



God Arising and Pleading His People's Cause Abraham Keteltas (1777)

Abraham Keteltas, a white New Yorker of Dutch ancestry, was trained as a Presbyterian minister. In 1776, he was a delegate in New York's revolutionary government, which declared independence from Britain. To escape the subsequent occupation of New York by the British military, he fled to Massachusetts, where he preached the pro-revolutionary sermon from which these excerpts are taken. Keteltas paints the revolution in starkly dualistic terms, as a struggle between good and evil. Among the evils he attributes to the British government are its efforts to mobilize indigenous Americans and enslaved Africans to fight against the rebel colonists, whom Keteltas characterizes as the true benefactors of the indigenous and the enslaved.

From the preceding discourse, I think we have reason to conclude that the cause of this American continent, against the measures of a cruel, bloody, and vindictive ministry, is the cause of God. We are contending for the rights of mankind, for the welfare of millions now living and for the happiness of millions yet unborn. If it is the undisputed duty of mankind to do good to all as they have opportunity, especially to those who are of the household of faith; if they are bound by the commandment of the supreme Lawgiver to love their neighbor as themselves and do to others as they would that others should do unto them—then the war carried on against us is unjust and unwarrantable, and our cause is not only righteous but, most important, it is God's own cause. It is the grand cause of the whole human race, and what can be more interesting and glorious. If the principles on which the present civil war is carried on by the American colonies against the British arms were universally adopted and practiced upon by mankind, they would turn a vale of tears into a paradise of God; whereas opposite principles, and a conduct founded upon them, have filled the world with blood and slaughter, with rapine and violence, with cruelty and injustice, with wretchedness, poverty, horror, desolation, and despair. We cannot therefore doubt that the cause of liberty, united with that of truth and righteousness, is the cause of God. [...]

Liberty is the grand fountain, under God, of every temporal blessing; and, what it is infinitely more important, it is favorable to the propagation of unadulterated Christianity. Liberty is the parent of truth, justice, virtue, patriotism, benevolence, and every generous and noble purpose of the soul. Under the influence of liberty, the arts and sciences, trade, commerce, and husbandry flourish, and the wilderness blossoms like the rose. [...] Under the auspicious smiles of liberty, riches increase; industry strains every nerve, secure of property; and joy and plenty smile on every side. How inestimable a blessing, then, must liberty be, and how inconceivably great its loss!

But if liberty is thus friendly to the happiness of mankind and is the cause of the kind Parent of the universe, certainly tyranny and oppression are the cause of the devil, the cause which God's soul hates. The holy scriptures abound with instances and prophecies of his judgments against tyrants and oppressors; and not only sacred, but profane history, prove the fulfilment of those prophecies. [...]he Bible [records] a tremendous warning against tyranny and oppression.^a God

^a Immediately before this statement, Keteltas had quoted from 1 Kings 21:17-24.

has shown his vehement abhorrence of these atrocious crimes by smiting the perpetrators of them with loathsome diseases and has commissioned lice, worms, and vermin to crawl within and upon them, to devour them alive, to render them into a living carrion, spectacles of horror and deformity and insufferable stench and abomination to all about them. Thus has God [...] shown how much he detests, and how severely he will punish, cruelty and injustice, the murder of the innocent, and the invasion of their rights and property.

And now are there any who call themselves Christians who dare avow, espouse, and support the invasion of liberty and the murder of those who rise up in its vindication? Yes, to the disgrace of human nature be it spoken, there are such inveterate foes to mankind—and who are they? They are the ministry and parliament of Great Britain, with their adherents and abettors. The groundwork of their present destructive measures is this most iniquitous decree: that the parliament of Great Britain hath power, and of right ought to have power, to make laws and statutes to bind these colonies in all cases whatsoever. This decree is contrary to the laws of God and man, to the British constitution, Magna Charta, the bill of rights, the charters of the colonies, and the express stipulations of preceding kings and their representatives. And as the cause is iniquitous in itself, so the war to support it has been carried on in the most inhuman, cruel, and injurious manner. The houses and possessions of the friends to this country have been seized and plundered; rich and valuable furniture has been wantonly destroyed or meanly seized and carried away. Our negroes, who have been nourished and brought up by us, and the savages of the wilderness, for whose temporal and eternal welfare we have labored, have been instigated to mangle, scalp, and murder us. Every engine has been employed to ruin our commerce, trade, husbandry, and religion. Every method has been contrived and executed to deprive us of the necessaries of life and cause us to perish for the want of food, clothing, and the means of defense. [...]

Our cause, therefore, my dear brethren, is not only good, but it has been prudently conducted. Be therefore of good courage; it is a glorious cause. It is the cause of truth against error and falsehood; the cause of righteousness against iniquity; the cause of the oppressed against the oppressor; the cause of pure and undefiled religion against bigotry, superstition, and human inventions. It is the cause of the Reformation against popery, of liberty against arbitrary power, of benevolence against barbarity, and of virtue against vice. It is the cause of justice and integrity against bribery, venality, and corruption. In short, it is the cause of heaven against hell—of the kind Parent of the universe against the prince of darkness and the destroyer of the human race. It is the cause for which heroes have fought, patriots bled, prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, and righteous men have died. Nay, it is a cause for which the Son of God came down from his celestial throne and expired on a cross. It is a cause for the sake of which your pious ancestors forsook all the delights and enjoyments of England, that land of wealth and plenty, and came to this once howling wilderness, destitute of houses, cultivated fields, the comforts and conveniences of life. This is a cause for the prosperity of which millions of fathers are praying, and our gracious High Priest is interceding [...]

The cause of God—his own cause—must prosper, in spite of earth and hell [...] Trust ye, therefore, the Lord Jehovah, for [...] he will never suffer the righteous to be moved. Eminent divines, celebrated poets, have given it as their opinion, that America will be a glorious land of freedom, knowledge, and religion—an asylum for distressed, oppressed, and persecuted virtue.

[...] Exert, therefore, your utmost efforts, strain every nerve, do all you can to promote this cause. Plead earnestly with God in its behalf by continual prayer and supplication, by repentance and reformation, by forsaking every vice and [by] the practice of universal virtue. Be ready to fight for it and maintain it to the last drop of your blood. *Herein was the love of God manifested, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* Pray for the happy period when tyranny, oppression, and wretchedness shall be banished from the earth; when universal love and liberty, peace and righteousness, shall prevail; when angry contentions shall be no more and wars shall cease, even unto the ends of the earth; when the Jews shall be brought into the Christian church with the fullness of the Gentiles, and all Israel shall be saved; when the celestial country and the heaven of heavens shall resound with joyful acclamations because the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. Hasten this blessed, this long wished-for period, O Father of mercies, for thy dear Son's sake. AMEN and AMEN.

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