

This Nation Shall Endure

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Humbly and gratefully I stand before you this morning, humbled by the responsibility which is mine as I face this choice audience, and grateful for this great and unique institution, founded by a prophet of God.

As an introduction to what I trust the Lord will be pleased to have me say today, I quote a short paragraph from a memorable prayer given at the dedication of the London Temple by President David O. McKay:

Next to life, we express gratitude for the gift of free agency. When thou didst create man, thou placed within him part of thine Omnipotence and bade him choose for himself. Liberty and conscience thus became a sacred part of human nature. Freedom not only to think, but to speak and act, is a God-given privilege. [Improvement Era, October 1958, pp. 718–19]

As a further introduction, I quote from another beloved leader for whom our newest college on this campus is named—President J. Reuben Clark:

The Constitution of the United States is a great and treasured part of my religion. . . . The overturning, or the material changing, or the distortion of any fundamental principle of our constitutional government would thus do violence to my religion.

. . . My faith teaches me that the Constitution is an inspired document drawn by the hands of men whom God raised up for that very purpose; that God has given His approval of the Government set up under the Constitution “for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles”: that the constitutional “principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, belongs to all mankind, and is justifiable before” the Lord. (D&C 101:77, 98:5.) . . .

So far as my knowledge goes, this is the only government now on the earth to which God has given such an approval. It is His plan for the government of free men. [President J. Reuben Clark, Stand Fast by Our Constitution, pp. 7, 172]

They Poured Out Their Blood

Not too many miles from Boston rests a large boulder on Lexington Green. Inscribed on this rock, which I read again a short time ago, are the words which Captain Parker gave to his minutemen on April 19, 1775, nearly 200 years ago:

Ezra Taft Benson was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 4 December 1973.

*Stand your ground, don't fire unless fired upon,
But if they mean to have a war
Let it begin here.*

And it began.

Said Webster, "They poured out their generous blood like water before they knew whether it would fertilize the land of freedom or of bondage."

But they aroused their fellow Americans. Within one year John Adams faced the body of men who were deliberating on whether to adopt the Declaration of Independence. With the inspiration of heaven resting on him, Adams was said to have declared:

Sink or swim, live or die, survive or perish, I give my hand and my heart to this vote. It is true, indeed, that in the beginning we aimed not at independence. But there's a Divinity which shapes our ends. . . . Why, then, should we defer the Declaration? . . . You and I, indeed, may rue it. We may not live to the time when this Declaration shall be made good. We may die; die Colonists, die slaves, die, it may be, ignominiously and on the scaffold.

Be it so. Be it so.

If it be the pleasure of Heaven that my country shall require the poor offering of my life, the victim shall be ready. . . . But while I do live, let me have a country, or at least the hope of a country, and that a free country.

But whatever may be our fate, be assured . . . that this Declaration will stand. It may cost treasure, and it may cost blood; but it will stand and it will richly compensate for both.

Through the thick gloom of the present, I see the brightness of the future as the sun in heaven. We shall make this a glorious, an immortal day. When we are in our graves, our children will honor it. They will celebrate it with thanksgiving, with festivity, with bonfires, and illuminations. On its annual return they will shed tears, copious, gushing tears, not of subjection and slavery, not of agony and distress, but of exultation, of gratitude and of joy.

Sir, before God, I believe the hour is come. My judgment approves this measure, and my whole heart is in it. All that I have, and all that I am, and all that I hope, in this life, I am now ready here to stake upon it; and I leave off as I began, that live or die, survive or perish, I am for the Declaration. It is my living sentiment, and by the blessing of God it shall be my dying sentiment, Independence now, and Independence forever. [The Works of Daniel Webster, 4th ed., 1:133–36]

Yesterday, I read further in the great current volume, *Quest of a Hemisphere*, by Boyle, published by Western Islands, Boston. I am grateful that we now have again a textbook for our children, grandchildren, and their parents that restores that which has, in many cases, been removed from our histories by wolves in sheep's clothing.

I love history books that tell history as it was—as the Book of Mormon tells it—with the Lord in the picture guiding and directing the affairs of the righteous, winning their battles for them.

In this new history, we read again, as some of us who are old enough remember reading, the courageous and stirring words against the Navigation Acts, the Stamp Act of 1765, and "taxation without representation." In this real American history we have the record of Washington, Jefferson, and the record of Samuel Adams of Boston, who organized Committees of Correspondence and groups of young men banded together as Sons of Liberty. We read again the words of James Otis that a law was void if it violated the human rights of man and that a man who is quiet is as secure in his house as a prince in his castle.

Here we read that:

The colonists fought the threat of aggression as much as aggression itself.

With grim determination, they opposed every attempt to rob them of any liberty they had gained.

To the colonists—our benefactors—it was not so much the amount as the principles of taxation (without representation) that the colonists opposed.

Here again in this new history are also the fiery words “give me liberty” of Patrick Henry of Virginia and also his words: “If this be treason, make the most of it.”

John Hancock, George Mason, Paul Revere—John Dickinson and his *Letters from a Farmer*, “We cannot be happy without being free.”

*The British colonies were largely settled by people who had revolted against their living conditions in other lands. They were rebels, in a sense, who had the courage to flee from want and persecution, and face the perils of a wilderness to seek a better form of life. When they found a better way, they fought to keep it. Their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren did not want any monarch to change their way of life. They had plowed their own lands, built their own homes, and made their own clothes. Who was their master? [Donzella Cross Boyle, *Quest of a Hemisphere* (Boston: Western Islands), p. 113]*

Chapter seven closes with a discussion of freedom of the press and these stirring words inspired by Peter Zenger: “The right to print the truth is a necessary part of political liberty.” And these by the famous lawyer, Andrew Hamilton from Philadelphia: “The loss of liberty, to a generous mind is worse than death. . . . The man who loves his country, prefers its liberty to all other considerations, well knowing that without liberty, life is a misery” (Ibid., p. 84).

