
The Mentality of Calvinism

Afrikaner religious and political links

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A RECENT SURVEY CONDUCTED by the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk showed that 36% of the white population belonged to this Church. If we add the members of the two other much smaller Dutch Reformed denominations we may confidently suppose that at least 40% of the white population consists of confessing Calvinists.

By contrast, if we take a look at the English-speaking churches, we will find few Calvinists, despite a liberal sprinkling of Scots among the English-speaking community, possibly with the exception of the Congregational Church, which is Calvinist by tradition. The Presbyterian Church belongs by rights to the same group, but as one of its leading ministers wrote in an article in *Personality* some time ago, they have by and large progressed beyond the "medieval" characteristics of Calvinism, and have therefore to be excluded.

The case of the Presbyterian Church is an example of the subservience of Christianity to nationalism with fatal consequences. Obviously the Christians of the Reformed faith in this country should be organised in one organisation with Afrikaans, English and African language branches. Meantime the situation is such that the English-speaking churches with 90% paper membership among Whites have hardly any moral authority in the English-speaking community and are in danger of losing whatever little of it is left by reason of persistent hypocrisy. They certainly have no hope of making any impact on the Afrikaans community because of their group prejudice against Calvinism.

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS of Calvinism which have a bearing on the socio-political situation are its emphasis on the rule of God in the community and its sense of predestination, a general attitude towards life first acquired in the personal relationship between God and the soul, which is the essence of all religion.

One of the main problems for Christians is where to take their stand in the world between the doctrine of creation and that of redemption. God created the universe, so it must be essentially good, but it is now in the hands of evil forces, and God is busy redeeming it—"trying to get it back".

For many Christians the fact of creation is of little if any importance and since the world is now in the hands of evil forces, they intend to back out of it as far as

possible, particularly out of politics as these are seen as the epitome of evil. This is notably the position of Methodists and Baptists, who by virtue of their exclusive occupation with things of the soul have been largely responsible for Christianising Africans in South Africa. These African Christians are in their turn "content to let the world go by" as the hymn says. This sort of Christianity is an unattractive proposition to wide-awake Africa today.

To Calvinists, however, the doctrine of Creation has always been an important impulse widening the sphere of redemption beyond the personal to the community; in other words Calvinists are dedicated to the rule of God in the community with all the personal zeal flowing from their sense of predestination.

Whereas to the commonsense English mind law-making is the business of running a state smoothly, as economically (with as little interference in the natural course of things) as possible, to the Afrikaans mind law-making is a form of worship, on which all possible effort and attention is to be lavished. It does not matter if we run up against a wall of hard economic facts and other practical difficulties, we will climb over it with the ladder of amendment to amendment of amendment if necessary (as has happened with the Group Areas Act), but we must have the ideal at least on paper. This is a psychological compulsion. Other South Africans must come to realise this and ignore them as laws in the ordinary sense of the word as far as possible. To Calvinism politics is part of worship.

Is the writer therefore implying that the apartheid blueprint, which has gradually enfolded before our eyes during the reign of the Nationalist Party, in all its iniquitous consequences—iniquitous by our common moral judgment, inspired by standards by and large grown out of Christian ethics—is an interpretation of the rule of God in South Africa? YES IT IS! But I am of course only talking about the motivation of it all, not about its rationalisation. We will, however, never be able to attack the rationalisations of Nationalist party politics with any hope of success unless we have a proper insight in and due regard for its motivation and this is what the antagonists of apartheid by and large lack.

There is for instance a genuine confusion of concepts among average nationalists with regard to culture, the contention being that the rise of Africans would mean the destruction of the Afrikaner's cultural identity. It is obvious that if South Africa became a democracy in the accepted sense of the word the Africans would be in the majority and the Afrikaners a minority: but judging from the history of the Malays, Indians and Jews in South Africa, there is no better safeguard for retaining one's cultural identity than being just that! It is the political majority which is by virtue of its position unable to isolate itself from outside influences. What it amounts to is that the Afrikaner is at the moment perpetrating the same cultural imperialism which he so rightly loathed in his British conqueror. In its wider sense religious concepts are at the basis of every culture and one cannot possibly transmit one's religion (as is done by the missionary endeavour of the Afrikaans churches) without transmitting one's culture: it is exactly this which makes a multiracial South African

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nation a working proposition. Some of the Afrikaans missionaries are increasingly becoming aware of this.

