

to the bourgeoisie in the stories of Moravia or the films of Antonioni, but is spreading through the squalid tenements of the de-racinated working class. It is a charge of tragic and disorganized destruction which Mr. Nichols makes in *Italia, Italia*; perhaps he buries it a little too deep inside the mass of information, discursiveness and recapitulation which, often usefully, he also provides, but it is there just the same. There is no Western society which can look on these illustrations of divorce between the government and the governed without checking the structure of its own foundations as a precaution. Perhaps that is part of Mr. Nichols' intention, too.

Reviewed by GABRIEL GERSH

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### *A Perverted Pedagogy*

#### **Have the Public Schools "Had It"?**

by Elmer Towns, *Nashville, Tenn.*:  
Thomas Nelson, Inc. 192 pp. \$3.00  
(paper).

IN DISCUSSING the question raised in the title Mr. Towns strives to avoid the opprobrium associated with "racism" or with "fundamentalism," and is at great pains to extol the formerly beneficial influence of public schools in shaping the American character. They were, it seems, the nurseries of all those pieties which the author comprehends in the term "Americanism," including the Protestant-Puritan ethic which has served as a catalyst for all the native virtues. Now, alas, all that has radically changed. The aura of religion and reverence has vanished, and with it the old fashioned notions of discipline and decorum. The grievous, almost intolerable bur-

dens imposed on the taxpayers for the building and maintenance of ever more sumptuous public school houses, gymnasias and playing fields, and for equipping them with the finest facilities available, has only served, along with the new cult of permissiveness—so Mr. Towns finds—to convert them into institutionalized assembly lines for the production of ignorance, lawlessness, and immorality. So, just as the Roman Catholic Church once found the establishment of parochial schools necessary to its perpetuation in America, the creation of Protestant church schools, Mr. Towns believes, now becomes necessary to the preservation of the Protestant ethic and the American system of values.

One may be tempted to dismiss as rhetorical exaggeration Mr. Towns' assertion that the nineteenth century public school movement was "the foundation of freedom in the United States," but there is solid realism in his contention that the public schools now represent a revolutionary force that threatens the traditional American values and thereby the continuation of American freedom. The original purpose of public education, Mr. Towns reminds us, was to prepare young men and women for the responsibilities of citizenship in a free society; but now that the true nature of mankind is being ignored, the schools have become instruments for the control of society by the educationists. The American concept of freedom, Mr. Towns insists, implies that it is the parents who are to "decide who will educate their children, what constitutes a school, and what constitutes education"; but he finds that today parents "have less to say about education, and Washington has more, than at any time in the history of the United States." As a result the schools are propagating a new society which repudiates the past and is replacing the traditional moral norms with a new post-Christian and post-American *ethos*. It is not, as some would prefer to believe, communist influence that has wrought this revolutionary change; Mr. Towns attributes it instead to the invasion

by the courts into educational affairs and to the curricular innovations fostered by exponents of the new pedagogy. As one of the consequent evils he cites the loss by local authorities of control over even such disciplinary matters as dress codes and expulsions. Other baneful consequences mentioned by Mr. Towns include the virtual abolition of school districts by the forced "busing" of children to achieve the ethnic ratios decreed by the courts or by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, the ever-growing power of teachers' trade unions, the pandemic of teachers' strikes, the forfeiture by teachers of student and parental respect, the discouragement and defection to other employments of many able and conscientious teachers and their replacement by persons of inferior aptitude and feebler dedication, the substitution of such ambiguous aims as "life-adjustment" and "self-identity" for the pursuit of competence in the traditional subjects of learning; finally the ubiquitous problems of violence, vandalism, and drug abuse.

As Mr. Towns sees it, the only certain antidote to the evils he has mentioned would lie in the proliferation of private schools conducted under religious auspices. Such schools, he believes, would serve as lighthouses of conscience reilluminating the concept of liberty and of the dignity and moral importance of persons, thus providing a much needed leaven in American society. Nevertheless, Mr. Towns does venture to suggest—though perhaps not very hopefully—some reforms whereby he thinks the public schools might be regenerated. There must be a recognition that the schools belong not to the jurists or to the utopian bureaucrats or to the educationist organizations and their lobbyists but to their respective communities where they must be responsive to parental wishes. The physical, moral and educational well-being of school children must be recognized as primarily the responsibility of parents rather than of politicians, jurists or bureaucrats. The role of discipline for both

pupils and teachers must be reexamined, and the tendency of members of either group to appeal to the courts against disciplinary rulings should be firmly discouraged, notwithstanding the agitation of revolutionaries or the threats of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Reviewed by TOMMY W. ROGERS

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### *The Heresy of the Young*

**The Children of Darkness: Some Reflections on the Kid Cult**, by Richard S. Wheeler, *New Rochelle, N. Y.: Arlington House, 1973. 189 pp. \$7.95.*

MR. WHEELER'S PURPOSE is to discuss the conflict between secular and religious influences in the United States; but in doing so he has chosen to focus on the youth rebellion—on "the kids and their counterculture"—because he believes it to be chiefly the young who have been subverting the established order, and the churches, he finds, have by and large defected to their side. Less than two generations ago, he says, there was a seemingly unbridgeable chasm between the individualist, capitalist and Christian majority and the handful of communist or anarchist radicals who wanted to overthrow our society and to replace it with another organized on a collectivist or on an antinomian pattern. Today the gap is rapidly being closed, and Mr. Wheeler finds a certain absurdity in the fact that it is now the liberals who

like to consider themselves alienated and slightly radical *vis-à-vis* the rest of America [while] the New Left feels alienated *vis-à-vis* the Liberal Establishment, although the helmsmen of the New Left have set their compasses only a few degrees to the left of the Estab-