

changed customer, losing his early love Ann Routledge, pardoning an army deserter at the plea of a distraught mother. These images are nearly indelible, and they and others like them are the *only* images. Unless they are somehow dispelled, charges against the political Lincoln will never stick. On the other hand, apart from Benjamin Franklin, how many such images do we carry in our heads of the Founding Fathers? Only too few. Here perhaps is a true work of recovery.

Bradford's charges against Lincoln are not without merit. And with his persuasive skills, he could undoubtedly convert students of Lincoln, those not devoted to hagiography, to his view. But to convince, that view needs to be developed at far greater length and with more careful analyses than provided here. For instance, a rhetorical analysis of a few Lincoln speeches, instead of piecemeal quotes, would buttress his arguments considerably. In his attacks on Lincoln in both books, Bradford seems to me to be a bit premature and could have written to better effect had he been a little more the wily rhetorician and a little less the blunt *vir bonus*.

Few readers will leave these books without having learned something vital, without having comfortable assumptions shaken. Many books promise this experience; few deliver as do Bradford's. His arguments are cogent, his reasoning is exact and exacting. His style is a model of concision, especially considering the weight he often requires it to bear. His passion is transparent: scratch any of his elegant, blue-veined sentences and you will find blood fit to boil a dozen Jacobins. He gives no quarter, however, to the false feeling of our time. In a period when history is being mauled by sociological assumptions, he teaches us to look at it historically again, minus the hysteria and sentimentality. Only in that way, he knows, can we make an appeal for recovery into a design for recovery.

Teaching and Learning Revisited

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Begin Here: The Forgotten Conditions of Teaching and Learning, by Jacques Barzun, *Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991. xii + 222 pp. \$24.95.*

THERE IS NO END to the publication of books and articles concerning the ceaseless crises in our educational system, especially in our public schools and colleges. There have been the jeremiads against the growing violence, drug addiction, the disappearance of civility, and the loss of academic proficiency. Although I have tended to agree with the traditionalists who have been angered by the erosion of academic standards and their replacement by interest-group-pleasing trivia, I have become disheartened by the increasing rancor of the dissenting voices on both sides and their failure to reach a reasonable agenda for discussion—let alone achieving a mutually acceptable accommodation. What a pleasurable relief it was, then, to read Jacques Barzun's *Begin Here*—a wellspring of good sense and stylistic elegance.

The book consists of fifteen essays Professor Barzun had written in the past—eight from the 1980s, two from the 1970s, four from the 1960s, and one (the last selection, as it turns out) from 1950. At first glance, the reader might think that in the rapidly evolving situation in education, anything written before 1990 would be quaint at best, obsolete at worst. If, however, one has the kind of historical perspective so urgently needed to understand the present, one would realize that colleges and universities had their problems at their inception in the Middle Ages, that from the very beginning, educators (not to be confused with "educationalists") have debated about what to

teach, how to teach, who should govern our school system—and other areas so troublesome today. This historical perspective would make us realize that crises are not a twentieth-century phenomenon. But despite the seeming eternity of crises, every crisis, like every set of fingerprints, is unique. It is therefore the uniqueness of the crisis which demands that each generation address it—using the lessons and experiences of the past and the pressures and needs of the present to determine what new approaches, if any, are imperative.

Barzun is ideally equipped to address the crises of our times. Ever since he joined the Department of History at Columbia University in 1927, he has been an influential teacher and an observer of educational trends; yet his books and articles have not been confined to one specialty or period. Unlike many of the procrustean specialists who have appeared during Barzun's lifetime (he was born in Paris in 1907 and emigrated to the United States when he was twelve years), he has ranged far and wide in his interests—from history to literature to philosophy to education. (His most popular book so far has been *Teacher in America*, first published in 1944.) To *Begin Here*, he has brought the collective force of his wisdom—a wisdom always rooted in concrete experience and reflection, and always laced with wit and elegance. To every one of the fifteen essays from the past, he has written an introduction to show the original essay's applicability to the 1990s. And unlike many of the books and articles which appeared in the last few decades and deal with various "crises" in education, he does not confine himself to a particular level or to a certain topic. Instead he examines the entire field of teaching and learning—from the public and private elementary school to the public and private university and every collateral topic—methods of teaching, the influence of outside pressures, etc.

He groups his fifteen essays—and their introductions—into three sections: "First Things," "Curriculum," and "Advanced Works." Under these groupings, he analyzes both what has contributed to the malaise in our school systems and what can and should be done to counteract the steep decline.

Barzun lists several causes for the deterioration of the quality of education on all levels. First, there has been the proliferation of the graduates from schools of education, who are guided by concepts and abstractions rather than by concrete experiences with students; who are mesmerized by jargon in never-ending articles and books; who believe that motivation in students comes from appeal to their sense of "excitement," "fun," and "innovation." They use "strategies," teaching machines, computers, film strips, objective-type tests, group learning—anything to avoid the more difficult task of improving their own knowledge of subject matter and conveying and sharing that knowledge with their students in meaningful ways. Students, however, seem to know better than these "educationalists" that there is no easy path to learning, that make-believe games and "rap" sessions are no meaningful substitutes for the student-teacher relationship. They also know the difference between a high grade which is deserved and a high grade which is a gift offering (or perhaps even a bribe). They know that a "social" promotion means really a demotion in self-respect, and when they meet a teacher who offers knowledge rather than a placebo, who does not confuse excellence with "elitism," they welcome that teacher with respect and appreciation.

