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February 21, 2004

An Open Letter to Seventh-day Adventist Pastors
Concerning Mel Gibson's, "The Passion"

Dear fellow Pastors,

My attention was recently called to the fact that some Seventh-day Adventist pastors are encouraging their members to attend the movie theater in order to see Mel Gibson's new movie, "The Passion." Because we are charged to be faithful before God, and basic ethics insist that we should honor the Seventh-day Adventist world church, both because it is God's agency for the promotion of the third-angel's message and because it is our employer, may I remind you what the world church has ruled on the matter of theater attendance?

Recreation and Entertainment

Recreation is a purposeful refreshing of the powers of body and mind. A vigorous, wholesome mind will not require worldly amusement, but will find a renewal of strength in good recreation.

"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 passion and glorify vice. The opera, with its fascinating display and bewildering music, the masquerade, the dance, the card table, Satan employs to break down the barriers of principle and open the door to sensual indulgence. In every gathering for pleasure where pride is fostered or appetite indulged, where one is led to forget God and lose sight of eternal interests, there Satan is binding his chains about the soul."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 459, 460. (See p. 212.)

We earnestly warn against the subtle and sinister influence of the moving-picture theater, which is no place for the Christian. Dramatized films that graphically present by portrayal and by suggestion the sins and crimes of humanity—murder, adultery, robbery, and kindred evils—are in no small degree responsible for the present breakdown of morality. We appeal to parents, children, and youth to shun those places of amusement and those theatrical films that glorify professional acting and actors. If we will find delight in God's great world of nature and in the romance of human agencies and divine workings, we shall not be attracted by the puerile portrayals of the theater.... Let us not patronize the commercialized amuse-

ments, joining with the worldly, careless, pleasure-loving multitudes who are “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 16th Ed., pp. 168, 169).

May I also draw your attention to the “Summary of Doctrinal Beliefs” located in the Appendix of the *Church Manual*, at p. 212:

25. In the Christian life there is complete separation from worldly practices, such as card playing, theater going, dancing, et cetera, which tend to deaden and destroy the spiritual life. (2 Cor. 6:15-18; 1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:19-22; Eph. 5:8-11; Col. 3:5-10. See pp. 168-170.)

Please note that this material is *not* in the supplementary section of the *Manual*. It is not optional.

It may be argued that there is a greater good to be attained by sending our people to attend this production. Let me assure you, there is not. The world church has not called us to engage in situational justifications, but to uphold what is agreed upon as representative Christian behavior.

Please, my fellow shepherds, join me in respecting the boundaries set forth by the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a world body, and send not your charges forth into the theater.

Let us engage the culture without patronizing commercialized amusements, no matter how apparently innocent. God is not sending members of the remnant church into the movie theater for their edification. Besides the wise boundary already noted, some additional concerns are:

- Inculcating indifference to the expressed will of the world church
- By personal presence at the theater manifesting in an appearance of evil
- Setting a precedent for future theater attendance
- Patronizing a branch of commercialized amusements (theater) associated in the public mind with immorality and debauchery
- Unwittingly promoting emotional reaction to visceral imagery and depictions of violence rather than the report of the unadorned biblical narrative and a moral response
- By all reports, the film’s depiction is bloody and violent in a manner unlike the inspired accounts

May God grant us eyes to see and ears to hear.

Sincerely,

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Seventh-day Adventists