

few things. Speaking Christianly, of course one can say that from the perspective of faith, the same reason will exist for being happy at Christmas 1990 that has existed ever since that unique Nativity in Bethlehem just about two thousand years ago. But knowing reasons for being happy in principle does not always guarantee being happy in practice. However, leaving aside the many bad things as well as the good things that could happen between a late September magazine deadline and a December publication date, let us cast an eye on some of the lesser reasons for hope and happiness that we can discern on what Herman Dooyeweerd called the temporal horizon.

Over twenty years ago I returned to Harvard's Widener Library—it was in the summer of 1968—and met John H. Finley, Jr., the professor of classics whose teaching fellow—one of many—I had been a few years earlier. Even then, approaching retirement, Mr. Finley already represented the “old Harvard,” where the “stock of the Puritans” was still alive, as “Fair Harvard” says, and the university could still make some claim to be a “bearer of truth and a herald of light,” if no longer “the bearer” and “the herald.” Looking out of his study window at the newly trashy condition of once-verdant Harvard Yard, Mr. Finley asked me what I thought of the changes. Then, without waiting for an answer, he continued, “It’s exciting—all these brilliant young men and women, such questioning, so much imagination. If only it weren’t all so sordid. . . .”

Mr. Finley is now very old, and quite thoroughly retired, in a genteel nursing home. Visitors have reported that his old wit frequently still shines through. But he is no longer up to making visits to Widener Library, or to the Harvard Yard. The grass is verdant once more, and such sordidness as there is is no longer so superficially apparent. Unfortunately, he cannot travel to the hinterland, and therefore he probably will not see what can be seen from library windows here.

I hope that this does not sound too much like an argument *pro domo*. But while Professor Bloom laments the closing of the American mind and the State University of New York publishes *The Moral Collapse of the University*, there are signs of new life. In *The Decline of the West*, Oswald Spengler predicted that the 1980’s—just closed out—would be marked by an “increasing primitivism of the political process.” Nineteen eighty-eight did nothing to refute him. He also predicted that international politics would begin to be dominated by monetary concerns (set “oil” for “money” and he is right on target). But what he did not predict was increasing numbers of young men and women turning, with zeal, enthusiasm, and vigor, to the study and propagation of the Christian tradition. There are 15 theological schools in the Greater Chicago cluster. One of them, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, has 40 percent of the total number of students.

The late Samuel Sandmel, a noted rabbinic scholar, once criticized his celebrated contemporaries Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann, *et al.*, with the remark that he had always thought that Christianity made sense if one really believed its doctrines to be true, but only then. Conservative evangelical schools such as Trinity, Gordon-Conwell, and Westminster, to name but three, and renewal-oriented Roman Catholic schools such as the Franciscan University of Steubenville, by no means have the luster and prestige of

Harvard, Yale, or even Notre Dame and the Catholic University of America. But they do have the students in theology and related disciplines, “brilliant young men and women” who really do believe the Christmas story to be true.

Students who peruse the Books of Daniel and of the Apocalypse, and observe Saddam Hussein masquerading as the new Nebuchadnezzar, may well wonder if we are not witnessing the “signs of the times” that herald the End. But—as Martin Luther said—if you know that the world will end tomorrow, you should still plant a tree today. Among the many ominous signs of the times, there are also positive ones, and among the most positive, in my evaluation, is the existence of such an energetic throng of young students who don’t have a closed mind, who reject the “moral collapse” of the academy, and who are serious about their faith. It would be wonderful, from an evangelical perspective, to have a foothold in the older universities, but lacking that—at least for the moment—it is encouraging, and a sign of hope for the future, to see where so many of the students are. ◊

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DOWN, NOT OUT

by John Shelton Reed

The editor has asked for “a few lines on some sign of hope, some change for the better, some reason for optimism” from my territory, so here are three cheery news items, two more or less having to do with the South, one with my trade of sociology.

For starters, how about the fact that National Public Radio has opened a Southern bureau? Since I’ve said some hard things in the past about the bicoastal bias of NPR, I’m happy now to give them credit for trying. True, they’ve set up shop in Chapel Hill, which doesn’t provide much of a challenge to the dominant NPR sensibility, but at least they’re not in Atlanta. NPR’s Southern correspondent, David Molpus, apparently hasn’t got entirely above his Mississippi raising; he got off to a good start by explaining that he chose to locate in North Carolina for its basketball and barbecue.

