

Why the French Revolution Is a Warning for Christians Today
by Patricia Engler on October 7, 2022 from Answers in Genesis

With its links to the ideas shaping our culture, its lessons on how anti-Christian agendas unfold, and its power to illustrate the consequences that flow from a society rejecting God's Word, the French Revolution offers four warnings that Christians today can't afford to ignore.

Standing outside the fire-scarred remains of Paris' Notre Dame cathedral, I didn't know about the other flames that had flickered there over 200 years earlier—torches lit to celebrate the "Worship of Reason."



It happened on November 10, 1793. But if you'd asked an onlooker, they'd have told you the date was 20 Brumaire, Year II. To help erase Christianity from society, France's revolutionary government had invented a new calendar complete with 10-day weeks, renamed months, and years numbered to center history at the Revolution rather than at the advent of Christ.¹ Soon after, revolutionaries began promoting secular worship festivals in lieu of Christianity—hence, the "Cult of Reason."

As part of the Notre Dame Festival of Reason, torch-bearing women symbolizing “goddesses” led a procession to an artificial mountain inside the cathedral.² A “Torch of Liberty” burned on an altar partway to the mountaintop, where a replica temple bore the inscription, *To Philosophy*.³ Similar festivals took place throughout France, with a “hymn” sung at one such event in 1794 including the line, “*Convenez en, mes bons amis: Rousseau vaut mieux que St. Pierre*” (“Agree, my good friends: Rousseau is better than St. Peter”).⁴



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The "Festival of Reason" in November, 1793, at Notre Dame. Author: Michel Hennin, 1777–1863 and Vinck, Carl de, 1859-1931. Public domain image retrieved from the Images de la Révolution Française Collection of Bibliothèque nationale de France, available from Stanford Libraries.

Rousseau, an eighteenth-century philosopher who believed that humans are inherently good, had argued that a totalitarian government ruled by majority consensus would offer true liberty. But—ironically, given Rousseau’s faith in human goodness—the Revolution which championed Rousseau’s ideas hunted, imprisoned, and guillotined thousands of humans in the name of this “liberty.” Despite its destructiveness, later revolutionaries including Karl Marx deemed the French Revolution an admirable, if incomplete, success.⁵ As a large contemporary Marxist organization currently declares on its website, That the greatest minds of our movement placed so much importance on understanding the French Revolution is no accident. Today, more than ever, a conscientious study of the Revolution is essential for anyone who seeks to change the world.⁶

In a sense, those words ring as true for Christians as for Marxists. With its links to the Marxist-Rousseauian thinking shaping today’s culture, its lessons on how anti-Christian agendas unfold, and its importance as a case study of the consequences which flow from a society rejecting God’s Word,⁷ the French Revolution offers reminders that Christians

today can't afford to ignore. Let's look closer at the French Revolution, beginning with the worldview climate in which it arose.

Before the Revolution: A Crisis of Worldviews

Rome had conquered France before the time of Christ, leaving France officially Roman Catholic after the empire's Christianization. But the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought two movements that would shake France's religious landscape: the Reformation, which called people to embrace God's Word as the authority for truth, and the Renaissance, which began promoting human thinking as the authority above God's Word. These rumblings of humanism swelled to an explosion of unbiblical philosophy during the Enlightenment.

While multiple French Enlightenment philosophers (*philosophes*) helped create the worldview climate behind the Revolution, one especially notable *philosophe* is Voltaire. Voltaire, an avid deist, believed that an impersonal "Supreme Being" had created the world and had given humans consciences to deduce certain moral codes but had not revealed himself through Scripture.⁸ So, Voltaire rejected the biblical revelation of a personal, triune God who sent his Son to redeem fallen creation.⁹ Believing that "theological religion is the enemy of mankind,"¹⁰ Voltaire tirelessly reviled Christianity, Judaism, and the biblical God;¹¹ attacked Scripture;¹² and fought unsuccessfully to pit science against the Bible.¹³



A portrait of Voltaire, part of a painting displayed in the 17th-century Café Procope in Paris.

