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A warm welcome to you all who are here today to attend our panel on “The Literary and Religious Imagination.” At a conference entitled “Back to Basics: Conservative Principles in the 21st Century,” it seems appropriate to explore how imagination fits into our lives and informs our ideas, our beliefs, even our concept of what it is to be human, in effect, our understanding of reality, for it is through images that we apprehend reality and are freed from the provinciality of time and place.

Thus, an understanding of the various types of imagination is essential to an appreciation of the workings of the civil-social order. If conservatives are to regain ascendance in our day, it will be necessary to appreciate the role imagination plays in politics and in economics as well as in religion, culture and the arts.

More than a half century ago, in “The Liberal Imagination” the great liberal literary critic, Lionel Trilling, wrote,

“If we now turn and consider the contemporary literature of America. We see that whenever we can describe it as patently liberal and democratic, we must say that it is not of lasting interest. I do not say that the work which is written to conform to the liberal democratic tradition is of no value but only that we do not incline to return to it, we do not establish it in our minds and affections. ... And since liberal democracy inevitably generates a body of ideas, it must necessarily occur to us to ask why it is that these particular ideas have not infused with force and cogency the literature that embodies them. This question is the most important, the most fully challenging question in culture that at this moment we can ask.”

One would think that this honest admission by Trilling would have given liberal writers pause for thought... but that was then as unlikely to happen as it is now. Instead such writers assume that their worldview is complete and consistent and ironically, “right” or correct and debunk, deconstruct and denigrate much of the great literature of the past which is inherently conservative in its broadest sense, as it deals with the truths of nature and of human nature.

If literature is the glue of society, transmitting to every generation, century upon century, a body of ethical principles and imaginative characters that contribute to our collective memory as a community and reflect the wisdom of our ancestors, what happens to entire generations who are not nurtured on its truths?

In former ages, it was imaginative literature that formed the judgment and discernment, not only of the educated, but the illiterate as well as they listened to tales read aloud or

stories passed on by the oral tradition. In medieval times, the morality and mystery plays imparted truths that performed this task.

In Russell's memoir, *The Sword of Imagination*, so important did he consider this concept, that he devoted 44 out of 476 pages to a discussion of the various types of imagination. He was convinced that the ultimate battle for the survival of Western Civilization would take place in the imagination.

Elsewhere, Russell concluded that, "Some ages need to be challenged to change because the dead hand of the past weighs heavily upon them, or because of a lack of imagination, or of slothful inertia. Ours is not such an age. We are a people almost obsessed with the new, with change for its own sake, with fad and foible."

In "Little Gidding," T.S.Eliot tells us that it is necessary from time to time, "To purify the dialect of the tribe. And urge the mind to aftersight and foresight." A tall order...purifying the dialect of the tribe. How, we ask, might conservatives possessed of imagination, go about this large task?

Our panelists today will provide food for thought about such matters. In this audience, there are numerous writers and editors upon whose wisdom we wish to draw, scholars who have written much about the importance of imagination. R.V. Young editor of *Modern Age*, Claes Ryn of *Humanitas*, Benjamin Lockerd of the T.S. Eliot Society, and Gerald Russello of *The University Bookman*, are among those we hope will make comments during the discussion period.