Death of a Teacher

By William F. Buckley, Jr.

The purpose of teaching individualism, he wrote, "is not to make individualists but to find them. Rather, to help them find themselves."

And so, at a relatively late age, he started the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists, whose goal it was to undo the damage done a half century ago by the Intercollegiate Socialist Society. I was the ISI's first president, but I was purely a figurehead, as I was soon reminded. In short order, I had a letter from him: "Am removing you as president, Making myself pres. Easier to raise money if a Jew is president. You can be V.P. Love, Frank."

And then, he started to write his wonderful books of essays, innocent—and that was their strength—of the entangling complexities of modern life. He dealt in personal and social truisms; he did not ever entertain the question that the world would conceivably presume to justify the subordination of the individual.

At first infatuated with atheism, he abandoned his faith in non-faith upon reading and re-reading Henry George. He came to believe in "transcendence." "Even the ultra-materialistic socialists," he wrote, "in their doctrine of historical inevitability, are guilty of transcendentalism. Admittedly, this is a flight of the finite mind from its own limitations; it is a search for security in an invariable; it is nothing but the dream of the infinite." John Chamberlain called him a mystic, and said: "His mystical assumption is that men are born as individuals possessing inalienable rights."

"These rights of man," his daughter Grace wrote me, "stem from a source higher than man, and must not be violated. To him, this was religion."

As a Christian, I postulate that today he is happy and serene in the company of the angels and the saints and his Celia. We who have time left to serve on earth, rejoice in the memory of our friend and teacher, a benefactor to us all, living and unborn. May he rest eternally in peace.