

SOME MEN OF INTEGRITY

by Henry Regnery

Mr. Regnery, chairman of the board of the Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, delivered this address at the 121st Commencement of Hillsdale College. At that time, he also received, from President George Roche, the Hillsdale College Independence Award, inscribed to "Henry Regnery, scholar, publisher, conservator of liberty."

While sitting in Symphony Hall, Boston, on a hot, humid June day almost forty years ago, waiting for the document which would mark my final and complete separation from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the study of mathematics, I made a promise to myself never, under any circumstances, in the extremely unlikely event that the opportunity should ever arise, to inflict myself as a commencement speaker on a group of helpless graduates. Nevertheless, here I am. However firm our resolve, the thousand or more people standing this spring before graduating classes all over the country, like me, couldn't resist the opportunity to try to impart to you and to others in your situation, remembering ourselves under similar circumstances, something we have learned which might help you to come to terms with the time and world you have inherited. It is a to you and to others in your situation, remembering ourselves under similar circumstances, something we have learned which might help you to come to terms with the time and world you have inherited. It is a privilege to speak to you, and one I found it hard to resist.

Having devoted most of my adult life to publishing books, which is to say, bringing the work of others to the attention of those who might be interested, my experience has been that of intermediary. I can make no claim to scholarship or to originality, but I have had the opportunity, because of the work I have been engaged in, to come in contact with creative people, and to see something of the process by which ideas become effective, or, to use a phrase of Ezra Pound, weigh in. In the highly organized

world we see around us, which seems more for the benefit of the organizers than the organized, and dominated, as it seems, by huge, impersonal bureaucracies—bureaucracies of government, of corporations, of labor unions, of education, of communications, it is easy to believe that the individual doesn't count for much, is a helpless pawn in a gigantic, impersonal apparatus. The course of history, however, is not determined by impersonal forces, by some mysterious Zeitgeist lurking in the shadows, but by human personalities, and what I would like to do today is to tell you something about the lives and impact of a half dozen or so men I have had some contact with who, by their intellectual integrity, devotion to principle, steadfastness and courage, have helped to preserve the values of our civilization; in a positive way have made a difference.

WHO, by their intellectual integrity, devotion to principle, steadfastness and courage, have helped to preserve the values of our civilization; in a positive way have made a difference.

I will begin with T. S. Eliot, a man whose name and work are familiar, I am sure, to all of you. He was born, of course, in St. Louis, came from an old New England family, went to Harvard when another Eliot, related to his family, was president, and came under the influence of such teachers as Josiah Royce and Irving Babbitt. He did graduate work at Harvard, spent a year or two studying in France and Germany, and in 1914 went to the University of Marburg to finish his doctoral thesis with the intention of becoming a professor of philosophy at Harvard, as his family wished and his background, education and

im·pri·mis (im-pri' mīs) adv. In the first place. Middle English, from Latin *in primis*, among the first (things)...

IMPRIMIS is the journal from The Center for Constructive Alternatives. As an exposition of ideas and first principles, it offers alternative solutions to the problems of our time. A subscription is free on request.

talents seemed almost to require. On the outbreak of the war he left Marburg for Oxford, and later finished his thesis, which was accepted. Instead of returning to Harvard, however, and going through the few formalities that remained for his degree, which would have assured him a comfortable and respected position, against the strong opposition of his family he chose to stay in England, and to make his way in the difficult and uncertain field of literature.



The way from the Harvard graduate student, recently arrived in war-time London without money or connections, to the towering figure we remember, recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, the great man of letters of his time, a poet, critic, essayist and playwright of an eminence unique for this century, was neither easy nor accidental, and was achieved without concessions of any kind to popular taste or fashion. Eliot was a conservative and an active Christian and churchman when the tide was overwhelmingly in the opposite direction, his poetry is demanding and his literary criticism, based as it is on a thorough and precise knowledge of literature and language, austere and uncompromising. For most of the first ten years after settling in London he worked as a clerk in a large bank, conscientiously and successfully; it was during this period that he wrote *The Waste Land*, which established his reputation as a major

poet, and founded the *Criterion*, which he edited for nearly fifteen years and made one of the most respected and influential journals in the English-speaking world.

