

Spoken at Commencement at Yale College July 28th 1853
Christian virtue the only safe basis of civil liberty,

The essence of civil liberty is self-government, this principle divides the race into slaves & freemen & according as it is recognized or not, a government is free or despotic.

There are two vital principles in human government. The first is that there is a God, the sovereign of the universe, who has given law to man. The second is that man is God's deputy-governor over himself - Thus from the first was the government of our race displaced - I say revelation & all human history rightly interpreted is a commentary upon it.

Every one who has a true idea of the essentials of manhood is logically a supporter of free institutions, while every sincere supporter of despotism, must be an atheist & a disbeliever in true manhood.

As there are but two genuine depositories of power, the first or God whence all originate & the second in man, who has it, by free gift, from the rightful dispenser, so there can be but two legitimate sources of government - And any & all governments that do not acknowledge these & found themselves upon these, must fall sooner or later from the nature of things. For a government without power is nothing & no power but that which is legitimate can ultimately prevail.

This then is the first requisite of a government that can entertain a reasonable hope of continuance - Free institutions do, in principle at least, acknowledge the true sources of power. This acknowledgement may be in some respects wrong & in much very imperfect. Some experience have their will to perform. But we may be sure that,

though it is fit rough & unincorporated, we are building on the solid & increasing granite for a basis. But the basis is in the principle part of an edifice, it ^{must} offer a secure resting place, the superstructure must stand by strength of its own.

Human Government we have seen must acknowledge manhood, it must then acknowledge man as man, that is, must acknowledge him as a free moral agent. But moral agency, from the fact of its freedom, may be rightly or wrongly used - When a moral agent pursues moral ends by moral means, then he fills his sphere & accomplishes the end of his being, otherwise he abuses his nature & proves himself unworthy of his trust, Now we are assured by authentic & authoritative revelation, amply sustained by the clear voice of prophetic experience, that no other form of manhood will finally prevail on this earth but that which is rightly used,

As in government can ultimately succeed that does not acknowledge manhood, so no manhood can succeed that does not acknowledge God - Here again we feel ourselves anchored to a rock, where we can move in safety & bid defiance to the storm,

The importance of this principle of self-government, under another name, has always been acknowledged by the philosopher of history & human nature - Even those who have been ignorant of its true nature have confessed to the vital necessity of virtue, to form a durable basis for successful government - And what is virtue but self-government,

The weakness of human nature is manifested, not alone in *præ* & naturally seeking the wrong, but in yielding to temptations that ultimately lead to the wrong - Hence it is, that we may often find instances of nations as well as individuals, pursuing a course of iniquity, because they have encountered no superior limitation to turn their natural course - God's laws are immutable,

rewards follow obedience to his laws, even though that obedience be unwilling. Every nations history is a proof of this. National prosperity is always traceable to some form of virtue.

Witness in the history of the world, every government, even the best, seems to have been born with the seeds of decay, and it has appeared as though virtue itself were, inevitably, self-destructive for the very prosperity it begets, proves its destroyer.

Our affections clasping, the land & liberty we love, beseechingly ask if this must be the fate of our own country: Are we bound to ruin by ^{destructive & inevitable} insurmountable ties? This question no mortal man can answer & though naturally interesting, it is not really important. Sure we may be that if like other nations it sinks in ^{beneath its} prosperity, like other nations, it must fall, nor would we wish it otherwise.

But there is a brighter destiny to which it may attain, there is a virtue that is not self-destructive. There is a self-government that can resist the fiercest assaults of temptation & gathering new life & strength from each successive victory, can securely plant itself on the rock of ages - The same divine power that once led off human nature in triumph from the fields of temptation in the wilderness & on the high mountain is still powerful for like conquests -

Christian virtue & that only can ensure prosperity - The arsenal of Omnipotence alone can furnish a rampart that is a safe protection against this ^{destructive} assault of human nature - You who wish an immortality for the institutions of your country, assiduously make them worthy of it - You who think yourselves patriots, prove yourselves such, by fighting valiantly in the sacred cause of Christian virtue, with the mighty weapons of a consistent example & honest, earnest precept -