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What About "God and Man"?

A Symposium

Chairman: E. Russell Naughton

God and Man at Yale is a book by a recent graduate of Yale, which centers upon the matter of academic freedom at that university. The author is young but the problems are as old as education itself. FOUR QUARTERS presents this symposium on the subject matter of the book because of the universality of the problems, and the fact that the book has aroused wide interest. Three students of La Salle were asked to discuss the book; their discussion is presented below in dialogue form. Next, individuals on the faculty were asked to comment on the book in terms of their specialized fields, and these remarks follow the students' dialogue.

There is a problem regarding the evaluation of *God and Man at Yale*: what is to be the basis of such an evaluation? The author himself offers four points to be considered: the teaching of religion, the teaching of economics, the control of an institution of higher education by the alumni, and academic freedom. It seems that the basis of evaluation must be shifted as it is applied to each of the four points. Moreover, the participants in this symposium are Catholics and they are writing in a Catholic magazine. However, the reader will find that the problems are seriously considered and that the basis of the evaluation will be found in terms of what ought to be done, what ought not to be done, and what is done, in both sectarian and non-sectarian institutions.

Student Round Table:

(Dialogue transcribed by Charles J. Fulforth, Senior English Major)

PAUL J. MCGINNIS (*Junior Education Major*): The book, *God and Man at Yale*, seems to be well done from a journalistic point of view—the points are forcefully presented and supported by facts.

JOSEPH G. MCLEAN (*Senior English Major*): I agree.

THOMAS J. BLESSINGTON (*Senior Business Administration Major*): I also agree, but the fact is, Buckley went to extremes in his crusade for the revival of individualism. We have to ascertain whether there is an undue distortion here or whether the emphasis was necessary in order to achieve the purpose of the book. I believe it was necessary and proper.

McGINNIS: Well, I don't think Buckley treated of the conditions at Yale very objectively, and I think that objectivity is a necessary virtue in a work of this sort.

McLEAN: I am not inclined to agree with you. Buckley is right in believing that something is sorely wrong with our present educational set-up. I think that he has done a fine job in unveiling many of the specific evils in the system in vogue today in so many of our colleges.

McGINNIS: That may be, and if the author were consistent in his own viewpoint, I would be willing to concede the validity of his method. However, I find many inconsistencies in Mr. Buckley's position. I say there is a contradiction between Christianity and pure individualism—in religious as well as economic and political matters.

McLEAN: Well, I admit that this is a weak point in Buckley's position and I certainly do not agree with his individualism.

BLESSINGTON: Why not discuss the teaching of religion at Yale first?

McLEAN: I am willing to do so and I point out that if Yale is a sectarian school and teaches (or tries to inculcate in the student) the belief that one religion is the true one, then it would be a breach of trust for the administration to expose the bulk of the students to a teacher whose lack of religious conviction could harmfully influence even one student even slightly.

BLESSINGTON: It seems to me that Yale must be considered a non-sectarian school today, even though it did begin under the auspices of a particular religious group.

McLEAN: This may be in line with what Buckley calls their teaching of religion as a cultural phenomenon. But, if this is the case, then no attempt should be made to establish any given set of religious values.

BLESSINGTON: Then the religion courses should be placed in the history department as history courses. If a course be called a religion course, it should deal with morality and the like, and this brings up some kind of religious values.

McGINNIS: I would consent to the teaching of a course in comparative religion as a history course—as a matter of fact, I think much profit could be derived from such a course. Obviously, though, there must be regular religion courses as well.

McLEAN: Theoretically, an atheist might give a more objective course in comparative religion.

BLESSINGTON: Students do look up to the teacher as a guide, and there is a danger in having irreligious teachers handling religion courses. Of course there is bound to be anti-religious prejudices in the teachers of other subjects—it would be impossible to exclude all of these in a non-sectarian institution.

