

## 16. MAXIMILIEN ROBESPIERRE: ESTABLISHMENT OF THE WORSHIP OF A SUPREME BEING\*

BY ROBESPIERRE [ADDRESS BY ROBESPIERRE READ TO THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC SAFETY, MAY 7, 1794]

*Citizens:* Every doctrine which consoles and elevates the mind ought to be received; reject all those which tend to degrade it and corrupt it. Reanimate—exalt—every generous sentiment and those great moral truths which some have attempted to extinguish. . . .

The idea of the Supreme Being and of the immortality of the soul is a continual appeal to justice: this idea is then social and republican. I know of no legislator who ever attempted to nationalize atheism . . . [and] you are fortunate in living in an age and in a country whose enlightenment leaves us no other task to fulfil than to recall men to nature and to truth. Be very cautious not to sever the sacred bond which unites men to the Author of their being. . . .

Let us learn the lessons of history. . . . Among those . . . at the time of which I speak, . . . one man, Rousseau, by the elevation of his mind and the grandeur of his character, showed himself worthy of being the preceptor of the human race. He openly attacked tyranny. He spoke with the enthusiasm of the Divinity; his masculine and virtuous eloquence painted in glowing colors the charms of virtue; it defended those consolatory dogmas with which reason supports the human heart. . . . Ah, if he had witnessed this Revolution, of which he was the precursor, who can doubt that his generous soul would have embraced with transport the cause of justice and equality? . . .

. . . Fanatics, hope nothing from us! To recall men to the pure worship of the Supreme Being is to give a mortal blow to fanaticism. All fiction disappears before truth, and every folly falls before reason. . . . Ambitious priests, do not expect that we shall re-establish your empire! . . . You have destroyed yourselves. And, besides, what is there in common between the priests and God? How different is the God of nature from the God of priests? Priests have so disfigured

the Supreme Being that they have done their best to destroy the idea; they have made him sometimes a globe of fire, sometimes an ox, sometimes a tree, sometimes a man, and sometimes a king. Priests created a God in their own image—they made him jealous, capricious, covetous, cruel, and implacable. . . . The true priest of the Supreme Being is nature; his temple the universe; his religion virtue; his *fêtes* the joy of a great people assembled under his eyes, to draw closer the sweet bonds of universal fraternity, and to present to him the homage of pure and sensitive hearts. . . .

The enemies of the Republic are all corrupt men. The patriot is in every sense an honest and magnanimous man. It is little to annihilate kings; we must make every nation respect the character of the French people. It is useless to bear to the end of the universe the renown of our arms, if very passion tears with impunity the bosom of our own country. Let us beware of the intoxication of success! Let us be terrible in reverses, modest in triumph, and let us secure peace and happiness by wisdom and morality. That is the true aim of our labors—

that our heroic and difficult task. We believe we shall achieve this aim by proposing the following decree\*:

1. The French people recognize the existence of the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul.

2. They recognize that the worship worthy of the Supreme Being is the practice of the duties of man.

3. They place in the first rank of these duties, to detest bad faith and tyranny, to punish tyrants and traitors, to relieve the unfortunate, to respect the weak, to defend the oppressed, to do to others all the good that is possible and not to be unjust to anyone.

4. Festivals shall be instituted to remind man of the thought of the divinity and of the dignity of his being.

5. They shall take their names from the glorious events of our revolution, from the virtues most cherished and most useful to man, and from the great gifts of nature.

6. The French Republic shall celebrate every year the festival of July 14, 1789, August 10, 1792, January 21, 1793, and May 31, 1793.

7. It shall celebrate on the days of *décadi* [The months in the new republican calendar were divided into three equal parts of ten days each called *décades*, the 10th days termed *décadi*] the list of festivals that follows: to the supreme being and to nature; to the human race; to the French people; to the benefactors of humanity; to the martyrs of liberty; to liberty and equality; to the republic; to the liberty of the world; to the love of the fatherland; to the hatred of tyrants and of traitors; to truth; to justice; to modesty; to glory and immortality; to friendship; to frugality; to courage; to good faith; to heroism; to disinterestedness; to stoicism; to love; to conjugal love; to paternal love; to maternal tenderness; to filial affection; to childhood; to youth; to manhood; to old age; to misfortune; to agriculture; to industry; to our forefathers; to posterity; to happiness. . . .

8. The National Convention summons all the talents worthy to serve the cause of humanity to the honor of contributing to its establishment by hymns and patriotic songs and by all the means which can enhance its beauty and utility.

10. The Committee of Public Safety shall confer distinction upon those works which seem the best adapted to carry on these purposes and shall reward their authors.

11. Liberty of worship is maintained, in conformity with the decree of 18 Frimaire.

12. Every gathering that is aristocratic and contrary to public order shall be suppressed.

13. In case of disturbances of which any worship whatsoever may be the occasion or motive, those who may excite them by fanatical preaching or by counter-revolutionary insinuations, those who may provoke them by unjust and gratuitous violence, shall likewise be punished with all the severity of the law. . . .

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