While Voltaire and other *philosophes* had no excuse for rejecting the Creator revealed in Scripture,¹⁴ it's worth pointing out where their criticisms of religious institutions were biblically valid. Unpacking the religious climate in pre-revolutionary France

could fill entire books,¹⁵ but here are just three of the relevant problems that Christians can learn from today:

Blending biblical and Greek worldviews. While a biblical worldview emphasizes the importance of both physical ("earthly") and spiritual ("heavenly") realms,¹⁶ a branch of Greek philosophy called *dualism* viewed immaterial realities as separate from and

superior to physical realities.¹⁷ As this unbiblical thinking slipped into the church, many Christians began to value permanently withdrawing from society to focus on solely “spiritual” pursuits.¹⁸ This opened the door for criticism from *philosophes* that Christendom had no practical value to society and needed a secular religion to replace it.¹⁹

Viewing humans as the authority for truth. Before the Reformation, Christians had increasingly begun to view the church as (more or less) equal to Scripture as the authority for truth—even if teachings by church spokespersons contradicted the Bible.²⁰ Meanwhile, the French monarchy had grown so enmeshed with the mainstream church that being a French citizen meant identifying with royalty-approved Christendom.²¹ Whoever happened to reign had power to punish—including by exile or death—people whose convictions didn’t match official teachings,²² which had become untethered from the sole authority of God’s Word. This cleared the way for *philosophes*’ criticism that Christianity was all about having (and abusing) political power.²³

Reflecting the Pharisees. Importantly, Jesus had a lot to say about religious leaders—scribes and Pharisees—who hypocritically pursued power, prestige, and wealth but “neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness”²⁴ (Matthew 23:23–24). Professing Christians who commit wrongdoings or otherwise act hypocritically do not change the truth of God’s Word; in fact, the truth of God’s Word provides a foundation for criticizing hypocrisy and wrongdoing in the first place. But while the *philosophes*’ unbiblical foundation didn’t grant them a consistent basis for criticizing wrongs, the wrongdoings of professing Christians opened channels for later anti-Christian propaganda.

Ultimately, these three factors boil down to Christians not living out a consistent biblical worldview. A consequence was that France’s history became mottled with bloodshed in the name of religion—even as much blood would spill in the name of the Revolution’s secular religion. However, at least two major differences existed between these tragedies. First, professing Christians who shed innocent blood were acting *inconsistently* with their worldview, while revolutionaries who shed innocent blood were acting *consistently* with theirs.²⁵ Second, as we’ve seen, the big picture of Scripture supplies an absolute basis for opposing innocent bloodshed, while the *philosophes*’ worldviews lacked that foundation.

Despite this lack, Voltaire didn’t seem to think morality needed a stronger basis than his deism supplied. Voltaire defined *goodness* by the troublesome standard of “that which is good for society,”²⁶ extolling neighborly love, beneficence, and tolerance.²⁷ Even so, Voltaire’s tolerance had its limits—especially when it came to tolerating Christianity. In a letter to the Prussian king, Voltaire wrote, “Ours is assuredly the most ridiculous, the most absurd, and the most bloody religion which has ever infected this world. Your Majesty will do the human race an eternal service by extirpating this infamous superstition.”²⁸

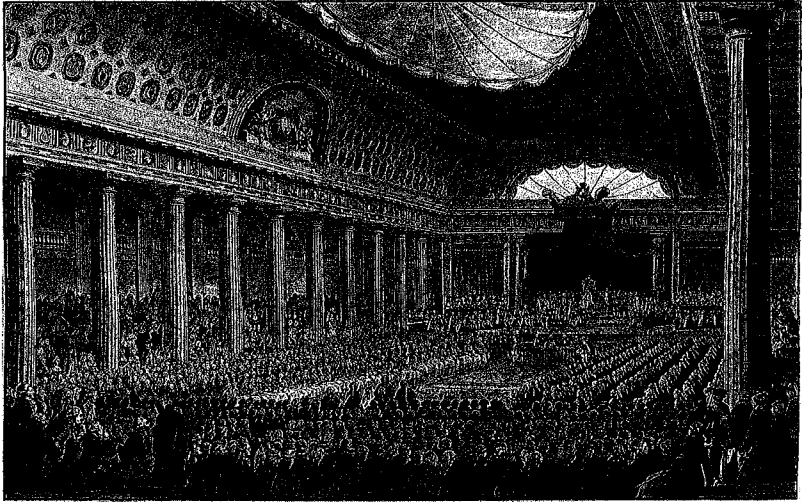
This quote highlights how, without God's Word as the authority for truth, the boundaries of tolerance, ethics, and morality become arbitrary—open for fallen, fallible, finite humans to (re)interpret and (re)define. The French Revolution would graphically illustrate the consequences of such “tolerance.” To see how these consequences unfolded, let's start by investigating how the Revolution began.

