

A TRIBUTE TO HENRY REGNERY

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Every college and university in the United States has a vice-president for development. This, usually undistinguished, bureaucrat has as his most important duty, the job of, as one of them once said, "nicing" prospective donors. This afternoon I do not propose to "nice" Henry Regnery but to pay a debt of honor owed him by the Republic, by the conservative movement, by the many communities to which he has belonged and which he has helped to put in place and shape, by our common culture, and most especially the personal debt I owe Henry after many years of friendship.

Shall I bring attention first of all to the debt the Republic owes Henry? Lesser men have been awarded the Presidential Medal for their civic and political efforts. It was, however, never Henry's style to press himself forward, to call on presidents, to seek the political limelight, to issue and sign manifestos, to be a political and cultural toady. He saw his role as that of quiet initiation, of support for and encouragement of ideas and policies which would benefit and protect the civic and cultural life of the Republic. He was quite content to live in an active and productive obscurity, serving on committees, boards of directors, groups of patrons, and above all publishing the books and pamphlets which reshaped the history and which helped reconfigure the culture of the United States.

Sometimes the ideas which he presented, midwived, and propagated were not well received by

the public. Half a Quaker and half a Midwestern isolationist and always wholly himself, he hated the moral and physical consequences of war and was active in indicting and accusing those who involved the United States in wars and foreign adventures past and present. His views might be contested. They could not be ignored nor could they be ascribed to any self-seeking or aggrandizing motive. He was a son of the Middle West and almost a Quaker. Of course such *unzeitgemaesse Betrachtungen*, such observations out of season, are not apt to be wildly popular. In politics, economics and culture, Henry's view was apt to be an alternative to the large loose thoughts of Washington and New York.

Before conservatism had a name, let alone a coherent body of theory, Henry was a conservative. In the dark days immediately after the Second World War when the forces of collectivism and centralization of power seemed everywhere triumphant, Henry was one of the founding fathers of what came to be called conservatism. In early 1944 Henry, Frank C. Hanighen, and Felix Morley pooled their talents and resources and founded *Human Events*. From this action grew a series of pamphlets which for distinction in authorship, cogency in reasoning and importance in analysis were unequaled in America in the mid 1940s. Out of *Human Events* and these pamphlets developed the Henry Regnery Company which we can now see was one of the most influential and innovating presses in the post World War II period and today continues its distinguished record. To put it bluntly and without exaggeration, there would have been no conservative movement in America without the Regnery press. It was Henry who published Bill Buckley's *God and Man at Yale*, Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind*, Frank Meyer's *In Defense of Freedom*, and Willmoore Kendall's *The Conservative Affirmation*. To list these books is only to skim the surface, for every major conservative figure of the movement was published by Henry Regnery.

And, of course, he did not make any money; quite to the contrary. It is a truism that in public life only the man who has everything to lose and nothing to gain is to be trusted. Watch out for the man who has nothing to lose and everything to gain. Such a man who has not even honor to lose may even become President of the United States. As the poet Goethe observed, "*Fuerterlich ist einer, der nichts zu verlieren hat.*" ("That man is terrible who has nothing to lose.") I have quoted Goethe deliberately because Goethe has served as Henry's mentor and model. That surely can be said of few Americans.

However, the interests of Henry Regnery are not narrowly political. It is not an accident that *Poetry Magazine* was published—and is still published—in Chicago and that many of the roots of American literary modernism are midwestern. It is a fond conceit of the New York intellectuals and some neo-conservatives that they brought the graces of literary modernism to conservatism via the lectures of Lionel Trilling. Surely that is mistaken, for Henry Regnery was personally acquainted with and published the major modernists while the *Partisan Review* was struggling with the impossible intellectual task of how to be both a Marxist and a modernist. I might remind you that the modernists, European and American, were conservatives, men of the Right, and reactionaries and were not apt to be found in the lecture halls of Columbia University.

Immediately after World War II, Henry began his effort to rescue the German people from the consequences of National Socialist rule and the devastation of total war. To understand this it helps to be, at least in spirit, half a Quaker, and to have one's roots in the cultural achievement of that other Germany. Henry was certain that Germany had to be brought back from the National Socialist abyss and enabled to become once more an important member of the European Community of nations. This seems self-evident now, but in 1944 the Morgenthau Plan called for the total de-

struction of Germany, its reduction by starvation and dismantling. One of the first books published by the Regnery press was Hans Rothfels's *The German Opposition to Hitler*. It was important for the world to know that not every German wore a brown or a black shirt. Rothfels's book was only one of many books the Regnery press published which sought to bring the post-war German political, social, and cultural reality to the attention of the English-speaking world. The effort was not always marked with success. Hans Sedlmayr's *Art In Crisis*, one of the post-war's most important art-historical discussions and criticisms of artistic modernism, sold, I believe, about 250 copies in the United States.

