts.
2. Unnaturalness of voice and action occurs.
3. Statements are made that are false, though represented as true in the play.
4. Use of expletives is common.
5. Situations that are false (such as ignorant angels) are portrayed.
6. Statements are made that trivialize the relationships between the heavenly beings (e.g., one play-angel saying of Michael in a sentimental voice, "He's an angel").
7. Physical affection is shown that is make-believe and without base in real life.
8. The negative role is emphasized over the positive.  
Because of our fallen natures, even though the positive and negative were to be given equal time and acting pressure or emotion, the negative would still have the greater impact.
9. One must play the role of the "bad guy."  
Here the major questions involve at least two areas:
  - a. What is the reflex affect on the player of playing the negative?
  - b. What power does the dramatization of the negative have on the function of the principle "by beholding we become changed" in a way that the *telling* of a story would not have?
10. The human being is the center of attention in a way that does not occur in preaching, teaching, or story-telling.

## Other Thoughts and Reflections

### 1. Christ's Example

Note again the following that call us to *copy Christ* regarding our area of discussion:

FE229

**I have not been able to find one instance where He educated His disciples to engage in amusement of football or pugilistic games, to obtain physical exercise, or in theatrical performances, and yet Christ was our pattern in all things.**

Letter 5, 1888

**All who have taken knowledge of Jesus Christ will imitate Him in their manner of instruction.**

GW383

**Not by startling notices and expensive display is His work to be carried to completion, but by following Christlike methods. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." It is the naked truth which, like a sharp, two-edged sword, cuts both ways, arousing to spiritual life those who are dead in trespasses and sins. Men will recognize the gospel when it is brought to them in a way that is in harmony with God's purposes.**

Note also again this counsel:

Ev396

**We are to keep as far from the theatrical and the extraordinary as Christ kept in His work.**

How far did He keep from it? The closest I can find in terms of *acting* was the real-life parable He enacted by cursing the fig tree. But there He remained who He was, and the fig tree did not make-believe die. In terms of *falsity*, the closest I have found Him is in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, in which He taught spiritual truth in the context of a verbally related story based on a popular misconception. Note that when He used the allegorical, He *told* it, He did not *act* it. This is clearly a far cry from "theatrics."

We should reflect briefly on what we find in Scripture as to God (and others) veiling themselves either because of the blindness of the people (Christ's veiling Himself in human flesh, Moses' veiling his face, the temple's veiling God's glory, etc.), or because of a setting of testing (Joseph's making himself strange to his brothers, Christ's appearing to treat the Syrophenician woman as a dog, etc.). It is of tremendous significance that in this antitypical Day of Atonement, we are to enter within the inner-most veil, to see as we are seen (see *EGW 1888 Material*, p. 27). While the flesh remains, the blindness it brings is removed by the cross, and the eyesalve to see things as God sees them comes to those who will stand in the great day of God's wrath by faith in the unseen.

## 2. A Parallel with Israel

Could we be doing the same as Israel:

Involvement in the symbolic was carried to the exclusion of reality.

Israel: taking the symbolic commanded by God and  
thinking that was all there was.

We: leaving the real commanded by God and  
becoming enamored with the unreal.

Both directions result in a move away from reality into the unreal.

## 3. Nature as the Antidote

The counsel for "something better" in regards to both games and "theatrics" is contact with the natural world God has made, which will keep up in touch with reality in contrast to the artificial. This is recommended explicitly both for students (CT274, 275) and for health patients (4T579).

## 4. Self Identity

### a. In Christ's experience

It is highly significant that the soul-attacking temptation hurled at Christ on the cross by the Jews was predicated on the identical point that was pleasingly and subtly passed in the devil's temptations in the wilderness: "If you are the Son of God...." Had Christ not built by faith the realization of Who He was, had He engaged in the slightest in working at being someone He was not, would He have withstood these temptations? Can the devil overcome us if we know, in reality not just theory, who we are—individual, unique children of God, each clear on their God-given identities, unmuddled by any form of practicing feigning?

### b. In "Postmodernism"

A trend in modern psychology attacking this Biblical concept openly is shown by an article in the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, August 23, 1992, entitled "To Thine Own Selves Be True." The introductory heading declares that "a new breed of psychologists says there's no one answer to the question 'Who am I?'" This review of "postmodernism," as it is labeled, contains the following telling points:

- "...disparate groups of selves ... inhabit us all."
- "There is the sense that we are often, if not always, playing..., the sense that each of us can switch roles as easily as we switch costumes...."
- "The true self is dead."
- "When they ['philosophers of the mind, cognitive psychologists and biologists who investigate the workings of consciousness'] examine the gray matter or interrogate their computer models in search of something that might pass for a self, they come up empty. It's not there."
- "Here [in America], there's a real press to individuate yourself, to be special and unique.... It's encoded in all our sacred texts and documents.... But in Japan, the common view is that the individual is just a fraction. You can only be whole there when you fit in with groups."

- "Maybe it is the separate, unified self—the one that traditional psychotherapists are still trying to help us 'find' or 'realize'—that is causing these feelings of 'emptiness, meaninglessness and unrelatedness.'"
- "...this new view of psychology seems most at home in America, particularly California....California has always been where the idea of the possible came from.... There is a bit of Hollywood in everyone in California—the sense that you can be other than who you are now, that you can kind of create yourself."
- "...how could you settle for creating just one self in a world where even adults are encouraged to play, a world where we can trade in our one 'true' nose for a shorter version, a world where we can move from one identity to another—with a change of clothes, a change of channel, an unexpected phone call—as easily as we might move from Main Street to Adventureland at Disneyland?"

The following are keys points to note from the above:

- (1) The counterfeit death to self which this philosophy espouses serves to confuse ones identity, rather than clarify it, which the Biblical death to self brings (the cross experience) under God.
- (2) The description of different "selves" destroys identity. This is the counterfeit to the valid differentiation of facets of one self, and of roles that one person has in real life. There is held out in this philosophy the need for playing conflicting identities, some of which may well be improper and immoral. How does this differ from the play-acting of theatrics?
- (3) The arrogant attitude is explicit: the "self" does not exist since I cannot find it.
- (4) This multiple personality belief will be seen to be a foundation for demon possession.
- (5) This "theory of multiple selves" is the counterfeit solution to "this exaggerated individualism." The true solution is the Biblical concept of corporate solidarity of the human race in creation, in sin, and in salvation. This in turn underlies the particularly present truth concept of corporate repentance. That is, in running from the extreme, unbiblical western position of "individual only" emphasis, this philosophy ends in the opposite ditch of "group only" identity of many eastern cultures. Scripture affirms both individual and group in a balanced way. God made all; we all are one. Christ would have died for one. "God so loved the world [corporate] that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever [individual] believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." An improper view of the corporate concept will give rise to a mob mentality as shown in Revelation, "all the world" (13:3, 8). Our individuality and our individual identity before God will be critical in the final conflict. Satan is conditioning the world in many ways for his great counterfeit unity.
- (6) Since "traditional psychotherapists" have not had the gospel solution to "emptiness, meaninglessness, and unrelatedness," we have coming up before us a subtle counterfeit to what God has been offering all along.
- (7) The connection of this philosophy to the concepts at the foundation of theatrics is clear. The make-believe is epitomized by "Hollywood," "play," and "Disneyland."

c. In acting

The issues related to self-identity were further highlighted in an interview with Marcello Mastroianni, Italian film star, reported in the *Los Angeles Times* of 3/23/93 (Section F). He is quoted as saying, "An actor in the beginning—as a young man, as a boy—is trying to express himself. He lacks courage, so he assumes the skin of another. An actor is like a canvas without paint: He needs the colors of somebody else.

