

February 03, 2015

ARCHANGEL MICHAEL:

In this speech by a fallen angel, you find how the French Revolution went forward. And some of you are still not able to see the evil in the false hierarchy groups' teachings. Thus read this and find what was the cause of the Reign of Terror that the churches were closed. Religion in France did not as before ever regain its prior leadership.

Robespierre's Speech on the Moral and Political Principles of Domestic Policy

The speech delivered by Robespierre in behalf of the Committee of Public Safety, in the Convention session of 17 pluviöse, is important for two reasons. It marks the high point of his struggle against divisive factions, both moderates and extremists, and it presents the outline of his vision of the Republic.

The plan of the speech is simple. After a dozen introductory paragraphs, the main proposition is stated: the Convention's policies must be guided by the principles of democratic government, and must meet the revolutionary circumstances of the war of liberty against tyranny. In the argument, which follows, each half of this proposition is developed separately. The speech doses with a peroration on the dangers of the existing situation and the remedies for it. Printed in pamphlet form immediately after delivery, this speech has been reprinted several times.

Citizens, representatives of the people:

We set forth, some time ago, the principles of our foreign policy. We come today to develop the principles of our domestic policy.

After operating for a long time at random and as if impelled by the movement of factions opposing one another, the representatives of the French people have finally shown a character and a government. A sudden change in the Nation's fortune told Europe that there had been a regeneration among the national representatives. But, up to the very moment when I am speaking, it must be agreed, we have been guided, in such stormy circumstances, by love of the good and by awareness of our country's needs rather than by a correct theory and precise rules of conduct, which we did not even have time to sketch.

It is time to mark clearly the aim of the revolution and the end we want to reach; it is time to take account of the obstacles which still separate us from it and of the means that we ought to adopt to attain it: a simple and important idea which seems never to have been noticed. Well, how could a weak and corrupt government have dared to implement it? A king, a proud senate, a Caesar, a Cromwell, must first of all cover their plans with a religious veil, compromise with all the vices, caress all the parties, crush the party of the good men, oppress or deceive the people, to attain the aim of their perfidious ambition. If we had not had a greater task to perform, if nothing were involved but interests of a faction or of a new aristocracy, we could have believed, like certain writers even more ignorant than they are perverse, that the plan of the French revolution was plainly written in the books of Tacitus and Machiavelli, and we could have looked for the duties of the people's representatives in the history of Augustus, Tiberius, or Vespasian, or even in that of certain French legislators; for, except for a few nuances of perfidy or cruelty, all tyrants are alike.

For our part, we come today to reveal to the whole world your political secrets, in order that all the friends of our country can rally to the voice of reason and the public interest; in order that the French nation and its representatives may be respected in all the countries where the knowledge of their real principles can be obtained; in order that the intriguers who are always seeking to replace other intriguers may be judged by easy and certain rules.

Farsighted precautions are needed to make liberty's destiny de-

pend on the truth, which is eternal, more than on men, who are ephemeral, so that if the government forgets the people's interests or if it falls back into the hands of corrupt men, in accordance with the natural course of things, the light of recognized principles will make clear its betrayals, and so that every new faction will meet death in the mere thought of crime.

Happy the people who can reach that point! For, whatever new outrages are prepared against it, what resources are presented by an order of things in which the public reason is the guarantee of liberty!

What is the end toward which we are aiming? The peaceable enjoyment of liberty and equality; the reign of that eternal justice whose laws have been graven not on marble and stone but in the hearts of all men, even the slave who forgets them and the tyrant who denies them. [Applause.] . . .

We want to substitute, in our land, morality for egotism; probity for honor; principles for customs; ethics for propriety; the rule of reason for the tyranny of fashion; disdain for vice for disdain for misfortune; self-respect for insolence; spiritual grandeur for vanity; love of glory for love of money; good men for good society; merit for intrigue; genius for wit; truth for brilliance; the charm of happiness for the boredom of sensual pleasure; human greatness for the pettiness of the great; a magnanimous, powerful, happy people for an easy, frivolous, and miserable people: that is, all the virtues and all the miracles of the republic for all the vices and all the absurdities of the monarchy. [Applause.] . . .

