

[From the J. Oliver Buswell, Jr. Papers, Box 286, File 16, original on green paper, 8.5" x 11"]

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WESTMINSTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
PHILADELPHIA

J. Gresham Machen
206 S. 13th St.,
Philadelphia, Pa

September 30, 1936

TO:

Miss Mary J. Gushard
1220 Lincoln Ave
Prospect Park, Pa

Dear Miss Gushard:

Your letter of Sept. 24th, addressed to me at the Seminary, which I do not visit very often in vacation time, did not come into my hands until yesterday evening. In reply to your inquiry, please let me say that I do not think it to be wrong to attend the theatre. My position regarding these matters is rather clear, and I have held it for a great many years. It may be set forth in part briefly as follows:

1. It is wrong to do things that are expressly forbidden in the Bible.
2. Where things are not expressly forbidden in the Bible, the individual Christian must determine, in the light of the Bible, whether they are wrong or not, and must act accordingly.
3. It is wrong for one Christian to tyrannize over the conscience of another in these matters.

That being so, I respect very greatly the conscience of a fellow-Christian who cannot conscientiously go to the theatre. I should hate to see him do what he thinks is wrong. I certainly cannot ask him to submit his conscience to mine. On the other hand, he ought not to ask me to submit my conscience to his. With re: to the "separated" life, I should just like to say two things. In the first place, worldliness is a great danger to the Church and consecration is the thing for which we ought to strive with all our might. No mere man, since the Fall, has ever in this life been perfectly consecrated to God; but we ought to strive always to be more and more consecrated to Him. In the second place, however, there is also an opposite danger. It is the danger of a false asceticism. It is the danger into which those persons in Colosse fell, when they said in a way which the Apostle rebukes: "Touch not, taste not, handle not." We ought to strive against that danger also. Particularly ought we to avoid subjecting our fellow-Christians to rules of our own choosing that go beyond what the Word of God contains.

Such are my principles. I do not claim to have followed them perfectly. Far from it. There have been times beyond number when I have fallen short of them. I certainly need to ask God daily to forgive me for my sins. But the principles that I have set forth do seem to me to be in accordance with God's holy Word, and they are principles which I think we ought to keep before our eyes.

Very sincerely yours,

(Signed) J. Gresham Machen