

Secularism Versus Christ: The Ethics of the Day

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Introduction

A disconcerting feature of an increasing number of downtown areas in large Western cities is the transformation of church structures into pubs and dance clubs. In America, England, Germany, Italy, and many other nations, one can see a place formerly consecrated to Christian worship now dedicated pleasures of the flesh. Vaulted ceilings, decorated pillars, and stained-glass windows remind the visitor that times have changed. To go to “the Church” in Dublin now means imbibing a different kind of spirit than when it was St. Mary’s Church of Ireland in the eighteenth century. This transformation encapsulates the process of secularization, for as the Greek poet Simonides recognized centuries ago, places are *loci* of memory.¹ A place that has been constructed by humans exists as “an effective carrier of cultural memory,” that enables future generations to maintain and develop the tradition of their ancestors.² Thus, when a church is gutted out and repurposed for gastronomic ends, the symbolic atmosphere speaks of the culture’s gradual loss of transcendent memory and horizontalization of its spirit—which can be called “secularization.” Taking exception to those who say that the profane use of the churches is “not destroying the old, but continuing it,” Owen Hatherley writes, “The approach of the French

¹ See Cicero, *De oratore* 2.86.

² Paul Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 30.

or Russian revolutionaries, who declared new festivals and rituals for new values and a new society, had the virtue of greater honesty.”³

The ethics of the West have undergone a similar process of transformation and destruction. The elderly can attest to how, within their lifetimes, the culture has changed from having its touchstone in Christian morals to what could be called an ethics of secularism. Actions previously unspeakable, like abortion or homosexual relations, are now paraded as virtue; behaviors once unknown to the common person, such as the surgical removal of healthy gonads from a young boy, are proclaimed as human rights. Where do these ethical values come from? How did we get here? As a small step to explain what underlies these moral judgments, I propose to examine the secularization of morality as it has occurred through the centuries.

What Is Secularism?

To understand the inner dynamism of secularism, it may be helpful to turn to Virgil’s fourth *Eclogue*:

The last age of Cumaean prophetic song now comes:
The great temporal order is born anew.
Now the Virgin returns . . .
Now from on high a new progeny descends.

With these mysterious and pregnant phrases, the Roman poet expressed what Christians eventually saw as a prophecy of Jesus Christ. Because of the coming of Christ, the pagan prophets cease their songs; born of the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Eternal Son of the Father descends from heaven and inaugurates a *magnus ordo saeculorum*, a great temporal order, *ab integro*—entirely fresh, anew, as the beginning of a new day is marked by the first rays of dawn after a long winter’s night.

The Incarnation also brought about a new way of conceiving time and space. Previously, a *saeculum* was approximately a hundred-year interval between state-supervised spectacles, literally the “Secular Games” that were so spectacular that generations would speak of them, and when the memory of the last one faded from living consciousness, they would be renewed. As the centuries wore on, even in the absence of any games,

³ Owen Hatherley, “When the Church Turns into a Pub,” *The Guardian*, December 27, 2012, theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/dec/27/church-pub-buildings-respect-honesty.

"*Saeculum* rhetoric highlighted emperors' establishment of new dynasties and power to secure prosperity for the empire: typical inscriptions begin with the formula 'in the most blessed *saeculum* of our lord N.'"⁴ Acting perhaps from Christian impulses, Constantine refused to hold any such games. Nevertheless, the court literature of his empire used *saeculum* rhetoric, "often praising the arrival of a [new] 'Golden Age.'"⁵

Once Christians were able to detach themselves sufficiently from pagan culture, they were able to reassert, on the societal level, the biblical view of time that was fully revealed in Jesus Christ. Christ reveals that, as the Creator, by whom all things were made, he is the master of time, "born of the Father before all ages," "the Alpha and the Omega," the one who is with us always, who makes all things new. Just as the Son of God came "into" the world by taking flesh, so Christ calls his people to be *in* the world but not *of* the world (see John 17:14–16). The apostles transmitted and developed this teaching: St. Paul told the early Christians in Gal 1:4 that "our Lord Jesus Christ . . . gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil *aion*," a Greek word translated in Latin as *saeculum* and in English both as "age" and "world"; in Eph 2:2 he speaks of Christ as delivering us from this present temporal-spatial order, this secularity, which is "the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." In 1 John 5:19, John affirms that "the whole world is in the power of the evil one," and therefore we are not to "love the world or the things in this world" (2:15). Although the world was created good, from the fall of Adam and Even up until the time of Christ, it had been under the reign of sin. Only with his divine and saving power can Christ declare: "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out" (John 12:31). If Christ's birth is the dawn of a new era, his death on the cross and resurrection is the bright noonday sun declaring his victory over the darkness of the old world of death and sin.

The Church Fathers developed this concept of Christocentric time even further. Without denying the natural goodness of the world, they affirmed that, without Christ it languishes under the lash of the Evil One, who is a slave-driver. Christ sets us free from sin and death, and establishes within us the freedom of the children of God, fully realized in heaven. Therefore, they generally made a theological distinction between three periods of time: first, the *saeculum* before the reign of Christ; second, the time of

⁴ Susan Bilynskyj Dunning, "saeculum," in *Oxford Classical Dictionary Online*, doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.013.8233.

⁵ Dunning, "saeculum."

Christ's reign in the present moment which is a new temporal order; and, third, the eternal reign of Christ in the *saeculum saeculorum*, in the ages of ages, in the timeless world without end.⁶ Thus, the term "secularity" came to be associated with ritual paganism, ludicrous games, and the rule of power without explicit reference to Christ.

The Christian view of the work of Jesus of Nazareth led some to conclude that "secularity" was a chronological reality, marked as the time of paganism before the Incarnation; or perhaps the rule of pagans before Constantine. If that were true, then the reign of a Christian emperor would begin a new age, in which Christ would be acting through his human agents—and if Christ is God, then this new time would be marked by manifest blessings of God.

This view of time and secularity was challenged by the barbarian sack of Rome in 410 under Alaric. The devastation and death that followed the attack of the Visigoths put into question whether any fresh era had begun at all, whether Christ was indeed God, whether the Church was a divine institution. Augustine answered the challenge by revisioning the Catholic view of time: the new era begun by Christ's reign is not so much a chronological reality whose sign is some political power; it is more truly a spiritual reality, for Christ is king from the beginning of creation, and he established covenants with Abraham and the other patriarchs as a foreshadowing of his more perfect and manifest later rule in his mystical body, the Church. Thus, the truest meaning of "secularity" is its spiritual sense, captured by the English term "worldliness," which entails a love for this fallen world and this passing time, this *saeculum* touched by sin, even unto the contempt of God. The contrary virtue can be called "godliness," or "Christlikeness," being "conformed to the likeness of Christ" (Rom 8:29), which entails the love of God above all, even unto the sacrifice of the self.

From within this Christian worldview, the Israelites in the time of Moses practiced secularity when they worshipped the golden calf, the prophets excoriated secularity when they called Israel back to true worship, and Christians have continually been tempted by secularity—and often have fallen into it, as seen most shamefully in the times of widespread corruption even at the highest levels of the Church. It was secularity that led popes to rule the Church for seventy years in Avignon, and it was

⁶ See Simona Cohen, "Early Christian and Medieval Concepts of Time," in her *Transformations of Time and Temporality in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 39–52.

secularity that, soon after the end of the “Babylonian captivity,” led to the Great Western Schism which saw three claimants to the papal throne.

At this point, it might seem as if I am equating “secularity” and “sinfulness,” as if the ethics of the day is characterized as the battle between sinfulness and Christ. But I am saying more. Persons, groups, and cultures can degenerate into secularity, worldliness, through sin, undoubtedly. It can also happen, at least in part, through ignorance, weakness, and folly. What typifies the “Secular Age” in which we live is not that it chooses sin: this sort of secularity is the temptation of every age. What typifies the present Secular Age is that it chooses *worldliness* as such: it is secular *in principle*; it embraces this fallen world, this passing time as its ultimate good, for *secularism* tends unto the malicious contempt of God. It has done so in four revolutions: the Protestant, the French, the Communist, and the Post-Modern Sexual Revolution.

Four Secular Revolutions

Before I begin describing four revolutions that led to today’s secularism, I would like to note that the following exposition is almost entirely unoriginal. That is, the framework I am providing has been largely described elsewhere, including the highest teaching authority of the Catholic Church.

When bishops of the Catholic Church met for the First Vatican Council, they issued the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith” *Dei Filius* on April 24, 1870.⁷ The introduction to this document provides a theology of history that mentions three stages of historical decline from Catholic truth within the Western world. The first stage described was that of what could be called the Protestant Revolution:

No one is ignorant that the heresies proscribed by the Fathers of Trent, by which the divine teaching of the Church was rejected, and all matters regarding religion were surrendered to the judgment of each individual, gradually became dissolved into many sects, which disagreed and contended with one another, until at length not a few lost all faith in Christ. Even the Holy Scriptures, which had previously been declared the sole source and judge of Christian doctrine,

⁷ Translation from *The Decrees of the Vatican Council*, ed. Vincent McNabb (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1907), 16–17.

began to be held no longer as divine, but to be ranked among the fictions of mythology.

It then described a second stage, which may be associated with the French Revolution:

Then there arose, and too widely overspread the world, that doctrine of rationalism, or naturalism, which opposes itself in every way to the Christian religion as a supernatural institution, and works with the utmost zeal in order that, after Christ, our sole Lord and Savior, has been excluded from the minds of men, and from the life and moral acts of nations, the reign of what they call pure reason or nature may be established.

Finally, the Council described the principles that would give birth to the Communist Revolution:

And after forsaking and rejecting the Christian religion, and denying the true God and His Christ, the minds of many have sunk into the abyss of Pantheism, Materialism and Atheism, until, denying rational nature itself, and every sound rule of right, they labor to destroy the deepest foundations of human society.

About seventy years later, on October 12, 1952, while undoubtedly fully aware of the theology of history provided by the First Vatican Council, Pius XII gave a speech to the men of Catholic Action, and he summed up the world-historical situation like this:

In these last centuries [Satan] has tried to effect the intellectual, moral, social disintegration of unity in the mysterious organism of Christ. . . . Here is the attempt to build the structure of the world on foundations that We do not hesitate to point to as *principally responsible for the threat to humanity*: an economy without God, a law without God, a politics without God. . . . so that Christ is a stranger in the universities, in the school, in the family, in the administration of justice, in legislative activity, in the assembly of nations, wherever peace or war is determined.⁸

⁸ Pius XII, "Discorso di Sua Santità Agli Uomini di Azione Cattolica nel XXX della Loro Unione," speech of October 12, 1952 (trans. mine).

Pius XII then describes three stages of history of this work of the enemy:

First, Christ yes, Church no.

Then: God yes, Christ no.

Finally: God is dead; rather: God has never existed.⁹

These correspond exactly to three revolutions:

- *Christ yes, Church no*: The Protestant Revolution against the Church;
- *God yes, Christ no*: The French Revolution's affirmation of deism but "rational" rejection of the central mysteries of Christianity;
- *Reason, yes, God no*: The atheistic Communist Revolution that Vatican I foresaw, and which was realized during the life of Pius XII.

A fourth revolution occurred after Vatican I and Pius XII. We can call it the "Revolution of 1968," or more accurately the "Post-Modern Sexual Revolution." Its motto is: "No Church, no Christ, no God, no Reason—only my power and pleasure."

