Conservatism is being debated extensively across America today, but discussions are frequently held without definition of terms or historical context. The presentation today is designed to enable you college students to think of political conservatism within a historical framework dominated by the work of Edmund Burke.

I encourage you to read some recent books on conservatism. You should read *Conservatism* by Peter Viereck, *The Conservative Mind* by Russell Kirk, *Conservatism in America* by Clinton Rossiter, and *The Case for Conservatism*, by Francis Wilson. There are many other good books which have been published recently, but your understanding will be advanced most by developing an awareness first of the life and work of Edmund Burke. This man is recognized as the father of philosophical political conservatism. The birth of conservatism is dated by the publication by Burke in 1750 of his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. I trust that this talk today will encourage you to undertake an acquaintance with Burke.

Conservatism has recently become fashionable again, and liberalism has declined in popular acceptance. A recent Gallop Poll reported that more American citizens considered themselves as conservatives than liberals. I do not have data on the same question for preceding years, but I suspect that this is the first time for several decades that more people
consider themselves conservatives than liberals.

A number of scholars have noted the decline of liberalism and the emergence of conservatism. Alan P. Grimes stated recently, "Liberalism in America has been at a low ebb since the Second World War." Carey McWilliams maintains that the political left has disappeared from our politics leaving only a greatly expanded middle and a swollen right. He said, "Half of the political spectrum has vanished; it simply isn't there." Walter Lippman stated, following the last general election:

The selection of Dillon as Secretary of Treasury confirms the view...that in general economic philosophy there is no serious difference between Kennedy and such progressive Republicans as Governor Rockefeller and Vice President Nixon...The truth is that Kennedy is a conservative of the age we live in.

These statements must be very confusing to students who take literally the charges of the Republicans that the Democrats are liberals and the counter-charges of the Democrats that the Republicans are conservatives. The reciprocal charges do have some validity within the narrow range of policy versus policy, but the facts are that they have relatively little validity within the context of political ideology versus political ideology. The relatively minor changes which occurred in government during the administrations of Truman, Eisenhower, and of Kennedy thus far is illustrative of the fact that the two parties hold essentially the same view of the contemporary role of government. In this talk then, we will be concerned primarily with the political ideology which underlies the programs of both major American political parties.
I think you are entitled to inquire whether I have any purpose other than to describe conservatism. The answer is that I do. I am interested that the term "Conservatism" should not be improperly used. Since the term became respectable again, individuals and groups have used the label for their own interests. I should like for you as informed citizens to be able to determine when the term is properly used and avoid its misuse.

In recent decades programs have been presented to the American people as Liberal whereas in reality they were radical. The people were misled. Now the danger is that programs are being presented to the American people as Conservative whereas in reality they are reactionary. The people are being misled again. The strength of a democracy depends in large measure upon the ability of the citizens to assess properly the nature of programs that are offered. As college students you should be able to analyze them accurately.

My discussion of Conservatism will have two parts. The first will be a general description of a conservative. The second will outline the major tenets of conservatism.

A conservative defies exact description. When we speak of a conservative, we are speaking of a particular mood, a faith, a way of life, a temperament which applies not only to politics but usually to other aspects of life as well. The conservative temperament as described by Burke and reflected in him may be characterized as wary of human nature, of reason and of human ability. There is a dislike of abstract theories, experimentation and Utopian claims. On the contrary, the conservative
temperament prefers to stay with things as they appear to be; there is a tendency to resist change because experience seems to be a better guide than a priori formulations. Basic to these characteristics is a very real fear of "rootlessness". Burke illustrated the conservative temperament in his assertion that "rage and frenzy will pull down more in half an hour than prudence, deliberation and foresight can build up in one hundred years."

Because conservatism flows from a living temperament there are nearly as many variations of conservatism as there are conservative statesmen and thinkers. For the sake of clarity here we will outline three positions. In the middle is the Burkean type, the moderate, the evolutionary. This is the type of conservatism with which this talk is concerned. On the extreme right is the reactionary, counter-evolutionary, the authoritarian. On the left the moderate conservative begins to blend into the characteristics of the liberal. The temperament of the liberal is optimistic rather than wary; there is a tendency to innovate rather than to develop, there is a reliance upon reason rather than feelings. It is true that there is no exactly precise line which can be drawn between a conservative and a liberal; but an understanding of the two different temperaments is helpful in distinguishing between them. This view is supported by Clinton Rossiter, a contemporary American conservative, who observed that:

The essential difference between conservatism and liberalism is one of mood and bias. No line separates one camp from the other, but somewhere between them stands a man who is at once the most liberal of conservatives and most conservative of liberals.
Personally I admire that man who stands in the middle because he would be able to recognize the strengths of conservatism and also its weaknesses; likewise he would appreciate the assets of liberalism and its liabilities as well.

