



## Considerations on France

*Joseph de Maistre, Richard A. Lebrun (Translator)*

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Although Maistre's influence within France was delayed until the Restoration, he is now acknowledged as the most eloquent spokesperson for continental conservatism. Arguing for a new alliance of throne and altar under a restored Bourbon monarchy, his work presents a providential interpretation of the French Revolution.

## Considerations on France Details

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Author : Joseph de Maistre , Richard A. Lebrun (Translator)

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### **Brian Denton says**

Savoyard aristocrat argues that the horrors of the French Revolution are a providential reckoning for a disobedient people and that the proper response is the elevation of throne and altar under a restoration of the Bourbon monarchy. The innocent blood spilt in revolution and counter-revolution, according to Maistre - and I'm quoting here - is merely, "the manure of the plant we call genius." Yikes!

Once again I agree in large part with Maistre's diagnosis of the human condition but find his prescription intolerable - and also wrong: Liberalism works.

I admire Maistre's stark pessimism, his understanding of the limits of reason, and his articulation of chaos and violence as constants in the order of things. Also, his understanding of the works of history as forever alien to the understanding of man will be familiar to anyone who has read Tolstoy's War and Peace.

The following few paragraphs get at the essence of this book and you'll like it if you like them:

"Sometimes it is asked, Of what use are these terrible austerities, which are also self-sacrifices, practised by certain religious orders? It would be precisely the same thing to ask of what use is Christianity, which rests entirely on an enlargement of this same dogma of innocence paying for crime.

The authority that approves these orders chooses certain men and insulates them from the world in order to make them conductors.

There is nothing but violence in the universe; but we are spoiled by a modern philosophy that tells us all is good, whereas evil has tainted everything, and in a very real sense, all is evil, since nothing is in its place. The keynote of the system of our creation has been lowered proportionately. All creation groans, and tends with pain and effort towards another order of things.

The spectators of great human calamities, especially are led to these sad meditations. But let us not lose courage: there is no chastisement that does not purify; there is no disorder that ETERNAL LOVE does not turn against the principle of evil. It is gratifying amid the general upheaval to have a presentiment of the plans of Divinity. We will never see the complete picture during our earthly sojourn, and often we will deceive ourselves; but in all possible sciences, except the exact sciences, are we not reduced to conjecture?"

Pair this book with Burke for contrasting strains of philosophical conservatism.

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### **Dan says**

I'm sure it's far superior in the original French, but one of the best short books on a lost strain of political thought. A grim but extremely well written work.

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### **Jules says**

I'm seldom creeped out by a book or even an author but this one managed to make me laugh in disbelief and recoil in horror at the same time. Being closer to the left myself I am not in the habit of reading reactionary, anti-freedom, religious screeds like this one, so when I did (back in 2009 in uni) I was perplexed at how someone can be so wrong. But de Maistre was an effective writer and my blood boiling in indignation is good evidence of that.

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### **Colm Gillis says**

De Maistre had an eye for a pertinent observation and there are plenty of these in his discussion of the French revolution and its aftermath. It is essentially rhetoric and the book has a lot of energy as a result but at times it does sag a little and veer off the script.

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### **Ben Cullimore says**

There is much to find troubling in *Considerations on France*, Joseph de Maistre's pro-monarchist, anti-liberal and ultra-conservative pamphlet penned in response to the French Revolution, but it cannot be doubted that it represents a fascinating example of counter-revolutionary thought at its most extreme. Maistre puts forward the case for a new alliance of throne and altar under a restored Bourbon monarchy, arguing with great passion against "democracy" and "equality" - ideas he believed were unnatural and doomed to fail. He states that the only natural form of government is one ruled by a hereditary government legitimised by the Catholic Church, claiming that "God warns us that He has reserved to Himself the establishment of sovereignties by never confiding to the masses the choice of their masters".

Describing the French Revolution as "one of the greatest crimes that can be committed", Maistre argues, in stark contrast to the Enlightenment thinkers' belief in equality and universal rights, that only kings and noblemen enjoy natural political rights, claiming that "the art of legislator is not to make people free, but free enough". For Maistre, undisturbed social order and durable civic institutions matter more than "liberty" and "freedom".

What makes *Considerations on France* such an important piece of work is the impact it had on nineteenth-century conservative and far-right thought. It is within Maistre's words that one can find the origins of the National Catholicism that underpinned the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, as well as the ideas espoused by thinkers such as Juan Donoso Cortés and Charles Maurras. As Isaiah Berlin stated: "Maistre is a kind of protagonist of the militant anti-rational fascism of modern times, and that is what makes him so interesting."

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### **Tiago Loureiro says**

Livro bastante bom do arqui-reacionário Joseph de Maistre. Defesa radical do absolutismo e dírissima crítica à Revolução Francesa. Apesar de defender teorias completamente ultrapassadas, tem alguns pontos de vista interessantes.

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**pplofgod says**

I think I almost ("almost" being the operative word here) disagree with everything that Joseph de Maistre has written in this book. Nonetheless, I'm giving it a high rating due to his very clear writing style.

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**Pinkyivan says**

A work of powerful style, but like most 19th century conservatism, mainly rhetorical. It is no wonder that they lost the cultural battle. It may be my just autism, but systems are the best thing in philosophy and are necessary if one wants to be the backbone of a consistent movement.

That said, de Maistre triggered all kinds of people in beautiful ways, he is essentially the original edgelord. If Chesterton is the Catholic Nee Chan, then de Maistre is a Catholic Schopenhauer. He really has produced a work of a haunting aesthetic, where you can almost feel the drums of violence and the flow of blood as you read.

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**J Scott Shipman says**

I've read bits and pieces of this---makes Machiavelli look like a Sunday school teacher.

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**Monty Milne says**

The introduction by Isaiah Berlin makes this the edition to get (anything by him is worth reading). Although he describes de Maistre as a hardline, ultra-reactionary, proto-Fascist I think he over-eggs the pudding. Based on the evidence here, de Maistre was a reasonable fellow with opinions it is difficult to disagree with, and which have been largely upheld by the court of history. It is in the field of religion where most modern thinkers are likely to have least in common with the author, but even here I was surprised by his moderation. (He shows more sympathy for the Church of England than most English Roman Catholics have ever demonstrated).

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