T. S. Eliot was a man of great dignity, but rather shy and unassuming, generous, always interested in younger writers. He lived in and was a part of his time, earned his living working in a publishing office, took an active part in church affairs, wrote on politics, lectured to university audiences. You will forgive me, I hope, if I quote the following lines from *East Coker* of *The Four Quartets*, which gives us not only a glimpse of Eliot's own estimation of his work, but an indication as well of his humility and the depth of his wisdom and understanding:

So here I am, in the middle way, having had
 twenty years—
 Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre
 deux guerres*—
 Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
 Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
 Because one has only learnt to get the better of
 words
 For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way
 in which
 One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each
 venture
 Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
 With shabby equipment always deteriorating
 In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
 Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there
 is to conquer
 By strength and submission, has already been
 discovered
 Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one
 cannot hope
 To emulate—but there is no competition—
 There is only the fight to recover what has been
 lost
 And found and lost again and again: and now,
 under conditions
 That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain
 nor loss.
 For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our
 business.

When one speaks of T. S. Eliot it is easy to turn to his friend Ezra Pound. Pound was born in Idaho, but was taken as a small child to Philadelphia, where he grew up. He received an M.A. in Romance Languages from the University of Pennsylvania, taught for one semester at Wabash College, and arrived in London by way of Venice in 1908 as a sort of wandering minstrel, with little more in his pocket than a book of his

poetry. Within five years he knew most of the important writers and artists of London, who also knew him, had published five books of verse, several translations, and *The Spirit of Romance*, which is



still in print. Pound not only had a great poetic gift, but enormous energy and vitality as well, all of which, combined with his extreme generosity, his crusading spirit and his passion for letters made him a uniquely creative person, not only in his own work, but through his influence on others. Pound met Eliot in 1914, who soon after sent him the manuscript of *Prufrock*; Pound, as is well known, immediately dashed off a letter to Harriet Monroe in Chicago, having more or less made himself European editor of her new magazine *Poetry*, and finally prevailed upon her to publish the poem, Eliot's first to be published, rather against her will, in the issue of June, 1915. Pound arranged to have other works of Eliot published, introduced him to various people, including Wyndham Lewis, who has written a delightful account of that first encounter with Mr. Eliot in the diminutive, triangular sitting room of Ezra's London flat. Pound, no doubt, had much to do with Eliot's decision to stay in London and devote his life to letters, and it was Pound, as we all know, who pulled the manuscript of *The Waste Land* together and turned it, as Eliot described the process "from a jumble of good and bad passages into a poem." Eliot, of course, was by no means the only writer to be strongly influenced by what Lewis was later to describe as the "astonishing

didactic intelligence" of Ezra Pound. Pound discovered James Joyce in 1914, when Joyce was living in Trieste, poor, cut off from his own countrymen and language, largely unpublished, almost completely unknown, discouraged; literally at the end of his tether. Pound arranged to get him published, found financial assistance, offered the intelligent, critical judgement and encouragement any artist needs, and this at a time when Pound's own circumstances were far from flourishing; during the first year of his marriage, from November 1, 1914 to October 31, 1915, his "gate receipts," as he described it, were exactly £42/10, about \$210. He was forced to do all sorts of odd literary jobs, even made his own furniture, but he had the time and energy to find the help Joyce desperately needed. Hemingway was a Pound discovery, and it was Pound who found a publisher for another unknown young American writer, Robert Frost. For all his mistakes in judgement involving politics, his enthusiasms for queer monetary quackeries, Pound was not only a great poet, but had a great and lasting influence through his unerring critical judgement, his generosity, his insistence on the proper use of language, his unswerving devotion to the truth as he saw it.

Having said something about Eliot and Pound, I should bring in also the third of the "Men of 1914," their life-long friend and associate in a number of projects, Wyndham Lewis. Lewis is less well known than Eliot or Pound, because, perhaps, of his difficult personality—he was excessively suspicious, quick to take offense, had none of the gentleness of Eliot, nor the great generosity that characterized both Eliot and Pound. Lewis, however, had a great intelligence. Roy Cambell, the South African poet, who had been a close friend of both Eliot and Lewis, once remarked to me, "Eliot is a saint, but Lewis (pointing to his head) has it up here." Lewis was an important painter—his portraits of Eliot, Pound and Edith Sitwell are of classic quality, he wrote a number of novels, at least one of which, *Revenge for Love*, will rank among the significant novels of this century. Such books as *Pale Face*, *Men Without Art*, the *Art of Being Ruled* still have much to say to us, and there is *Time and Western Man*, a frontal attack of great learning and erudition on what Lewis considered the basic philosophical position of the contemporary Western world, the philosophy which holds, as he put it, that "time and change are the ultimate realities." In addition to all that, Lewis was highly regarded as an art critic, and was a polemicist of great skill. Finally, Eliot, who should have known about such things, said of him, "The opinion to which I do not hesitate to commit myself is that Mr. Lewis

is the greatest prose stylist of my generation—perhaps the only one to have invented a new style.”

