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Joseph de Maistre and Retributionist Theology*

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Abstract

*Joseph de Maistre is usually portrayed as Edmund Burke's French counterpart, as they both wrote important treatises against the French Revolution. Although Maistre did share many of Burke's conservative political views, he was much more than a political thinker. He was above all a religious thinker who interpreted political events through the prism of a particular retributionist theology. According to this theology, God punishes evil deeds, not only in the afterlife, but also in this terrestrial life; and sometimes, he may even use human tyrants as instruments of his wrath. This interpretation especially evident in Maistre's *Considerations sur la France*, an early work in his philosophical career. In that book, Maistre interprets the French Revolution as divine punishment, and in that regard, his views bear some similarities to the Deuteronomist historian in the Hebrew Bible, who interpreted the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Exile, as divine punishment in retribution of Israel's sins.*

Keywords: Joseph de Maistre, Retributionist theology, *Considerations sur la France*, Deuteronomist historian.

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Introduction: was Joseph de Maistre only a political philosopher?

In a controversy over the origins of language with Condorcet, Joseph de Maistre claimed that language is identical to thought, and therefore, could not have been invented by men, but rather, granted by divine grace. According to Maistre, inasmuch as language is the registry of the oldest memories of a cultural group, it is better not to alter ancient languages, for in that way, we will be closer to the divine grace that was originally given to humans. In such a manner, even if he wrote his works in a modern version of the French language, Maistre was an enthusiast of Latin, because this was the language that was used for the glory of Empire and Church in previous epochs, and to which Maistre hoped the world would return (Berlin, 2013).

It is very revealing that a thinker such as Maistre is nostalgic about the use of Latin, as this adequately represents his attitude towards modern times. Whereas, roughly 150 years before Maistre, another Frenchman, Descartes, became the first modern philosopher and chose to write in French, Maistre did the reverse: he preferred the use of Latin, as an emblem of the reaction against modernity, and as a symbol of the return to the glory of the pre-revolutionary days.

In this regard, Maistre's influence is almost null today. The last nail in his coffin was Vatican Council II's decision to prefer vernaculars over Latin in Catholic liturgy. We could think that, for practical purposes, Latin is a dead language; likewise, the ideas of Maistre are also dead. Hardly anybody talks about Maistre in a course on Philosophy, and his works are not frequently reedited. The reason for this is relatively simple: nobody dares deny the great impact the French Revolution has had on the modern world.

During the first decades of the 19th Century, reactionaries were expecting a restoration of the *Ancien regime*, and with the fall of Napoleon, this indeed happened, but it did not last for long. After the big revolutions of the 19th Century, interest in Maistre and other exponents of reactionary counter-Enlightenment ideology waned. Today's Western world is largely the descendant of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, and Maistre's counter-Enlightenment ideas have little force in our society.

Yet, Maistre's ideas are not completely dead, in the same sense that Latin is not really a dead language. The Catholic Church still has some use for Latin, and romance languages (very much alive today) are derivatives of Latin and rely on it for grammar and etymology. Something similar could be said of Maistre. Although his ideas are not explicitly discussed in most universities, his way of thinking is still widespread in the religious ideas of popular Christianity.

Maistre was above all a political philosopher. He had a very clear objective: to attack the French Revolution and to defend the virtues of monarchies. Maistre upheld the doctrine of divine right, advocated for a theocracy, repudiated constitutions, recommended kings to submit to the Pope, and justified the Inquisition. None of these ideas are alive today, although historians render attention to Maistre's political philosophy because of the impact they had in the

early 20th Century, when liberalism was still not in full force (Armenteros, 2011). In fact, he is widely recognized as perhaps one of France's most influential philosophers, in the period immediately following the fall of Napoleon (Reardon, 1975).

But on a deeper level, Maistre was a religious thinker, and albeit not often recognized as such, his ideas remain popular. Maistre was a typical exponent of the retributionist theology that remains common in the religious beliefs of many people. Indeed, many historians recognize Maistre as much a theologian as a philosopher (Strensky, 2003). I shall come back to retributionist theology later on, but for now, it suffices to say that this theology is a way of thinking about God in terms of retribution: God punishes evildoers, and his violence is thus justified.