What is the nature of the government that can effect these prodigies? Only that government which is democratic or republican: these two words are synonyms, despite the abuses of common diction; for aristocracy is no more republican than is monarchy. Democracy is not a state in which the whole people, continually assembled, itself rules on all public business, still less is it one in which a hundred thousand fractions of the people decide, by unrelated, hasty, and contradictory measures, on the fate of the entire society; such a government has never existed, and it could exist only to lead the people back to despotism.

Democracy is a state in which the sovereign people, guided by laws which are its own work, itself does all it can do well, and through delegates all it cannot do itself.

It is, then, in the principles of democratic government that you must look for the rules of your political conduct.

But, to found and consolidate democracy, to achieve the peaceable reign of the constitutional laws, we must end the war of liberty against tyranny and pass safely across the storms of the revolution: such is the aim of the revolutionary system that you have enacted. Your conduct, then, ought also to be regulated by the stormy circumstances in which the republic is placed; and the plan of your administration must result from the spirit of the revolutionary government combined with the general principles of democracy.

Now, what is the fundamental principle of the democratic or popular government—that is, the essential spring which makes it move? It is virtue; I am speaking of the public virtue which effected so many prodigies in Greece and Rome and which ought to produce much more surprising ones in republican France; of that virtue which is nothing other than the love of country and of its laws.

But as the essence of the republic or of democracy is equality, it follows that the love of country necessarily includes the love of equality.

It is also true that this sublime sentiment assumes a preference for the public interest over every particular interest; hence the love of country presupposes or produces all the virtues: for what are they other than that spiritual strength which renders one capable of those sacrifices? And how could the slave of avarice or ambition, for example, sacrifice his idol to his country?

Not only is virtue the soul of democracy; it can exist only in that government. . . .

Only in democracy is the state really the *patrie* of all the individuals who compose it and can it count as many interested defenders of its cause as it has citizens. That is the source of the superiority of free peoples over all others. If Athens and Sparta triumphed over the tyrants of Asia, and the Swiss over the tyrants of Spain and Austria, we need not look for any other cause.

But the French are the first people of the world who have established real democracy, by calling all men to equality and to the full rights of the citizen; and there, in my opinion, is the real reason why all the tyrants in league against the Republic will be vanquished.

There are great consequences to be drawn immediately from the principles that we have just set forth.

Since the soul of the Republic is virtue, equality, and since your aim is to found, to consolidate the Republic, it follows that the first rule of your political conduct must be to relate all your operations to the maintenance of equality and the development of virtue; for the first care of the legislator ought to be to fortify the principle of the government. Thus all that tends to stir the love of country, to purify morals and customs, to elevate souls, to direct the passions of the human heart toward the public interest, ought to be adopted or established by you. All that tends to concentrate them in the abjection of the personal self, to reawaken the infatuation for petty things and disdain for great things, ought to be rejected or suppressed. In the system of the French revolution, what is immoral is impolitic, what is corruptive is counterrevolutionary. Weakness, vice, prejudice are the road to royalty. Drawn along too often, perhaps, by the weight of our old usages, as well as by the imperceptible tendency of human weakness, toward false ideas and pusillanimous feelings, we have to guard against excessive energy much less than against excessive weakness. Perhaps the greatest peril we have to avoid is not being fervent from zeal, but rather becoming tired of the good and intimidated by our own courage. So, turn ever tighter the spring of republican government, instead of letting it run down. I have no need to say here that I do not want to justify any excess. The most sacred principles are abused; it is for the government's wisdom to consider circumstances, to seize the right moment, to choose the method; to prepare great things is an essential part of doing them, as wisdom itself is part of virtue.

We do not claim to cast the French republic in the Spartan mold; we want neither the austerity nor the corruption of a cloister. What we have just presented to you, in all its purity, is the moral and political principle of popular government. You have a compass by which you can steer into the middle of the storms of passion, into the eye of the hurricane of intrigues around you. You have the touchstone by which you can test all laws, all proposals, suggested to you. By ceaselessly comparing them with that principle, you can henceforward avoid the usual peril of great assemblies, the danger of being surprised and of hasty, incoherent, and contradictory measures. You can give all your operations the cohesion, unity, wis-

dom, and dignity that ought to distinguish the representatives of the first people of the world.

