

Find this article at:

<http://www.statesman.com/opinion/palaima-going-by-the-book-191643.html>

COMMENTARY

Palaima: Going by the book

Thomas G. Palaima, REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR

Austin American-Statesman Monday, January 25, 2010

The books that political figures write tell us lots about their future ambitions.

Barack Obama's "Dreams From My Father" re-released in 2004 and "The Audacity of Hope," published two years later, were written with 2012 in mind. They turned out to be just as useful in 2008.

John F. Kennedy's "Profiles in Courage" (1955) won the Pulitzer Prize and in 1960 gave him a much-needed brand of statesmanlike wisdom beyond his years. Sarah Palin's "Going Rogue" signals that her real ambitions lie outside the Fox News studios.

We ignore the books of politicians at our own risk. Their books give us both the sheep's clothing and the wolves. The classic example is Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf." Hitler's rambling narrative later became prescribed reading for the youth of Germany and newlywed couples. But the fascism, hatred of Jews and intellectuals and grandiose dreams of personal power and German hegemony were all there well before Hitler actually became leader.

Of the candidates for Texas governor, only incumbent Rick Perry has gone author like Palin. Not surprisingly, she has endorsed Perry: "He walks the walk of a true conservative." Palin likes Perry's opposition to abortion rights and to using federal money for education in Texas or to help unemployed and uninsured Texans. We don't know how Palin feels about the words Perry writes. But we should take the time to find out how we feel about them.

Perry's book, "On My Honor: Why the American Values of the Boy Scouts Are Worth Fighting For," came out in February 2008. Although classified as a book on parenting and families and the Boy Scouts, they are the sheep's clothing.

George W. Bush gave us an unending war on terror. Perry, according to his publisher, gives us "a culture war that rages close to the surface of American life." The book recounts in great detail what Perry calls "the left's attacks on the Boy Scouts of America" and "takes dead aim at the moral relativism of the secular humanist movement, indicting its corrosive impact."

Perry describes rural Texas in the 1950s as a simple, homogenous Garden of Eden, from which we were cast out in the 1960s. In his view, the '60s were a dark period of "sexual revolution, anti-Vietnam War activism and opposition to government authority" that brought about our current "overemphasis on individualism" and failure "to teach children right and wrong."

He does not consider that the authority we defied in the '60s cost 57,000 American lives in Southeast Asia, kept black Americans separate and unequal, kept women locked up as little homemakers, kept gays and lesbians in the closet and viewed free political speech and thought as un-American activities.

Perry puts "attacks on Scouts" in three main categories: girls and women, God and sexual orientation or gay rights. He admits it was good that the Boy Scouts finally permitted women into all adult leadership positions in February 1988. But he refuses to see what many scouting organizations in other countries have already seen: Having adults of all sexual orientations being openly and naturally who they are is healthy for the youngsters and teenagers who need to have nurturing role models for their own developing identities.

And there is also no harm in finding out that adults can behave reverently as scout leaders even if they doubt or deny the existence of God. I was an active and caring scout leader for eight years and kept my agnosticism in the closet.

Do read Perry's book. He thinks he is fighting a culture war. You might want to know how he is fighting it and which side he thinks you are on.

tpalaima@sbcglobal.net