

4-1993

# SDA Youth and the Movies: An Analysis of the Church's Current Message

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## Recommended Citation

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**SDA Youth and the Movies:  
An Analysis of the Church's Current Message**

A Southern Scholars Research Project  
by  
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April 26, 1993

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**SDA Youth and the Movies:  
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The Seventh-day Adventist Church has long grappled with the issue of movie theater attendance, especially since television and videocassette recorders arrived on the scene. These mediums make it possible to view popular "movie theater" films at home, church socials, or schools. And that is exactly what is happening. While the Church formally holds a standard of non-theater attendance, it is condoning the same material shown in a different location.

The foreground of this conflict centers on youth culture. Today's youth, the majority of which have been brought up on heavy doses of television, are unable to understand the standard or apply it to their lives.

Now more than ever the issue is a crucial one. For example, Roger Dudley, author of *Valuegenesis*, says, "If standards are perceived as inconsistent and unreasonable--not applicable to life in the late twentieth century--young people leave the church and turn elsewhere. The Valuegenesis study uncovered more problems in this area than in any other" (Dudley--Value--49).

So what is the Adventist Church saying to its youth regarding this important issue? Two of the main ways the Church has of communicating with its youth are through school rules and *Insight* magazine. This study looks closely at school rules and *Insight*, analyzing the Church's message to youth. Is the Church's standard

being upheld by either school rules or by *Insight*?

The Church still holds that it is morally wrong to attend movie theaters, yet televisions, VCR's, and movies shown at schools are allowed. What do schools and *Insight* magazine tell youth about this confusing issue?

### Background

The Adventist Church's standard on movie theater attendance is based on the writings of Ellen G. White. Here is her main statement on the issue:

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.... Low songs, lewd gestures, expressions, and attitudes deprave the imagination and debase the morals. Every youth who habitually attends such exhibition will be corrupted in principle. The only safe course is to shun the theater, the circus, and every other questionable place of amusement (White 652).

Although in Mrs. White's lifetime theaters consisted of live shows, the counsel she gave against those shows was transferred to movie theaters when they became popular in the 1920's (Pember 31).

In 1927, the General Conference delivered its official word concerning movie theater attendance in a small book called

*Standards of Christian Living*. It admitted that although some pictures shown there had value, the safest policy was to "shun these places of amusement" (*Standards* 14). Even while in this book admitting that "Customs and fashions change with the years, but principles of right conduct are always the same," the General Conference proceeded "in this matter of setting standards of conduct to serve as a guide for our young people" (4).

A search of *Church Manuals* reveals that the policy that first appeared in 1959 regarding motion pictures closely follows the wording of the *Standards of Christian Living*. Part of the manual's statement says, "We earnestly warn against the subtle and sinister influence of the moving-picture theater, which is no place for the Christian" (*Manual* 145). That entire statement then made concerning theaters is still found in the 1990 *Church Manual*, as is the book's adamant declaration in 1942: "In the Christian life there is complete separation from worldly practices, such as card playing, theatergoing, dancing, et cetera, which tend to deaden and destroy the spiritual life" (182).

School rules at this time supported the Church's standard and continued to do so until presumably well into the 1980s. In past generations, a student who attended any kind of theater was a prime candidate for dismissal (Wood 10).

But while the Church's standard regarding movie theater attendance held steady, massive changes occurred in the visual media industry. Television became popular during the late 1940's (Pember 37). In 1975, Home Box Office became the first pay cable

channel, making it possible to watch on a home television set movies which had traditionally appeared only at theaters (43). The most monumental change came in the 1980s when the same movies playing at theaters could, within a matter of weeks, be viewed at home with the use of home video recorders (45). One author says the consequence of this practice is that most SDA's feel little need to be discriminating viewers (Osborn 5). When *place* is emphasized, there is a lack of concentration on *content*.

So although the Church continued to shun theater attendance, the "questionable place of amusement" became the family living room. Also, schools and churches show for recreation the same movies as have previously appeared at the theater. The double standard which followed from this contradiction has not gone unnoticed by youth. In 1975 an *Insight* article reported a study of young peoples' entertainment which showed 48 percent attended the movie theater. (Only 35 percent affirmed that the practice "is all right") (Thayer 16).