"Ah, acting.... it's exhibitionism. An actor is like a child: He wants everybody to be interested in him. A child is accustomed to be loved and not to have to give back. If you want to be loved, really loved, don't ask an actor!"

Note the key concepts:

- (1) lack of courage (i.e., self-identity) so one takes another's
- (2) self-centeredness, the opposite of maturity as seen in the reality of agape

#### d. In Geisha

The 10/95 *National Geographic Magazine* had an article on Geisha (Japanese "gei" = art). Geisha are women who for 250 years have been "entertainers of Japan's male elite through music, dance, song, and conversation." "Geisha first appeared in the 17th century as dancers and musicians" in the brothels in Kyoto, Tokyo, and Osaka. "The earliest geisha were men, but by the mid-18th century the profession was dominated by women..." "Her business is to sell a dream—of luxury, romance, and exclusivity..."

A Kyoto client is quoted as saying, "I have seen how geisha prepare their makeup, but I don't like to. I want the romantic ideal, not the reality. I don't want to know their tricks. I don't want to know their sad stories. I want to keep it as a dream, and they want to keep it as a dream for me. That's the business."

Even more significantly, a Kyoto Geisha said, "I'm tired of people's eyes. I'm tired of pretending to be someone I'm not, tired of flattery. I would love to be thought of as a frank and honest person, speaking and acting as I really feel. But this business won't allow that."

#### 5. Pantheism Philosophically Akin to "Theatricizing"

The beautiful reality of the indwelling Christ, which results in my character being changed like unto His *with my individuality and identity preserved*, is counterfeited clearly by all pantheistic thoughts, of blending personalities and identities. It is of this same character that we find theatrical actors, who lose their identities in that of another, and remain changed by that experience.

In this context, the essential question appears in all activity to be, "Are you yourself, in God's image, or are you feigning another person?"

#### 6. Parallels with Spiritualism

Compare these two points:

- (1) The demons feign people for deceptive purposes. The demons are not deceived as to who they are, but those who hear and see them often are.

(2) Religious people who feign others for the purpose teaching truth deceive themselves because by beholding they become changed. The amazing thing is that those who hear and see them may receive truth (God can work *in spite of the medium at times*), but they also may have their imaginations poisoned.

Compare also these two points:

(3) The modern seances of channeling allows another being to speak through you.

(4) Play-acting allows another character to speak through you. Contrast this to how God wants to speak through you. His method with us parallels how He inspired the writers of Scripture. They were not God's pen, passive channels for His very words, rather were His penmen, inspired with heavenly thoughts and concepts, who then transmitted those with the stamp of their *own* individuality. The Holy Spirit does not indwell us in the same manner as the demons want to possess us.

## 7. The Company Play-Actors Keep

Note those who play-act:

(1) Children: In regards to childish things, we put them away when we become adults.

(2) Professional actors: These are a segment of our society we are not to emulate; the youth are not to develop a taste for the stage (RH 01/04/81); these are often modern idols.

(3) Hypocrites: These were the actors in Scripture, self-deceived, usually thinking they were right and on God's side.

(4) Psychopaths: These are criminally ill and are incarcerated. They are experts often at making people think they are someone they are not (like practicing medicine for years while never having gone to medical school). These are actors who in a sense have stepped over the line from entertainment into real life; we recognize that they are sick. Why the dividing line? Such dichotomy is but a symptom of a sick society. Is the professional actor copying real life or copying a psychopath?

(5) Demons: These are the actors *par excellence*. They can impersonate other beings down the duplicating a dead person, even the perfume they used to wear. Note here that Satan is the "master actor" (ST 05/18/82).

## 8. Historical Opposition to Theatrics

### a. In France

Bossuet, chaplain of Louis XIV, was antitheater, while Louis was putting on theatrical performances in the palace.

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## 9. Unequivocal Counsel

Some contend that the Lord's messenger does not bring an explicit, unequivocal message of condemnation of all "theatrics." While we have that awful ability as human beings to see whatever we want to see, we must plead for and accept "the love of the truth" without which we will believe a lie (2 Thess. 2:10). If after receiving that love we base our faith on the weight of evidence in all the inspired counsel, we have the assurance of arriving at truth.

The following references (they can be found in the section "Spirit of Prophecy Counsel — Methods Not Recommended") are unequivocal to the point that the use of simple English and common logic demand a clear position. These statements summarize where the weight of evidence lies. Mark these counsels carefully. When we find more inspired instruction we should gladly reconsider.

Ev137  
Ev207  
Ev266, 267  
Ev396  
MS 42, 1898  
2SM23  
9T110

## Questions and Answers

(Questions are adapted from ones submitted by Pastor Larry Christoffel as our local church pondered the issue.)

### **1. How important, vital or relevant is this issue? Why study it?**

Our issue is vital, for it is stated that "men will recognize the gospel when it is brought to them in a way that is in harmony with God's purposes" (GW383:2). Under God we do not want to cloud the gospel.

### **2. What is our anticipated outcome of our study on this topic?**

The anticipated outcome of addressing this issue is a better understanding of, and hopefully under the Spirit a consensus regarding, the methods God has sanctioned to give the gospel.

### **3. What do we regard as authoratative? Upon what types of evidence do we base a conclusion? How would we regard the majority opinion, our church's current official opinion, its past opinion, testimony of individual members, our own human conscience, the writings of Ellen White and the Scripture? Does the fact that we have once taught a thing as the church mean that we must never change or move away from what we once held?**

Inspiration, revelation is above all reason, but appeals to it, and sanctifies and molds it. Thus we have room first for revelation, and then for reason and experience. Tradition (the teachings of the church in the past) is a valid part of reason and experience, but is subject to inspiration. The principles of truth brought to us by inspiration are unchangeable, but our understanding and application of them are to improve and expand within a clearly defined "Thus saith the Lord."

