

Dear friends, greetings again from Berrien Springs.

We now turn to spiritual matters, and today we reflect on the spirit of our modern age – cynicism. Today we will be discussing cynicism, its origin and impact, so here goes.....

‘Whatever!’

Whenever someone looks at me full in the face and uses these words, I experience a strong sense of disappointment on their behalf. Yet, I often say, ‘Whatever!’ when I open a letter asking for my support!

Why? Because ‘Whatever’ expresses the dominant spirit of our age – cynicism.

Cynicism begins with the wry assurance that everyone has an angle. Behind every silver lining is a cloud. The cynic is always observing and critiquing, but never engaging, loving or hoping.

How did we get to this point? Satan’s first recorded words were cynical. He told Adam and Eve, ‘For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’ (Gen. 3.5, NKJV). Satan suggested that God’s motives were cynical, that instead of acting for the good of Adam and Eve, God was really acting to protect His dominant position. Satan seductively gives Adam and Eve the inside track – here is what is really going on! Such is the deadly intimacy that cynicism seems to offer.

When God called the Seventh-day Adventist movement to proclaim the Everlasting Gospel to every nation, tribe, language and people, America had an optimistic culture. This was based on the Judeo-Christian confidence in the goodness of God acting on our behalf. Knowing that the Good Shepherd is watching us over gives us confidence to walk through valley of the shadow of death. Even in the presence of my enemies I can feast richly because God is with me!

But something happened in the late 19th century – optimism shifted its foundation from the goodness of God to the goodness of humanity. We were exhorted to have faith in faith itself, and Julie Andrews sang in *The Sound of Music* about having confidence in confidence itself! Such optimism however, rooted in the goodness of people, collapses when we come face to face with the reality of evil. The horrors of communism and fascism and modern warfare removed any confidence in the intrinsic goodness of humanity for many....and for each one of us today, our first encounter with evil tends to be highly personal and can be deeply distressing.

And this shattered optimism leads to world-weary cynicism, and to tongues that say, ‘Whatever!’ as a defense against further disappointment.

Philosophically, C.S. Lewis captures the essence of this tragedy, arguing that if you see through everything, you eventually see nothing.

‘You cannot go on “explaining away” forever: you will find that you have explained away explanation itself. You cannot go on “seeing through” things for ever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it...If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To “see through” all things is the same as not to see.’ (C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, p. 81).

Spiritually, the lapse into world-weary cynicism means when walking through the valley of the shadow of death, the cynic focuses on the darkness, whilst the born-again child of God focuses on the Good Shepherd. Our culture of cynicism has removed the Good Shepherd from the 23rd Psalm, and what happens when we do this?

Read the 23rd Psalm below, but only read the words in bold, which are what we are left with when we remove the Good Shepherd. Horrifying, isn’t it?

The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.

~~He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow
me all the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.~~

Let me write it the 23rd Psalm without the Good Shepherd much more clearly.

**My;
I shall want.
Me
Me
My soul;
I walk through the valley of the shadow of death;
I will fear evil;
Me in the presence of my enemies;
My head;
My cup;
Me all the days of my life.**

When we remove the Good Shepherd from the 23rd Psalm, we are left alone and obsessing over our wants whilst in the midst of the valley of the shadow of death. No wonder so many are so cynical! With the Good Shepherd gone, we are alone in a world of evil. Without the Good Shepherd, those we serve are left alone in a cruel, cold world, without hope or hope of a Savior.

In the AFM family we are scattered around the world, reintroducing the Good Shepherd into homes and communities that are separated from the Good Shepherd and are walking alone through the valley of the shadow of death. Collectively, we serve that faith might be restored in the intrinsic goodness and love of God, and hope rekindled in the soon coming of the Good Shepherd.

I would urge you to pray fervently for one another, so that Satan's cynicism might be dispelled, hope in God restored, and the Good Shepherd might walk with more and more of His children through the valley of death to life everlasting.

Best wishes,

Conrad.