

# Europe after the French revolution, Napoleon's obtain of power

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The French Revolution is viewed as a turning point because it was seen as an important stage in a succession of movements that later spread across the globe to ultimately affect the life of mankind.

It is observed that the effects were especially serious for Christianity since they brought actions which struck at the privileges and status of the Roman Catholic Church. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen on August 26 1789 held that "the source of all sovereignty is located in the nation; no body, no individual can exercise authority which does not emanate from it expressly. The peasants were relieved of a burden which had taken about a twentieth of their produce when tithes were abolished. Consequently, the church was deprived of one of its chief sources of revenue. Church land, which comprised about a fifth of the area of France was confiscated and became the property of the state.

In July 1790, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was enacted by the National Assembly. Among other things, bishops were to be elected by the voters who chose the civil officials and the pope was merely to be notified of their choice. Payment of the clergy by the state was no blessing in disguise since the former was to take an oath of allegiance to the latter. [It must be observed that Spenser criticized caesaropapism (doctrine of state control over the church) in his significant publication way back in 1675]. The pope's power was reduced to that of stating the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church. Indeed "churchmen felt this new act meant secularization of the church and they were violently opposed to it. The above notwithstanding, the blood of a martyr is seed for the church. After the French Revolution, Christianity, probably to the dismay of the revolutionaries, did not die. Truth (Jesus) was in the grave for three days but eventually resurrected. Persecution, in the history of Christianity, could be regarded as a stepping stone rather than a stumbling block. Fire did not beget cold and impotent ash. After the French Revolution, the church became much more involved in speaking on relevant issues of the day. Christianity was viewed from a different perspective. Evangelism was given a thoughtful



consideration. In spite of all the negative effects of the French Revolution, the brand of Christianity that emerged transformed itself by positively interacting with the philosophical mindset of the day.

## Napoleon :

In 1799 members of the ruling Directory conspired with the well-known military leader Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) to take over the French government by means of a coup d'état. It was successful, and Napoleon quickly asserted his own dominance over others. By 1802 he had full power, and by 1804 he was the self-proclaimed Emperor Napoleon I.

The period from 1799 to 1815 is generally known as the Age of Napoleon. Rising with opportunities presented by the French Revolution, Napoleon gained power not only in France, but directly and indirectly throughout much of continental Europe. Within France he crushed threats from both radicals and royalists who wanted to extend or reverse the French Revolution. Through administrative reforms, codification of laws, and settlement with the Church, he institutionalized some of the changes brought about by the revolution and took the heart out of others. Backed by the ideological force of the revolution and strong nationalism, his armies extended French rule, institutions, and influence throughout Europe. In 1814 Napoleon's forces, weakened by overextension and a disastrous Russian campaign, were defeated by a coalition of European powers. After Napoleon's defeat, the major powers, meeting at Vienna, attempted to establish a new stability that would minimize the revolutionary and Napoleonic experiences.

The sources in this chapter focus on the principal interpretive debate connected with Napoleon: How should Napoleon and his policies be understood? Is Napoleon best viewed as a moderate defender of the French Revolution, as an enlightened despot in the eighteenth-century tradition, or as the first of the modern dictators? To provide insight into these issues, the selections will examine Napoleon's rise to power and his ideas, external policies, and internal institutions.