### **4. To what extent does the local church have the right to pontificate on matters which the church at large does not, to make certain tests which the *Manual*, or leadership of the church, does not recognize? Or to set policies which would bind local leaders with regard to how a program is carried out? To what extent is the liberty of the individual protected when he may disagree with what others within the church may think? Is the thinking of the group "collectively" to be imposed upon the conscience of the individual?**

The extremes we must avoid in any matter that is critical to understand is to abdicate on one hand and to pontificate on the other. It seems clear that God calls us first to understand individually any aspect of truth that He brings to our attention. We individually are not to abdicate that responsibility nor to pontificate once having completed it. Then individuals who have done their individual work under the Spirit have a solemn obligation to corporately come together in understanding and practice. That, it seems obvious, is what the church is all about. And this should be done on items that need not be tests of fellowship. No pontifical binding of local leaders is desired, only a coming together in understanding. No individual can be forced to believe anything; he is at liberty under God. When one joins a fellowship of believers, he in freedom chooses to believe aspects of truth that put him in harmony with the others. These are sometimes called tests of fellowship. Basically, that means you agree on them. On details beyond tests of fellowship, the individual is at liberty, but only under a "thus saith the Lord." A Christian's liberty is bound by God's inspired instructions. He strives to find the principles of truth therein that apply to *all* of the areas of his life. Such is the process of sanctification. And as it is done, he inevitably draws closer to others who are experiencing the same. The pontifical spirit of dictating is not a fruit of sanctification.

**5. Is our basic rule that if the Bible does not make a position explicitly clear, there is room for individual liberty and freedom of thinking on the subject, for a non-judgmental attitude toward other brothers and sisters in Christ? Or, is our basic rule that if the Bible does not recommend a practice, we are against it, as the Church of Christ people say about musical instruments in the church? Does the fact that Christ did not recommend Christian "theatrics" prove that we should be against it? If Jesus did not recommend "theatrics," does this mean we should forbid its use?**

If the Scripture is not explicit regarding something (i.e., does not speak of that item *by name*) then we are to look for principles that apply to the explicit. Since it says nothing about cigarettes, we look for principles about care for the body, etc. Thus we look for general principles, or specific application of principles in parallel areas, that can apply to unmentioned activities. When we understand such principles, and the ways they apply to our own personal lives, we have no right then or ever to be judgmental about those who do not see as we do. We are not called to be judges but witnesses. We witness to the truth. We are willing to have our understanding of truth examined, in the light of inspiration. We are under solemn obligation to testify to the truth. It is the Holy Spirit that brings understanding and conviction. And it is Jesus Christ, our advocate, who will judge, by His words.

In further regard to explicit instruction, however, it is critical to note that the lesser light is explicit in areas such as tobacco and drama in ways that the greater light was not. Both agree fully on principle.

**6. How do we interpret evidence? Can we distinguish between fact and opinion? Do we use a proof-text method of interpreting documents? Are we comfortable with a historical-contextual approach?**

Inspired evidence is understood for the principles involved. Such principles are much better perceived in the light of the historical context, but are obviously not limited to that. Opinion is to be seen in contrast to an authoritative "thus saith the Lord."

**7. Do the majority of Seventh-day Adventists reject Christian "theatrics"? Do church leaders view the "theatrics" issue differently from the laymen? Have Seventh-day Adventists always opposed the use of "theatrics" in the church? Do they now oppose it? What bearing do past or present positions have on what we should now do?**

These questions are best answered by doing a survey or studying the history of the church. But the results of both would be subject to the constraints as noted in answer #3.

**8. What are the presuppositions which we bring to this study? In our understanding of Christianity, how do we view the world? What did Jesus mean when He said, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (John 17:15, 16)? Is your world-view such that you believe there is nothing really good in the world, in terms of its art, music, philosophy, literature, sciences, government, culture, methods of communication?**

The "world" of Scripture is naturally at enmity with God. He loved it in order to redeem it from sin. Any good in the world has come from God. Thereby secular products are usually a mixture of good and bad, thus more dangerous than that which is unmixed. The implication of Christ's statement was that while "in the world" we would be "of heaven."

**9. Does Mrs. White deal explicitly with the issue of Christian "theatrics"? If we should say she does not, then we would have to settle the issue on other grounds than appealing to her. What did Ellen White mean by her strong statements against drama and the theater? Did she categorically reject the use of drama, for instance? Can it be shown that she explicitly opposed the use of "theatrics" in the church?**

The definition of "drama" and "theatrical" must be left to her uses of it. It is clear that there is the true and the false in drama. The theatrical is of the false. Dramatic is not equal to "theatric." Her statements about the theatrical are explicit and unequivocal.

**10. How legitimate are philosophical arguments against Christian drama which neither the Bible nor Ellen White employed as a basis for either defending or attacking its use in the church?**

Philosophical arguments are valid only as sanctified reason can be valid in a search for truth. Revelation must ever stand over and above this use of reason, but does not categorically invalidate it.

**11. Are Christian "theatrics" to be condemned because the roots of the theater are in the Hellenistic rather than the Hebrew, Christian culture?**

The Greek culture was by and large a God-less (but by not means "gods-less") culture. That the theater springs from such an origin at the very least makes it suspect. But there is much more evidence than that of origin.

**12. Because some playwrights and actors are less than admirable citizens, is this a justifiable reason to forbid the use of Christian "theatrics"?**

No more than the fact that some "Christians" are hypocrites (actors) makes Christianity to be an undesirable thing. However, Christianity is not the product of Christians in the same way that the theater is the product of playwrights and actors. God writes the script and literally indwells the real-life actors of Christianity. The spirits that inspire the theatrical are clearly of another realm. The devil is the father of lies (John 8:44), as well as the master actor (ST 05/18/82).

**13. Just because we have every reason to reject most of the programs and movies (the "message") of television and the public theater, should we abandon theatrical performances (the "medium") as a legitimate means of communication? Is it possible to distinguish between the effect that an acted pageant or play has upon *the observer*, from the *actor himself or herself*. That is to say, is there a fundamental difference between the "medium" and the "message"? Should we be prepared to evaluate each in its own right, or must they be considered morally together?**

We should not reject any medium as bad because of the messages it carries that are bad. For example, a pornographer's use of the printed page can't make the printing of gospel books and pictures bad. We can look at the medium and its effect independently of the use that it made of it, in the same way that we could analyze the effects of screaming on the recipient separate from the message that was being screamed.

**14. With regard to the effect upon the actor, is acting inherently evil? Is it deceptive? Is a "hypocrite" (actor) to be seen differently when he plays a part in a play as opposed to the Jewish leaders who lived two-faced lives? Does acting imply a deliberate intent to deceive, or is it just the opposite? Does the acting have a baneful effect upon the actor, causing him to lose touch with reality, or to live in an imaginary world?**

There is no Scriptural approval for pretense, only condemnation. To act something that one is not has inescapable effects on the actor. Willem Dafoe who played Jesus Christ in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, says that he "never played a role that didn't affect" him. The USA Today article on him August 25, 1988, further states, "portraying one of the world's most revered religious figures was enriching in ways that are hard to articulate. 'I don't know ... (playing Jesus) gave me a more profound understanding of his teachings; it was a way to articulate the struggle that's in us all. But I can't patly say anything like, 'Now I think this way.' How did it change me? It contributed to whomever I am today.' And who is that? He's an actor versatile enough to convincingly play a remorseless killer in *To Live and Die in L.A.* before segueing to his compassionate soldier in the Oscar-winning *Platoon*."