It is not the obvious consequences of the principle of democracy that need to be presented in detail; it is rather the simple and fertile principle itself that deserves to be expounded.

Republican virtue can be considered in relation to the people and in relation to the government; it is necessary in both. When only the government lacks virtue, there remains a resource in the people's virtue; but when the people itself is corrupted, liberty is already lost.

Fortunately virtue is natural to the people, notwithstanding aristocratic prejudices. A nation is truly corrupted when, having by degrees lost its character and its liberty, it passes from democracy to aristocracy or to monarchy; that is the decrepitude and death of the body politic. . . .

But when, by prodigious efforts of courage and reason, a people breaks the chains of despotism to make them into trophies of liberty; when by the force of its moral temperament it comes, as it were, out of the arms of the death, to recapture all the vigor of youth; when by turns it is sensitive and proud, intrepid and docile, and can be stopped neither by impregnable ramparts nor by the innumerable armies of the tyrants armed against it, but stops of itself upon confronting the law's image; then if it does not climb rapidly to the summit of its destinies, this can only be the fault of those who govern it.

Besides, in a sense, one can say that to love justice and equality, the people does not need great virtue; it has only to love itself.

But the magistrate is obliged to sacrifice his interest to the people's interest, and his pride, derived from power, to equality. The law must speak imperiously above all to him who is its voice. The government must weigh heavily on all its parts, to hold them in harmony. If there exists a representative body, a primary authority constituted by the people, it must exercise ceaseless surveillance and control over all the public functionaries. But what will control it, if not its own virtue? The higher the source of public order is placed, the purer it ought to be; the representative body, then, must begin in its own midst by subduing all private passions to the general passion for the public weal. Fortunate are the representa-

tives, when their glory and their interest itself, as much as their duties, attach them to the cause of liberty!

From all this let us deduce a great truth: the characteristic of popular government is confidence in the people and severity towards itself.

The whole development of our theory would end here if you had only to pilot the vessel of the Republic through calm waters; but the tempest roars, and the revolution imposes on you another task.

This great purity of the French revolution's basis, the very sublimity of its objective, is precisely what causes both our strength and our weakness. Our strength, because it gives to us truth's ascendancy over imposture, and the rights of the public interest over private interests; our weakness, because it rallies all vicious men against us, all those who in their hearts contemplated despoiling the people and all those who intend to let it be despoiled with impunity, both those who have rejected freedom as a personal calamity and those who have embraced the revolution as a career and the Republic as prey. Hence the defection of so many ambitious or greedy men who since the point of departure have abandoned us along the way because they did not begin the journey with the same destination in view. The two opposing spirits that have been represented in a struggle to rule nature might be said to be fighting in this great period of human history to fix irrevocably the world's destinies, and France is the scene of this fearful combat. Without, all the tyrants encircle you; within, all tyranny's friends conspire; they will conspire until hope is wrested from crime. We must smother the internal and external enemies of the Republic or perish with it; now in this situation, the first maxim of your policy ought to be to lead the people by reason and the people's enemies by terror.

If the spring of popular government in time of peace is virtue, the springs of popular government in revolution are at once *virtue and terror*: virtue, without which terror is fatal; terror, without which virtue is powerless. Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible; it is therefore an emanation of virtue; it is not so much a special principle as it is a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to our country's most urgent needs.

It has been said that terror is the principle of despotic government. Does your government therefore resemble despotism? Yes, as the sword that gleams in the hands of the heroes of liberty resembles that with which the henchmen of tyranny are armed. Let the despot govern by terror his brutalized subjects; he is right, as a despot. Subdue by terror the enemies of liberty, and you will be right, as founders of the Republic. The government of the revolution is liberty's despotism against tyranny. Is force made only to protect crime? And is the thunderbolt not destined to strike the heads of the proud?

Nature imposes on every physical and moral being the law of striving for its own preservation: to reign, crime slaughters innocence; and in crime's hands, innocence resists with all its might. . . .

