



# Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith

*James H. Billington*

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## **Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith** James H. Billington

The history of modern revolutions is the story of people in the grip of ideas and beliefs. In this masterful work, James H. Billington traces the course of the revolutionary faith from its earliest origins in occult Freemasonry to the allegedly "scientific" Marxism of today. Through brilliant portraits of the clashing case of characters that populated this centuries-long drama, he shows how two of the three ideals of the French Revolution—equality and fraternity—split apart and became the founding tenets of two separate revolutionary traditions. The first, equality, became the base for the vision of a transnational society free of class distinctions; while the second, fraternity, did the same for the vision—always more powerful and popular—of the nation and its brotherhood of blood. Both had their heroes and madmen, philosophers and adventurers; and both degenerated from their original dream of transcendence and glory to their twentieth-century denouements in totalitarian tyranny. This panoramic history reveals the dynamic role of symbols and songs as well as the surprising origins of words like "communism." The scene moves from the cafes of Paris to the opera houses of Italy and on to a technological institute in St. Petersburg. The key actors include forgotten figures like Bonneville, Barmby, and Radchenko alongside the more familiar Saint-Just, Marx, and Lenin.

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