Two items need to be noted here: (1) Acting *acts* reflexly on the actor. (2) A good actor can equally play Christ as he can a killer. And such is deception, in the sense that the better the acting, the more one forgets the reality of who the actor really is, at the same time that the actor is also being subtly changed in the same direction.

**15. Is it possible for a morally good person to enact an antagonist (villain, evil) role, or a person with a bad character to act the part of a protagonist (hero or good person)? Does the character of the actor enter into the message which he or she conveys to the audience?**

If one excels in acting, it is immaterial what one really is, as far as being good at portraying any desired character. In other words, the better at being multifaced one is, the better he succeeds in the theatrical, at least in terms of versatility. If a "good person" has a hard time portraying a "bad person" because he inherently in real life is a "good person" then he is a bad actor. The words themselves obviously lead to such conclusions.

**16. With regard to the effect upon the actor, is it less deceptive to act in a pageant where you merely dress the part of another, or to mime or mimic through actions another, or is it the personal testimony which is spoken which gives it a deceptive flavor?**

Pretense can exist with or without words.

**17. Is Christian "theatrics" wrong because acting in a church drama creates in the person doing the acting a craving to become a professional actor/actress? Would it be less than honorable to aspire to the profession of becoming a Christian actor?**

These are best answered by RH 01/04/81 (in the section "Spirit of Prophecy Quotes — Methods Not Recommended").

**18. Is the problem of Christian acting that it deals with creativity and the imagination, symbolism rather than reality, fiction rather than non-fiction, or figurative elements rather than literal? Are these the deceptive essence of acting? Why did God give us both sides of our brains?**

Creativity, imagination, figurative elements, and symbolism are not necessarily of the realm of the unreal or the make-believe. Rather they are to be used to facilitate the grasp of unseen or unappreciated realities, while being true to reality in doing that. Such is their sanctified use.

**19. Is the problem with acting that there is movement, and that if a person merely stood in one place there would not be a problem?**

Pretense can be stationary.

**20. Would a "monologue" be less deceptive for the actor than for a "dialog" part, or even a scene involving several others?**

If I were playing the role of a dog, a second actor playing my master and telling me to "heel" would likely have more of an effect on me than solely my sitting on a stage and barking or howling a monologue. More to the point, if I were playing the role of Jesus Christ, having another actor playing the role of someone bowing down and worshipping me would seem obviously to have a much different effect on me than my play-preaching the Sermon on the Mount all by myself.

**21. Is it the "plot" and its development which gives Christian "theatrics" a negative moral value?**

There is nothing of pretense in a plot per se. Many of the parables of Christ had plots.

**22. Is participating in Christian drama bad because you should be out living instead?**

The time involved in doing theatrical activity well (called "painstaking effort" in Letter 5, 1888,) would much better be spent in real life. See MS 42, 1898: "If you desire a public career, there [not: 'is Christian acting you can go into,' but there] is a work you may do. Help the class you represent in plays. Come to the reality...."

**23. Is Christian drama basically wrong because of the expenses or time invested in the project?**

Expenses and time are usually involved in any project of significance, whether good or bad. Thus the repeated use of the term "painstaking effort," noted above, is even more significant. Such would have importance only if the activity was less than ideal, a work less than that to which we are called, which is exactly the point made in that letter.

**24. Is attending a religious play or drama wrong because it is recreation or fun? Is it OK for Christians to enjoy themselves and have a good time? Can Christian "theatrics" be both entertaining and educational?**

That which recreates the image of God in a human being is that which in reality is rewarding; such is true recreation. And such is not boring or unimaginative. The solemn, dynamic joy of walking with Christ outweighs the "fun" of pretending as much as the earth outweighs a grain of sand. There are indeed pleasures at His right hand, but not as the world gives.

**25. Is it wrong for singers to put pathos in their voices, or evangelists enthusiasm in their message? Is it deceptive to teach little children finger plays and to go through the motions with them in their simple songs? How far would you take this?**

Pathos, enthusiasm, and movement, all to describe things that are real to you and really yours are clearly genuine.

**26. Looking at the effect upon the observer of a Christian theatrical, is it negative because the action is visual and kinesthetic, rather than auditory or simply read? Would it be acceptable to read a play, rather than to see one performed?**

Reading how an actor is to act out another person's life would be dull compared to plain reading that person's life. A biography would make much better reading (faster, more complete, etc.) than a script based on such a biography. Things visual and kinesthetic as well as things auditory and read are all merely activities of real life, any of which may be used for good or bad. (See comments under "Spirit of Prophecy Counsel—Miscellaneous" regarding some thoughts on measuring the

distance we are to keep from the theatrical, as seen by reflections on what Christ Himself did according to the instruction in Ev396.)

**27. Is visual learning less moral than auditory learning? Is seeing an enacted scene evil, but reading about it less evil?**

Visual impact is tremendously greater than auditory, thereby being much more effective in molding good or bad. Thus the seeing of evil would be much worse than the hearing of it. But the acting of it seems to have an effect greater than even that of seeing, for one *does* it, if only in make-believe, and if he does it well, his emotions identify with it at a very deep level. Thus the doing of something that is not the real you has tremendous, reflex effect upon you.

**28. Does attending Christian "theatrics" create a craving for public theater attendance?**

The inspired counsel answers this explicitly in 4T578 and RH 01/04/81.

**29. Does observing Christian "theatrics" make the observer unresponsive to spiritual things, which he then regards as dull and boring?**

The theatrical clearly feeds a taste for the make-believe. And a fevered imagination needs the realities of nature for healing, not the excitement of the theatrical (4T579).

**30. Does the place where the drama is observed make any difference as to whether it is right or wrong to observe? Is association a reason to avoid the theater?**

Association, as well as content and medium, is of significance.

**31. Does the fact that some Christian plays have been poorly done, and been technically bad, give any reason to reject drama as a medium of communication?**

No. But to recommend more "painstaking effort" does not seem to be the answer.

**32. Should Christian drama be excluded because it is such a powerful medium of communication, for as the Scripture says that by beholding we become changed (2 Cor. 3:18)?**

The power of a medium is of significance (see #27). Power by itself is neither good nor bad, if it is not to mean coercion. The power of pretense, even in an attempt to teach something good, seems *at best* a mixed bag.

**33. If Christian drama is a legitimate communication vehicle, and we neglect to use it, will God hold us responsible as unjust stewards? The Faith for Today Broadcast from 1950 to 1975 reported over 183,000 graduates from their Bible course, and over 24,000 known baptisms. If it is legitimate as an evangelistic tool in the world, wouldn't we also consider its possibility for use in the church for worship and teaching? Can we afford to ignore one of the most powerful communication tools known to man? Satan is using it to sweep multitudes into his service. It may be the only way we could reach certain classes.**

Paul makes it plain that God can use the preaching of Christ, "whether in pretense, or in truth" (Phil. 1:15-20). It is clear in this incident the intent was *not* good, rather to "add affliction" to Paul. But this instance shows that whether God can use a method or not does not *in itself* make the method appropriate. In contrast to "one of the most powerful communication tools known to man," we have and are neglecting *the* most powerful, the real life *spectacle* of a Christian living a Christ-like life. This will reach all classes. The "loving and lovable Christian" crosses all boundaries, defeats all arguments. This is what God is waiting for, not more expert actors in more acted plots on more TV stations in more cities, etc.

