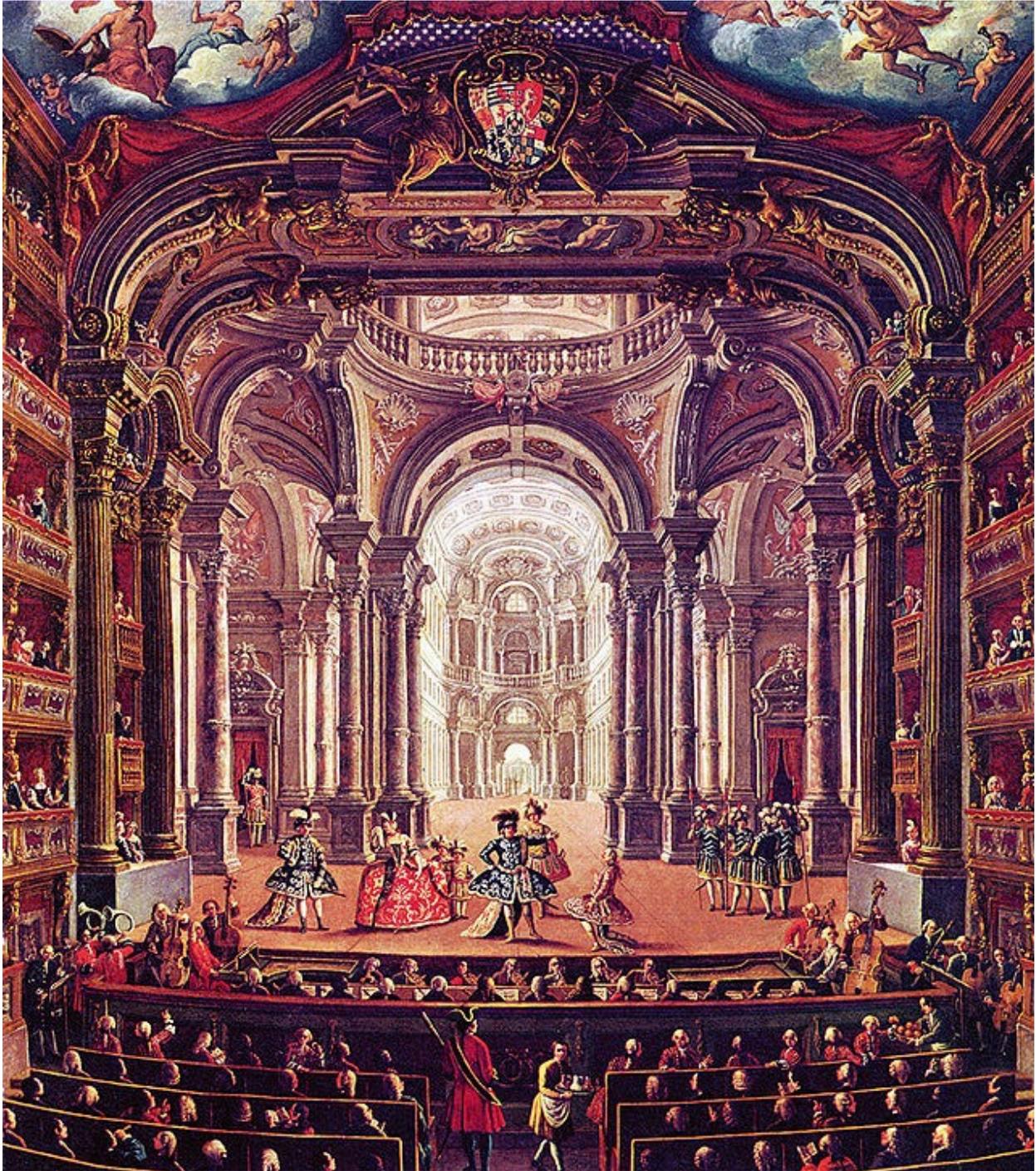


John Chrysostom On The Evils Of The Theater

2/16/15, by Clement Pulaski



Sin is often dressed in attractive garb.

From age to age, the sins of man change very little. New technology may arise and provide new ways of committing the sin, but the sin itself remains the same. With the mounting media buzz surrounding the release of the pornographic bondage film "Fifty Shades of Grey", it is an appropriate time to reflect on the incalculable evil spread by lascivious performances on stage and screen. Acts that would still cause many to blush are normalized by the sinful spectacle. The little remaining decency in our society is destroyed as we gather around in the dark like a group of perverts and pant after the filth of (edited) Hollywood.