Studies from the 1970s also show that youth felt disenchanted with having standards dictated to them. One young man commented, "Most everything [in academy] was a memorization trip. Especially in Bible class. When I saw that what people were saying was not something they'd thought out themselves, I said 'Forget it'" (Zbaraschuk 12). Another youth replied to a question asked in *Insight* in 1970 about how much a young person should look to his Church for setting personal standards. The respondent felt that he should seek guidance from God, trusted friends and

the Church, after which he should "make decisions in life for [myself] as a free, responsible person" (Cummings 14).

Youth in the 1970s were finding church standards losing relevance in their lives. One young woman, also in reply to the question from the previous paragraph, said after young people leave the safety of the Church or Church schools, they have no personal principles to build standards on; they are left with only rules (Mosher 14).

The disenchantment with standards naturally carries over into the present. "I think the Adventist Church is too legalistic," explains one young woman. "All this law-keeping reminds me of the Pharisees of Jesus' time" (Dudley--Value--146). Another youth asked, "Why do there have to be such specific rules and fine lines on which one side is clearly wrong and the other side is clearly right? Doesn't the Church know there are a lot of gray areas" (146)?

The Valuegenesis study of 11,000 youth in the late 1980s revealed information which is helpful in determining the present state of youth and the movie attendance issue. The study showed that two-thirds of Adventist youth are against the Church's standard of avoiding movie theaters (Dudley--Value--150). Dudley concludes that, given the fact that the Church's youth do not strongly support the standard and since most Adventists apparently attend movie theaters, "the present standard seems to be but a joke" (150).

One danger of holding the double standard of condemning



theater attendance but condoning the same material shown in a different location is that the Church loses relevance to current lifestyles, especially those of youth, most of whom have grown up rooted in the television generation. One author says, "Our young people see through the phoniness and begin to wonder about the rest of the package" (Johnsson 4). Young people tend to regard doctrines and standards as one unit. Therefore, when youth decide that standards are not being adapted as they should be, they tend to reject doctrines along with the standards (McAdams 9).

Here is what one young person observed, "I have seen [youth] leave the church because the church is resistant to change. There is a lack of understanding and flexibility of what really happens out in the real world. New ideas and ways of thinking are frowned upon or ignored" (Dudley--Lost Generation--19). Dudley calls church rules and standards the "hinge of retention." Acceptance of rules and standards ranked second among factors which determine whether youth plan to belong to the Church by age 40. Therefore, "How we handle church standards is the crucial issue in the determination of whether or not we will retain the rising generation of the Church" (Dudley--Value--147).

### **Research Types**

To discover the message sent to youth regarding theater attendance, the secondary school age group was used primarily, with some attention to college youth. Concentration was on school rules and *Insight* magazine articles dealing with the subject, both of which are primary sources of information for youth.

### Research of School Rules

The quest for knowledge of school rules regarding movies resulted in a return postage paid survey sent to 42 North American Adventist academies. Surveys were also mailed to the 10 Adventist colleges to discover if the policies were consistent with those of the secondary level (See Appendix V to view the surveys). The main result desired from the survey was to find out whether schools still hold a policy against theater attendance and whether that policy is still enforced. Several other questions were asked which provided some information, although not enough to formally analyze.

There was an 83 percent return from the surveys. Of the 42 mailed to secondary schools, 36 were returned. Seven of the ten college surveys were returned.

It was found that 87.5 percent of the boarding schools which returned the survey do not hold a theater policy, while 71 percent of the colleges hold no theater policy. None of the non-boarding academies reported holding a policy. (See Appendix III for the survey analysis.)

Of those who do hold the policy, most claim to enforce it. The methods vary--from sending the student before Administrative Council, to counseling the student on reasons for not attending. But when asked how many incidents of discipline occurred in recent years, the answer was invariably zero, or one or two incidents. So it appears that even most of the schools which reported holding a policy are not strictly enforcing it (See

Appendix II for the policy statements of the schools which hold a theater policy.)

One of the reasons it is not enforced was stated indirectly by survey respondents. They made statements like, "Students are not to attend theaters while in attendance at the school. But we have no control over what they do when they go home." Similarly, village students are not affected by the school's policy. One respondent stated, "If dormitory students were found at the theater, it would probably result in being campus-bound. The one theater in town is not within the boundaries where dorm students are allowed to walk. If village students were known to attend the theater, no discipline would result."

