

Book Reviews

The Superfluous Men. Conservative Critics of American Culture, 1900-1945, edited by Robert M. Crunden. ISI Books, P.O. Box 4431, Wilmington, DE 19807, 428 pp., hardcover, \$24.95.

This book has a variety enough of authors and points of view to please no one, if the reader is looking for an agreeable few hours of innocent pleasure. On the other hand, if you can tolerate varying opinions and enjoy statements that are clearly written though not of your persuasion, you might find the book a delight. All of the authors are called conservative.

Attention is given to Santayana. I have never enjoyed Santayana, though I have read him irregularly for many years. I prefer writing that is simple and clear. Nor can I appreciate someone who delights in religion as a pleasant piece of nonsense we should value. Neither can I appreciate the Southern Agrarians. The time is past when we can base society on the farm. That way we shall starve, unless we reduce the world population drastically and pledge to live by the simple virtues but without technology.

Religion gets hard treatment by almost every author. There is almost universal agreement that the old faith is believed by no serious intellectuals. What then shall we do? Several authors blame modern ills on the Protestant Reformation, which is nonsense, and a couple of others argue that, notwithstanding that religion lacks intellectual maturity, we should become fundamentalists for some reason I could not divine. Lost sight of is the fact that people support religion because it is conducive to personal holiness, even if the clergy is obscure on the point.

H. L. Mencken is a delight with his comments on "The Need for an Aristocracy" and "Notes on Democracy." Mencken was a journalist with scholarship, genuine scholarship, which, sadly, is lacking now. Irving Babbitt writes on democracy and leadership and contrasts Humanism with humanitarianism. Democracy, he says, is in trouble because we have inadequate leadership, and, without this, we are rubble pushed around by talkers. Humanism promotes well-being by disciplined will, while humanitarianism promotes well-being by sentimentalism. The latter never achieves its goals because it assumes the development of character without work, which is impossible. Albert J. Nock despises what is called education but is no more than vocational training. A classical education, he believes, trains the capacity for inquiry without sentiment, which is the great need. My favorite author is Walter Lippman who writes clearly about the good society and is sensible without yelling.

—Angus MacDonald

The Libertarian Theology of Freedom, by Revered Edmund A. Opitz. Hallberg Publishing Corp. P.O. Box 23985, Tampa, Florida 33623, 160 pp., hard cover, \$18.95.

The thesis of this book is that the Christian faith underlies the practice and the law of American society, as it does that of European societies, and this faith has given us freedom, respect for property, compassion, and industry; further, the traditions of the Christian faith have underlined everything we do with these basic principles so there is little argument about them. They are accepted universally.

The disagreement arises from how we become compassionate. Few deny the validity of freedom, obedience to law, and the necessity of work, but what shall we do with the poor? The majority today believe that one of the functions of government is to assist the poor. Mr. Opitz argues that they are best helped by personal charity, the poor helping themselves, and that the compulsion of the state increases the poverty of society as a whole. His argument has merit when reliance on state subsidies denies the poor of the energy, freedom, and creativity they need to improve their lot.

There is a difference between the poor and derelicts. In today's world where anyone who wishes to work can find work, the poor have little excuse for not working. Welfare reform is an affirmation of that. We are left with derelicts. Can private charity take care of them? Perhaps. Mr. Opitz's libertarian philosophy does not answer the question.

The value of the book is the affirmation that wealth is created by individuals, transcendent laws derived from the Christian tradition rule society, and these laws inspire us to godly living.

—Angus MacDonald

A Cure Worse Than the Disease, by M. Lester O'Shea, Hallberg Publishing Corporation, P.O. Box 23985, Tampa, Florida 33623. 270 pp., hard cover, \$24.95.

This book studies legislation and judicial decisions that aim at "fairness" and argues that preferential treatment harms the recipient of special treatment and is unfair to everyone else.

The fight against "discrimination" is now largely a lunatic levelling crusade, a political payoff scheme, and a racket. It has created a system of de facto preferential treatment for another and a bonus program for the shameless.

The author points out that, in a market economy, it would be stupid for an employer to discriminate against an employee for any characteristic that is irrelevant to the work to be done. The imposition of legislative or judicial mandates puts confusion into the marketplace, breeds resentment, and increases the resentment that it is supposed to remove.

The book begins with a study of political correctness on college campuses where the principles of the Inquisition are normal. If you are not orthodox you are condemned, your literature stolen and burned, and you are treated as an outcast. He then goes through the litany of the victim classes: minorities, women, the aged,

impaired, homosexuals. Legislation and judicial decrees favor these as against the dominant white male, and lawsuits are brought with trivial claims. We operate under American, not English, laws—so the loser pays no fine, even for a trivial lawsuit. As class actions are generally brought against corporations or the federal government, both of whom are considered to have deep pockets, the defendant generally settles for a cash payment because of the exorbitant cost of litigation. Legislation that allows these excesses panders to prospective voters.

The book is well prepared and worth reading.

—Angus MacDonald

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- We should preserve the values of Western Civilization: the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions.