

# THE REVOLUTIONARY AGE

## I. Bible as Absolute Base for Law

- A. Paul Robert's mural in Lausanne.
- B. Rutherford's *Lex Rex* (Law Is King): Freedom without chaos; government by law rather than arbitrary government by men.
- C. Impact of biblical political principles in America.
  - 1. Rutherford's influence on U.S. Constitution: directly through Witherspoon; indirectly through Locke's secularized version of biblical politics.
  - 2. Locke's ideas inconsistent when divorced from Christianity.
  - 3. One can be personally non-Christian, yet benefit from Christian foundations: e.g. Jefferson and other founders.

## II. The Reformation and Checks and Balances

- A. Humanist and Reformation views of politics contrasted.
- B. Sin is reason for checks and balances in Reformed view: Calvin's position at Geneva examined.
- C. Checks and balances in Protestant lands prevented bloody resolution of tensions.
- D. Elsewhere, without this biblically rooted principle, tensions had to be resolved violently.

## III. Contrast Between English and French Political Experience

- A. Voltaire's admiration of English conditions.
- B. Peaceful nature of the Bloodless Revolution of 1688 in England related to Reformation base.
- C. Attempt to achieve political change in France on English lines, but on Enlightenment base, produced a bloodbath and a dictatorship.
  - 1. Constructive change impossible on finite human base.
  - 2. Declaration of Rights of Man, the rush to extremes, and the Goddess of Reason.
  - 3. Anarchy or repression: massacres, Robespierre, the Terror.
  - 4. Idea of perfectibility of Man maintained even during the Terror.

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## **IV. Anglo-American Experience Versus Franco-Russian**

- A. Reformation experience of freedom without chaos contrasts with that of Marxist-Leninist Russia.
- B. Logic of Marxist-Leninism.
  - 1. Marxism not a source of freedom.
  - 2. 1917 Revolution taken over, not begun, by Bolsheviks.
  - 3. Logic of communism: elite dictatorship, suppression of freedoms, coercion of allies.

## **V. Reformation Christianity and Humanism: Fruits Compared**

- A. Reformation gave absolutes to counter injustices; where Christians failed they were untrue to their principles.
- B. Humanism has no absolute way of determining values consistently.
- C. Differences practical, not just theoretical: Christian absolutes give limited government; denial of absolutes gives arbitrary rule.

## **VI. Weaknesses Which Developed Later in Reformation Countries**

- A. Slavery and race prejudice.
  - 1. Failure to live up to biblical belief produces cruelty.
  - 2. Hypocritical exploitation of other races.
  - 3. Church's failure to speak out sufficiently against this hypocrisy.
- B. Noncompassionate use of accumulated wealth.
  - 1. Industrialism not evil in itself, but only through greed and lack of compassion.
  - 2. Labor exploitation and gap in living standards.
  - 3. Church's failure to testify enough against abuses.
- C. Positive face of Reformation Christianity toward social evil.
  - 1. Christianity not the only influence on consensus.
    - a) Church's silence betrayed; did not reflect what it said it believed.
    - b) Non-Christian influences also important at that time; and many so-called Christians were "social" Christians only.
  - 2. Contributions of Christians to social reform.
    - a) Varied efforts in slave trade, prisons, factories.
      - (1) Wesley, Newton, Clarkson, Wilberforce, and abolition of slavery.
      - (2) Howard, Elizabeth Fry, and prison reforms.
      - (3) Lord Shaftesbury and reform in the factories.
    - b) Impact of Whitefield-Wesley revivals on society.

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## VII. Reformation Did Not Bring Perfection

But gradually on basis of biblical teaching there was a unique improvement.

- A. With Bible the ordinary citizen could say that majority was wrong.
- B. Tremendous freedom without chaos because Bible gives a base for law.

### Questions

1. What has been the role of biblical principles in the legal and political history of the countries studied?
2. Is it true that lands influenced by the Reformation escaped political violence because biblical concepts were acted upon?
3. What are the core distinctions, in terms of ideology and results, between English and American Revolutions on the one hand, and the French and Russian on the other hand?
4. What were the weaknesses which developed at a later date in countries which had a Reformation history?
5. Dr. Schaeffer believes that basic to action is an idea, and that the history of the West in the last two or three centuries has been marked by a humanism pressed to its tragic conclusions and by a Christianity insufficiently applied to the totality of life. How should Christians then approach participation in social and political affairs?

### Key Events and Persons

Calvin: 1509-1564

Samuel Rutherford: 1600-1661

Rutherford's Lex Rex: 1644

John Locke: 1631-1704

John Wesley: 1703-1791

Voltaire: 1694-1778

Letters on the English Nation: 1733

George Whitefield: 1714-1770

John Witherspoon: 1723-1794

John Newton: 1725-1807

John Howard: 1726-1790

Jefferson: 1743-1826

Robespierre: 1758-1794

Wilberforce: 1759-1833

Clarkson: 1760-1846

Napoleon: 1769-1821

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Elizabeth Fry: 1780-1845  
Declaration of Rights of Man: 1789  
National Constituent Assembly: 1789-1791  
Second French Revolution and Revolutionary Calendar: 1792  
The Reign of Terror: 1792-1794  
Lord Shaftesbury: 1801-1855  
English slave trade ended: 1807  
Slavery ended in Great Britain and Empire: 1833  
Karl Marx: 1818-1883  
Lenin: 1870-1924  
Trotsky: 1879-1940  
Stalin: 1879-1953  
February and October Russian Revolutions: 1917  
Berlin Wall: 1961  
Czechoslovakian repression: 1968

## Further Study

Charles Breunig, *The Age of Revolution and Reaction: 1789-1850* (1970).  
R.N. Carew Hunt, *The Theory and Practice of Communism* (1963).  
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Peter Gay, ed., *Deism: An Anthology* (1968).  
John McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church* (1970).  
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1957).  
Louis L. Snyder, ed., *The Age of Reason* (1955).  
David B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (1975).  
J. Kuczynski, *The Rise of the Working Class* (1971).  
Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma* (1958).  
John Newton, *Out of the Depths. An Autobiography*.  
John Wesley, *Journal* (1 vol. abridge).  
C. Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger, Ireland, 1845-1849* (1964).