

IV.2.d World  
RevolutionsWorld Revolution

World revolutionary moves, especially on the continent, were as much against the church as against the state or the social order. In most cases the church was sufficiently corrupt to merit the societal rebuff. We sketch but two of these moves and we do it quickly.

The French Revolution

This bitter period is perhaps the acme of classical study in societal revolution. You are urged to read at some point Carlyle: THE FRENCH REVOLUTION and Dickens: A TALE OF TWO CITIES. The whole thing was a class protest against the excesses of the court and the church. The court had become oppressive, excessive and unresponsive. The church had been politically oriented, had moved against the Huguenot middle class to its dissolution, and had abused the lower class with taxing. The government had abolished (expelled) the Jesuits in 1764 and in 1773 the pope abolished the order, although a segment of it continued and it was eventually restored. Religious fervor, tortured by all these things, had become virtually unknown and the French government, in some feeble effort to save itself, had actually stopped persecuting Protestants in 1787. It was too late and the tide ran against the court. In 1789 all church lands were confiscated by the government and in 1790 the monasteries were abolished. The tide of 1793 found Christianity abolished in France and the subsequent murder of hundreds of Catholic clerics...not a pretty picture. By 1795 the great persecution had run its course and the Napoleonic Concordat came in 1802. Napoleon, having overrun the papal states, brought the pope to France and succeeded in having the Pontiff renounce all territorial ambition...a renouncing that the popes later renounced. The French Organic Articles of 1802 allowed for a religious expression and in effect made France a religionless country. These treaties were modified somewhat after the Napoleonic period but the revolution in France gave a spread to free-thought and agnosticism that can hardly be estimated in our time. Interesting data on the age and the church-state relationship may be seen in Martin: THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN CHURCH.

The American Revolution

The American revolution was quite different.