Prelude to the Revolution

Understandably, an event as complex as France's 1789 Revolution isn't bound to have a simple cause. Scholars have interpreted the Revolution's origins different ways, exploring factors like Enlightenment philosophy, political crises, and conflicts between social classes.²⁹ Entire books unpack these topics in detail.³⁰ For now, let's look at a big-picture overview of key events.

Before the Revolution, France had a type of feudalistic society, with a royal family reigning over three social tiers called *Estates*. The First Estate contained higher clergy in the official church, which owned about 10% of France's land³¹ and collected tithes from other Estates.³² Nobles, who possessed lordly titles—but not always wealth—made up the Second Estate. The Third Estate held everyone else, including peasants, priests, and the bourgeois—upper middle-class commoners who were traditionally excluded from nobility despite sometimes sporting thicker wallets.³³

While the nobility paid some taxes, France's complicated tax system privileged the first two Estates.³⁴ In 1787, the controller general of French finances proposed reforms to this system to help resolve the government's dire financial straits.³⁵ However, pushback against these proposals led King Louis XVI to summon the Estates-General, a meeting of representatives from all three Estates, which had not happened for 175 years.³⁶



The Estates General. Painting by Isidore-Stanislaus Helman, 1743–1806, and Charles Monnet, 1732–1808. Public domain photo retrieved from Wikipedia.

On May 5, 1789, the moment arrived. The Estates convened—and immediately disagreed about how to conduct the meeting. Should they count votes according to *individuals* or *Estates*?³⁷ Counting by Estate would mean that the Second and First Estates' consensus could together override the Third Estate, which represented most of France. With no decision reached by the third week of June, representatives of the Third Estate took matters into their own hands, dubbing themselves the National Assembly.

After being locked out of the royal meeting hall on June 20, the National Assembly gathered on the king's tennis courts and vowed not to leave until devising a new national constitution. Rumors soon emerged that France's upper echelons were conspiring against the Third Estate, fueling public fear, unrest, and chaos that culminated in a violent showdown as crowds stormed the fortress Bastille.³⁸ On August 4, the National Assembly (now known as the National Constituent Assembly) announced the abolition of tithing and feudalism, which had required peasants to pay dues to landowners.³⁹ A few weeks later, the Assembly released a document meant to serve as an ideological foundation for the budding revolutionary government: The Declaration of the Rights of Man.⁴⁰

The Declaration of the Rights of Man

This declaration showcases a striking effort to ground justice, freedom, and equality in human ideas rather than in God’s Word. The document begins, The representatives of the French people, organized as a National Assembly, believing that the ignorance, neglect, or contempt of the rights of man are the sole cause of public calamities and of the corruption of governments, have determined to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, unalienable, and sacred rights of man.41

We can already see the Assembly did not begin from the foundation of Scripture, given that they attributed humanity’s core problem to ignoring the “rights of man” rather than to sinning against God. The trouble is, God’s Word establishes the *basis* for the human rights which the Assembly presupposed. After all, Genesis reveals that God created humans in his image with inherent dignity, value, and meaning. But worldviews which reject God and accept only material explanations have no grounds for such rights—not

only because humans become equal to animals, but also because rights themselves are immaterial, unable to exist in a purely material universe.



