

# N T H R S R T F L R N N G

## Another Sort of Learning

By James V. Schall, Ignatius Press, 1988, 299 pages, \$12.95.

The phenomenal popularity of the television quiz show *Wheel of Fortune* no doubt derives from the program's ingenious economic imperative, which encourages contestants to delay solution of the puzzle while racking up points for guessing the letters that compose it. Home viewers are thereby assured of knowing the answer long before it is officially acknowledged. Indeed, first-time viewers unfamiliar with the scoring system are wont to exclaim of the calculating, sometimes greedy contestants: "How can they be so stupid? The answer is obvious!"

What keeps *Wheel of Fortune* fans coming back is the pleasant feeling of superiority they enjoy each time the answer is revealed and they find out that it's just what they thought it was. "I knew it was *The Closing of the American Mind* before they bought any vowels," one self-satisfied viewer confides. "I knew it as soon as I saw the C," boasts another.

One can't help but suspect that many readers knew what Allan Bloom was going to say before they read his book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, and that this predictability in fact accounts for its tremendous popularity. After all, Bloom didn't really tell us anything we didn't already know, did he? We've known for years that the colleges are filled with ideologues and ignoramuses (ignorami?). We didn't need to spend \$20.00 on a 400-page book to find that out, but of course we did, and we have to admit that we felt pretty good that someone finally said what we've said all along.

Though it too exposes the blight in the groves of academe, James V. Schall's *Another Sort of Learning* is not likely to enjoy the success of Bloom's book. Rather than make us feel superior, and just a little bit smug, by confirming our bleak assessments of contemporary education, Schall's effort seems designed to make us uneasy. We can't help but question the marketing savvy of an author who asserts that "most of the important things we do not in fact learn are not learned

because we choose not to learn them." Is Schall insinuating that we ourselves are to blame for our manifest deficiencies? That's no way to sell books.

And how can he suggest that a university is "not really equipped" to provide the education that we seem not to have gotten? What does he mean by describing contemporary education as "a system that is designed, consciously or unconsciously, to prevent us from confronting in our own lives the ultimate questions of existence and essence"? That's going to go over real big in the college towns. After all, it's one thing to say that the system isn't working (and that a few billion bucks will set it right); it's another thing entirely to say it isn't meant to work. Why, that's subversive! But what else can Schall mean when he asserts that "we meet the more ultimate things in our churches, in our families, in our living, in our friendships"?

Though we may have quibbled with Bloom's selection of worthy authors (after all, who bears more of the blame for the triumph of relativism than Rousseau and his co-conspirators, Diderot and Voltaire?), at least we recognized their names. But look at the list of authors\* that Schall recommends: Who in God's name are E. F. Schumacher, Gil-

\*Schall's List: G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* and *St. Thomas Aquinas*; Dorothy Sayers, *The Whimsical Christian*; J. M. Bochenski, *Philosophy: An Introduction*; Hilaire Belloc, *The Path to Rome*; Christopher Derrick, *Escape from Skepticism: Liberal Education as If the Truth Really Mattered*; E. F. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed*; C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* and *The Four Loves*; Gilbert Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue*; Eric Mascall, *The Christian Universe*; Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being: The Letters of Flannery O'Connor*; Henry Veatch, *Rational Man*; Josef Pieper, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity* and *The End of Time*; Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Solzhenitsyn at Harvard*; Julian Simon, *The Ultimate Resource*; Stanley Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God*; Raymond Denney, *Reason and Dignity*; Marion Montgomery, *Reflective Journey toward Order*; Eric Voegelin, *Conversations with Eric Voegelin*; M. Krapiec, *I — Man: An Outline of Philosophical Anthropology*; Yves Simon, *The Philosophy of Democratic Government*; Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe*; James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*.

bert Meilaender, Eric Mascall, and Stanley Jaki? And is it really necessary to read G. K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, and C. S. Lewis? Bloom doesn't even mention these guys.

Schall, it seems, doesn't know when to quit. He isn't satisfied condemning relativism; he has to use the T-word: Truth. Of course, Bloom used it too, but somehow, when Schall uses it, it seems to mean something specific. And it jars us, for we are not used to hearing it used that way, as Schall himself concedes:

The premises of "modernity" . . . do not allow us to think there is such a thing as a right order in anything, particularly in ourselves. Philosophic "pluralism" or skepticism typical of modernity constantly reminds us that nothing is true, that it is in fact dangerous even to propose that there might be truth, for this would imply that some kind of decision about reality can be made.

Where does Schall say we can find this truth? In Christianity. It is *revealed* to us, he says, much to the savant's chagrin: "Nothing has served to chide the pride of the philosopher more than this idea that the humble have been exalted [through revelation] to openness to the highest things." According to Schall, the failure of the university — the failure of all social institutions — can be traced to the individual's refusal to accept God. "Much of modern life is, in a sense, a constant effort to suggest to us some 'good,' some end, less than God as that which bears and incites our service and devotion." Schall reaffirms Chesterton's assertion that, "in the modern world, there [is] only one 'unpardonable heresy' and that [is] classic Christian orthodoxy."

This isn't the kind of thing we expected Schall to say. This isn't the kind of thing we want to hear. This isn't the kind of thing that sells books. What does religion have to do with education, anyway? And who in his right mind is going to pass up *Wheel of Fortune* to read some kind of religious tract? ■

— F. R. DUPLANTIER