For the purposes of a short exposition that I offer here, I will not lay out the strongest historical argument, which would require me to prove both that the stages listed by Vatican I and Pius XII are accurate summaries of the successive chronological eras, and that the stages are causally linked, such that the former led to the latter in some significant way. Instead, I will offer a more modest argument, as befits the occasion, and offer representative evidence suggesting how the revolutions manifest, symbolize, and promote a secular morality, and I will cite authorities who identified linkages between the eras. I hope that even if this framework leaves many questions as to details, it provides a heuristic that can help make sense of the messy moral situation in which we live.

The Protestant Revolution

In saying that the Protestant Revolution is the first domino to fall in a line of events that has contributed to present secular morals, I am not alone in the academy. Brad Gregory tells much of the story in his brave and wide-ranging work, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious*

⁹ Pius XII, "Discorso" (trans. slightly altered for clarity).

Revolution Secularized Society.¹⁰ According to Gregory, the words and deeds of the early Protestant leaders led to a cascading wave of change throughout society: “The Western world today is an extraordinarily complex, tangled product of rejections, retentions, and transformations of medieval Western Christianity, in which the Reformation era constitutes the critical watershed.”¹¹ Much of the evidence and analysis proffered by Gregory is compelling. Lest one say, “It’s all Luther’s fault,” Gregory avers, “the Reformation’s influence on the eventual secularization of society was complex, largely indirect, far from immediate, and profoundly unintended.”¹² A few observations may be made.

First, according to Gregory, the teachings of Duns Scotus on the univocity of being are, as it were, the ur-source of secularization, insofar as Scotus proposes a flattening of God’s transcendence.¹³ A closer look at Scotus’s own words in context indicate his position was rather more nuanced, and relinquished nothing in affirming God’s infinite ontological distance from creation.¹⁴ Furthermore, although Luther himself many times declared that he was “of the party of Occam,” and used nominalist tools to further his project, the German preacher also disagreed with Occam, and other nominalists, on crucial issues including issues of loving God, of will, of law, and of grace, among other areas.¹⁵ Therefore, I am wary of the camp that lays the blame of the modern world on the shoulders of Occam, the nominalists, or Duns Scotus.

Second, I would note that Gregory’s depiction of the Protestant movement as a “Reformation” is somewhat in tension with his description of it as a “Revolution.” A re-formation can mean one of two things: either a return to the original form of a thing, or the provision of a new form to a

¹⁰ Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2012).

¹¹ Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 2.

¹² Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 2.

¹³ See Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 36–37, 42–43, 52–55, 64–66, 345–46.

¹⁴ Gregory seems to draw upon the work of John Milbank’s *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), despite his recognition that it and other works of the “Radical Orthodoxy” group have been severely criticized in works such as *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy*, ed. Wayne Hankey and Douglas Hedley (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005). See also Garrett Smith, “The Analogy of Being in the Scotist Tradition,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 93 (2019): 633–73.

¹⁵ See Theodore Dieter, “Luther as Late Medieval Theologian: His Positive and Negative Use of Nominalism and Realism,” in *The Oxford Handbook to Martin Luther’s Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and Lubomir Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 31–48.

thing. Many Protestants have argued that their movement was a return to a more pristine form of Christianity, one unincumbered by the “corrupt” accretions of later ages, which supposedly existed prior to Constantine. But a careful reading of the Church Fathers and an attention to all of the archeological and other historical evidence show that all the principles that have developed into authentic Catholicism existed from the beginning. Indeed, the letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch, written only decades after the death of St. John the Apostle, show the basic elements of Catholic doctrine and institutional structure already in place—this is partly why I myself converted from Protestantism. As St. John Newman famously said, “To be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant.”¹⁶ Other Protestants therefore say that they offer some “new” form to Christianity, typically with reference to the newness of the Holy Spirit who works in surprising ways. This position can accurately be called a “revolution” insofar as it turns the Christian world upside down, for it entails a repudiation of the historical forms of Christianity prior to the coming of Luther and Calvin, at least as seen and practiced by Catholics, such as the use of icons, the invocation of the saints, the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the affirmation of Holy Orders, obedience to the pope as the visible head of the Church, and so on. For this reason, it seems to me that the term “revolution” is more fitting to describe the Protestant movement.

Third, it remains unclear whether the secularizing Protestant positions were truly “unintended.” A person can intend a cause without knowing its full, distressing effects. Pandora might not have foreseen and intended the disastrous results of opening her box, and she might not have reveled in the disaster, but she surely intended to open it, despite warnings. Luther accepted the trade-offs that his revolution provoked—though he lamented its negative effects—and to the end he held fast to the basic stance that gave rise to them. Consider the following as examples of how the Protestant Revolution instilled principles of secularism that persist to our day.

Luther’s relation to the Christian princes may illustrate how Protestant theology quickly manifested its social ramifications, and how concerns of social power helped create theological justifications for revolution. In 1520, Luther wrote: “If we punish with the gallows, robbers with the sword, heretics with fire, why do we not still more attack with every kind of weapon these teachers of perdition, these Cardinals, these Popes, and that

¹⁶ John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870; repr. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 8 (introduction, no. 5).

whole abomination of Romish Sodom, which, without ceasing, corrupts the Church of God, and why do we not wash our hands in their blood?"¹⁷

Later that year, Luther issued his tract *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* in August of 1520, telling them that the state could no longer be judged by bishops and the Church, that individuals by their private judgment might determine for themselves what to believe and disbelieve, and that the hierarchical structure of the Church, along with the sacrament of Holy Orders, was a fraud and unworthy of obedience.¹⁸ He wanted to break down three "walls" that enclosed the Church and state together, as well as prevented non-Catholic forces from invading.

The First Wall: Spiritual Power over Temporal. Luther took authority from the Church by saying that everyone is a priest and he gave people more authority to govern the temporal sphere. Consequently: no "middle institution" between the people and their rulers; no possibility for the Church to call governors to task with divine authority.

The Second Wall: Authority to Interpret Scripture. Luther declared that the laity need not depend on the Church's interpretation of Sacred Scripture: they can decide for themselves. This undermines the effect the Church can have on the temporal sphere, because Protestants developed their own standard for laws and regulations—not only concerning their faith, but everything that faith touches, such as how to organize the temporal sphere, and what constitutes right and wrong. Finally, the rulers could appeal to their own interpretation of Scripture as divine authority for their positions, and, in principle, could not be checked by bishops or the pope.

The Third Wall: Authority to Call a Council. This went far beyond conciliarism, which proposes that bishops in an ecumenical council have authority over a pope, and can depose him. Luther worked to eliminate the spiritual sphere's influence over the temporal sphere; he wanted to shift political power to the temporal authorities who supported him. By saying that the laity could call an ecumenical council, Luther aimed at eliminating the hierarchical structure of the Church.

German peasants, moved by the preaching of Luther and his allies, fomented rebellion.¹⁹ In 1522, Luther published a brief pamphlet advising

¹⁷ Cited in Henry O'Connor, *Luther's Own Statements Concerning His Teaching and Its Results* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1885), 41.

¹⁸ Martin Luther, *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Respecting the Reformation of the Christian Estate*, trans. C. A. Buchheim, ed. C. W. Eliot, in *The Harvard Classics* 36 (New York: Collier, 1910), 263–333.

¹⁹ See Peter Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525: The German Peasants War from a New Perspective*, trans. Thomas A. Brady (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

"all Christians to abstain from revolt and rebellion," which, despite its title, states that the average person "has ample reason to break forth with the flail and club," and that he himself has never been induced to stop the violence of those with flail and fist.²⁰ In the same year, he said, "It would be better if all bishops were murdered, all institutions and convents rooted out, rather than one soul be lost. . . . Is it not most reasonable that they should encounter a powerful rebellion which will root them out from the earth? And we could only laugh, were this to happen. . . . All those who help to upset the dioceses and to destroy the power of the Bishops . . . are beloved children of God and true Christians; they defend the commandment of God, and contend against the order of the devil."²¹

In response, the peasants rebelled not only against the Church, and against Catholic rulers, but against *all* rulers, including those who favored the "new Christianity." Ignited in 1524, the Peasants' War spread across the Germanic regions of the Holy Roman Empire during 1525. With his earlier writing, Luther had encouraged the German *nobility* to rebel against lawful authority: against the emperor and against bishops; and he encouraged all Christians to rebel against the pope. But the rebellion of the peasants against the German nobility was too much for Luther. The nobility were his allies. They supplied Luther and his movement with their protection, support, and their funds. So he penned a tract entitled, *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants* (May 1525). He wrote: "The peasants . . . have sworn to be true and faithful, submissive and obedient, to their rulers . . . [but] now deliberately and violently breaking this oath, . . . they are starting a rebellion, and are violently robbing and plundering monasteries and castles which are not theirs."²² To maintain their dominance, with the encouragement of Luther, the Protestant aristocracy fought and killed nearly one hundred thousand peasants.²³ The remaining peasants learned their lesson well: a large majority in the Northern

²⁰ O'Connor, *Luther's Own Statements*, 42.

²¹ O'Connor, *Luther's Own Statements*, 43.

²² Martin Luther, *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*, trans. Charles M. Jacobs and rev. Robert C. Schultz, in *The Christian in Society III*, vol. 46 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Robert C. Schultz and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 47–55, at 49–50.

²³ Luther stated that due process of law was not owed to the peasants: "I will not oppose a ruler who . . . will smite and punish these peasants without first offering to submit the case to judgment. He is within his rights" (*Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes*, 52). He invokes language of crusade in the war: "Anyone who is killed fighting on the side of the rulers may be a true martyr in the eyes of God, if he fights . . . in obedience to God's word. On the other hand, anyone who perishes on the peasants' side is an eternal

Germany become Lutheran and rendered obedience to a secular power whom Luther declared to have spiritual power to interpret the Gospel.

Here we discover what James Simpson refers to in his book *Permanent Revolution: The Reformation and the Illiberal Roots of Liberalism*.²⁴ According to Simpson:

Protestantism is a powerfully and necessarily self-conflicted tradition, precisely because its anti-formalism repudiates tradition. In flight from nothing so energetically as from prior forms of itself, Protestantism is best described as an anti-tradition tradition of permanent revolution, forever targeting earlier and/or competing versions of itself (rather than Catholicism) precisely as the source of most lethal threat.²⁵

In these ways and many others, Protestantism was deeply anti-historical, and like all revolutions, radically anti-traditional: neither ecclesiastical nor societal tradition was respected as valuable in itself and intrinsically worthy of handing on to a new generation. Indeed, one of the striking characteristics of the revolutionary mindset is what Thomas Aquinas would call “impiety” toward the past, that is, an instinct that one is not beholden to the guidelines laid down by our forefathers, but that everything can be subject to continual revision and even destruction—indeed, the iconoclastic smashing of venerable statues has always been one of the delights of the revolutionary spirit—with the implicit warning that today’s unquestionable dogma can become tomorrow’s unmentionable heresy.

More than twenty years after his revolution began, Luther expressed surprise: “Who would have begun to preach, if we had known beforehand that so much unhappiness, tumult, scandal, blasphemy, ingratitude, and wickedness would have been the result? I confess that I am much more negligent than I was under the pope, and there is now nowhere such an amount of earnestness under the Gospel, as was formerly seen among monks and priests.”²⁶ All of this should be kept in mind in light of Luther’s appeal to his own personal authority. He stated, “I am certain that I have my teaching from heaven,” and, “My doctrines will stand, and the Pope will fall, notwithstanding all the gates of hell.” And, “I am certain that Christ

firebrand of hell, for he bears the sword against God’s word and is disobedient to him.” (53).

²⁴ James Simpson, *Permanent Revolution: The Reformation and the Illiberal Roots of Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2019).