- McLEAN: The problem of teachers influencing students is indeed a serious one and I think it can be judged only on the basis of the integrity of the individual teachers. An atheist would lack integrity as a teacher only when he has allowed his own personal prejudices and biases to intrude upon the subject matter of the course.
- McGINNIS: Of course, snide anti-religious remarks of a teacher would do little harm were a student to take them with a grain of salt.
- BLESSINGTON: Such remarks might also arouse the competitive spirit in some students; encourage comments and discussion; and, perhaps, benefit everyone.
- McLEAN: The question of the personal bias of some teachers is only a facet of the central problem Buckley feels Yale is facing. The real problem is the overall rejection of religion as a vital influence. Certainly, if what Buckley reports is true, no difference of opinion is presented to the student on this matter, for there seems to be a common front against religion in many areas of instruction.
- McGINNIS: That seems to be true, but the religious services at Yale seem to be as well attended as many of the same kind at our Catholic colleges—here at La Salle we do not have crowded chapel services.
- BLESSINGTON: The difference between Yale and La Salle seems to be in the type of student attending the services, since religious services seem to be more of a social function at Yale, and so attendance gives social stature.
- McLEAN: I would like to move on to the economic aspects of Buckley's book. Although I would object to the one-sided views Buckley sees as offered to the unwary student by Yale's economics department, I cannot accept Buckley's solution. In attacking what he considers an extreme condition, he proposes that another extreme replace it.
- BLESSINGTON: Buckley does seem to feel that anything to the left of Taft is too far to the left.
- McGINNIS: I am convinced that the extreme individualism which Buckley proposes is a very materialistic one, despite the contentions of Buckley to the contrary.
- McLEAN: I agree with you on that. The tenor of the whole section dealing with economics seems to deny the value of making ethical judgments on economic activities. For Buckley, the law of supply and demand equates what is done and what *should* be done. Remove social control (such as government regulation), permit *laissez-faire* economics, then the basis of all activity becomes man's own selfish desire. This position is untenable for me.
- McGINNIS: Common sense demands some type of government control.

BLESSINGTON: Then we stand unanimously opposed to Buckley's economic views. We also stand opposed to the treatment of economics from just the collectivist viewpoint—as seems to be the case at Yale, according to Buckley.

McLEAN: I particularly disliked Buckley's inference that government regulation always brings concomitant loss of freedom. In England, for example, a new party was elected to office despite the fact that a socialistic group was in power at that time. There never is a loss of real freedom if the people are alert.

McGINNIS: Turning to the problem of the alumni, I wish to say that I don't believe that the power to control college policy should lie in the hands of the alumni. It would be impossible for so large a body to agree on governing principles. I would take the position Buckley rejects: the authority as to what shall or shall not be taught should be the instructor.

McLEAN: Mr. Buckley would substitute authority of the alumni for that of the teacher. Is this an improvement? The values which he says are being taught at Yale did not occur spontaneously, but were developed over a long period of time. It would be safe to assume that many Yale graduates are also immersed in a materialistic tradition, even if under the name of individualism. Absolute power in the hands of either group can well lead to academic dictatorship.

BLESSINGTON: I think we are agreed that the alumni should not have control of a college and that the major responsibility rests with the administration.

McGINNIS: Apparently the administration feels that some accounting is due the alumni, for Mr. Buckley extracts sentences from the addresses of the university presidents in which they say Christian principles are being taught. It appears, according to Buckley, that the presidents are painting a rosy picture of affairs at the university, and so the alumni are unaware of what is truly happening at their alma mater.

McLEAN: If the administration tells its alumni that Christian principles are being fostered (provided what Buckley writes is true), it is either tragically unaware of conditions at the school or it is lying. In either case, this is a serious charge which Buckley brings against the administration.

BLESSINGTON: If Buckley's charges are true, it is fitting that he wrote the book. It is the duty of the present student.

McGINNIS: It is the inconsistencies of Buckley I object to. For instance, he tells the alumni to discontinue their financial support of Yale University until its supposed leaning toward atheism and collec-

tivism is corrected. However, in the same section, he points out that alumni contributions must continue if Yale is not to go to the national government for aid—this, of course, is collectivism at its worst.

McLEAN: I agree with this statement of Buckley's inconsistency.

McGINNIS: And now for the matter of academic freedom. In its broadest sense, academic freedom does not exist at Yale, if what Buckley says is true.

BLESSINGTON: This is a particular problem of our civilization.

McLEAN: Yes. As long as you have a civilization which drifts into atheism and immorality because of the lethargy of the people, there will be no universal standards of right and wrong and, under this mode, an atheist has just as much right to foster his views as does a believer. However, at Yale, truth and error are not given equal chance according to Buckley—at least, irreligion is given many advantages over religion. Even if truth and error are permitted to fight freely, truth will not *always* be victorious. The forces of truth certainly ought to be given equal chance.

BLESSINGTON: I do think that even a non-sectarian university can set a standard to which all must conform. Naturally, such a standard cannot be too rigid. Should a student or teacher not accept that standard, he remains free to choose another university in which to study or teach.

McGINNIS: I'll agree with that.

