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"Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5)

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Preview

In a series of fascinating personal observations, world-renowned economist Thomas Sowell talks about the failure of central planners and social engineers to improve the lot of blacks in America. He contrasts that failure with the success of blacks who have regarded hard work and determination rather than entitlements and victimhood as the key to getting ahead. He describes a bygone era in Harlem, but makes it clear that the values that inspired this era live on. Dr. Sowell's remarks were delivered during Hillsdale's Shavano Institute for National Leadership 10-year anniversary gala in Colorado Springs this past January.

There is a story, which I hope is apocryphal, that the French police were chasing a criminal who fled into a building in Paris. Their first thought was that they would surround the building. But then they realized that the building was so large, and had so many exits, that they didn't have enough policemen on the scene to do that. So they surrounded the building next door, which was smaller and had fewer exits.

Much of the academic research in the social sciences follows exactly this pattern of reasoning.

Often we don't have information on the variables that matter, so we surround other variables, using statistics that the Census Bureau, or the Congressional Budget Office, or someone else has supplied to us. Last year, for example, both the media and the politicians seized upon statistics which showed that blacks received less prenatal care, and had higher infant mortality rates, than whites. The obvious answer was more government spending on prenatal care. Yet the very same study showed that Mexican Americans received even less prenatal care than blacks and had slightly

Public Policy and Some Personal Reminiscences

by Thomas Sowell, Senior Fellow
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lower infant mortality rates than whites.

Prenatal care was the building next door.

Recently, looking back over my life while writing some autobiographical sketches, I realized that the variables which economists and sociologists can measure are not the variables that matter. Sometimes friends and colleagues, at gatherings like this, introduce me as someone who came out of Harlem and went on to the Ivy League (and, better yet, the University of Chicago). But this presents as unique something that was far from unique.

It was not the norm for people in Harlem to go on to college, but neither was it unique—not among the kids who grew up in Harlem in the 1940's, as I did. I am neither the best-known nor the most prosperous person to come out of the same neighborhood during the same era. Nor were all the others basketball players.

All of the places where I lived while growing up in Harlem were within a ten-block radius of 145th Street and St. Nicholas Avenue. Within that same radius lived a boyhood friend named Eddie Mapp, who is today dean of one of the colleges in New York City. In a building on the corner of 145th Street and St. Nicholas lived another boy, named Leonti Thompson who was not

a friend of mine—I can recall the teacher having to separate us when we were fighting in class—but Leonti grew up to become a psychiatrist, owned property in California's Napa Valley, and is today retired and living overseas, while I still have to work for a living. In the same building as Leonti lived an older boy who also did well and who made a name for himself—Harry Belafonte.

Within the same ten-block radius, at the same time, another fellow grew up to make money and a name—James Baldwin. Someone else who went to college within this same ten-block radius, though he lived elsewhere, was a young man named Colin Powell.

Were all these simply rare individuals? Perhaps, but it is also true that more black males passed the difficult entrance examination for Stuyvesant High School in 1938 than in 1983, even though the black population of New York was much smaller in 1938. As for the masses of students in the Harlem public schools at that time, their test scores were lower than those of students in affluent neighbourhoods, but not dramatically lower like today, and they were very similar to the test scores of white students in other working class neighbourhoods, such as on the east side of Manhattan. During some years, the kids in Harlem

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Thomas Sowell is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace and is the author of such well-known books as *Classical Economics Reconsidered* (Princeton University Press, 1974), *Knowledge and Decisions* (Basic Books, 1980), *Markets and Minorities* (Basic Books, 1981), *A Conflict of Visions* (William Morrow & Company, 1987), *Compassion Versus Guilt* (William Morrow & Company, 1989), and *Preferential Policies: An International Perspective* (William Morrow & Company, 1990). Nobel economists F.A. Hayek and Milton Friedman have called his work "brilliant"; Forbes has called him one of the greatest economists writing today.

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Editor: Ian Hodge

scored higher than the kids on the lower east side, and in other years the kids on the lower east side might nose them out. But they were both in the same league.