In his relations with other people Lewis could be exasperating and difficult—he is said to have cheated publishers out of advances on occasion, he could be disloyal to his friends and merciless and sometimes unfair to his enemies or imagined enemies, but for all that, his position toward art and letters was one of uncompromising seriousness and honesty, and it is for this reason that he deserves our admiration and respect. He was overwhelmed by the conviction that Western civilization was destroying itself, and that it was his obligation to do whatever was in his power to halt the process of disintegration. His war against the prevailing orthodoxy of his time and those who represented it can only be understood on the basis of this conviction. The depth of his feelings, perhaps, can be gathered from the following: “With all the energy at their disposal, a majority of the modern intellectuals have striven to excite to passionate action—not to exhort to reflection and moderation, not appealed to the reason, but always to the emotions: they have pointed passionately to the battlefield, the barricade, the place of execution, not to what is harmonious and beautifully ordered. This is in fact *the betrayal*.” Rather than “petting and fawning upon his contemporaries,” as he felt most of the writers of his time made a practice of doing, because that is what was wanted, Lewis devoted his enormous energy and talent to intelligent, rigorous criticism and to creative work of the highest order.

In 1947, in the disillusionment of post-war London, he wondered if the fight had been worthwhile. “Today, I should not write such books at all. People ought to be allowed to drop to pieces in any way they choose.” But then the old fighter went on to say, “. . . Darwin, Voltaire, Newton, Raphael, Dante, Epictetus, Aristotle, Sophocles, Plato, Pythagoras: all shedding their light upon the same wide, well-lit Graeco-Roman highway, with the same kind of sane and steady ray—one need only mention these to recognize that it was at least excusable to be concerned about the threat of extinction to that tradition.”

There are many other men who, in our time of troubles and mass uniformity of opinion have maintained their moral and intellectual integrity and thus contributed to the life of reason and to the preservation of civilized values. One could speak of the economist Wilhelm Roepke, for example, who, a few weeks after Hitler came to power dared to put his position and life on the line by pointing out in a

great public speech that what was happening was not a renewal or an awakening, but a return to barbarism, and who lived to provide the German authorities, in the dark days after the war, with the policies which led to the German economic revival, and which owed their legitimacy alone to his moral integrity. Eric Voegelin is another man who ought to be mentioned, one of the great scholars and creative thinkers of our time, for what he has done, among other things, to illuminate the long, arduous process by which reason was discovered as the ordering force in existence. All that would take too long; I will add only two to the gallery I have tried to present to you, both of them known personally to many of you, and if not personally, certainly through their work: Russell Kirk and William F. Buckley Jr.



Russell Kirk was born in Michigan, not far from here, and still lives, of all places, in Mecosta, surrounded by ghosts and the stumps of Michigan's former glory. He did his undergraduate work at Michigan State, and graduate work at Duke and St. Andrews University in Scotland, where he felt most at home as a student, I think, and which has had the most pervasive influence on him. It was at St. Andrews where the book originated which established his reputation, *The Conservative Mind*, which was published in 1953, when Kirk was 35 and an Instructor

in History at Michigan State. Other books had helped to prepare the way for the revival of conservatism, Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*, Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences*, among others, but it was the breadth of scholarship, the classic English, the skill with which its author demonstrated the vitality and significance to our history of a long tradition that made the appearance of *The Conservative Mind* a landmark in the intellectual history of the post-war period. It was this book which not only gave the opposition to the prevailing liberal orthodoxy its name, but substance and coherence as well. If there is a conservative movement in this country, and we have every reason to believe that there is, it was Russell Kirk who set it in motion. Soon after the publication of *The Conservative Mind* he gave up the security of a teaching position at Michigan State to embark on the difficult career of independent writer and man of letters. His many subsequent books and essays, his newspaper columns and his lectures have all served the restoration of values and the attainment of a more humane society. His last book is a study of the work of T. S. Eliot, whom he knew personally and whose work he has studied with characteristic thoroughness and understanding. *Eliot and His Age* is a book on a high level of scholarship, and written in a style worthy of the master of language who was its subject. It would be appropriate, I think, to conclude this brief account of Russell Kirk with the last paragraph of his Eliot book, which is a beautiful summary of Eliot's career and says much as well about the man who wrote it: "Lifelong, Eliot had contended against the spirit of the age. He made the poet's voice heard again, and thereby triumphed; knowing the community of souls, he freed others from captivity and lonely ego; in the teeth of winds of doctrine, he attested the permanent things. And his communication is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living."

