

REFLECTIONS ON THE RENEWED SIGNIFICANCE OF HUGUENOT THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT

Traditional Huguenot values might be usefully employed in the planning of political objectives for the future. In rejecting the views which have rendered man a mere object, a new form of spiritual humanism is advocated. In contrast to the merely "structural" and the "communicative" a form of philosophy which allows for an essentialist participation should be encouraged. The present situation in South Africa, within the framework of post-colonial Africa, is discussed, and certain parallels drawn between the Afrikaners and the bourgeoisie in France following the Revolution of 1789. It is pointed out that the Afrikaner "bourgeois" people can be regarded as being perhaps the only remaining bourgeois people still in a progressive period of their civilization. This makes them a powerful force. The question now to be considered is to what extent the labouring classes could be drawn into the mainstream – and it is not impossible that this could be achieved without upheaval if old Huguenot values were to be respected. Certain writers like Ellul, Brun, and Aron suggest creatively ways in which, in contrast to the Saussurean principle of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, forms of unity may be attained. The arbitrariness of the linguistic sign and its consequences should be avoided at all levels. It is therefore suggested that the original Huguenot values could help contemporary scholars and politicians to plan ahead in a deductive rather than an inductive way for a more just and credible future. What has to be sought, as had been the case with Calvin too, is the deduction of God rather than the inductions of man.

Old Huguenot values may just be what is now needed to reconsider political standpoints in order to plan usefully for a worthy future. Spiritual guidance is necessary to counteract old formalisms and clannish barriers, as well as all reductions of human beings to structures. Linguistics has made of man an object, a sheer participant in a diagram, leaving out the essentials of *substance* and *essence*. A new form of spiritual humanism is now needed.

It may be that those who wish to look ahead for good and better days should find enlightenment in the study of the works, philosophical and spiritual, which have sprung from the Huguenot tradition and the like in this country and in others whence these original values have emigrated; France, dramatically, remains a hotbed of intensive thinking.

*The contemporary approach to French Studies in the rest of the world often

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consists of looking at *Enlightenment* with a bow to the French Revolution, Positivism, Gauchism and the recent forms of Structuralism. A certain appropriation in post-Saussurean studies of meanings by forms has probably not been sufficiently signalled by the scholars to the general public and it is unknown in practice that various currents of French thought have attempted to and succeeded in defeating the philosophies of Sartre, Lacan, Althusser, Barthes, Michel Foucault and the like. These, basically speaking, depended upon subjective Freudian or Marxist theories.

Names like Pierre-Henri Simon, Maurice Clavel, Jacques Ellul, Ionesco, Pierre Emmanuel, Jean-Marie Benoist, Denis de Rougemont, Jean Brun, André Charmson¹, etc. should be known in this country and their works translated and made available to the media as well as studied in the universities. The Catholic and Protestant cults have in France grown closer and closer since Vatican II and a proper spiritual climate is readily available in French speaking countries, which keenly counterbalances any imperialism based upon Marxist studies or the only too frequent pragmatist approach. Indeed, ancient deductive thinking must be appraised anew, “demythologized”, if need be, in an *essentialist* manner².

There is a post-Bergsonian and post-Bachelardian school of thought which disregards the otherwise too well-known impact of Herbert Marcuse, of Georg Lukàcs, of Lucien Goldmann or indeed of Genette and Todorov. Values must be found behind words and placed in a creative context of vital impulse. Words are therefore made to represent and to carry the meaning which shaped them, they must no longer be encouraged to die away or to be computerized for the sole purpose of “structural” consumption or “communication”, which, come to think of it, is the same thing.

The old values cherished by the Huguenots were constituted of a combination of generative thinking, of creative action and of reflexive sensitivity. They expected a mission to be granted to them with an open view, to a larger grasp on a world which would, through meditation, be revealed to them, not as they wanted it — this is a sign of subjectivity — but as they were predestined to have it. Many misinterpretations occurred when only ‘partial’ perception was seized upon (subjectivity, again), but the source for hope, reflection and an adjuvant for an honest leap forward, came each time the interest of one individual became second to the advancement of freedom and truth. Freedom was not seen as an existentialist engagement but as an essentialist, in a way which might never even have been formulated at the time and which is that of *pure perception*, which a combined

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study of the thoughts of Calvin and Bergson will possibly help to emphasize.

Is the impressive philosophy of Louis Lavelle⁴ on totality known in South Africa? Are the *Omega* point of Teilhard de Chardin⁵ and the Calvinian view on watching out for revelation⁶ grasped? It is indeed important to be allowed access to translations of these works and to ponder them. Dream the world out and it becomes true. Perhaps it is what is needed now for a renewed and reformed vision of tomorrow's world with peace and progress.