McLEAN: I believe that it is impossible for a modern non-sectarian college to have a standard to which everyone will conform. I cannot see the basis for such a standard.

McGINNIS: You have a point there. Our age is one of transition, and we seem to be headed towards a new social and moral order. In such a transition, there always is conflict between traditionalists and progressives, and it would be most difficult to set a standard when neither of these trends can be given undue prominence.

BLESSINGTON: We cannot abolish a standard just because people have a disinclination to follow it. The fact remains that we do have a standard of morality in our country—witness the senatorial committees which are empowered to investigate subversion and corruption in the government.

McLEAN: We, as Catholics, have an objective standard and this may be true for other religious groups, but I do not think you can argue that such a standard exists in general within social groups in this country.

McGINNIS: There is a problem here, but I believe that a college professor has the right to teach what he believes is objective truth. I think Buckley magnifies to an unwarranted degree the fact that some professors slammed religion and morality only to make their courses more enticing.

BLESSINGTON: We cannot subscribe to complete academic freedom.

McGINNIS: That is true. Academic freedom is not an absolute right. In certain fields, such as economics, what is right may change. However, morality does not change even though everyone may not agree as to how morality applies in a particular case.

McLEAN: But this still does not solve the problem. Most people today do not recognize absolute values. How, then, can they have standards? I believe that you cannot force values upon a faculty if the administration does not agree on just what constitutes the standard.

McGINNIS: Then professional competency should be the primary qualification to be looked for in the teacher. He should be able to teach his subject without thrusting his moral views upon the student. Moreover, a student ought to recognize a situation in which the professor goes off his proper subject matter.

McLEAN: But you must remember that students are easily impressed by their teachers, and some teachers have greater capacity than others to so impress their students.

McGINNIS: They shouldn't be, but I will admit that some are.

BLESSINGTON: Non-sectarian colleges are built upon the premise of academic freedom. If this is properly applied, then each side should have a chance to present its viewpoint. In this manner, the student ought to be able to investigate and draw his own conclusions.

McGINNIS: I think that a professor should state his opinions as opinion and not as if they were facts. Moreover, he ought to give a short summary of the opposing arguments before making any dogmatic pronouncements.

BLESSINGTON: Your idea seems impractical. A professor will be unable to present the opposite viewpoint with conviction. I think there should be teachers for both sides.

McGINNIS: Well, Buckley seems to say, "Teach me what I want to hear or don't teach at all."

McLEAN: We cannot agree with that. My general view of the book is that Buckley had sufficient grounds for writing it if what he says in it is true, but I cannot agree with him as to the solutions he proposes for the problems.

BLESSINGTON: I find that statement acceptable.

McGINNIS: I concur in this verdict.

BROTHER EDWARD PATRICK, *Associate Professor of Religion*:

The average college in the United States is secularistic in mood and atmosphere. It ignores religion because religion is supposed to be a private matter; it is supposed to be something that cannot be proved or tested in a laboratory; it is something that a man cannot be sure of; if he is sure of his religion, it is because he has faith, and having faith is a nice affair, but it isn't important.

Influential men in the average college ignore religion. If pressed for a reason, they may say quietly: "Well, anything you say about God or religion is a gratuitous statement and cannot be proved. In this respect it makes no sense, and is therefore non-sense, and as such has no importance in an institution dedicated to science."

So the professors and their students in the average college in the United States ignore religion. Frequently this is the case where originally the college was a seminary for a Protestant sect. This is the case at Yale, according to William Buckley's book.

Then there are members of the faculty in the average college who are actively scoffers at religion, who call religion and especially Christianity, ghost-fear or modern witchcraft, who regard those who are religious as superstitious and stupid. And they believe it their duty to warn their students against this sort of charlatanism. So they ridicule and laugh at religion. They strive to free their charges from the manacles of modern religious practices. They make witty remarks about religion and get their students to laugh in class and they get a reputation. Buckley says Yale has men like that.

Then there are professors in American colleges who teach courses in religion, who read the Bible and interpret it in a scholarly fashion, who have certain beliefs that are traditional and are strong for the moral law. But they are not sure about the true faith. They are not always certain what the Scriptures mean and who Jesus Christ is. They are confused about historic Christianity and the historical fact of the Church. And their students become confused also. Again, Buckley: there are men like that at Yale.

A Catholic who comes face to face with this sort of agnosticism, and antagonism, and confusion in a college like Yale is bound to react strongly if he is as alert and as intellectual as William Buckley. But he is manifesting *naïveté* if he expects a college like Yale to strengthen him in his faith and his religion. Yale doesn't promise to do that. Yale makes few promises, it would seem, but it doesn't promise a Catholic that he will find courses to make him understand and appreciate his religion.

