

Lecture IV: The French Revolution and 19th Century Europe

Source: Justo Gonzalez's *The Story of Christianity* Vol. 2, pgs. 262 - 273

I. The French Revolution

- a. Louis XVI was the king of France at the time. He was tolerant of French Protestants, which angered the massive Roman Catholic population. Economic conditions in France worsened at the same time that the king and his nobles were costing the people more and more. The monarchy decided to fund this lifestyle by taxing the nobles and the clergy, two groups that had never been taxed before.
- b. A key term for understanding this time period is bourgeoisie. This word comes from French and refers to the middle class. This class of people has a great deal of power in capitalist society because they control a large amount of money collectively.
- c. The French government was ruled by the monarchy, but there was also the Estates General, which was a legislative body that was made up of three classes of individuals: the clergy, the nobility (the very rich), and the bourgeoisie.
- d. When the clergy and nobility refused to pay the taxes that Louis XVI demanded, he called for the Estates General to decide the issue. Since two-thirds of the group was made up of the people refusing to pay taxes, Louis knew he was in trouble. He decided to alter the makeup of the group. He dramatically increased the number of members from the bourgeoisie - in the end, this class outnumbered the clergy and nobility combined.
- e. The Estates General eventually decided to declare themselves the National Assembly and the true representatives of the majority of France. Louis XVI feared this new group and ordered it disbanded. The National Assembly refused to disband until France had a constitution. The king responded by removing popular bourgeoisie politicians, which led to violent protests and riots. This led to the storming of the Bastille, the prison holding the enemies of the monarchy on July 14, 1789.
- f. The National Assembly became the National Constituent Assembly and that body issued the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen," which established basic civil and human rights. The king refused to accept this and other actions taken by the new Assembly; however, his actual power over the government and the people of France was minimal at this point.
- g. The Assembly moved to reform the political and economic aspects of the French government and also worked to reform the religious institutions of the country. They issued the "Civil Constitution of the Clergy" in 1790 which attempted to set clear rules and guidelines on the Catholic Church in France.
- h. This Civil Constitution was intended to reform the Church and it was rejected as schismatic by Pope Pius VI, however, Louis XVI, under pressure from the Assembly, agreed to the Constitution. All members of the clergy were forced to swear allegiance to this new constitution and if they refused were to be deposed. This caused a huge split within the French Catholic church.
- i. In 1791 the National Constituent Assembly became the Legislative Assembly, which was a far more radical body. Soon after that, France was at war with Austria and Prussia (monarchies that feared the spread of revolutionary ideas from France). France lost but maintained its borders and the Assembly blamed Louis. The Legislative Assembly was then replaced by the National Convention, which immediately abolished the monarchy and proclaimed that France was a republic. Four months later the king was executed for high treason.
- j. The bourgeoisie now controlled France through the National Convention. France remained at war with numerous European powers and the French economy suffered. Peasants rioted and people feared foreign invasion. This all led to what is known as the

“Reign of Terror,” which was a time when many thousands of people were executed for suspected counterrevolutionary beliefs and activities. These people were publicly executed by another French invention the guillotine.

- k. Many Christian leaders, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, opposed the “Reign of Terror” and this led the leaders of the Revolution to fear and hate the Church. The revolutionaries had hoped that the state would be run by reason and science not superstition and religion.
- l. The French Revolution led to the creation of a new religion – the religion of reason, or the “Cult of Reason,” and later the “Cult of the Supreme Being.” This new religion built temples to Reason (churches) and declared a list of saints including Jesus, Socrates, Marcus Aurelius and Rousseau. This new religion also established rites and rituals for weddings, funerals, etc.
- m. During this time period between 2,000 and 5,000 priests were executed as counterrevolutionaries for not swearing allegiance to the Republic.
- n. In 1798, France invaded the Papal States and captured Pope Pius VI and brought him to France as a prisoner.
- o. In November 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte, a military commander, became master of France. Napoleon sought reconciliation with the Catholic Church and negotiated with Pope Pius VII (the previous pope died in a French prison).
- p. In 1801 Napoleon and the pope reached an agreement that gave France some control over the selection of bishops. In 1804 the pope crowned Napoleon Emperor.
- q. The peace between the pope and Napoleon was short lived. France again invaded the Papal States and Pope Pius VII was taken prisoner. Pius remained a prisoner of France throughout Napoleon’s reign.
- r. When Pius VII was released he returned to Rome and declared amnesty for all of his enemies. He also acted to bring peace between Napoleon and England.



