

Thoughts on Ministry of Healing

(27) Liquor Traffic and Prohibition (pages 337-346)

Summary:

Healing ministry does not end with individuals, a strong work of social justice is needed to deal with the entrenched powers of the liquor industry, which brings wealth to a few and great wretchedness to many.

Thoughts:

This chapter is the strongest argument in favor of social justice in the book so far. Ellen White argues that the liquor business is sheer robbery. For the money received, no equivalent value is returned. Instead the dollars spent on liquor bring only a curse to the spender. (337)

Behind the sale of liquor is the working of Satan. The consequences of the production and consumption of alcohol include prostitution, crime, child and spouse abuse, mental and physical illness, colonial control over non-christian populations, and all sorts of addiction. The liquor industry not only supplies the product but uses all sorts of snares to market it to those not yet ensnared. (337-339)

Ellen White argues that the church shares responsibility for the degradation caused by alcohol when it accepts members involved in the liquor trade and donations of money raised by the manufacture and sale of alcohol. (340-342)

The church also bears responsibility when it does not protest government licensing and regulation of the alcohol industry. The social costs of alcohol production and consumption are so great that the church cannot afford to be silent in the face of social and governmental support for the industry. (342-246)

Ellen White's passion for this topic is evidenced by her support for the Women's Christian Temperance Union, for which she would often speak. Ironically, and as evidence for White's flexibility, the WCTU at the same time was supporting Sunday laws in the United States. Ellen White did not fear guilt by association when the issue was important to her.

There is no nuance in this chapter. The great degradation that results from alcoholism generates some strong language. In utilizing these perspectives we should remember that a significant number of people who use alcohol use it in moderation and don't display most of the destructive tendencies of the alcoholic.

In Ellen White's day slavery, anti-tobacco and anti-alcohol crusades were natural allies in the battle for societal reform. A possible parallel today is the gun industry. Would she say that gun manufacturers are responsible for the deaths their products cause? Drinking and driving is another contemporary area where a consensus for social reform may be possible.

In this chapter Ellen White seems to be promoting prohibition of production and consumption. Was Prohibition (1919-1933) ultimately a plus or a minus for the nation as a whole? It would be interesting to study whether more people were killed annually by the mafia during Prohibition or annually by alcohol before and since. One also has to balance the good that would come from reducing alcohol production and consumption with the huge police resources that might be needed to enforce some sort of prohibition today. A more productive approach might be how government has effectively reduced tobacco consumption through restricting the locations where smoking can occur and social pressure (public service announcements). One

cannot overstate the evil of mass media showing young, athletic types on the beach enjoying alcohol. This makes alcohol socially acceptable and regulating the intentional and unintentional promotion of alcohol is a direction where constructive change can occur. In spite of its social acceptance, alcohol is the most abused narcotic today.

In Ellen White's day, temperance and abstinence were not as sharply distinguished as they are today. The two ideas often meant the same thing. When she uses the term temperance it often means abstinence. But moderation in good things is also important.

Quotable Quotes:

"Houses of prostitution, dens of vice, criminal courts, prisons, almshouses, insane asylums, hospitals, all are, to a great degree, filled as a result of the liquor seller's work. Like the mystic Babylon of the Apocalypse, he is dealing in "slaves, and souls of men." Behind the liquor seller stands the mighty destroyer of souls, and every art which earth or hell can devise is employed to draw human beings under his power." (338)

"The licensing of the liquor traffic is advocated by many as tending to restrict the drink evil. But the licensing of the traffic places it under the protection of law. The government sanctions its existence, and thus fosters the evil which it professes to restrict. Under the protection of license laws, breweries, distilleries, and wineries are planted all over the land, and the liquor seller plies his work beside our very doors." (342)

"Less harmful would it be to grant liquor to the confirmed drunkard, whose ruin, in most cases, is already determined, than to permit the flower of our youth to be lured to destruction through this terrible habit." (342)

"Considering only the financial aspect of the question, what folly it is to tolerate such a business! But what revenue can compensate for the loss of human reason, for the defacing and deforming of the image of God in man, for the ruin of children, reduced to pauperism and degradation, to perpetuate in their children the evil tendencies of their drunken fathers?" (344)

"It is not the drunkard and his family alone who are imperiled by the work of the liquor seller, nor is the burden of taxation the chief evil which his traffic brings on the community. We are all woven together in the web of humanity. The evil that befalls any part of the great human brotherhood brings peril to all." (345)

Tweets of Healing:

Behind the liquor seller stands the mighty destroyer of souls. (338)

Little children are in daily peril through the neglect, the abuse, the vileness of drunken mothers. (339)

From the so-called Christian lands the curse of alcohol is carried to the world. The West is hated because of this. (339)

Churches that accept members who work in the liquor industry are virtually sustaining the liquor traffic. (340)

The government sanctions the liquor industry's existence and thus fosters the evil which it professes to restrict. (342)

The government that licenses the liquor seller should be held responsible for the results of his traffic. (343)

The evil that befalls any part of the great human brotherhood brings peril to all. (345)

There is no man whose interests the liquor traffic does not imperil. (345)