Unit 5 LEQ #2

How and to what extent did Enlightenment ideas about religion and society shape the policies of the French Revolution in the period 1789 to 1799?

Contextualization: In Europe during the 17th and 18th century, an intellectual movement emerged and became known as the Enlightenment. At around the same time during the 18th century, France was going through its own revolutionary movement known as the French Revolution starting in 1789. Thesis: Many of the ideas from the Enlightenment influenced the French Revolution, especially with regards to religion and society. As a result, Enlightened ideas about religion and society affected the policies during the French Revolution. Argument: Although the policies in the French Revolution did not completely follow Enlightened ideas, the Enlightenment still had an effect on the revolution.

Body 1: The Enlightenment’s ideas about religion affected several policies created during the French Revolution.

- Evidence: During the Enlightenment, many philosophes, such as Voltaire, believed that religion, specifically Christianity, hindered human improvement, rationality, and happiness due to the belief that humans were born sinful.
- Analysis: Policies regarding de-Christianization during the Republic of Virtue reflected a more “reasonable” republic. Although this was similar to the Enlightenment’s belief that religion was irrational, it differed in that during the revolution, the point of rejecting Christianity was to keep the people more loyal to the state than the Church.
- Evidence: Although some philosophes rejected religion, there were several who believed there was some religion creating deism believing in a god that doesn’t intervene with the universe after creating it.
- Analysis: Robespierre created a religious cult similar to deism where the Supreme Being is worshiped. Despite having similarities to Rousseau’s civil religion, the main purpose of the Supreme Being was just to have a religion for the people to worship in the now secular France.

Body 2: Enlightened ideas about society also affected policies made in the French Revolution.

- Evidence: The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen was influenced by the Enlightenment’s ideas of natural rights all men are entitled to at birth such as John Locke’s belief that the rights were life, liberty, and property.
- Analysis: In the Constitution, the four natural rights were life, property, security, and resistance to oppression, which was obviously influenced from the Enlightenment. These rights were believed to be available to all men. However, the Constitution differs from the Enlightenment in that the rights would be more useful for those who owned property while Locke’s could be more applicable to all social classes.
- Evidence: In the Enlightenment, women and men were viewed to be in separate spheres of society with women being in the domestic sphere while men were more active.
- Analysis: As the French Revolution continued on with several more Constitutions being written, women actually had less freedom than they had before the revolution. Because of that, women were still confined to the domestic sphere. In the Enlightenment, there were actually several philosophes such as Montesquieu who believed that women should have a greater role in society.

Conclusion: The Enlightenment had an influence on religion and society during the French Revolution. Even though the French Revolution shared many of the ideas from the Enlightenment period, there were still differences in the policies during the revolution. Synthesis: Another intellectual movement was known as the Romantic period. This took place after the French Revolution and Napoleon’s conquests where it was a reaction against Enlightenment. The Romantic period emphasized emotions and imagination rather than reason. The Romantic period also encouraged the revival of Christianity while the Enlightenment leaned more towards rejection of Christianity.