

Frank Chodorov

January 24, 1967

(The eulogy delivered at Mr. Chodorov's funeral.)

Most of you know, some of you better than I, the biography. He was born in New York, poor, the son of Russian immigrants, and he lived on the lower West Side, even as it was slowly becoming fashionable. "They painted the fronts white and the shutters green," he wrote fifty years later, "and invested the section with profitable romance by reviving its ancient name of Greenwich Village."

He finished high school and enrolled at Columbia University, where, during his first year, his principal interest was football, and he made the varsity squad. He graduated, and married, and went out to make his way in commerce, "having," as he wrote, "given up as hopeless for a Jew the ambition of becoming a professor of English." He worked, and made a modest living, for himself, his wife, and his two children. And then, in the thirties, his two children grown, he turned one day to his wife and asked her permission to leave his life and the little security it had given him in order to teach. Up until then, like Paul Gauguin, he had mostly seen, and now, like Gauguin, he wanted to express himself. Her consent, to

that as to every request he ever made, was instantly given. And he began the career, quietly, studiously, passionately, which made him friends among so many people who never laid eyes on him.

During all the years he had worked as a salesman and in advertising he had continued to read, and early in his post-graduate career he had fastened on Henry George as the object of his primary fascination. At first he was drawn to George because of the literary style. "Here," he once recalled, "was something of the cameo clarity of Matthew Arnold, a little of the parallel structure of Macaulay, the periods of Edmund Burke. I know I was more interested in how this man Henry George—some fellow who, I had heard, had run for mayor of New York—said it than in what he had to say. Probably a nineteenth century essayist, I surmised, whom I had missed and the deficiency had to be made up. I borrowed [*Progress and Poverty*] for a week or two."

Now, having for many years cultivated what he grew to believe was the unique social vision of George, he became the director of the Henry George School. But in due course there was a falling out, and he resigned. One cannot truly understand Henry George, he once remarked, without understanding his antipathy toward socialism. But George's most modern exegetes, he feared, were disposed to traduce George, to put his social philosophy at the service of the state. And it was the centralized state that Frank Chodorov was born, and lived, to oppose.

He had a go at journalism. During those years he had met Albert Jay Nock. Once again, in his admiration for Nock, he could unite his passion for prose and for a philosopher of the individual. Nock, the stunning belletrist, the author of *Our Enemy the State*, the founder of the renowned journal the *Freeman*. The two of them had a go—unsuccessful—at reviving the ancient *Freeman*. He turned then to individual journalism, rented a dingy little office downtown near where he grew up, and founded a personal monthly four-page journal which he called *analysis*. I met him there, where he wrote, edited, copyread, published, distributed, and merchandised the little journal which got under the skin of those, comparatively few, who

recognized that all, or seemingly all, of America, in a fit of opportunism, had lost hold of the ancient moorings. *analysis* was, for those who saw it, the testimony of a single man against the spirit of an age which had become infatuated with the possibilities of the central solution for the problems of society. In *analysis* the old fires burned, or rather were kept flickering. "Lenin," John Chamberlain wrote in 1952, "said it long ago: to make collectivism stick in a land that has known the blessings of individualism, you must catch a whole generation in the cradle and forcibly deprive it of tutors who have learned the bourgeois alphabet at their mothers' knees. In a land of republican law this is impossible; no matter how clever or omnipresent the collectivist propaganda may be, a few culture-carriers of the old tradition will escape. They may be reduced to publishing broadsheets like *analysis* instead of books; they may be compelled to conduct their straggling classes in dingy rooms in old brownstone fronts. Certainly they will have a hard time getting posts on a university faculty. But they will be still hanging around—and still talking—when the tinsel begins to wear off the latest Five Year Plan or government-sponsored Greenbelt colonization scheme. Their books and pamphlets, ready for the chance encounter that sparks all revolutions or 'reactions,' will fan the revival of the old tradition that periodically displaces the callow presumptions of the 'new.'"

The sparks were struck. He accepted a post with *Human Events*, which in those days was four pages of sparkling news commentary by Frank Hanighen and four pages of philosophy by him, alternating with Bertrand de Jouvenel, with William Henry Chamberlin, and, on the fourth week, with a guest. From there he went once again to the resurrected *Freeman*, which he served as editor, in association with Leonard Read. He left it to freelance, joining the staff of *National Review*, and then the tragedies, in rapid succession, struck.

His wife died, shortly after they celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary. He was inconsolable, lost; a mild rebuke, this individual powerlessness, some would say, to the spirit of total individualism—some, but only those who misunderstand

the nature of the individualism he believed in, which called for aloofness from remote and synthetic and involuntary associations, but which flowered in the giving of oneself to one's family, and friends, and philosophical soul mates. He went to Europe, for the first time, and was able to report exultantly on the collapse of rigid Marxism in Germany, the end of that demonic ideology that had elevated to religious faith the necessity to subordinate the individual. He returned to New York happy to conclude that dogmatic socialism was on the wane, but pessimistic, in his gentle, yet obdurate, way, that the forms would outlive the substance and that the inertia of statism would continue to erode the individual and the free society. And he kept on preaching.

