

AF FROM WILLIS
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Book suggestions

*The book is a living integration of all the theological disciplines.

I have never cared more about what happens to NYTS than I do now, so please so receive any suggestions I may make. [I have never craved more than that the suggestions I make should be received meditatively.]

With the sad ~~affaire~~ Andy Young and Jimmy Carter's "crisis of the spirit," I adduce this quote from a great classic in the understanding of our civilization, Chas. Norris Cochrane's CHRISTIANITY AND CLASSICAL CULTURE: A STUDY OF THOUGHT AND ACTION*FROM AUGUSTUS TO AUGUSTINE (Ox/61 paper, p. 344): "an increasing sense of the inefficacy of political methods for the treatment of the characteristic maladies of *Romanitas*," the 4th-c. order eroded by exploitation and parasitism.

I read this book in connection with preparing a series of endowed Jewish lectures (the first being "Who is Jesus for Us Jews and Christians Now?"). Afterward, I discovered that the great political scientist Hans Morgenthau named this classic as one of the ten most influential books in his life. And that most perceptive poet of our time, W.H. Auden, wrote of it: "I have read this book many times, and my conviction of its importance to the understanding of the epoch with which it is concerned [the time of the birth and rise of Christianity, spiritually and politically and culturally] --and not only to that, but also to our own--has increased with each reading."

Here is the history of action/reflection in our heritage, a powerful spotlight on how we as NYTS came to this style. Working through this book would be a great way to educate in what we--we the West and we Christians and we NYTS--are all about (though I'm not equating all these). And it would be explosive to interface this great book with the brilliantly researched, counter-present-trends THE DISPLACED MAJORITY, by Dermott Robertson (in the Library), an outrageous book full of truth and bias.

Now that I have more leisure to meditate, one of the questions I've been praying and sweating over is *How can we be both messianic and modest, with the integrity of both?* The arts have been helping me. One of the arts, in my opinion, is humor; and we have none better, in human-social concern, than Russell Baker, whose column in NYT today I've reproduced on the back of this sheet. Two comments arising from my musing on the column:

1. All the positions here satired on busing are fraudulent. He has not omitted any positions. Therefore, all positions on busing are fraudulent. Now, doesn't it take some modesty to admit that?

2. The most powerful sanction is a negative peer sanction, what I may coin a word for: *plesiophobia* (the fear of negative opinion of you on the part of people you work with; seen as peers with the same general aim, it is *syntelophobia*; and as companions in collegium, *hetairophobia*). This fear acts to keep the reality component low and the ideological-illusional component high in all institutions and movements, including NYTS.

ORP

Playing It Liberal

Having bid farewell to school houses several years ago with the sorrow of a man emerging from 30 years of lost wanderings in the Dismal Swamp, I have only lately begun studying the nuances of human passion created by the busing issue and the strange behavior they produce.

1 Take Smith, for example, whose children attend public schools. Smith despises school busing, but does not dare say so for fear that Carling will call him a "racist."

A vociferous champion of social and political uplift, Carling holds that the random intermingling in faraway schoolrooms of children rich and poor, black and white, is a blessing to the Republic. Resistance to the idea, to his way of thinking, can stem only from a benighted racism, which must be plainly labeled and denounced wherever it raises its evil face.

Smith, who likes to fancy himself a decent fellow, cannot take the obloquy he knows Carling will heap upon him. So he keeps silent, despising school busing quietly and silently hating Carling.

The Carlings of the world have an easy time with the Smiths, who live in terror of being publicly exposed as illiberal. Smith refuses to complain about his tax rates for fear of being called a "fascist," fears being caught with an opinion on the Palestinian problem lest he be called an "anti-Semite" and hates to have people see his wife cooking dinner because he is afraid feminists will call him an "oppressor."

3 Barry, on the other hand, is not so easily pushed around by terrorist epithets. He confronts Carling with righteous rage. He points out before the assembled crowd that Carling, this gallant hussar of public school busing, sends his own children to private school.

The Carlings almost invari-

ably send their own children to private school. The assumption seems to be that with a father as enlightened as Carling, a child doesn't need the beneficial intermingling of rich and poor, black and white. And, since Carling can muster the heavy money which private school costs, he may believe he is doing the less fortunate a good deed by helping them enjoy the beneficial intermingling without undue classroom crowding.

Barry does not see it this way. A man of outspoken conviction, he calls Carling a "hypocrite." Carling preaches one doctrine and practices another, says Barry. All of us in Barry's audience enjoy that. It is always comforting to see someone else's hypocrisy called to account, since it decreases the chances of anybody's noticing your own.

Carling, of course, denies hypocrisy, but his defense is a trap. The simple fact, he pleads, is that he wants only the best education for his children. The place to get it, regrettably, is private school. When public-school education equals the excellence of private schools', Carling will gladly offer his loved ones to the beneficial intermingling of the school bus, whether that glorious day come tomorrow, or, as is more likely, 85 years hence.

Carling is now hung up in his own barbed wire. "You are an elitist!" cries a man in the crowd. It is Hamlin. No man is more qualified to drive the dreadful word "elitist" into a fellow creature's heart, at least in this confrontation.

Hamlin's children have always been bused to public schools and, though their reading level is three years beneath the national average and they are regularly robbed of their lunch money in the corridors, Hamlin is proud, not only because his kids can take it, but also because they

are being protected from the corrosive infection of "elitism."

Hamlin is black and, so, would never dream of calling Smith a "racist." He will leave that to Carling, the white liberal, but he will not tolerate Carling's white liberal "elitism." Barry, of course, is also an "elitist," but nothing can be gained from calling him one publicly, since Barry is not ashamed of it. Barry boasts about being an "elitist." This is how he gets away with calling Carling a "hypocrite."

Boasting about your indifference to uplift is the best way to keep the crowd from getting a harpoon into you. So Barry boasts about sending his children to private school and, if anyone accuses him of being a "fascist," he will boast about that, too, boasting in passing that he enjoys oil-company dividends from windfall profits and is the only person in the room who enjoyed total avoidance of last year's income tax.

Barry doesn't care whether his children get a better education in private school. He simply figures that private school is better than public for learning arrogance.

It is Hamlin who infuriates Quinn. Like Hamlin, Quinn is also black, but he has no more use for busing than Smith has. Quinn sees it as a scheme by the white power structure to destroy the integrity of the black community. Hamlin's eagerness to submit to the plot infuriates Quinn, but he doesn't dare say so. He is afraid Hamlin would accuse him of having a "ghetto mentality," and he does not want to give whites the satisfaction of hearing him explain how the despicable "ghetto" turned into the comforting "black community" he now cherishes.

Meanwhile, the politicians present have left the room and the judges, being too old to think about children, ponder statistics. ■

Niculae Asciu

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