With the French Revolution a new era dawned for the bourgeoisie of Europe, and whereas some of their members had been able to work closely for generations with the aristocracy, 1789 marks the rejection of the upper classes by their more progressive challengers in an attempt to enforce Republicanism. It was only with the Commune in 1870 and then later in the course of the 20th Century that the new political force of the labour classes appeared which is still endeavouring a rejection of the Bourgeois ethos: they generally see this as progress.

When decolonization took place in the late 50's, both England and France renounced power, readily or reluctantly, according to the degree of proximity. Indeed, time-hallowed factors had helped to establish special links with one or more vassal countries. The Northern Irish problem has not yet been resolved and it took a difficult political crisis and a war to complete the independence of Algeria with all the setbacks it meant for the *Pieds-noirs* (the actual French settlers) and their accepted European values. This community was surprisingly rapidly reintegrated in the homeland. From there on, it was generally accepted that colonization was a bad thing and that it should not be allowed to survive. One did not seem to realize that it was the first time in Man's history that the conquistadors had decided to restore political freedom and indeed independence upon previously enslaved lands. World opinion, (even when aid to the Third World appeared essential to help maintain some standard in newly-freed countries which would otherwise have regressed even further back had they not been aided) held that every people should have a right to organize themselves the way they pleased.

It is not generally understood in Europe, for example, that South Africa had something of a 'French Revolution' around 1948 and that it made it difficult to the new rulers to foresee a subsequent upheaval; nor could be foreseen the necessity for the Blacks to accede to power. In this analysis⁷ which is only tentative and in no way final, the English ruling classes will be equated to

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the pre-revolutionary French Aristocracy. The Afrikaans power that took over by 1948 had many of the characteristics of the constructive die-hard Bourgeoisie which had carried out the French Revolution of 1789. The working classes which gradually made their way up to political consciousness through the Industrial Revolution experienced in England during the 19th Century and more closely in France with the IIIrd Republic (1871-1940), can be broadly equated with the Black working classes as they are presently known in South Africa. It may be that racial distinctions have been singled out to contain the possible push upwards of the Black and Coloured communities. In reality the Black populations of South-Africa are by and large the working classes who are at present experiencing an outburst of Marxist propaganda — be it socialist or communist — in other parts of the 'free' World.

What is not understood in Europe is that the Afrikaners are still experiencing an indeed very active progression and that there is no sign as yet of the degeneracy which, from the turn of the Century has struck the European Bourgeoisie. The vast majority of Blacks have not yet reached the degree of self-governing ability that would make their independence or indeed their access to power profitable to them. The Dutch communities of South Africa, on the contrary, have made a considerable success of their accession to independence and as a new country show the best examples of a successful decolonization — from the English, that is.

This notwithstanding, Black Communities in the rest of Africa have acceded to power with qualified success or failure and it is understandable that the Afrikaner Community should feel reluctant to see their advancement hampered by Black terrorism, which is only one of the major approaches now utilized by the labouring classes to make their way to power. Afrikaans rule has indeed achieved, in our modern times, success comparable to the best of European bourgeois achievements⁷; not surprisingly so, either, since they, themselves, were of dynamic original stock and that only Colonization had forced them to play the unsatisfactory part of the poor Whites of America.

A contrasting situation has therefore been attained. The Afrikaners are, perhaps, in ethos, the only remaining bourgeois people of their time to be still in a progressive period of their civilisation. The rest of the World does not seem to understand that, unfortunately. The World as a whole has reached a different standard of values, which some may even rightly consider a form of decline with regard to earlier achievements. Western

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Europe, for example, and South Africa, live a different degree of evolution within the same lapse of time and it is likely that the state of bourgeoisie shall reach higher peaks with the latter country which is still in progression thanks to the kind of ethos which it advocates. In a context of bourgeois values, South Africa appears to be a resurgence, at the same time ahead of and behind her time, which might continue to make of her, if certain conditions are respected, a very strong civilisation indeed.

Phase three of her development has not yet been entered, though. The question is relevant to the integration of the labouring classes. Can South Africa learn from past trial and error recorded in the rest of the world? There, both the labouring classes and the black acceded to power despite the obvious failure of a number of régimes. The alternative put to South Africa by the rest of the world is, for the time being, "Adapt or beware of ostracism"; the rest of the world exerts pressures for alignment to their own norms for democracy. This is today the price to pay for keeping an independent Bourgeois society which might soon possess some of the highest standards in the modern world. It is not impossible that if ancient Huguenot values are respected this might be achieved without any turmoil. It may, however, necessitate turning a blind eye to nationalistic, static and sterile values with a move towards a certain form of integration. Some people may of course think that such a target is impossible, that it is better to keep the Black populations aside and that one ought indeed to give them a chance to develop their own political objectives elsewhere.

