FOREWORD.
Neo-calvinism and the French revolution[1]

The French Revolution was bad for France, Napoleon was worse. Try to say something like that in French academia or in French polite society and you will be met by a torrent of abuse, such is the influence of Marxist historiography in the French-speaking world down to the present.

Those who might agree, in some measure, would be the Catholic historians of the right, who have sought, by all means, to bring grist to their thesis that the Protestant reformation was the culprit for Enlightenment free-thinking, or those, who like Pierre Chaunu, are independent enough to see that the consequences of the Revolution led to bleeding France dry and set up the scenario for the three Franco-German conflicts of the following centuries.

This book presents the neo-Calvinist thesis that the Revolution replaced one religion by another, Christian theism with a man-centred secularism that is ironically profoundly religious. Such an idea is highly scandalous for the French élite, either political or cultural, for two reasons. Firstly, the idea that any form of religion at all could be connected with freedom rather than intolerance and the oppression of others is totally off the radar of French secular humanism. It is an incomprehensible idea. You might as well argue that the moon is made of green cheese as claim that religion might in some way correspond to healthy human aspirations. Secondly, there is the utter impossibility for the French secular mentality to see itself as having religious roots or motivations. They see it simply as a form of pure naturalism, described as being « neutral », aided and abetted by Darwin, Marx and Freud. These ideas die hard even in postmodern France, where to be « neutral » is to be objective and unbiased.

However, one of the main arguments that could be brought along for the plausibility of the van Prinsterer proposition is the irrefutable historical rôle of Napoleon, under whom France had never had it so bad. While taking some measures to butter up the Church, such as restoring the traditional calendar and reintroducing religious festivals, these were simply smoke and mirrors to hide the basic programme. Napoleon versed himself in the literature of Athens and vituperated Jerusalem. He reintroduced slavery in the colonies, and reduced the programme of liberty, equality and fraternity to tatters. All that remained of it was the military fraternity of brothers in arms under a supremo who was an autocrat.

Napoleon was a Jacobin at heart and what he did in word and deed bears out the neo-Calvinist thesis. Liberty was destroyed as he brought France and Europe to its knees both in military and economic terms. Equality ? Napoleon it was who put the Church in its place (and also the Pope who was transported to Fontainebleau) by attempting to

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[1] In *Neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution*, ed. J. Eglinton, G. Harinck, Bloomsbury, London, 2014, x-xi.

banish it from public life. The Emperor created a new priesthood in France through the founding of the elitist system of the *grandes écoles*, that remains in place today and makes France a highly conservative country hiding behind libertarian rhetoric. Concerning his *Code civil* with its Roman antecedents it has be said that « what is most striking for the modern obersever, is, first, its profound social injustice, and second, the extent to which this injustice was the work of Napoleon himself. What we see is not a universal charter of justice but rather a device designed to propitiate the elites though whom France was now to be ruled... in particular the position of women deteriorated dramtically[2]. »

Napoleon revealed his true colours in the Bayonne affair (1808), which was called by one of Joachim Murat's aides-de-camp « the most iniquitous spoliation which modern history records *Napoleon's Wars. An International History*, 1803-1815, Penguin 2008[3]. » Napoleon was however *vox Dei*, and his comment on the affair was of another ilk : « However it may have been, I disdained ways that were tortuous and banal : I felt myself to be that powerful ! I struck from too great a height. I wanted to act both in the fashion of that Providence which remedies the ills of mortals by means that are their equal, however violent, and in a manner unfettered by judgement...[4] »

These quotations and much more, are amply documented in Charles Esdaile's recent scholarly work on Napoleon and his wars. It all goes to bear out that when man abolishes God he ends up by playing god himself and, as Dostoievsky once remarked, from unlimited liberties come unlimited despotisms. All this bears out the neo-Calvinist thesis about the Revolution and revolutions, presented in this book.

Paul Wells
Professeur de théologie systématique, Faculté Jean Calvin, Aix-en-Provence and Extraordinary Professor at North-West University, South Africa

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[2] Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars. An International History*, 1803-1815, London, Penguin 2008, chapter 3, p. 33, Kindle edition.

[3] M. de Marbot, *The Memoirs of Baron de Marbot*, I, London 1892, cited by Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars*, chapter 7, note 50.

[4] E. Las Cases, *Mémorial de Sainte Hélène*, I, 784-785, ed. G. Walter, Paris 1956, quoted by Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars*, chapter 7, note 51.