²⁵ Simpson, *Permanent Revolution*, xi.

²⁶ O’Connor, *Luther’s Own Statements*, 56.

Himself calls me [an Evangelist], and looks upon me as such, for He is the Master of my doctrine, and on the last day He will also be a witness, that it is not mine, but His own pure Gospel.”²⁷ Luther’s shock and distress at the results of his teachings did not lead him to question his movement. To the contrary, he doubled down on his position despite seeing the fruit borne by his tree.

According to Jewish historian Yehoshua Arieli, the very “development of modern history” is characterized by “the successive creation of frameworks of human activity, relations, attitudes, concepts, powers and institutions which lay outside the authority and influence of the Church.”²⁸ From that perspective: “The Reformation and the establishment of the Protestant churches and sects must be seen as powerful instruments of secularization, which aimed to destroy the basic conceptions of the sacerdotal Catholic Church, as a separate and independent order of grace, which possessed the keys to salvation and claimed authority over the secular order.”²⁹ Arieli rightly emphasizes the theological principles that undergirded the secularizing tendencies found throughout this revolutionary movement: “The Protestant doctrine of salvation by faith and its rejection of other worldly asceticism and withdrawal from the *saeculum* . . . represented decisive steps in the process of secularization, supplanting the Catholic conception of transcendence and its relation to the world.”³⁰

Numerous examples of Protestant secularization present themselves to the researcher. Davide Cantoni and his coauthors show that Protestant efforts at “economic secularization” was a “first-order shock” to the market. Such efforts included expropriation of vast numbers of monasteries by the Protestant state, seen in England, Germany, Holland, and elsewhere; increased construction of administrative governmental buildings and the destruction of churches and chapels along with a decreased construction of such; and a reallocation of public funds toward political ends and away from specifically religious purposes such as saints’ festivals.³¹ These factors stemmed, ultimately, from theological principles, often expressed explicitly by the leader-agents of change, such as Luther. The former priest worked to make previous convents and monasteries into schools administered by

²⁷ O’Connor, *Luther’s Own Statements*, 19–20.

²⁸ Yehoshua Arieli, “Modern History as Reinstatement of the Saeculum: A Study in the Semantics of History,” *Jewish History* 8, no. 1 (1994): 205–28, at 218.

²⁹ Arieli, “Modern History,” 218.

³⁰ Arieli, “Modern History,” 218.

³¹ Davide Cantoni et al., *Reallocation and Secularization: The Economic Consequences of the Protestant Reformation* (London: Center for Economic Performance, 2017).

civil authorities, and although he desired that “the Gospel” be taught in such places, other Protestants took the symbolic destruction of the sources of religious culture to its logical conclusion: they meant to avoid religious education altogether. Thus, Luther was led to lament that people would say, “Why should we bother to have them go to school if they are not to become priests, monks, or nuns? ‘Twere better they should learn a livelihood to earn.”³² Marriage, too, became secularized, with Luther infamously declaring it to be not a sacrament, but an “external and worldly thing, like clothing, food, a house, the court.”³³ Joel F. Harrington comments: “Stripped of its sacramental status by Protestant theologians and jurists, marriage . . . became a *res politica* (political matter). Once clerical celibacy was effectively abolished in evangelical and Reformed lands, the secularization of marriage was complete.”³⁴ The result was not only the allowance of divorce and remarriage, unknown in Catholic culture, but, perhaps more profoundly, a more pervasive view that male–female relations existed only on a natural plane, separate from the transcendent and theological. This secularization of the imagination extended to the entire material sphere. Christine R. Johnson argues that the Catholic use of relics, ritual objections, and charitable donations for masses and indulgences saw “the use of the material as an avenue for the spiritual,” whereas the Protestant rejection of all such ordered and dismantled “this previous web of meanings,” challenging the very idea of using “the material as a conduit to and from the spiritual.”³⁵ The trajectory of these tendencies was a relegation of the material, visible, sensory world to the power of human potentates.

Because of a theology that portrayed grace as opposed to nature, Simpson argues that the Protestant Revolution took an autocratic stance. “Centralization is both the parent and the child of revolutions,” Simpson observes, for “the centralizing of early modern nation-states permits the revolution, but the revolution also provokes greater centralization in its turn, until, of course, the unsustainable violence of the revolution produces

³² Martin Luther, “To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools,” cited in Charlotte Methuen, “Education in the Reformation,” *The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations*, ed. Ulinka Rublack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 483–503, at 483.

³³ Joel F. Harrington, “Legal Courts,” in Rublack, *Oxford Handbook of Protestant Reformations*, 504–24, at 507.

³⁴ Harrington, “Legal Courts,” 507.

³⁵ Christine R. Johnson, “Commerce and Consumption,” in Rublack, *Oxford Handbook of Protestant Reformations*, 708–25, at 710.

the great counter narrative of modernity (i.e., decentralizing division of powers),” seen in the process of revolutions that foster de-colonization.³⁶

The theological-political underpinnings to this centralization of secular power deserve attention. Within the typical medieval view, represented by Thomas Aquinas, God has absolute power, but typically does not exercise it immediately: he gives freedom to individuals that allows for a creative and local expression of faith, and when they go astray, he offers forgiveness through the sacrament of penance.³⁷ In Simpson’s telling, which overturns threadbare narratives of unbridled papal power, the popes acted in much the same way.³⁸ The pope would maintain a loose grip in the reins of the Church, pulling back when it seemed that someone was obstinately and feverishly working to plunge the carriage into the abyss heresy, apostasy, or schism. Simpson continues:

Sixteenth-century Protestant theology was starkly different. The Protestant God acted, not coincidentally, like sixteenth-century monarchs, insisting on his absolute prerogatives. . . . Sixteenth-century Protestant theologians of all stripes invested God with massively concentrated, and newly opaque, executive praxis (notably predestination), at the center of a purified, utterly homogeneous True Church of the elect. . . . That is, Protestant theology gave precedence at every point to God’s *potentia absoluta* [absolute power].³⁹

Simpson lists signs of centralization and revolution by the Protestant secular state in England, beginning with Henry VIII, including these state-sanctioned actions:

³⁶ Simpson, *Permanent Revolution*, 20.

³⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 103, a. 6. Thomas argues that God makes use of secondary created causes—especially rational creatures—so that they might cooperate with his governance, thus making his collaborators more perfect by sharing in his governing power. See Piotr Stanisław Mazur, “The Dignity of the Person in the Context of Human Providence,” *Forum Philosophicum* 14 (2009): 109–18.

³⁸ Perhaps the most notorious of anti-Catholic historiography was penned by John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments of these Latter and Perillous Days, Touching Matters of the Church* (1563), commonly known as *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, which contains salacious tales of Protestants and other heretics suffering under Catholic clerics. In 1571, the Church of England’s Convocation commanded that all cathedrals and houses of Anglican clerics should keep copies of Foxe’s book for public use, thus contributing to its great influence through the centuries. See Patrick Collinson, “Truth and Legend: The Veracity of John Foxe’s ‘Book of Martyrs,’” in *Clio’s Mirror: Historiography in Britain and the Netherlands*, ed. A. C. Duke and C. A. Tamse (Zutphen, Netherlands: De Walburg, 1985), 31–54.

³⁹ Simpson, *Permanent Revolution*, 20.

- It posited unmediated power relations between highly centralized, single sources of power on the one hand, and now equalized, atomized, interiorized, and terrorized subjects on the other;
- It looked aggressively upon, and sought to abolish, horizontal, lateral associational forms;
- It generated revolutionary accounts of both ecclesiology and the individual life: both could achieve a rebirth, wholly inoculated from the virus of the past;
- It abolished old and produced new calendars and martyrologies;
- It demanded and enacted cultural revolution, through iconoclasm of the repudiated past's accreted, erroneous, idolatrous visual culture;
- It actively developed surveillance systems;
- It legitimated violent repudiation of the past;
- It appropriated the private property of religious orders and centralized previously monastic libraries;
- It legitimated revolutionary violence by positing an intimate connection between violence and virtue. In this culture, persecution and violence were a sure sign that the Gospel was being preached, that Christ was indeed bringing not peace but the (necessary) sword. The absence of tumult was symptomatic of somnolent hypocrisy. Violence was a necessary obligation within the logic of History.⁴⁰

According to Simpson, these key features in the Protestant Revolution “find rather exact parallels in more recent revolutionary cultures, for example in France, Russia, China, or Cambodia.”⁴¹ He suggests that the similarities are not a mere coincidence, and instead imply an ideological continuity:

The fact that this typology of separate features can often be found together, as a package, in widely different historical moments might, indeed, embolden us to formulate an idea of a comparative revolutionary historiography / sociology. . . . sixteenth-century evangelical

⁴⁰ Adapted from Simpson, *Permanent Revolution*, 21–22 and throughout. Eamon Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press: 1992) gives rich detail that illustrates many of these tragic consequences of Protestantism in England.

⁴¹ Simpson, *Permanent Revolution*, 22.

religion provides a robust template for later instantiations of the package.⁴²

Simpson marshals abundant evidence from original English sources to corroborate his contention. Other sources point in a similar direction. The all-encompassing discipline of Calvin's Geneva could be cited as an example of the Protestant tendency to absorb and transform all cultural expressions—including the legal, educational, and matrimonial—into this-worldly realities. Meanwhile, Marx said that the “the radicalism” of the German theory of revolution

begins from the resolute *positive* abolition of religion. The criticism of religion ends with the doctrine that man is the supreme being for man.⁴³ . . . Germany's revolutionary past is theoretical—it is the Reformation. In that period the revolution originated in the brain of a monk, today in the brain of a philosopher. Luther, without question, overcame servitude through devotion but only by substituting servitude through conviction. . . . But if Protestantism was not the solution it did at least pose the question correctly.

According to Marx, the Communist Revolution would go beyond the bounds of Luther's primary concern for the nobility, but the core principle of expropriating property in favor of a secular state would remain: “Just as [Communist] emancipation will not be confined to princes, so the secularization of property will not be limited to the confiscation of church property”; rather it would entail the abolition of all private property, which was associated with the bourgeoisie business owners.⁴⁴

Centuries later, Marxist philosopher Andrew Collier would similarly

⁴² Simpson, *Permanent Revolution*, 22.

⁴³ See Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Warning to the West* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976), 127: “Of course there is a perfectly simple explanation for this process. It is not the superficial one, so fashionable in our day, that man himself is irreproachable and everything is to be blamed on a badly organized society, but a purely human one. Once, it was proclaimed and accepted that above man there was no supreme being, but instead that man was the crowning glory of the universe and the measure of all things, and that man's needs, desires, and indeed his weaknesses were taken to be the supreme imperatives of the universe. Consequently, the only good in the world—the only thing that needed to be done—was that which satisfied our feelings.”

