
BOOK REVIEWS

Higher Education and the American Resurgence, by Frank Newman

A Carnegie Foundation Special Report. Princeton: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Reviewed by Lee Royce, Vice President of College Relations, Belmont College, Nashville, Tennessee.

Higher Education and the American Resurgence is a comprehensive report prepared by Dr. Frank Newman, President of the Education Commission of the States, under the auspices of the Carnegie Foundation. Hundreds of conferences with faculty, administrators, business and civic leaders went into this thoroughly researched and documented report on the current state of American higher education.

Dr. Newman extends the theme that education is our nation's greatest hope and necessary investment if we are to succeed in an increasingly competitive, complex, and problem-laden world. He concludes that colleges and universities can play a central role in national renewal if they set certain key priorities and sustain values primary to the education experience.

This report contains many excellent and creative proposals whose adoption would improve the quality, purpose, and access of American higher education, particularly with regard to new federal initiatives which are so important to setting the national educational agenda.

At first reading it might seem that this global report would have little relevance to the rather specific context of campus ministry. Although the report informs the campus minister with the best thinking on a subject which of itself should be of interest to such a minister, it details solutions, particularly in the high-tech sciences, which have little to do with campus ministry.

However, underlying the entire presentation is a call for the reaffirmation of certain key values and attributes necessary for an "American Resurgence." And these values and attributes seem to me to be precisely at the heart of effective Christian discipleship and campus ministry. Let me illustrate with two examples.

(1) As America faces problems often of staggering dimensions—the quest for world peace, economic growth, inner-city decay, nuclear energy concerns, Dr. Newman details the steady decline in college students' sense of the need for service and civic responsibility. He laments the rise of self-interest and calls education for service and citizenship the colleges' chief responsibility. What could be more germane to effective campus ministry than promoting the Christian philosophy which places service to others above self-aggrandizement?

Newman asks the question "How, then, can higher education transform the experience of going to college so that it fosters a sense of civic responsibility?" Who should be better able to answer the question than informed and motivated Christians? It seems to me that campus ministry at its best would be the ideal place to educate for service and civic responsibility.

(2) This provocative report demonstrates clearly that all too often students' natural tendencies toward "creativity and responsibility are stifled by a classroom approach that makes them passive objects of learning rather than active colleagues in the learning process." The recommendations are definitive: Develop active learning environments where students help design the programs, take risks, and participate in internships and extracurricular service opportunities. Again it seems the campus ministry program is designed to do exactly this, and when it does it develops the best in Christian discipleship.

Admittedly, most of this paper's recommendations about the reform of higher education and the federal involvement are beyond the sphere of a local campus ministry. But the underlying thesis is not, and it is this: If education is to lead an American resurgence through turbulent times we must produce students of concern and conviction who place a high priority on the quality of life and on service to others. They must respond creatively and boldly. I can think of no better laboratory for that process than the local campus ministry.

Teaching a Stone to Talk, Annie Dillard; Harpers Colophon Books, 1983; \$5.95 pb, 177 pp.

Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Annie Dillard; Bantam Books, 1974; \$3.95, 279 pp.

Reviewed by Michael L. Allen, Pastor, Baptist Temple Church, Alexandria, Virginia.

Discovery is the word that comes to mind when reading Annie Dillard (a recent discovery of my own). This poet, naturalist, observer of life, discovers truth and meaning in the world around her. Through her writings (mostly columns and magazine articles collected in these two books), she shares discovery with her readers.

Her narrative flows freely carrying us through her mind's eye into the world around us. Once there we discover many things heretofore unnoticed or unseen. A mockingbird, free-falling from a tree, opens its wings just in the nick of time — "just a breath before he would have been dashed to the ground" (*PTC*, 8). The "wall of dark shadow" that approached during a total eclipse of the sun — "we no sooner saw it than it was upon us, like thunder. It roared up the valley. It slammed our hill and knocked us out. . . . It rolled at you across the land at 1,800 miles an hour hauling darkness like plague behind it" (*TST*, 100).

Dillard writes not only to the sense but to the intellect as well: "We can live anyway we want. People take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience — even of silence — by choice. The thing is to stalk your calling in a certain skilled and supply way [like a weasel who] lives as he's meant to, yielding at every moment to the perfect freedom of single necessity" (*TST*, 16).

Calling, the incarnation, evangelism, grace, apocalypse, and fundamentalist Christians are all considered in these essays. You'll have to make your own index, for Dillard does not intend to write theologically or in traditional theological categories. Nevertheless, her work reflects a sensitivity to the holy.

Perhaps the author's greatest strength is also her greatest weakness, for her prose flows like poetry. Unfortunately, the poetic often overpowers the narrative. Occasionally she "discovers" more than anyone would ever want to know about expeditions to the North Pole or damsel flies. Though her writing is at times difficult to read, the effort is rewarding.

The essays, originally written for a variety of publications from *The Atlantic* to *Sports Illustrated*, are thematically connected, but are easily enjoyed one at a time with appropriate time afterward for reflection.

Both *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and *Teaching a Stone to Talk* are brimming with good sermon or devotional illustrations, phrases that make catchy titles or become the one thing a hearer remembers. The one area where the illustrations fall short is the area of interpersonal relationships; we would have hoped for more. Her encounter with the little boy who witnesses to her (*TST*, pp. 77ff) and her time at the cabin in the woods with the young girl she calls "the child" (*TST*, pp. 153ff) are tender and nostalgic. I suspect Dillard is more comfortable with the frogs in the pond near her Virginia home. Nevertheless, these are refreshing books for those of us who spend so much of our reading with abstract ideas and ancient traditions.

Dillard's writing is devotional, inspirational, educational, and provocative. She appeals to the senses: sight, sound, touch, and awe. Her images will enrich your vocabulary and your ability to appreciate the world around you.