Of course, retributionist theology did not begin with Maistre. A relatively obscure man from Savoy could not have had so much influence over Western civilization in such a short period of time. Maistre only added on to a much more important religious canon that affirms retributionist theology. That canon is the Hebrew Bible. But, the Hebrew Bible principles that Maistre upheld, are precisely the ones that Christianity worked hard to overcome. Maistre was a firm defender of the retributionist theology in which God commands the violence against the world, and therefore, it is futile to oppose it. For that reason, throughout his lifetime, Maistre was an enthusiast of militarism. As Isaiah Berlin has well pointed out, we should see Maistre as a precursor of fascism. Jean Yves Pranchere (Pranchere, 2001) even thinks we should see Maistre as one of Carl Schmidt's antecessors in the philosophy of fascism.

Maistre always thought of himself as a Christian, and many ways, of course he is. But, the nucleus of his thinking resembles much more the Hebrew Bible theology that Christianity to a large extent attempted to reform. Christianity has never aspired to a total rupture with its Jewish roots, and most of the Christian message already is foretold in the Hebrew Bible. But, the Hebrew Bible principles that Maistre upheld, are precisely the ones that Christianity worked hard to overcome. Maistre was a firm defender of the retributionist theology in which God commands the violence against the world, and therefore, it is futile to oppose it. For that reason, throughout his lifetime, Maistre was an enthusiast of militarism. As Isaiah Berlin has well pointed out, we should see Maistre as a precursor of fascism.

Maistre's religious views resemble those of Ancient Judaism during the times of the Babylonian Exile. In his philosophy, the prevailing image is that of a just and retributionist God who rewards good and punishes evil. During the Babylonian Exile (6th Century B.C.E), an author we do not entirely know, wrote an important section of the Hebrew Bible. According to the documentary hypothesis, this author is called the Deuteronomist (Friedman, 1997). This author formalized the image of a just God that rewards or punishes deeds. The so-called Deuteronomist theology has left a major imprint on Jewish and Christian religious thought, and it is very notorious in Maistre's thought. In what follows, I will

analyze how, even from the moment Maistre wrote an early work, the *Considerations sur la France*, originally published in 1821, the influence of Deuteronomist theology is already present.

The *Considerations sur la France*

At first, the French Revolution met with great enthusiasm throughout Europe. But, once the details of revolutionary violence came to be known, many critics soon appeared. Terrified by the horrors of the Revolution, these critics energetically wrote treatises and pamphlets to condemn the Revolution. In the process, they set up the bases of the counterrevolutionary movement that persisted in Europe throughout the first half of the 19th Century. Only one year after the start of the Revolution, Edmund Burke published *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, a seminal work in political conservatism.

Six years after Burke's book, Maistre published *Considerations on France*, an energetic indictment of the Revolution. Ever since, Maistre has been considered an emulator of Burke in France, as they have both been seen as champions of counterrevolution in France. Certainly, Maistre had read Burke's work, and it is clear that he was influenced by it. But, the comparison with Burke is not entirely accurate, as Maistre became a *sui generis* philosopher.

Burke wrote in a very sober style. His intention was precisely to warn against revolutionary passion. Maistre, by contrast, wrote in a much more energetic and passionate style: his hatred for the Revolution was on the same level as the hatred the revolutionaries felt for the *Ancien regime*. Burke was concerned with order, peace and stability, and although he never ceased being a religious man, his ideas were strictly political. Maistre, by contrast, was much more concerned with violence and sacrifice, and as mentioned above, his philosophy is more religious than political.

Yet, very much as Burke, Maistre was a man overwhelmed by the events of his time, and he always interpreted them in religious terms. The Revolution deeply affected his personal life. His family's origins were in Savoy, and they always had connections with aristocrats. As a result, once the Revolution began, his family had to abandon Savoy in 1792. Ever since, Maistre traveled around Europe preaching hatred against revolutionary movements, and recommending his European hosts not to follow the path of his fellow countrymen.

Considerations sur la France is Maistre's first formal piece of work. It is a short book, written in the style of a pamphlet. The argument is straight forward: the French Revolution has been a catastrophe, not only for the French people, but for all of humanity. The internal contradictions of the Revolution will lead to its own ruin, and the Monarchy will be inevitably restored. Maistre proclaims this restoration with great enthusiasm.

Maistre was noteworthy for his argumentative skills, but ultimately used them to reach outrageous conclusions. Maistre had originally intended to use as a title of his book, *Considerations religieuses sur la France*. But, Maistre preferred to

keep the current title, probably as an attempt to disguise his religious views, and make them more mainstream in the political discussion of his day.

