

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

Saint-Bonnet, fire breather of the legitimists

June 29, 2021 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

Antoine-Joseph-Elisée-Adolphe Blanc de Saint-Bonnet (1815-1880) was a Lyonnaise legitimist, counterrevolutionary and ultramontane thinker, among the highest calibre of his kind. Combining a vivid Christian anthropology with staunch ultra-royalist views and lapidary, biting prose, he could be described as like Joseph de Maistre but without the fideism, occasionalism and absolutism that taint the latter with a certain heterodoxy. In another sense, he could be compared to Thomas Carlyle, except with a much crisper writing style compared to that of the meandering Scottish sage, and a devout Catholic traditionalist as opposed to an innovative romantic. Saint-Bonnet is extremely quotable, indeed his prose can be smoothly cited like aphorism without at all being aphoristically muddled in its thought. Some of it is intense, and can be felt as though a dagger is being thrust in your heart, twisted, removed, and stabbed right back in. For instance:

Slavery was a school of patience, submission, self-denial, humility. Pride alone prevents grace from penetrating into the soul, and it is humility, removing the obstacle, which allows it to enter it. Now, ancient man found in slavery a necessary treatment of patience and resignation, which brought him closer to renunciation, the supreme virtue of the soul and the moral end of Christianity.

To the farmer [the socialists] said: you will not pay your rent; to the worker: you will have the full product of your wage; to the vast majority of debtors: mortgages will be abolished; then to the crowd: you will consume everything without working. Panem et circenses .. What force is there to oppose that of such logic? You have just raised a bunch of slaves! But slaves who will not obey and who ask to devour you.

In our cities, with our manners and our doctrines, a salary increase is too often an increase of alcohol in the gullet of the worker, and an increase of indigence for the women and for the children.

If public liberties rest on the aristocracy, neither should the aristocracy, which is the head, be fattened at the expense of the body and limbs. Do not make the people pay too much for the conditions of their greatness.

If men are equal before the law, they are equal before the breadline.

We only create paper when we have no more money: therefore it represents our misery.

In man, unlimited freedom would prove that he is perfect. If he were, he would not have to receive the freedom to become so.

By the luxury of industry you huddle the poor in our cities, around theaters and cabarets, and now you want to give them alms?

The budget of a nation is the cost of its vices; the cost of the police to watch it, of the courts to punish it, and of the army to protect it. And the day when the costs of its vices exceed those of its virtues, it becomes prey to its enemies.

Power is a burden; it is an apostolate to which one must devote oneself: the new classes made it a business.

Who does not read everything in that single word “republic”? Intelligence is already called a tyranny; merit, an aristocracy; heredity, a privilege; property, theft; religion, a lie; royalty, a forfeit ... What will you have left? Not even your head: already the hideous arm of the Terror is advancing!

The use of force, so often cursed, stops anthropophagy, suspends murder and infanticide, puts a stop to the most cruel injustices, imperceptibly calms hatred, sets conscience free, prepares the place for law, for merit, for virtue, for kindness, then for charity, to which men can therefore peacefully obey; in short, this force assures them of all the goods of the earth when God has placed it in the hands of a King.

So on and so forth.

Among Saint-Bonnet's admirers we can count Charles Baudelaire, who read *La Douleur* on recommendation of Barbey d'Aurevilly. He was well known to Joris-Karl Huysmans, Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and Léon Bloy, the latter calling him “one of the intellectual majesties of [his] century.”

The family name derives toponymically from the commune of Saint-Bonnet-le-Froid, which in turn is named after Saint Bonitus, a 7th century bishop of Clermont. Antoine's father, Joseph-Marie Blanc-Saint-Bonnet, saw many of his family numbers murdered in the revolutionary terror of 1793, and notably abstained from serving under Bonaparte's regime. He played a role in the Bourbon Restoration, and notably intervened to prevent a reprisal by the Allied armies against a revolt that broke out a small town around the Rhône in 1814, for which Louis XVIII awarded him a merit of honor in 1815. He served as a royalist volunteer during the Hundred Days, and later became mayor of Chevinay. In addition, he was a generous patron to the Carmelite Order.

Antoine Blanc de Saint-Bonnet was a pupil in Bourg in the late 1820s, where reportedly the instruction was quite mediocre. His classmates included Edgar Quinet. Saint-Bonnet spent much of his free time wandering outside in nature, and would later critically write of said period about how the curricular focus on classical antiquity was damaging to the Christian upbringing of youths: “The child, who, during the eight years in which his mind is formed, sees the most serious people, in critical and serious circumstances of life, swear by Jupiter, by Hercules, by Juno, and is taught that it goes without saying that all antiquity, so many great men, this immense civilization did not swear and leaned on nothing. His mind receives a terrible shock. He grows up and gets used to the idea that beyond the soul there can be nothing, there is not even a need for anything. Thus, arriving at the moment when our imagination begins to open, the ancient point of view establishes a kind of peaceful maturation that frames with our imagination, with our native apathy. Christianity then seems to be something accidental.”

Later, he would go on to study at the Collège-lycée Ampère (then known as the Royal College of Lyon), where he among other luminaries would be a pupil of the Abbé Noiroi (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph-Mathias_Noiroi), a renowned Catholic philosophy professor. Dubbed “the Christian Socrates” and “the kneader of souls,” although he did not leave much in the way of a bibliographic legacy, he greatly inspired such luminaries as Victor de Laprade, Frédéric Ozanam, Victor Cousin, Lacordaire, and of course Saint-Bonnet. In sharp contrast to the ontologism of Maistre and Bonald which prioritized arational assent to revelation as superior and determinative to the practical exercise of reason, Noiroi would say “It is to shake Christianity to attack human reason,” and this is certainly reflected in Saint-Bonnet’s thought which, although not scholastic, shares a similar natural law-driven ontology.

