



Sermons (like this one) from Colonial-American clergy (like Abraham Keteltas) supported colonial revolutionary ideas by saying that God and Biblical authority backed the Americans' quest for freedom.

Among the words of this highly politicized sermon—delivered in Newburyport, Massachusetts during 1777—are these (split into paragraphs for easier reading):

In all ages of the world, God has raised up men who have by their writings and public speeches, pled his people's cause. How many able advocates in both houses of parliament, have warmly pled and espoused the cause of this much injured country [America].

How many learned, sensible, and excellent pamphlets have been written, both in England and America, to vindicate our rights and Liberties, and prevent our destruction and blessed be God, that all true Christians, in every part of the world, who plead the cause of truth, liberty, and virtue, are in effect interceding for us.

How many fervent prayers are continually ascending from millions of sanctified and benevolent hearts in our behalf, to the throne of grace; and what is more important than all these, we are deeply interested in the all-powerful and all-prevailing intercession of Jesus our merciful High Priest.

...
I might easily shew from prophane [profane], as well as sacred history, that God has pled his own and his people's cause; the cause of religion, liberty, and virtue. But I only mention two instances of modern history.

The first I shall relate, is the revolt of the seven united provinces of the Netherlands.

Philip the 2d, king of Spain, was on the throne of the most powerful kingdom in the world ... He oppressed the Dutch, and began to abridge their civil and religious liberties; they petitioned for a redress of their grievances; but they were ignominiously styled Geux, that is beggars, and their petitions with the greatest scorn and contempt; whereupon, relying on God, they, although but a handful of men, against a mighty monarchy, rebelled against Spain, under the conduct of the prince of Orange, and at length, after a long, and arduous struggle, were acknowledged by their tyrants, to be FREE and INDEPENDENT STATES!

The Swiss cantons, long oppressed by the mighty house of Austria, at last formed the glorious and magnanimous resolution of throwing off the abhor'd yoke of slavery and vile subjection; they fought against multitudes, a most unequal match, but what they wanted in numbers, was supplied in bravery and resolution. The goodness of their cause, and the blessing of God was in the stead of armies - they fought with unparalleled intrepidity against the slaves and instruments of mercenary power, and they gloriously triumphed, and established their liberties upon a strong foundation, which remains unshaken to the present day - they are now the freest people upon earth; nay, they are supposed to be the only free people in three quarters of the terraqueous globe.

Thus I have shewn you how God has pled his own, and his people's cause, I shall now just touch upon our Psalmist's petition, that God would arise and plead our cause.

...
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 indisputed 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 commandments of the supreme lawgiver, to 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, has filled the world with blood and stupor, 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 & Righteousness, is the cause of God.

This is the glorious cause in which Great Britain herself, has frequently and strenuously contended against tyrants and oppressors. Not to mention preceding struggles for liberty...Great-Britain cannot in justice blame us, for imitating her in those noble thoughts of liberty, which have been her greatest glory - she cannot condemn us, without condemning the conduct of her greatest patriots and heroes, without denying her king's right to his crown, and declaring her opposition to the spirit and interest of her own excellent constitution.

I am bold to affirm, that all the surpassing glory, by which she has eclipsed other nations, has been owing to this admirable form of government, so favorable to the rights of mankind. She never has been more illustrious at home or abroad, never more remarkable for her internal glory or external splendor, her peace, plenty and prosperity at home, or her victories, achievements, & conquests abroad, than when her liberties flourished, and a patriot king sway'd the scepter; as she never has been poorer, more miserable and inglorious, never been more impotent in herself, or made a meaner figure in the eyes of her neighbors, than when her liberties were violated, and a tyrant sat upon the throne.

...When principles of liberty, and a ministry and parliament under their influence have governed Great-Britain, how happy have her subjects been? How formidable to her enemies? But when opposite principles and rulers have been predominant. What misery has overwhelmed her inhabitants? And what a contemptible appearance did she make in the sight of other nations? How has she been torn to pieces by civil broils, and been covered with her own blood? How evident is this from the present unnatural war, waged against her own children, to establish arbitrary power?

How have her once victorious troops fled ignominiously, before an army of undisciplined peasants, commanded by officers, most of them utterly inexperienced in war! How have her sturdy veterans been led captive by country boys, and her transports, merchantmen and military stores, been taken by our privateers? What insults doth she not continually meet with from her enemies, without daring to resent them? And unhappily divided against herself, doth she not totter on the brink of destruction, and owe her present precarious respite from ruin, to the policy and forbearance of her foes?

O England! Thou once beloved, happy, and glorious country! Thou land of freedom and delight! How is thy gold become dim, and thy fine gold changed! It was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. Thy rulers are companions of thieves, every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

You see my brethren, from the preceding observations, the unspeakable advantages of liberty, to Great-Britain, and how fatal to her have been the invasion and decline of this inestimable blessing. How absurd then! How inglorious! How cruel and unjust in her conduct, in carrying on this bloody war, to ruin and enslave us - Liberty is the grand fountain, under God, of every temporary blessing, and 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.

It's fair to ask whether this was a religious sermon or a political call to revolutionary action.

Credits:

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress - "Religion and the Founding of the American Republic."

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Political-Sermon-by-Abraham-Keteltas-God-Arising-and-Pleading-His-People-s-Cause->

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Political-Sermon-by-Abraham-Keteltas-God-Arising-and>

-Pleading-His-People-s-Cause-