The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, painted by Jean-Jacques-François Le Barbier, 1738–1826. Public domain photo from Wikipedia.

Granted, the Assembly’s worldview seemed more deistic than materialistic, proclaiming man’s rights “under the auspices of the Supreme Being.”42 But a nebulous “Supreme Being” does not reveal clear moral standards through Scripture. Humans must

determine those standards themselves. The resulting standards might *sound* compelling but can appeal to no foundation higher than fallible human reasoning to define, defend, and demand moral “goodness.”

Take, for instance, this crucial line from the Declaration: “Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law.”⁴³

This might look reasonable at first glance. But if we stop and think about it, basing objective morality on anything but a personal God raises serious problems. For example, without God’s Word as the authority, who can absolutely, consistently define what *harm* means, or why harming someone else is wrong? Attempts to define *good* and *bad* apart from an external truth rooted in God’s unchanging character become arbitrarily circular. Saying that “harming” others causes “injury” and is therefore “wrong” is just another way of saying bad actions cause bad results and are therefore bad. But what makes “badness” fundamentally bad is grounded in nothing higher than capricious human calculation, opinion, and rhetoric. As a result, humans can redefine *bad* in ways that justify guillotining thousands of people—despite theoretically being opposed to harm and injury. Redefining language reflects humans’ attempts to redefine truth—and with it, morality, ethics, and justice.

When a collection of humans (like the National Assembly) makes itself the authority for truth in this way, the result is totalitarianism. In fact, nearly 200 years after the French Revolution, psychiatrist Robert Lifton observed that redefining morality and manipulating language were hallmarks of “thought reform” (brainwashing) in totalitarian communist regimes.⁴⁴ To enforce their own power, totalitarian states must subjugate—or eliminate—anyone and anything that holds to a higher authority, including God’s Word. The result is the kind of dechristianization that unfolded during the French Revolution. Let’s investigate the key steps involved.

Hallmarks of Dechristianization

Whether looking at the French Revolution or later totalitarian regimes, we find that dechristianization programs tend to involve recurring patterns of steps that serve as a warning today. (We saw some of these patterns earlier in this blog series when examining Christian persecution in Rome.) Here are three of these steps, which do not necessarily unfold in a set order, can happen simultaneously, and may occur in cycles with different levels of (usually increasing) intensity:

Require total allegiance. As part of dechristianization, new policies begin commanding the church to bow to the state’s authority *above* God’s authority. Officially, the state may maintain a policy of religious freedom or tolerance; however, this tolerance only applies so far as Christians ultimately submit to the state. Where Scripture conflicts with the state, Christians are told to compromise God’s Word to accommodate the unbiblical

culture. As a result, regional Christendom tends to divide into an “official church” which complies with the regime and an “unofficial church” which operates under the radar.

Remove Christian influence. To show that the state, not God, is considered the final authority, totalitarian regimes increasingly begin to suppress, marginalize, and villainize the church. Christian leaders, especially within the unofficial church, are strategic targets in the early phases. But eventually, no Christian is immune. Visible signals of Christian influence disappear as churches close, crosses vanish, and services cease. Meanwhile, popular culture helps to paint Christianity as outdated at best and dangerous at worst. To speed up, justify, and rally public support for more extreme dechristianization, the regime begins to paint biblical Christians as “enemies of the state” and to scapegoat Christians for local crises.

Replace Christianity with an alternate worldview. As spiritual beings, humans need an outlet for worship. Regime leaders, philosophers, or celebrities embodying the regime’s ideals may become objects of worship in lieu of Christianity, even as the totalitarian system itself plays the role of “God.” Meanwhile, people may turn to non-Christian forms of spirituality that blend with—or revolve around—the state religion. These new spiritualities sometimes include rituals meant to mock Christianity, driving home the dechristianization agenda.

With these hallmarks in mind, let’s see how all three steps played out during the French Revolution.