Saint-Bonnet’s first major work, published in 1841 at the age of 26, was *De l’unité spirituelle, ou De la société et de son but au delà du temps*. “Victor Cousin was enthusiastic about the young philosopher and Narcisse-Achille de Salvandy, Minister of Public Instruction, awarded him the cross of the Legion of Honor in 1844. The success was so great that these three volumes would have to be re-edited in 1845,” according to a biographical note. (<https://forumarchedemarie.forumperso.com/t14287-un-vrai-francais-antoine-blanc-de-saint-bonnet>).

His writings form a cohesive and interrelated corpus. *L’Unité Spirituelle* (1841) and *La Douleur* (1849) are his two major philosophical works that set out his views on theodicy, social ontology, anthropology, the nature of law, etc. All his other works are built on top of these foundations, including his two main political treatises, *La Restauration Française* (1851) and *La Légitimité* (1873). The former is more polemical and concise, whereas the latter is a ~700-page work that explores greater depth. *L’Infallibilité* (1861) is somewhere in between, as it doubles both as a statement of ultramontane principles that coincide with his social ontology, but also restates his more directly political positions on kingship, aristocracy, capital formation, etc. *Le XVIIIe Siècle* (1878), his last work published while he was alive, is a general tract critiquing Enlightenment philosophy that conceptually borrows from his whole oeuvre.

L’Unité Spirituelle opens up by stating that it “contains a study of Being, a study of man, and a study of society; that is to say an ontology, a psychology, and what we will be obliged to call a *coenology*.” The term “coenology”, from the Greek “koinós” (common), was intended to be an early term for what would eventually be known as sociology, but it clearly never caught on. Nonetheless, this does make Saint-Bonnet an unsung pioneer, and the conservative roots of sociology are something that Robert Nisbet often pointed out.

“This book, we say, contains an ontology, because it is in God, or the uncreated Being, that we must study man, or the being who was created; it contains a psychology, because it is in man, or the social being, that we must study Society, or the environment made for man; finally, it contains a coenology, because it is in Society, the most universal phenomenon of creation, that the motive, object and purpose of creation must be studied.”

Until then the psychologists had not studied in man the essential faculty, that is to say the faculty which finds its object only in the absolute. They have only seen man from the side which looks at the earth, but have not seen him from the side which looks at Heaven — this is what he sets out to remedy.

His ultimate aim:

For you yourself will recognize that, obeying the law by which the conditions of the absolute are realized in time, and following point by point the triad of the human soul, the economic order also goes through three historical phases: slavery, competition, association; that is to say, inequality, equity, solidarity. The first, while Society was still at the height of its strength; the second, while the Society is only at justice; the third, when the Society will be in charity, when the exclusive reign of Power and that of Wisdom will come to be fulfilled in the reign of the Spirit. When the spirits have returned to unity by belief, there will no longer be any obstacle posed by the rise of great industries.

The union of corporate bodies will bring about the association of interests. There, we will see the reconstitution of this great unity of religion, economics and politics; that is to say, the spiritual bond, the material bond and the artificial bond of Society. We will see reconstituted, I say, this great unity so long sought and to which must ultimately be the result of the efforts that mankind must accomplish in time. But, before reconstituting the unity of all the members of humanity, it is necessary to reconstitute the unity of the very elements of Society. If, today, religion does not yet have any influence on men, if the economy does not yet know how to distribute its wealth, and if politics cannot yet behave towards us as it does. should, is that religion, economics and politics are divided. The great misfortune is that those who admit the consequences, do not want to admit the principles; just like those who have the principles, do not want to admit the consequences. Politics does not know where it comes from, or where it should go; economics know this a little better, although they still need to raise their eyes; and those who are concerned with morality no longer know how to bring out economics and politics.

Of reason and revelation: "In giving us revelation, God did not claim to exempt us from science. No more than by handing over the land to us, he did not believe in dispensing us from cultivating it. God has given us to believe, by revelation, the things that we are to conceive by reason. One carries infallibility, the other carries clarity. One presents the truth to us, the other makes us accept it."

Saint-Bonnet rejects the notion of a civil state abrogating a natural state, and instead says the latter implies the former. For otherwise "if the power to which we must obey has no other title than that of having instituted itself or of having been instituted by other men; that if, therefore, despotism is legitimate and acts within its rights; that if force is the origin of sovereignty; that if marriage, paternal power, all duties and all rights have no basis in human nature, and all the different institutions which protect these so-called natural relations of man do not derive from his nature, but depend solely on the arbitrary will of those who invented them; that if the whole of society is, in a word, only a public establishment, and that everything there is, consequently, conventional and arbitrary," it so follows "it is quite clear, we say, that such a society is not the natural state of man, and that, if there can be no society of another nature, that is to say, where the laws, instead of being conventional and arbitrary, are natural, truly legitimate, and deriving only from the constitution of man, as every being must obey only the laws of his nature, man is not made to live in Society!" — a ridiculous implication.

Saint-Bonnet makes it clear that a study of morals has to be made on the basis of a person constituted as individual substance of a rational nature, and that consequently history is of limited use for this. History shows what man has been, but not what he will be if he chose to fulfill the laws his creator imprinted on him. Man's moral freedom means that the laws are known upfront by which we can judge moral acts, as opposed to gathering empirical facts to derive moral laws: "This character of freedom of moral beings, diametrically opposed to the character of inertia of physical beings, means that we can approach the moral world only by knowing its laws, so that they lead us to the appreciation of acts; while the study of the physical world is entirely in the knowledge of the facts, which lead to their laws."

“In the moral world, beings are free, and freedom precisely gives the power to resist its law; how would the gathering of free acts be likely to serve for the induction of the law, since these acts are perhaps operated outside the law? So that, if in the physical world, all facts reveal, declare and proclaim their law; in the moral world, on the contrary, many facts hide, conceal and obscure the law which was to govern moral agents,” he says.

Or more bluntly: “The experimental method applied to the sciences which have man as their object can lead, in morality, only to the theory of vice, and in the social sciences, only to the theory of slavery. Despots, and the villains who support them, have an interest in taking history as a field of experience. For history is only a secular demonstration of the downfall of man. As it is really, for the most part, only the universal register of all bad actions, those who want to draw from it examples of conduct for individuals as for nations can, without going beyond logic or facts, establish the doctrine of evil and proclaim the principles of human perversity.”