He thought of *Considerations sur la France* as a book about a great tragedy. This tragedy would not only be national; it would be a religious tragedy as well. His arguments against a revolutionary government was not strictly political. In the early pages of the book, he appears to be a secular author (very much as Burke and most of the other critics of the Revolution), but then, he abandons his secular outlook and makes a theological argument against the Revolution. In his view, the French Revolution was not just a political or historical tragedy or mistake; it was actually a manifestation of pure evil.

The Enlightenment thinkers talked a great deal about progress, and provided an optimistic outlook. Maistre, on the contrary, presents a terrifying image of the Revolution. Consider, for example, this description: “What distinguishes the French Revolution, and what makes it a unique event in History, is that it is radically evil, no element of good alleviated the gaze of the observer; it is the highest degree of corruption, it is absolute impurity... In what page of History can we find such a huge quantity of vices operating at the same time? What an accumulation of cruelty and degradation!”(Maistre, 2016: 46).

He goes on with drastic descriptions: “[The Revolution] was an inexplicable delirium, a scandalous rejection of everything that is respectable amongst human beings, an atrocity of a new kind, which fools around with its crimes, and over all, an impious prostitution of reasoning and of all the terms built to express ideas of justice and virtue”(Ibid, 47-48).

Maistre blames this evil, not only on the revolutionaries, but also on the philosophers who provided the ideas for it: “Philosophy, having eroded the cement that united human beings, it no longer provides moral contributions. Civil authority, favoring with all its forms the toppling of the old regime, gives the enemies of Christianity all the support... Altars are taken down, immune animals dressed as priests have been parading the streets, sacred cups have been used for abominable orgies, and prostitutes now lay over the altars formerly decorated with cherubs” (Ibid, 58-59).

Maistre therefore concludes that the Revolution’s origins are not exclusively human. For Maistre, the Revolution is an entity by itself, independent of the revolutionaries: “Men do not drive the Revolution; the Revolution drives men” (Ibid, 8). Revolutionaries are servants to the Revolution, and the Revolution is devilish in itself: “In the French Revolution there is a satanic character that distinguishes it from everything that has ever been seen and perhaps will ever be seen” (Ibid, 51). In Maistre’s view, revolutionaries are clearly in league with the Devil.

These allusions to Satan do not seem to be mere metaphors. Maistre truly believed that there were dark supernatural forces at play, and that these forces overtook the heart and minds of revolutionaries. But, in this, there is a contradiction that Maistre never seemed to be aware of. On the one hand, he

considers the Revolution to be in league with Satan. But, on the other hand, he also considers that the Revolution has been carried out by God. It is as if both God and Satan teamed up to hurt humanity. Consider, for example, this passage: “Providence wanted that the first strike be hit by Septembrists, in order for injustice to be impious” (Ibid, 6), “there were nations condemned to death as guilty individuals, and we know why. If it was part of God’s purpose to let us know his plans regarding the French Revolution, we would understand it as the punishment of the French people as the sentence of a Parliament” (Ibid, 15).

In other words, God conducted the French Revolution as punishment for all the depravity of the French people. These vices were not those of the *Ancien regime*, but actually, of the revolutionaries themselves. Because of the Revolution’s blasphemies, God punished the French people with all the terror that became common during Robespierre’s days. If France suffers the horrors of the Revolution, it is because the country deserves it. God punishes France, but this will cleanse the country of all its impiety: “Every life, every wealth, every power, were in the hands of the Revolutionary power, and this monster drunk with power, dunk with blood and success... was at the same time a horrendous punishment for the French people, and the only means capable of saving France” (Ibid, 17), “the horrible shedding of human blood, caused by this great commotion, was a terrible means; however, it is as much a means as a punishment, and this can give rise to interesting reflections” (Ibid, 25).

Maistre laments the revolutionary catastrophe. He suffers seeing his beloved country in ruins, yet finds joy in thinking that God has punished his country, for this is the only way it can be regenerated. Maistre had not really been born in France; he did not even have the opportunity to live in France for a long period of time. Some generations before his birth, his family had migrated to Savoy, and he always held a strong attachment to the French culture of his ancestors. In his mind, France is the country selected by God; it is the nation that Providence has chosen.

The retributionist theology of the Hebrew Bible

Many cultures have developed the idea that they are the chosen people by God. Many Empires have had this notion, in support of their self-proclaimed civilizing mission. But, in Maistre’s philosophy, it is different. France has been given a glorious role to play, but at the same time, it has been chosen by God to be punished, because it failed to meet God’s designs previously.