Many others who don't hold a theater policy maintain that students are expected to avoid the theater while on school-sponsored trips. Those schools that do enforce the policy stress that it isn't regarded as a moral issue. One registrar said, "...We hold [this rule] because the parents/board ask us to. We cannot be responsible for what movies students can/will watch as we are not their parents." (See Appendix I for general comments made by survey respondents.)

The 83 percent return on the survey was encouraging because it allows the conclusion that the results are a fair picture of what most Adventist schools are doing. The survey results show that Adventist secondary schools and colleges no longer enforce the Church's regulation on moviegoing in the way it stated by the *Church Manual*.

In the absence of a standard against moviegoing, which basically admits schools know youth are attending theaters regularly, what is being done to help students make choices for what they will watch? The researcher searched Church curriculum guides to find out if there is any mention of movie theaters or how Bible and English teachers should handle the issue. Search of the curriculum, along with dialogue with Bible teachers about the Church's Bible textbooks, revealed that nothing is formally being done to aid youth in making decisions on what to watch.

#### **Research of *Insight* magazine**

The researcher wanted to examine the message *Insight* magazine has given concerning movies during its 22 years of publication. To accomplish this, the Adventist periodical index was searched under the headings of moving pictures, amusements, recreation, and SDA standards.

*Insight* has published 41 articles directly related to the subject of movie-watching. The articles were put into four categories, which the researcher determined after surveying the articles. The categories are:

- A. *Upholds traditional standard.* Articles in this category defend the idea that Adventists should not attend movie theaters.
- B. *Questions traditional standard.* These articles begin to question, but do not go so far as to suggest alternatives to the present standard.

- C. *Suggests new approach.* Articles in this category go beyond merely questioning the standard; they suggest alternatives to the traditional approach, such as selectivity.
- D. *Exposes dangers and drawbacks.* These articles show the negative side of motion pictures (examples would be violence or mind control) without favoring approach A, B, or C.

Written analysis of *Insight's* message is arranged by decades. For the numerical analysis, see Appendix IV.

#### **Review of *Insight* in the 1970s**

As the new youth magazine after the cessation of the *Youth Instructor*, *Insight* became a forum for discussion of the theater issue. Eight articles directly related to the theater issue were published, dating from 1970 through 1976. The following discussion will attempt to briefly characterize the message *Insight* fostered during those years.

In the category, "Upholds traditional standard," four articles were published. Three are consistent in that they are personal testimonies regarding movies: "Here's why I don't go...." They also have discarded the notion that the theater is bad because of atmosphere or location. One author gives reasons such as the movies not glorifying God, consumption of money and time, and debased media messages (Harvin 25).

Mike Jones in his article staunchly defends SDA Belief No.

24, which states that the Christian life separates us from theatergoing and other worldly amusements. He gives the reasons of poor content, difficulty of being selective, ruination of imagination, weakening of spirituality, and lack of Christ-like themes (Jones 22, 23).

Lack of value found in movies was one reason another author rejected theatergoing. She mentions wanting to live by Philippians 4:8, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest...think on these things." The same author also says that, although she may be choosing movies wisely, by going to the theater she may act as a stumbling block to others (Spruill 22).

Unlike the first three authors, Richard Duerksen defends the standard by saying that Adventists have traditionally placed too much emphasis on "do's and don'ts" and not enough on the positive aspects of Christianity. He states, "Exercise, work, play--*everything* takes on new meaning when it is done with Christ" (Duerksen 5).

Two articles were coded "Questions traditional standard." One author questioned the Adventist tendency to place doctrines and standards in the same category, therefore giving doctrinal permanence to issues that should change as culture evolves. He sees this situation as introducing the following problem:

When cultural attitudes and patterns of behavior change (as inevitably they do) some of the standards that were appropriate in an older culture become inappropriate in the new one. If the young come to believe that the

standards are as unchanging as the central themes, they may be tempted to renounce the central themes as soon as it becomes apparent that the standards must change (McAdams 9).

As solutions, McAdams suggests letting teens know that "Christian love" is behind rules and allowing for "vigorous conversation" between older and younger generations concerning rules (11).

The other item which questioned the traditional standard actually consisted of two replies from teens to the question "How much can a young Christian develop his own philosophy in regard to standards...and how much should he look to his church for guidelines?" One respondent stressed that he is a "free moral agent" but also emphasized the importance of seeking guidance from God and the Church (Cummings 14).