Ability grouping was very common in the Harlem schools in those days, as it was throughout the system. A Harlem youngster who was in the top-ability class at his grade level received a solid education that would allow him to go on and compete with anybody, anywhere. It is somewhat embarrassing today when people praise me for having gone through the Harlem Schools and then on to Harvard. I did not go through the Harlem schools of *today*—and would be lucky to get into any college if I did.

What is relevant to public policy is that none of the educational success of the past was a result of the kinds of policies and programs that are today being actively promoted in Washington or in the media. That is, we had none of the so-called "prerequisites" for quality education.

We did not, for example, have racially integrated student bodies. Nor did we have racial role models: Virtually all the teachers were white. I was taught more about a Dutchman named Peter Stuyvesant than about Frederick Douglass or W.E.B. DuBois. There was no "community input." It is also very doubtful that we had "adequate funding," since there never seems to be any in education. Those things are all like the building next door.

Certainly we did not have small classes and there were no teacher's aides. More importantly, there were no security guards. I was 42 years old when I first saw a security guard in a public school. Today, there are national conventions of public school security guards.

No one asked us if we preferred innovative and "exciting" teaching, rather than "rote memory." The Bible says: "By their fruits ye shall know them." In the educational literature of today, it is "by their excitement ye shall know them." When they proclaim a new program to be "exciting," people who ask, "Does it work?" are regarded as party poopers.

Back in the Harlem of the 1940s, no one asked if our homes were broken or bent. We did not sit around in circles unburdening our psyches, nor would anyone have dreamed of calling a teacher by her first name. No one asked what my sexual preferences were—nor would I have known what the question meant if they had.

I was very fortunate to have gone through school in those days, rather than today—and that good fortune has benefited me the rest of my life. It was one of those many pieces of good fortune which I could not fully appreciate until years later. But my good fortune did not consist in the kinds of things being promoted today, or the kinds of things that can be measured in the statistics of economists or sociologists. If I had been raised in a home with twice the money and half the attention, there is no question that I would have been much worse off.

Another piece of good fortune was meeting the kid named Eddie Mapp, whom I mentioned earlier. He came from a family with more of an educational background than mine, and he was more sophisticated about education and culture. He took me to a public library for the first time, and I can still recall the great difficulty I had understanding why we were in this building with all these books, when I had no money to buy books.

Part of my good fortune consisted of the family that I grew up in—and part of the ill fortune of today's students consists of the systematic undermining of families, and of the traditional values that parents try to pass on. Nowhere is this undermining of parents more pervasive and systematic than in the public schools. You would simply have to read the textbooks, or see the movies shown in schools, to understand what a betrayal is going on behind the backs of parents and the public.

Where I have been able to find schools with the kind of academic quality once taken for granted, they have seldom had the "prerequisites" listed by the education establishment. One of these schools, which I researched some years ago, was P.S. 39 in Brooklyn, a ghetto school where students scored at or above their grade level, even though about a third of them were on welfare. The building

A proposed homosexual vilification bill in the NSW parliament was intended to stop people saying and doing certain things with respect to homosexuals. For example, it was explained that while the proposal would not prevent reference to people as homosexuals, it would certainly stop people saying things such as wishing that a homosexual might get run over by a bus. This leads to an interesting proposition.

Would this proposal be used against Christians who might pray to God Almighty that He might bring down His wrath and anger on homosexuality? The imprecatory Psalms have long been used by God's people, not as a means of vindictiveness, but as an expression of the terrible with which God's righteousness and His holy name are held in contempt by so many.

There's been no discussion on this, and since most churches don't believe in praying in this manner, then it clearly has not become an issue. Maybe, however, someone might inquire to determine just what would be the case if the homosexual community, whose antagonism to "fundamental" Christianity is well established, were to gain such legislative favour as recently proposed. Perhaps we should be vigorously opposing such ideas because, in the end, not only would such legislation be wrong, but in addition it would clearly prevent Christians from public praying for God to visibly intervene in the affairs of men.

