

Q. & A. File No.

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Candles in wedding

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1500 Lynn Avenue  
Detroit Lakes, Minnesota

My dear Brother

In regard to the use of candles in worship services, let me say that there is no instruction from Ellen White's pen in this connection-- at least in so far as their use in weddings is concerned. This, of course, is not distinctly a worship service, yet it comes under that category in a broader sense. If you would like material that would help you in planning a wedding in harmony with Christian standards, turn to The Adventist Home, page 100 onward.

In Volume 7 of the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, p. 1040, a number of entries to the candlesticks of the sanctuary are made. Actually these candlesticks were lamp holders for the "candles" for lamps and burned oil rather than wax or tallow. I was chatting with Elder A. V. Olson, chairman of our White Trustees Board. He told me that when he was a boy he would take a string and dip it in melted tallow. Then he would pull out the string, dip it in water and return it to the melted tallow. Each trip back to the tallow increased the diameter of the developing candle and soon he had a candle in his hand.

Seventh-day Adventists use candles in Missionary Volunteer services. Have you been to an MV Rally in which everyone holds a candle and the candles are lighted by the neighbor next door, that is, the youth standing by your side? We also use candles in capping exercises in our nursing schools. Weddings by candlelight are not uncommon-- all or nearly all other lights being extinguished at the time.

Candles are useful things. They have their place, but perhaps not in a Seventh-day Adventist baptismal service or regular worship hour. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with the candles, but we must admit that they smack of Catholicism. Is not this the principle objection to their use? Seventh-day Adventists dislike any aping of Roman ceremonialism.

Miss Mount, who is searching through the Ellen G. White diaries, finds nothing there about candles. Elder Odom, who has just completed the indexing

of the published Spirit of Prophecy writings, finds nothing there about candles, that is, candles in worship. A reference is made of candles being used in Bible times to search out the homes of the people for leaven at the feast of the Passover and Unleavened Bread, but nothing concerning the use of candles in worship services.

Jesus left with his disciples no word on liturgy, church construction, or the mechanical features of Christian worship. To the woman at Jacob's well, however, He said, "God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." John 4:24. Seventh-day Adventists like to worship God "in truth" not in error. Roman Catholicism worship is in error. It is not in truth. We have not been able to find anything in the Word of truth that would condemn or condone candles in worship services. But it would seem that the spirit of worship would insist that externals be removed as far as possible, and that candles, if they are used, should contribute something tangible to the service. For example, providing light where there is no electricity, or perhaps in a symbolic way as our brethren use the candles at the MV rallies or at one of the Florence Nightingale capping services.

Rome began her apostasy in the days when bishops began to enjoin that which God had not specifically forbidden. Rome found herself deep in apostasy when she had declined to the place where she forbade that which God specifically enjoined—for example, the Sabbath.

To rule out or to condone practices or usages in areas where the Scripture and Spirit of Prophecy are silent is dangerous ground. A principle to follow is given by Paul: "Wherefore if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth lest I make my brother to offend." I Cor. 8:13.

The use of candles in worship may involve the foregoing principle. If this is so, then we should heed the principle. If candles are used ostentatiously and for ornamentation and effect exclusively, then another principle is at stake. That is simplicity in the worship of God. In this event the candles ought not to be used. I think I could be happy to worship God without any candles at any time in any services until the work on earth is done. But we must be careful about categorical statements.

With Christian love, I am

Faithfully your brother,

D. A. Delafield, Associate Secretary  
ELLEN G. WHITE PUBLICATIONS

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