The second respondent stressed the need for internalization of values, which would encourage teens to decide their own standards. She pointed out that "Young people leaving the Adventist Church have nothing to live for; they have heard the do's, but mainly the don'ts, for so long that when they leave they have almost nothing in the line of principles to live by" (Mosher 14).

The one article for the 1970s which was coded "Suggests new approach" was written in 1975 by Dick Winn. It did not drop the moviegoing belief, but was selected for this category because it allows for a certain amount of individuality in selection of entertainment. While the author does admit that this article

displays his own philosophy on entertainment, he states the following:

...It is dangerous business for one to try to interpret for another what activity is good and what is best. So many factors enter in: motivations, past experiences, present level of awareness, and the Holy Spirit's own timing for that person. [But] we can loathe our...old value systems, and affirm again that we crave to know only the very best (Winn 13).

The article coded as "Exposes the dangers and drawbacks of movies" is a six-page discussion on movies which seems more appropriate for an older audience. The author describes how film affects the emotions of children and adults, ending by emphasizing the similarities between movies and religion. For example, he says the theater "...often resembles a majestic temple" (Oosterwal 7) and that the movie hero acts as a Christ/redeemer figure. He ends by appealing to Church members not to judge others who watch movies, but to show them the Christian solution of the "movie need" through the "kingdom of God in us through Christ our Redeemer" (8).

### **Summary of the 1970s**

From the literature review, it is evident that the opinions about movie attendance were split about evenly between those remaining loyal to the old standard and those suggesting change. It seems that *Insight* was attempting to act as an open forum for



discussion of the issue, something never before attempted in SDA youth magazines. One youth's letter to the editor said, "*Insight* doesn't soft-soap truth. I know truth steps on people's toes, and that brings criticism, but if a person is honestly seeking to love, your magazine can help show them how to do it better" (Johnson 2).

Encouraging observations can be made about the 1970s message. For instance, *Insight* rejected the idea that the movie theater is physically a bad place. At the same time it began concentrating on content as the reason to avoid movies.

#### **Review of *Insight* in the 1980s**

The last word from *Insight* in the 1970s concerning theater-going came in 1976. The next attention to the problem appeared in 1981. During that five year period movies which had previously been found in theaters increasingly began to appear via cable television and home video cassette players.

*Insight* published twenty articles relating to movies in the 1980s.

For the category, "Upholds traditional standard," three articles were published. One is a small piece which defends the traditional notion that watching a movie in a theater is worse than watching the same material on television or at a school gathering. The author's reasoning is that, "It is different in the theater! No commercials. A darkened room to eliminate diversions from the story. In short, the filmmaker has a very tight

grip on your sensory input" (Graham 7).

The other article in this category defends the traditional standard by examining the principles which underlie the "don't go" standard. The author states that these can act as guidelines for television, shopping, vacations, as well as for moviegoing. The principles involve cost, time, atmosphere, content, witness, and use of alternative entertainment (Moyers 11).

Two articles dealt with the category, "Questions traditional standard." The article, "Food for Thought," authored by a youth pastor, drives home the point by using an allegory. "Super Duper Abundant Club" becomes code for the SDA Church, and theater becomes "The Eaters" restaurant. The author uses this allegory to expound on the history of the entire issue, exposing the double standard of refusing to attend theaters while watching identical material using a VCR. He explains that youth are more and more questioning the standard, and he wishes the Church had some answers (Coffin 10, 11).

The author of the other article in this category, "Patrolling the Do-Not-Go Line," compares the problem to a World War II battle. He says Adventists are lulled into a false sense of security when they hide blindly behind the "don't go" standard, refusing to admit the reality of the problem and deal with it (Moyers 10).

Ten articles were published which fit the category, "Suggests new approach." All authors repudiate the idea that "place" has anything to do with movie-watching. One author gives the

principle of moderation as the correct approach to all entertainment, including movies. He explains that even watching "approved" movies in excess is wrong. He also says, "I'd suggest we drop this game and start talking more about goals." The author seems willing to allow youth to make personal choices of entertainment, but with the caution that "It's hard to take an honest look at where your life is heading. It may be hardest of all to admit that even a kosher activity may be leading to destruction" (Brothers 23).