Cultures that believe themselves to be chosen by the gods do not usually believe that they have also been chosen for punishment. Maistre’s view is different, but he was not truly an innovator in this regard. The way he interprets the French Revolution as God’s punishment of his own chosen people, is reminiscent of Ancient Israel. The idea that God chooses a people and favors them, but severely punishes them at the same time (even more so than any other nation), was the basis of the Hebrew concept of *berith* (the Covenant).

The Hebrew notion of Covenant became especially important during the process when the sources of the Torah were collected in the 6th Century BCE. One of the authors of those sources, commonly called the Deuteronomist by scholars, made the Covenant one of his most important themes. The most prominent doctrine in the book of Deuteronomy is the so-called “election theology”. According to this doctrine, God has established a Covenant with Israel, and the terms of this alliance are simple. God will favor Israel, as long as Israel complies with the Law that God gave to Moses. If Israel honors this Covenant, it will be blessed. However, if Israel disobeys, God will send horrendous punishments (Deuteronomy 28:1-28).

The God of the Deuteronomist can be extremely violent. Some critics even claim that violence is the central theme of the Hebrew Bible. For example, theologian Raymund Schwagge estimates that there are around three thousand Hebrew Bible passages in which God kills people (Schwagge, 1997). A portion of those passages represents God killing people for no rational motive whatsoever, such as the striking of Uzziah for his mistakes handling the Ark (II Samuel 6:6-7), or the attempt to kill Moses without any explanation (Exodus 4:24).

But, the theology of the Deuteronomist is different: God kills, but not capriciously. God makes people suffer, but only as punishment due to the impieties of Israel. God himself can execute the violence, or in some cases, he can use human beings as instruments of divine punishment. Furthermore, after the time of the Deuteronomist, this retributionist theology had a considerable influence over a new religious conception, according to which, suffering was no longer a punishment by God, but rather, it was the evildoer himself who brought upon his own tragedy; in other words, evil only goes back to the evildoer.

Most scholars agree that the Deuteronomist not only wrote the book of Deuteronomy; he also likely wrote the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. For convenience, scholars call the corpus of these books the “Deuteronomist history”. Scholars hold this view for many technical reasons, but perhaps the most important, is the fact that in those books, the same retributionist themes of Deuteronomy are also present.

The author of the Deuteronomist history tells the story of Israel, from the time of settling in Canaan, the epoch of the Judges, the Monarchies, and, finally, the Babylonian Exile. Most scholars believe the Deuteronomist was part of the exiled community, Friedman even suggests that he may have been Jeremiah (Friedman, 1997).

The Babylonian Exile has a deep impact on Biblical literature, and was a major influence on the shaping of Israel’s religious ideas. In the face of such a catastrophe, Biblical authors tried to make some sense out of it. They had trouble understanding how God’s people could be so easily humiliated by its enemies. Yet, they found an answer that squared well with the prevailing retributionist theology: the Hebrew were being exiled, because they had disobeyed God, and had broken the terms of the Covenant. This is the interpretative framework that is

used by the author throughout the whole of the Deuteronomist history. The tragedies of Israel throughout this long period are due to God's punishments. This series of punishments reaches a climax with an event that surpasses the previous ones: the exile. The Deuteronomist interpreted it as a just and necessary divine retribution for the sins of the people.

Maistre and retributionist theology

We can begin to see that Maistre's interpretation of the French Revolution is deeply embedded in Hebrew Bible theology. In the same manner that Maistre believed the French Revolution was part of a divine plan to punish France, the Deuteronomist believed that the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile were also part of a divine plan to punish Israel.

As mentioned above, there seems to be a contradiction in Maistre's thought: on the one hand, he believed the French Revolution to be the work of the Devil, but at the same time, he believed it was directed by God. There is no such contradiction in the Deuteronomist history, for the Devil makes no appearance. Satan is a religious concept of Persian origin, and it was introduced in Biblical literature after the times of the exile; it is therefore posterior to the time of the Deuteronomist. In the theology of the Deuteronomist, God appears in a dual image: he can be loving yet vengeful; it will all depend on how he retributes human beings.

In many Hebrew Bible passages, God punishes by himself. But, in the Deuteronomist theology, God uses some human beings as means of his retribution. In such a manner, for example, God punishes Israel, but uses the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar as instrument of his wrath. As presented in the Deuteronomist history, this is an vicious king and does horrible things to the Hebrews, but somehow he has the approval of God.