And yet one or the other must succumb. Indulgence for the royalists, cry certain men, mercy for the villains! No! mercy for the innocent, mercy for the weak, mercy for the unfortunate, mercy for humanity.

Society owes protection only to peaceable citizens; the only citizens in the Republic are the republicans. For it, the royalists, the conspirators are only strangers or, rather, enemies. This terrible war waged by liberty against tyranny—is it not indivisible? Are the enemies within not the allies of the enemies without? The assassins who tear our country apart, the intriguers who buy the consciences that hold the people's mandate; the traitors who sell them; the mercenary pamphleteers hired to dishonor the people's cause, to kill public virtue, to stir up the fire of civil discord, and to prepare political counterrevolution by moral counterrevolution—are all those men less guilty or less dangerous than the tyrants whom they serve? All who interpose their treasonous gentleness between those villains and the avenging sword of national justice resemble those who would throw themselves between the tyrants' henchmen and our soldiers' bayonets; all the impulses of their false sensitivity appear to me only sighs of longing for England and Austria. . . .

With what good humor are we still duped by words! How aristocracy and moderation still govern us through the murderous maxims they gave us!

Aristocracy defends itself better by intrigue than patriotism does by service. We try to control revolutions with the quibbles of the

courtroom; we treat conspiracies against the Republic like lawsuits between individuals. Tyranny kills, and liberty argues; and the code made by the conspirators themselves is the law by which we judge them.

Though it involves our country's safety, general report cannot be substituted for the evidence of testimony, nor obviousness itself for literal proof.

Justice delayed means immunity from punishment; possible impunity encourages all the guilty; and yet there are complaints against the severity of justice; there are complaints against the imprisonment of enemies of the Republic. Examples are sought in the histories of tyrants, because those who complain do not want to choose them in the histories of peoples, nor derive them from the natural tendency of liberty threatened. . . .

It is clemency to mankind to punish its oppressors; it is barbarism to pardon them. Tyrants' rigor has no principle but rigor; the republican government's rigor begins in charity. . . .

What frivolity it would be to regard a few victories won by patriotism as the end of all our dangers. Glance at our real situation. You will be aware that you need vigilance and energy more than ever. Sullen ill-will everywhere acts contrary to the government's operations. The fatal influence of the foreign courts, while it is more effectively hidden, is thereby neither less active nor less deadly. Crime, intimidated, has done nothing but cover its operations more adroitly.

The internal enemies of the French people are divided into two factions, like two army corps. They march under banners of different colors and by separate routes; but they are marching to the same destination: their purpose is the disorganization of popular government, the ruin of the Convention—that is, the triumph of tyranny. One of these two factions urges us to commit excesses; the other, to be weak. One wants to change liberty into drunken frenzy; the other, into prostitution. . . .

One faction has been called the moderates; the other has been designated—more cleverly perhaps than precisely—as the ultra-revolutionaries. This denomination can in no case be applied to the men of good faith who may be carried away by zeal and ignorance to actions beyond the sound policy of the revolution, and it does

not characterize accurately the perfidious men whom tyranny hires to practice false and deadly applications that compromise the sacred principles of our revolution.

The false revolutionary is deficient more often than excessive in [his response to] the revolution. He is moderate or insanely patriotic, according to the circumstances. What he will think tomorrow is decided for him today by committees of Prussians, English, Austrians, even Muscovites. He opposes energetic measures and exaggerates them when he has been unable to block them. He is severe toward innocence but indulgent toward crime, accusing even the guilty who are not rich enough to purchase his silence nor important enough to merit his zeal, but carefully refraining from ever compromising himself to the point of defending virtue that has been slandered; now and then discovering plots that have already been discovered, ripping the masks off traitors who are already unmasked and even decapitated but extolling traitors who are living and still influential; always eager to embrace the opinion of the moment and as alert never to enlighten it, and above all never to clash with it; always ready to adopt bold measures provided they have many drawbacks; falsely attacking the measures that have only advantages or adding all the amendments that can render them harmful; speaking the truth sparingly but as much as he must in order to acquire the right to lie with impunity; giving forth dribbles of good and torrents of evil; full of fire for great resolutions which signify nothing; worse than indifferent to those which can honor the people's cause and save our country; giving much attention to the forms of patriotism; very much attached, like the devout whose enemy he declares himself to be, to formal observances, he would prefer to wear out a hundred red caps than to accomplish one good deed. [Applause.] . . .