⁴⁴ Karl Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction,” in *The Marx-Engles Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 60–61. Admittedly, Friedrich Engels's *The Peasant War in Germany* (1850), while

see Luther as a major step “towards an erasure of the boundaries between sacrality and secularity.”⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Leszek Kolakowski summarized the views of Socialist Jean Jaurès as holding that the origins of German Socialism are found in Luther’s theological-social efforts: “Fighting against the tyranny of Rome, Luther taught his countrymen to fight tyranny of every kind. The Lutheran notion of freedom as circumscribed by the divine law is part of the critique of false freedom in the economic sphere.”⁴⁶ This led, in turn, to Kant’s desire to reconcile “the freedom of the individual with the authority of the state and its right to control economic affairs,” with the state ultimately having the final decision-making power with its hegemonic control of rational deliberations for the common good.⁴⁷

In a similar vein, Antonio Gramsci intriguingly said that “the historical process that started with the ‘medieval’ Luther . . . extend[s] all the way to Hegel,” and through Hegel to Marx and his followers.⁴⁸ Gramsci also testified: “Where Luther enters, civilization disappears. . . . Luther and the Renaissance stand at the beginning of all modern philosophy and civilization.”⁴⁹ Finally, the Italian Communist draws a line connecting Protestantism, the French Revolution, and Marxist historical materialism:

Because of its popular development, the Reformation was able to resist the armed assault of the Catholic coalition, and thus the German nation was founded. A comparison can be drawn between this movement and the French “political” Enlightenment that preceded and accompanied the Revolution of 1789: the latter, too, was an intellectual and moral reform of the French people. . . . Renaissance-Reformation—German philosophy—French Revolution—secular [liberalism]—historicism—modern philosophy—historical materialism. Historical materialism . . . is

praising Luther’s own revolutionary potential, sympathized with the peasants against the “religious” oppression of Luther.

⁴⁵ Thomas A. Brady, “Marxist Evaluations of Luther’s Thought,” in Kolb, Dingel, and Batka, *Oxford Handbook to Martin Luther’s Theology*, 573–83, at 581, discussing Andrew Collier, *Christianity and Marxism: A Philosophical Contribution to their Reconciliation* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁴⁶ Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Founders—The Golden Age—The Breakdown*, trans. P. S. Falla (New York: Norton, 2008), 461–62.

⁴⁷ Kolakowski, *Main Currents*, 462.

⁴⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 3 vols., ed. and trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992–2007), 3:154 (notebook 7, §1).

⁴⁹ Gramsci, Letter to Tatiana Schucht of December 1, 1930, cited in *Prison Notebooks*, 3:494.

the crowning point of this entire movement of intellectual and moral reform. It corresponds to Reformation + French Revolution, universality + politics.⁵⁰

These claims of Gramsci show that both Marxists and non-Marxists have alike seen certain revolutionary principles in the movement that, starting with Luther and Calvin, extended and developed into more recent revolutions. The motto “Christ yes, Church no,” taken in isolation, could seem to be little more than a theological re-centering of the Christian community upon the person of Jesus of Nazareth, but in fact its implications reach much further than might be imagined. One of the more immediate effects it had was to induce skepticism regarding the necessity of Christ for right-ordering of society.

The French Revolution

The French Revolution reveals that every revolution both repudiates many of the explicit principles of the previous revolution and advances the core of the previous revolution’s spirit. A variation on Oedipus: the daughter kills the father who generated her, but befriends the mother who gave her birth. That is, without discounting material contributors to the French Revolution, such as bristling famine and increasing prices of bread, the *formal* causes deserve a priority of focus, because as has been said about economic developments beginning around the same period, the ideas, ideologies, and ethics of a culture are the primary engines of change.⁵¹

Earlier ways of characterizing the French Revolution are represented by Joseph de Maistre, who lived in the time of the revolution and saw it as a “combat to the death between Christianity and *philosophisme*,” that is, the sophistical thought of such *philosophes* as Voltaire, Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and their English predecessor Francis Bacon.⁵² This was no invention of a fevered brain. The revolutionaries themselves decorated Rousseau “as a prophet and patron of the Revolution,” in the word

⁵⁰ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 2:142 (notebook 4, §3).

⁵¹ Deirdre Nansen McCloskey, *Bourgeois Equality: How Ideas, Not Capital or Institutions, Enriched the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), throughout, but esp. 121–22.

⁵² Joseph de Maistre, *Considérations sur la France* in *Oeuvres*, ed. Pierre Glaudes (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2007), 229. See his works *De l’État de nature, ou Examen d’un écrit de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1795); *Examen de la Philosophie de Bacon, ou: l’on Traite Différentes Questions de Philosophie Rationnelle* (1836 [posthumous]).

of Joan McDonald.⁵³ Feasts were held in honor of Rousseau; his visage was carved into stone and placed prominently in the National Assembly; hymns and poems were composed about him; orators and pamphleteers invoked his name as a personal symbol of liberty, equality, and fraternity.⁵⁴ A number of historians have, since then, taken that sort of claim as their starting point of their own account of the causes of the French Revolution and subsequent revolutions.⁵⁵

More recently, scholars have shifted their perspective to show that the revolution and its principles were derived not only from philosophy but also from religion. Dale Van Kley, in his work *The Religious Origins French Revolution*, argues that the principles undergirding the revolution were derived, in part, from the Protestant Calvinist theology, which rejected the supposed “superstition” and “fanaticism” of Catholic faith and morals, which rejected as “clericalism” the practice of giving clergy a special role in society, including politics, which taught Jansenists to undermine respect for the monarchy, aristocracy, and episcopacy alike—which were depicted as theologically bankrupt, morally corrupt, unfit to rule, and despotic, with the result that one’s conscience could choose rebellion over obedience.⁵⁶ Revolution was righteousness. Burdette C. Poland similarly argues that the French Revolution not only opened political horizons for Protestants hitherto cloaked from their ambition, but was in part furthered by their “non-conformist” independence from Catholic-influenced political structures.⁵⁷ Here, too, de Maistre displayed a flair for rhetorical incisiveness when he said, “the son of pride, the father of anarchy, the universal dissolvent, was Protestantism.” He continues: “Here is the terrible character

⁵³ Joan McDonald, *Rousseau and the French Revolution 1762–1791* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 161.

⁵⁴ See McDonald, *Rousseau*, 156–62. Ironically, though, much of McDonald’s book shows that, despite the frequent reference to Rousseau, his *Social Contract* was not widely read before 1791, and more aristocrats analyzed his book than revolutionaries.

⁵⁵ See Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 35–97; Waller R. Newell, *Tyranny and Revolution: Rousseau to Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 7–39; *Voltaire’s Revolution: Writings from His Campaign to Free Laws from Religion*, ed. and trans. G. K. Noyer (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2015).

⁵⁶ Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution 1560–1791* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

⁵⁷ Burdette C. Poland, *French Protestantism and the French Revolution: A Study in Church and State, Thought and Religion, 1685–1815* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 12, and throughout.

that Protestantism deploys from its cradle: it is born a rebel, and insurrection is its habitual state.”⁵⁸ This is why men in his day would say that the Gospel preached by Protestantism had nothing to fear from Robespierre:⁵⁹ Protestantism invoked the Word of God, the French Revolution the Rights of Men, but in de Maistre’s view, what the Protestant Revolution was to religion, the French Revolution was to politics: “It is the same theory, the same motion, the same result.”⁶⁰

“Christ no, God yes,” the French Revolution distanced itself ideologically from explicit Protestant faith in the Incarnate Word of God.⁶¹ In the words of Thomas Carlyle, “Man, as is well said, lives by faith; each generation has its own faith, more or less; and laughs at the faith of its predecessor”: the “faith” of the French Revolution was in the reason of man and the Social Contract.⁶² The revolution nevertheless extended the Protestant principle of private judgment and individual reason—even to the point of rejecting *sola Scriptura*. Like the Protestants, the French Revolution divinized the “people’s will,” but no longer to promote a theocratic society, such as Calvin’s Geneva, run by “experts” in scriptural theology. Lawyers, not theologians, became the new priests, aided by politicians, pamphleteers, newspapermen. Like the German Protestant Revolution, the French proclaimed a “new Evangel . . . born in the Destruction of a World.”⁶³ The French Revolution was the second revolution proudly to proclaim its novelty and to condemn most of the immediate past—this had been done, as we have seen, by Martin Luther. But there is more. One of Van Kley’s central theses is:

What marched under the banner of Jansenism somehow united some of the biblical, doctrinal, and presbyterian ecclesiastical tendencies of the Protestant Reformation with the apologetical miracles and some of the chief social constituencies of the Catholic League—marched, that is, at the head of conceptual and even social

⁵⁸ Joseph de Maistre, *Sur le Protestantisme* in Glaudes, *Oeuvres*, 311–30, at 312.

⁵⁹ De Maistre, *Sur le Protestantisme*, 323.

⁶⁰ De Maistre, *Sur le Protestantisme*, 330.

⁶¹ Robespierre proposed that the first article of a decree of his newly formed government should be: “The French people recognize the existence of the Supreme Being and of the immortality of the soul” (Jean Matrat, *Robespierre: Or the tyranny of the Majority*, trans. Alan Kendall with Felix Brenner [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971], 253).

⁶² Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, ed. David R. Sorensen and Brent E. Kinser (1857; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 263.

⁶³ Carlyle, *French Revolution*, 126.

baggage that brought together all that was most politically subversive about both sides of the sixteenth-century religious divide.⁶⁴

Jansenism, a Catholic movement holding much in common with Calvinism, contributed to the French Revolution both by undermining respect for the monarchy and aristocracy, which were enfeebled in light of Jansenist attacks on their corruption, and also by the increased readiness to abandon the Catholic faith as a rejection of moral and political corruption as well as an affirmation of human freedom unfettered by ecclesiastical or societal tradition.

The French Revolution utilized many of the same repressive methods that the Protestants had used in Germany, England, and Ireland against the Catholic Church:

Even in its initial and most moderate phase the French Revolution deprived the Catholic Church of the tithe, nationalized its property, and ended its corporate independence, unilaterally redrew ecclesiastical boundaries, [and] all but abolished the regular clergy. . . . During the Revolution's later and more radical phases, revolutionaries imprisoned or massacred many clergy [and religious, including, infamously, the murder of an entire convent of Carmelite nuns, and] . . . changed Christian place-names, destroyed or defaced Christian iconography, [and] cut down church towers and melted down church bells.⁶⁵

Eventually, the Church, "tainted with its monarchical sympathies," followed the monarchy in defeat, similar to the process that had occurred earlier in Germany when the Protestant princes rejected the Holy Roman emperor as well as the Roman pontiff.⁶⁶ In all, this could be described as an "official oversight of dechristianization," even when stemming from the secularizing principles of Protestantism.⁶⁷ For example, Suzanne Desan shows that, like the Protestant secularization of marriage, so the French Revolution "radically redefined the family, its internal dynamics, and its relationship to state" by legalizing divorce, abolishing primogeniture

⁶⁴ Van Kley, *Religious Origins*, 11–12.

⁶⁵ Van Kley, *Religious Origins*, 1.

⁶⁶ Poland, *French Protestantism*, 196.

⁶⁷ Edward J. Woell, "The Origins and Outcomes of Religious Schism, 1790–99," in *A Companion to the French Revolution*, ed. Peter McPhee (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 145–60, at 146.

inheritance, reducing paternal authority, and placing the family under the legal jurisdiction of civil family tribunals.⁶⁸

But the French Revolution also went beyond Protestantism by subverting the place of Christ within social life. Churches were closed, or open only for the feverish discussions and drunken revels of an unbridled populace. The altars were overthrown, donkeys were paraded through the streets in bishops' vestments, chalices were used in orgies, and on the altars that the Catholic faith surrounded with cherubim they placed nude prostitutes.⁶⁹ Many churches were converted into "temples of reason," in which services were held to the "Cult of the Supreme Being," the "Cult of Reason," or, in the case of Jacques Molines, "the God of Nature and Liberty," to whom Molines wrote a prayer that reads, in part:

Without temples, without altars, without priests, and WITHOUT KINGS, we raise toward you the prayer of free men who desire no temple but the vault of the sky, no altar but a pure soul, no offerings other than social virtues, no priesthood other than Reason, no masters other than the Law, no God but you, Grand Being, and la PATRIE!⁷⁰

Carlyle picked up on the continuity within discontinuity to the Protestant Revolution: "From Martin Luther in the Market-place of Wittenberg to [Robespierre in] Paris, what a journey have we gone; into what strange territories has it carried us!"⁷¹

"Strange territory" is an understatement for Robespierre's terror, including the establishment of the Committee of General Security and the Committee of Public Safety, tasked with investigating a "conspiracy against public liberty," and flushing out traitors whose factions must be purged from public life.⁷² The storming of the Bastille on July 14 was a symbolic attack upon a royal fortress that held arms, ammunition, and a few prisoners—it had once housed Voltaire, and, after its destruction, would later

⁶⁸ Suzanne Desan, "The French Revolution and the Family," in McPhee, *Companion to the French Revolution*, 470–85.