And even more so: “Theft, squandering, concubinage, abandonment, exposure, etc., are also facts; in the examination of the immediate causes which have produced these facts, we shall also find reciprocal needs; and these needs are indeed facts!”

If man is not free, he has no more power to fulfill his law than to repulse it. Saint-Bonnet rejects the emphasis on climate as determining men’s moral calculus, since “despotism and barbarism do not suit any climate, and men do not derive their nature from the land, like plants.” Climates, like temperaments of men, are accidents and do not essentially change moral laws governing men, and so “there is this difference, that men, in all points of space and time, are not in the state they should be, although they all approach it more or less; and that, therefore, they cannot all obey their natural law alike and to the same degree. It is therefore a question, by means of legislation, of making to each people an application of this law, one, identical and eternal, according to what this people can endure according to its development. So that all the laws of the different peoples, or of the same peoples in their different phases, should only be progressive applications of this unique and eternal legislation. So, it is by appropriating it to the particular situation of each of these peoples that we must take into account the influence of inclinations and the type of life favored by the climate; because these are resistances which cannot be forced without offending human freedom too greatly, but which must be accepted only in order to better erase them subsequently by the sole natural and profitable power, the power of human free will reaching to get rid of all the shackles of matter.”

Society is based on legislation; legislation is based on natural law; natural law rests on morality; and morality rests on the ontological notions, that is, on the absolute laws of God; but the laws of God, which are the laws of being, are the very principles of reason.

A social-ontological implication of moral freedom: “While the active being is spiritual, that is, he is aware of his life; he can seize himself in his existence, feel himself in his own substance, since it is his substance that knows itself and seizes itself. Thus, the moral being is first an active being, that is to say acting only by itself, it follows that its law can not govern it without its knowledge; it can only direct it in its acts, especially as it offers itself to him to make himself known, so that he can realize it for himself. The moral being being secondarily a spiritual being, that is to say having consciousness of himself, it follows that nothing is more immediate to him than his own substance, which is the substance of the moral world.”

Indeed, Saint-Bonnet even dabbles in some racial anthropology, basing racial differences on the consequences of free moral choice:

Physiologically speaking, no one believes in the equality of intellectual aptitude between the various populations of the globe, any more than in the equality of aptitude between the various individuals contained in these populations; but also no one is unaware that all men do not make equal use of their moral freedom. As, according to a general law, the organs develop in consequence of the normal exercise which they are given, while they atrophy, in consequence of all the excesses that laziness begets, it follows that some individuals, for the wisdom of their conduct, amount to a dignified growth of all the sublime virtues contained in human nature; while others deliver to the passions, with murderous prodigality, the precious energy with which they were originally endowed. So that, while the former transmit all the richness of their constitution to children to whom they take care to communicate early on the happy education in which they grew up, the latter leave only abortions weak in body and body. spirit, struck with all the infirmities of debauchery from the womb of their mother. This is how that in the same population we find all at the same time the most beautiful families and the most miserable remains of the gnawed type of humanity. Here is the whole theory of races.

But physiologically exposed to a dissolution which increases more and more by the complication of vices and misery, this people, as a result of the physiological law of the generating impulse, after a few generations progressively altered, will offer us, in its organic constitution, a variety so different from that of the people whose population will have grown in virtue and prosperity, that we will believe them both, empirically also, of different races.

Then, that climates still come above all to put their signature; that they change over time the color of hair and skin; let them make whites and blacks, blondes and browns, browns and coppers; that they accustom some to the heat and the others to the cold, that they finally provide them with various foods; nothing more true. But it is the virtues and prosperity, vices and misery, which, transmitted from generation to generation, develop or exhaust our physiological constitution.

Later on the same point:

Also man is jealous of his freedom to the point of preferring the harm that it can do to him to the good that would be imposed on him. This invincible attachment to freedom is quite natural: for human nature it is only the instinct of its preservation. There is physiological proof of freedom; these are the traces it leaves on the human body: if man irresistibly yielded to a law, as the organs develop by virtue of the exercise that one makes of them, the conformity and the regularity of the law would have produced, among all men, similar conformity and regularity. So animals are today what they were yesterday; those who belong to the same species all look alike: among us, on the contrary, there are as many hearts as there are men, as many faces as there are people. So the same head cannot be used to study the human race, as in natural history, the same animal, the same plant, can be used to study a whole species, a whole family. If all men are so different from each other, if the individualities are so distinct, then there must be something special, unique to each one, that in short, each individual uses their freedom differently. Also, this is what explains to us why men, created equal before God, find themselves in such great inequality on earth. For, the soul develops or deteriorates according to the use that freedom makes of its faculties, and the body, at the same time, is strengthened or exhausted according to the use that the soul makes of its organs.

So that, it is not the development or the degradation of the brain and muscles which inevitably involves the development or the degradation of the faculties of the soul, since it is the opposite which takes place – only, it is true that the soul, once locked in the diminished circle of impoverished organs, no longer has the power to cross, without incredible efforts, their narrow limit, and can no longer compete temporally with souls endowed, on the contrary, with wonderfully developed cerebral and muscular organs. And, indeed, as the soul manifests itself in this world only through the body (reason and its ideas, through the cerebral organs, freedom and its volitions, through the muscular organs), there is immediately manifested among men a great variety and a frightful personal inequality; especially if these provisions are still transmitted from generation to generation.

All sciences rest on three ontological foundations: unity, variety, harmony; in turn human societies on force, justice, wisdom.

Naturalism is rebutted by the existence of harmony: “Harmony is so much the general property of everything that exists, that the spirit of analogy, which rests only on the belief in harmony, is in the constitution of human reason. And, in fact, if reason is the faculty of conceiving reality, there must be a parallel between reality and the human mind, by means of which the mind, without leaving its speculation, can explain the arrangement of phenomena in reality; hence it is necessary that both, if it is permitted to speak thus, have been cast into the same mold, that they have come out of the same Creator. Now, if the human mind was created to know the universe, and the idea of harmony is among its rational conceptions, it is because there is in the universe a harmony to know.” Where harmony is defined to be “the relation of cause to effect; it is the relation of the law to means, and from means to purpose; it is the propriety of laws with beings, and beings with their laws; it is a sequence of proportionate means to reach the goal suspended to a final cause.”

