

A

SERMON

DELIVERED AT WINDSOR,

ON SUNDAY, JULY 4, 1810.

A large, elegant handwritten signature in cursive script, which reads "Geo. Leonard". The signature is written in dark ink and features a prominent initial "G" and a long, sweeping tail.

BY REV. GEORGE LEONARD, A. M.
Rector of St. Paul's Church, Windsor, Vt.

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JULY 22, 1810.

Sermon for Sunday, July 4, 1819.

DEUTERONOMY XXXIII. 29.

Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency.

FORTY-THREE years ago this day, the United States became a nation. This was no less a happy, than a great event, considered either in a religious or civil view. In a civil, we are presented with the novel exhibition of a people rationally and coolly investigating their rights, forming compacts to preserve them, surmounting mighty obstacles, and finally establishing, and sitting down quietly under, a form of government, which we do not pretend to say is perfect, but which comes the nearest to such an one as enlightened reason, directed by honesty, and a thorough knowledge of the nature of man, without any bias of interest, would dictate; and perhaps the most perfect the world has ever seen: in a religious, we see the sacred institutions of every order of christians guarded from the encroachments of more powerful sects, by such a system of toleration, as that charity and catholicism, which every true believer of the gospel should possess, most fully countenance. Under these considerations, and at this auspicious

cious period, when our country is at peace abroad and at home, it cannot be deemed improper on this holy day, now the birth-day both of our spiritual hope in Christ, and of our national freedom, to notice, with hearts full of gratitude to God, our pre-ominent privileges, civil and sacred.

Insensible I am not, that my conduct in giving a political discourse may be by some animadverted; and I regret to say, that the sacred office of the ministry has been so often perverted to subserve the purposes of faction; in supporting or denouncing the political creed of one party or the other; in harranguing for or against some particular administration of government. The pulpit is not in its design, nor should it be made in its use, the forum of political altercation. It is not the proper tribunal before which to arraign public men, and from which to decide the merit of public measures. I have often most sincerely lamented, that in times past the altar should be so frequently profaned with the incense of political zeal; and thus, instead of being, as it should never cease to be, a moral engine to give light, purity and refinement to men, be made the instrument of ambition.

But, as christians, we should not give up all concern for our welfare as citizens; and the more anxious should we be to give an early attention to the means of our safety as members of the body politic, when we reflect that on this depends the security of religious liberty. It is owing to the benignity of our civil institutions, that we do not receive our creeds and our sacred rites at the hand of temporal power, and that our holy religion has

not been converted into a machine to subserve the purposes of tyranny. It is from the truly rational nature of our civil compact, that each order of christians sits quietly under its own vine and fig-tree, and has none to molest or to make afraid; yes, my brethren, that we are assembled in this place, at this time, and enjoy the privilege of worshipping the Most High God as our own unconstrained consciences direct. With great propriety may we, therefore, at this time consider the events, more particularly in a religious point of view, which have contributed, under the guidance of a divine Providence, to the rise and establishment of a vast empire on these western shores of the Atlantic.

This continent was made known to civilized nations at a most fortunate period of the world. The revival of letters had now awakened Europe from the long lethargy of mental night; the mists of gross darkness and barbarism which had for ages oppressed the nations, began to be dispelled; and reason, that noblest gift of God, was beginning to be emancipated from the shackles of papal superstition, and of feudal tyranny. The enormous power of an usurped spiritual dominion had begun to give way before the progress of truth. Men were becoming properly enlightened by science. The clouds of the ages justly denominated dark, were beginning to disperse. Men were becoming more sensible to the dignity of their nature, and were learning to think and reason for themselves. From these causes they were imbibing much of the spirit of civil and religious freedom. They had begun not only to reason well, but to form correct principles of action. As they had once thought and acted only as they were bidden

by their spiritual and temporal tyrants, they were now left more free to investigate, and to form themselves in religion and politics, upon the great principles and maxims of the wisdom of antiquity, and of the purest ages of the christian church. In fine, the moral state of man, so far as the reformation extended, was much elevated and improved.

At the same time men were becoming more enlightened, and ameliorated in their condition, a new region had been discovered, where they might fly from the tyranny of European courts, and enjoy liberty. The American continent opened wide its bosom to the oppressed and the enterprising of the nations of Europe, and thousands flocked to it, in order to put in practice the systems they had formed of civil and religious rights.

True it is, indeed, that the middle and southern sections of the continent were occupied and peopled by papal courts, where their slaves have continued, for near three centuries, to groan under the chains of their temporal and spiritual masters. Late political events have, however, roused them from their servile slumber, to a sense of their rights; and we cannot but look with a secret hope to the issue of the manly struggle in which they are engaged, and give them our best wishes, that they too may share in the liberty and improvement of their brethren of the north; and that a free communication may be opened between these fairest portions of the earth, enriched with all the gifts and treasures of nature, and the rest of the world; that the fer-

tile regions of Mexico, of the Andes, and of the La Plata, may taste all the blessings of Independence.

North America, where a merciful providence has assigned us, my brethren, our happy lot, you very well know, was principally peopled from the Protestant States of the North of Europe, by emigrants from Great Britain and Ireland, and the kindred nations of the continent, Holland and Germany. It is true the Catholic people of France very early established themselves on the borders of the St. Lawrence and the Lakes, and long strove to subject the whole country to their dominion, until, by the energy of a Chatham, they were brought under the British government. It is beyond our recollection, but our fathers have told us, how this people, in connexion with the aborigines, were long the sore scourge of our ancestors, and kept them inured to arms, and all the rugged scenes of war. It would be unnecessary to relate all the hardships and toils, the privations and sacrifices, this hardy, brave, and pious people endured, in encountering and subduing a savage soil, a savage people, and a subtle and cruel neighbor, continually at war with their mother country; but these things should be had in everlasting remembrance by their posterity. At length, after all these severe trials, the English laws prevailed here; the English language, literature, customs, and religion. At the peace of 1763, the prosperity of the then American colonies was at its height: they were delivered from the arrogance of a troublesome neighbor, in the subjugation of the Canadas: their population, commerce and agricultural improvements were most rapidly extending. But they had new and untried difficul-

ties to encounter. It was at this time that England, under the auspices of a misguided and infatuated ministry, contrary to the counsels of her soundest statesmen, and a large portion, perhaps a majority, of her subjects, sought to collect, by an unconstitutional taxation, a revenue from her colonies. This produced a general indignation in the great body of the people, and led to that resistance, which brought about the separation we have now under consideration.

That the cause of America was just, we have the opinion of the ablest writers in every part of the world: but it was a hazardous experiment; and had it not been for the interposition of that providence, whose merciful care is so eminently conspicuous in every part of our history, it would have resulted in our total ruin. Had the management of our affairs fallen into the hands of any of the mad spirits of those times, where, let me ask, would have been your liberties? You may seek for an answer in the history of all similar revolutions, in ancient and modern times, particularly in the triumphs of a Cromwell, and a Bonaparte, over a mad populace, led on to their ruin by a blind and misguided zeal. That this was not our condition, was owing entirely to the goodness of God in raising up patriots, whose virtue fitted them peculiarly to the exigencies of the times, and saved us from those vices which are always let loose in such a struggle. Though there are times, in which a resistance of this nature becomes necessary to the preservation of the liberty and happiness of a people, it is at all times dangerous; and I should do injustice to my feelings, and to my holy calling, if I did not in this public manner, bear testimo-

ny against the general principle, and inculcate, as essential to public prosperity, a wholesome subjection and obedience to government. Let these considerations lead us, my brethren, at this distant period, when our passions have had sufficient time to subside, to cast a veil of charity over the conduct of those, who, from conscientious motives, were prevented from embarking in this cause, yet no doubt had their country's good in view.

From the embarrassments into which these then colonies were thrown, by their determination to resist these encroachments on their rights, they were led, having previously had but little connexion or mutual intercourse with each other, except through their common mother country, to form a confederacy for their mutual protection and preservation. Hence arose that UNION, which every patriot must most sincerely pray God may be to all generations a perpetual and indissoluble BOND, giving wholesome laws, support and peace to every portion of this extensive and rapidly increasing republic. It was on the 4th of July, 1776, an immortal day in the annals of our history, that a constellation of sages from every portion of this extensive confederation, declared before the world, and in reliance on the protection of Almighty God, THAT THESE UNITED STATES WERE, AND OF RIGHT OUGHT TO BE, FREE, SOVEREIGN AND INDEPENDENT. The time had arrived which was marked out in the wisdom of divine providence, that a gallant, high spirited and well informed people should be no longer under the government of a nation three thousand miles distant, who knew but little of their condition and the laws they required, and who had but little interest in their welfare, excepting what

should arise from their own advantage. I need not state to you by what prowess, by what sufferings, by what firmness and perseverance, amidst the greatest difficulties and embarrassments; by what sacrifices of blood and treasure this declaration was sustained, till it was acknowledged by one nation after another, and finally by Great Britain herself. Let the hoary headed patriot, (for the youngest who were engaged in this eventful struggle, are now declining towards the grave,) let him tell you the story, and may posterity never be so ungrateful as to forget it.

