

“William F. Buckley: the founder”

By Sam Tanenhaus | *Yale Alumni Magazine*, May/June 2008

“. . . .It was not only the prestige of the (*Yale Daily News*) chairmanship that Buckley craved. It was the platform it afforded, the editorial he wrote each day, the keys of his portable Royal clacking furiously as he sent forth a fresh shaft into the center of Yale's soft liberal heart. "Everyone read them, and everyone had a strong reaction," the 1950 *Yale Banner* would note of Buckley's provocations. "Some will always think of Bill as an arrogant, reactionary bigot. Others will always admire his courage, integrity, and sincerity." You could draw either conclusion from his frontal assault on sociologist **Raymond Kennedy** '28, a very popular teacher whose course Buckley had taken as a freshman. An ardent supporter of civil rights, Kennedy had stirred the campus in 1947 with a public lecture, "Race Relations: Colonial and American," that condemned colonialism and white supremacy.

But to Buckley he was a corrupter of youth whose indisputable "brilliance of oratory," along with his "bawdy and slapstick humor" had the ill-disguised purpose of making "a cult of anti-religion." Kennedy's mocking accounts of his skirmishes with religious zealots were "funny, without a doubt," Buckley granted. And Kennedy of course was entitled to his atheism. "The question," Buckley asked, "is whether this sort of business, blatantly unintellectual, biased, and unobjective, in some cases harmful, is proper business for a University lecturer." In a follow-up editorial Buckley compared Kennedy's influence over unformed student minds to the hypnotic spell "Nazi oratory" had cast over naive Germans, though of course Buckley rejected any "comparison between Mr. Kennedy and a Nazi."



1950 Class Book - Buckley at the News building.

There was immediate protest—from faculty, students, even from Buckley's *News* colleagues, who called an emergency meeting. Buckley considered resigning but instead agreed to publish a note explaining that the Kennedy editorials, like all the others, "represent ultimately the view of one man. The responsibility is the Chairman's." But Buckley wasn't entirely alone in his views.

Private letters of support came from several faculty, not to mention from grateful clergy. And Buckley's first Kennedy editorial, "For a Fair Approach" was reprinted in *The Catholic World*. One month into his chairmanship, Buckley had found the theme, the unacknowledged biases of liberal orthodoxy, that would inform *God and Man at Yale*, as well as conservative ideology for half a century to come.

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