**34. To what extent is the gospel of justification by faith, that is, imputed righteousness, involved in reckoning things to be which are not actually? As we reckon ourselves to have died with Christ and to have been resurrected with Him, we are motivated to grow in Christlikeness—not because we have already achieved, but because God counts us as though we had achieved in Christ. It is this feature of the gospel which is the mainspring of the plan of salvation, and the key to victory over sin. Christian drama could utilize this same technique—imputation for the sake of conveying spiritual truths. Was the whole typical system of the Old Testament a dramatic experience? Did that make it wrong? Does the concept of "by beholding we become changed" apply here (See Romans 6)?**

We come at last to the theological implications inherent in drama. For an actor to say and do something while in reality being something else is as the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Their play-believing, saying, and doing (as Matt. 7:15-23) has nothing to do with the imputation of righteousness, which takes a sinner who is powerless to reconcile himself to God, and reinstates him, both in name *and in reality* in Christ. If God had been dabbling in make-believe, then He would have called us righteous *without* Christ's having to be born, live, die, and be raised *in reality* for us and as us.

The fact that the reality in the individual is not fully grown at the start is of no more significance than is the fact that an acorn is not a fully grown oak tree in its seed form (in Christ) or at its first sprout (faith's first response). It is still in reality an oak. The two necessary elements are there: the gift of life, undeserved but real, and the potential, put in at creation of the fully grown tree (or man).

To deny the *reality* of justification by faith beyond the record-keeping aspect, is to lose the fact that this justification has an inseparable tie to the sprout of sanctification, the genuineness of the work of the Holy Spirit as evidenced in the thief on the cross who immediately upon justification by faith began to do all he could for Christ. Without this absolutely necessary birth of reality in the individual, the claim of "Lord, Lord" is shown, with all that follows, to be "iniquity" (Matt. 7:23). Again, the inward reality of faith that has no outward reality is shown to be a sham, indeed not real but "dead." James 2 and STC 62, 63 make this truth clear.

Thus the reckoning of sinlessness through justification by faith is seen in its reality in the immediate sprout of new life in sanctification's beginning. And the reckoning continues daily while the sprout grows; in fact, it cannot grow without the reckoning. But the reckoning is not of a pretense. [As the second Adam, Christ included me when He worked out the reality of His perfect life. Before Calvary He stated that that work was finished (John 17:4)]. Jesus Christ's life of perfection, in which I was incorporated and which I am reckoned to have, was real, fully grown. Such He reckons me to be, and into such He grows me if I do not resist, because in reality I am already in Him, and if I believe it, I grown up in Him by continuing to reckon it by faith—my heart response to what He has done.

The integrity (oneness) of this experience denies any truth to the splitness of the Pharisees, the religious actors of Christ's day. Such a needed experience of oneness was also the burden of many of Christ's parables, which constantly warned against those who wanted justification without sanctification, a make-believe salvation. The body and the spirit were intended in creation to be together. Reality demands that. Spiritualism maintains the opposite.

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The reality of justification by faith removes it also from being a basis for the pretense of play-acting. Romans 4:17 can easily be misconstrued to appear to support a make-believe justification. "Abraham, who is the father of us all, (as it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before Him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were..." (Rom. 4:16, 17). Two things make it clear from this passage that the phrase "as though they were" does not refer to unreality, rather to God's intent.

First, the parallel phrase "quickeneth the dead" indicates that when God "calls," things don't remain the same! As Creator, His word has creative power. When Christ called Lazarus to come forth from the tomb "as though he were alive," he became alive and came forth! In the context of Abraham, his need was his "own body now dead" and "the deadness of Sarah's womb" (vs. 19). But Abraham's faith in God was such that he was "fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform" (vs. 21), not just to imagine or to pretend. What was not so with Abraham (his great need) was so with God (both His purpose and His ability).

This power of God is what Abraham believed, and this is the second point of reality. It was this faith that "was counted unto him for righteousness" (vs. 3). God does not count unrighteousness as righteousness, but knowing we are helpless (dead), He has made plain His intent and ability for the entire race in Christ. And when I believe that promise of His, He acknowledges that as "right," or "righteousness," the beginning of life from the dead! Praise His name!

The drama of the Old Testament sacrificial system, in showing in types the truth of this salvation, also speaks of a reality that includes provisions both for reckoning and changing. (See also the section "Biblical Reflections — The Sanctuary System as Symbols."). David in Psalm 51:16-19 shows the utter uselessness of sacrifices without change of heart. Thus Biblical drama in any form has ever been integrated, complete, real-life, over against the disruption of pretense, presumption, and make-believe.

## **Conclusion**

In Scripture we find:

- multiple and extensive use of symbols, visual objects, symbolic activities, and parables
- uniform absence of God using people feigning other people to teach truth and reality
- a uniform condemnation of people who feign in sport or in reality.

In the Spirit of Prophecy we find:

- a uniform condemnation of anything of a theatrical nature
- multiple and extensive recommendations of real life, of nature, and of using objects in teaching, like charts and object lessons.

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**Appendix A — Letter 5, 1888 (Battle Creek Christmas Program,  
December 25, 1888)**

Dear Brother Morse,

I have risen at three o'clock this morning to write you a few lines. I was pleased with the lighthouse, and the scene which had required so much painstaking effort was one which could have been made most impressive, but failed to be made as forcible and striking as it might have been when it cost so much time and labor in preparing it. The part acted by the children was good. The reading was appropriate. Then if there had been good, solid talk on that occasion in regard to children and teachers in the Sabbath schools laboring earnestly for the salvation of the souls of the children under your charge, presenting the most acceptable offering to Jesus, the gift of their own hearts, and impressive remarks, short and right to the point, [on] how they could do this, would it not have been in keeping with the work we have been trying to do in the church?

Every stroke now should be in harmony for the one great purpose, preparing of the hearts, that individually pupils and teachers should be as a light set on a candlestick that it may give light to all that are in the house, which would be carrying out the idea strikingly of a lighthouse guiding souls that they may not make shipwreck of faith. Can you tell me what marked impression the two poems rehearsed by the two ladies on the stand would have to do with this work?

The singing was after the order we would expect it to be in any theatrical performance, but not one word to be distinguished. Certainly the tempest-tossed ship would be wrecked upon the rocks if there were no more light coming from the lighthouse than was seen in the exercises. I must say I was pained at these things, so out of order with the very work of reformation we were trying to carry forward in the church and with our institutions, that I should have felt better if I had not been present. This was an occasion that should have been gotten up not only for the Sabbath school children, but words should have been spoken that would have deepened the impression of a necessity of seeking for the favor of that Saviour who loved them and gave Himself for them. If [only] the precious hymns had been sung, "Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee," and "Jesus lover of my soul, let me to Thy bosom fly, while the billows near me roll, while the tempest still is high." Whose souls were inspired with new and fresh zeal for the Master in those songs sung whose virtue was in the different performances of the singer?