The Revolution vs. Christianity

As an early hint that the Revolution would require total allegiance, the Declaration of the Rights of Man stated, “No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law.”⁴⁵ The trouble was, the Declaration defined *law* not as an expression of the objective morality God’s Word supplies,⁴⁶ but as “the expression of the general will.”⁴⁷ If the people’s will changed, the law should change too. This meant that religious freedom existed on paper, so long as the state remained the authority for truth and for determining the boundaries of that freedom—boundaries that could change with the “general will.”⁴⁸ Within a few years, this façade of religious tolerance would crumble, unmasking a war against Christianity.

The mask fell slowly at first. A few months after the August 1789 decree to abolish tithing, the Assembly decided to simplify France’s financial troubles by taking over church-owned land.⁴⁹ The next summer, the Revolution’s demand for total allegiance intensified through legislation known as “The Civil Constitution of the Clergy.”⁵⁰ As historian Noah Shusterman described it, “The Civil Constitution was the Constituent Assembly’s attempt to reshape the church, to make it part of the Revolution—and, in the process, strengthen the government’s authority over the church.”⁵¹

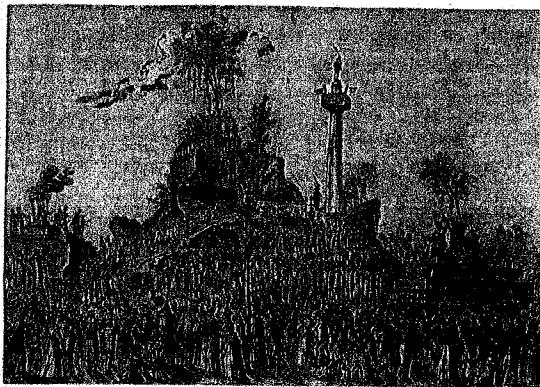
So many clergy pushed back against the Constitution that, in November 1790, the Assembly issued an ultimatum: clergy could either sign the Constitution or lose their positions and pensions.⁵² About 45% of clergymen refused to sign, dividing the church into official (“Constitutional”) and underground (“refractory”) branches.⁵³

With the lines drawn, the removal of Christian influence gathered momentum. In August 1792, the Assembly ordered refractory clergy to either leave France or be forcibly exiled to Guiana.⁵⁴ Incidents of brutality against nuns had already begun, unhindered by the National Guard, by spring of 1791.⁵⁵ Then in 1793–1794, the mask fell away entirely during the Reign of Terror.

No longer could clergy dodge persecution by being “Constitutional”; *all* priests faced the ultimatum of resignation or imprisonment—or worse.⁵⁶ The darkness only deepened after the Law of Suspects in September 1793 decreed the arrest of “enemies of liberty,” including anyone who hadn’t been granted a *certificat de civisme*—certificate of good citizenship.⁵⁷ People couldn’t travel or conduct public business without these certificates, which could be refused to anyone who wasn’t considered sufficiently zealous for the Republic.⁵⁸

That same autumn, the new Republican calendar arrived to try erasing Christianity from time itself.⁵⁹ A wholesale destruction of visible references to Christianity elapsed, with revolutionaries removing crosses, burning sacred books, and changing the names of streets, towns, or other sites that referenced Christianity.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, synagogues and church buildings from every denomination were closed to be demolished, repurposed, or converted into Temples of Reason.⁶¹

The Worship of Reason clearly signaled many revolutionaries’ agenda to replace Christianity with other worldviews, although a subtler sign had appeared with a June 1792 decree that each commune (township) erect an “altar of the fatherland.”⁶² As a darkly ironic illustration of the problems with worshipping reason, liberty, and virtue instead of God who is the source of these gifts, the leaders of the Cult of Reason were themselves guillotined in the spring of 1794. Maximilien Robespierre, an infamous figurehead of the Reign of Terror and an ardent admirer of Rousseau, replaced the Cult of Reason with a more Rousseauian “Cult of the Supreme Being.”⁶³ Less than two months after inaugurating the cult, however, Robespierre himself faced the guillotine.⁶⁴⁻⁶⁵



Preparations for the "Festival of the Supreme Being." Author: Michel Hennin, 1777–1863. Public domain image retrieved from the Images de la Révolution Française Collection of Bibliothèque nationale de France, available from Stanford Libraries.

