

Permanent Things



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The Common Mind: Politics, Society and Christian Humanism from Thomas More to Russell Kirk

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It is fitting that Andre Gushurst-Moore's book *The Common Mind* was published in 2013, as this is the 60th anniversary year of Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind*. In this wonderful book the author traces the "common mind" in a historical fashion similar to Kirk's approach, with essays on important Christian

Humanists. And what is this "mind" these writers spanning centuries share? The author claims it is the force of *integration* in a world that has been on the fast track towards fragmentation since the Renaissance. As G.K. Chesterton pointed out, the common mind is not a mob mentality, but rather "the mind of all the artists and heroes; or

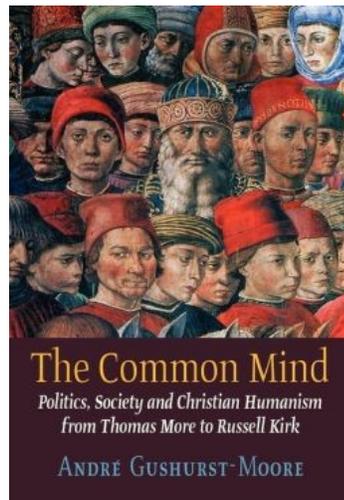
else it would not be common. Plato had the common mind; Dante had the common mind... Commonness means the quality common to the saint and the sinner, the philosopher and the fool." The legacy of Christian Humanism is one of thinkers who sought to renew the "discarded image" of the medieval world in their current time and place through resistance to disintegration, demonstrating that when men of letters who uphold the common mind are absent from a

culture, the state gradually moves in to fill their place. In addition to providing a lineage of literary humanists up to Russell Kirk, Gushurst-Moore touches on a number of topics that highlight the extremes in opposition to Christian Humanism today, especially in Europe: secular liberalism and

Islamic fundamentalism. Yet despite these forces and the further mechanization of human life, Gushurst-Moore assures us Christianity is nothing if not a faith of hope. Just as Russell Kirk always insisted, cheerfulness *will* keep breaking into the bleakest circumstances. *The Common Mind* demonstrates that the Christian Humanist vision

is a tenacious one, where life is always "worth living, in accordance with created nature, and a home where family, affection and good company play their part in human flourishing, as persons and as a society...where law, order, and the right balance of the public and the private intensify the joy of living, with the promise of heaven as its completion."

reviewed by Ashlee Cowles,
current Wilbur Fellow at the
Russell Kirk Center



Wilbur Fellows at the Russell Kirk Center

Christopher Petter recently received a master's degree in the liberal arts graduate program at St. John's College in Santa Fe and also studied English at the University of Dallas. Petter came to the Russell Kirk Center to prepare for doctoral programs and to further research T.S. Eliot and Southern writers such as John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Donald Davidson.

Flavio Alencar recently completed an M.A. in social history at the Universidade Federal Fluminense in Brazil and is currently working on a law degree. While at the Russell Kirk Center he researched Kirk's historical essays and books, especially his understanding of tradition as it applies to national identity. Alencar is also in a post-graduate program in International Politics as preparation for a career in Foreign Service.



Kevin Gelzhiser, a Ph.D. candidate at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland, is writing his dissertation on Senator Arthur Vandenburg and his leadership at a conference on Mackinac Island that led to the founding of the UN. Gelzhiser came to the RKC to research Kirk's writing on Senator Robert Taft's position regarding the isolationist vs. interventionist controversy within the Republican Party. A native of Philadelphia, Gelzhiser is also a member of the historic National Guard unit that began under the leadership of George Washington.



Ashlee Cowles received a master's degree in theology from Duke University and has taught philosophy at the college level as an adjunct instructor. She is preparing to pursue doctoral research in medieval history at either the University of Saint Andrews or the University of Cambridge. Ashlee came to the Russell Kirk Center in order to research Kirk's writings on the moral imagination and liberal arts education. She is also completing a historical novel for young adults.

Rodrigo Farias is a Ph.D. candidate in history from the Universidade Federal Fluminense in Brazil. After he completed an M.A. in history with a thesis on the "new left," he decided to come to the RKC to research conservatism, specifically the influence of William F. Buckley and Russell Kirk.



Fall 2012– Spring 2013 Wilbur Fellows with Dr. Benjamin Lockerd and Annette Kirk: Kevin Gelzhiser, Christopher Petter, Ashlee Cowles, Flavio Alencar, and Rodrigo Farias

Seminar at the Russell Kirk Center



Dr. John Pafford with the students from the American Studies Program at Hillsdale College.

Dr. Pafford spoke on his recent book, *Russell Kirk*, which is included in the series on Conservatives and Libertarians published by Continuum.