But in fact you can now get decent barbecue in Cambridge, Massachusetts. That’s my second piece of good news: right there in the belly of the beast, in the heartland of secular humanism, they’re deconstructing pigs at Jake & Earl’s Barbecue. When I first heard about Bay State



barbecue I feared the worst—something like the catfish recipe I saw in *Esquire* not long ago that called for minced shallots, dry Sauterne, heavy cream, and poached seedless grapes, with pastry crescents in place of hushpuppies. But Jake & Earl's is run by a Southside Virginia boy, Chris Schlesinger, who reportedly tends a pretty good, traditional pit. My spy complains that Jake & Earl's motto ought to be "Southern Food at Northern Prices," but many Yankees wouldn't take a \$1.75 barbecue sandwich seriously. Besides, if a Virginian can rip them off, I say more power to him.

Obviously I don't buy the theory that eating pork makes you stupid, but good barbecue can certainly make you mellow, and Cambridge could use a dose of that. (By the way, Schlesinger is the author of *The Thrill of the Grill*, which is the kind of cookbook Jimmy Buffett would write if the composer-singer of such fun-in-the-sun masterworks as "Cheeseburger in Paradise" wrote cookbooks.)

To close on a more sober note: I wrote recently in *Chronicles* about Professor James Coleman of the University of Chicago, who a few years ago faced the threat of censure by the American Sociological Association. Coleman's transgression was not plagiarism, not fabricating data, not suppressing uncongenial findings, not dishonesty of any sort. On the contrary, Coleman had honestly reported his best interpretation of some sound research, and his offense, quite simply, was that his conclusions were not "p.c."—politically correct. In the event, the ASA did not disgrace itself by censuring a man who may be the most accomplished sociologist working today, but I gather it was a near thing.

Well, how's this for good news: Jim Coleman was recently elected president of the ASA. True, by any equitable standard his election was long overdue, but when he was finally nominated, he won handily.

It is ironic that Coleman was nominated by petition, having been passed over once again by the association's nominating committee, which came up with two worthy but less "controversial" figures. A generation ago, in *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties*, Samuel Stouffer reported that the elites of most American organizations, from churches to labor unions, were more "liberal" than the rank and file. This sociological generalization seems to have held up pretty well over the years, and it seems to hold for

the discipline of sociology itself. The fact that Coleman wasn't nominated by the association's official machinery suggests that the association's ordinary members are less far gone in ideological double-think—or at least less cowed by vocal pressure groups—than its leadership. Funny that it takes something like a populist revolt to restore "elitist" standards like excellence, isn't it?

We have a long way to go yet in sociology, and as far as I can see the condition of some other disciplines, notably in the humanities, is still deteriorating. But do you suppose that these things really do go in cycles? Could it be that the old academic values are just down, not out? ◇

John Shelton Reed is a professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is spending the 1990-1991 academic year at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Stanford, California.

WHY I LOVE THE LAMBADA

by Janet Scott Barlow

Three weeks after leaving home for college last fall, my son reported that he had attended a university-sponsored "minority festival," an event organized to explore, understand, and celebrate minority and alternative lifestyles, perspectives, and sensitivities. This was, however, a festival of unforeseen consequences, since it came to pass that all of the minority and alternative-lifestyle booths were completely ignored save one, that being the Hispanic booth, whose occupants, foregoing the usual leaflets and lectures, had set up a stage on which they presented a demonstration of the Lambada, that wonderfully steamy Latin-flavored dance. A huge and diverse crowd of students mobbed the front of the stage, all of them drawn there, according to my son, by a shared thirst for knowledge: the female partner in the dance duo—was she or was she not wearing panties under her twirling skirt?

The moral here is: never sell kids short. In a time when educators systematically practice political indoctrination in the name of intellectual and social development, it's nice to know that kids by their very nature—their nature being involuntarily youthful—are capable of turning coercion on its ear by transforming a university-sponsored sensitivity fest into a debate over a dancer's underwear. In the midst of artificially imposed questions, the young still seek real answers. Lambada, anyone? ◇



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