We now proceed from our general description of a conservative to an outline of the major tenets of conservatism.

A first major tenet is the religious basis of society.

Someone has said that the mortar that holds together the mosaic of conservatism is religious feeling. The writings of Edmund Burke led Russel Kirk to observe that the first cannon of conservative thought is the "belief that a divine intent rules society..." An official statement of the British Conservative Party referred to the tenet in this fashion:

Man is a spiritual creature adventuring on an immortal destiny, and science, politics, or economics are good or bad so far as they help or hinder the individual soul on its eternal journey. This is an age of change—but there are unchanging truths, and in such times as ours, it is above all things necessary to keep this before our eyes.

Quentin Hogg stated that he is convinced that "There can be no genuine conservatism which is not founded upon a religious view of the basis of civil obligation..."

Earlier conservatives stated their belief that above all there is a moral order with which life as well as government should align itself, and to which the individual, including the politician, is accountable. Burke said:

All persons possessing any portion of power ought to be
strongly and awfully impressed with an idea that they act in trust; and that they are to account for their conduct in that trust to the one great Master, author and founder of Society.

When there is a belief that a divine intent rules society the individual holding such a belief tends to be cautious in several respects. He concedes that his own ideas can be influenced by the divine intent and thus does not rely overly on his own individual reason as a basis for initiating and conducting programs. Again, in the administration of programs, he is concerned that government should operate in harmony with the divine intent. This is not to say that the conservative is a visionary, but rather that there is a tendency to look beyond himself for wisdom. Perhaps it would be accurate to say that the conservative, as opposed to the liberal, is less likely to rely on human reason as conclusive.

A second tenet of conservatism concerns the nature of man.

The conservative holds that man is a composite of good and evil. He is a blend of excellencies and imperfections. It is true that if man is carefully educated and placed in a favorable environment and held by the restraints of tradition and authority that he will display qualities of rationality, sociability, industry and decency. However, man will never be able to throw off all the tendencies arising from his nature and restraint are needed.

This view of man tends to place the source of man's maladjustments and discontents in defective human nature rather than in a defective
social order. Clinton Rossiter has pointed out the implications this view of humanity has for government when he said:

No truth about human nature and capabilities is more important than this; man can govern himself, but there is no certainty that he will. Free government is possible but far from inevitable. Man will need all the help he can get from education, religion, tradition, and institutions if he is to enjoy even a limited success in his experiences in self-government. He must be counseled, encouraged, informed, and checked. Above all, he must realize that the collective wisdom of the community, itself the union of countless partial and imperfect wisdoms like his own, is alone equal to this mightiest of social tasks. A clear recognition of man's conditional capacity for ruling himself and others is the first requisite of constitution making.

Because of the Conservative's view of the nature of man, it is not surprising that a conservative is not enthusiastic about assigning vast amounts of governmental power to men. Rather, the conservative is interested in restraining the government official in his tasks by custom and tradition, by law and by other checks including that of re-election.

A third tenet of conservatism is reverence for history and tradition. Political conservatism has been called the "politics of prescription". The view is that the source and authority of institutions is their sheer weight of age, the fact of their existence "time out of mind". What this amounts to is that the conservative places greater trust in tradition and history than in man's reason and his abstract theories as a guide for action.

History and tradition for the conservative is not a static but a living thing. It is constantly changing, but always leaves society
firmly rooted in the past. When change appears imminent or necessary, the proposed innovations are subjected to the tests of observation and experience, and, when the change is accepted, it is always within the framework of tradition. The new must always be rooted in the old. The conservative does not seek to maintain the status quo but he does hold that any innovation must clearly offer the expectation rather than just the possibility of improvement.

It is true that the conservative does not early anticipate change and this has led to the charge that he will not accept change. Burke, however, indicated the importance of change with respect to the state when he said, "A State without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation". Burke also thought that world leaders should remain flexible in their outlook and stated, "A disposition to preserve and an ability to improve taken together, would be my standard of a statesman." With respect to the relation of conservatism and the real life of politics, Quentin Hogg said:

The function of Conservatism is to protect, apply and revive what is best in the old. He therefore is the true Conservative who seeks to fit in the old culture, the old humanism, the old Christian tradition of Europe to the world of radar and the atomic bomb, in such a way that our Christianity masters the bomb and not the bomb our Christianity.