The prophet Jeremiah further developed this theology. In fact, the book of Jeremiah has many parallels to the book of Deuteronomy, and many scholars believe they could have been written by the same author. In the face of Nebuchadnezzar's imminent siege of Jerusalem, Jeremiah warns that God has favored the Babylonian king, because he will be the means of divine wrath. Through Jeremiah, God announces: "Now I will give all your countries into the hands of my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him. All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him. If, however, any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the sword, famine and plague, declares the Lord, until I destroy it by his hand" (Jeremiah 27: 6-8).

Maistre uses the same Deuteronomist theology to interpret the French Revolution. In his account, Robespierre plays the role of Nebuchadnezzar. While the Deuteronomist presents Nebuchadnezzar as an instrument of God's will, the

Babylonian king is nevertheless represented as a cruel tyrant. Maistre does the same with Robespierre. He never doubts the viciousness of Robespierre's tyranny: "Robespierre, Collot or Barere never thought about establishing the revolutionary government and the reign of terror; they were insensitively driven by the circumstances, and we will never see something similar again. These excessively mediocre men, exercised over a guilty nation the most horrid despotism that has ever been mentioned in history, and were probably the men in the kingdom most surprised by their own power" (Maistre, 2016:6).

If Robespierre was extremely mediocre, how then could he have achieved so much power? Maistre explicitly claims that God gave the tyrant that power: "The crimes of the tyrants in France were becoming instruments of the Providence" (Maistre, 2016: 21). Maistre even incurs in a contradiction. He first describes Robespierre as mediocre, but then, claims he is a genius: "The King has never had an ally, and it is sufficiently evident... that the coalition hoped for the disintegration of France. Now, how to resist the coalition? With what supernatural means could the effort of Europe be resisted? The infernal genius of Robespierre was only capable of performing this prodigy" (Maistre, 2016:17).

In Maistre's thinking, a human coalition cannot defeat a tyrant that has been appointed by God. Through Robespierre, God himself becomes a tyrant in France, and annihilates all human efforts to attempt to restore happiness.

The Deuteronomist interpreted the catastrophe of the Babylonian exile in terms of the past deeds of Israel. Given the importance of the Covenant in the approach of the Deuteronomist, he seemed to believe that, inasmuch as God was just, all these catastrophes came as a result of Israel's sins.

The greatest sin of Israel was, of course, apostasy. This is the greatest concern for the Deuteronomist and most authors of the Hebrew Bible. The chronological order of the Decalogue reflects this very well. "You shall have no other gods before me" is the first Commandment (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7). Most of the history narrated by the Deuteronomist is about Israel's struggle to comply with this command. But, it is not Israel's only sin. Besides from apostasy, both the Deuteronomist and the Prophets denounced social injustice, and ritual vanity.

Whenever a catastrophe is interpreted as divine punishment, then the sins of the people must be emphasized. And this is what Maistre precisely does throughout much of *Considerations sur la France*. If the Revolution is divine punishment, then there must have been countless sins prior to it. Although Maistre hoped for a return to the *Ancien regime*, he was still critical of it. In his view, the *Ancien regime* was guilty of some sins that justified the Revolution as divine punishment. Very much as the Biblical Prophets criticized the excessive concern with rituals, Maistre also criticized the Catholic clergy: "It cannot be denied that the priesthood, in France, needed reforms, and although I am far from adopting the vulgar declamations about the clergy, it is no less undisputed that the opulence, the luxury, and the general inclinations of the spirits towards laxity had set the clergy on decline... during the times that immediately preceded the Revolution,

the clergy had descended, more or less as the Army, from the position that it previously had in public opinion”(Ibid, 20).

But, much more than discuss the sins of the *Ancien regime*, Maistre prefers to emphasize the sins of the revolutionary movement itself. Under Maistre’s interpretation, the Revolution’s terror is not properly divine punishment for the sins of the *Ancien regim*, but rather, for the corruption of the men that inspired the Revolution. Revolutionary philosophical ideas were the sins, and the Reign of Terror was the punishment for having listened to the likes of Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu. Robespierre is the divine response to the impieties of the *philosophes* and all the blasphemies that were done in their names.

Very much as in the Deuteronomist history, in Maistre’s account, the greatest of all sins was apostasy. In France, this apostasy was not so much the cult and worship of other gods, but rather, something much more troubling to Maistre: enlightened atheism. Maistre believes atheism is absurd and dangerous: “every imaginable institution stands on a religious idea, otherwise they would just be temporary. They are strong and long-lasting inasmuch as they are divinized... Philosophy is, to the contrary, an essentially disorganizing power” (Ibid, 24).

