

Narcissus and Christ in SDA Education

Jay Kesler, former president of Youth for Christ, in a recent interview with *Christianity Today* supports the view that today's adolescents, like those of the 1950s, have become largely "apathetic" about the world. But unlike the youth of the fifties, whose apathy was a product of ignorance,

Today's teenagers are apathetic not because they don't know enough to care about the world; they're apathetic because they know just enough about the world to think that they don't matter. They've seen so much on television and discussed so many big issues in their social studies classes, that they feel helpless and hopeless in the face of the incredible global problems.¹

Last Christmas, a Takoma Academy graduate, on his return to the area to visit his classmates of two years before, was overwhelmed by the seeming indifference about spiritual things that had enveloped several of his friends who were quite alive spiritually when they were in academy together. Obviously, the youth of the SDA Church are not immune to the kinds of pressure affecting the population at large.

Could it be that our approach to apocalypse, to discipline, to recreation, or to church life is causing our youth to feel helpless, ignored, unimportant, or useless?

At a forum on "Whither the SDA Church?" at the Silver Spring, Maryland, church on a recent Sabbath afternoon, a local principal of one of our academies reported that a group of his students, who chose to visit Disney World for their class trip, by noon were openly expressing their boredom and ennui. By contrast, another group who went to Antigua over the Christmas holidays as Maranatha International helpers to build a church and repair a school returned full of enthusiasm and joy at having worked hard and sacrificed their vacation to provide meaningful help to people in need.

As Kesler observes, if we are going to motivate our youth to find meaning and adopt the vision that

shaped our lives, we need to be "intentionally Christian in this culture." We need to ask ourselves at home and in our schools, "Are our goals self-serving, narcissistic, or do we live out God's concern for others (are we Christian)?" Youth who have bought into the increased self-absorption of the times are doing so because they have not been challenged by significant alternatives that provide an unselfish focus that satisfies their needs. Truly, "without a vision the people perish."

If our schools and homes are to continue to reflect the image of the Christ whose life is more caught than taught, we will have to be intentionally earnest about transmitting our Christian goals to the young people we serve.

Kesler asks, "Are we just *polite* materialists? Are we just secularists who don't swear and drink, or are we qualitatively different people? What do our kids see in us?"²

Matthew Arnold, in comparing the cultural sources that have affected modern Western culture, identifies the Hellenistic and Hebraic traditions as two major forces that define our sensibilities. According to his view, the Hebraic should yield to the best of Hellenism—resolute action and strict obedience to conscience should be tempered by clear thinking and spontaneity of consciousness. To achieve both would elevate culture to the place of greatest good. Our later experience has shown that life divorced from the values of duty and moral conduct leaves one ultimately awash in a disoriented subjectivism steeped in self-absorption. Can we continue to accept such a vision or will we see to it that at least in our classrooms and on our campuses, Christ will vanquish Narcissus?—V.S.G. □

FOOTNOTES

¹Gregg Lewis, interviewer, "The Return of Apathy," *Christianity Today* (October 18, 1985), p. 20.

²*Ibid.*