The Revolution's Consequences

Along with the destructiveness of dechristianization, what other consequences spilled from the Revolution which had sworn that "liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else"?⁶⁶ Describing the cost of human life involved, historian Timothy Tackett reported,

We will never know the precise death toll. One careful count of all those executed through the judicial process yielded a total of just under 17,000. But such figures do not include executions without trial or deaths during incarceration—and given the miserable conditions in many of the prisons, a substantial number succumbed before they could appear before a tribunal. A total of at least 40,000 deaths seems not unlikely. All classes, moreover, were touched by the executions: over a fourth of the victims were peasants, and nearly a third were artisans or workers. Only 8.5 percent were nobles and 6.5 percent were clergymen.⁶⁷

While the guillotine was invented as a supposedly more humane way of execution at the beginning of the French Revolution, later months exposed the Revolution as anything but "humane."⁶⁸ Details from contemporary reports are too disturbing to unpack here; suffice it to say that brutality against women and children, extreme glorification of violence, and the executions of individuals in front of their family members were all well-documented.⁶⁹

How did the revolutionaries justify these atrocities? A hint lies in the Orwellian title of the government body responsible for enforcing decrees during the Reign of Terror: "The

Committee of Public Safety.”⁷⁰ This title reminds us that, without the foundation for truth God’s Word supplies, regimes can easily manipulate language to justify atrocities. *Evil* becomes a lot easier to call *good* if it’s committed under the auspices of freedom, justice, and safety. As professor of peace and conflict studies Alex Bellamy put it, “Many revolutionaries seemed to be aware that mass killing contradicted the liberties set out in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen but they insisted that exceptional measures were legitimate if necessary for the defense of the republic.”⁷¹

Part of the “defense of the republic” involved obliterating the liberty the revolutionaries (sometimes literally) worshipped. Tackett reports, “Freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion had all been essentially removed.”⁷² Correspondingly, life for everyday citizens dimmed to a hue which would foreshadow the aftermath of the communist Russian Revolution. For example, one commentary observed, The policies of the Jacobins created an atmosphere of tension and fear for poor as well as rich. Children were used to spy upon their teachers. Women found themselves arrested for a passing remark made in a breadline. They could not understand why the government enforced the Law of Suspects against humble people as harshly as it did against former nobles.⁷³

Another trait of the Reign of Terror which resurfaced in later totalitarian contexts (and is arguably appearing again in aspects of today’s Western cultures) is the *intolerance of neutrality*. People couldn’t avoid risk simply by refraining from speaking *against* the Revolution; they had to show they actively *supported* it. Tackett commented, By 1793 a whole segment of the most radical militants were attacking not only the counterrevolutionaries, but anyone whose attachment to the Revolution was deemed insufficiently energetic. Moderation and passivity could be treated as crimes. Those who did not support their views in every respect must be against them.⁷⁴

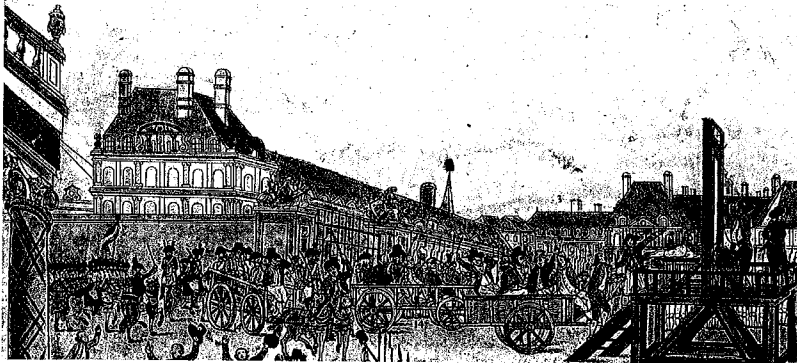
Looking Back on the Revolution

In all these respects, the French Revolution illustrates how attempts to achieve freedom, justice, and morality on the foundation of man’s word must ultimately backfire. That’s not to say the Revolution didn’t produce any useful effects. For instance, revolutionary governments implemented measures to make education accessible, aid the needy, and abolish slavery in the French colonies.⁷⁵ Scholars have also commented at length on the French Revolution’s role in advancing modern electoral democracies.⁷⁶

