

MODERN AGE

A QUARTERLY REVIEW



The Fourth Editorship

THE PRESENT ISSUE of *Modern Age* is the first to appear under the editorship of George A. Panichas, the fourth editor since Russell Kirk brought out the first issue in the summer of 1957. Having been a regular contributor since 1967 and literary editor since the death of Joseph M. Lalley in 1980, Dr. Panichas was well aware of how demanding the editorship of such a journal as *Modern Age* can be. The fact that he was willing to step in at a critical time is not only a source of gratification to those of us associated with the magazine, it is also evidence that, after twenty-five years, it still has a mission and purpose. But what was the purpose of *Modern Age*, what did our small group have in mind when, during the latter years of the Eisenhower administration, we decided to launch a "Conservative Review," as *Modern Age* at first styled itself? Having said this, the question naturally follows, Have our hopes been justified?

In 1957 we were, of course, more than twenty-five years younger than we are now, which had some influence on our view of the world and particularly on our estimation of our own powers, but more than that, the circumstances of the time were vastly different: Camelot, the New Fron-

tier, the Great Society, the Vietnam War, the "Hippie and Drug Culture" of the sixties were all in the future, as were many of the political and social problems that loom so large today—the deficit, inflation, unemployment, exhibitionist homosexuality and pornography with the decline of standards associated with them, to mention only a few and to say nothing of the very different and far more dangerous power relationships in the world around us. Liberalism, then as now, was the dominant influence in communications and in the colleges and universities, as is evidenced by the developments I have enumerated above, but was being seriously challenged: Friedrich A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* had appeared in 1945, Richard M. Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences* in 1948, and in 1951 William F. Buckley appeared on the scene with the publication of *God and Man at Yale* and founded his magazine *National Review* four years later. It was the publication, and success, of Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind* in 1953 that brought the various elements of opposition to liberalism together and was the decisive factor in the founding of *Modern Age*.

Looking back, it seems apparent that

the time was favorable for the launching of a conservative review, but we were under no illusion that a quarterly of limited circulation could have a decisive or even noticeable influence on the immediate course of events. We did believe, however, that in the sterility and conformity of the age of liberalism and mass communications it would be worthwhile to attempt to stimulate discussion and to give a voice to those who would conserve what Russell Kirk in our first issue called "the best elements in our civilization," and to those who would remind our readers, however few they might prove to be, of the "sustaining intellectual and moral structures of civilization," to use here a striking phrase of Eliseo Vivas, himself a "sustaining structure," from the beginning, of *Modern Age*. In such modest aspirations, to some degree at least, we have been successful; *Modern Age* has been less successful, after a rather promising start during the editorship of Kirk, in encouraging "the debate and symposium" and in attracting "distinguished short stories and good verse," as he described two of his objectives in his "Apology for a New Review," but all of us must work within the confines of our talents and limitations, and editors are no exception. Each of the three previous editors of *Modern Age* gave the magazine the benefit of his own particular skills, experience, and interests: under Kirk we enjoyed the benefit of his familiarity with the history of conservatism, his fine literary style, and his broad cultural interests; Eugene Davidson brought his extensive knowledge in the field of foreign affairs and the experience he had gained over many years as editor of a distinguished university press; and Dr. David S. Collier brought his training in political philosophy and a varied and constructive academic career, all to the advan-

tage, we like to think, of our readers.

The advent of George A. Panichas to the editorship of *Modern Age* brings a new dimension to our magazine. He is a professor of English, but no pedant, a conservative, but as Austin Warren says of him, neither a doctrinaire nor programmatic conservative, and as the many essays and reviews he has contributed to *Modern Age* clearly show, he has a discerning mind, high critical standards, and the will to apply them. We live in a time of dissolution, a time when the distinctions between good and evil, between what is of value and what is worthless, between creative and destructive influences, are disappearing, rather are being consciously destroyed, and by the very forces of our society whose calling it should be to uphold and to defend them—the professors and intellectuals (for the latter I am content with Hayek's apt description, "second-hand dealers in ideas"). In such a time what Panichas calls "the courage of judgment," the willingness to make distinctions, to call things by their right names, is desperately needed. It is this quality above all, I think, that he brings to *Modern Age*. What we can expect from George Panichas is clearly indicated in the following lines from the Introduction to his book of essays, many of which appeared originally in *Modern Age*, *The Courage of Judgment*:

Authentic fulfillment of critical responsibility demands a rigorous commitment to principles of order, to the making of hard choices and categorical decisions, to the selection and the espousal not merely of aesthetic, literary, or linguistic values but of ethical and moral derivatives—and imperatives.

—HENRY REGNERY

*"If the foundations be destroyed,
what can the righteous do?"*

— Ps. 11:3.

In Continuity: An Editorial Restatement

G E O R G E A. P A N I C H A S

THE LAW OF CONTINUITY, according to Leibnitz, underlines the principle that all change is continuous, that nothing passes from one state to another *per saltum*. Continuity identifies an unbroken, uninterrupted connection, or succession, and as such contributes to harmony and unity, to the inner and outer order of life and society. It is associated with other primal qualities: with reverence, with discipline, with steadfastness. In continuity we seek to conserve those patterns of existence that resist the volatile tendencies which make for disorder. But in a world in which fragments and quantum leaps characterize the disconnectedness, the disequilibrium of our times, it has little or no appeal. Continuity is not a popular word with those who in increasing numbers instinctively side with the destructive and profane urge as it is found in the guise of supposedly progressive thinking and action. To speak for continuity in a predominantly liberal society invites derision. The idea of continuity, we are variously told, died in 1789, or in 1917, or at that point when, as Nietzsche announced, God died.

A rootless society clearly disdains the discipline of continuity: disdains, that is, what continuity both signifies and prescribes. The passage from discontinuity to Dis, it seems, is not unusual if one is to judge by the existent conditions of American (and Western) civilization. Indeed, it is the relentless speed with which this passage has been made that is so frightening. Little or nothing to contain the momentum is evident; no inner check, as it were, is deemed an appropriate measure to be applied correctively to our expansive temperament and mischievous habits. Not the continuous, in the sense of what is enduring and permanent, but the discontinuous, in the sense of wanton usurpation, elimination, cessation, deprivation, best describes the nature of things. And that fact, of course, helps to define the moral and spiritual crisis of our time.

Continuity is a word that, with other words embodying moral value, has been gradually disappearing from our language: from the very language of life itself. We do not want to be reminded of anything that