“Laws bind beings; by this link they preserve them from independence or dissolution, they link them to their condition of life. Well, Order is not only the connection of all beings by their laws, but also the connection of all the laws themselves; it preserves them from mutual independence or from dissolution by attaching them to the root of their life. Order is therefore the sum of all the conditions of existence, and consequently the general way of being, the necessary situation of the universe.”

Reason is the substance that created finite beings share with the infinite Creator, and to reason he attributes many concepts that cannot be derived purely from sensory experience: unity, substance, causality, infinity, law, necessity, eternity, order, perfection, justice, etc. Rationality more specifically is

the “spiritual sensitivity of the soul,” which consists of moral sense (conscience), aesthetic sense (taste) and intuitive sense (understanding).

This line of analysis is carried over to *La Douleur* (On Pain), a theodicy on the expiatory nature of pain as a remedy to and punishment for sin. The quote on slavery cited in the beginning is taken from Chapter XXIV. That slavery existed as a school of humility during antiquity, as preparation for man receiving the gospel, is due to the fact that “all emancipation comes from virtue, from the inner strength recovered by man. It arises from this power to resist our instincts which makes us overlook the pain inherent in work; then it is completed by this moderation in the enjoyments from which capital results, which completes the liberation of man from oppression wherehold both his fellows and nature,” i.e. slavery was needed to tame man, to make him more receptive to the free gift of superabundant grace.

So the strong link between pain and merit: “However, God wanted to create the good man, that is to say in power not to sin. After that, it was up to man, weak enough to let himself fall to his roots, to take up his work again in the depths of pain. But then the broken stem, the plant lying on the ground will grow back, drawing henceforth its sap from mercy and grace. In this way, it is man who has accepted the kind of trial that pain imposes, at the same time as he has entered into the ends by which it will increase its merits. God made man, man did evil, no one caused pain: it was born from the infirmity or the unworthiness peculiar to the created being, which an incredible love calls to incomparable existence.”

Pain builds character, as your granddad knew: “Pain is concerned with re-establishing equality of conscience and conditions before God. The craftsman, who tires himself from morning to night, usually retains healthy limbs and a peaceful mind; pain rarely visits his mind or body. The rich, who condemns himself to idleness, constantly feels his health disturbed and his mind restless; pain, substituting for work, pursues its thought and its flesh. This is what makes people say that the poor are happy and that the rich are lacking.”

War exists to produce sacrifice, and so is a microcosm of the school of life, where “virtue, which work gradually produces, is only a tendency to heroism. Life, which takes the work by the foot, is only a learned march towards death. From here, one realizes the nature of existence.”

Pain is the exitus-reditus of infinity, bringing finite men back to their maker, it is the spark that ignites humanity’s sociable nature, so “hence the wars, diseases and universal misery: anything that can multiply effort. Hence, society and the affections arranged throughout life: everything that can assure love. Our very body leaves only tears and sweat in its tracks.”

Crucially, pain guides man’s moral freedom into fulfilling his law through the habituation of virtue, which encourages labor, which creates capital to be passed on as posterity. Recall Saint-Bonnet’s anthropology that races mirror the hierarchy of souls by their merits, it so follows that pain is the school by which lower classes ascend to the higher:

Freedom, this power to be a cause, this faculty of merit, wants man to remake himself. The soul must begin again as a sub-work from the beginning. Yes, because of his very weakness, man must build himself up little by little, step by step, and, so to speak, second by second by virtue of unrelenting effort. Work is only the continuous act. If man wants to be, let him be by his own strength!...

The uplifted soul tends to produce, through blood and through education, a posterity that seeks to rise further. All virtue reappears, each spring, ready to bloom again on its stem; and every vice waits until a contrary will has reduced it. By transmitting their fortune and their blood, men transmit certain beginnings of their soul: education and examples do the rest. The state in which each of us is born reveals only too well our true genealogy! Thus, freedom eliminates all equality on earth, and fraternity, that is to say charity, far from being their corollary, comes aptly to bring peace between the two...

Labor could not decrease on earth except by an increase in capital, that is to say, by freedom acquired by moderation in enjoyment. The man who breaks the shackles of pride and laziness is awaited in the free fields of the spirit. Societies can change by force, but the law on which society is based will never change. If the Redemption penetrated all souls, there would be this magnificent revolution that the lower classes, instead of being the most numerous, would become less and less so in this great progression of the staggering of souls. The economic order is only the establishment of the various circles of the test which each of us needs...

Freedom is precisely what cannot be given: it exists on the condition of being acquired. It is the force which uses itself and which above all comes from itself. Causality that does not come out of oneself would not be causality. And first, man not being, he had to be created, but created precisely with the power to accept or appropriate his own freedom!

La Restauration Francaise, published shortly before Louis-Napoleon's coup in the midst of republican mayhem, would build upon these foundations for a stern political treatise. The book in fact begins with a discussion of capital and Saint-Bonnet's vision of a moral economy. All economic problems are, at root, moral problems. "Through the admirable art of creation, the satisfaction of need is conditioned by effort, that is to say, the development of man. So that morality is formed in him at the same time as wealth; so that he cannot advance one step on earth until he has taken that step in Heaven."

Excessive focus on luxury, i.e. transient consumption goods over long-term production and heritable immovable wealth, feeds into pauperism: "Of three men producing the bread, the garment and the roof of man, luxury has usurped one. Vanity and sensuality have taken from bread and blood; they have taken from the human race this flower of the product which had returned to the capital from which the future was to emerge. And as a man worships what is in his hands, he called his impiety by the sweet name of luxury. Then he said to the crowd: It makes you richer!"