Do you want to put [such men] to the test? Ask them, not for oaths and declamations, but for real services.

Is action needed? They orate. Is deliberation required? They want to begin with action. Are the times peaceful? They will oppose every useful change. Are the times stormy? They will speak of reforming everything, in order to throw everything into confusion. Do you want to keep sedition in check? They remind you of Caesar's clemency. Do you want to deliver patriots from persecution? They propose to you as a model the firmness of Brutus. They discover

that so-and-so was a noble when he is serving the Republic; they no longer remember this as soon as he betrays it. Is peace advantageous? They display the rewards of victory. Is war necessary? They praise the delights of peace. Must our territory be defended? They want to go and punish the tyrants beyond the mountains and seas. Must our forts be recaptured? They want to take the churches by assault and scale heaven itself. [Applause.] They forget the Austrians in order to make war on the devout. Do we need the support of faithful allies? They will declaim against all the governments in the world and propose that you put on trial the great Mogul himself. [Applause.] Do the people go to the Capitol to give thanks to the gods for their victories? They intone lugubrious chants over our previous reverses. Is it a matter of winning new victories? In our midst they sow hatreds, divisions, persecutions, and discouragement. Must we make the sovereignty of the people a reality and concentrate its strength by a strong, respected government? They discover that the principles of government injure popular sovereignty. Must we call for the rights of the people oppressed by the government? They talk only of respect for the laws and of obedience owed to the constituted authorities.

They have found an admirable expedient for promoting the efforts of the republican government: it is to disorganize it, to degrade it completely, to make war on the patriots who have contributed to our successes. . . .

Thus, for example, after having disseminated everywhere the germs of civil war by a violent attack on religious prejudices, they will seek to fortify fanaticism and aristocracy by the very measures, in favor of freedom of religious observances, that sound policy has prescribed to you. If you had left free play to the conspiracy, it would have produced, sooner or later, a terrible and universal reaction; but if you stop it, they will still seek to turn this to their account by urging that you protect the priests and the moderates. You must not even be surprised if the authors of this strategy are the very priests who most boldly confess their charlatanism.

If the patriots, carried away by a pure but thoughtless zeal, have somewhere been made the dupes of their intrigues, they will throw all the blame upon the patriots; because the principal point of their Machiavellian doctrine is to ruin the Republic by ruining the republicans, as one conquers a country by overthrowing the army

which defends it. One can thereby appreciate one of their favorite principles, which is: men must count as nothing—a maxim of royal origin, which means that all the friends of liberty must be abandoned to them.

It is to be noticed that the men who seek only the public good are to be the victims of those who seek to advance themselves, and this comes from two causes: first, that the intriguers attack using the vices of the old regime; second, that the patriots defend themselves only with the virtues of the new.

Such an internal situation ought to appear worthy of all your attention, above all if you reflect that at the same time you have the tyrants of Europe to combat, 1,200,000 men under arms to maintain; and that the government is constantly obliged to repair, with energy and vigilance, all the evils which the innumerable multitude of our enemies has prepared for us during the course of five years.

What is the remedy for all these evils? We know no other than the extension of that mainspring of the Republic: virtue.

Democracy perishes by two kinds of excess: the aristocracy of those who govern or the people's scorn for the authorities whom the people itself has established, scorn which makes each clique, each individual take over the public power and lead the people, through excessive disorders, to its destruction or to the power of one man.

The double effort of the moderates and the false revolutionaries is to drive us back and forth perpetually between these two perils.

But the people's representatives can avoid them both, because government is always able to be just and wise; and, when it has that character, it is sure of the confidence of the people. . . .

