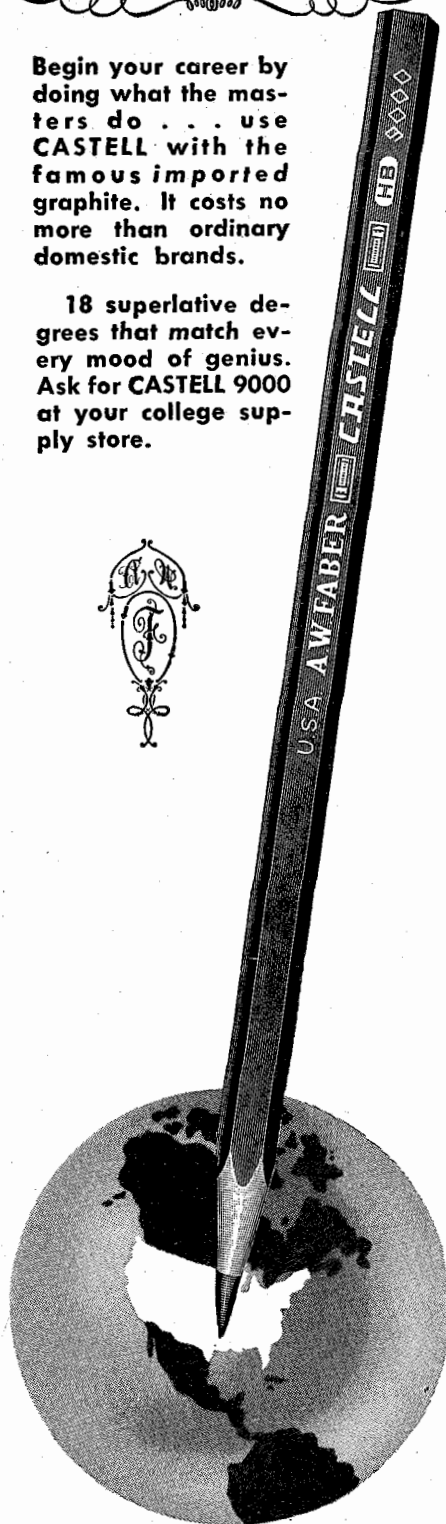


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BOOKS

GOD AND MAN AT YALE: The Superstitions of "Academic Freedom"

by William F. Buckley, Jr.
Henry Regnery, Chicago \$3.50

Reviewed by Hallett Smith
Chairman of the
Division of the Humanities

YALE IS A UNIVERSITY in New Haven, Connecticut. Among the diverse and distinguished living alumni of the place are Dean Acheson, Senator Taft, Clark Millikan and Henry R. Luce. The alma mater song ends "For God, for Country and for Yale," and in New Haven this series is not felt to be an anticlimax.

But a recent graduate, William F. Buckley, Jr., of the Class of 1950, has now fired a broadside at the University for not doing right by God or Country. The faculty is, he says, composed largely of atheistic socialists, and, what is even more surprising, he claims that the students are strongly influenced by the teaching.

This kind of complaint is not new; it has been heard many times in recent years from politicians, super-patriotic organizations and Westbrook Pegler. It is unusual, however, to hear the complaint, so elaborately presented as it is in this book, from an able and clever young man just out of the university. Mr. Buckley writes well and knows how to dramatize his points in the manner of a skillful debater. His book deserves, and will get, attention from alumni of privately-controlled institutions other than Yale.

His first argument, that Yale works against Christianity, is fairly well defined. By Christianity Mr. Buckley means a personal faith, something beyond ethics and philosophy. He describes the basic courses offered in the field, mentioning the professors by name and analyzing their religious positions.

Even the courses taught by clergymen are inadequate, for him, because they are not direct exhortations of the faith. It is a little difficult to see how anything short of Billy Graham would satisfy him. Mr. Buckley does not defend or explain his conception of Christianity; he merely says he is committed to it. But he apparently puts little emphasis upon the Christian virtue of humility: *God and Man at Yale* is an arrogant book.

Mr. Buckley's argument on economics amounts really, as the author frankly admits, to an attack upon academic freedom. He believes that the Yale alumni are predominantly believers in "individualism," i.e. free enterprise, "The American Way," capitalism as it operated in this country before 1932. The social science faculty at Yale does not teach this gospel, he says, and it is the clear duty of the alumni to withhold financial support until it does. He would like, apparently, to have the alumni constitute themselves a board of censorship on textbooks and a board of inquisition on faculty members and their beliefs. (This in the name of "individualism.")

What kind of university Yale would be if Mr. Buckley had his way is somewhat hard to imagine. I do not think it would have many students, and I feel fairly sure it could never again boast of such names as Benjamin Silliman, Josiah Willard Gibbs or William Graham Sumner on its faculty. It would be evangelical and to the right of Senator Taft. But could it possibly be called a great university?

Mr. Buckley's case against Yale is elaborately documented, and his book may well cause alarm among many alumni. I think the total effect of the book can only be described as harmful to higher education and to the university the author says he loves. For this is no thoughtful, impartial examination, despite all the cases cited. It is a slick job of special pleading.

When he is confronted with an important statement of a point of view opposed to his, like the great letter of Grenville Clark to a disgruntled alumnus of the Harvard Law School, he avoids discussing the content of the letter but calls it "a lengthy, erudite statement" and makes a great to-do about the number of words used by the parties in the controversy.

He is very adroit at shifting his ground, and he is in possession of a large arsenal of loaded phrases. He will not expose his own position to attack, but keeps calling up offensive reserves from his recent personal experiences at Yale, the published opinions of people on his side, and, most of all, quotations out of context.

Mr. Buckley says he realizes that exaggeration and distortion would do Yale unwarranted damage and cause personal humiliation to himself. A reviewer can only report that the exaggeration and distortion are right there, in the book.