

Henry Regnery

## Beginning with Buckley

*William Buckley's publisher notes the silver anniversary of God and Man at Yale.*

Last October 15 marked an important date in the history of the postwar conservative movement: the 25th anniversary of the publication of William F. Buckley, Jr.'s *God and Man at Yale*. The impact of that book and the turmoil it caused are hard to imagine now, but in 1951 it was an instant best-seller that probably provoked more controversy, and was more widely reviewed and more passionately condemned, than any other book of the past generation.

Looking back, it could well be that *God and Man at Yale* was more important for what it did than for what it actually said. It challenged a concept which dominates university education, namely that knowledge is an end in itself, to be pursued for its own sake without regard for purpose or values; and, in addition, the book launched the career of Bill Buckley. To keep it all in perspective, it may be worthwhile to recall some other important dates in the history of the modern revolt against liberalism: Albert J. Nock's *Memoirs of a Superfluous Man* was published in 1943, F.A. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* in 1944, and Richard Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences* in 1948. *The Conservative Mind* appeared in 1953, two years after *God and Man at Yale*; it is indicative of the influence of this book by Russell Kirk that the word "conservative" is hardly used in the book that vaulted Bill Buckley, then two years out of Yale, into prominence. In *God and Man at Yale* Buckley described himself not as a conservative, but as an individualist. Now, a generation later, it would be difficult to conceive of the conservative movement without Bill Buckley: through his articles, books, public appearances, and his magazine *National Review*, but most of all, perhaps, by his manner and personality, he has given it style, has brought divergent factions together, and has become its representative figure.

The thesis of *God and Man at Yale* is clear, unequivocal, and easily stated. Buckley argued that Yale represented itself, and derived its support on the basis of this representation, as a great educational institution dedicated to upholding and handing on the basic values and traditions of American society, values and traditions that are essentially Christian and individualist. Instead of this, however, Buckley went on to say, Yale in its teaching and by its example was inculcating values which are contrary to the teachings of Christianity and, in the areas of economics and politics, collectivist. As for academic freedom—the sub-title of the book is *The Superstitions of Academic Freedom*—it had become nothing more than a "handy slogan that is constantly used to bludgeon into impotence numberless citizens who waste away with frustration as they view in their children and their children's children the results of *laissez-faire* education."

Buckley supported his argument with numerous examples of the attitudes of influential teachers and the contents of textbooks, and by describing the impact of a Yale education as experienced by a recent graduate who, having strong convictions of his own, was

well aware of what went on about him. He ended his book with a plea to the alumni, as the proper custodians of the university, to assert themselves, to demand, as the price of their support, that Yale represent the moral and spiritual values it claims to stand for and which the alumni themselves—or so Buckley thought—really believe in. Such a book, obviously, was a great challenge to Yale, and even more to the reigning orthodoxy of liberalism, and for a young man to throw such a challenge at one of the most strongly entrenched, self-satisfied, and influential groups in the country took courage and conviction; the fact that he survived it all is evidence both of his strength of character and the essential correctness of his position.

Although Bill Buckley, having been Chairman of the *Yale Daily News* as an undergraduate, had already made his views well known, Yale reacted to his book as though it had been invaded from outer space. There were news stories, editorials, letters to the editor, and a series of long, heavy-handed replies from various professors in the *Yale Daily News*; the *Alumni Magazine* responded equally indignantly to "the book," as it soon came to be called; and the university appointed a commission to investigate "the intellectual and spiritual welfare of the university"—making no mention of Buckley or the book—which reported, needless to say, that all was well. The first great blast from outside the Yale community came from McGeorge Bundy, who was then associate professor of government at Harvard. His review, which appeared in the November *Atlantic*, can be said, I think, to have set the tone of the "official" response to the book. Bundy found the book "dishonest in its use of facts, false in its theory, and a discredit to its author." In his reply to Buckley's rejoinder, both of which appeared in the December issue of the *Atlantic*, Professor Bundy, who must have been in a white heat of passion at the time, began: "When I sat down to review Mr. Buckley's book, I was somewhat concerned lest my readers refuse to believe that so violent, unbalanced and twisted a young man really existed." And Theodore M. Greene, professor of philosophy at Yale, from whom, therefore, one might have expected something better, began a long reply to the book in the *Yale Daily News* with the observation: "Mr. Buckley has done Yale a great service, and may do the cause of liberal education an even greater service, by stating the fascist alternative to liberalism so clearly that we can all see it for what it is...."

In fairness to Yale and the academic profession, it must be said that not all professors became so hysterical as Professors Bundy and Greene. Professor William K. Wimsatt, Jr. of the Yale English Department, also writing about the book in the *Yale Daily News*, commented: "The section on religion I do not find startling. The voices of militant scepticism at Yale have always sounded far louder to me than those of evangelism. Despite the genuine religious and moral outlook of many individual members of the faculty, the prevailing secularism of the university is palpable. I agree with Mr. Buckley that a good deal of superstition attaches to the term 'academic freedom.' The freedom of a citizen never has been and never can be complete—unless in a society about to dissolve. And the scholar-teacher does not escape being a

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citizen....A professor's political freedom can surely be no wider than anybody else's, and his responsibility is surely somewhat heavier than that of many others." Felix Morley, former President of Haverford College, wrote in a long review in *Barron's* that: "...his well-reasoned and well-supported argument must be taken seriously...Mr. Buckley makes a case against current college instruction that cannot go unanswered." And Peter Viereck, in a not uncritical review in the *New York Times*, was able to say: "As gadfly against the smug Comrade Blimps of the left, this important, symptomatic, and widely hailed book is a necessary counterbalance."