It is a truth which ought to be regarded as commonplace in politics that a great body invested with the confidence of a great people can be lost only through its own failings. Your enemies know this; therefore you can be sure that they are applying themselves above all to reawaken in your midst all the passions which can further their sinister designs.

What can they do against the national representation if they do not succeed in beguiling it into impolitic acts which can supply pretexts for their criminal declamations? They are therefore necessarily obliged to obtain two kinds of agents, those who will seek to degrade it by their speeches and those, in its very midst, who will do

their utmost to deceive it in order to compromise its glory and the interests of the Republic. . . .

Far from us is the idea that there still exists in our midst a single man weakling enough to intend to serve the tyrants' cause! But farther from us still is the crime, for which we would not be pardoned, of deceiving the National Convention and betraying the French people by a culpable silence! For it is the good fortune of a free people that truth, which is the scourge of despots, is always its strength and salvation. Now it is true that there still exists a danger for our liberty, perhaps the only serious danger which remains for it to confront. That danger is a plan which has existed for rallying all the enemies of the Republic by reviving party spirit; for persecuting the patriots, defeating and disheartening the faithful agents of the republican government, rendering inadequate the most essential parts of the public service. They have intended to deceive the Convention about men and about conditions; they have sought to put it on the wrong track about the causes of abuses, which they have exaggerated so as to make them irremediable; they have studiously filled it with false terrors, in order to lead it astray or paralyze it; they seek to divide it, above all to create division between the representatives sent out to the departments and the Committee of Public Safety. They have sought to influence those representatives to contradict the measures of the central authority, in order to produce disorder and confusion; they have sought to embitter them after their return, in order to make them the unknowing instruments of a cabal. The foreigners turn to their profit all private passions, even abused patriotism.

They first adopted the plan of going straight to their goal, by slandering the Committee of Public Safety; they flattered themselves aloud that it would succumb under the weight of its laborious duties. Victory and the good fortune of the French people defended it. Since that time they have adopted the plan of praising it while paralyzing it and destroying the results of its work. All those vague declamations against necessary agents of the Committee; all the proposals for disorganization, disguised under the name of reforms, already rejected by the Convention and reproduced today with a strange artificiality; that eagerness to extol the intriguers whom the Committee of Public Safety was obliged to remove; that terror

inspired in good citizens; that indulgence with which conspirators are favored: that whole system of imposture and intrigue, whose principal author is a man whom you have driven from your midst, is directed against the National Convention and tends to give effect to the resolutions of all the enemies of France.

It is since the time when this system was put forward in pamphlets and given effect in public acts that aristocracy and royalism have again begun to raise their insolent heads, that patriotism has again been persecuted in a part of the Republic, that the national authority has encountered a resistance which the intriguers had begun to abandon. If these indirect attacks had served only to divide the attention and energy of those who have to carry the immense burden that you have assigned them and to distract them too often from the great measures for the public salvation in order to occupy themselves with thwarting dangerous intrigues; even so, they could be considered as a diversion useful to our enemies.

But let us be reassured, it is here that the truth has its sanctuary; it is here that the founders of the Republic reside, the avengers of humanity, and the destroyers of tyrants. [Applause.]

Here, to destroy an abuse it suffices to point it out. It suffices for us to appeal, in the name of our country, from counsels of self-love or from the weaknesses of individuals, to the virtue and the glory of the National Convention.

We call for a solemn debate upon all the subjects of its anxiety and upon everything that can influence the progress of the revolution. We adjure it not to permit any hidden particular interest to usurp ascendancy here over the general will of the assembly and the indestructible power of reason.

We will limit ourselves today to proposing that by your formal approval you sanction the moral and political truths upon which your internal administration and the stability of the Republic ought to be founded, as you have already sanctioned the principles of your conduct toward foreign peoples. Thereby you will rally all good citizens, you will take hope away from the conspirators, you will assure your progress and confound the kings' intrigues and slanders, you will honor your cause and your character in the eyes of all peoples.

Give the French people this new gage of your zeal to protect patriotism, of your inflexible justice for the guilty, and of your

devotion to the people's cause. Order that the moral and political principles which we have just expounded will be proclaimed, in your name, within and without the Republic. [Applause.]