While these painstaking efforts were being made to get up the performances, meetings were being held of the deepest interest which should have engaged the attention, and which called for the presence of every soul lest they should lose something of the message the Master had sent to them. Now this Christmas has passed into eternity with its burden of record, and we are anxious to see the result of it. Will it make those who acted their part in it more spiritual-minded? Will it increase their sense of obligation to our heavenly Father who sent His Son into the world at such an infinite sacrifice to save fallen man from utter ruin? Was the mind awakened to grasp God because of His great love wherewith He has loved us?

We hope, now that Christmas is in the past, that those who have put forth so much painstaking effort will now manifest a decided zeal, and earnest, disinterested effort for the salvation of the souls of the teachers in the Sabbath school, that in their turn they may each labor for the salvation of the souls in their classes, to give them personal instruction as to what they must do to be saved. We hope that they will find time to labor in simplicity and in sincerity for the souls of those under their care, and that they will pray with them, and for them, that they may give to Jesus the precious offering of their own souls, that they make literally true the symbol of the lighthouse in the beams of light shining forth from their own strong efforts in the name of Jesus, which should be put forth in love, they themselves grasping the rays of light to diffuse this light to others, and that there shall be no settling

down to a surface work. Show just as great skill and aptitude in winning souls to Jesus as you have shown in painstaking effort for this occasion just past. Point them in your efforts, with heart and soul enlisted, to the Star that shines out to the morally-darkened heaven at this time, even the Light of the world. Let your light shine that the tempest-tossed souls may set their eyes upon it and escape the rocks that are concealed beneath the surface of the water. Temptations are lying in wait to deceive them; souls are oppressed with guilt, ready to sink into despair. Labor to save them; point them to Jesus who so loved them that He gave His life for them. . . . [ellipse in original release]

The Light of the world is shining upon us that we might absorb the divine rays and let this light shine upon others in good works that many souls shall be led to glorify our Father which is in heaven. He is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, and it grieves the heart of Jesus that so many refuse the offers of His mercy and matchless love.

Will all who acted an interested part in the program of last evening work as zealously and interestedly to show themselves approved unto God in doing their work for the Master, that they may show themselves intelligent workmen that need not to be ashamed? Oh, let the teachers in the Sabbath school be thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the message for this time, carrying that message into all their labor. There are souls to be saved, and while in the Sabbath school work there has been much form and a great amount of precious time occupied in reading of reports and records, there has been but little time to really let light shine forth in clear, steady rays in the very instruction needed to save the souls of the children and youth. Less elaborate speeches, less lengthy remarks, and plain, pointed truth presented, not one word uttered to exhibit profound knowledge, not one word in any speech, but the greatest evidence of real knowledge is the great simplicity.

All who have taken knowledge of Jesus Christ will imitate Him in their manner of instruction. They will not have hard words, difficult to understand, but will aim to do no surface work, be short in every address, and not labor to exhibit themselves but to come directly to the point to inculcate ideas which are of value, and every word used should be so plain that the children need not go home and get a dictionary and search out the meaning of the words used by teachers and superintendents. The strength of the educator is in being understood, that he shall not need an interpreter. The less there is of machinery and forms that are really not necessary, the better it will be for the school.

Imitate the great Teacher, give lessons that are clear and plain, not complicated, not buried up with a mass of words. Few words spoken plainly, clearly, presented in humility and the meekness of Christ will reach hearts, while the many words cannot be retained and are as a lot of waste paper thrown into a wastebasket, to be lost as rubbish. Few words, distinct and simple, will accomplish far more than a multitude of words which confuse the mind and will not interest, so that nothing stands out clear and forcible.

Our Sabbath schools should not be molded to become mechanical, but all teachers and superintendents should look upon them as the Lord's school where souls are to be instructed how to become Christians, that while the awful guilt and grievous character of sin shall be urged home upon the soul, at the same time the mercy and compassion of God should be clearly presented in Christ giving His life for the sins of the world, thus revealing a love that is measureless.

Jesus must be presented in simplicity to the children as a sin-pardoning Saviour offering within the veil the blood of His atonement, and while Jesus is pleading in their behalf, now, just now, while Jesus is making an offering for sin, ask Him to forgive and pardon your sins, to remove your transgressions.

Thus educate the children and youth to pray, teach the children how to repent. The time taken up in so large a school in reading reports ought to be occupied every moment in the very best kind of solid instruction. Lead out the minds by making interesting remarks. Tell them to seek God, and make the service of Christ full of attraction, tell them it is in vain to think they can make themselves better and promise to amend. For this will not remove one spot or stain of sin but impress upon their minds that they must not only repent and forsake

sin, but the way to obtain a sense of sin and true repentance is to cast themselves just as they are upon the declared mercy and revealed love of God. This would not be presumption, for every ray of light comes to them from the throne of God. It is the duty of teachers and ministers to guard against ideas that lead to presumption and confidence that cannot be sustained by the Word of God, to feel safe for eternity when they are not safe.

It is the duty to rouse the soul to a sense of its privileges, and God expects corresponding returns in faithful service to Him. The soul is not to be always shrouded in clouds of doubts, but they are to make their calling and election sure. The Scripture makes the marks of true religion clear and decided if we will apply the close test Christ has given. "By their fruits ye shall know them." The rewards of eternity, though purchased by Christ, shall be rigidly proportioned to their works. There must be no listlessness, no drifting with circumstances, with a feeling of security. There must be faith and hope and patience and longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, goodness, and mercy enlisted. (--Letter 5, 1888; 19MR300-305)

[This communication was written early Wednesday morning, December 26, 1888, and related to a dramatized Christmas program put on by the Battle Creek Sabbath School. The children wore costumes. Ella M. White, Mrs. White's six-year-old granddaughter, was in the program, dressed to typify an angel.]

## **Appendix B — Further Historical Context of Letter 5, 1888: Righteousness by faith diluted by drama**

The Christmas involved in the letter in Appendix A was some six weeks after the Minneapolis General Conference Session. The events following the Minneapolis meetings are of great significance, being full of spiritual and historical value. A summary of them follows, giving dates and events from the end of the GC Session, through the Colorado campmeeting in September 1889. Many of these were meetings Ellen White shared with A. T. Jones.

