



Adventists, Valentine's Day and the Romantic Imperative

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The media and retail outlets are awash with stories and merchandise, fuelling the romantic fever surrounding Valentine's Day (14 February). While some Adventists embrace the opportunities that the day affords to declare their undying love to their beloved, others recoil from the occasion as a relic of pagan debauchery. The origin of the day is clouded in speculation. However, in spite of

revisionist attempts to romanticise the origins of Valentine's Day, the strongest evidence indicates that it has its roots firmly in a pagan ritual called Lupercalia, a feast held in honour of the Roman god, Lupercus. This amounted to a sexual lottery in which names were drawn out of a box at random to select sexual partners for a year until the next Valentine's Day came around. The modern practice of giving cards to ask/tell someone to "be my Valentine" seems to be a holdover from this ancient sexual lottery. So, should we take a firm stand and "touch not the unclean thing" (2 Corinthians 6:17), or can we in all good conscience separate ancient pagan practices from the modern observance of the day?

It is totally understandable that sincere believers would wish to avoid a day whose origins are so steeped in depravity. But does Valentine's pagan roots invalidate the modern-day practice of sharing romantic gestures that are consistent with good Christian values? If the mere connection to paganism was sufficient to warrant our rejection, we would have to go back to referring to the days of the week by their number designation rather than the pagan names dedicated to Norse gods that we have adopted. In the same way that Ellen White took a very pragmatic approach toward the Christmas season, Valentine's Day can also be, "made to serve a very good purpose" (The Adventist Home, 478). While people's minds are focussed on love and romance, we can use the opportunity to promote the best principles for healthy relationships in our programming and outreach.



Many have a strong objection to being dictated to as to when they should demonstrate affection to their spouse, by organisations and companies who have a vested interest in the day. A major part of the value of romantic acts is their unexpected nature. Giving gifts out of a sense of obligation can actually rob the deed of real value. However, while 'romance' has been blatantly commercialised in the pursuit of 'filthy lucre', it is still alive and well and should always remain so in every marriage. However, if we have to rely on a 'day' in order to 'be romantic' we have bigger problems to worry about than the distant taint of paganism. In the context of marriage, far from being just a pleasant bonus, romance is an essential element of a healthy marital relationship. The fact that a marriage cannot depend on the warm fuzzy feelings generated by acts of love, does not invalidate the value of these warm fuzzies. A marriage devoid of affectionate emotional input becomes dry, lifeless and monotonous.

Because there is no one size fits all, trying to define romance is like trying to nail jelly to a wall. One man's romantic gesture is another woman's passion killer. In general terms, Jimmy Evans, founder of Marriage Today, defines romance as "self-initiated pursuit . . . Romance says, 'I like to think about you and I want to please you as a priority in my life.'" Romance shows that the object

of our love is on our heart and that we really care. The effort and creativity that we invest to demonstrate our love communicates the value we see in each other. So, in the words of the Apostle, "let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband" (1 Corinthians 7:3).

♥ *Always & Forever* ♥