⁶⁹ De Maistre, *Considérations sur la France*, 48.

⁷⁰ Cited in Poland, *French Protestantism*, 250–51 (emphasis original).

⁷¹ Carlyle, *French Revolution*, 354.

⁷² William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 279. "Crushing dissent was the quintessence of Robespierriest dictatorship," in the words of Jonathan Israel (*Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from The Rights of Man to Robespierre* [Oxford and Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014], 459).

welcome a procession of revolutionaries who carried a bust of Rousseau upon their shoulders. The beheading of its governor and its destruction were potent signs of the violent and revolutionary spirit against the old Catholic regime and the inauguration of a new order. The aristocratic regime was abolished with the publication of the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen” on August 26, 1789, and within that context, the state began to control the clergy, requiring them to be citizens first and Catholics last. Around twenty thousand priests under coercion submitted letters of ordination to state officials, and six to nine thousand of them married under duress. An estimated thirty thousand priests were forced to flee France within a decade.⁷³

Under the aegis of liberty, Louis XVI was beheaded and between 110,000 and 250,000 citizens died, tens of thousands of whom were executed on charges of “counter-revolutionary activity,” while others fell in battle. Alexis de Tocqueville argues that “the principle of centralization of power did not perish in the Revolution”; rather, “this very centralization was at once the Revolution’s starting-off point and one of its guiding principles.”⁷⁴ By the time of the French Revolution, European states had been undergoing a centralizing tendency for centuries. The Protestant Revolution led the English, Spanish, and French crowns to contract power in order to maintain hegemony over more and more aspects of civil and religious life, as a way to prevent any disorder that could arise from the freedom that exists within subsidiarity. The French Revolution, without the reins of Christian doctrine and authority to halt excesses, therefore furthered “administrative” and “ideological centralization” through one of the chief means available to the average person—physical violence.⁷⁵

One might call the guillotine the “heart of the Revolution,” for the entire movement, in the words of Carlyle was violent, “a thing without order, a thing proceeding from beyond and beneath the region of order, it must work and welter, not as a Regularity but as a Chaos; destructive and self-destructive; always till something that *has* order arise, strong enough to bind it into subjection again.”⁷⁶ The “Law of Suspects” (September 5, 1793) demanded that those suspected of politically maladroit activities should be detained, and the Law of 22 Prairial (June 10, 1794) virtually

⁷³ Van Kley, *Religious Origins*, 3.

⁷⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Doubleday, 1955), 60.

⁷⁵ David Andress, “The Course of the Terror 1793–94,” in McPhee, *Companion to the French Revolution*, 293–310, at 303.

⁷⁶ Carlyle, *French Revolution*, 560.

dispensed with witnesses in a trial, and the accused were forbidden legal counsel for defense.⁷⁷ The conclusion appears inevitable: this sort of revolution naturally leads to tyranny.

The revolutionary movement was not without its moderates. So unjust was the regime that earlier proponent and ideological guide Abbé Raynal later repudiated the violent despotism of the self-righteous mob.⁷⁸ Similarly, Jean-François de La Harpe, once an admirer of Voltaire and lecturer on revolutionary philosophy, felt the sting of the revolution through his unjust imprisonment. There, he converted to Catholicism and became an advocate for throne and altar.⁷⁹ But the winds of Protestantism developed into the whirlwind of the French Revolution, which in turn gave rise to the law-giving autocracy of Napoleon. In a somewhat similar way, the chaos of the Communist Revolution found an unstable stability in the blood-drenched tyranny of Stalin.

The Communist Revolution

The next revolution can be summarized with the motto “Reason yes, God no” or “God is dead; God has never existed.” Here, the tendency to affirm human reason as if it were in opposition to belief in God, which began in the 1700s, gains ascendancy as a principle for organizing society, until eventually militant atheism comes to control the majority of political processes. To introduce the Communist Revolution, I will quote from Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s *Warning to the West*, a series of talks he gave in the mid-1970s after he left the Russian gulags and came to live in the United States:

It is astonishing that Communism has been writing about itself in the most open way, in black and white, for 125 years, and even more openly, more candidly in the beginning. *The Communist Manifesto*, for instance, which everyone knows by name, and which almost no one ever takes the trouble to read, contains even more terrible things than what has actually been done. It is perfectly amazing. The whole world can read, everyone is literate, yet somehow no one wants to understand. Humanity acts as if it does not understand

⁷⁷ Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 275.

⁷⁸ Paul H. Meyer, “The French Revolution and the Legacy of the Philosophes,” *The French Review* 30, no. 6 (1957): 429–34, at 429.

⁷⁹ Meyer, “French Revolution,” 432.

what Communism is, as if it does not want to understand, is not capable of understanding.⁸⁰

As with Protestantism and the French Revolution, I will try to offer a few examples to illustrate the spirit of the Communist Revolution, especially insofar as it relates to other revolutions.

Before turning to Socialism and Communism as they have existed in modern times, it will be useful to briefly turn to ancient precursors that inspired later epochs. First, we may consider life in Sparta as organized by the lawgiver Lycurgus. Alexander Gray called Lycurgian Sparta “Greek communism in practice.”⁸¹ Plutarch relates that, for reasons of perceived fairness as much as political expediency, Lycurgus convinced the wealthy in the city to renounce their property, so that it could be equally redistributed among all citizens.⁸² It is said that when he saw equal harvests from the families on their plots of land, he extolled the situation as one reflecting sharing among brothers. He worked, further, to extinguish all distinctions and inequalities among Spartans, including the virtual elimination of money, which in turn extinguished buying and selling “luxury” goods and services, which then degraded trade with other Greeks. He also commanded Spartans to eat in common, and insisted that the children did not belong to parents, but to the city-state, which regulated marriages, conjugal unions, and births. To limit violent crimes, and to focus the energy of the men, they lived in dormitories and were forbidden to own knives and all of their time was occupied in some “useful” manner directed to preparation for warfare outside of Sparta, living in the city as in a military camp. This austere subordination of the individual to communal interests contributed to Sparta’s stable military prowess, seen perhaps above all in their defense of Greece at Thermopylae against the Persian invaders. However, it also seemingly ensured that Sparta would never reach the heights of sculpture, literature, or philosophy, unlike its freer rival, Athens. All of this being said, Samuel Bostaph, after a careful sifting of the evidence, argues, “there is no

⁸⁰ Solzhenitsyn, *Warning to the West*, 54.

⁸¹ Alexander Gray, *The Socialist Tradition: Moses to Lenin* (London: Longmans and Green, 1946), 11. Moderating this claim, Gray admits that the *polis* “was not so much a State as a military machine” that depended upon the slave-class Helots for support (14).

⁸² For the following, see Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, in *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. John Dryden, rev. Arthur Hugh Clough (New York: Modern Library, 1940), 49–74.

historical support for Sparta's having been a communist society or having had a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' or other state socialist regime."⁸³

Second, Plato, apparently influenced by Sparta's example, presented a political philosophy that became a point of departure for later Communist theorists. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates works to persuade Glaucon that the bond of unity is the greatest good for a community, whereas the greatest evil is discord and plurality.⁸⁴ Accordingly, guardians of the community ought to be without private property, and hold all things in common, including wives and offspring.⁸⁵ These recommendations are to prevent civil authorities—the guardians—from exercising tyranny upon the populace, upon whom they depend for their necessities. In his *Laws*, Plato gives a sort of encomium to a more universal sharing of goods, saying:

You'll find the ideal society and state, and the best code of laws, where the old saying "friends' property is generally shared" is put into practice as widely as possible throughout the entire state. Now I don't know whether in fact this situation—a community of wives, children, and all property—exists today, or will ever exist, but at any rate in such a state the notion of "private property" will have been . . . completely eliminated from life. . . . The laws in force impose the greatest possible unity on the state—and you'll never produce a better or truer criterion of an absolutely perfect law than that.⁸⁶

Gray comments that this position runs largely against the individualist emphasis of an anthropological theory that sees man as naturally free and unrestrained by an overarching state even when he voluntarily joins with others politically.⁸⁷ Werner Sombart once noted that Socialism is more than "an economic or social program": it is an entire worldview.⁸⁸ The Socialist view tends to incorporate all things into itself, similar to the way a swamp absorbs and digests anything that falls into its brackish waters. Thus, "Christian belief is made part of the Socialistic idea, and

⁸³ Samuel Bostaph, "Communism, Sparta, and Plato," in *Economic Thought and Political Theory*, ed. David Reisman (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 1994), 27.

⁸⁴ See Plato, *Republic* 5.462a, trans. G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve, in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997).

⁸⁵ See Plato, *Republic* 3.416–17.

⁸⁶ Plato, *Laws* 5.739c–d, trans. Trevor J. Saunders, in Cooper, *Complete Works*.

⁸⁷ Gray, *Socialist Tradition*, 28.

⁸⁸ Werner Sombart, *Socialism and the Social Movement*, trans. M. Epstein, 6th ed. (London: J. M. Dent, 1909), 22.

the teaching of Christ is used in the interests of Socialism. Indeed, it is often said that Christ was the first Socialist.”⁸⁹ With a similar impulse, Marx asserted that Plato was an early theorist of Communism.⁹⁰ Bostaph, however, notes irreconcilable differences amid certain influences on later Communist theories.⁹¹

To understand the operative principles in the Communist Revolution, historical analogues provide some utility, but more directly revelatory is the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. For our purposes, we can take it as paradigmatic of the thought of Marx and Engels, and Communism as a whole.⁹² According to the general Communist view, the narrative arc of history is constituted by successive waves of class struggles. These struggles are reducible to relations of “oppressor and oppressed . . . in constant opposition to one another, carried on in an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time end[s], either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes” (473–74). Underneath whatever developments or setbacks society experiences, there exists a “more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society, up to the point where that war breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat” (483). Again, “The history of all past society has consisted in the development of class antagonisms, antagonisms that assumed different forms in different epochs. But whatever form they may have taken, one fact is common to all past ages, *viz.*, the exploitation of one part of society by the other” (489). To eliminate class antagonisms once and for all, Communists aim at the following:

⁸⁹ Sombart, *Socialism*, 22.

⁹⁰ See Marx’s inaugural article (October 16, 1842) as the editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, cited in Bostaph, “Communism, Sparta, and Plato,” 2–3.

⁹¹ See Bostaph, “Communism, Sparta, and Plato,” 28–29, detailing five key differences: (1) Anthropology: Plato held that human nature is fixed, whereas Marx believed that a higher stage of Communism would change human nature; (2) Virtue: for Plato, that is man’s highest end, whereas for Marx, historical materialism eliminates the reality of virtue and vice; (3) Austerity: in the *Republic*, lack of goods was to promote the altruism of the guardians, whereas for Marx scarcity enables the fulfillment of Communism; (4) Hierarchy: Plato saw the division of labor as inevitable because of irresolvable inequalities among men, whereas for Marx there ought to be no division of labor in late-stage Communism; (5) History: for Plato, the elite (*aristoi*) rule in the perfect state, whereas Marx predicted the dictatorship of the proletariat which would precede the collapse of the state entirely.