Only a Catholic college can help a Buckley develop his religious instincts and virtues, his doctrines and practices, his culture and ideals. It is amusing to see a Catholic student calling upon a secularist college to return to its Protestant ideals. But that seems to be what William Buckley is trying to do. It is ironic to see a Catholic going to Yale and more ironic

to hear him complain that the college doesn't develop religion. What did William Buckley expect?

JAMES F. KELEHER, *Assistant Professor of Philosophy:*

The value of the book is to be found largely in the fact that the author has succeeded in getting into the arena of public discussion a chronic disease of our American way of life. That disease is, of course, the aggressive secularism to be found in all phases of our activities, including some professedly religious. The secularization of religious institutions has been proceeding intermittently but progressively for over a century, despite occasional setbacks such as that given by the Rev. Timothy Dwight at Yale, to which Mr. Buckley refers. Mr. Buckley's contribution to the problem is properly journalistic, rather than remedial. By describing actually current situations and naming current practitioners, Mr. Buckley has done his best to make it impossible for college students and their family advisers to rely on the cliché "It really isn't so bad as you are trying to make it, Father." The religious situation in non-Catholic colleges, including some professedly denominational, is, in the precise meaning of the phrase, God-awful.

Mr. Buckley does, indeed, prescribe a remedy on the basis of his verifiable diagnosis. But the intellectual ground-plan for a university which he describes as the replacement for the secularized institutions of our day is the ground-plan of most, if not all, Catholic colleges and universities in America today. Since that is the kind of education which Mr. Buckley recommends, he won't get it from the trustees, the officers, or the alumni of the secularized institutions either now or in the foreseeable future. He will get it from almost any Catholic institution. Mr. Buckley will also get, in a Catholic institution in America, regular exposure to the Papal Encyclicals on Labor. The unenlightened economic individualism which seems to be part of Mr. Buckley's personal heritage is not part of his Catholic heritage. It is, rather, part of the secularized heritage which practicing Catholics, as Catholics, reject.

ROBERT J. COURTNEY, *Assistant Professor of Government:*

The success of much of the teaching which William F. Buckley, Jr., condemns is clearly evident by a casual look at the contemporary scene: improper governmental influence is exerted to obtain loans; gifts to the right persons lessen the tax burden; there is dishonesty in relief disbursements, corruption in public enterprises, corrupt dealing between government and private corporations.

Disreputable dealings and corruption are evident at every level of government—national, state, and local. All are the result of a complete disregard for the moral law by the many, and the complacency of countless others toward this moral decadence. Once an individual rejects the truth of the moral law, anything is justifiable.

There is nothing which can mitigate the effect of the good life, which is the desire of all, more quickly than an undermining of the essential values of mankind. The current concept that belief in God is for elderly ladies and the unenlightened leads those who "really know" to cast aside this mesmerizing influence as contrary to the social welfare.

With atheistic materialism as the goal of modern man, under the aegis of the leaders of the Communist dictatorship, respect for lawful authority becomes a mere expediency. The various facets of this Marxian idea have led many non-Communists to accept this concept as their way of life. Socially-minded persons indoctrinated with a philosophy of social welfare based on expediency, and lacking moral truth, find it a simple matter to commit acts of injustice in the name of justice and social well-being.

That something should be done about this situation is clearly evident, because social justice can best be accomplished under the moral law. However, any attempt to interject the thought of God into the public school system brings the cry of "unconstitutional" from the pseudo-liberals who believe that since God cannot be non-partisan He must be banned completely from the individual's mind. Let these Church-State segregationists try to content themselves with the current results of this Godless life and its evil consequences!

The partial solution to this perplexing problem seems to lie in the non-public domain: the strengthening and expansion of the sectarian school system, a more vigorous church-school program for those who must attend the public schools, a greater recognition of vocational training in sectarian schools, and in the colleges a vigorous attempt to instill in the minds of our future leaders those values which are truth itself.

This program must be financed from non-governmental funds in order to preserve the independence of the school system so that the program may be faithfully executed. Such a condition places a burden upon those who would undertake this project, one requiring a financial sacrifice, but the moralist must be willing to make sacrifices for his cause.

What happens to academic freedom in our insistence upon teaching based on the moral law? It is preserved and strengthened, because academic freedom does not permit unbridled license to teach anything at variance with the truth and there can be no reasonable doubt of the truth of the moral law. To permit dissemination of error would find the schools in the anomalous position of helping to forge the steel of their own destruction.