Barzun does not neglect to look at the forces outside the classroom that have contributed to the disintegration of performance and to the inflation of smoke-screening and scapegoating. The usual complaint that what is needed is more

money is negated by statistical evidence that much of the money allocation goes into relatively unproductive channels—expansion of audio-visual aids, bigger gymnasiums and sports stadiums, for example. He is also aware that many of the debasing changes have come from external pressures to politicize the curriculum and to substitute all kinds of social programs intended to reform society—and the world. And so, teaching and learning at times have been transformed into propagandizing and brain-washing.

And, of course, there is the overwhelming evidence that since the end of World War II, admission to colleges has been facilitated by federal, state, and municipal financial aid; consequently, the college population has not only vastly increased in numbers, but in ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity—each group claiming a piece of the educational pie. But despite increased public financing, the colleges have not improved academically. We now have less education for more people; in a survey taken in 1990, it was found that there were 60 million functional illiterates in the United States. There has been an increase in buildings, in sports activities, in salaries for athletic coaches, in transforming the function of college presidents from leadership in the academic community to fundraising and “selling” the college. And this transformation has been accompanied by the use of Madison Avenue techniques to get students (and their parents) to purchase a basically inferior product.

It may appear that Barzun is critical only of “educationists” and outsiders; nonetheless, he does not spare his colleagues in the humanities, the sciences, and the social sciences. He rightly complains about the endless profusion of books and articles which contribute no lasting value to knowledge—and certainly not to wisdom. The verbal explosion has been caused by the “publish-or-

perish” syndrome and the desire to embellish one’s credentials. And he points to the tendency on the part of college and university teachers to abdicate their first function—to teach rather than do “research” and also their failure to cooperate with teachers in the elementary and secondary grades to work out a symbiotic relationship at all levels.

As to what should be done to halt the precipitous decline in educational achievements, Barzun believes that, above all, we must recall what our goals in schools should be: “Schools are not intended to moralize a wicked world but to impart knowledge and develop intelligence, with only two social aims in mind: prepare to take on one’s share in the world’s work and, perhaps in addition, lend a hand in improving society, *after* schooling is done. Anything else is the nonsense we have been living with.”

Once we keep these goals clear in mind the rest will follow logically: proper teaching in our grade schools in the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic. And the methods employed to accomplish these modest goals would be the methods that have proved successful for centuries: teaching reading by studying each letter in a word rather than the “look-and-say” method which has not only failed to insure adequate reading comprehension, but also has ruined the student’s spelling ability; teaching addition, multiplication, and division—not by the use of unrealistic “modern math,” but by the successful techniques of the past, including memorization of multiplication tables and of passages from the classics.

Similarly, history would be taught as a series of narratives—of certain events, certain people—at certain places, at certain times. The teacher should not try to incorporate all cultures, all peoples, all events—arranged so as to give each ethnic group its place in the sun. Furthermore, one should not forget that the

highest value of history is the development of "judgment in worldly affairs":

The student who reads history will unconsciously develop what is the highest value of history: judgment in worldly affairs. This is a permanent good, not because "history repeats"—we can never exactly match past and present situations—but because the "tendency of things" shows an amazing uniformity within any given civilization. As the great historian Burckhardt said of historical knowledge, it is not "to make us more clever the next time, but wiser for all time."

Classics, which Barzun grants are not the same for all people, even for the "experts," nevertheless do have certain traits in common: a link with the past, a repository of thought and feeling, adaptability to different countries and times, and general endorsement by a majority of teachers and critics. There may be classics in the non-Western world but they would be very difficult to teach because of inadequate knowledge by students and even by teachers of cultural differences among various ethnic groups. Hence most of the English-speaking world is left with Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, Homer, Virgil, Dante, Twain, Melville, Poe, Dickens, Fielding, Swift—not an impoverished literary feast by any means. And of course, the teacher can add others of his choice—e.g., Hawthorne, Joyce, Dostoevsky, D. H. Lawrence, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson and many others.

In essence, then, Barzun argues for a restoration of what used to be taught until the end of World War II—the fundamentals in the elementary grades, the addition of other subjects as the student progresses on the educational ladder, such as foreign languages, science, philosophy, etc. But one should never forget the basic goals of education: teaching and learning. All the rest is piffle and endless commentary.

What makes Barzun's diagnosis and

prognosis even more attractive is the elegance of his style, punctuated as it is with apt allusions, aphorisms, and wit. In criticizing the committee approach to solving problems in education, he writes: "A school can no more be run by committees and votes than can a ship." Commenting on the tendency of "educationists" to cover failures by webs of jargon, he writes: "You pretend to be in a state of uninterrupted orgasmic euphoria while actually in a condition of perpetual impotence." And in reflecting on the growing habits of college teachers to abdicate teaching for "research," attending conferences, writing up grant proposals and projects, giving speeches, grinding out articles, etc., Barzun believes that at least some of these "researchers" and manufacturers of pseudo-scholarship ultimately feel the futility of their efforts: "Some of them, perhaps, would like to change the name of their magazine *Daedalus* to *Sisyphus*."

In covering such a multitude of topics in the last forty years or so, Barzun obviously makes judgments with which some readers are bound to disagree. I myself think that the pernicious influence of TV, movies, and "rock" culture is scanted. This unholy trinity makes it extremely difficult for a student endlessly exposed to mediocrity and immorality to make the necessary transition to Barzun's educational ideal. I also feel that, while knowledge of one's subject matter is most important, I would not minimize psychological motivation or effective teaching methodology as requisites for the best results in the learning process. I vividly recall, and with considerable distaste, two of my own graduate English professors whose knowledge of their subject matter was indisputable, but whose lecturing from notes was not only soporific but also traumatic. At times I also felt that Barzun's occasional nostalgic desire to return to Pascalian monasticism (one of the thoughts he ex-