⁹² The following is taken from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in *The Marx-Engles Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 473–500. It will be cited by the page numbers of this edition parenthetically in the main text above.

- The overthrow of the supremacy of the oppressor [bourgeoisie], and the conquest of political power by the oppressed;
- The abolition of private property;
- The abolition of “individuality and freedom,” insofar as it is possessed by the oppressor;
- The abolition of “bourgeois notions of freedom, culture and law,” which Marx says are “the conditions” of the oppressor’s property and oppression;
- The abolition of “eternal truths . . . all religion, and all morality”;
- The abolition of the family;
- State-controlled education;
- The abolition of countries and nationalities;
- To wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie;
- To centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State;
- The abolition of all property in land;
- The centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the state.

These monstrous intentions can be effected only by tyranny, Marx and Engels admit, at least in the first stages of the revolution: “Of course in the beginning, this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property, . . . but which . . . are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionizing the mode of production” (490).

According to François Furet, the French Revolution became a paradigm for the Communist tyrannical regime: “The Terror was government by fear, which Robespierre theorized as government by virtue. Invented to destroy the aristocracy, it soon became the means to dispose of the wicked and to combat crime. It became an integral part of revolution.”⁹³ Robespierre declared to the *Convention nationale*, a standing legislative body, during the vote on the Prairial Laws that, when dealing with the enemies of the revolution, “it is less a question of punishing them than annihilating them.”⁹⁴ Thus, too, Marxism swung the cudgel of tyranny to realize its ends, ever turned against the dignity of legitimate human freedom. Solzhenitsyn cites the original writings of Marx and Engels to prove this:

⁹³ François Furet, “Terror,” in *Dictionary of the French Revolution*, ed. F. Furet and Mona Ozouf (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1989).

⁹⁴ Quoted in Matrat, *Robespierre*, 260.

“Reforms are a sign of weakness”; “Democracy is more to be feared than monarchy and aristocracy”; “Political liberty is a false liberty, worse than the most abject slavery.” In their correspondence Marx and Engels frequently stated that terror would be indispensable after achieving power, that “it will be necessary to repeat the year 1793. After achieving power, we’ll be considered monsters, but we couldn’t care less.”⁹⁵

Marxism scoffs at any moral constraints. Lenin once remarked:

Is there such a thing as communist ethics? Is there such a thing as communist morality? Of course, there is. . . . In what sense do we reject ethics, reject morality? In the sense given to it by the bourgeoisie, who based ethics on God’s commandments. On this point we, of course, say that we do not believe in God. . . . We reject any morality based on extra-human and extra-class concepts.⁹⁶

Looking to revolutionary France as an example for future action, Lenin prepared for a revolution in Russia by explaining why the socialistic Paris Commune failed in 1871.⁹⁷ There were two major mistakes, Lenin said. First, the revolutionaries “stopped half-way” and allowed themselves to be swayed by ideas of justice, nationalism, and common tasks with their ideological enemies.⁹⁸ Second, and perhaps more importantly, the revolution was stymied by “excessive magnanimity”: “Instead of destroying its enemies it sought to exert moral influence on them; it underestimated the significance of direct military operations in civil war.” Lenin declared that “peaceful methods of struggle” would serve ordinary, everyday purposes, but “there are times when the interests of the proletariat call for

⁹⁵ Matrat, *Robespierre*, 260. He quotes from the first Soviet edition of 1929, which citations I reproduce without page numbers.

⁹⁶ The Third All-Russia Congress of the Russian Young Communist League took place in Moscow, October 2–10, 1920, and was attended by an estimated six hundred delegates. Lenin addressed the first session the evening of October 2. The transcript was published in *Pravda* on October 5, 6, and 7, 1920. It also appears in vol. 31 of Lenin’s *Collected Works*, cited in Paul Kengor, *The Devil and Karl Marx: Communism’s Long March of Death, Deception, and Infiltration* (Gastonia, NC: TAN Books, 2020), 115.

⁹⁷ Solzhenitsyn, *Warning to the West*, 62.

⁹⁸ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “Lessons of the Commune,” originally published in *Zagranichnaya Gazeta*, no. 2 (March 23, 1908), in *Collected Works*, vol. 13, trans. Bernard Isaacs (Moscow: Progress, 1972), 475–78, at 475.

ruthless extermination of its enemies in open armed clashes.”⁹⁹ When the Communists took power, they took Lenin’s word as gospel and aimed their pistols not only at *individuals* who stood in their way, but at entire classes and groups. After all, it was said: “Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another.”¹⁰⁰ Once all of Communism’s goals are achieved, Marx and Engels claimed, everyone will be so perfectly equal, so entirely homogenized, that with no differences among them, all class struggles will cease. Forty-three million dead in Russia alone, and Communism still did not succeed.¹⁰¹

The extraordinary effects of Communism and its grand self-delusion entail that “the essence of Communism is quite beyond the limits of human understanding. It is hard to believe that people could actually plan such things and carry them out. And it is precisely because its essence is beyond comprehension, perhaps, that Communism is so difficult to understand.”¹⁰² Like Luther, the Communists substituted a human infallibility—based on the certitude of human reason, whether operating through the individual or the mob—for the infallibility of the Vicar of Christ guaranteed by the Holy Spirit. Leon Trotsky proclaimed: “None of us desires or is able to dispute the will of the Party. Clearly, the Party is always right. . . . We can only be right with and by the Party, for history has provided no other way of being in the right.”¹⁰³ Similarly, Lenin declared:

It is the absolute duty of Social-Democrats to make a public statement of their attitude towards religion. Social-Democracy bases its whole world-outlook on scientific socialism, i.e., Marxism. The philosophical basis of Marxism, as Marx and Engels repeatedly declared, is dialectical materialism—a materialism which is absolutely atheistic and positively hostile to all religion. . . . Religion is the opium of the people—this dictum by Marx is the cornerstone of the whole Marxist outlook on religion. Marxism has always regarded all modern religions and churches, and each and every

⁹⁹ Lenin, “Lessons of the Commune,” 478.

¹⁰⁰ Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 490.

¹⁰¹ See Solzhenitsyn, *Warning to the West*, 19: “In 1937–8, at the height of Stalin’s terror, if we divide the number of persons executed by the number of months, we get more than forty thousand persons shot per month!”

¹⁰² Solzhenitsyn, *Warning to the West*, 19.

¹⁰³ Leon Trotsky, “Speech to the Thirteenth Party Congress,” May 26, 1924, in *The Challenge of the Left Opposition: 1923–1925*, ed. Naomi Allen (New York: Pathfinder, 1975), 161.

religious organization, as instruments of bourgeois reaction that serve to defend exploitation and to befuddle the working class. . . .

Marxism is materialism. As such, it is as relentlessly hostile to religion. . . . We must combat religion—that is the ABC of all materialism, and consequently of Marxism. But Marxism is not a materialism which has stopped at the ABC. Marxism goes further. It says: We must know how to combat religion, and in order to do so we must explain the source of faith and religion among the masses in a materialist way. The combating of religion cannot be confined to abstract ideological preaching, and it must not be reduced to such preaching. It must be linked up with the concrete practice of the class movement, which aims at eliminating the social roots of religion.¹⁰⁴

The Bolsheviks not only worked to crush and destroy the exterior elements of Christianity; they also strove to propagandize their way into the hearts and minds of believers, and to subvert them. On May 15, 1932, Trotsky inaugurated a “Five-Year Plan of Atheism.” Its stated aim: “Not a single house of prayer shall remain in the territory of the USSR, and the very concept of God must be banished from the Soviet Union as a survival of the Middle Ages and an instrument for the oppressions of the working masses.”¹⁰⁵ Like many other five-year plans within the Soviet Union, this one failed before its due-date arrived. Nevertheless, once in power, Stalin established a more effective system of controlling religion, whose six elements were emulated by Communist regimes throughout the world.¹⁰⁶

- First, to proclaim “freedom of religious belief” in the State constitution, which increases incentives “to abandon the mainstream church to seek other faiths”;
- Second, to steal most ecclesiastical property, to prevent them from offering educational and charitable activity, and to allow only restricted liturgical services;

¹⁰⁴ Lenin, “The Attitude of the Workers’ Party to Religion,” first published in *Proletary*, no. 45 (May 26, 1909), in *Collected Works*, vol. 15 (Moscow: Progress, 1973), 402–13.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in N. de Basily, *Russia under Soviet Rule: Twenty Years of Bolshevik Experiment* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938), 423.

¹⁰⁶ The following is from Richard Madsen, “Religion under Communism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, ed. Stephen A. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 585–601, at 587.

- Third, to “imprison and even execute the major leaders of the dominant church, not officially on religious grounds, but on grounds that they are attacking the revolution”;
- Fourth, to co-opt the clergy into Communism in order to undermine the ethos and teaching of the church, and to encourage other religious groups to attack the dominant Christian group;
- Fifth, “having destroyed the leadership of the dominant church, appoint compliant successors. The dominant church will now be a subservient, hollowed-out shell”;
- Sixth, once the dominant Christian group has been fully infiltrated and subverted, to then destroy the other religious groups that previously had been instrumental in attacking it.

It is estimated that, by 1939, only a few hundred churches out of around 46,000 remained open, until Stalin found religion useful in promoting patriotic sensibilities among soldiers and the populace; once World War II was over, another crackdown restricted Orthodox Christianity until the 1960s.¹⁰⁷ Here, then, the principle of militant atheism becomes moderated in practice, to the extent that the revolution is better and more easily served by wearing the dead skin of a religion than by removing all vestiges of the religious system within a culture.

The Post-Modern Sexual Revolution

The new wave of revolutionary thought and activity that culminated in the 1960s can be summed up with the motto, “No Church, no Christ, no God, no Reason—only My Power and Pleasure.”

Gramsci is one of the chief figures who helped Marxism move beyond mere economic theory and interests, and to focus on cultural change as part of its strategy. From Gramsci’s perspective, “Karl Marx is for us a master of spiritual and moral life,” who grasped “the mysterious rhythm of history,” and who inspires change throughout society.¹⁰⁸ The Italian thinker argued that the Communist Party, which he called “the political organization of revolutionaries,”

¹⁰⁷ Madsen, “Religion under Communism,” 588–59.