Among the advantages of war, if it can be, on the whole, said to have any advantages, it is perhaps one of the greatest, that it serves to elicit, and bring into public view, *talent* and *character*. The talents and virtues brought into action by this great struggle, were of the most exalted kind: but I shall confine my observations to those of that illustrious man, who commanded the American armies. It is saying too little, that his wisdom, his firmness, his prudence, his valor saved his country; it is still more indebted to his virtue. We have heard much of disinterested patriotism. We have seen a few instances of it. This man was an exalted one. He

“A bauble held the pride of power,
 “Spurned at the sordid lust of pelf,
 “And served his country for himself.”

His inestimable services were not bought with his country's hire: he freely gave what no money could have purchased. With him the narrow interests of self were lost in the consideration of the public good. It was the wonder of Europe, that he had done so much for

his country, and nothing for himself. With an army devoted to his nod, calling upon him for justice from their countrymen, and even reproaching his delay, he might have made himself a king, his officers nobles, honorably provided for his soldiers, and made the people vassals. But no; his was the glory, which virtue gives; a glory which obscures all the tinsel glitter of royalty. Other men have been brave, other men have been wise and great; but more can be said of the hero of America than can be said of them all; HE WAS A GOOD MAN.

When, therefore, we carefully trace the events which led on to the establishment of a free people on this western continent; when we observe their signal deliverance and preservation at every stage of their history, we see displayed the designs of a wise providence; and to the nice and religious observer it must appear that it was the manifest purpose of heaven, in the settlement and growth of these North American states, to make way for laying the foundation, and building up, a free republic; a government under which rational liberty might be enjoyed, and under which the church might stand on its proper basis; *duly enlightened reason, guided by divine revelation, and principle deeply rooted in the heart, without the interference and control of civil power.* Every event, we have seen, has, in the order of things, conspired, and has been directed by an omnipotent hand, guided by unerring wisdom, to bring about this grand purpose. In the language of the text, "Happy art thou, O people, saved of the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency. Who is like unto thee?"

The question has often been asked by the enemies of our Independence, what we have gained by it; much—in two points of view; a *civil* and *religious*.

First—we will consider what we have gained in point of *civil liberty*.

There have been many theories by speculative men on the subject of government. They have portrayed the advantages, and the disadvantages of each order of it, and have come to quite different conclusions. Some have supposed that particular forms of government were of divine appointment. But this does not appear. Human government, in the abstract, is undoubtedly of divine appointment. The powers that be, are ordained of God. It is thus the divine will, that men should be under the government of salutary law; but the particular forms of government must be dictated by the state of the people; and that government I conceive to be the best, which secures all the objects of government; the protection of the rights of all classes of the people in their several spheres and avocations, with the least expence and oppression to them,

From the state of this American people has arisen a government peculiar in its kind. It is an assemblage of free, sovereign governments, united in one great republic, the several component parts of which are as independent of each other in their legislative capacity, as they are of any foreign power. Thus the evils to which a republic, extensive in territory, and abounding in population, is exposed, are prevented. No country whose territory is large, and whose population is nu-

merous, has ever yet been able to preserve a free government; and I conceive for this reason: the energy of law must be extended in proportion to the increase of the difficulty with which obedience to it is secured.— It is much less difficult to form laws for a small state, and to cause those laws to be respected and observed, than it is in a vastly large empire, thickly peopled. Mild laws may be put into execution by mild means, and obedience and respect to government may be obtained without strengthening and enlarging its powers to such an extent, that it will become despotic, in the small state: in the large one, where millions are to be governed by one legislative body, differing in habits and manners, in their sentiments and their interests, the hands of government must be strengthened; its laws must have energy, and to put them in execution in every part of this extended dominion, it must have innumerable subordinate branches, all deriving their existence and their support from the same source; all filled by men who unite from interest, in the views and sentiments of the chief government, and from that receive one common impulse to action. All these subordinate limbs of government, when so strongly united to one body, must give it strength, vigor, and the effective means of its own defence and preservation. All these coming together, form the strength and power of monarchies, as the roots of the mighty oak extend themselves widely and deeply, and give nourishment and stability to the vast trunk, and majestically spreading boughs.

Small states, though they have the advantage of large ones, in that they have more freedom and equality among their citizens, still have their disadvantages.

They are destitute of strength, and are ever liable to be swallowed up and devoured by their powerful neighbors. They have not the means of making their names respected in foreign courts, and never can have their due influence in adjusting the regulations of commerce, and in the settlement of treaties. Thus, while they may possess more liberty, they have far less strength for their security.

