

Theater Attendance and Theatrical Amusements.

(Actors and Theatrical Amusements)

And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. (Acts 19:29)

Question.—*What do we mean by actor?*

Answer.—The word “actor” is the English translation of “hypocrite,” ὑποκριτής, and this noun is derived from the verb ὑποκρίνομαι, which originally meant “to explain, to interpret, as in dreams.” From that, it came to mean, “to make answer, or speak, on the stage, to impersonate, or play a part, to feign, or pretend,” cf. Luke 20:20. In its noun form, it means, “one who answers, an interpreter; an actor, stage player; a dissembler, pretender, hypocrite,” cf. Matt. 23:14, 15; Gal. 2:13.

Although there is nothing in the Greek tradition to suggest that actor carried negative connotations (it was a neutral term), at least any more than the stage, yet the word “actor” (ὑποκριτής) became the chosen word to translate the Hebrew term for “evildoer” (עוֹלָם), in the LXX, cf. Job 27:8. The background of its use can be discerned, during the Intertestamental Period, in the antithesis found in the literature between the spirit of lying and the spirit of truth. This is evident in James' discussion of the governing of the tongue, Jas. 3:8-12.

In the New Testament, this word, “hypocrite,” is always used in a negative sense. Jesus attacks his opponents, for their dissembling at the signs of the time, calling them hypocrites, Luke 12:54-56. He calls them hypocrites who have more concern for their cattle than for the healing of a sick woman, Luke 13:15, 16. According to Christ, actors, hypocrites, and those like them, have their place in hell, Matt. 24:51.

Question.—*What is the occupation of the stage and stage players, or actors?*

Answer.—It is one of the chief occupations of the stage and theater to make light of those things which Scripture enjoins as of serious consequence, cf. Prov. 14:9. Now, we know that sin is any want of conformity unto the law of God, 1 John 3:4. Men may make distinctions in sin, but all sin is highly offensive in the sight of God, Hab. 1:13. Solomon condemns those who mock at sin, yet sin forms the point of interest in dramas, tragedies and comedies, it is precisely there wherein the carnal mind takes pleasure, cf. 2 Thess. 2:12. This is contrary to the holy affections of the Psalmist, David, Ps. 119:53, 136, 158. Those who make sin a subject of merriment or sport, or commit sin for the diversion of others, or find amusement in witnessing sin committed by others, are fools, cf. Prov. 10:23. A fool shows by his conduct that he is void of understanding, destitute of reason and sound judgment, Prov. 1:22.

First, it was sin that brought death into the world along with all of our woes, Rom. 6:23. If there was no sin, there would be no pain of body or distress of mind, Ps. 103:3. Sin cast our first parents out of paradise, Gen. 2:17; brought the curse of God upon the world, Gen. 3:17; drowned the world of old, Gen. 6:5, 7; burned with fire and brimstone Sodom and Gomorrah, Gen. 18:20; it is the father of all our miseries, Jas. 1:15. It is sin that brought Jesus to the agony of the cross,

1 Pet. 3:18. It is sin that has planted in you the seeds of the dissolution of body and spirit, Rom. 5:12.

Second, Christians are called to love the Lord with all the heart, soul and mind, Matt. 22:37-40. When love to God and our neighbor have a real and operative existence in the heart, no command in the divine law will be deliberately transgressed, Gal. 5:13. Yet, if we think on the purity and holiness of God and the nature of most dramatic compositions, of the theater and its attendant pollutions, it is hard to harmonize to two, *cf.* Ps. 119:140; Eph. 5:3; 1 Pet. 1:16. The spectacle of the theater presents a world devoid of the need of a Mediator and is, therefore, contrary to the Christian religion, 1 Cor. 6:14, 15.

Third, the occupation of the actor and the institution of the theater are contrary to the prayer of saints, Matt. 6:13. It is the nature of theater to conceal its mischief and its wickedness under a specious mask, *cf.* 2 Cor. 11:14; Eph. 5:11. In theatrical amusements, there is much to excite the feelings, interest the mind, including the outward decoration, the beauty of language, interspersed with moral lessons and virtuous sentiments, to lull and pacify the conscience, *cf.* Gal. 6:8; Phil. 3:19. Thus, in these amusements we are faced with two sources of danger, outward enticement and inward corruption, wherefore we ought to avoid all occasions to sin as we pray God to keep us from it, Matt. 26:41. It is a provocation to pray this prayer whilst purposing to follow after temptations, *cf.* Ezek. 20:28.

Fourth, Christians, in their baptismal vows, have consecrated themselves to a lifelong struggle against the three sources of sin: the devil and his works, Eph. 6:10-13; the world and its pomps and vanities, John 15:18-21; and the flesh and its lusts, Gal. 5:17. The devil is the ruler of the darkness of this world, and the father of lies, the great deceiver, John 8:44. The theater is just calculated to aid the tempter, to increase his influence, and to accomplish the purposes of his will, 1 Pet. 5:8. In the theater, through the agents of actors, his enticements are presented, and his works abound—dishonoring the name of God, mocking sin and spiritual religion, dialogues filled with evil and corrupting communications, licentious scenes, transgressions of the law of God, *cf.* Ex. 23:13; Ps. 101:3; Eph. 5:12. Theater attendance and the occupation of actors is contrary to those vows upon all called by the name of Christ, Deut. 23:21.