

A Remarkable Conservative Presence

A REMARKABLE conservative presence has come into existence in the third quarter of our century. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* appeared in 1944, Kirk's *The Conservative Mind* in 1953, and soon thereafter began the development of conservative periodicals, strongholds in the academy, publishing houses, educational institutions, political organizations. Nearly all of these reached a high level of quality. A clear separation from the lunatic fringe was achieved. An impressive constellation of conservative "stars" rose over the horizon. Hayek and Kirk, *auctores* of modern conservatism, are still among us. Next to them Bill Buckley, a whole institution by himself, replete with *NR*, *Firing Line*, books, column, lectures, wit and elegance. Conservative politicians became celebrities. In the field of periodicals we have such jewels as *National Review* and *The Alternative*, and among quarterlies, *Modern Age* and *Intercollegiate Review*. Brilliant scholars like Friedman, Haberler, Nisbet, Vivas, Voegelin, and ISI's exemplary seminars have maintained highest standards of conservative education. Conservative research institutions and colleges have compelled the public acknowledgment of their excellence. A stream of books scholarly, commentary, and fiction still flows with undiminished vigor. YAF and ACU are energetic but responsible organizations of political influence, as is New York's Conservative Party. Much reason for thanks, much ground for satisfaction.

Still, it must be admitted that the practical influence of conservatism is not the equal of this intellectual presence. The specifically conservative line is "more reliance on market forces," to which one might add, "more resistance to the Soviet Communist threat." By itself, that line does not lack in clarity and visibility. What it does lack is breadth and depth. Confined essentially to economics and armaments, it leaves out a

multitude of human concerns arising from the action or nonaction of the modern state. Above all, however, it consists in proposals for action without the background, or, rather, context, of a body of religious, philosophical, moral, cultural consensus which the public could discern over against the liberal-socialist onslaught. Conservatives, by and large, rally behind proposed action, the proposals keeping within narrow confines. Beyond those confines, they are not united; one may even say they are divided in their deeper convictions. Some adhere to the heritage of the Enlightenment, Cartesian science, and even Positivism. Others acknowledge the lights of the Christian tradition and Greek love of wisdom. Concerning cultural matters, moral issues, the concept of man, and even history, conservatives speak to our time not with one voice, and to a large extent even have nothing to say. Thus, confronted with destructive raids on one moral position after another, "conservatives find it very difficult to say where the crazyness lies" which "leaves capitalism and its conservative defenders helpless before any moralistic assault, however unprincipled" (to use Irving Kristol's words). Among American conservatives there is nobody who talks with the tones and the depth of meaning of Solzhenitsyn, and him we have enshrined on a pedestal instead of studying and apprehending his insights.

During the third quarter of this century conservatives have scored brilliantly and often, but the greater task is yet left to the fourth quarter. We have been quite successful in journalism, education, scholarship, and lobbying. We have raised the banners of the market principle and patriotism. Now it is incumbent on us to stir the deeper layers of our minds and decide on our commitments to the good, the true, and the beautiful. In the shallowness of liberal and socialist humanism, we must rediscover the depth of being and of history. In the process we must first learn, and then teach, to recognize distinctions between truth and perversion, rationality and semi-rationality, philosophy and ideology. We need great

figures whose personal lives are an eloquent alternative to liberal relativism (as is, again, Solzhenitsyn's). We need orators who can call the bluff, and decry the false plausibility, of the ideologists, positivists, and humanist moralists. We need lawgivers who can translate deep convictions into public rules.

Today we celebrate an initial victory. "After the victory, tighten your helmets!"

—GERHART NIEMEYER