* * * *

One of the major problems with the public media is that they do not keep before us issues of vital importance. Many people seem indifferent to the affairs of life and, while they like to have some brief knowledge of the topic, a sustained follow-up campaign is not demanded. Consequently, it is not provided.

Aids and related illnesses is one topic that we should demand stay on the agenda. While the publicity has certainly died, the issue itself has not gone away. For example, new strains of hepatitis have been discovered. Hepatitis E has now been located. (What will they do when they've found the 27th strain? Call it hepatitis AA?)

In a recent interview, Gene Antonio, author of *The AIDS Cover-Up*, has confirmed that AIDS is still on the increase. It is estimated that by the year 2000 there will be 120 million people with the AIDS virus throughout the world. This is an incredible number. In less than 20 years since its discovery, the AIDS virus will have infected millions.

What is also becoming clear is that AIDS can no longer be confined to the homosexual community. It is a disease that has no sexual preferences. Since the infected numbers are expanding, it is also clear that those with the virus are taking little or no efforts to reduce their activities so that the virus will not be passed on.

Together with the AIDS virus are the new strains of hepatitis and a marked increase in tuberculosis. All of these diseases are deadly and highly contagious. Current medical knowledge does not effectively allow treatment of AIDS. The treatment for tuberculosis is known, it's expensive, and

was so old that there were gas jets in the halls, because it was built in the era of gas lights, before electricity.

One of the unfashionable things the school principal did was to have ability grouping within the school. This school, like so many schools, was once an all-white institution. As the neighborhood changed, the composition of the students obviously changed with it. I asked the principal: "Suppose someone else wants to reproduce what you have done here. If they have ability grouping, won't there be a period of transition, where the white kids are concentrated in the top classes and the black kids in the bottom classes? And even though that will take care of itself over time, won't you get a lot of flack during the transition?"

His reply was: "You just take the flack." That is not an attitude you find among most public school administrators.

One of the great contrasts between the schools of the past and the schools of today is in discipline. Here I speak from some experience, because I was one of the mischievous kids who ran afoul of that discipline, though not in anything like the ways kids get into trouble today.

When my eighth-grade teacher discovered a prank in the classroom, she said "Oh, if I ever find out who did this, Sowell. . . ."

On one of the many afternoons when I was kept after school, Miss Karoff said sarcastically, "Well, here we are again, Sowell, just the two of us."

"Good grief, Miss Karoff," I said, "if we keep staying in after school together all the time, people will begin to talk."

Without even looking up from her paperwork, she replied, "We'll just have to learn to live with the scandal."

Today, punishing a student, much less suspending him, can literally be a federal case. Recently, in East Palo Alto, a ghetto not far from Stanford University, there was a legal challenge to the suspension of a student who kicked a teacher in the groin. The student had legal counsel supplied by the Stanford law school, which runs a project in East Palo Alto. Apparently Stanford thinks that they are helping the residents of East Palo Alto by keeping hoodlums in their schools, so that the other children there can't learn.

Isn't it a shame that blacks don't have enough money to be able to hire attorneys to go over into white neighborhoods and create lawsuits to keep white hoodlums in school, so that the people at Stanford and similar places could understand the consequences of what they are doing?

The great tragedy of contemporary American education is that actual consequences mean far less than prevailing myths. These myths and illusions cover many areas, including the role of teachers and the relationships between students and teachers.

My great mentor, the late George Stigler at the University of Chicago, was not one of those who shared these illusions. When someone mentioned to him the legendary image of Mark Hopkins sitting on a log, talking to a student on the other end, Stigler said: "Sometimes you could do just as well sitting on the student and talking to the log." The "self-esteem" dogma, so much in vogue in education today, never seemed to be one of Stigler's guiding principles. Anyone who crossed swords with George Stigler, whether in a classroom or otherwise, was unlikely to have his self-esteem raised. As for the warm and close relationship between student and teacher, Stigler once said of his own mentor, Jacob Viner: "I never threw my arms around Jacob Viner; he would have killed me if I'd tried." And I never threw my arms around George Stigler for exactly the same reason.