Authors in the category of "Suggests new approach" expressed the need for principles, rather than rules, to guide decision-making about movies. In an *Insight* editorial, Dan Fahrbach shoots down the idea of trying to turn the Bible into a rulebook. "However," he says, "there are plenty of clear, common-sense principles--'By beholding we become changed'; 'Whatever things are honest, just, pure, lovely, or of good report, think on these things.' In each principle, God is at the center" (Fahrbach "Footloose"--14).

One author summed up the value of principles, rather than rules, this way:

Living from principle leads to a more truly moral life style. It is also a life style that can be maintained in the flux of a changing world. Principles and the right understanding of them allow a person to properly adapt to the rapid forces of change with which each person is engulfed (Bietz--"Q&A"--7).

Several articles in this category of "Suggests new approach" offered concrete guidelines to help youth in their choice of movies. For example, one author states,

We must learn to discern. Following are some suggestions to help you in the hard work of Christian discernment and choice: 1. Take a values check [explanation follows each suggestion.] 2. Recognize that content is the real issue. 3. Learn how film works. 4. Carefully select the films and video you view 5. Go on a film and video fast for a whole week (if you can) (Gainer 12, 13).

For the category, "Exposes dangers and drawbacks of movies," eight articles were published. The intent of these articles is expressed by one column, titled "No Comment," which begins, "Movies, Mags, Music, Television. Tough decisions. Hard choices. Here's information to keep in mind" ("No Comment" 5). What follows is a list of statistics of movie makers' personal values.

Most articles in this category present material of which youth should be aware in order to make wise choices; these pieces do not seem intent on producing a certain mindset in youth.

Another example from this category is Gordon Bietz's article "Century 21 Theatre." The author envisions an "ultimate experience" without a movie screen. The mind control of these "movies" would be unquestioned --the experience would take place inside the viewer's brain with the use of an "Interactive Technographic Mind Imager (Bietz--"Theatre"--5)."

### Summary of the 1980s

Analysis of the 1980s articles reveals a shift in the message being sent to youth regarding movies. Whereas 1970s articles had been fairly evenly spread over the four categories, in the 1980s a majority of articles were in the categories of "Suggests new approach" and "Exposes dangers and drawbacks of movies." Presumably the decreasing validity of the standard, partially due to videocassette recorders, affected *Insight's* message. One would also assume that the numbers of Adventists attending theaters steadily increased during the 1980s, and that this also affected the message.

The notion of allowing youth to develop personal standards toward moviegoing grew stronger during the 1980s. This is evident from the editor's statement in June, 1984:

In the coming months *Insight* will be featuring stories and articles on the media. Some of these articles may be controversial. Some may make you angry--or sad. But keep in mind, we are exploring the Biblical principles. It will be up to you to make your rules (Fahrback 15).

### Review of *Insight* in the 1990s

The five articles from 1989 were grouped with those of the 1990s because they began a shift in ideals after the last 1980s article in 1986. No articles were published during the 1990s which fit categories A and B, "Upholds traditional standard," and "Questions traditional standard."

Eight articles were published which deal with the category, "Suggests new approach." These articles are almost entirely of the type which give youth practical help in the form of guidelines. For example, one item is a "Cornerstone Connections" lesson which discusses the whole issue of theater attendance and includes features asking youth to list their feelings about different subjects. For example, there is a list of locations for watching movies: theater, video, television, and school gym. Beside the list is space to write "pros" and "cons" for each item (Welch 27).

Stuart Tyner's 1989 article is probably the most perceptive article *Insight* has published on this subject. It is representative of the magazine's current message to youth. Tyner says Christians have three options in regards to movies:

1. Watch anything and everything.
2. Totally eliminate all movies.
3. Be discriminating in what you see.

Option 1, watching anything and everything, is inappropriate for most Christians, especially if they accept the idea that what they see and hear strongly affects them.

Option 2, totally eliminating movies, cuts out all films, whether at the theater, the school gym, or on television. Tyner points out that some may adopt this philosophy and be perfectly satisfied with it. But most would not make this choice.

That leaves option 3, exercising discrimination. Tyner points out that this is the most difficult choice, because it

requires youth to set their own standard and stick to it.

Tyner then gives practical tips on how youth can make wise choices of movies. For one, he asks youth to evaluate their goals--what they want out of life.

