**3rd Place Winner, National High School Essay Contest**
**Ephraim Blair, Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School**

In 1955, William F. Buckley founded National Review, the foremost conservative intellectual magazine, to "stand athwart history, yelling Stop," urging prudence against the tide of unbridled progressivism in his day (Buckley, Publisher's Statement). Yet, America–and the world–has dramatically changed in the past seven decades, sometimes for the better but often for the worse.

Today, the very pillars of civil society–truth, order, and liberty–are under assault. Now, traditional family values are openly scoffed at, as many challenge basic biological facts. Unassimilable waves of mass migration threaten the stability of the nation, as politicians, including those ostensibly on the right, disregard constitutional safeguards and checks and balances. Thus, many on the right and left cynically ask what conservatism has actually conserved. How did we get here and where must we go?

The aforementioned degradations have largely come about due to our overreliance upon the abstract. Ideas and values are critical, but, if not defined and understood through a traditional framework, they are complete bunk. Abstractions of ideas are so broad that they can be stretched to the point of meaninglessness. Sure, the conservative supports equality, where anyone can succeed based on merit. But a socialist or radical might also say they support equality (or "equity"), by which they mean the redistribution of income. The conservative loves liberty, by which they mean the freedom to do what one ought, free from government encroachment. Whereas the liberal's liberty is the ability to do whatever they want, no matter the consequence. However, when one says they are for the promotion of equality, liberty, justice, order, and truth through the preservation of the family, of the Constitution, of Judeo-Christian values, of the Anglo-American Common Law tradition, and of free market capitalism, then there is no confusion.

Buckley and Frank Meyer took upon themselves the daunting task of uniting the disparate factions of conservatism into a winning coalition through "fusionism," blending elements of traditionalism, libertarianism, and anti-communism–which united them all (Edwards, 2018). Like in Buckley's time, conservatives continue to squabble over various policy prescriptions. However, as Russell Kirk wrote, true conservatism is much larger than debates about trade, tax brackets, and foreign policy. More so than it is an ideology, conservatism "is a state of mind, a type of character, a way of looking at the civil social order." Although he states that there is no "Model Conservative," Kirk consistently finds inspiration from Edmund Burke, the Anglo-Irish statesman who is often called the Father of Modern Conservatism, embodying Kirk's ideals of "prudence" and a continual dedication to the "permanent things" (Kirk, Ten Conservative Principles).

Modern politicians navigating the seas of great change ought to take great inspiration from Burke, who rejected radicalism while embracing necessary change. Unlike many in Parliament, Burke was sympathetic to the Patriot cause during the American War for Independence because he saw their grievances as legitimate. But, more importantly, he saw that their cause was just because they were "not only devoted to liberty, but to liberty according to English ideas and on English principles" (Burke, Speech on Conciliation). In other words, the Patriots were fighting to restore their rights, not to invent new ones or revolt against traditional institutions.

On the other hand, Burke vociferously disparaged the French Revolution for simply embracing the principles of liberté, égalité, fraternité without grounding them in tradition. He wrote that the French revolutionaries "may have made a Revolution, but not a Reformation," condemning them for having "subverted a Monarchy [and the Church], but not recovered freedom" (Burke quot. in Grant, 371-2). As Burke further prophesied, destruction, demagoguery, and dictatorship ultimately befell the French, since their revolution was rooted in radicalism, not prudence.

Yet, today, many have fallen prey to the same misconceived notions and naiveté that plagued the French Revolution, wishing to make drastic change by making intellectual shortcuts, never considering how the rules and customs they so detest came about and what purpose they serve. Increasingly, many, including conservatives, are tempted by the ideal of an "open society." But, as Buckley so eloquently responded to Leo Cherne in an episode of Firing Line, we should not "want society to be open to certain ideas…you can make certain exclusions, and those exclusions don't have to be reconsidered" (Buckley quot. in Knowles, lxxii).

We know what works and what can be excluded. The West has thousands of years of accumulated wisdom, comprising the bedrock of our civilization. This wisdom teaches us that free markets and individual liberty grounded within biblical morality, constitutional limits, and the family unit are the secret to a freer, happier, and flourishing society. As President Lincoln said, quoting the Bible, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." If we agree on our foundations, we can stand athwart together and debate the rest later.

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Ephraim Lawrence Blair is a sophomore at Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, Maryland. Coming from a military family, he has lived across the country, from Maryland to Virginia and Florida. He is interested in studying history, politics, economics, and language. Additionally, he is an avid golfer and piano player, as well as a debater and a voracious reader. Currently, he is writing a full-scale biography about President William Henry Harrison.