

Source I

The condition of France is such that it may end up in total disintegration, and this result will come even more quickly if violent solutions are applied to all the overwhelming ills. The cause of all our problems is the partisanship that divides and destroys governmental authority. There are, however, only two ways to accomplish this: force or reconciliation.

Force can only be used by foreign armies and this means resorting to war. It will be horrible because it will be motivated by violence and despair. Can a king contemplate all these misfortunes with equanimity and bring them down upon his people?

One can never govern a people against its will. This maxim is as true in Constantinople as it is in a republic. Right now the will of this nation is for the Rights of Man, senseless though they be.

I believe then that I should join my will to the principles of the Constitution. I realize how difficult it will be to govern a large nation this way, I will even say that I believe it to be impossible. But the obstacles that I would have put in the way [by refusing to accept the Constitution] would have brought about the war I sought to avoid. I prefer to proceed towards a better order than that which would result from my refusal

Source:

A letter from Louis to his brothers. Félix-Sébastien Feuillet de Conches, ed., Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette et Madame Élisabeth, vol. 2 (Paris: Plon, 1864), 366–75.