
A COLLECTION OF ELLEN G. WHITE QUOTES ON THEATRICAL DISPLAY

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NOTE: The compiler's comments and headings are in bold italics.

As you read and prayerfully consider the following quotes, please keep in mind a few things:

- ***The "theater" in Ellen White's day referred to a place where dramatic performances were given in person. In our day, we still might see similar performances in person; we also might find them in the form of recorded movies (in their multitudinous locations both private and public), radio, etc.***
- ***"Theatrical" sometimes refers to the theater fairly directly; other times it refers to a more general putting on of display (such as performing a musical piece or making certain gestures while speaking, for the purpose of show). In either case, there are issues for the Christian.***
- ***Several of the following quotes refer to specific situations: the literary societies, sanitariums (health institutions), evangelistic meetings, etc. However, note that the principles may be applied to other areas of our work and life, as well.***

A DANGEROUS RESORT FOR PLEASURE

Among the most dangerous resorts for pleasure is the theater. **Instead of being a school for morality and virtue, as is so often claimed, it is the very hotbed of immorality.** Vicious 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.** The love for these scenes increases with every indulgence as the desire for intoxicating drink strengthens with its use. **The only safe course is to shun the theater,** the circus, and every other questionable place of amusement. {The Adventist Home 516.2}

Satan has invented many ways in which to squander the means which God has given. Card playing, betting, gambling, horse racing, and theatrical performances are all of his own 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. {Counsels on Stewardship 134.2}



DON'T FEED DESIRE FOR AMUSEMENT

If physicians and workers flatter themselves that they are to find a panacea *{i.e. a "cure-all"}* for the varied ills of their patients by supplying them with a round of amusements similar to those which have been the curse of their lives, they will be disappointed. Let not these entertainments be placed in the position which the living Fountain should occupy. **The hungry, thirsty soul will continue to hunger and thirst as long as it partakes of these unsatisfying pleasures. But those who drink of the living water will thirst no more for frivolous, sensual, exciting amusements.** The ennobling principles of religion will strengthen the mental powers and will destroy a taste for these gratifications. {Counsels on Health 241.2}

Worldly or theatrical entertainments are not essential for the prosperity of the sanitarium or for the health of the patients. The more they have of this kind of amusements, the less will they be pleased unless something of the kind shall be continually carried on. The mind is in a fever of unrest for something new and exciting, the very thing it ought not to have. **And if these amusements are once allowed, they are expected again, and the patients lose their relish for any simple arrangement to occupy the time.** But repose, rather than excitement, is what many of the patients need. {Counsels on Health 240.1}

Various entertainments are introduced to make the meetings interesting and attractive for the worldlings, and thus the exercises of the so-called literary society too often degenerate into demoralizing theatrical performances and cheap nonsense. All these gratify the carnal mind, which is at enmity with God; but they do not strengthen the intellect nor confirm the morals. {Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students 541.3}

ONE STEP LEADS TO ANOTHER

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. {Counsels on Health 240.2}

Death, clad in the livery of heaven, lurks in the pathway of the young. Sin is gilded over by church sanctity. **These various forms of amusement in the churches of our day have ruined thousands who, but for them, might have remained upright and become the followers of Christ.** Wrecks of character have been made by these fashionable church festivals and theatrical performances, and thousands more will be destroyed; yet people will not be aware of the danger, nor of the fearful influences exerted. Many young men and women have lost their souls through these corrupting influences.—The Review and Herald, November 21, 1878. {Counsels on Stewardship 202.1}

DON'T SEEK METHODS TO MAKE DISPLAY

We might see a different order of things should a number consecrate themselves wholly to God, and then devote their talents to the Sabbath-school work, ever advancing in knowledge, and educating themselves so that they would be able to instruct others as to the best methods to employ in the work; but 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 expending time, money, and effort to make a display, let the whole effort be made to gather sheaves for the harvest.** {Christian Education 134.1}

EVEN MUSICAL PERFORMANCES CAN BE TAKEN TOO FAR

There should be in the meetings nothing of a theatrical nature. The singing should not be done by a few only. All present should be encouraged to join in the song service. There are those who have a special gift of song, and there are times when a special message is borne by one singing alone or by several uniting in song. But the singing is seldom to be done by a few. {Counsels on Health 481.3}