He also advises youth never to watch a movie unintentionally. He suggests checking ratings, reading reviews, and talking with people who have watched the movie. Tyner encourages youth to set high standards and then guard them by making wise choices.

In addition to these tips, the article includes a table which can be used to rate a prospective movie. After gathering as much information as possible, youth can use the table to evaluate the movie according to violence, profanity, stereotyping, and other categories. This system uses numerical rating, making it easier to decide if a movie fits one's standards (Tyner 5-7).

Three articles were published which fit the category, "Exposes the dangers and drawbacks of movies." One piece is a 271-item list of the violent acts committed in the movie Robin Hood. At the end are questions for evaluation; such as "Maybe some of these acts aren't really violent. Or maybe our perspective on violence has been warped and degraded through constant exposure. Which do you truly think it is?" (Robin Hood 11).

Another article, "Twelve Guns From Galilee," imagines the story of Jesus with "box office appeal." Colliding the story of the most non-violent Man with Hollywood provides a new perspective on media violence. For example, the article says, "This scene where Jesus clears the Temple is a classic. But I think our

Hero needs a little more firepower for the job. Nobody is going to pay attention to a guy waving a rope. I'm thinking [He should shoot an] Uzi" (Peckham--Guns--9).

### Summary of the 1990s

The 1990s *Insight* articles show a total shift of coverage to the areas of "Suggests new approach" and "Exposes dangers and drawbacks of movies." No articles were published for the categories "Upholds traditional standard," and "Questions traditional approach."

Articles follow the example of the 1980s in that they offer practical help on movie selection. This seems only fitting since there is not even mention of upholding the traditional standard the way the Church formally states it. *Insight* is calling for high standards, but it is calling for them to be set by the individual, relying on his or her own principles.

### Conclusion

So what is the message *Insight* and school rules are currently giving youth?

*Insight's* current message leaves no room for the Church's standard against moviegoing. *Insight* is striving to make up for the Church's lack of action on this very important issue. Articles the magazine prints encourage youth to use personal principles to take a stand on the movie issue. And *Insight* is committed to helping youth examine their own values and how those values



relate to choice of entertainment.

Forty-one articles in a 22 year period are not a large number. But this is somewhat encouraging because *Insight*, although it does offer guidance on the topic of movie attendance, has concentrated more on central issues of Christianity. *Insight* is interested in portraying Jesus Christ through the articles it prints. More articles can be found on the topics of unselfishness, salvation, witnessing, and mission service than on moviegoing. One reader commented, "You tell [us] about the Bread of Life and [we] are being fed. *Insight* lays it on the line; the Man Jesus is where it's at" (Holdren 2). Although *Insight* obviously sees a need to help youth develop guidelines on entertainment, they realize that the focus of the Christian life should be on Christ and a future spent with Him.

The survey of school rules shows that schools have also dropped a standard that no longer fits. Those who do hold it seem not to hold it for moral reasons.

Perhaps the fact that schools have dropped this standard means that they, like *Insight*, are also focusing on the more central issues of Christianity. But it is evident, from the search of curriculum guides and dialogue with Bible teachers about the Church's Bible textbooks, that nothing is formally being done to aid youth in making decisions on what to watch. The curriculum does include guidelines for selection of literature. Surely movies deserve that type of attention also, since movies, not books, are what youth choose mainly to look at.

Several officials from the Education department at the Union, Division, and General Conference levels were consulted for their opinions on the issue. One official said, "In the curriculum, there needs to be some guidelines for Bible and English teachers on this subject." Another stated, "We [the church] have been wrong all along. What we should have been doing all these years is teaching selectivity."

Although one education official said he thinks church standards should always be higher than what members practice, the majority seem to agree that change is in order. One official who was especially candid said there can be no education on selection until the problem is confronted openly. He said, "As long as we hide our heads, our kids will watch anything and everything--they are not being told otherwise." Of course this is in an official sense. It is difficult to determine how individual teachers and pastors are treating the issue, if at all.

Another official said, "Administrators are scared of criticism--We are walking on eggshells. If one of us will speak up [on the issue], the rest will follow." When the General Conference president visited Collegedale on March 27, 1993, he said that "bringing a lifestyle issue into policy undermines the value of it."