The meetings in Battle Creek in December 1888 were a significant revival, based on the Minneapolis message of righteousness by faith. The following are references to this message in the letter:

(1) "...Meetings were being held of the deepest interest which should have engaged the attention, and which called for the presence of every soul lest they should lose something of **the message the Master had sent to them.**" (paragraph 4)

(2) "Oh, let the teachers in the Sabbath school be thoroughly imbued with the spirit of **the message for this time**, carrying **that message** into all their labor." (paragraph 7)

Note how the root of the message is in the full revelation of the love of God:

(1) "**His great love** wherewith He has loved us" (paragraph 4)

(2) "the offers of His mercy and **matchless love**" (paragraph 6)

(3) "...the mercy and compassion of God should be clearly presented in Christ giving His life for the sins of the world, thus revealing **a love that is measureless**" (paragraph 10)

(4) "...tell them it is in vain to think they can make themselves better and promise to amend. For this will not remove one spot or stain of sin but impress upon their minds that they must not only repent and forsake sin, but the way to obtain a sense of sin and true repentance is to cast themselves just as they are upon the declared mercy and **revealed love of God.**" (paragraph 12)

Notice how Christ is the center:

**Jesus must be presented** in simplicity to the children as a sin-pardoning Saviour...." (paragraph 11)

In this context, this letter is seen to be powerful, new covenant counsel on how to deal with children, bringing them the reality of the message of righteousness by faith, and leading them experientially into it. It is a clear, strong directive away from theatrics. Instead we should "imitate Him in [our] manner of instruction." (paragraph 8)

The events surrounding this letter are covered in 3Bio420-424. Many of these have documents that accompany them in the *Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*. Please refer to them for more details, and a wealth of spiritual food. Here is a brief outline of key events in which Ellen White was involved:

1888/11/04 (Sunday)	End of Minneapolis General Conference Session
1888/11/22 (Thursday)	Michigan State Ministers' Meeting at Potterville
1888/11/23 (Friday)	Sermon at Potterville MI
1888/11/24 (Sabbath)	Sermon at Potterville MI
1888/11/29 (Thursday)	Sermon at Potterville MI
1888/11/29 (Thursday)	Iowa State Minister's Meeting at Des Moines
1888/12/08 (Sabbath)	Sermon at Battle Creek
1888/12/15 (Sabbath)	Week of Prayer Reading entitled "The Scriptures a Sufficient Guide"
1888/12/15 (Sabbath)	Week of Prayer in Battle Creek and meetings following
1888/12/20 (Thursday)	Evening (5 p.m.) talk with students
1888/12/20 (Thursday)	Night talk at the Tabernacle
1888/12/22 (Sabbath)	Sermon
1888/12/22 (Sabbath)	Afternoon talk
1888/12/23 (Sunday)	Evening talk
1888/12/25 (Tuesday)	Christmas Program in Battle Creek
1888/12/26 (Wednesday)	Letter 5, 1888
1888/12/29 (Sabbath)	Afternoon talk in Battle Creek
1888/12/30 (Sunday)	Evening talk at Tabernacle
1889/01/05 (Sabbath)	Sermon at Battle Creek
1889/01/10 (Thursday)	South Lancaster Meetings (see RH03/05/1889)
1889/01/11 (Friday)	Sermon at South Lancaster
1889/01/13 (Sunday)	Talk at South Lancaster
1889/01/14 (Monday)	Sermon at South Lancaster
1889/01/19 (Sabbath)	Sermon at South Lancaster
1889/01/??	Morning Talk at South Lancaster
1889/01/21	Final meeting at South Lancaster?
1889/02/23 (Sabbath)	2Sermons at Indianapolis
1889/02/04 (Monday)	Return to Battle Creek
1889/03/28 (Thursday)	Chicago Meetings
1889/04/04 (Thursday)	A break made

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1889/04/05	Morning Talk at Chicago
1889/05/07 (Tuesday)	Kansas Workers' Meeting and Campmeeting
1889/06/05 (Wednesday)	Williamsport PA Campmeeting
1889/06/11 (Tuesday)	Rome NY Campmeeting
1889/06/25 (Tuesday)	Wexford MI Campmeeting
1889/08/25 (Sunday)	Kalamazoo MI Campmeeting
1889/08/27 (Tuesday)	Saginaw MI Meeting
1889/09/10 (Tuesday)	Colorado Campmeeting

### **Appendix C — Letter 58a, 1898 (Attending and Acting in Theatrical Performances)**

Cooranbong, Australia  
To Mrs. Gorick, July, 1898

My sister, you are to be connected with Jesus Christ. Our Saviour, in His example, has led the way which every sinner who turns from sin must follow. By taking the requisite steps--in conversion, in repentance, in faith, and baptism--he is to fulfill all righteousness. Christ has shown that repentance, faith, and baptism are the steps that all must take if they would follow His example. All who in obedience to Christ's command follow in this ordinance, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, signify that they are dead to the world. They are buried in the likeness of Christ's death, and raised again from the water in the likeness of His resurrection. Says the apostle Paul: [Colossians 3:1-4 quoted].

Christ is the light of the world. All who are born into the kingdom of God, Christ adopts into the household of faith. If you have been converted, then the whole tenor of your life is changed. You have been convicted by the Word of God. You have accepted unpopular truth. But now comes your danger. As a mother you have not felt your responsibility to so educate and train your children that they would consider themselves a part of the family firm, to take hold with their mother in their education and become efficient in learning a trade. This is essential for practical life, and this is work that devolves upon the parents. They are to educate and train their children in this probationary time, that they may not remain in disobedience and transgression, standing under the banner of the prince of darkness, and uniting their God-given powers with the enemy of righteousness.

My sister, you have decidedly failed in the duties which every mother should do in the fear of God, in training her children to lift with her the burdens that come with every child that is born into the family. You have a work to do even now, and God will help you if you will take up your work in your home life. Your children are God's property, and they should not be left to become estranged from Him. True, you have had large odds to contend with, but you have not maintained the surrender you made of yourself to the Lord. Had you followed on to know the Lord, you would have better understood what it means to give up your way and will to the Lord. But the temptation and snare of the enemy came to your children, and through them to yourself, and as a family you are in constant peril of the loss of your souls.

Had you, my sister, followed on to know the Lord, you would during this period of time have had enlightenment from the Sun of Righteousness. Your only safety lay in following in His footsteps. But in not decidedly taking your stand to give no sanction by your presence to the theatrical performance of your children, you have encouraged them in their choice of the use they have made of their talents. Their capabilities and power belong to God, but they are not now being used to gather with Christ. All their talents were lent them to use to the honor and the glory of God, that they might win souls away from everything that pertains to this class of fascinating amusement that absorbs the mind and draws it away from God and from heavenly things. But they have not had an experimental knowledge of

what is truth. The principles of truth have never been stamped upon their souls. The deceptive temptation that they can be a blessing to the world while serving as actresses is a delusion and a snare, not only to themselves, but to your own soul. Said Christ, "Without Me ye can do nothing." Can the Lord Jesus Christ accept these theatrical exhibitions as service done for Him? Can He be glorified thereby? No. All this kind of work is done in the service of another leader.

My sister, you cannot have an experimental knowledge of the love of God in the soul, and the joy of true obedience to your Lord, who has bought you and your family with the price of His own blood, while you join yourself to these things. Your family do not understand as do you the reasons of the faith that leads away from all such pursuits. You can never be free in Jesus Christ and yet have a divided heart. My sister, you need now to consider that your influence in accompanying your daughters to the theater is decidedly against Christ. He declares that "he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37).