James Person also spoke on the book he is compiling of selected letters from Russell Kirk's extensive correspondence.

Book Review: *Russell Kirk* by Dr. John Pafford

Dr. John Pafford's 2010 book *Russell Kirk* is as succinct and all-encompassing as its title suggests. This trim hardcover offers readers a sweeping view of Kirk's personal story from childhood origins to old age, then delves into the thoughtful, nuanced conservatism that developed over the course of his prolific intellectual life. Anyone curious for an introduction to this Renaissance Man's thoughts and their far-reaching influence across academia and politics in the 20th century would do well to begin here.

Pafford himself proves to be the ideal author of such a biography, having been first a student of and then a friend to Kirk at the height of the latter's career. His intimate familiarity with both Kirk's independent ideas and the personal force behind them shines through in his writing. The reader thus learns not just of Kirk's polished, published conclusions, but of the meaningful personal struggles and successes that shaped them over time.

*reviewed by Karie Luidens,
Graduate Assistant at GVSU*

Banner Year for the *Bookman*

For calendar year 2012, the *University Bookman* had an increase in unique visitors of 50%, up to 28,610, generating 80,668 page views. Also the journal was often linked to on websites such as The Imaginative Conservative, Bookforum, First Things, and RealClearBooks. In February an article by Bill McClay saw the highest traffic to date.

Some highlights from the past year include interviews with Booker-shortlisted writer Will Self, American Conservative writer Michael Brendan Dougherty, and Richard Gamble. *Bookman* authors have taken fresh looks at Enoch Powell and Jeanne Kirkpatrick, and published a critical examination of George R. R. Martin's fantasy series, *Game of Thrones*.

The *Bookman's* summer reading list was a hit, as was Bruce Frohnen's two-part essay on the statesmanship of John Adams. Also, the Schall archives celebrated the many contributions the wonderful Father James V. Schall, S.J. has made to the *Bookman* through the decades. All in all, a spectacular year for the online journal!

For free access to the *University Bookman*, visit the Kirk Center website.
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The Conservative Mind Featured in the Detroit News

What does The Conservative Mind still have to teach a new generation?

President Barack Obama's decisive electoral victory this past November caused panic in some conservative circles. Questions about the continuing relevance of conservative first principles are common fodder for the chattering classes, both right and left. But there is not much that is really novel in this latest conservative setback. Some 60 years ago, the chief role of conservatives was to resist and oppose, even as a Republican assumed the presidency. And almost 50 years ago, conservatives suffered an even more complete catastrophe at the polls.

One landmark book published in the spring of 1953 by a young Michigan State College professor began to change all that. Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind* contributed to the re-imagining of American politics by countering the prevailing liberal narrative that there was no such thing as a conservative tradition in America. Kirk did so by sketching intellectual portraits of key writers and statesmen from the 18th century to the present, each of whom had added to the deposit of conservative thought.

What lingers with conservatives after reading Kirk is the striking impression of an encompassing spiritual standpoint; the disposition Kirk communicates is just as important as the particular arguments he advances. Well before today's cognitive behavioralists, Kirk understood that people are moved to act principally by feelings, intuitions and affections. He also knew that such feelings proceed directly from thoughts, and so he set out to reframe popular thinking about conservative ideas in a positive way, and to elicit intelligent conservative action from his readers. This approach is why optimism even in the face of defeat is so integral to Kirk's "imaginative conservatism" that appeals to both mind and heart.

Great Society-style politics may be

booming just now, but studies demonstrate over and over that a bust is on the horizon. Conservatives have the opportunity—and the obligation—to prepare for the coming burst of the entitlements bubble by fashioning a compelling and workable alternative, which will inevitably rely upon economically independent and morally vibrant communities.

For conservatives to reclaim the allegiance of the middle class they will need to rise above the rhetoric of mere individualism, even as they resist, or turn back, the advance of the federal government in our lives. Conservatives will need to rediscover the language and policies of a political movement that puts communities first.

Conservatism will always have the feel of a resistance movement. It represents a natural check on the relentless energies and ambitions of the social reformer, who never encounters an institution or social practice he does not believe should be "reformed." It is the conservative's job to resist the unbridled pursuit of change for change's sake and to determine through careful deliberation which reforms may be prudently advanced and which are likely to do more harm than good.

Since Kirk's book 60 years ago, generations of American conservatives have made the necessary case for the importance of tradition, more realistic and balanced approaches to reform, and the imperative to focus attention on the health and stability of Kirk's "little platoons," those vital institutions of civil society.

Excerpted from an Op-Ed by Michigan native and ISI Executive Vice President Jeffrey Nelson, published in the Detroit News February 21, 2013.