So from all appearances, the stage is set for change--for open dialogue which can make the church a relevant part of young peoples' lives. *Insight* magazine has dropped the standard and concentrated on the pertinent issues; Schools have apparently

dropped the standard; and administrators finally seem more ready to discuss it.

### Recommendations

What should happen now? The answer will not come easily, that is certain. The "Faith, Values, and Commitment" Taskforce, under the direction of the North American Division Board of Education, has some valuable recommendations to offer in connection with the Valuegenesis study it conducted. The publication *Risk and Promise* states, "In response to the need to emphasize core values, we recommend that families, congregations, and schools:

1. Periodically evaluate current standards and life style practices. Such evaluation would seek to:
  - a. Identify the relationship between core values and the specific practices that stem from them.
  - b. Establish those practices that are central to the purpose and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the local community.
  - c. Agree on those practices that are useful and central in promoting faith in Christ and encouraging a life of service.
  - d. Establish governance practices in accordance with good educational policy, positive effective discipline, and efficient human organization.
  - e. Eliminate those rules and lifestyle practices that

are not consistent with the four previous goals (*Risk and Promise* 19).

If this system were followed, it is evident that the Adventist standard against movie-going would need to undergo major revision or be dropped altogether.

An example of a grassroots-level Church leader who has adopted a new standard is Fred Crowell, who published the article, "Movies: Where or What?" in the February, 1993 issue of *Ministry* magazine. Crowell carries out the suggestions of Stuart Tyner's 1989 *Insight* article (discussed on page 19 of this paper).

As a pastor, Crowell decided to experiment by allowing youth group members to choose a movie from the video store to watch for a Saturday night social. He and the young people used a set of questions (for example, "Does this movie enhance or detract from my system of values?") to evaluate the movie after they finished watching it.

Although the chosen movie, *Three Fugitives*, has "a fair amount of profanity and some violence," Crowell's group judged it in general to be a good film. They said the overall theme, that of helping others, reminded them of the good Samaritan Bible story. But they also decided that "continual viewing of films with profanity, violence, or immorality might desensitize them and leave them less resistant to these things in their own lives" (Crowell 18).

Crowell seems to think his experiment is a good model for

others to try. He says, "The situation would improve if parents and church leaders took stock of what we and our young people watch. I trust that the guidelines suggested here will help toward that end" (Crowell 18, 19).

While it seems that the time is ripe for reevaluation of the Church's stand on moviegoing, there is something individuals can do. That is to have a close relationship with the real Standard, Jesus Christ. Several people, when asked by the researcher their opinion on the movie issue, gave a reply like this one, "You know, if we all had the right relationship with Christ, everything else would just fall into place. He will bring us under conviction of what we should and should not be doing."

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## Appendix I

General comments regarding movie attendance written on returned survey forms by boarding academy registrars:

"Theater attendance is very common among SDA families now. We do not knowingly allow students to do this while under our control, but parents and older siblings take the young people off campus and they take them."

"The only statement we have that refers to attending theaters is that students are not expected to attend movies while residing in the dorms. We do not hold this as a moral issue. We hold it because the parents/board ask us to. We cannot be responsible for deciding what movies students can/will watch as we are not their parents. This philosophy has existed for many years. I assume it will keep going on!"

From same respondent: "One of our concerns is the principle of "by beholding we become changed." In the high school years we are still responsible for this. Even the public schools have to be careful what they endorse."

"Might I also mention that one of the popular class-sponsored activities is "movie night" in which the chapel in the boys dorm is set up with a large screened TV and a movie of supposedly approvable nature is secured from the video store. Popcorn or pizza and drinks are sold and admission is charged. So though the

policy states you could be suspended for attending the theater, we, in a sense, bring the theater to the kids."

Answers to survey question #1, which asked, "Does your student handbook contain a policy dealing with theater attendance/videos/TV?:"

"Not theater unless considered place of questionable amusement."

"Yes. However, being a boarding academy this only deals with having TV's or videos in their room. We do not have a policy regarding theater attendance *unless* it is done while on a school sponsored outing.

"The reference to theater attendance is not clearly stated but written as questionable amusements. If student attends while at the school, student is counseled and given free labor."

**Appendix II**

Policy statements of the three schools which currently hold traditional rule:

"Experience has taught that there are some practices which should not be found in a Christian school. The school will not knowingly receive or retain a student who engages in the following activities: #9. Dancing or attending dances, attending motion picture theaters, or other questionable amusements."