However, similar ends have been accomplished in other places without such violent, totalitarian means—often thanks to the influence of a biblical worldview. In England, for instance, the spread of the Protestant Reformation provided an important backdrop for transitioning the government to a parliamentary democracy under a constitutional (rather than absolute) monarchy.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, Christians acted consistently with their worldviews to help reform factories, prisons, hospitals, and orphanages; make education accessible for the needy; and abolish the British slave trade.⁷⁸ Such results were possible

because God's Word provides a consistent foundation for doing good, condemning evil, and renouncing hypocrisy. The fact that the French revolutionaries' worldviews lacked this foundation could not remain hidden, however noble some of their intentions. Correspondingly, Christian scholar Francis Shaeffer interpreted the French Revolution as a disastrous attempt to copy political reforms in England which had their roots in the Protestant Reformation. Shaeffer observed, There were indeed vast areas in France which needed righting, but when the French Revolution tried to reproduce the English conditions without the Reformation base, but rather on Voltaire's humanist Enlightenment base, the result was a bloodbath and a rapid breakdown into the authoritarian rule of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821).⁷⁹

Despite its faulty foundation and fatal fruits, Marx championed the French Revolution as a monumental victory—an uprising of the middle class which brought civilization one step closer to the ultimate revolution of the working class.⁸⁰ Marx called this event “the most colossal revolution that history has ever known.”⁸¹ Even today, various secular voices admire the Revolution's humanistic ambitions. For instance, a recent web article published by the American Humanist Association, whose motto is “good without a God,” stated that “For humanists, the French Revolution marks the beginning of a new age of enlightenment, freedom, and rational thought.”⁸²



The execution of Robespierre. Author: Carl de Vinck, 1859–1931. Public domain photo retrieved from Wikipedia.

These comments highlight a recurring refrain among people who—like Rousseau, Marx, and secular humanists today—hope that a works-based-salvation plan of being “good without a God” will eventually liberate humanity. When confronted with the disastrous results of regimes which enacted such plans, the hopeful tend to conclude that these regimes' founders had the right ideas, but simply didn't (or couldn't) apply those ideas the right way. But studying history should remind us that there *is* no right way to build

society on a faulty foundation. When fallen, finite humans try to function as the authority for truth, goodness, and human rights, the results are consistently *dysfunctional*.

Summary: A Four-Way Warning

In the end, we've seen the French Revolution offers at least four warnings which Christians today must not ignore. First, the worldview battle leading up to the Revolution warns us how a culture's *ideas* come to shape its *realities*. We must pay careful attention to who is discipling our culture's young people, because the ideas instilled in them today will form the philosophical basis of society tomorrow.

Second, the way that Christians' inconsistency in pre-Revolutionary France handed fuel to the later dechristianization agenda warns us to live out an uncompromised biblical worldview. Otherwise, we risk standing with the hypocrites of whom Paul said, "As it is written, 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you'" (Romans 2:24).

Third, the Revolution warns us how dechristianization happens. With human reasoning instead of God's Word as its foundation, a society that began by embracing freedom, equality, and tolerance came to demand total allegiance, remove Christian influence, and replace Christianity with other worldviews. By understanding these processes, we can better recognize and respond to similar patterns we see today.

Fourth, the Revolution warns us of the consequences that unfold when a well-intentioned society tries to be "good without a God." The Declaration of the Rights of Man sounded wonderful in theory but had no foundation in practice. Without God's Word as the basis for morality, the revolutionaries could redefine *being good* to mean violently exterminating those who disagreed with them.

Altogether, these warnings from the French Revolution remind us that we must hold fast to God's Word without compromise, without fear, and without retreat. Only the light of God's Word can reveal what the torches at Notre Dame's Festival of Reason could not illuminate: the way to true liberty is Jesus.