The soil of the land parallels the virtue of a people:

Anyone who has studied things at their base knows that, after the given down payment, man created his soil; that the soil created the climate; that the climate created blood; that the blood has multiplied the nations, and the nations have exalted souls.

And he who saw the peoples step by step, knows that when souls have fallen, nations have crumbled, blood has become poor again, the climate uninhabitable, the soil unfruitful, and the harshness of nature occupies the earth again.

“What then is Capital? First, a product; Second, a product spared; Third, a product saved and used. From which it follows that Capital is always due, firstly to work, secondly to virtue, thirdly to intelligence. The two agents of production, nature and labor, have limits; the ground is limited in its extent, the population in its strength. Capital, on the contrary, does not meet any necessary limit. Now, the fertility of nature and of labor being proportional to Capital, Capital remains the definitive agent of production, in other words of prosperity.”

“Fruit of activity in production and restraint in consumption, this sacred agent is no longer the product of nature, but that of our soul. Man enters into civilization only through his soul. The difference between antiquity and modern times is marked by that of Capital. The beginning, the increase and the development of a people, is only the beginning, the increase and the development of its Capital.”

If men shall not work by their volition, then someone will have to impose it on them: “Let us know this well: if there had not been men free from all physical labor, there would not have been a civilization to abolish slaves later... Without slavery, the slave would not have subsisted. But without the slave, no free man; and without free man, no civilization. Humanity, through slavery, began its capital.”

He takes a jab at those who would insist otherwise: “It was up to each people to enter into civilization without going through slavery! It was only up to so many savage tribes to start cultivating, before a neighboring people submits them to it! It was up to the human race in society not to form two classes: one that wants to fulfill its laws, listening to the laws of the soul, the other that wants to flee them, listening to the instincts of the body.”

And so capital exists in proportion to virtue: “To maintain a nation without capital, it is necessary that the mass of men are prey to exhausting work; this is slavery. When this nation rises on a larger capital, already a part of the population can enter liberal functions; this is the middle ages. Finally, when this nation sits on more capital in excess of that which is sufficient, men, not being obliged to give all the hours of the day to the maintenance of the body, can devote some of them to the maintenance of the soul; it is to this end that civilization tends.”

“When Christianity, abolishing the slave, entrusted capital to the free man, it was because he gave him virtue, which prevents him from consuming too much. Destroy virtue by its root, which is Faith, there is no longer a barrier between us and barbarism,” he says.

How capital is produced in general, and from this he does not exclude the rentier, so maligned by economic liberals and socialists:

The farmer produces capital when, instead of using his product to embellish his clothing and his furniture, to enrich his table and his lodging, he employs it to put back in his soil, fertilizer or into construction.

The manufacturer produces capital when, instead of applying his surplus to the expenses of his person or of his house, he adds it to the capital with which he will employ one or two more workers.

The rentier produces capital when, instead of using his rents for the unproductive consumption of superfluous tastes, he puts them to increase his own capital, the production of his estates, or the number of those who find bread and labor there.

From here we can see who is destroying capital. The ability to produce capital in a nation is only the simplicity of customs and the love of work. Develop passions, laziness and vanity in a people, you lead it to its economic ruin. Savings being the source of capital, and capital the source of the improvement of the people, saving is therefore the first social virtue, the great popular virtue.

Laziness does not produce, passion consumes, and vanity burns everything. Diverting wealth from its purpose, presumption leads its current to the spillway of unproductive consumption. Any capital formed apart from the wealth necessary for the maintenance of the body and the progress of the soul, is a levy on what the producers of this wealth should have saved in order to turn it into capital.

Consequently, Saint-Bonnet is a fierce enemy of socialism and redistributive policies; indeed, he at one point calls socialism “the fall of civilization”:

Capital follows the law of irrigation. The comparison is striking. A weak spring comes out of the earth; this trickle of water is absorbed by the three or four meters of soil that surrounds it. Let us dig a basin to receive it, and soon the accumulated flood runs to water in an area of eight or ten thousand meters. The water returning to the tank, the operation starts again. That the surrounding meadow had demanded the destruction of the basin which connects its waters, and three or four meters rotten under the rushes would replace the fertility of a hectare. Property is the reservoir of capital.

Among the savages, where there is an inflexible equality before nature, the chief fails to build up capital to start a nation. Capital was the nucleus of any empire. It was by breaking the sad equality of nature that society was born; and man entered into the path of merit, where he found righteousness. This is why charity is the supreme law of the earth.

To protect work, let's protect capital more than ever. As the lever is longer, the arm acquires more power. Wanting to sacrifice capital for work is to sympathize with the pain of the latter for today, and to destroy it for tomorrow. All in all, it is the owner who abuses the capital the least: it is he who has trained it to this day. The worker would abuse it much more: it is he who has spared nothing to this day! The classes remain, the men who compose them constantly change; they constantly talk about what they are, or according to their virtues. Society is only the whirlwind of merits.

He is also against capital taxation, as “any increase in tax is equivalent to a decrease in salary. Not only does the tax absorb a portion of the public revenue, but by the fact it seizes the capital corresponding to this income; he destroys it by an irreparable alienation. The budget is just so much taken away from the capital of the people. It seems to strike the owner and the capitalist; in fact, it affects the one who owns neither buildings nor capital, in other words the proletarian.”

And as a counterfactual: "All families have the same number of generations behind them, retorted or unknown. Suppose only that, since the French Monarchy, each man has invested in capital the money he has drunk or gambled, and the money he would have won in those wasted moments. Suppose that the sons left this first capital to live in the image of their father. There are roughly four generations of heirs per century: well, calculate where this fourth descendant would have arrived! Now apply here the geometrical progression given by the figure of the fourteen centuries, next to the capital that each family would possess today in France!"

"In the formation of property alone, and in its use when it is acquired, enter the two greatest, the two most wonderful laws of the Infinite on creation: one by effort, the other by renunciation. In a single way God gives freedom to all the earth, then raises this freedom to love. On property are based the two key traits of man, personality and charity. By abolishing it, you would destroy society rather than property."