The American Republic has, by its peculiarity of situation, the advantages of both the large and the small state. To a general government is confided the protection of our foreign rights, and the power of arbitration between the individual states; while to the states is confided those subjects of legislation, which more immediately touch the interests of the people; such as the forming and executing criminal codes, the adjustment of property, and the defence of individual rights: in fine, every thing that regards the life, liberty, and property of the constituent. On the preservation of this delicate balance between the Federal and the State governments depends our safety. Weaken the general government, and we approach to anarchy: on the other hand, let the general government, by the magnitude of its legislative powers, its wealth, its patronage, encroach on the prerogatives of the states, and we approach towards a consolidation; and, of course, according to my former observations, a despotic government.

It would exceed the limits of this discourse, to go into the discussion of all the blessings which arise to the citizen, from a government in all its branches elective; but we should ever be mindful, that such a government

has its disadvantages, as well as advantages, and that its security depends entirely on the virtues of the people: and while it feels an immediate and salutary influence from the good sense and correct principles of the public, it must ever receive a deleterious and fatal impulse from the popular passions and vices. LIBERTY, in the genuine sense of the term, has its origin rather in the public principles, manners, and feelings of a people, than in any particular form of government; and we should, therefore, for the preservation of our own, be more careful to diffuse correct principles, virtue and religion through community, than merely to adjust the powers of our constitutions.

There have been many gloomy predictions with regard to the issue of our government; but experience is the only true test of wisdom on this subject. It has withstood serious obstacles; it has protected the rights of the people, and, with their prudence, their patriotism and their virtue, WHY WILL IT NOT STILL? Every man feels security under it, though he sees but little of the pomp and pageantry of power: every one is sufficiently protected in his calling, in his person, his property and fame, though there are no establishments kept up at an enormous expence. The whole machine moves still and silently on, while every object is secured. Like the hand of providence, if I may use the comparison, it is, felt not seen. This very simplicity constitutes the chief excellency and beauty of our government; and may God in his mercy, which has hitherto preserved us, still deliver us from any sudden and violent innovation on this wise and benign system.

Secondly—we are to consider what has been gained by our independence in point of *religious liberty*.

The religious feuds which sprang up in Europe at the era of the reformation, contributed to the settlement of America. This land became the general resort and asylum of the *oppressed* and the *discontented* of all nations and religions. The Puritans, having failed in their attempts to subvert the established religion of the mother country, and to set up their own in its stead, migrated to these eastern states, and here, whatever were their virtues in other respects, used every measure which any religious despotism ever used, to keep down every opposing form of faith. The Anabaptists, with their restless and undermining views, as to every established form of religion and government, diffused themselves widely in all the states. The Quakers, with their singular fanaticism, but sober and industrious habits, founded themselves in Pennsylvania. The French Hugonots took shelter here from cruel oppression and death, and their descendants are among our best citizens. The Papists, by a singular transformation, from being the most persecuting order in Europe, became liberal in America, and founded the flourishing colony of Maryland, upon the broad basis of an universal toleration. The Methodists, soon after their rise in England, found their way to this country, and have extended themselves to the most remote and unfrequented parts, where they have no doubt been useful. The wide field for enterprise here has invited the industrious Scotch, who have strongly established their religious institutions in the middle and southern states. The Dutch early brought their religion and customs to the fertile banks of the Hudson. And last in the order, though not least in estimation, the English Church established itself in the Southern States, and to a considerable extent in all the states. These several orders of

religion at first pushed each other with the utmost violence; but they have at length learnt, that the best way to live quietly together, is by mutual toleration, and they have long ceased to disturb each other, except by a proselyting spirit, which we must own is too common for the good of religion.

Now let me ask, my brethren, what would have been our condition, had the illustrious founders of our great Republic have distinguished any one of these orders with peculiar civil privileges? The thing was as impracticable as it would have been impolitic: they could, therefore, only put all these religions upon the same basis as to civil rights, and may God grant that this land may never be afflicted with religious oppression and persecution.