But, very much as the Biblical Prophets, Maistre also denounced the moral impieties of France: “[Civil] marriage is nothing but legal prostitution; there is no paternal authority, there is no limit on crime” (Ibid, 47). Maistre continues in his portrayal of French depravity: “If we take a look at the acts of the National Convention, it is difficult to express what one experiences. When I go with my mind to the time of its sessions, I feel like the sublime bard of England [Milton], to an imaginary world; I see the enemy of the human genre seated in a circle and invoking all the malign spirits in this new Pandemonium” (Ibid, 48).

In the Deuteronomist history, the catastrophe of the Babylonian exile is evoked with various emblematic images, not least of which is the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, as well as the profanation of the sacred objects that were inside. It is not unlikely that Masiter thought of the assault on the Bastille in Biblical terms. In the Deutereonomist history, the humiliation of Zedekiah (Judah’s last king) was a powerful image to portray the intensity of the punishment God was issuing against Israel: “and he was captured. He was taken to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where sentence was pronounced on him. They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. Then they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon” (II Kings 25:6-7). It is very probable that this image caused a lasting impression on the mind of many Hebrews in the generations to follow.

For Maistre, the image of the humiliated king is also very prominent. His indignation is very vivid: “every drop of Louis XVI’s blood will cost torrents for France; four million Frenchmen, perhaps, will pay with their heads this great national crime of an antireligious and antisocial insurrection, crowned by a regicide” (Ibid, 113). Very much as the Deuteronomist, Maistre believed the humiliation of the king is the climatic point of the catastrophe.

The Deuteronomist had no doubts about Zedekiah's corruption: "[Zedekiah] did evil in the eyes of the Lord, just as Jehoiakim had done. It was because of the Lord's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end he thrust them from his presence" (II Kings 24:19-20). In other words, Zedekiah deserved his punishment. The author of the Deuteronomist history insists on retributionist theology; in his view, God punishes accordingly.

In this aspect, Maistre does not closely follow the retributionist theology typical of the Deuteronomist history. In reference to Louis XVI's execution, he mentions that the Revolution has been carried out "over the ruins of the throne and altars, spilled by the blood of the best of kings, and by an innumerable multitude of other victims" (Ibid, 109). Very seldom does Maistre distance himself from retributionist theology, but this is an exception. Even if Louis XVI was executed as part of God's plan, he was still an innocent victim.

Perhaps this exception to Maistre's retributionist theology can be explained by the way his ideas related to monarchy as an institution. The Deuteronomist theology was closely aligned with the Prophetic movement, and the Prophets continuously criticized kings. In a general sense, Prophets defended the monarchy as an institution, and their Messianic images were very kingly, indeed. But, this did not mean a full support of the particular kings the Prophets interacted with. The kings of Judah liked to be surrounded by visionaries that gave them good presages. Prophet literature in the Hebrew Bible usually labels these visionaries as "false prophets", as opposed to the real Prophets who announced bitter events to come.

Maistre, by contrast, was an enthusiast of monarchs and upheld the doctrine of divine right. He did not seem to believe that kings can be corrupt, or at least, he thought kings' corruption is very mild compared to the corruption in a Republic. Hebrew Prophets such as Hosea and Amos staunchly defended social justice, and although some Prophets were associated to aristocracies (such as Isaiah), they never stopped expressing their concern for the lower classes. Although Maistre shared with the Biblical Prophets their retributionist theology, unlike them, he was not much concerned with the plight of common folk. He was decidedly on the side of the rich and privileged, and for that reason, he defended the purity and innocence of kings at all times.

In his opposition to the corrupt monarchy of Judah, Jeremiah preached defeatism in the face of the Babylonian threat, and this earned him many enemies. His message was quite straightforward: "Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; serve him and his people, and you will live" (Jeremiah 27: 12). In his view, it is futile to resist the divine plan. Jeremiah's message is consistent with his retributionist theology: inasmuch as the people has sinned, punishment must be accepted.

In this aspect, Maistre also departs from conventional retributionist theology. Although he admits that the Revolution is part of God's punishment, he still exhorts his countrymen to begin a counterrevolution that resists revolutionary

tyranny. Masitre was not willing to uphold Jeremiah's defeatism. Jeremiah was accused of treason by his own people. Even though Maistre's approach resembles Jeremiah's in seeing Robespierre as an instrument of God's punishment, Maistre never advocated for surrender and servitude to the tyrant. In fact, much of his philosophy is a call to arms.

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