



The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor
Ezra Stiles (1783)

Ezra Stiles was a white Congregational minister and president of the college that later became Yale University. The following excerpts come from a sermon Stiles delivered to newly elected members of Connecticut's state government in his capacity as a minister of Connecticut's state church. Stiles's sermon predicted a splendid future for the almost officially independent United States (the peace settlement formally ending the war for independence had not yet been finalized) and offered lengthy religious and political advice for how to achieve that splendid future. In these excerpts from a section in the middle of the sermon, Stiles characterizes the United States as an expanding, English, Protestant nation—an "empire"—with a divine mission to promote political liberty and true Christianity throughout the world.

I have thus shown wherein consists the true political welfare of a civil community or sovereignty. The foundation is laid in a judicious distribution of property and in a good system of polity and jurisprudence, on which will arise, under a truly patriotic, upright, and firm administration, the beautiful superstructure of a well-governed and prosperous empire.

Already does the new constellation of the United States begin to realize this glory. It has already risen to an acknowledged sovereignty among the republics and kingdoms of the world. And we have reason to hope and, I believe, to expect that God has still greater blessings in store for this vine which his own right hand hath planted, to make us high among the nations in praise and in name and in honor. The reasons are very numerous, weighty, and conclusive. [...]

[“This will be a very great nation”]

Liberty, civil and religious, has sweet and attractive charms. The enjoyment of this, with property, has filled the English settlers in America with a most amazing spirit, which has operated, and still will operate, with great energy. Never before has the experiment been so effectually tried of every man's reaping the fruits of his labor and feeling his share in the aggregate system of power. [...]

Our degree of population is such as to give us reason to expect that this will become a great people. It is probable that within a century from our independence, the sun will shine on fifty millions of inhabitants in the United States. This will be a great, a very great, nation, nearly equal to half Europe. Already has our colonization extended down the Ohio and to Koskaseah^a on the Mississippi. [...A]n accelerated multiplication will attend our general propagation and overspread the whole territory westward for ages. So that before the millennium, the English settlements in America may become more numerous millions than that greatest dominion on earth, the Chinese Empire. [...]

We shall have a communication with all nations in commerce, manners, and science beyond

^a Kaskaskia, Illinois—a nearly abandoned village in the 21st century, but in the 1700s and early 1800s it was a territorial capital, first French, later American.

anything heretofore known in the world. Manufacturers and artisans, and men of every description, may perhaps come and settle among us. They will be few indeed in comparison with the annual thousands of our natural increase and will be incorporated with the prevailing hereditary complexion of the first settlers—we shall not be assimilated to them, but they to us, especially in the second and third generations. This fermentation and communion of nations will doubtless produce something very new, singular, and glorious. [...]

The rough, sonorous diction of the English language may here take its Athenian polish and receive its attic urbanity, as it will probably become the vernacular tongue of more numerous millions than ever yet spake one language on earth. It may continue for ages to be the prevailing and general language of North America. [...T]he English language will grow up with the present American population into great purity and elegance, unmitigated by the foreign dialects of foreign conquests. And in this connection, I may observe with pleasure how God, in his providence, has ordered that, at the Reformation, the English translation of the Bible should be made with very great accuracy—with greater accuracy, it is presumed, than any other translation. [...] It may have been designed by Providence for the future perusal of more millions of the human race than ever were able to read one book, and for their use to the millennial ages.

[“Illumine the world with liberty”]

God be thanked, we have lived to see peace restored to this bleeding land, at least a general cessation of hostilities among the belligerent powers. And on this occasion, does it not become us to reflect how wonderful, how gracious, how glorious has been the good hand of our God upon us, in carrying us through so tremendous a warfare! We have sustained a force brought against us which might have made any empire on earth to tremble; and yet our bow has abode in strength, and, having obtained help of God, we continue unto this day. [...] What but a miracle has preserved the union of the States, the purity of Congress, and the unshaken patriotism of every General Assembly? It is God who has raised up for us a great and powerful ally—an ally which sent us a chosen army and a naval force [...] It is God who so ordered the balancing interests of nations as to produce an irresistible motive in the European maritime powers to take our part. [...] So wonderfully does Divine Providence order the time and coincidence of the public national motives, cooperating in effecting great public events and revolutions. [...]

Great and extensive will be the happy effects of this warfare, in which we have been called, in Providence, to fight out not the liberties of America only, but the liberties of the world itself. The spirited and successful stand which we have made against tyranny will prove the salvation of England and Ireland and, by teaching all sovereigns the danger of irritating and trifling with the affections and loyalty of their subjects, introduce clemency, moderation, and justice into public government at large through Europe. Already have we learned Ireland and other nations the road to liberty [...] Ireland has become gloriously independent of England. Nor will the spirit rest till Scotland becomes independent also. [...]

This great American Revolution, this recent political phenomenon of a new sovereignty arising among the sovereign powers of the earth, will be attended to and contemplated by all nations. Navigation will carry the American flag around the globe itself and display the thirteen stripes and new constellation at Bengal and Canton, on the Indus and Ganges, on the Whang-ho and the

Yang-tse-kiang, and with commerce will import the wisdom and literature of the East. That prophecy of Daniel is now literally fulfilling [which says] there shall be a universal traveling to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. This knowledge will be brought home and treasured up in America and, being here digested and carried to the highest perfection, may reblaze back from America to Europe, Asia, and Africa and illumine the world with truth and liberty.

That great civilian Dr. John Adams, the learned and illustrious American ambassador, observes thus: “But the great designs of Providence must be accomplished—great indeed! The progress of society will be accelerated by centuries by this Revolution. The Emperor of Germany is adopting, as fast as he can, American ideas of toleration and religious liberty; and it will become the fashionable system of Europe very soon. Light spreads from the dayspring in the west; and may it shine more and more until the perfect day.” So spreading may be the spirit for the restoration and recovery of long-lost national rights, that even the Cortes of Spain may re-exist and resume their ancient splendor, authority, and control of royalty. The same principles of wisdom and enlightened politics may establish rectitude in public government throughout the world. [...] An emulation for liberty and science is enkindled among the nations and will doubtless produce something very liberal and glorious in this age of science, this period of the empire of reason. [...]

[“Gospelizing the nations of the earth”]

Little would civilians have thought, ages ago, that the world should ever look to America for models of government and polity; little did they think of finding this most perfect polity among the poor outcasts, the contemptible people of New England [...] And while Europe and Asia may hereafter learn that the most liberal principles of law and civil polity are to be found on this side the Atlantic, they may also find the true religion here, depurated from the rust and corruption of ages, and learn from us to reform and restore the church to its primitive purity. [...]

More than three quarters of mankind yet remain heathen. Heaven put a stop to the propagation of Christianity when the church became corrupted with the adoration of numerous deities and images, because this would have been only exchanging an old for a new idolatry. Nor is Christendom now larger than it was nine centuries ago. The promising prospects of the *Propaganda fide* at Rome are come to nothing, and it may be of the divine destiny that all other attempts for gospelizing the nations of the earth shall prove fruitless until the present Christendom itself be recovered to the primitive purity and simplicity; at which time, instead of the Babel confusion of contradicting missionaries, all will harmoniously concur in speaking one language, one holy faith, one apostolic religion to an uncontroverted world. At this period, and in effecting this great event, we have reason to think that the United States may be of no small influence and consideration. [...] It may have been of the Lord that Christianity is to be found in such greater purity in this church, exiled into the wildernesses of America, and that its purest body should be evidently advancing forward, by an augmented natural increase and spiritual edification, into a singular superiority, with the ultimate subserviency to the glory of God in converting the world. [...]

And when the set time [...] shall come in God’s good and holy providence, while Christendom may no longer disdain to adopt a reformation from us, the then newly gospelized heathen may light up their candle at America. In this country—out of sight of miters and the purple, and

removed from systems of corruption confirmed for ages and supported by the spiritual janissaries of an ecclesiastical hierarchy aided and armed by the secular power—religion may be examined with the noble Berean freedom, the freedom of American-born minds. And revelation, both as to the true evangelical doctrines and church polity, may be settled here before they shall have undergone a thorough discussion, and been weighed with a calm and unprejudiced candor, elsewhere. Great things are to be effected in the world before the millennium, which I do not expect to commence under seven or eight hundred years hence; and perhaps the liberal and candid disquisitions in America are to be rendered extensively subservient to some of the most glorious designs of Providence, and particularly in the propagation and diffusion of religion through the earth—in filling the whole earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

A time will come when six hundred millions of the human race shall be ready to drop their idolatry and all false religion, when Christianity shall triumph over superstition, as well as Deism and Gentilism and Mohammedanism. They will then search all Christendom for the best model, the purest exemplification of the Christian church, with the fewest human mixtures. And when God in his providence shall convert the world, should the newly Christianized nations assume our form of religion, should American missionaries be blessed to succeed in the work of Christianizing the heathen—in which the Romanists and foreign Protestants have very much failed—it would be an unexpected wonder and a great honor to the United States. And thus the American Republic, by illuminating the world with truth and liberty, would be exalted and made high among the nations, in praise and in name and in honor. I doubt not this is the honor reserved for us; I had almost said, in the spirit of prophecy, the zeal of the Lord of Hosts will accomplish this. [...]

[Thus I have] shown wherein consists the prosperity of a state, and what reason we have to anticipate the glory of the American empire [...]

Source: Ezra Stiles, *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor* (New Haven, CT: Thomas & Samuel Green, 1783), as reproduced in John Wingate Thornton, ed., *The Pulpit of the American Revolution: Or, The Political Sermons of the Period of 1776* (Boston: Gould & Lincoln, 1860), 438-441, 445-446, 454-455, 458-459, 461-467, 469-472, 485-487, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044009767450>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

Excerpts edited and annotated by John-Charles Duffy. Italicized section headings added by Duffy. In order to keep thematically related material together, text excerpted from pp. 458-463 of the published sermon (beginning with “We shall have a communication with all nations...” and ending with “for their use to the millennial ages”) has been relocated such that here it *precedes* text excerpted from pp. 441-455 (beginning with “God be thanked, we have lived to see peace...” and ending with “...till Scotland becomes independent also”). An additional paragraph break inserted for readability. Footnotes in the source publication omitted. Spelling modernized or Americanized (except for names). Punctuation emended in line with modern conventions. The capitalizing or lowercasing of words reproduces the usage of the source publication, including the seemingly inconsistent capitalization of *Providence*.

These edited excerpts from Stiles’s sermon are intended for **teaching** purposes only. For **research** purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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