And now, William F. Buckley Jr. Bill Buckley became a national figure almost overnight with the publication in 1951 of *God and Man at Yale*, which he began to write immediately after his graduation from Yale in 1950, and was published just as Yale was celebrating, with appropriate ceremony and fanfare, the 250th anniversary of its founding. The impact of the publication of this book at that particular moment, as Dwight McDonald remarked at the time, was comparable to that of a small boy setting off firecrackers at a formal garden party. The ivy-league establishment was not amused. McGeorge Bundy, for example, reviewed the book with great solemnity and outrage in the pages of *The Atlantic*,

and although a Professor of Political Science at Harvard, it must be said that he let his indignation take possession of his critical faculties. Replying to the Buckley letter that followed in the pages of *The Atlantic*, and hardly recovered from the trauma of the whole episode, Prof. Bundy wrote, "When I sat down to review Mr. Buckley's book, I was somewhat concerned lest my readers refuse to believe that so violent, unbalanced, and twisted a young man really



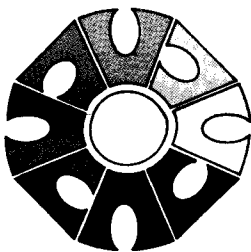
existed. His rejoinder removes that concern." The book aroused a storm of controversy, much of it, unfortunately, about on the level of Bundy's review, but it did bring attention to the fact that the universities had strayed a long way from their original purpose, which was to search for and elucidate the truth, and transmit the values of the civilization that nurtured them to the next generation. This youthful work of Bill Buckley, therefore, served the enormously useful and important purpose of focusing attention on one of the great issues of our time, the proper aim of higher education.

God and Man at Yale, as we are all well aware by now, was no flash in the pan. His first book was followed by *McCarthy and His Enemies*, written in collaboration with Brent Bozell. This was a serious,

documented study, the only one ever to have been made, of the whole McCarthy episode and the related problem of government security. There have been many books since, collections of essays and books of personal experience, of which the most characteristic, perhaps, is the delightful account of a week in the life of Bill Buckley, *Cruising Speed*. But he has done more than write books. In 1955 he founded *National Review*, a journal of opinion which comes out every other week, and under his guidance has become a strong voice of sanity and a much needed antidote to the prevailing liberal orthodoxy. Who will forget, for example, the searching analysis of George McGovern's economics, and where else could it have appeared but in *National Review*? Through his lectures, columns, debates and all the rest, Bill Buckley has used his keen intelligence, his unswerving honesty, his wit and his adroitness with words to ferret out hypocrisy, foolishness and mendacity, as well as to illuminate what he calls "the eternal verities." Our country would be a duller, poorer and less vital place without Bill Buckley.

What I hope I have been able to do in describing the careers of these five men is to demonstrate to you that the age of discovery, of opportunity, isn't behind us, and that it is still possible, in this age of the mass man, of conformity, of bureaucracy, to "contend against the spirit of the age," purposely and effectively, without resigning from society, with-

out trying to destroy the order of existence, but living as part of it. T. S. Eliot, with his poetry, his plays and such books as *The Idea of A Christian Society* has had, and will continue to have, a far greater impact on men's thinking and therefore on the real course of events than any number of Weathermen, urban guerilla fighters or romantic revolutionaries. Not one of the three "Men of 1914," Pound, Eliot and Lewis, who are certainly among the great literary figures of this century, it is well to remember, ever wrote a "best seller," ever wrote a book that was a selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club, or ever, during his lifetime, had the ungrudging approval of the liberal establishment as represented by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Saturday Review*, or *Time* magazine, and, furthermore, they didn't need any of these things; their eminence and influence derived from other, more lasting, sources. I should like, finally, to point out that not one of the five men I have spoken of has purchased success at the price of conformity to prevailing opinion or of compromise, or by "petting and fawning upon their contemporaries." They have all gone their own way, expressed the truth as they saw it, stood for what they believed, but lived within and as a part of society, and all have been eminently successful, in the only way success can truly be measured. All of these things, I hope, will give you something to think about, and may be of help to you in making your own choices in the years ahead.



Center for constructive alternatives®

Mr. Don Lipsett has joined Hillsdale College's Center for Constructive Alternatives as director. Educated at Indiana University, where he received his B.S. and M.B.A., Mr. Lipsett is founder and secretary of The Philadelphia Society, an organization of conservative and libertarian scholars. He has worked for the Foundation for Economic Education, *National Review*, the American Security Council, and was executive secretary of the American Conservative Union. Mr. Lipsett is also a member of the Mont Pelerin Society.

"We are very fortunate," said Dr. George C. Roche III, president of Hillsdale College and founder of the CCA, "to have a man of Don Lipsett's experience and ability as director of the CCA. In our first year, we got off to a tremendous start under Clark Durant, who now leaves us to attend Notre Dame Law School. I am confident that Don will maintain our high standards and make the CCA an even more effective and influential program."