There are those who believe that evaluating the quality of a teacher means having someone sitting in the classroom, observing what is going on, and then writing up a report afterward. Many would apply this procedure all the way up to the college level. From my own experience, I think this is both a mistaken and a dangerous idea.

What goes on in a classroom is neither the sum total of teaching nor even the most important part of teaching. Certainly during my own teaching career, at least half the work of a course consisted of preparing the course, and all of that took place before the first student showed up.

One of my teachers in college, Professor Arthur Smithies, never would have passed the classroom examination test. Smithies used to sort of drift into the classroom, almost as if he had meant to go somewhere else and had taken the wrong turn. He would wander around the room, look out the window, and become fascinated by the traffic in Harvard Square. Then, being a polite fellow, he would realize that we were still there, and turn to say something to us. Students thought he was a terrible teacher. But, in fact, his course shaped my whole career.

Professor Smithies taught the history of economic thought, and through him I became interested in that subject which became my professional specialisation in economics. It was through Smithies' course that I first learned of George Stigler. After read-

requires complete isolation of the patient.

The new antibiotic wonder-drugs have become highly important in the fight against many illnesses, including hepatitis. However, it is now clear that germs and viruses are building their own immunity to these drugs. This means that stronger doses are required to overcome illness.

This would seem to indicate that it is wise to avoid antibiotics except in essential cases. Doctors may be prescribing these drugs too easily, thereby exacerbating the buildup of immunity against the drugs by viruses and germs. For example, it may not be necessary to take antibiotics for a common cold. While the discomfort is real, a cold will usually disappear after a few days. The abuse of substances, even good substances such as antibiotics, appears to produce its own level of detrimental effects. The biblical pattern of everything in moderation remains appropriate.

EVERY THOUGHT CAPTIVE

by Richard L. Pratt Jr.
reviewed by Matthew Hodge

Have you ever tried to talk to someone about the Bible, and been confronted with the question, "How do I know the Bible is true?" Sadly, there are some Christians who don't know how to answer these questions. Defending the Christian faith, or Biblical apologetics, as it is commonly called is an important part of Christian life.

Every Thought Captive by Richard L. Pratt Jr. is a guide to apologetics. This book tells us that the reason why unbelievers refuse to believe in God and His Word is because they are committed to independence. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, they chose to make a decision independent of God. From that time onwards sinful man has wanted to make his own decisions about life, the Bible, and even the existence of God.

The book starts with a definition of apologetics. Apologetics comes from the Greek word APOLOGIA. APOLOGIA refers to defence. Therefore apologetics refers to defending something. Biblical apologetics means defending the Christian faith.

Every Thought Captive then moves on to talk about Creation and how all creation is dependent on God. God is independent of man. The Bible says in Acts 17:25: "neither is He [God] served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things." Being God's creation, man is dependent on God. Acts 17 goes on to say in verse 28: "for in Him we live and move and exist. . ." Although man can think and reason by himself, true knowledge is revealed to us by God.

Then Mr. Pratt talks about the nature of man before sin, and how man was totally dependent on God. He talks about the nature of man during sin. Eve desired to make her own decisions and be independent, and in choosing to do this instead of following God, death and sin entered the world. The nature of man after he has been redeemed by Christ is discussed. Even though Chris-

ing an article by Stigler among the assignments in that course I resolved that I would study under him in graduate school.

Had you observed Stigler himself in class, he was much better than Arthur Smithies. But I am sure that there would be other teachers whom you could not have distinguished from George Stigler in the classroom—except by the *substance* of what he said. Only if you could understand and appreciate his substance would you realize that here was one of the great minds of our time.

