

In Memoriam

Alexandre Marc

Alexandre Marc died on 22 February 2000, three weeks after his 96th birthday. He was the last and probably the most important founding father of Personalist Federalist thinking. This school of thought was developed at the beginning of the 1930s through two reviews, *Esprit* and *L'ordre Nouveau*.¹ For Alexandre Marc, Personalist Federalism was understood, above all, as a philosophy and methodology that should avoid the errors of ideologies. Instead, he spoke of a “doctrine” or, referring to German philosophy, a *Weltanschauung*.

Before summarizing the main elements of Personalist Federalism, let us reintroduce Alexandre Marc. Born in Odessa in 1904, he was the son of a Jewish Russian banker. Marc personally experienced some of the most important events of the twentieth century. After having moved to Moscow with his parents, he listened to Lenin’s and Trotsky’s speeches on the Red Square. He was more convinced by Trotsky and became involved in a social democratic association of high-school youngsters who published a review. One day, they sent him to buy newspapers. On his return, he saw all his friends being arrested to be later executed. On another occasion, he escaped execution by an officer of the Tsarist army and, then, by an officer of the Communist red militia. Finally, his parents fled to Paris where they spent their first week in the most expensive hotel, believing that the communist revolution would only last a few weeks. Four months later, they ran out of money and began a difficult life.

After completing high school, Alexandre Marc graduated from the Institute of Political Science in Paris. He then completed his studies by going to La Sorbonne University where he studied law for a few terms. After that, he turned to philosophy and went to Freiburg in Germany, where he had Edmund Husserl as a professor and met Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, and Edith Stein.

Back in Paris in the early 1930s, he founded the review *Esprit* with the Roman Catholic thinker Emmanuel Mounier and *L'Ordre nouveau* with the Swiss Protestant Denis de Rougemont, the agnostic thinkers Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu, and the Russian Orthodox Nicholas Berdiaeff. Their writings were strongly influenced by the German philosopher Max Scheler and the Jewish personalist Martin Buber, the Protestant theologian Karl

¹This review does not have the slightest link with the French extreme right movement of the 1960s which developed under the Front National and Le Pen’s leadership.

Barth, as well as by the Catholic writer Jacques Maritain and Gabriel Marcel. Alexandre Marc's family respected some of their Jewish traditions but they did not practice the religion. In the early 1930s, Marc joined the Roman Catholic church.

One of his German friends was Harold Schulze-Boysen, one of the leading resisters against Adolf Hitler, who took him to a place where he briefly listened to the *Führer*. At the beginning of World War II, Marc volunteered for the French army. After the armistice of 1940, he founded the resistance movement at Aix-en-Provence. He then realized that a large majority of French people supported Pétain. His neighbors refused to speak to him and his family. In 1943, Marc, his wife Susanne, and their four children fled to Switzerland under dramatic circumstances.

Back in France after the end of the war, he immediately founded the European Federalists Movement and started to work for reconciliation with Germany. He got in contact with Konrad Adenauer whom he had met when Adenauer was mayor of Cologne in the early 1930s.

In 1954, Alexandre Marc founded C.I.F.E., the International Centre of European Studies. This private international organization is a kind of federation composed of several institutes and programs of European Studies, the most important of which is the European Institute of Advanced International Studies (I.E.H.E.I.), which offers a trilingual (French, English, German) MA course of one year in Nice and Berlin. C.I.F.E. and its member institutes were conceived by Marc as a school of thought where personalist federalism would be taught or described by his own and his colleagues' publications. Marc wrote about twenty books and contributed to many others. He also published several hundred articles.

The personalist school of thought was always opposed to both centralist collectivism and exaggerated individualism. During the early 1930s, collectivism appeared both in Nazi Germany and in the Soviet Union where, in the name of racist nationalism or a future classless society, individual liberty was oppressed. On the other side, Western democracies and market economies were often based on the assumption that the sum of individual egotisms would promote general wealth and happiness. The disastrous results of the 1929 economic crisis showed that millions of people were excluded from a decent standard of living. Hence, liberty did not mean anything to them.

Marc and his friends found the roots of their thinking in both Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's writings and the personalist philosophy. Mainly, but not only, in his late work *Du Principe Fédératif*, Proudhon proposed a model for society made up of autonomous communities which federate on the basis of contracts freely negotiated and entered into. Marc's usual interpretation of Proudhon's federalism was: "Power should be everywhere, even at the center." The Proudhonian grass-roots were local communities, such as

organized neighborhoods in large cities or villages as well as workshops and small-business units. They all should be autonomous and democratically self-governed. Then they should federate in regions and nations as well as in common units of production and business, which in turn were supposed to form finally a global transnational confederation. The underlying principle of Proudhon's interpretation of *social contract* finds its expression in "mutualism." Conflict resolution should be regulated by balanced covenants between the different autonomous communities or by generally accepted rules.

Alexandre Marc used to describe Proudhon's methodology as an "open dialectic" in opposition to Hegel's "closed system" where the polarity between *thesis* and *anti-thesis* disappeared in a standardizing *synthesis*. Conflicts should neither be solved by the "rule of the strongest," as happens in the anarchy of today's globalized market competition without controlled rules established by federal covenants or in the non-structured international society, nor should the polarity be oppressed by a centralized system, such as the Jacobine nation-states where conflicts are "solved" by uncontrolled political leaders or institutions.

The "open dialectic" of personalist federalism should, as Marc often said, refuse "either-or" thinking and propose the "as well as" method instead. The personalist philosophy understands the human being both as a unique individual and as a member of various private communities and groups and also of different public structures, such as a municipality, a region, a nation, a transnational continental community like the European Union, and finally of humanity. This pluralism is usually rejected by ideologists, who tend to put the emphasis on one exclusive or privileged identity, such as the nation or the social class. Indeed, nationalism tries to explain to citizens that their belonging to a nation-state or an ethnic community should count more than anything else. A similar one-way street method was used by the Marxist-Leninist ideology where belonging to a social class was considered more important than any other identity.

Personalist federalism rejects this method of privileging one exclusive identity. The methodology of this philosophy is based on the following principles:

1. An objective analysis of global pluralism should lead to guarantees for individual liberty and social responsibility of each human being, each community or group, as well as each public level. This objective is conditioned by the legal and financial guarantees of autonomy and self-government.
2. Conflicts between autonomous communities, institutions, or public levels should be solved neither by the anarchy of competition without rules nor by the arbitrary decisions of an uncontrolled center, but by mutually accepted covenants or rules

between the various units and levels. Here, we find the principle of cooperative federalism.

3. The federal division of competencies and power should assure that each level—member organizations or subgroups as well as the global institutions—possesses adequate means to solve its own problems. Here, we find the principle of subsidiarity which intends both to protect autonomy and self government at the grassroots and to achieve greater efficiency at the global level as well as a higher degree of transparency. Here, we also find the principle of checks and balances introduced in the American system by the founding fathers of the U.S. Constitution. No political, social, economic, or cultural entity should exist without at least the counter power of one other community or institution.
4. Personalist federalism always tends to increase the democratic principle of participation by applying it not only to individuals but also to all subgroups or member organizations that should also participate in common decision-making procedures or institutions.

Alexandre Marc was well aware of the necessity to accept constant revision of his model, when reality called for it.

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