

# The New Criterion

## Features

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### Should he have spoken?

by [Roger Scruton](#)

The household gods of liberalism

In 1968 the products of the postwar baby boom decided to seize the European future and to jettison the European past. In that same year Enoch Powell delivered to the Birmingham Conservatives the speech known forever after as “Rivers of Blood”: a speech that cost him his political career, and which, on one plausible interpretation, made the issue of immigration undiscussable in British politics for close to forty years. It is a speech that raises in its acutest form the question of truth: What place is there for truth in public life, and what should a politician do when comfortable falsehoods have settled down in government, and their uncomfortable negations seek forlornly for a voice?

“Human kind cannot bear very much reality,” said T. S. Eliot. It is not one of his best lines, but he used it twice—in *Murder in the Cathedral* and in *Four Quartets*—and in both places its prosaic rhythmle ...

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