INTEREST HEARERS, BUT AVOID EXTRAVAGANCE AND OUTWARD SHOW

Those who do the work of the Lord in the cities must put forth calm, steady, devoted effort for the education of the people. While they are to labor earnestly to interest the hearers, and to hold this interest, yet at the same time they must carefully guard against anything that borders on sensationalism. **In this age of extravagance and outward show, when men think it necessary to make a display in order to gain success, 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.** {Evangelism 66.1}

Much more prayer, much more Christlikeness, much more conformity to God's will, is to be brought into the Lord's work. Outward show and extravagant outlay of means will not accomplish the work to be done. {Evangelism 66.2}

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. At times you do that which is represented to me as the shredding of wild gourds into the pot. **This display makes the truth taste too strongly of the dish. 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.—Letter 190, 1902. {Evangelism 127.1}

Some ministers 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.**—Gospel Workers, 383 (1915). {Evangelism 136.1}

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; but when the worker makes his labors so expensive that others are unable to secure from the treasury sufficient means to support them in the field, he is not working in harmony with God's plan. 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. {Testimonies for the Church, Volume 9 142.3}

Do not divest the truth of its dignity and impressiveness by preliminaries that are more after the order of the world than after the order of heaven. Let your hearers understand that you hold meetings, not to charm their senses with music and other things, but to preach the truth in all its solemnity, that it may come to them as a warning, arousing them from their deathlike sleep of self-indulgence. **It is the naked truth that like a sharp, two-edged sword cuts both ways.** It is this that will arouse those who are dead in trespasses and sins. {Testimonies for the Church, Volume 9 142.4}

SHARE THE TRUTH IN ITS DIGNITY AND SOLEMNITY

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.—Letter 15, 1890. {Evangelism 644.1}

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.—The Review and Herald, September 28, 1897. {Evangelism 207.2}

He who gave His life to save men and women from idolatry and self-indulgence left an example to be followed by all who take up the work of presenting the gospel to others. God's servants in this age have been given most solemn truths to proclaim, and their actions and methods and plans must correspond to the importance of their message. If you are presenting the word in Christ's way, your audience will be deeply impressed with the truths you teach. The conviction will come to them that this is the word of the living God. {Testimonies for the Church, Volume 9 143.1}

I am instructed that we shall meet with all kinds of experiences and that men will try to bring strange performances into the work of God. We have met such things in many places. 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. {Evangelism 137.3}

The enemy will watch closely and will take every advantage of circumstances to degrade the truth by the introduction of undignified demonstrations. None of these demonstrations are to be encouraged. The precious truths given us are to be spoken in all solemnity and with sacred awe.—Manuscript 19, 1910. {Evangelism 138.1}

Our success will depend on carrying forward the work in the simplicity in which Christ carried it forward, without any theatrical display.—Letter 53, 1904. {Evangelism 139.4}

ALL GLORY TO GOD

The Lord has given evidence of His love for the world. There was no falsity, no acting, in what He did. He gave a living gift, capable of suffering humiliation, neglect, shame, reproach. This Christ did that He might rescue the fallen. While human beings were instituting schemes and methods to destroy Him, the Son of the Infinite God came to our world to give an example of the great work to be done to redeem and save man. But today the proud and disobedient are striving to acquire a great name and great honor from their fellow men by using their God-given endowments to amuse.—Manuscript 42, 1898. {Evangelism 267.1}

In our work we are not to go onto a hilltop to shine. We are not told that we must make a special, wonderful display. The truth must be proclaimed in the highways and the byways, and thus work is to be done by sensible, rational methods. The life of every worker, if he is under the training of the Lord Jesus Christ, will reveal the excellence of His life. 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.—Letter 53, 1904. {Evangelism 396.2}

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.—Letter 352, 1908. {Selected Messages, Volume 2 23.3}

TO SUM IT UP...

I have a message for those in charge of our work. Do not encourage the men who are to engage in this work to think that they must proclaim the solemn, sacred message in a theatrical style. Not one jot or tittle of anything theatrical is to be brought into our work. God's cause is to have a sacred, heavenly mold. Let everything connected with the giving of the message for this time bear the divine impress. Let nothing of a theatrical nature be permitted, for this would spoil the sacredness of the work. {Evangelism 137.2}

We are handling subjects which involve eternal interests, and we are not to ape {mimic} 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.—Manuscript 96, 1898. {Evangelism 139.3}

Christ presented the truth in its simplicity; and He reached not only the most elevated, but the lowliest men of earth. {The Voice in Speech and Song 289.1}

For an in-depth blog post on this topic as it pertains to children's ministry, please visit: <http://hastenhome.com/vbs/whats-wrong-with-drama-at-vbs/>