THE BIRTH OF THE REPUBLIC is at once the crowning moment and the turning point in Afrikaner nationalism. Up to that time criticism was felt to be a breach of loyalty towards one's oppressed people; now Afrikaners are beginning to direct their critical faculties on to themselves and we witness a steadily increasing volume of criticism. It would be unwise to regard a situation as hopeless which has just taken on a better complexion. We should not become desperate because our future Afrikaner liberals have displayed such an exquisite sense of loyalty; on the contrary, this is what present liberals need in the face of mounting pressure.

There are of course a number of people who have been and are persuading themselves that Fascism and Calvinism have much in common, both in and outside the Dutch Reformed churches. In that case one might as well say that Jews and Nazis stand essentially for the same thing! It should be obvious that that which God predestines is of the essence and it so happens that the God of Calvinism is the very same One as the God of Judaism.

There is an essential difference between wartime attitudes and alliances, springing from the expediencies of the moment, like the American-Russian alliance of the last war and the pro-German attitude of Afrikaners (because they were anti-British) or the pro-German attitude of the Finns, (because they were anti-Russian) and the persistent efforts of disguised Nazis, like most of the authors of *Greense*—the extraordinary preponderance of German names not having escaped attention—to equate Nazism and Calvinism. The few Calvinists in Germany in Hitler's days were perfectly immune against Nazism. Calvinism also is by no stretch of imagination more guilty of misconceiving its relation to the State, than any other branch of Christianity has proved to be in history, but it is in a better position to correct itself.

For most people, whatever their philosophy, to be comfortable in the here and now seems to present an irresistible lure, whereas others simply have no choice but to fight for justice.

Apart from this minority which is consciously perpetrating "blasphemy", the overwhelming majority are simply unwilling to face facts they feel unable to cope with. Afrikaners have a tradition of running away from difficulties in the political sphere and if there can be "no further trek" physically, we can still trek on in the realm of political dreams (and this is a general human phenomenon). Dreams, however, sometimes end in nightmares.

I remember saying to an Afrikaans minister that Dr. Verwoerd was the all-time confidence trickster. The description is wrong, however, in one essential aspect: whereas the victims of the con man do not want to be tricked, the Afrikaners ask for it. In Dr. Verwoerd therefore they have the man they want, but not the man they need.

The man they want will help them to perpetuate a mental ostrich attitude with no trouble to his conscience as he adheres to the superman morality. The man they need will appeal to their true selves, their desire to

serve God; a service which will demand real sacrifices, not the lip-sacrifices referred to with so much pathos in speeches by present Afrikaans leaders. You cannot be made to sacrifice for selfish ends.

IT IS OUR DUTY TO BE THE MEN of the moment, to compel the electorate to face facts, to point the way to the future, to "play" the government the same way it is playing with its voters, to bring about a voluntary extension of civil rights and economic privileges, remembering that a state functions only secondarily through the laws on the statute book, but primarily through adherence to a common morality.

The acid test to determine if justice and freedom are ruling in a country is if that country can "afford" a communist party. If the people of a country are reasonably happy with social circumstances, few people will be in the mood to prepare for a revolution. Why is just about the whole white electorate suffering from "red phobia" if a just solution is being sought to the country's problems?

Looking backwards into the history of my country of origin, moulded by Calvinism in an 80-year struggle for freedom, I hope that the new African will have much in common with the old Calvinist, who sang in the words of the Dutch National Anthem:

*Mijn Schildt ende Betrouwen
Syt Ghy O God mijn Heer,
Op U so wil ick bouwen
Verlaet my nimmermeer.
Dat ick toch vroom* mag blijven
U dienaar t' aller stont,
De tyrannie verdrijven
Die my myn hert doorwont.*

*vroom means courageous.

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