The Word of God is free. Under its hallowed power of influence you may with the disciple John say, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Thus you may cooperate with God in saving many souls to Christ. You may be a savor of life unto life by becoming a living influence in your family to save them from Satan's deceptive snares. But if you are not steadfast, rooted and grounded in the truth, self-delusion will place you where God cannot use you as a vessel unto honor. The light that comes from God is the light which guides the human soul to God, and the Lord calls for every power He has lent the human agent to be exercised strenuously on Christ's side of the question, to rescue the souls deceived and infatuated with just such service as your daughters have entered upon--to amuse and delight the senses and endeavor to supply a necessity in which Christ has no part.

You can see, my dear sister, that the blessing which attends the cheerful, consecrated sons and daughters of God cannot be realized by those who work with a divided heart. You do not feel the freedom, the rest, and the joy of believing in Christ because your mind is largely taken up with worthless things. Your work, and the work that God has given your children to do, you are not doing. They have consented to work up a counter-attraction that has no Christ in it.

If the truth as it is in Jesus is brought into actual contact with the souls that are ready to perish, it will produce good works. The talents of your daughters should be brought into the home life to make a model home. They should use their God-given powers to reform, to restore, and to bring order and discipline and sound principles into the home life. This would be the beginning of the work represented in the Word of God as bringing to the foundation gold and silver and precious stones, which are imperishable. This work will bring the approval of God. Angels of God in the heavenly courts would rejoice to see such a work done.

The "form of sound words" is to be prized, for it leads to right actions. The souls of your children cost the greatest sacrifice our God could make. He gave His Son to die that they might not perish. They have souls that Jesus loves. But if they follow a course of disregard for the truth and the commandments of God, they cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. If they accept the only One who can save them from ruin, He will accept them and their service. And angels of God will be their escorts as they use their powers in guiding lost and perishing souls to a haven of rest. The power of the truth will elevate the nature, refine the taste, sanctify the judgment, and give them characters after the divine similitude. They will become members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King.

There is an abundance of theatrical performances in our world, but in its highest order it is without God. We need now to point souls to the uplifted Saviour. Deceptions, impositions, and every evil work are in our world. Satan, the wily foe in angel's garments, is working to deceive and destroy. The object of the death of Christ was to declare His righteousness, and no man, woman or child can do this in his own strength, or by his own words.

Paul declared: [Ephesians 3:8-11 quoted]. To make known "unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places . . . the manifold wisdom of God." Righteousness is made known in that manifold wisdom, for nothing that is unrighteous can be wise. The wisdom of God and the power of God are waiting every human agency. God desires that we shall put to the tax every spiritual nerve and muscle, that we shall strive for an entrance into that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. All who win eternal life will arm themselves for the conflict against every influence that would obstruct the way. They must bring their minds up to noble and elevated thoughts. While they offer humble prayer to God, they are to search to know what is truth.

Does my sister place herself in a position where the Lord can come close to her to manifest His presence? What do the angels see in your house on the Sabbath day? All who become members of the heavenly family will have a philosophy and faith that is founded on a true faith in Jesus Christ. His life alone is to be our guide. His life, His attributes, are to become woven into all our life and all our works. God speaks from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye Him."

Christ did not come into the world to disparage education, for He Himself was the greatest Teacher the world has ever known. Christ came to call the minds of His redeemed people to learn of Him. He will sanctify the human talents that are employed for His glory. He came to make human learning strong and pure and ennobling, and of such a character that He could commend. He came to give it a foundation upon which to stand--a knowledge of Himself. Christ declared, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matt. 5:17). He came to give every specification of the law a depth and meaning which the Pharisees had never seen nor understood. Christ is the originator of all the deep thoughts of true philosophy, of every line of that education that will be retained through sanctification of the spirit. True education is that which will not be left behind when He shall come to be admired in all them that believe.

Every member of your family is deciding his own destiny. Those who will be rewarded with the gift of eternal life in the kingdom of God will be those who are learning here of the great Teacher. You do not have peace and joy because you have not consecrated yourself to God. To you the voice of your children is above the voice of Jesus Christ, and in not taking your stand firmly you are being led away from God and His holy requirements. In becoming their escort and companion to go where they choose, you are making yourself one with them. You endorse the ambitious enterprise that is perverting their talents so that God cannot sanctify them. And the food you thus give to your soul, in seeing and hearing, is making its impression upon the mind. Should the heavenly intelligences offer you the bread of heaven, you would have no relish for it.

Just that which you give your soul to feed upon will determine the character of your experience. If you place yourself in objectionable positions where the Lord is not honored or glorified, you disqualify yourself for enjoying wholesome, heavenly instruction that would make you wise unto salvation. You are bought with a price. The plan of salvation is so vast that it brings into action the attributes of the divine nature.

If we will let Him, the Lord by His Holy Spirit will put every part of our entrusted capabilities into His service. He will cause us to feel our deep need of the grace of Christ, that we may feel His love constraining us to declare that, could we multiply our powers a thousandfold, they should all be invested in the work and cause of God. Our testimony would be, "Of Thine own we give Thee" (1 Chron. 29:14). When we have a soul hunger for Christ, we shall be filled with His fullness.

My sister, I have an intense interest that you shall have the rich manna of heaven upon which to feed. Read the sixth chapter of John. You are choosing whom you will serve. If you keep before your eyes and in your ears the transactions of the theater, you will find in your heart no soul hunger for God. It is a question of life or death with you. The Lord has appointed means whereby you may gain spiritual strength and comfort. But if you close the door of your heart to the rays of light from the throne of God and give your mind to the

performances of the stage, you can have no peace, no joy, no hope. Gradually you have been losing the spirit of assurance. Your love for Bible religion is dying out. You cannot serve God with a divided heart.

I have a message for your daughters: You are not feeding upon the bread which came down from heaven, but upon husks. All the praise and glory you receive from human beings is of no value. Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Christ, the Sent of God, gave His life a sacrifice that the world might have a second probation in which to return to their loyalty to God. When Christ was threatened by His foes, He said, "My kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). It is not My mission to recognize caste and human theories, or to establish political interests. My kingdom is not to be set up by the power of human armies or the sword. If My kingdom were of this world, then would My soldiers fight. No human power can weaken or overthrow My kingdom through the enemies of God."

Who are the subjects of the kingdom of heaven? Daniel tells the world the name by which they shall be called. "The saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever" (Daniel 7:18). And Paul writes to the Philippians: [Phil. 1:1,9-11; Eph. 2:18-22 quoted].

All who are enrolled as citizens of the heavenly country are required that their behavior shall be such as the gospel of Christ can approve. And it is our privilege to claim the rights and privileges of subjects of the kingdom of heaven. But to everyone who accepts Christ as his personal Saviour, He says, "Come out from among them [the world] and be ye separate." We are to conform to the Lord's requirements, and not disgrace our citizenship before the angels of heaven or before men. We are to render to God cheerful service. Christ does not speak to those who are no more to wrestle with temptation; who are not in any danger of being drawn away from Christ and overcome by the wiles of Satan, when He says: "Let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ. . . . Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; . . . For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:27, 29). There is to be no strife or vainglory, no selfishness or murmuring, no disputing, nothing impure or dishonest found in the characters of the followers of Christ.

Letter 58a, 1898 (11MR334-342)