Education professors may believe that there is such a thing as teaching independently of what is being taught, but that is one of the reasons our schools are so bad. The notion that some college dean, especially from one of those large universities with 20,000 or 30,000 students, could sit in classrooms with professors from 30 or 40 different disciplines and form any intelligent idea of what they were saying in substance—such a notion boggles the mind.

I had another reminder of my good fortune a few years ago, when my niece confessed to me that she had harboured a number of resentments over the years. One thing that provoked her resentment was when her father and I would talk about the old days when I was growing up, and all the things that we did together, sane and insane. What made her resentful was that he never did any of those things with her. Her resentments were also on behalf of her brother, as well as herself. Her father, she said, "treated you better than he treated his own son." When I thought about it, I realized that she was probably right.

The reason was simple: I happened to come along earlier, at a time when her parents were a couple of carefree young people with two salaries and no children, and with lots of time, much of it given to me.

This good fortune, like so many of the factors that go into shaping people's lives, consisted of things which are utterly uncontrollable by the government, or by any other human institution. Had I been born five years earlier or five years later, there is no question that I would have been worse off. If you looked at the kinds of statistical indices used by economists and sociologists, my niece came from a better environment than I did, but it was not an environment that was able to offer her as much as my environment offered me.

The whole notion that you can equalise opportunity in the things that matter is utopian. Some years ago, there was a study of National Merit Scholarship finalists broken down by the size of the family they came from, from two-child families to five-child families. In each family size, the first-born became a National Merit finalist more often than all the other children put together. Here we are talking about children born of the same parents and raised under the same roof. Yet even though heredity and environment, as those terms are conventionally defined, have both been held constant, nevertheless here is a major disparity in outcomes.

Clearly, conventional statistics do not measure what really matters, nor are policy-makers who rely on such statistics able to do much more than surround the building next door.

tians do still sin like non-Christians, they are dependent on God to save them from their independent ways.

The non-Christian view is considered. Non-Christians claim to be able to make decisions based on their own independent decisions. But what is their independence based on? They may say that their decisions are right and true because they are based on science. But what is science based on? How can the non-Christian be absolutely sure that science is true? He cannot.

The Christian, however, makes his decisions based on the Bible. The Christian knows the Bible is true and infallible because God says so in His Word. Unbelievers may say they do not believe in the Bible, and that it is not true, but as they have no infallible standard to judge God's Word with, they cannot at any time be absolutely certain that the Bible is not true.

Attitudes and Actions is another topic. How Christians approach the unbeliever is very important. We should approach the non-Christian with gentle firmness, i.e. not being too weak and compromising in our defence, and not overly pushy and bulldozing.

"The Basic Structure of a Biblical Defence" is the longest chapter in the book. It details the basic method of defending the faith and confronting unbelievers. We should tell unbelievers that our claims are based on our commitment to Christ, whereas their claims are based on their commitment to independence.

The book tells us how to use Scripture to back up our claims, and how to argue by folly. This means showing the non-Christian that using his independent standards he has no alternative but God's True Word. For example an unbeliever cannot be absolutely certain that God does not exist, because he has not been everywhere and studied everything, so therefore the unbeliever cannot prove that God does not exist. He cannot be absolutely uncertain that God exists either. He still has not studied enough and been everywhere to find proof that the existence of God is uncertain. The non-Christian is really left with no alternative if he sticks to his commitment to independence. Subsequently the unbeliever should be asked to forsake his commitment to independence. Only then, will he be free from this dilemma.

Author Richard Pratt provides examples of the possible objections that unbelievers might raise against Christianity and the Biblical answers to these objections. Mr. Pratt's book is a practical guide for defending Christianity.

Best of all, it was originally intended for high school students, so it is written in clear, simple text, making it easy to understand for the ordinary person. (Take it from me. I'm only 14 and I understood it, when I read it.) Also, *Every Thought Captive* is written in the form of a series of lessons, so it can be used in schools, youth groups, and Bible studies.

Every Thought Captive is available from Christian Reformed Bookstore, 68 Charlton Street, ASCOT QLD 4007. Price: \$8.95 + \$1 post & handling.