We have come a long way since McGeorge Bundy characterized William F. Buckley, Jr. as "violent, unbalanced, and twisted" to the point of being unbelievable for having pointed out a situation which subsequent events—the student revolts of the 1960s, among others—have made obvious. While the universities themselves have proved Buckley to have been right in his basic thesis, the immediate impact of the book, in spite of the storm it aroused, was probably slight, at least on Yale. As Bundy confidently predicted they would, Yale alumni contributed more to their university the year after the publication of "the book" than they ever had before, thus confirming Joseph Schumpeter's famous remark that the bourgeoisie not only educates its enemies, but permits itself to be educated by them. The great question the Buckley book raised, however, still remains unanswered, and asking it may have been its greatest service: If those entrusted with handing on "the sustaining intellectual and moral structures of civilization" (the phrase is Eliseo Vivas') instead disparage and

subvert them, where are we to turn?

How does one account for the remarkable impact of a book which, as Dwight MacDonald observed, was "a non-fiction work by an unknown author put out by a small publisher and dealing with no broader or livelier topic than the Yale curriculum"? MacDonald's explanation, that "there is a big market today for anti-liberal polemics," explains nothing. The book was perfectly timed, of course—Yale was in the act of celebrating, with much ceremony, the two-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of its founding just as the book came out; but there was more to it than timing. The book was written in great style, the facts, however much one might quibble about this or that quotation or emphasis, were irrefutable, Buckley's personality and skill as a debater were invaluable promotional assets, and Yale is a major American institution. There is also another factor, and this might be the most important one: Buckley, as I said at the beginning, challenged a concept of knowledge and of teaching which has dominated the universities for at least a century, and which many people, perhaps more instinctively than explicitly, were beginning to feel uneasy about. Hiroshima and Nagasaki had demonstrated with startling clarity that knowledge, pursued for its own sake and without regard to value or purpose, can give us the means to destroy ourselves. Bill Buckley put an issue before us for which there is no simple solution, but which becomes every day more pressing: How do we control the universities? His solution, that the alumni must step in and take over, was obviously no solution, but the question remains. □

Joseph Hazan

## Why France Belongs in NATO

*France's re-entry into full military status in the Atlantic Alliance  
would breathe fresh vigor into the Free World.*

A great power play is in the making in Western Europe. It began with the oil crisis of 1973; now it threatens to make the whole continent a Soviet sphere of influence. While the Communist threat in Western Europe looms large—perhaps larger than ever before—NATO, the treaty organization designed to defend Western Europe, lies weak. The Soviet Union continues to devote ever larger proportions of its Gross National Product to its military forces, despite a lagging national economy. The Warsaw Pact forces outnumber those of NATO 3 to 1 in manpower, planes, and tanks, and the Communist forces are deployed offensively, whereas the readiness of United States armed forces in Europe is, in the words of the U.S. General Accounting Office, "woefully deficient." Meantime the Communist political opposition within Europe presses ever harder to accede to power. In Italy, a Communist takeover of the parliament was averted in last summer's elections, but the Communists continue their insidious penetration into the highest levels of government. Communists now lead the most powerful—and still growing—labor organization in Spain; the revolutionary leftists of Portugal, denied power last year in the first elections since Salazar's demise, wait anxiously for a false step by the Socialist minority government; in the United Kingdom the extreme Left is becoming increasingly vocal while the Labour Party tries desperately to avoid a major economic catastrophe.

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But France appears to stand aloof from this power play, her allegiance to NATO shaken since General de Gaulle withdrew France from the integrated military command in 1966.

Gaullists claimed that France's adherence to the NATO integrated command would hazard dragging her into a conventional war in remote Angola or Indochina, or worse, into a nuclear conflict. Yet in the light of global realities, there must be doubt as to whether a country like France, if it acts alone, is not in the end working against its best interests by profoundly weakening NATO. In the only valid sense, French national independence must be understood as the condition wherein French values are best preserved. And the aims of Soviet foreign policy pose a far greater menace to those values than would the most constricting alliance with the United States. Throughout history, even the greatest of empires have relied on alliances to defend themselves. And the mark of a true statesman is to recognize in time the necessity for alliance. It is in light of these observations and my faith in alliances that I should like to re-examine briefly France's Atlantic policy of the last two decades and to suggest what its new orientation should be.

One of General de Gaulle's first major moves after regaining power in 1958 was to propose that NATO be led by a tridirectorate of France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It is vital for Gaullists to remember this because they tend to forget that de Gaulle's initial choice was not independence but integration in a system where France would be on a par