

Author changes views, supports traditional education

WASHINGTON—You may not remember Neil Postman's controversial book of a decade ago: "Teaching as a Subversive Activity."

No matter. It was all a mistake in the first place, he now admits. Well, he doesn't quite admit that he was wrong, only that the time—and his views—have changed. His new book is "Teacher as a Conserving Activity."

**william
raspberry**

The earlier book, co-authored with Charles Weingartner, was heavily into education "reform." More electives. More freedom. More openness. More individualization of instruction. More tolerance in such matters as grammar.

Now he's pushing such traditional values as careful speech and writing and even dress codes.

What happened?

"Fifteen years ago," Postman told the New Times in a recent interview, "it seemed to me that the schools needed to be innovative because culture—its politics and social ideas—was not keeping pace with technological change. So the schools had to serve as a spark for change. They needed to do things like add more subjects to the curriculum."

"WE SUCCEEDED IN opening up the schools, but since then the impact of tele-

vision and the other communications media have forced change at a much more rapid rate than even I thought possible 15 years ago. The changes have come fast and furious. Now schools face a different situation."

It wasn't so much that he was wrong back then, you see. It's just that times have changed. Television, you know.

Postman should come off it. Television and "the other new media" weren't the culprits, then or now. The problem is a mistaken view of what the public schools can and should do.

Education—public education most especially—should be a conservative enterprise. Its central purpose is (or should be) to preserve the common themes, the traditional values, of the society and to conserve a common body of knowledge.

When the rest of society is in flux, as it was at the time of Postman's earlier book, it becomes more important, not less, for the schools to stay on track.

JAZZ MUSICIANS WILL understand what I mean. The essence of jazz is innovation—improvisation. But if the horn men are to be free to take flights of improvisational fancy, the bassist or the drummer—somebody—must hold the line.

DUE IN PART to the influence of writers like Postman, we have children engaged in historical criticism who never learned grammar and spelling. We have children who are choosing from a dizzying array of "electives" before they are old enough to know the necessities. And the

result is that we are raising up a generation of children who know neither the new or the old.

To return to the music analogy, it seems to me that it is the peculiar role of the schools (and of the homes) to do two things: to conserve the accumulated knowledge of theory and technique and to keep thumping out the rhythm that makes improvisation and innovation possible.

Seek ye first a thorough grounding in the traditional and the innovative shall be added unto you.

Postman, to his credit, seems finally to understand that, though only dimly.

Pope...

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In the same vein, the sanctity of human life, of which the pope spoke eloquently, is clear as long as we don't define life. Again, science has upset order: It has enabled us to save the most handicapped, the wounded, and to extend "life" in the form of breathing. We are forced every day to make very human decisions about what life is. Is pulling the plug "euthanasia" or ensuring a "natural death"?

We have, to a certain degree, displaced nature in our attempt to soften its rule. Today, biomedical sciences are the greatest challenge since astronomy. In the 17th century, it was heresy, a burnable offense, to say that the earth was not the center of the universe, but just a planet that cricled around the sun.

IN BRECHT'S famous play about Galileo, an old cardinal gasps: "Mr. Galileo transfers mankind from the center of the universe to somewhere on the outskirts. Mr. Galileo is therefore an enemy of mankind and must be dealt with as such."

"I've done a turnaround on the question of standard dialect," he told the Times. "Back in those days, I had the idea that a school should encourage diversity and variety on the ground that society was not doing that."

"Now it seems to me that many of our institutions—religious, economic, political—encourage diversity and variety. So one valuable function of the schools today is to teach some standard language that could then act as a unifying force for all the children in school."

Welcome back, Postman.

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Even his pope, Urban VIII, a man educated in science, allowed Galileo to be arrested by the Inquisition. As the head of the Church he had to defend harmony.

If astronomy violated the order of heaven and earth, today biomedical sciences, like technology, change the human place in the balance of nature.

At the very end of Brecht's play, the pope cries, "I do not want to hear the battle cries: 'Church, Church, Church!! Reason, Reason, Reason!'" Eventually those battle cries died down: The earth moved around the sun and the Church accommodated.

Unless we are willing to go back to a world in which people give birth to eight children to ensure the survival of two, in which death was often swift and arbitrary, or willing to accept a world in which nature eventually rules again through famine, we have to accept birth control. Surely, on this issue, too, the Church will accommodate.

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Projecting into the future, allow me to allude to the November meeting and some other student government concerns. In the November meeting there are four (and possibly five) issues of student concern. First, the question of a \$2 student fee increase will be posed to the regents for the funding of the student union utilities. I feel that a student fee increase at this time would be unwise.

Another item on the November agenda will be a proposal to implement a program aimed at the training of graduate teaching assistants. This program would entail teaching techniques and language enhancement. Hopefully, with the small amount of dollars needed for a T.A. training program we can improve the quality of undergraduate education. Much credit is due to the ASUN Senate for initiating this idea.

Two more items will be brought up in November: the proposed Alumni Center and a change in the Speakers Policy. Much has been said and written about the Alumni Center proposal. The posture we will take is that a new Alumni Center is needed but not at the expense of students.

This issue of funding political and ideological speakers via mandatory student fees will be regenerated in November.

Another item I wish to inform you of pertains to the hours of the libraries on-campus next semester. The library staff has moved that, due to budgetary deficiencies they will close campus libraries one hour earlier Sunday through Thursday and entirely on Saturday. ASUN feels this is an atrocity. We will go to extremes to combat this proposal.

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