As if this isn't incendiary enough, he goes on to throw a bomb at all the core demands of political liberalism:

The profession of faith of the first newspaper to come, will give you the program of the doctrines of the time. There are some that will offer you from fifteen to twenty fundamental institutions.

And above all:

Institution of credit, so that those who have never founded capital, will now have it;

Institution of mortgage banks, so that the unfortunate people who have not borrowed enough, continue to do so;

Institution of the press, because speech is inviolable and has not yet produced enough harm;

Institution for the freedom of worship, so that all those to whom the law of God displeases, can congregate;

Institution for free education, because there are not enough downgraded men and it is necessary to increase the number of revolutionaries;

Institution for vocational education, because there are not enough men who leave the career of their father to starve or live in shame;

Institution for free access to justice, because there are not enough trials and legal quarrels should be a right of the poor;

Free institutions of the sciences and arts, because one does not leave the plow enough for industry and trading;

Institution to defer all taxes on the rich, in order to stifle capital when it can be formed and take off.

"If men do not have to disengage themselves from evil, nor to rise individually and by various degrees to good, there is not among them a hierarchy of merit: radical equality is the law. And if the earth, because of man, was not made sterile, if its fertility is all spontaneous, capital no longer has in us its source, property no longer has title, occupation is our single right. – You preach dogmas, but you do not want the devotees to put them into practice," he tells the liberals and socialists.

Life is organized to keep the man in poverty, so that man opposes himself a set of virtues to leave it.

His economic doctrine summarized at its most punching:

The bourgeoisie is simply socialist. It maintains in religion and morality precisely the principle from which socialism deduces its economic practice. When the bourgeoisie says that it is not socialist, it knows very little about what it says, it does not know what it really thinks. It is socialist even by the economic root. Listen to them speak of the invasions of the Church, the encroachments of religious orders, a better distribution of capital, its mobilization, mortgage banks, public finance, credit expansion, etc., etc. — as many pledges offered to socialism...

There are no economic questions, there are only moral questions.

Take away a few hours of labor, and if man is immoral, instead of employing this leisure in favor of his soul, he employs it in disorientations that consume his body.

Find the means of increasing the wages, and if the man is immoral, instead of devoting them to the welfare of his family, he intoxicates his senses.

Give more political liberty, weaken penal laws, and if man is lost, he will do more harm.

Multiply the banks of loan, since these are your ideas, to recklessly offer money to the landed laborers, and generally the farmer will be more indebted.

Or, in other words: "Since there is no God, he says, and that I must enjoy, that besides I am the true majority, I come, according to all the legal forces, to enact a law which divides with better right the capital. I come to destroy individual property, that is to say injustice and inequality, and finally to make the whole crowd sit at the banquet of social life!"

In terms of political proscriptions, Saint-Bonnet was just as sharp. He proposed a mass confiscation of subversive books and a purge of schoolteachers, to be replaced by those strictly vetted for their knowledge of religion, and with a canonical marriage:

Power is in your hands; it must be used immediately to root out the sting that has been planted in the bosom of the people. You will not say that it is the people who have become so by themselves! It is you who wrote these millions of books that he has read for a century, before taking up the pen and the floor in turn.

The provincial bookstores are still full of these sad volumes; some, made up of licentious novels, for the use of women and young people; and the others, of the most ridiculous policy, for the use of men. Our big bookstore houses in Paris have crumbled under the weight of the multiplied editions of Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, undermined at the end by the small treatises, the chansonniers, the filths and the novels of all force, of which the bourgeoisie made its delights, and whose masses are poisoned at this hour.

A man in power has two things to do right now:

1. To operate a general seizure in France of all harmful books. Empty the bookstores blind, even if we have to devote ten million for compensation! Economically, we offer to bet that this suppression would sufficiently dry up the vice, so that with the increase of work and the reduction of mad consumption, we recognize within two years an average addition to production of 25 francs per individual of both sexes, on the lower half of the population; that is, four hundred and twenty-five millions in income on general production in France. Don't you see where the Revolution came from? Sell books! does the first man come have the right to deliver poisons?

Books in France! May Augeas clean up his stables quickly, or an unexpected Hercules will sweep away both the filth and the stable ...

2. Dismiss the teachers from the ecoles normal. Whether they know it or ignore it, they are socialists by doctrine, and some by intention; leave them a pension of 150 francs, or more if necessary, for ten years, and help them in any case to provide for themselves. Immediately after this dismissal, proceed, by ecclesiastical juries, to a new examination of the dismissed on the in-depth knowledge of Christian doctrine, attesting to the in-depth readings they had to do; then, at a new reception, require the religious formalities of the sacrament of marriage.

Near the end, we have our summary: there is no freedom without society; no society without the law; no law without power; no power without legitimacy; no legitimacy without infallibility.

The hierarchy of social classes is analogous to the hierarchy of souls: "To satisfy the law of Heaven, the soul rises on two planks, personality and love. Man ascends to the first of these degrees, which is strength, to arrive at the second, which is love, which introduces into holiness. Nations, and classes within nations, are like souls. The virtues of the bourgeoisie are more particularly the virtues of the personality: work, foresight and frugality. Here the soul gains strength. Also, what distinguishes the bourgeoisie is the creation of capital. The virtues of nobility are more particularly the virtues of love. Here the soul pours out its gifts: justice, bravery and disinterestedness. Also, what distinguishes nobility is disinterestedness or honor. The people rise to the bourgeoisie; the bourgeoisie ascends to the nobility; the nobility then ascends to Holiness, for it only has one step left to take."

"People never save themselves. And already they are never founded by themselves, but by their aristocracies."

La Légitimité continues and expands on the same themes. The chapters dealing with Saint-Bonnet's proposals for an electoral law and a bicameral assembly were republished separately as *La Loi Électorale et les Deux Chambres* (1875).