Again, it was the Regnery press which published Wilhelm Roepke's *Economics of the Free Society (Die Lehre von der Wirtschaft)*, describing an economic order which became the basis of the German *Wirtschaftswunder*. Roepke introduced the concept, as you well know, of the "social market economy," a free economy, market oriented, which was socially responsible. It has recently been argued by some self-designated "neo-conservatives" that it was they with their liberal backgrounds who brought a sense of social responsibility to the economic and social theory of conservatism. Regnery's early 1960's publication of the translation of Roepke's book demonstrates clearly that such a view is ahistorical nonsense.

There is a sad note to my discussion of Henry Regnery's German connection. Henry's major contribution to the creation and acceptance of the new Germany was never acknowledged or honored. Lesser men who had done far less for Germany were awarded *Pour le Merit*. This behavior is in keeping with the German penchant for rewarding one's enemies and ignoring and neglecting one's friends. History, however, keeps better books than the ignorant present.

The publication history of Regnery, more recently, Regnery Gateway, is but the shadow of a man. Not

many publishers can say that. Henry's father once observed that if he made any money he would probably be publishing the wrong kind of books. Animating that unusual man was a capacity for friendship and a passion for community. That is to see Henry at the local level, but that, of course, is where all conservatism begins.

Henry was never any place long before he had established a network of personal relationships, formed a committee, organized a string quartet, joined a club or entertained the neighborhood to a concert. His ideal of community was the string quartet in which the individual voice and ego was subordinated to the common effort. Of course, this being earth and not high heaven, the communities with which Henry was involved did not always, shall we say, play in harmony. Henry grew up in Hinsdale, Illinois and his model of community was the unconscious memory of what that pre-World War I village was like. Those of you who have not been blessed by the experience of small town life in America before World War II will never know what you have missed, Edgar Lee Masters, Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis to the contrary notwithstanding. Even then, however, Hinsdale was an annex to Chicago and it was Chicago that Henry eventually took as his community. Henry was well acquainted with the failed efforts and aborted hopes of those who attempted to make the "hog-butcher for the world" into a community characterized by high culture. These efforts he studied and chronicled in his book *Creative Chicago: From the Chap-Book to the University*. That his effort fell on deaf ears is exemplified by the fact that the *Chicago Tribune* did not have the good grace to give it a review. The failing causes of Chicago culture were institutions Henry heavily underwrote. The collapse and disappearance of the Chicago Conservatory of Music and the expropriation of the penthouse quarters of Cliff Dwellers by a misguided Chicago Symphony grieved him deeply. He had written and privately published a history of the Cliff Dwellers, Chicago's most important club. Long after retirement

Henry continued to interest himself in matters literary and historical and these late reflections are shortly to be published under the title, *A Few Reasonable Words*.

Perhaps no Chicago institution seemed to Henry to hold greater promise than the University of Chicago. His association with the University and its far too young and inexperienced president, Robert Maynard Hutchins, was intimate. Henry was one of the managing editors of *Measure*, the dazzling journal of University of Chicago intellectuals. The Regnery Company published the Great Books for Hutchins' Great Books Foundation until the compulsions of knee-jerk liberalism exemplified by Mortimer Adler led the Foundation to break its contract with Regnery Company.

It was in the context of the University of Chicago that Henry was to meet so many of the Central European intellectuals who were to play such a large role in his thinking and his personal life. His relationship to Hutchins was gradually eclipsed by Hutchins' growing incapacity for serious thought.

Politics, community, and personal life; these were the three areas in which Henry's conservatism was most manifest. Of these perhaps personal life was the most important and exemplary for the conservative movement. To put it boldly, Henry taught us how to behave as conservatives. He was devoted to his family, as a series of privately published family memoirs attests. The greatest of these acts of filial piety was the publication of the massive T. P. Cope diary, the diary of his wife, Eleanor Scattergood Regnery's distinguished ancestor. Parenting, as all of you know who are fortunate enough to be parents, is filled with both joy and grief. The joys Henry proudly acclaimed and the sorrows he quietly and stoically bore.

The Regnery Company was a partnership—and what a partnership! Without Eleanor Regnery, loving, quietly judgmental, generous and practical, Henry

ing, quietly judgmental, generous and practical, Henry would have been half a man. She is one of the original beautiful people before that designation was tarnished by what 40 years ago was called Cafe Society.

It would have been easy for Henry to be, like so many of his Chicago contemporaries of similar status and position, a "hollow man." Henry's life style and ideal was that of the service aristocracy. Henry and I often discussed the Adams family and although Chicago is a long way from Boston, the resemblance between Henry and the Adamses of Quincy and Washington was striking.

His capacity for friendship was complemented by a wide and generous charity. Those who were wrong or who had wronged him were rarely confronted. Henry preferred what seemed to me rather tortuous explanations and exculpations of their offensive behavior.

His life has been one of great simplicity. He has a positive aversion for what has been called the fetishism of the material object. To be in beautiful surroundings was important to him but the beauty was not the beauty of "things" but the quality of natural harmony, interesting and rational conversation, music and literature and above all, selfless and noble actions. To quote yet another German, J.J. Winckelmann, his life has been characterized by "*edele Einfalt und stille groesse*," "noble simplicity and quiet greatness."