JOSEPH F. HOSEY, *Instructor in English:*

I found the most interesting section of Mr. Buckley's book to be his chapter on "The Superstitions of 'Academic Freedom,'" and I have selected it for comment here. I believe it constitutes the key portion of the volume, and that his whole thesis stands or falls upon the points he makes in it. If I do not misunderstand him, he says that the concept

of academic freedom, as it is generally understood, is at best an illusion, at worst a deliberate hoax. At some point or other in the academic process truth must be distinguished from falsehood and superior values from inferior ones, and after this point has been reached it is sheer nonsense to allow anyone to teach anything false or inferior.

Now this fact is hardly contestable. The great question is not *whether* an accepted body of truths and values is to be taught, but *who* is to determine what such truths and values are. Mr. Buckley puts this function squarely into the hands of "the consumer" of education, the parents who pay the tuition and the alumni who endow the academic community: ". . . it must be affirmed that every citizen in a free economy, no matter the wares that he plies, must defer to the sovereignty of the consumer." Mr. Buckley wrings his hands in anguish at the thought that in education this principle ought to be followed but is not; I have for years been under the impression that it is followed but ought not to be.

The horrible fact is that the conviction that people should get what they pay for has reduced American education almost to idiocy: teachers who neither know nor respect their subjects (though they have studied "educational methods") teach arbitrarily assigned subjects to students who are not interested in learning; they then give examinations which do not in fact test anything but the students' animal cunning, and confer diplomas and grant degrees which have purely economic, not academic, value. How did such a state of things come about if the people who are paying for it do not want it?

They do want it. More accurately, they don't want anything except the diplomas and the degrees. They get them, and like to feel they've spent a certain amount of time and effort, in addition to money (our one real standard of value), in the process. What concern is it of any citizen, from the taxpayer who merely supports the public schools to the wealthy university alumnus who endows a new gymnasium, what subjects are taught in the classrooms? None at all. They are not paying for knowledge, but for the prestige and economic advantages of a degree. And that is just what they get. Mr. Buckley's naive assumption that the Yale alumni, or any other alumni for that matter, wishes specifically to see Christianity and *laissez-faire* capitalism taught in our universities, will not bear examination. The people who rule American education, at Yale or anywhere else, are in fact indifferent or hostile to religion of any kind, and *laissez-faire* economics must be supported by a mass of discredited generalizations that no longer seem to convince even its adherents, to judge by the pitch of their voices. The natural result is that religion is taught indifferently or with positive hostility, and individualistic economics not at all.

The fact is, of course, that final academic decisions ought no more to be made by students, parents, or alumni than final medical decisions ought to be made by patients or legal decisions by litigants. Such inversion does sometimes certainly occur, but at the risk of health or loss of a

lawsuit. And in the academic world as well, the "sovereignty of the consumer" can end only in anarchy and chaos. It has in fact already done so.

The variety of opinion regarding this book was expected. Obviously it has many good points and many bad ones. Both the students and the faculty seem to admire the journalistic perfection of the book and the effectiveness of its presentation. Unfortunately, this seems to be the best thing that can be said for the work.

Concerning the teaching of religion, Buckley points out that more harm is done than good in this matter. The objection of the contributors to the symposium to Buckley's chapter on religion is that he expects far too much in a non-sectarian institution. The question is raised as to why he went to Yale if he were looking for objective truth. As a Catholic, he should have sought that truth in a Catholic educational institution.

Regarding the teaching of economics, the contributors agree that there is a dangerous overemphasis on collectivism. The textbooks themselves are obviously not so dangerous; they are used in certain Catholic colleges he lists in his appendix. The objection most manifest among the contributors is the identification of individualism with Christianity. All the contributors felt that this was unwarranted.

Concerning academic control by alumni, those who expressed opinions maintained that such control was unrealistic and not to be desired.

On the problem of academic freedom, there was much disagreement with Buckley. Although all admit that the problem is a complex and difficult one, no one seemed to like Buckley's solution to it. Obviously the teacher is a vital influence in his classroom and he must follow his convictions. But the contributors feel that other viewpoints, too, should be provided. No one feels that Buckley is justified in the restrictions he would place upon the freedom of teachers. Once again, it is felt that his approach to the matter is unrealistic.

The general conclusion of this symposium is that the problems raised by Buckley do exist, but his solutions to those problems are rejected as inadequate, ineffective, and unrealistic.

● E.R.N.