As with the Huguenots of the Dispersion⁸ contemporary French metaphysical writers consider with great insight both the faults of pragmatic and Marxist thinkers who attempted after Kant, after Sade, after Nietzsche, to edit out the names of God and Man, leaving the empty spatial notion of structure with which sheer nomenclature replaces the identity of meaning. Those who are known as the New Philosophers⁹ are perhaps the last bridging body between the nihilist view and an agonizing form of Humanism. With Jean-Marie Benoist, they claim that Marx is dead, but cannot deliver themselves from the spell of May 1968: hence the tribute they pay to the Kantian Schools.

Deeper, and more apt to serve the needs of South Africa today, are thinkers like Jacques Ellul¹⁰, Jean Bruin and Raymond Aron¹¹ whose analyses of contemporary currents in French thought are related to acknowledged Humanist and Christian precepts which they have learnt to "demythologize", as indeed Milton and Calvin had in their days. A similar

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interest could be found in the study of poets, whom because they have consciously rejected the temptations of Surrealism, are aware of the deeper side of 'transparence'¹². With Patrice de la Tou du Pin¹³, Pierre Emmanuel or indeed Leopold Sedar Senghor, the poetical works of a certain intelligentsia, philosophical by nature, are formidable obstacle to Materialism in a world which tends under Marxist influence to be divided into the equivocal myth of the struggle of the classes. The *essentialist* view¹⁴, however, introduces a third dimension, which is an absolute, not seen as arbitrary or fascist, but on the whole as 'total' or 'complete' whereas any division of the world into parts can only lead to negativism and fight. In the light of "absolute consciousness" which is an ideal outcome for "pure perception" — a concept which it is greatly interesting to study after Bergson or in the Christian tradition — one will probably quite readily disregard any long-lived subjective or partisan addiction.

In a field where the Social Sciences will include metaphysics, literature in its creative sense, and allied philosophies, the names of Teilhard, Jean Grenier, Ferdinand Alquié¹⁹ and Lavelle will strike right chord and one could do well to read Denis de Rougemont's *Penser avec les mains* or Ionesco's *Notes et Contre-Notes*¹⁶. The corpus of names suggested here to be pondered upon, if a Post-Graduate Centre for the Study of Contemporary French Thought were to be created in South Africa, would of course necessitate a greater number of names and amongst them one could certainly place a first generation of writers like Antonin Artaud, Paul Claudel, Jean Giraudoux¹⁷, Gabriel Marcel, Roger Caillois¹⁸, Jean Anouilh, or indeed Samuel Beckett, Francois Mauriac and even Charles de Gaulle¹⁹, not the politician, but the poet and thinker. All those with cosmic or religious believes would help slay the materialist slogan of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign.

Indeed at the more advanced levels of post-Saussurean Linguistics, through pragmatic and Marxist interest, Social Scientists tend to provide sheer *interpretations* within structural frameworks that give contextual life to the signifiant whereas what is needed is a "demythologization" of a transcendental nature which finds a chronological start within the meaningful *signifie*²⁰, unlike with Barthes or Lacan. This results in the revelation of an *exegesis*, and the Word finds its forms in a language which it coins under the flux of Revelation. This unity is alien to the Saussurean principle of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign as it is known after the age of positivism. The French School of Structuralism has developed the idea that what was true for Linguistics was also true for all the fields of the Social Sciences. If one dares to question the necessity for the arbitrariness of the

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linguistic sign, one also suggests the possible oneness of a kind between the *signifié* and the *signifiant* as it is shown in a relationship by which the Word of God is revealed in the flesh.

At a political level it also means a quest for unity, and the people of a nation (*signifiants*) cannot confer upon the rulers rights which they themselves do not possess. Within Christianity God only can be the origin of Revelation. The principle of popular sovereignty often evoked by those people who have not turned quite Marxist yet, is not any more convincing than this other arbitrariness, that of the prince. The law of man is not that of God unless the Word of God is indeed revealed to man. A Huguenot thinker of the Dispersion, Pierre Juricu²¹, was already adamant about this in the Seventeenth Century. He spoke of the coming of sin and of the division of goods. He explained that since the Fall, God had not established by a general law the power of masters over slaves, and that of sovereigns over subjects. Both people and prince must refer to an absolute and political wisdom as a tributary to commonsense in the light of the revelation of the Word (... often far away from all rational human quibbles or structural disguises afferent to dialectics and contemporary pseudo-Marxist and Pragmatic principles in human communication: these, however hidden as they may be to some, are of a perverse nature).