Fourth century preacher John Chrysostom dealt with the exact same problems when guiding his flock. He recognized that crude the blasphemous humor and the whorish portrayals of women on the stage did great service in the cause of Satan. From his sixth homily on the Gospel of Matthew:

It becomes not us then to be continually laughing, and to be dissolute, and luxurious, but it belongs to those upon the stage, the harlot women, the men that are trimmed for this intent, parasites, and flatterers; not them that are called unto heaven, not them that are enrolled into the city above, not them that bear spiritual arms, but them that are enlisted on the devil's side. For it is he, yea, it is he, that even made the thing an art, that he might weaken Christ's soldiers, and soften the nerves of their zeal. For this cause he also built theatres in the cities, and having trained those buffoons, by their pernicious influence he causes that kind of pestilence to light upon the whole city, persuading men to follow those things which Paul bade us flee, "foolish talking and jesting" (Ephesians 5:4). And what is yet more grievous than these things is the subject of the laughter. For when they that act those absurd things utter any word of blasphemy or filthiness, then many among the more thoughtless laugh and are pleased, applauding in them what they ought to stone them for; and drawing down on their own heads by this amusement the furnace of fire. For they who praise the utterers of such words, it is these above all who induce men so to speak: wherefore they must be

more justly accountable for the penalty allotted to these things. For were there no one to be a spectator in such cases, neither would there be one to act; but when they see you forsaking your workshops, and your crafts, and your income from these, and in short everything, for the sake of continuing there, they derive hence a greater forwardness, and exert a greater diligence about these things.

And this I say, not freeing them from reproof, but that you may learn that it is you chiefly who supply the principle and root of such lawlessness; ye who consume your whole day on these matters, and profanely exhibit the sacred things of marriage, and make an open mock of the great mystery. For not even he who acts these things is so much the offender, as you are before him; thou who biddest him make a play on these things, or rather who not only biddest him, but art even zealous about it, taking delight, and laughing, and praising what is done, and in every way gaining strength for such workshops of the devil.

Tell me then, with what eyes will you after this look upon your wife at home, having seen her insulted there? Or how do you not blush being put in mind of the partner of your home, when you see nature herself put to an open shame? Nay, tell me not, that what is done is acting; for this acting has made many adulterers, and subverted many families. And it is for this most especially that I grieve, that what is done does not so much as seem evil, but there is even applause and clamor, and much laughter, at commission of so foul adultery. What do you say? That what is done is acting? Why, for this selfsame reason they must be worthy of ten thousand deaths, that what things all laws command men to flee, they have taken pains to imitate. For if the thing itself be bad, the imitation thereof also is bad. And I do not yet say how many adulterers they make who act these scenes of adultery, how they render the spectators of such things bold and shameless; for nothing is more full of whoredom and boldness than an eye that endures to look at such things.

And thou in a market-place wouldest not choose to see a woman stripped naked, or rather not even in a house, but callest such a

thing an outrage. And go up into the theatre, to insult the common nature of men and women, and disgrace your own eyes? For say not this, that she that is stripped is an harlot; but that the nature is the same, and they are bodies alike, both that of the harlot, and that of the free-woman. For if this be nothing amiss, what is the cause that if you were to see this done in a market place, you would both hasten away yourself, and drive thence her who was behaving herself unseemly? Or is it that when we are apart, then such a thing is outrageous, but when we are assembled and all sitting together, it is no longer equally shameful? Nay, this is absurdity and a disgrace, and words of the utmost madness; and it were better to besmear the eyes all over with mud and mire than to be a spectator of such a transgression. For surely mire is not so much an hurt to an eye, as an unchaste sight, and the spectacle of a woman stripped naked. Hear, for example, what it was that caused nakedness at the beginning, and read the occasion of such disgrace. What then did cause nakedness? Our disobedience, and the devil's counsel. Thus, from the first, even from the very beginning, this was his contrivance. Yet they were at least ashamed when they were naked, but you take a pride in it; "having," according to that saying of the apostle, "your glory in your shame" (Philippians 3:19)

How then will your wife thenceforward look upon you, when you are returned from such wickedness? How receive you? How speak to you, after you have so publicly put to shame the common nature of woman, and art made by such a sight the harlots' captive and slave?

Now if you grieve at hearing these things, I thank you much, for "who is he that makes me glad, but he which is made sorry by me?" (2 Corinthians 2:2) Do not then ever cease to grieve and be vexed for them, for the sorrow that comes of such things will be to you a beginning of a change for the better. For this cause I also have made my language the stronger, that by cutting deeper I might free you from the venom of them that intoxicate you; that I might bring you back to a pure health of soul; which God grant we may all enjoy by all means, and attain unto the rewards laid up for

these good deeds; by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and dominion forever and ever.
Amen.