It is not accurate then to describe Conservatism as looking solely to the past. It is more accurate to characterize Conservatism as looking to the past as a guide for the future.
A fourth tenet of Conservatism is a respect for private property.

Savastano in his Case for Conservatism stated that, "The principle of private property is inviolable. Where the sanctity of property is disregarded, freedom is restricted, and state authority turns into oppression."

The conservative's insistence upon private property has led to the charge that he is interested primarily in protecting himself economically and that he is not interested in the welfare of society generally. However, the conservative's concern for private property does not lie entirely upon a personal economic basis.

The conservative holds that private property provides a sphere within which the individual can exercise the faculties of a free man through personal choice and decision. In addition, private property provides an incentive for productive work by the citizens of a community. Moreover, the conservative holds that private property is the most important single technique for the diffusion of economic power. It is true that there are hazards in private property because one or a few may gain excessive economic strength. However, there are other institutions which can function to prevent abuse, especially the government. In any case the conservative maintains that the hazards of private property are less than the alternative of government ownership.

A fifth tenet of Conservatism is that man is both an individual and a social being.
Although the conservative is charged with being wholly concerned with the individual, in reality he holds that besides being an individual man will find fulfillment only in society. Society is something more than the total of individuals living in a community, and it is of value to man. Burke emphasized that "Society is essential to (man's) physical and spiritual existence; government serves him as the chief agent of society".

When a Conservative speaks of rights, he is not only thinking of individual rights but of collective ones as well. Russell Kirk has said, "The true rights of man, then, are equal justice, security of labor and property, the amenities of civilized institutions, and the benefits of orderly society." Rossiter observed:

These rights are both natural and social--natural because they belong to man as man, are part of the great scheme of nature, and are thus properly considered the gift of God; social because man can in fact enjoy them only in an organized community.

A sixth tenet of conservatism is limited government.

All of the foregoing has brought us to consider the conservative idea of government. The Conservative holds that the institution of government is limited in its ability to meet all the needs of man and should be restrained from assuming excessive responsibilities. Clinton Rossiter emphasized the point by saying, "Government cannot by nature solve all or even a majority of (man's) problems."

A conservative attempts to distribute the responsibilities for a well-ordered society among the numerous institutions rather than just
assigning them to the government. Individuals, churches, schools, governments, private businesses, all should share in maintaining a well-ordered society. In this way no single institution is loaded beyond its capacity.

With respect to the government the conservative is concerned that adequate checks are employed to keep the institution and its policies in harmony with the will of the people. Some of the techniques for checking which are approved by the conservative includes separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism and periodic elections. The conservative heartily approves the concept of constitutionalism which means essentially that the government is limited by law.

The checks upon the government are sometimes viewed by the liberals as impediments to dynamic action, but to the conservatives they provide restraints and guides to prudent action.

This presentation today is by no means exhaustive, but I should like to mention a seventh tenet of conservatism—a preoccupation with values.

This last tenet I am mentioning is not discussed as directly in the literature on Conservatism as the preceding ones I have mentioned. Nevertheless, I think that a preoccupation with values has been a part of philosophical conservatism since Burke.

The father of philosophical conservatism, Edmund Burke, was not a man who unthinkingly approved any action of an old institution, even one as venerable as parliament. This man, who was himself a member of Parliament, stood in the House and denounced the government for its actions relative to the American colonies. Why did he challenge his own govern-
ment for its actions? The reason is that he held the colonials were fighting for the basic values for which England had stood and which England was temporarily forsaking. He approved the colonial's actions in fighting to conserve those values they had been taught by their motherland.

In this day when so many organizations are being established, programs launched and plans presented which employ the term conservative, I would like to encourage you college students to observe them carefully and determine whether they are designed to conserve the values of our society. Unless they do they are not actually conservative.

In closing, I think you would be justified in inquiring how these criteria could be applied in assessing whether a program is conservative or not. One way to approach the problem is to ask yourself several questions. Does the program seem inherently right? Is the program in harmony with our historical and institutional development? Does the program reinforce the traditional values of our society? These questions, when answered in the affirmative point in the direction of a program in harmony with the tenets of philosophical conservatism.