¹⁰⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *II Grido del Popolo*, May, 4, 1918, in *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 39.

leads the [proletariat] class by penetrating into all the organizations in which the working masses are assembled; and by carrying out, in and through these, a systematic mobilization of energies in line with the program of the class struggle, and an activity aimed at winning the majority to Communist directives.¹⁰⁹

He went on to say: "The party leads and unifies the working class by taking part in all struggles of a partial nature, and by formulating and agitating around a program of demands of immediate interest to the working class," which were more than of an economic character: the struggles involved all issues of organization and political freedoms.¹¹⁰ Thus, Gramsci insisted that the Communist Revolution must take on different forms determined by existential circumstances: "It is necessary to be able to adapt ourselves to every terrain offered us by reality; to make use of every agitational theme; and to stress one form of organization or another, depending on what is needed and depending on each one's possibilities for development."¹¹¹

Regarding the ends of this form of revolution, Gramsci observed that "what the Jacobins achieved in the French Revolution" was the "formation of a national popular will."¹¹² This collective will should not imposed from the top down, but rather ought to be a "national revolution" that arises from "moral and intellectual reform, that is, the question of religion or worldview," which eventually actuates "a complete and accomplished form of modern civilization."¹¹³ In Gramsci's view, this overarching social organism, which he styles the "modern Prince," an abstract revisioning of Machiavelli's personal Prince, "takes the place, in people's consciousness, of the divinity and of the categorical imperative," that is, it replaces God and universal moral norms; "it becomes the basis of modern secularism and the complete secularization of life and of all customary relationships."¹¹⁴

Gramsci's strategy of penetrating all organizations, of taking part in all struggles related to Communist ends, of adapting tactics to every terrain, and of using every agitational theme, has much in common with the idea of the Socialist "long march through the institutions." Herbert Marcuse credited this idea to a comrade from the 1960s:

¹⁰⁹ Antonio Gramsci, "The Italian Situation and the Tasks of the PCdI (Lyons Theses)," in Forgacs, *Gramsci Reade*, 160 (no. 37).

¹¹⁰ Gramsci, "The Italian Situation," 161 (no. 39).

¹¹¹ Gramsci, "The Italian Situation," 162 (no. 41).

¹¹² Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 3:248 (notebook 8, no. 21).

¹¹³ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 3:248 (notebook 8, no. 21).

¹¹⁴ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 3:249 (notebook 8, no. 21).

Rudi Dutschke has proposed the strategy of the *long march through the institutions*: working against the established institutions while working in them, but not simply by “boring from within,” rather by “doing the job,” learning (how to program and read computers, how to teach at all levels of education, how to use the mass media, how to organize production, how to recognize and eschew planned obsolescence, how to design, et cetera), and at the same time preserving one’s own consciousness in working with the others.¹¹⁵

Saul Alinsky similarly argued that some radicals in his day had developed “understanding and insights . . . beyond the dialectical materialism of orthodox Marxism,” but retained their basic orientation toward culture and life.¹¹⁶ He stated that his *Rules for Radicals* was meant to offer directions for “a pragmatic attack on the system” of modern life, saying, “That means working in the system.”¹¹⁷ In other words, it took the Stalinist tactic of subverting Christianity from within and worked to apply that tactic to every institution possible.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, a number of movements throughout the world created new cultural conditions that extended far beyond the Soviet regimes then in power: peace protests against the use of nuclear warfare and the war in Vietnam; civil rights efforts in the United States and South Africa; protests against the “six days war” of June 5–10, 1967, between Israel and Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq; and cultural revolts characterized by feminism, youth culture and rock music, drug use, and so-called hippie “free love.”¹¹⁸ Political activism often was encouraged by anarchists and Marxists, who rejected what they perceived as imperialist capitalism; they were typically not workers themselves, but rather students who wanted to change politics and culture, including the Vietnam War, arts, and the encouragement of the Black Power movements.¹¹⁹ To the extent that such movements were opposed to the hegemonic powers of governments, Communist parties and Communist-dominated trade unions typically

¹¹⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1972), 55 (emphasis original).

¹¹⁶ Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Vintage, 1971), xiii.

¹¹⁷ Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, xviii, xix.

¹¹⁸ Robert Gildea, “The Global 1968 and International Communism,” in *Endgames: Late Communism in Global Perspective, 1968 to the Present*, vol. 3 of *The Cambridge History of Communism*, ed. Juliane Fürst, Silvio Pons, and Mark Selden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 26, 34–35.

¹¹⁹ Gildea, “The Global 1968 and International Communism,” 3:35.

denounced such “student adventurism,” for the new version of the revolution turned against its Stalinist father-figure in significant ways.¹²⁰

This Marx-inspired movement, then, focused more on cultural than economic change. Accordingly, the agitators of the 1960s and onwards still spoke against capitalism and “big business,” but the oppressor–oppressed paradigm now had new dimensions.

- In the Church, clerics were called the oppressors, the laity the oppressed;
- In the realm of the sexes, men were called the oppressors, women the oppressed;
- In the realm of races, whites were called the oppressors, people of color the oppressed;
- Eventually, in the realm of sexual proclivity, “heterosexuals” were called oppressors, and homosexuals and lesbians the oppressed;
- And still more recently, in the realm of genders, “binary”-identifying people are called oppressors and “transgenders” the oppressed.

These views are closely connected: the sexual revolution served as a paradigm for the unfolding of later views.

Engels formulated sex relations in classic Marxist terms of oppressor and oppressed: “The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male.”¹²¹ Rather than seeing male and female as complementary and mutually supportive, he sees their relations in simplistic zero-sum terms: “Prosperity and development for some is won through the misery and frustration of others.”¹²² In sum:

Wherever the monogamous family remains true to its historical origin and clearly reveals the antagonism between the man and the woman expressed in the man’s exclusive supremacy, it exhibits in miniature the same oppositions and contradictions as those in which society has been moving, without power to resolve or

¹²⁰ Gildea, “The Global 1968 and International Communism,” 3:36.

¹²¹ Frederick Engels, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, ed. Eleanor Burke Leacock (1884; repr. New York: International Publishers, 1972), 129.

¹²² Engels, *Origins*, 129.

overcome them, ever since it split into classes at the beginning of civilization.¹²³

The Soviet System family code of 1918 sought to overturn this supposed oppression by implementing changes which were revolutionary with respect to Russian Orthodox Christian morals: the institution of civil marriage; easy divorce; legalization of abortion; communal raising of children.¹²⁴ More subversive of the current system were the new laws regarding homosexual behavior. Dan Healey reports, "French revolutionary secularization and rationalization of statutes had (perhaps unintentionally at the outset) included the decriminalization of sodomy in 1791, later deliberately confirmed by Napoleonic fiat in 1805 and in the penal code of 1810," which almost certainly influenced the Soviet code.¹²⁵ The result was the decriminalization of sodomy in the 1922 Russian criminal code.¹²⁶ Consent between mature adults, without reference to nature, became the fundamental criterion for determining the legality of sexual acts. Later, when Stalin wanted to encourage the conception of children, many of the earlier Soviet laws regarding marriage and family, and sodomy, were repealed. But the revolutionary principles remained. In Wilhelm Reich's view, "the sexual revolution in the Soviet Union started with the dissolution of the family," because "sexual needs broke the chains of the economic and authoritarian family bonds," specifically, "patriarchal" interests.¹²⁷ He interpreted these changes to exemplify "the revolution *from sex-negation to sex-affirmation*."¹²⁸

The term "sexual revolution" appears to have been coined in 1921 by Wilhelm Heinrich Dreuw, seen in his book *Die Sexual-Revolution*, which depicted social restrictions of the time at war with "gushing impulses" and "overwhelming stirrings" toward sex.¹²⁹ More influential was a book

¹²³ Engels, *Origins*, 131.

¹²⁴ Donna Harsch, "Communism and Women," in Smith, *Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, 488–504, at 495.

¹²⁵ Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 120–1.

¹²⁶ Healey, *Homosexual Desire*, 122.

¹²⁷ Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution: Toward a Self-Governing Character Structure*, trans. Theodore P. Wolfe (New York: Orgone Institute Press, 1945), 157.

¹²⁸ Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*, 162 (emphasis original). For a sympathetic analysis, see Bertell Ollman, *Social and Sexual Revolution: Essays on Marx and Reich* (Boston: South End, 1979), esp. 159–75.

¹²⁹ John Levi Martin, "Structuring the Sexual Revolution," *Theory and Society* 25 (1996): 105–51, at 107 and 119.

by Reich, whose title in English was translated as *The Sexual Revolution*, but which in the original German was *Sexualität im Kulturkampf*. John Levi Martin notes, “‘Kulturkampf’ (cultural struggle) was the word used to describe Bismarck’s fight with the Catholic Church, and so does not mean ‘revolution.’”¹³⁰ Nevertheless, the term “revolution” is appropriate for Reich’s work, for although it arose subsequent to Reich’s more political Marxist phase, Communist thinkers nevertheless shaped his Freudian approaches in basic language, orientation, and perspective.¹³¹ In 1946, the United Nations’ Commission on the Status of Women issued a report on their first session: “Women must take an active part in the fight for the total elimination of fascist ideology. . . . In order to achieve this goal, the purpose of the Commission is to raise the status of women, irrespective of their nationality, race, language, or religion, to equality with men in all fields of human enterprise, and to eliminate all discrimination against women.”¹³² Simone de Beauvoir believed that this statement, and others like it around the world, were directly influenced by earlier laws passed in Soviet Russia. From her perspective, “the game is won. The future can only lead to a more and more profound assimilation of woman into our once masculine society.”¹³³ De Beauvoir claims: “Just as in America there is no Negro problem, but rather a white problem; just as ‘anti-semitism is not a Jewish problem: it is our problem’; so the woman problem has always been a man’s problem.”¹³⁴ From this perspective, the sexual revolution was needed for the female to be “emancipated” from the masculine dominance in the relation between the sexes. Taking a step further along the same lines, Betty Friedan states that the first wave of feminism “was a revolution.” Like other revolutionary thinkers, she justifies the “excesses of the feminists” by saying that they were a means to a good end, and “in themselves a demonstration of the revolution’s necessity.”¹³⁵ Envy of men

¹³⁰ Martin, “Structuring the Sexual Revolution,” 108.

¹³¹ In Sherry Wolf’s phrase, with the help of the Marxist theory of liberation from alienation, “Reich argued for overturning the social and economic order, which require sexual repression, in order for people to lead sexually liberated lives.” According to her, Reich’s teachings were foundational to gay and transgender movements (*Sexuality and Socialism History, Politics, and Theory of LGBT Liberation* [Chicago: Haymarket, 2009], 274).

¹³² United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, *Report of the Commission on the Status of Women to the Economic and Social Council*, February 25, 1947, p. 12, (available at documents.un.org/doc/undoc/der/nl4/722/31/pdf/nl472231.pdf).

¹³³ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), 148.

¹³⁴ De Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 148.

¹³⁵ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1974), 80.

played a significant role, seen in the early feminist rejection of marriage and motherhood and “turning their backs on the old feminine image,” but above all insofar as the feminists strove to become “a different kind of woman.”¹³⁶

On the surface, the early feminist movements could appear to have little to do with secularism: ostensibly, their energy was focused on securing equal civil rights for women. As the movement has progressed, however, it has not only upended traditional roles of male and female in society, but much more radically challenged the claim that there is a stable order in the universe that gives rise to universal moral standards. Thus, feminists have played an integral role in raising the banner of the “gay rights” movement. Although some feminists have insisted that their work is to uphold the rights and value of women alone, a greater portion have been arm-in-arm in supporting the decriminalization of homosexual activity, and the re-definition of marriage to include two people of the same sex. More recently, most leading feminist voices have favored the transgender movement: they added colors to the rainbow flag they flew before. From portraying male–female differences as impositions of law and society, it was not too much of a stretch to see male–female gender differences as constructs of society, and then as existent only within an individual’s self-determination. Feminism, from the revolutionary perspective, was only one stage in a larger movement that seeks to eliminate all forms of “oppression,” however that is defined. Mallory Millet recalls how, in 1969, her sister, Kate, helped develop Marxist categories within the feminist movement.

We gathered at a large table as the chairperson opened the meeting with a back-and-forth recitation, like a Litany, a type of prayer done in the Catholic Church. But now it was Marxism, the Church of the Left, mimicking religious practice:

“Why are we here today?” she asked.

“To make revolution,” they answered.

“What kind of revolution?” she replied.

“The Cultural Revolution,” they chanted.

