

# COMMENCEMENT

## Class of 2004



**Standing:** Headmaster Dr. Kenneth Calvert, Brian Clow, Nicholas Hayes, Annette Kirk, Matthew Mosley, Kyle Eriss, Henry Arnn, President Dr. Larry Arnn  
**Seated:** Amanda Belson, Melanie McElroy, Naomi Woods, Caitlin Baron, Caitlyn Buchhop

of our being. “We must strive to fix a circle of quiet by regularly retreating from business to learn how to be, not just how to do,” she said.

She warned the students that “from this day forward, your existence will never be precisely what it was before,” and encouraged them to be moral beings. In closing, Mrs. Kirk advised the graduates to keep in mind that, as the English poet Alexander Pope said, “You are part of a grand chain of being.”

Annette Y. Kirk is president of the Russell Kirk Center for Cultural Renewal in Mecosta, Michigan, and publisher of the cultural quarterly *The University Bookman*. She is also vice president of the Wilbur Foundation and director of the residential Fellows Program. She holds a bachelor of arts degree and an honorary doctor of letters degree from Molloy College. A native New Yorker, Mrs. Kirk moved to Mecosta when she married Russell Kirk. Her late husband is best known for authoring *The Conservative Mind*, a history of conservative thought.

## IMAGES FOR THE JOURNEY

### Commencement Address by Annette Kirk • June 6, 2004

Your commencement today, the end of your 12 years of schooling, is but a beginning of another phase, another chapter in your life, in your history that began at conception and will continue for all time and beyond. When we look at baby pictures of ourselves or read stories we wrote when we were young, we become aware that we are really the same person possessing the same soul even if our outward appearance changes as we grow older. The ultimate development of the soul—which only occurs when we have had some experience of life—brings the ability to discern “the still point,” which T.S. Eliot tells us, resides at the core of being.

Our lives can best be likened to a journey, a pilgrimage. When we were children, we were considered by all who loved us to be adorable little angels—but if truth be told, we were also often selfish little creatures whose favorite words were “me” and “mine.” As we grew older, if given proper guidance, we learned to expand our affections beyond our own wants and our association with just our own family and to become more involved in the lives of others. You graduates have been fortunate to have experienced here a caring academic community and to have acquired friends that may be yours for life.

During the course of our journey, if we are to nurture in ourselves an interior life, we must strive to fix a circle of quiet around ourselves by regularly

The Academy held its fourth annual Commencement Ceremony on June 6, graduating the ten members of the senior class. Three of the graduates—Caitlin Baron, Caitlyn Buchhop and Melanie McElroy—were the first to complete all 12 years at the Academy.

Dr. Kenneth Calvert praised the students, teachers and parents for their hard work. National Merit Finalist Nick Hayes included in his valedictory address to his fellow students a passage in Latin that said, “Your future is a brilliant sky bedecked with the promise of a million tomorrows.”

Dr. Brad Birzer, the Russell Amos Kirk Chair in History at Hillsdale College, introduced Commencement speaker Annette Kirk, calling her “a person of immense grace.”

Mrs. Kirk told the graduates, “We are the same person possessing the same soul even if our outward appearance changes as we grow older” and advised them to periodically find “the still point,” which T.S. Eliot said “resides at the core”

retreating from the noisiness and busyness of the everyday, so we can learn how to “be,” not only how to “do.” It is during such times of reflection we come to appreciate that we are beings possessing souls. Learning to fix this circle of quiet around yourselves becomes essential just now as you stand at a transitional point in your life. For from this day forward, upon the closing of this ritual, this ceremony marking a passage in your time here on earth, your existence will never be precisely as it was before.

Arnold Toynbee remarks in *An Historian’s Approach to Religion* that the human condition is necessarily tragic. For within each one of us, two great conflicting impulses work. One of these is the yearning to make one’s self the center of the universe; the other, a yearning for the love and communion of others. The person properly called “normal” is one who has maintained some tolerable tension between these impulses.

In a talk entitled *The Rediscovery of Mystery* that Russell gave here at Hillsdale more than two decades ago, he said, “We cannot find our way in this world without images; for as Chesterton tells us, all life is an allegory, and we can understand it only in parable. We must continually endeavor to transcend the image of self if we are to glimpse the world beyond the world...

“The image, then, can raise us on high or it can draw us down to the abyss. If we study good images in literature, in music, in the visual arts, why, the spirit is uplifted and in some sense liberated from the restraints of the flesh. But if we submit ourselves to evil images, why, we become what we admire.”

