

Intolerance: A Memo
by Paul Lake

Hate those who hate or be among the hated.
The truth grows clearer with each passing day:
Intolerance cannot be tolerated.

Don't think you're safe; no one's inoculated.
Hate means whatever public voices say;
Inflaming first the hater, then the hated,

It spreads whenever ideas are debated
That might cause some discomfort or dismay.
Intolerance cannot be tolerated.

So here's a list of things you've advocated
Now and again which might lead some astray.
Hate them or find yourself among the hated

Who think intolerance can be abated
By honesty, equality, fair play.
Intolerance cannot be tolerated,

A thought so true, it can't be overstated,
Or brook deliberation or delay.
Hate those who hate or be among the hated.
Intolerance cannot be tolerated.

Redcoats
by Paul Lake

Like redcoats ranked in regimental lines,
We march in perfect time up the long hill,
Numb to the crack of sniper fire till
A random shot strikes down the brave companion
Marching beside us, leaving a gaping hole
For thought to trouble like an anxious tongue.

Then row on row of distant muskets fire,
Chopping us down like hail assaulting wheat.
Our lines quick-step in double-time as guns
Rake through our ranks like ten pins, leaving each
To face a firestorm of shot and smoke
Disarmed and faltering . . . one at a time,
Brought down by cancer, coronary, stroke.
Then all is silence. No man breaks that line.

Inhuman Rights

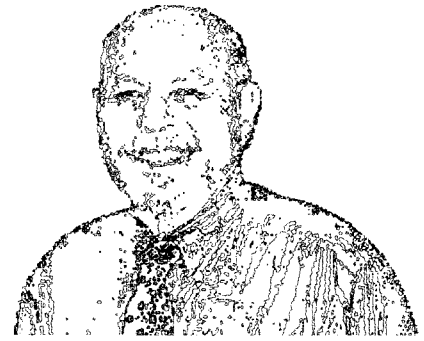
Since the father of the French (and, by now, European) New Right, Alain de Benoist, sent me an inscribed copy of his most recent book, *Au-Delà des Droits De L'Homme* (Krisis, 2004), I read the text attentively. Like him, I have wondered why natural rights (now called *human rights*) have become, in the words of Régis Debray, “the last to date of our civil religions, the soul of a world without a soul.” Benoist has no trouble finding a swarm of self-styled consciences of humanity, from Elie Wiesel to papal spokesmen, who assure us that “human rights” represent a divine revelation and a religious mystery. One author, Marcel Gauchet, who speaks of *le sacre des droits de l'homme*, may be on to something when he stresses the ritualistic nature of human-rights talk. As Benoist properly observes, one can contextualize the phenomenon historically and sociologically, but it is hard to demonstrate that the abstract universals he analyzes are something more than a time-bound fiction. Until about 20 years ago, despite the United Nations’ periodic enumerations of human rights, perceptive contemporary thinkers (including Alasdair MacIntyre, Hannah Arendt, and Raymond Aron) would have agreed with Edmund Burke, David Hume, Joseph de Maistre, and the German Historical School that natural and human rights are the inventions of misguided moralists.

Benoist outlines with concision how the current cult got started. After looking at the piecemeal construction of a “state of nature” reference point in the 16th and 17th centuries, Benoist turns to Locke as the progenitor of the full-blown figment of people living as individuals outside of civil society before consenting to become part of a voluntary community. Benoist departs from a general conservative criticism of this view by stressing the moral impulse behind it. This, he insists, may be as essential for the theory as its justification of a life full of individual material gratification. By presenting society as an artificial construct devised for the use of essentially asocial individuals, natural-rights advocates assign their own ethical end to political life, the self-actualization of individuals as equal bearers of the same

right to physical satisfaction. Note that neither accomplishment nor differential worth has anything to do with this equally distributed claim. Although Benoist also introduces the interpretation of individual rights put forth by Kant, which stresses human dignity, he suggests that this variation has not been as important as the mainstream natural-rights view, which emphasizes entitlement. The Kantian view is a morally ascetic one, centered on a rational will that commands respect because it requires the fulfillment of duty. Needless to say, such a position is not likely to capture the imagination of a consumerist society composed of pleasure-seeking individuals.

Benoist is much more convincing in showing how this theory has become sacralized in the late 20th century than he is in tracing its development in the early-modern period. What Benoist ignores is that, for centuries, Europeans believed in the Bible and in Christian theology yet, for the most part, held recognizably classical views about society and the social nature of man. While the Protestant Reformation, to some extent, moved away from a Christian Aristotelian perspective, it continued, except at its fringes, to uphold a hierarchical, organic understanding of social life. Although both Jesuit and Calvinist political writers in the late 16th century began to experiment with a “state of nature” concept, neither believed this was more than a device for placing limits on absolute monarchies. In contrast to the monarch’s pretensions to be the father of his family of subjects, theologians started to treat his relation as being contingent on the recognition of certain (no longer customary) rights. Such a search for a grounding for a political theory that would limit power, however, was not the same as denying the corporate nature of people. It was only with the Lockean revolution that the real march toward hedonistic individualism began.

Benoist is particularly acute in clarifying the convergence of circumstances in Europe and America that has caused this to happen. He leaves no doubt that those who argue for human rights are modern religious fanatics. The “universal rights” they worship have nothing to



do with the social or moral practices of most of mankind and operate exclusively in a late-modern Western culture and those societies that have fallen under its influence. Equally significant, the laundry list of rights is continually modified. According to President Bush and the National Endowment for Democracy, universal rights now include feminist self-actualization, a concept that would have mystified those French Revolutionaries who, in 1789, affirmed the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens. The new declaration drawn up by the United Nations in 1974 treats property as a right only indirectly, although it is a paramount right in the U.N. declaration of 1948. How can a doctrine be sacred whose content keeps changing?

The answer Benoist provides is that the doctrine’s content is relative to an expanding empire and global economy. Were it not for an American imperialist presence and the breakdown of traditional societies abroad, human rights would not be in such vogue. Put differently, an expansionist American power can determine the contents of a chimera that has acquired the character of a post-Christian religion.

I offer one slight caveat on Benoist’s otherwise convincing brief. It is questionable whether the defenses Third World intellectuals offer for their exotic practices (such as female circumcision) have to be accorded the respectability Benoist lavishes on them. We can frown on these practices without believing that the United States has a duty to invade and reeducate societies that engage in them.

Today, we not only export the inalienable right to property or religious tolerance but push feminist and homosexual causes as “human rights,” and we may soon have other goodies to shove in the faces of foreign populations. c