



THE SONG AT THE SCAFFOLD

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A 10-WEEK BOOK STUDY



SESSION ONE: INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER 1, PAGES 1-7

Introductory questions:

What do you know about the French Revolution?

What were the driving forces behind the French Revolution?

What has been the result of the French Revolution? Was this revolution a change for the better?

Did our American Revolution spur the French Revolution?

What do you know about the Carmelite order?

People to know:

Louis XVI – King of France at the dawn of the Revolution [1789], executed in 1793, the year the Reign of Terror began. His queen: Marie Antoinette.

Robespierre – the leader of the Reign of Terror and its victim in 1794

Jean-Jacques Rousseau – “noble savage” – his political theory was to throw off all law, Church and State, and revert to the natural state.

Voltaire – Frenchman living in and writing essays on England – made Reason his god, Enlightenment thinking – freedom from Church dogma and the tyranny of the King.

Pope Pius VI – decried the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, an attempt to subordinate the Roman Catholic Church to the secular French government. Many Catholics turned against the Revolution when this decree came out in 1790.



CHAPTER ONE:

(HOW WOULD YOU TITLE THIS CHAPTER?)

The image of the overturned carriage greets us as we begin this chapter. How is this image emblematic of what will unfold in this chapter?

The writer of the letter gives us a summary of the book in a few phrases:

- ❁ The date of his letter places us in the era of the French Revolution.
- ❁ He notes Marie Antoinette: Catholic queen of the last king of France, beheaded.
- ❁ He notes Charlotte Corday, “the Angel of Assassination,” a French radical who killed Jean-Paul Marat in his bathtub. His faction led the Revolution into a more radical course, including the purge of the Gironde (who were against the monarchy but against the increasing violence of the Revolution). She was executed in 1793. Note that the recipient of the letter considers Charlotte Corday “magnificent.”
- ❁ He calls his interlocutor a “dear disciple of Rousseau” and acknowledges his loathing of Christian culture. What does this tell us of the recipient’s political views?
- ❁ He considers the resignation of the Catholic martyrs and the Catholic faith to be a “necessary restraint upon terror.” How does that work?
- ❁ Blanche de la Force is introduced:
 - 🍷 With a “soul-stirring voice”
 - 🍷 As proof of the frailty of human power
 - 🍷 As a Carmelite novice
 - 🍷 As the daughter of the Marquis de la Force
 - 🍷 Think of the meaning of her name: White Power, Pale Power, Bloodless Power
 - 🍷 She became afraid of her own fear and suffered trying to hide it
 - 🍷 What do you think of these characterizations? What do they tell you of Blanche?
- ❁ The Marquis de la Force is introduced:
 - 🍷 He esteemed the writings of Voltaire. What does this tell you?
 - 🍷 This “sophisticated” man was unaware that “the subtle spice of his conversation might eventually season the crude cookery of the mob.” Do you see parallels to this naïve ignorance in the anarchy of the Spring and Summer of 2020?
 - 🍷 He considered the Carmelite convent his daughter entered as a “prison of religion.”
- ❁ The fireworks catastrophe foreshadowed the fate of France:
 - 🍷 The orderly, well-fed peasants who lined the route erupted easily into a mob.
 - 🍷 Marquise de la Force was told: “You sit here safe...soon, it is you nobles who will be dying!” She gave birth prematurely and died soon afterward. Does her fate parallel the French Revolution itself?