“And how do we make Cultural Revolution?” she demanded.

“By destroying the American family!” they answered.

“How do we destroy the family?” she came back.

“By destroying the American Patriarch,” they cried exuberantly.

¹³⁶ Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 80.

“And how do we destroy the American Patriarch?” she replied.

“By taking away his power!”

“How do we do that?”

“By destroying monogamy!” they shouted.

“How can we destroy monogamy?” . . .

“By promoting promiscuity, eroticism, prostitution and homosexuality!” they resounded.¹³⁷

Many of the women who were part of this group went on to found the National Organization of Women (NOW), and to “take down the Patriarchy,” in Millet’s words, with their stated aim to

infiltrate every institution in the nation: the universities, the media, primary and secondary schools, PTAs, Teachers Unions, city and state governments, the library system, the executive branches of government as well as the judiciaries and legislatures. One of their most desired results was the smashing of every taboo in Western culture. . . . polygamy, bestiality, Satanism, pornography, promiscuity, witchcraft, pedophilia.¹³⁸

Some of the foundational reasons why feminism went this direction have been voiced by Judith Butler, among others. In a recent interview, Butler declared her opposition to feminists such as Sheila Jeffreys and Janice Raymond, who said that that transgender surgery is contrary to human dignity. In Butler’s view, this “prescriptivism” aspires “to a kind of feminist tyranny.”¹³⁹ For her, of paramount importance are “forms of politics that support and encourage self-affirmation.”¹⁴⁰ Emmanuel Todd has told this story in greater detail.¹⁴¹ On a broader plane, Carl R. Trueman argues that figures such as Freud “sexualized” the revolution, with the help

¹³⁷ Mallory Millett, “Marxist Feminism’s Ruined Lives,” *Front Page Magazine*, September 1, 2014, frontpagemag.com/fpm/240037/marxist-feminisms-ruined-lives-mallory-millett, cited in Kengor, *Devil and Karl Marx*, 365–66.

¹³⁸ Millett, “Marxist Feminism’s Ruined Lives.”

¹³⁹ Cristan Williams, “Judith Butler on Gender and the Trans Experience: ‘One Should Be Free to Determine the Course of One’s Gendered Life,’” *Versobooks Blog*, May 26, 2015, versobooks.com/blogs/news/2009-judith-butler-on-gender-and-the-trans-experience-one-should-be-free-to-determine-the-course-of-one-s-gendered-life.

¹⁴⁰ Williams, “Judith Butler on Gender.” See Judith Butler’s *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁴¹ Emmanuel Todd, *Lineages of the Feminine: An Outline of the History of Women*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity, 2023).

of “postmodern neo-Marxism” seen in critical theory and the various traditions that swirl around it, including the Frankfurt School, Maoist doctrines, and theorists such as Vladimir Lenin, Georg Lukács, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, and Michel Foucault. The result is that we are now living in the time of the triumph of the erotic, the triumph of the therapeutic, the triumph of transgender ideology, marked by its ubiquity in Western advertising, media, and discourse.¹⁴² This is what Andrew Doyle calls the “new Puritanism.”¹⁴³ The term Augusto del Noce uses is “the permissive society,” which demands that the family be destroyed because the family is inherently linked to tradition, which hands on enduring values, and therefore is inherently linked to “an objective order of unchangeable and permanent truths,” which are viewed as constrictive of individual freedom.¹⁴⁴ Del Noce cogently argues that “the idea of the permissive society requires that atheism be presupposed,” for, ultimately, “the Logos,” the expression of God’s eternal, unchanging reason and order, “will appear to

¹⁴² Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Crossway, 2020).

¹⁴³ See Andrew Doyle, *The New Puritans: How the Religion of Social Justice Captured the Western World* (London: Constable, 2023), 15: “The word ‘puritan’ as a synonym for intolerance and self-righteousness actually predates the rise of the puritan movement of early modern England. It was originally a pejorative term which was eventually adopted by its targets. . . . Later historians helped to cement the popular understanding of puritans as killjoys. Thomas Babington Macaulay, for instance, claimed that the puritans ‘hated bear baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators.’ . . . [Neo-puritans] seek to publicly shame those they consider dissidents, and condemn all those who stray from the righteous path.” Speaking about the Frankfurt School, Doyle notes: “Their legacy is often described as ‘Cultural Marxism,’ although this phrase has been widely interpreted as an anti-Semitic trope deployed by conspiracy theorists who believe that the émigrés of the Frankfurt School had infiltrated American society during the 1930s as part of a Jewish plot to dissolve Western society from within. . . . Anyone with the slightest familiarity with the Frankfurt School will understand that it advanced a reworked form of Marxism that sought to explain its failure to instigate a socialist revolution through the anaesthetizing effects of culture. As the author and commentator Marc Sidwell puts it, they aimed ‘to seize the means of cultural production.’ . . . The neo-Marxists of the Frankfurt School redirected their analysis from class to the concurrent influence of sex and culture. Drawing on Freud, they deemed the nuclear family and traditional gender roles to be as stultifying as economic inequality” (94–95).

¹⁴⁴ Augusto del Noce, “The Ascendancy of Eroticism,” in *The Crisis of Modernity*, ed. and trans. Carlo Lancellotti (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014), 157–86, at 161.

be ‘the origin of the logic of domination,’” against which man set himself in revolutionary secularism.¹⁴⁵

A Brief Conclusion Regarding the Ethics of Christ

When noticing that the doctrines and behavior of the early Protestants were implicitly formed by the same principles that would later manifest themselves in the French Revolution, the Communist Revolution, and the Post-Modern Sexual Revolution, this is not to overlook the various forms each revolution took: internecine disagreements, splintering of factions, betrayal of former comrades, and adoption of new authorities and new methods all characterize the revolutionary spirit, which generally tends in the same direction. Del Noce said that “Marxism represents the climax of modernity, inasmuch as modernity is intended as complete rejection of dependence.”¹⁴⁶ As we have seen, the rejection of all dependence is a basic theme that runs throughout the Protestant and French Revolutions as well: the first rejected dependence on the Catholic Church, the second rejected dependence on Christ. Looking in 1865 at what I am calling the revolutionary phenomenon, St. John Henry Newman summed up the situation in a phrase: “The spirit of lawlessness came in with the Reformation, and Liberalism is its offspring.”¹⁴⁷ Newman defined Liberalism in the following way: “Liberalism in religion is the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another. . . . It is inconsistent with any recognition of any religion, as *true*. It teaches that all are to be tolerated, for all are matters of opinion. Revealed religion is not a truth, but a sentiment and a taste.”¹⁴⁸ Earlier, Newman had named this belief structure “The Religion of the Day,” observing that it is

built upon worldly principle, yet pretending to be the Gospel, dropping one whole side of the Gospel, its austere character, and considering it enough to be benevolent, courteous, candid, correct

¹⁴⁵ Augusto del Noce, “The Roots of the Crisis,” in *Crisis of Modernity*, 137–56, at 141. Here, del Noce is quoting Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (New York: Vintage, 1962), 99–100.

¹⁴⁶ Augusto del Noce, “Secularization and the Crisis of Modernity,” in *Crisis of Modernity*, 73–84, at 78.

¹⁴⁷ John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being A History of His Religious Opinions* (London: Longmans and Green, 1908), 192.

¹⁴⁸ John Henry Newman, “Biglietto Speech” in *Addresses to Cardinal Newman with His Replies, Etc., 1879–81*, ed. W. P. Neville (London: Longmans and Green, 1905), 64.

in conduct, delicate,—though it includes no true fear of God, no fervent zeal for His honor, no deep hatred of sin, no horror at the sight of sinners, no indignation . . . at the blasphemies of heretics, no jealous adherence to doctrinal truth, no especial sensitiveness about the particular means of gaining ends, provided the ends be good, no loyalty to the Holy Apostolic Church, of which the Creed speaks, no sense of the authority of religion as external to the mind.¹⁴⁹

Rising up against this “worldly principle” and fourfold secularizing revolution, one following upon the other, the ethics of Christ includes four affirmations which build on each other. I will name them in the inverse order of the revolutions, and leave a fuller exposition for another occasion.

First, the ethics of Christ affirms the goodness of reason and reason’s ability to know the truth about the human being, right conduct, and his ultimate destiny. Aristotle rightly affirmed that the human being is the creature that seeks to know. Christian ethics affirms that truth exists outside of man, and is housed not only in the material and empirical, but above all in the transcendent and personal, found in God himself. This affirmation will be of particular importance in the West, which suffers from the Post-Modern Sexual Revolution, where discourse is reduced to power relations between people, and where there is widespread subversion of trust and mutual respect in the search for truth about the human person, the nature of gender, the proper relation between the sexes, absolute moral norms, and objective truth.

Second, the ethics of Christ affirms that reason and faith are not inimical to one another, nor are they in competition for the obedience of men. Rather, as Pope John Paul II affirmed, “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.”¹⁵⁰ Science, philosophy, theology, and the mystical knowledge of God that comes from deep union with him in prayer find their union and harmony in the perfect and intelligible truth that emanates from the Word of God. This affirmation will assist areas where Communism retains an influence, and where Christianity still has cultural purchase, and the nineteenth-century attacks

¹⁴⁹ John Henry Newman, “The Religion of the Day,” in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans and Green, 1907), 309–24, at 314.

¹⁵⁰ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998), introduction.

on faith continue in the guise of discourse about evolution, the beginning of the universe, the order in the cosmos, and other similar matters.

Third, the ethics of Christ affirms the centrality of the Incarnation and the redemptive work of Christ as revealed in the Gospels. The Catholic Church's magisterium has taught: "One can and must say that Jesus Christ has a significance and a value for the human race and its history, which are unique and singular, proper to him alone, exclusive, universal, and absolute."¹⁵¹ The Second Vatican Council states in *Gaudium et Spes*: "For God's Word, by whom all things were made, was Himself made flesh so that as perfect man He might save all men and *sum up all things in Himself*. The Lord is the *goal* of human history, the *focal point* of the desires of history and civilization, the *center* of mankind, the joy of all hearts, and the *fulfillment* of all aspirations" (§45; emphasis added). This affirmation will help respond to the ethics guided by the deism of the French Revolution and the contemporary quasi-Gnosticism or the relativistic view of salvation sometimes called "moralistic therapeutic deism," in which a vague idea of gods, or the divinity of the universe, guides people's consciences.

Fourth, the ethics of Christ affirms the Church's irreplaceable role in salvation. From the sacrament of Baptism, to the sacraments of Marriage and Holy Orders, all the way to the sacrament of extreme unction for the dying, the grace of God is given ordinarily and chiefly through the sacraments that Christ instituted and entrusted to the Church, who has celebrated them faithfully throughout the centuries. The Church's authoritative teachings guide our actions, and the example of the saints show us how to reach our heavenly homeland. This affirmation especially helps people who are disillusioned with the Church, and are tempted to replicate within themselves a Protestant revolutionary ethos to "find their own way" to Christ. It can encourage them to see God's hand in history, working even through imperfect instruments, writing straight with a crooked pen.

In sum, if Christ's birth is the dawn of a new era, his death on the Cross and resurrection are the bright noonday sun declaring his victory over the darkness of the old world of death and sin. Therefore, St. Paul exhorts us: "Be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom 12:2). So that we might not be conformed to this world, our minds must be transformed; we must "put on the mind of Christ," which sees that his reign has begun now through his humble

¹⁵¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church (2000), §15.

sacrifice of charity, but is completed in eternity where every knee shall bow before him (see Phil 2:5–11). N.V.