I should do injustice to my feelings, if I did not, before I close this discourse, endeavor to relieve the Communion to which it is my unspeakable happiness to belong, from the weight of political odium under which it has so long and so unjustly lain. When I joined myself to this Communion, which I did upon the maturest reflection, a question arose to my mind, not among the least important in my enquiry, whether I should in any way compromit my duty to my country. As to my duty to my God and Redeemer, I had long satisfied my mind; but I still owed duties as a citizen; and is it possible, my brethren, that he who is *faithful* and *consistent* in his duties as a christian, should be a bad citizen, whatever may be the particular form of his faith? Still there seems to be a prejudice in the minds of some, not, I confess, among the most enlightened and liberal,

that there is something incongruous in our regimen of the Church with the republican institutions of the state. Is it because we have different orders of clergy? Does not the same organization hold in every civil institution in this country? In the legislatures, national and state, there is the executive, senate, and house of representatives; in the judiciary, there is the supreme court of appeals, the court of common pleas, and the court held by a single justice: and to the same effect I might name every branch of the government, civil and military. Is it because we are identified with the established Church of England? It has been archly said by some one, that names govern the world; but it is here a mere name that has its influence. We have no connexion whatever with the Church of England, but what a community of regimen, of doctrine, and of worship gives us.—
 “When, in the course of Divine Providence, these American states became independent with respect to civil government, their ecclesiastical independence was necessarily included.” This is the language of the preface to the Book of Common Prayer. Accordingly, since the Revolution, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States has received a re-organization, in conformity to its civil relations, and has been put under the supreme government of a general convention, composed of its bishops, and a clerical and lay delegation.

Does this prejudice exist for the reason that many of the Episcopal Communion refused to join in the Revolution? It was because they were conscientiously attached to their government; and if this was a crime, pardon it; it is a very useful principle in every govern-

ment. The Church did indeed, as it ever ought to, look with abhorrence on the spirit of violence, which at that time so much pervaded the people, and detested the Vandalism, which violated her sanctuaries, committed outrages on her ministers and members, profaned and demolished her churches and altars, and despoiled her of her lawful rights; and even to this day holds her property with a sacrilegious grasp. It is, however, to be recollected, that if many Episcopalians were unfavorable to this cause, many stood by their country, in the time of her greatest peril, and it never should be forgotten, that the country owes, under God, its independence to an Episcopalian; and all, whatever may have been their views before, now it is achieved, and acknowledged, and settled, as it is by treaties, will be the last to yield it, or to compromit its duties.

How does this prejudice appear in point of fact? I do not know how it has happened, but so is the fact, from no concert or effort of Episcopalians, but from the fortuitous expression of public opinion, if I may so speak, most of the principal offices under the constitution have been held by members of this Communion. Of five Presidents, four were educated in this faith; and in all the highest offices of government, have been men of this persuasion, and also men high in influence, who have held no office: and, let me ask, have the sacred rights of conscience ever been invaded? Has there existed any danger of their being invaded? Is there any danger from that enlightened statesman who now fills the chief chair of state? No; every man of common candor will say, that no order of christians, in this country, has behaved with so great moderation, as the

Church. She has been persecuted and oppressed, yet she has borne it without reviling. Other denominations have made the whole land echo with their complaints of persecution; but she has been led as a lamb to the slaughter, and has opened not her mouth. She asks only for the protection of her rights, and will be the last to call in question that great principle of toleration, by which she, in common with her fellow christians of other denominations, enjoys freedom of conscience. Her language in relation to the civil powers, is what every christian Communion should hold: "The power of the civil magistrate extendeth to all men, as well clergy as laity, in all things temporal; but hath no authority in things purely spiritual. And we hold it to be the duty of all men who are professors of the Gospel, to pay respectful obedience to the civil authority, regularly and legitimately constituted."*

These are only the remarks which justice claimed. I wish to say nothing which would serve to excite a sectarian jealousy among the various orders of religion in this land. I wish to see it forever put at rest, and the only emulation subsisting among them to be, which shall preach the most consistent doctrines, and adorn their profession with the greatest holiness and purity of life.

On this day, my brethren, holy to the cause of civil and religious freedom, what subjects of the most ardent gratitude to Almighty God crowd upon the mind! A country vast in extent, and enriched with all the en-

*Art. XXXVII of the Articles of Religion.

downments of nature, and offering the most valuable rewards to the hand of industry! A population multiplying with an unexampled rapidity, enjoying the most free, benign, and liberal institutions of government and religion; well informed as to their rights, and possessing, as they have given the most abundant evidence, the skill, the prowess, and the means to defend them from all lawless aggression; extending, with rapid strides, their improvements in agriculture, in trade, in the arts and sciences; at peace at home, and respected abroad! And O may God avert from us any calamity, which may interrupt this progress of happiness, and of glory! May we ever be mindful of the source from whence we have derived these unspeakable privileges, and never, by our ingratitude, provoke heaven to take them from us! May we ever be careful to consecrate all our national advantages by piety and virtue, and in proportion as we are a happy and a prosperous, endeavor to be a religious people. "Happy are the people, who are in such a case; yea, blessed is that people, whose God is the Lord."