At all levels one ought to beware of the consequence of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, a principle which postulates the death of Man after that of God. The French poet Valéry was quite right when he suggested as early as 1918: "We now know that our civilisations are mortal". It may be that the original Huguenot values, through such a deal, could help contemporary scholars and politicians to plan ahead in a deductive rather than an inductive way for a more just and credible future. What of course must be sought after, as was the case with Calvin, is the deduction of God rather than the inductions of men.

NOTES

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³ Henri Bergson, *Essais sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, Alcan, Paris, 1896; *Les Deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, Alcan, 1932. Gaston Bachelard, *La Dialectique de la Durée*, P.U.F., Paris, 1963; *L'Engagement rationaliste*, P.U.F., 1973; *L'au et les songes*, José Corti, Paris, 1943.

⁴ Louis Lavelle, *La Présence totale*, Editions Aubier/Montaigne, Paris, 1934.

⁵ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Phénomène humain* (Points), Le Seuil, Paris, 1955.

⁶ Jean Calvin, *L'Institution Chrétienne* (Publié par la Société Calviniste de France), Labor et Fides, Genève, 1955.

⁷ See, Denis de Rougemont, *Penser avec les mains*, (Idées) Gallimard, 1970.

⁸ Guy Howard Dodge, *The Political theory of the Huguenots of the Dispersion*, Octagon Books, New York 1972.

⁹ Bernard-Henri Lévy, *La Barbarie à visage humain*, Grasset-Fasquelle, Paris, 1977. André Glucksmann, *Les Maîtres Penseurs*, Grasset, 1977.

¹⁰ Jacques Ellul, *Les Nouveaux possédés*, Fayard, Paris, 1973; *Trahison de l'Occident*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 1975.

¹¹ Raymond Aron, *Dimensions de la conscience historique*, Librairie Plon, Paris, 1961.

¹² Charles P. Marie, I. 'Préface à la Révolution essentialiste', in *La Mésangelette* (Préface de Jean Guirec), Ed. Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Paris, 1980. 2. 'La Tour du Pin et le rayon limpide', in *Fer de Lance* N.100 (An analysis of *La Quête de Joie*), Cannes, France, 1977.

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¹⁴ Charles P. Marie, I. 'A re-examination of "Form and meaning" in Camus' *Le Malentendu*', in *Nottingham French Studies*, Vol 17. N. 2, Nottingham University, England, October 1978; reprint in *Literatur* N., PU vir CHO, RSA, 1983. 2. 'Rimbaud desintégré ou l'Evidence au Pays du Neverland', in *Fer de Lance* N. 113/114 et 115/116, Cannes 1981. 3. 'Dans l'ombre de "l'Arbre aux Iées" — Anouilh et Montherlant', in *Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre*, Paris, 1982-3.

¹⁵ Jean Grenier, *Absolu et Choix* (Introduction philosophique), P.U.F., Paris, 1961. Ferdinand Alcuic, *Philosophie du Surréalisme*, Champs, Flammarion,

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¹⁶ Idées, Gallimard, 1966.

¹⁷ See, Charles P. Marie, 1. *La Réalité humaine chez Jean Giraudoux*, published with the help of the University of Exeter, La Pensée Universelle, Paris, 1975 (with the author, Dept. of French PU vir CHE, 2520 RSA). 2. *Jean Giraudoux aux sources du sens*, Editions d'Austrasic (2 Faubourg Tarragnoz — 25000 Besançon, France), 1982.

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¹⁹ Charles P. Marie, 'Le sceptre et le balancier' (An essentialist approach to Gaullism), in Revue *Espoir* (Charles de Gaulle Institute) N. 14. Plon, Paris, March 1976.

²⁰ Charles P. Marie, 'From *anima* to *animus* — An essay in Chronological Semiology', in *M.A.L.S* (Midland Association for Linguistic Studies), University of Birmingham, England, 1980.

²¹ R.J. Howells, *Pierre Jurieu : Antinomian Radical*, (Durham Modern Languages Series) University of Durham, England, 1983. Ernest Albaric, *Essai sur l'esprit national du protestantisme français au 16ème et au 17ème Siècle*, Slatkine Reprints, Genève, 1969.