*Continued on back*

## Congratulations To Our 2004 Graduates

**Nicholas Hayes** – Valedictorian, National Honor Society Member, Honor Student, National Merit Finalist – Harvard University

**Caitlin Baron** – Salutatorian, National Honor Society Member, Honor Student – Hillsdale College

**Henry Arnn** – University of Dallas

**Amanda Belson** – Kellogg Community College

**Caitlyn Buchhop** – Ferris State University

**Brian Clow** – National Honor Society Member, Honor Student – Hope College

**Kyle Eriss** – Hanover College

**Melanie McElroy** – Albion College

**Matthew Mosley** – Jackson Community College

**Naomi Woods** – National Honor Society Member, Honor Student – Huntington College



*Best of Luck  
in the Future!*

*Commencement address continued from front*

Through images and especially fantasy, the mind of the child is led to apprehend reality. Myths, legends and tales of marvels enable little ones to grasp certain truths about human nature. When our daughter Monica was three, her favorite book was *Pinocchio*. By reading it to her, we hoped that she would learn moral truths from the Talking Cricket, grasp the consequences of the Puppet's misbehavior and perceive in the Fox and the Cat the power of malice in this world. She did take a dreadful joy in the perils of the hero and a satisfying pleasure in his redemption. Hopefully, Monica also came to know something of the need for order in the soul and the presence of temptation in the world. If when young, children are given wonder, creation always will remain wonderful to them.

Think of the tales told you when you were children either by your parents or your teachers, rhymes you learned or stories that you read to yourself. Those early images stay with us for life and often determine what kind of people we become. They help to form our character, a word which means "marks that endure," marks that are forever imprinted on our minds and hearts.

Today, more elaborate tales of wonderment for older readers can be found in the works of Tolkien and Lewis and others. Often set outside time and space, in an age that never existed historically, they are more relevant to the present condition of humanity than are most of today's campaign speeches. Profoundly religious, they are far more subtle and exciting than are most religious tracts.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, a terrible power of evil encompasses Middle Earth, Tolkien's imaginary realm. But a little band of courageous companions—men and hobbits and dwarves and elves, and even animals—resist and in the end, overthrow Sauron, the Lord of the Rings. This is a victory only temporary, however, for the struggle of mankind against evil is endless. Tolkien teaches not only that truth, but how to live in the present and how to triumph over temptation and death.

During your college years, for the image of what it is to be human, read Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*—and learn something of the character of sanctity. Read Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, and perceive something of the folly of the consequences of rebellion against nature—and find, too, how much reading of books can make a hero of a janitor. Thomas a Becket was flesh once while Bradbury's janitor is imaginary; but no matter. What does matter is seeing both the splendor and the misery of the human condition.

If we neglect to foster the imagination, we will suffer a great loss—that of our identities. For if we are not moral beings, we are but walking and talking machines composed of organic tissue. It is the moral

imagination that confers our identity upon us and which we must nurture in ourselves and transmit to the rising generation.

In this regard, we might reflect briefly, on the concept of piety—by which is meant reverence—not only for things spiritual but also for habit, custom and tradition. Of piety, Richard Weaver has said, "It seems to me that it signifies an attitude toward things which are immeasurably larger and greater than oneself without which man is an insufferably brash, conceited and frivolous animal. I do not in truth see how societies are able to hold together without some measure of this ancient and now derided feeling. . . the realization that piety is a proper and constructive attitude. . . helped me to develop what Russell Kirk calls "affection for the proliferating variety and mystery of traditional life." This realization was for me a kind of recovery of lost power or lost capacity for wonder and enchantment."

Thus, those who possess a spirit of piety accept the responsibility for teaching sentiments and attitudes that are the underpinnings of any viable society.

Finally, what other works of moral imagination might I recommend to you graduates who have been well prepared by your studies here at the Academy to be able to appreciate literature with theological themes?

Well, this fall, there will appear a collection of all three books of Russell's short stories in an anthology, entitled *Ancestral Shadows*. In a review of them, our daughter, Cecilia, a graduate of Hillsdale College, wrote, "My father's fiction often considers the eerie, the macabre, and even the diabolic. It portrays harsh spiritual battles beyond time and death. Such haunting works are far removed from the children's tales he told us, but they share a common element; the appeal to a normative consciousness, touching upon struggles of an ethical nature."

The best way to prepare yourself to read these stories, Thomas Howard tells us, is to "draw your chair close to the fire, pull the blinds, see that all is bolted and barred and huddle over your book. You will not be disappointed: goose-flesh will soon creep upon you, as you discover a specter at your elbow."

What then do I leave with you today as further advice for your journey? Decide, on a regular basis, to fix a circle of quiet around yourself, somewhere far from the madding crowd, perhaps in a nook or cranny in your college's library. If you are disposed toward meditation, reflect that you are part of the great chain of being that Alexander Pope speaks about or on the contract of eternal society, which is comprised of those who are dead, those who are living and those who are yet to come that Edmund Burke tells us about. Or—if such reflections seem a bit too daunting, then just choose a good book to read and lose yourself in the magic of its story. One's spirits are often best revived by reading tales of wonder, which, on occasion, can also result in our being, as was C.S. Lewis, "surprised by joy."