

# THE SONG AT THE SCAFFOLD

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A 10-WEEK BOOK STUDY



SESSION FOUR: CHAPTER 4, PAGES 22-28

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.

Madame Acarie – see the note at the bottom of page 16

Madame Louise of France – see the note at the bottom of page 17

CHAPTER FOUR: \_\_\_\_\_

(HOW WOULD YOU TITLE THIS CHAPTER?)

The images of thugs and “shady characters” in the form of looming shadows greet us as we begin this chapter. How is this image emblematic of what will unfold in this chapter?

## The Revolution progresses:

- ❁ The Religious Commission investigated the convent:
  - ✚ To register the number of nuns and their ages.
  - ✚ To ascertain the sincerity of the sisters.
  - ✚ To encourage the nuns to join the Revolution. They considered nuns to be “imprisoned.”
  - ✚ To survey the material goods of the convent to be seized by the Revolution.
- ❁ Can you imagine yourself as a Carmelite?
  - ✚ The devotion to the Lord.
  - ✚ The charism to suffer for others.
  - ✚ The commitment to prayer for the world.
- ❁ Do you think these nuns are imprisoned or free?
- ❁ Do you think contemplative vocations are beneficial:
  - ✚ For the world?
  - ✚ For the souls of the nuns?
- ❁ Blanche’s reaction to this investigation: utter terror. Why?
  - ✚ She shrieked, wept, and threw herself into the arms of her novice mistress.
  - ✚ Can we gauge the depth of her religious vocation by this reaction?
- ❁ The revolutionary “rationalists” reject Divine Revelation. How could they possibly understand a contemplative vocation?
- ❁ The author tells us that the revolutionary was a “small soul” who considered the convent “a hotbed of superstition” and whose nuns “professed a fanatical Creed.” Is this attitude still prevalent today?
- ❁ The Carmelite devotion to His Majesty was a fierce love; they were not likely to back down in the face of mere earthly authority.
  - ✚ Sister Marie of the Incarnation’s voice “knelt in devotion” as she affirmed her knowledge of the terrible death which threatened those who opposed the revolution
  - ✚ Sister Marie responded as Jesus did to Pilate: “Your authority is only as great as God permits – not an iota greater!”
  - ✚ Sister Marie confessed to the Mother Prioress that she had “exceeded the command to speak briefly and courteously.” We are told parenthetically that “the flaws in this great soul lay far beyond common shortcomings.” What flaws do you see in Sister Marie of the Incarnation?
- ❁ The image of a sickle being wielded to sharpen a weapon ends this chapter. This forebodes a violent fate for the nuns.