II. The New Europe

- a. During the reign of Napoleon as leader of France, 1799 to 1812, there were a series of wars that became known as the Napoleonic Wars. Some of these wars were started by Napoleon in hopes of dominating all of Europe and eventually the world, while others were waged to defend other countries and defeat Napoleon. Napoleon’s rule ended in 1812 at the Battle of Waterloo, when British forces (with some European allies) defeated the French military and captured Napoleon.
- b. With the defeat of Napoleon, Louis XVIII, brother to Louis XVI, was installed as the new king of France. Throughout most of Europe the monarchies that Napoleon had defeated were restored. The remainder of the century was relatively peaceful.
- c. Despite this relative peace there were social movements and unrest. One of the major causes of this was the drive to unite Germany and Italy. Throughout Europe the power of the bourgeoisie grew and the economic system of the West developed into following the law of supply and demand. The law of supply and demand suggests that the government should not be involved in business or the economy. At the time, this was known as economic liberalism, but now is known as conservatism.
- d. In 1848 there were revolutions and riots throughout Europe. In France the Second Republic was proclaimed and then in 1851 Louis Napoleon declared himself Napoleon III, emperor of France.
- e. Italy began to unite in 1852 and was finally united in 1870. Popes refused to recognize the united and free Italy until 1929. Germany also united during this time period.

III. Developments in Great Britain

- a. The Industrial Revolution had significant impacts on Great Britain as well. In fact, it had an even bigger impact on Great Britain than the rest of Europe and began there much earlier. The revolution caused the growth of the middle class and their power increased as well. The poor and the aristocracy both were hurt by the revolution, which led to a huge wave of migration from Great Britain to the colonies and former colonies of the empire (United States, Australia, India, South Africa, Canada and New Zealand. It was in this environment that Karl Marx created the ideas of socialism and communism.
- b. At the same time (the late 18th century) the Church of England was suffering from many of the same problems that the Roman Church suffered during the Medieval era –nepotism, absenteeism, and corruption. During the 19th century there was a renewal within the Church of England and also the emergence of a Evangelical wing of the church. At the same time there was a counter movement, which eventually became known as the Anglo-Catholicism – these people emphasized tradition, apostolic succession and communion.
- c. Other protestant churches also grew in England during the 19th century.

IV. Latin America (Gonzalez pgs. 274-281)

- a. Latin America generally refers to everything south of the United States and the islands in the surrounding waters. The tensions that affected Europe and America during this time period also affected Latin America. There had long been tensions between the Europeans that came to the region as conquerors and the native inhabitants of the region.
- b. The Europeans that came there became very wealthy by exploiting natural resources and slave labor. All the political and civil power was held by Europeans.
- c. In 1808, Napoleon defeated the king of Spain and appointed his brother to be the new king. Napoleon's brother, Joseph Bonaparte, declared that all Spanish colonies must now obey him; however, he had no way to enforce his authority. So the colonies enjoyed relative independence. In 1812, Napoleon was defeated and Joseph was pushed out of power. The former king was reinstated and initially tried to exert direct control over the colonies, but eventually relented.
- d. In 1816 Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay declared independence from Spain as the River Plate. In 1819, Paraguay declared independence from the River Plate and Uruguay did the same in 1828. Chile declared independence in 1818. Northern South America (Colombia, Venezuela, and Panama gained independence through military victories over Spanish forces.
- e. In 1826 the Panama Congress met to discuss the future of the region. Some had hoped to unite the continent into a confederation similar to the United States; however, regional and local issues (and American interests) kept the continent divided.
- f. Mexico declared independence on September 16, 1810. Central America declared independence from Mexico in 1821. Panama remained part of Columbia until 1903 after the United States manufactured a coup.
- g. Brazil, the one significant non-Spanish colony in Latin America, gained its independence from Portugal following the end of the Napoleonic Wars. In 1825, its independence was recognized by Portugal.
- h. Haiti declared independence from France in 1804, but the French did not acknowledge it until 1825. The United States did not recognize this until 1862, during the midst of the Civil War.
- i. The class separation that was a major part of Latin American society (newer European immigrants vs the native population) also had an impact on religious life. The entire region was devout Roman Catholic. Popes refused to appoint bishops to the newly independent countries until 1827 when Leo XII appointed bishops to Greater Colombia.
- j. Parish priests and other local clergy supported rebellion. Sixteen of the twenty-nine signers of the Argentine declaration of independence were priests. Priests helped to further the rebellions of the region.
- k. During the second half of the 19th century, immigrants, especially from Asia, changed the religious makeup of Latin America.