Method of enforcement: "The problem is taken to a discipline committee to decide what action to take."

"Infractions subject to suspension: #6. Attending the theater, and other questionable places of amusements."

Method of enforcement: "It usually doesn't come to our attention since the only opportunity they have is when they go home."

"Certain types of conduct are not in harmony with the Christian life style and cannot be permitted in our school. An offense in any of the following points makes a student liable to discipline or to dismissal from school: #13. Attendance at places of questionable amusement, including rock concerts, theaters, discos, gambling places, etc."

Method of enforcement: "They (offenders) go before Ad council."

## Appendix III

## Analysis of Mailed Survey (83% return)

Secondary Schools

Total mailed: 42  
 Total returned: 36  
 Minus 2 invalid: 34 used

Colleges

Total mailed: 10  
 Total returned: 7

(Raw data)	<u>Hold theater policy</u>	<u>No theater policy</u>
Boarding schools	3	21
Non-boarding schools	0	10
Colleges	2	5
 (Percentages)		
Boarding schools	12.5	87.5
Non-boarding schools	0	100
Colleges	28.5	71.4

## Appendix IV            Results of *Insight Analysis*

41 articles related to movies were published from 1970 to 1992.

Articles were coded using the following categories:

- A. Upholds traditional standard
- B. Questions traditional standard
- C. Suggests new approach to the problem
- D. Exposes dangers and drawbacks of movies

	<u>Category A</u>	<u>Category B</u>	<u>Category C</u>	<u>Category D</u>
1970s	4	2	1	1
1980s	2	2	10	8
1990s	0	0	8	3

### percentages

1970s	50	25	12.5	12.5
1980s	9	9	45	36
1990s	0	0	73	27

## Appendix V School Rules Surveys

Please check appropriate responses:

37

Boarding Academy       Non-boarding Academy       College/University

1. Does your student handbook contain a policy dealing with theater attendance/videos/TV?

If so, please photocopy the following:

- \_\_\_a. The page dealing with theater attendance, etc. from 1992-93 school year.
- \_\_\_b. If possible, the equivalent handbook page from 1968 or similar year.

2. How is your school's policy concerning theater attendance carried out?

- \_\_\_a. The policy is not currently enforced.
- \_\_\_b. Students who attend theaters are formally disciplined. If this is true, what is the procedure? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_c. Students who attend theaters are counseled/warned of reasons for non-attendance.

\_\_\_d. Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Approximately how many incidents occurred during this school year (or recent year) of students receiving some type of discipline for violating the school's theater attendance policy?

- \_\_\_a) 0
- \_\_\_b) 1-2
- \_\_\_c) 3-4
- \_\_\_d) 5 or more

4. Which English courses devote time to helping students develop personal guidelines for choice of movies and television programs?

none       Eng. I       Eng II.       Eng III       Eng. IV

5. If above is true, about how many class periods per year are devoted to this?

1-2       3-4       5 or more

6. Which Bible courses devote time to help students develop guidelines for movies, etc.?

none       Bible I       Bible II       Bible III       Bible IV

7. If above is true, about how many class periods per year are devoted to this?

1-2       3-4       5 or more

Please check appropriate responses:

38

Boarding Academy       Non-boarding Academy       College/University

1. Does your student handbook contain a policy dealing with theater attendance/videos/TV?

If so, please photocopy the following:

\_\_\_a. The page dealing with theater attendance, etc. from 1992-93 school year.

\_\_\_b. If possible, the equivalent handbook page from 1968 or similar year.

2. How is your school's policy concerning theater attendance carried out?

\_\_\_a. The policy is not currently enforced.

\_\_\_b. Students who attend theaters are formally disciplined. If this is true, what is the procedure? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_c. Students who attend theaters are counseled/warned of reasons for non-attendance.

\_\_\_d. Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Approximately how many incidents occurred during this school year (or recent year) of students receiving some type of discipline for violating the school's theater attendance policy?

\_\_\_a) 0

\_\_\_b) 1-2

\_\_\_c) 3-4

\_\_\_d) 5 or more

4. Does your school currently offer courses which deal specifically with helping students develop personal guidelines for choice of movies and television programs? If so, please explain. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_