And then, at the Freedom School in Colorado, he was struck down. His daughter, Grace, went to him, and he was barely able, after the stroke, to talk. But he did, in near delirium, mention that his faith in Henry George was whole, that George, above all others, understood. She brought him back to New York, and he recovered his powers of speech. But he could not write again, and as he grew worse, he could not read, and not to write, not to read were consignments to an insanity from which he was saved only by his devotion to Grace and her husband, Herbert, and to his grandchildren, Lisa, and Erik, and Francine. After a while he needed professional nursing care, and the first summer he stayed in the country, near Grace. I saw him there, and puffing his fugitive pipe, he leaned over to me and said grumpily: "You know what this place is? It's a die-in." His eyes twinkled, but he was not greatly amused—without his typewriter, his books, without even, for long hours of the day, his family. But he was resigned. He had been resigned ever since Celia died.

That fall he returned to New York, to the Mary Manning Walsh home, run by Catholic sisters, and there nursed first by Sister Fidelis, then—when she was transferred to Boston on the grounds that her miraculous attentions could not be monopolized by a single city—by Sister Bernadette Mary, who gave him attention and love. And always Grace, and Herbert, and the children. And the forbidden cigarette lighters, sneaked in to

him like hacksaw blades to men in a death house, and the wicked gleam of appreciation at this final defiance of authority. Individualism to the end. And finally, last Wednesday, a crisis, and a merciful death.

After I met him at *analysis*, we were frequently together. He came to Yale to speak while I was still an undergraduate. His manner was diffident, slightly didactic, firm, gentle—always gentle. Dr. Opitz reviewed one of his books and remarked that an extraordinary feature of it was that he united a polemical passion with an apparent incapacity to utter any meanness toward anyone, dead or alive. He spoke from a heart full of belief, enlightened by a mind keen and observant and understanding. He spoke thus, in style resolutely undemagogic, on every occasion. He thought it somehow profane, by the force of oratory, to seduce any listener toward positions with which he wasn't, somehow, organically oriented. "The purpose of teaching individualism," he wrote, "is not to *make* individualists but to *find* them. Rather, to help them find *themselves*. If a student takes readily to such values as the primacy of the individual, the free market place, or the immorality of taxation, he is an individualist; if he swallows hard, he must be counted a recruit for the other side." There are those, he was saying—and he took his thought from the Book of Job and later from the immortal essay of Albert Jay Nock on the Remnant—who are latently capable of understanding. Those who aren't, well, they aren't; but do what you can for those who are.

Whether a point of view about the political redeemability of the non-Remnant so morose is realistic doesn't much seem to matter somehow. It is quite enough for any man to do to stir the sentiments and thought of those who are predisposed to listen. And so at a relatively late age he swung into high gear. Among the enterprises he started was, in 1952, the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists, whose goal it is 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 figure-head, as I was soon reminded. In short order I had a letter from him: "Am removing you as president. Making myself

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pres. Easier to raise money if a Jew is president. You can be V-P. Love. Frank."

And then he started to write his books, his wonderful books of essays, innocent—and that was their strength—of the entangling complexities of modern life. It simply didn't matter that there had been an Industrial Revolution, that economists had made finicky examinations of the business cycle, that E had been discovered to be equal to mc squared. Because he dealt in personal and social truisms in his books, and he did not ever entertain the question that a world, whatever its conceits and effronteries, would conceivably presume to justify the subordination of the individual.

During the years immediately after he left Columbia, he was greatly infatuated with atheism. On reading and rereading Henry George, he abandoned his faith in nonfaith, though he never joined a religion; indeed, he ordained that no service said over his grave should be religious. He came to believe in "transcendence," a confession he wrote into an essay which he entitled—and the elision is his, not his editor's or his publisher's—"How a Jew Came to God." Many people, he penetrated, are unwitting believers. "Even the ultra-materialistic socialists," he wrote, "in their doctrine of historical inevitability, are guilty of transcendentalism. Admittedly, I reasoned, this is a flight of the finite mind from its own limitations; it is a search for security in an invariable; it is mining for bedrock in the infinite." As for him, he could only bring himself to say that religion, the kind of religion he believed in, is a "faith in the possibility of an explanatory pattern of constancies." John Chamberlain called him a mystic—"but only," said Chamberlain, "in the sense that all men of insight are mystics. His mystical assumption is that men are born as individuals possessing inalienable rights."

"These rights of man," his daughter, Grace, wrote me yesterday, "stem from a source higher than man and must not be violated. To him this *was* a religion. It was a belief handed down to his son and daughter as a religious concept—even though he did not consciously mean it thus. . . . He refused to think about spiritual freedom or the freedom gained through

the spiritual life; but in his concept of man's right to himself he unknowingly carried and tried to spread a message from the spiritual world."

We are gathered here today to affirm that knowing Frank Chodorov or even knowing his works was a spiritual experience. We weep at the loss of a father and a grandfather, a personal friend and teacher to those who knew him and his writings, a friend of the human race, whose faith in it—and love for its individual members—ennobles mankind. 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.