Once more, a brutal skewering of compulsory mass education: "We are also cruelly mistaken with regard to the solution expected from compulsory education. Should all the children of the people begin to read at this time? To answer this question, it will suffice to consult the circulation figures of our newspapers, and to know that *Le Siècle* and obscene books obtain the greatest number of readers in France ... all the children of the people to such an infection, and, in any case, to the terrible luck of increasing for them, as for Adam, the consequences of the knowledge of good and evil? We shudder in the presence of so little common sense. Why do you want to make an absolute question out of an entirely conditional question? Should we not ask ourselves: Who should teach these poor victims to read? then: what are we going to give them to read?"

To those demanding legal equality and an end to ranks and privileges: "Civilization cannot be built in a day. It is based on acquired capital and therefore on rents, but more so on its acquired aristocratic lineages, which keep both capital and virtues which produce by their merits, their size, their ability, their charity, their holiness, so there are families where civilization is found to be completely failing: from there it spreads over the others. Why undo what is done? Why let this precious reservoir run off like a pearl?"

Even more clearly:

Aristocracy is not only the triumph of the family, the expression of its dignity, the sign of its persistence; it does not only offer the principle of the human family perpetuating itself through the ages, it is also the first element of the nation. It is the source of its wealth, the basis of its freedoms, the mark of its superiority, the citadel of its rights, the national ferment of the populations, as the clergy is its divine ferment.

The monarchy is itself as the supreme expression of the aristocracy, the apotheosis of the family, the same glorification of men. It is in us submitting to the representative of God on the earth that our obedience is worthy and reasonable, that our will moves in the middle of freedom. This is the kingdom that paternal authority applies to the entire nation. Also, as supreme expression of the dogma of the family, the monarchy brings with it the highest luster after the holiness, giving it nobility. The perpetuity of families is only that of the nation...

There must be a heredity of honor [nobility], as there must be an heredity of goods [bourgeoisie]; and the need is everywhere.

The middle class, thus beheaded, or separated from its superior impulse, could not but introduce lower ranks of men and those less suitable for leading a people. Despite this, at the time when the nobility fell, if the bourgeoisie had not existed, if, despite its obvious faults, it had not been there to maintain the example of work and savings and provide for administrative functions, one wonders if we would still be a nation!...

It is not only an odious injustice to bring back the prelate, the magistrate, the good man on the same level as the scoundrel and the dissolute man, it is also nonsense. It is to maintain a disastrous position to drown the ruling classes in universal suffrage, thus stifling all superiorities. Unitarianism is chaos, it is national destruction. If the people ignore the operation of the magistrate, if they do not understand the prodigious work of the priest, and go away repeating that he is only an idler, in turn the merchant, the man of the middle class, does not understand the purpose of an aristocracy, nor the role of noble sentiments.

The governing classes at the time, he describes as destroyers of respect, usurpers of public education, shameless stockmen, seekers of popularity and exploiters of the people, hoarders of credit and money, promoters of the godless state, protectors of Masonic lodges.

Saint-Bonnet proposes a bicameral assembly, the two chambers mapping to two distinct interests in a realm. Within free and moral beings, that is to say within nations, there are two kinds of interests: moral interests, which are those of the entire nation, and material interests, which are more particularly those of individuals. The first, permanent and fundamental, are represented by a permanent and more particularly national class; the second, modifiable and contingent, are represented by an elected and more particularly provincial class.

Male householder suffrage shall be the norm: "Since social capacity begins with the father of the family and the owner, the fathers of families and the owners are therefore the real municipal voters. They appoint, according to the number of the population, the electors to the canton, these appoint the electors to the arrondissement, the latter the electors to the department, who appoint the deputies to the elective chamber."

The rebirth of aristocracy will also require a diminution in the status of mercantile values:

What will the Revolution do with this swarm of purveyors, gold-stitched cabaret-keepers, skillful sales assistants, gigantic brokers, great merchants of clothes, wines, groceries or shoes who arrive from all sides? Loaded with an opulence to make the old noble houses look poor in comparison? They will be very honest, no doubt, but would you like these men with little enlightenment, little inclined to enthusiasm, little in love with truth, little posed to great things and sometimes jealous of those highest impulses be at the top of our society?

How to avoid this? – First, by not decorating those who have earned money (we are of course far from ignoring the patriotic devotion of the victims of the last war); then, by not favoring industry above all, by means of which the enriched one comes to crush the man of honor; moreover, by placing the magistrate above the merchant, the soldier above the dealer, and the priest above all; Finally, taking as the social base the capacity of virtue and the constitution of rural property, as is done in all nations since the world began.

Now the problem is solved precisely when what is called force, which is ultimately where the authority is in the hands of the best men, the least passionate men, the most righteous men and more enlightened. These men are necessarily those who have acquired knowledge and capital, since these things can only be learned and retained only by the moderation in the pleasures, the sense of justice and the love of the truth.

“The nation will gradually resume its local freedoms. It will no longer be a victim of the great mistake of parliamentarism: of the assemblies which govern, with a State which administers everything! The country is then thrown, on the one hand, into anarchy, on the other, into practical despotism. A nation needs to be governed, but much of it has to govern itself... The return of the King, the support due to the Church, the true teaching, the rebirth of the aristocracies, the reconstitution of property, the erection of the Peerage and the reestablishment of a sound electoral law, not less than the reduction of industrialism, the abolition of pauperism, of the press and of cabarets, are urgent necessities before which all objections vanish,” are in his words what summarize his project.

In *L’Infallibilité*, we have the agenda set out at the start: “Four rights grounded Europe: Infallibility, royalty, heredity, and property. Four errors have successively shaken them: Gallicanism, liberalism, republicanism, and socialism.”

“Nations are deployed to the field of history, in proportion to the size of the families that led them.” Indeed, kings and nobles create their nations, whereas to artificially give a people nationality by means of cultural propaganda, mass literacy and paper constitutions, Saint-Bonnet compares to giving a beggar a fortune that he will quickly waste away.

On the necessity of the Incarnation: “If the Word had come among men without putting on a body, perhaps, also, he would have founded only an invisible Church, like the spirits. But the invisible light which it had transmitted, merging with that of reason, would have taken up its inconveniences. Human nature, fortified and enlightened for a moment, would have turned back to its ways, and nothing would have warned it. The Word, having become man, – founded a Church for man; visible, endowed with a body, speaking, acting like him.”

The stakes of the Revolution, sadly advanced by 1861, are indeed very high:

Under the pretext of a higher freedom, the Revolution has robbed peoples of their public freedoms, of man his private freedoms, his true freedoms; it has abolished the provinces, cities, corporations, all collective interests; it has affected the ancient constitution of the family, of property, restricted the rights of truth, dispersed the secular shelters of science, prayer and charity, demolished man on all points! Merit is the law of man: but, under the name of equality in one God, it breaks the sacred law of merit, and in this way destroys law even to its germ.

Under the dear name of liberty, it violates his conscience, it subjugates man even to his family, to the education of his children. Under the revered name of righteousness it entered his house, it divides his goods to his sons, ruins his paternal authority, steals the future from his blood, and the great citizen is no longer master of his own domains! Finally, under the respected name of the State, it took the place of man, of the family, of the municipality, of the city, of the Province; it will replace charity, it will replace Faith! May nations seek, today, what they have built with the work of history, and may man seek his place among the nations! Of his merit, of his right, of his conscience, of his thought; it will replace charity, it will replace Faith!

I implore them to fight the Revolution ... That they fight a more formidable invasion, for them more dangerous than Islamism: invasion in their soul, in their own genius, and which will suffocate man to his very heart. Islamism only attacked it with the senses, the Revolution attacks it with its very reason, overturns its conscience, replaces it with pride, kills the two eternal guardians of man, law and truth.

And in *Le XVIIIe Siècle*, his final work, it all comes together:

Philosophically, the authority of Kings derives from the necessities left by the Fall. To them belongs, not the peoples, not the kingdoms, but the power to govern them when they have been constituted; as, in the order of grace, our souls belong to Jesus Christ because he saved them. The delegation of Providence is, moreover, brought to them by heredity; heredity, daughter of Providence and respected for ages, and, when necessary, withdrawn by this very Providence...

As if, before being, they had been able to create it; as if the population existed before the nation, the nation before the principles on which it is based, and these principles before the beliefs which introduce them into souls! To take the savage for primitive man, consequently, to imagine that the wild state is for man a natural state, or a beginning and not a debris of civilization, and, therefore, to conclude that peoples have all raised themselves to the social state by themselves, such are the blunders of the last century, all in opposition to the state of human nature and the depositions of history, all in opposition to common sense and facts...

Whatever name it takes, sovereignty is nothing other than this law, armed for defense of human nature. By making this law reign, it represses the evil that binds us, it delivers souls, it multiplies men, reestablishes the relationships which must exist between them, and thus build up the nations. Citizens do not create Kings, any more than children decree fathers; the effect does not produce the cause. Laws, religion, territory, customs, courts, administrations, agriculture, acquired rights, local or particular freedoms, everything is formed with the help and sheltered from sovereignty, that is, the power exercised by Kings. It takes their authority to facilitate production of goods, of which our freedom is of use to ensure the law of merit, of which these rights are only a safeguard: the law of merit without which nothing would happen, nothing would arise among men...

Could a being give himself his law without having given himself life? And if every creature must obey only its law, or that of whom it holds existence, does not the free being have above all the right to obey only God? Who could take this away from us? God once removed, there remains no other authority than that of force, that is to say of caprice, injustice, brutality, revenge, unreason, avarice, proscriptions, abuses, murder. It must be understood: here, for sovereignty, we have the people in place of God, and for law, atheism with its horrors. Everything is sanctioned by the vote, legitimized by universal suffrage, this child and this brother of universal mediocrity. Here, all genius, all virtue, all superiority is proscribed like a danger, like an insult.

Such was the thought of Antoine Blanc de Saint-Bonnet, the gem of the counterrevolution, a powerful mind, a man of principle, of faith, and of great wisdom. A man whose works are to be cherished as an accomplished Catholic layman, a fiery wit like few others.

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6 thoughts on “Saint-Bonnet, fire breather of the legitimists”

1. Carl says:

[July 19, 2021 at 1:48 am](#)

Very interesting,

Have you ever considered making your own version of Robert Beum's essay on "ultra-royalism"? Some sort of reactionary primer. An essay about counter-revolutionary thought in general, and not specifically the French variety?

Many people came to know something about real French right wing ideas through Beum. Even though his essay is riddled with inaccuracies and have unfortunate goofy aspects.

You have recommended somewhere a group of writers to the reader interested in right wing thought. However, you just listed their names (some extremely obscure). But what have they write that is the best? And I should add, who exactly are some of them? Musci? etc...

Anyway, your writing have been very helpful to my own research. Thank you.

Reply

- Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur says:

July 19, 2021 at 5:31 am

Yes, I will be publishing a counterrevolutionary bibliography probably by the end of the year, and will think of including an introductory essay as well.

Reply

- Carl says:

July 19, 2021 at 10:45 pm

Much appreciated.

On a side note, one inaccuracy in Beum's essay is that he mistaken the Viscount Saint-Chamans (https://infogalactic.com/info/Auguste_Louis_Philippe_de_Saint-Chamans) for his brother, the General Count Saint-Chamans (https://infogalactic.com/info/Alfred_Armand_Robert_Saint-Chamans). There is a third brother, I don't recall his name.

The reason for mentioning them here is because the Viscount wrote extensively about luxury in his magnum opus, "Traité d'Économie Publique" (1852), if I don't misremember.

A comparison of him with Saint Bonnet might be worth while.

Reply

2. dissentingsociologist says:

July 26, 2021 at 9:45 pm

Doug Smythe here, I want to talk to you about Haller and restoring political science, how can I DM you, or you me.

Reply

- Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur says:

July 26, 2021 at 9:48 pm

I'm on Twitter @pompilivs, you can DM me there.

Reply

- Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur says:

July 26, 2021 at 9:54 pm

I also sent you an email using the address linked to your WP account.

Reply.

Website Built with WordPress.com.