Thus, in colonial days, did the people of the colonies stand firmly against any form of dictatorship. Thousands of immigrants came to the settlements along the Atlantic seaboard, with only a vague idea of the freedoms they were seeking, because they had not known many of them. They

were pursuing a vision. Freedoms sprouted in a wilderness like flowers on a vacant lot, because each person who came had broken the pattern of life in his old country and he was starting all over again. “Something new” began to grow in the New World—a mere idea. People began to question the right of government to interfere with their freedom to come and go, to buy and sell, to own or lease, to talk or listen, to vote and elect. In other words, people began to think they had the right to govern themselves. Yet, a new nation had to rise in the Western Hemisphere before this idea gained the force of law. “ [Ibid., p. 84]

And so today on Lexington Green, you will see a sacred old monument nearly two hundred years of age that covers the remains of those patriotic minutemen, and on this monument are inscribed these words:

*Sacred to liberty and the rights of mankind!!!
The freedom and independence of America
Sealed and defended with the blood of her sons. . . .*

Yes, there is much, much more on that old historic monument, including their names.

Yes, their mother Gentiles, as Nephi foresaw 2,367 years before, were gathered together upon the waters and upon the land to battle against them. “And I beheld,” said the prophet Nephi, “that the power of God was with them, and also that the wrath of God was upon all those that were gathered together against them to battle. And I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles that had gone out of captivity were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations” (1 Nephi 13:18–19).

Modern Prophets’ Tribute to the Founding Fathers

With independence won, another body of men assembled, and under the inspiration of heaven they too drafted a document—probably the greatest instrument ever struck off at a

given time by the mind of men—the Constitution of the United States.

Said J. Reuben Clark, that great constitutional lawyer:

The framers (of the Constitution) were not political tyros (beginners) flying a political kite to keep in order the henyard, that is, the colonists. They were men widely experienced in affairs of government.

. . .

The Constitution was not the work of cloistered, fanatical theorists, but of sober, seasoned, distinguished men of affairs, drawn from various walks of life. They included students of wide reading and great learning in all matters of government. . . .

The Constitution was born, not only of the wisdom and experience of the generation that wrought it, but also out of the wisdom of the long generations that had gone before and which had been transmitted to them through tradition and the pages of history. . . .

These were the horse and buggy days as they have been called in derision; these were the men who traveled in the horsedrawn buggies and on horseback; but these were the men who carried under their hats, as they rode in the buggies and on their horses, a political wisdom garnered from the ages. As giants to pygmies are they when placed alongside our political emigres and their fellow travelers of today, who now traduce them with slighting word and contemptuous phrase. [J. Reuben Clark, Jr., Church News, November 29, 1952; Stand Fast by Our Constitution, pp. 134–37]

If there are those who doubt President Clark's tribute to our Founding Fathers, then hear the words of President Wilford Woodruff:

Those men who laid the foundation of this American government and signed the Declaration of Independence were the best spirits the God of Heaven could find on the face of the earth. They were choice spirits . . . inspired of the Lord.

Everyone of those men that signed the Declaration of Independence, with George

Washington, . . . called upon me, as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the Temple at St. George two consecutive nights and demanded at my hand that I should go forth and attend to the ordinances of the house of God for them. . . .

Would those spirits have called upon me, as an Elder in Israel, to perform that work if they had not been noble spirits before God? They would not. . . . Said they: “. . . We laid the foundation of the government you now enjoy, and we never apostatized from it, but we remained true to it and were faithful to God.” [Conference Reports, April 1898, pp. 89–90; Journal of Discourses, 19:229]

Self-Government Involves Self-Control

These two documents—the Declaration of Independence and Constitution of the United States—resting on the bedrock of the love of the Lord and of liberty, became the foundation of our Republic. And from this foundation has come the greatest civilization on the face of the earth.

James Russell Lowell was right when he said: “Our American republic will endure only as long as the ideas of the men who founded it continue dominant” (quoted in *Prophets, Principles and National Survival*, p. 149).

What were those ideas? Well, they were in part incorporated in our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution. God grant we will all become familiar with both of these documents. And Washington covered them well when he said:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. . . reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle. It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. [George Washington, Farewell Address, September 17, 1796; The Writings of George Washington, Ford Edition, 13:307–8]

I serve as a member of the Board of Trustees of this great university. One year we invited the late Cecil B. De Mille to speak to our student body and accept an award. I will never forget his words when he stated that men and nations cannot break the Ten Commandments, they can only break themselves upon them.

And he was right. Only a moral and religious people deserves or will defend its freedom.

Edmund Burke stated it well when he said:

Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites—in proportion as their love of justice is above their rapacity—in proportion as their soundness and sobriety of understanding is above their vanity and presumption—in proportion as they are more disposed to listen to the counsels of the wise and good, in preference to the flattery of knaves. Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon the will and appetite is placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters. [Edmund Burke, Works, 4:51–52, quoted in Prophets, Principles and National Survival, p. 33]

As Elder Albert E. Bowen put it: “Self-government involves self-control, self-discipline, an acceptance of and the most unremitting obedience to correct principles. . . . No other form of government requires so high a degree of individual morality” (*Improvement Era*, 41 (1938): 266, quoted in *Prophets, Principles and National Survival*, p. 128).

A Land Choice Above All Others

I love this great nation of which we are a part. I have traveled and lived abroad just enough to make me appreciate rather fully what we have here. I never return to these shores from abroad, as I have done scores of times, but what I think of the words of Scott:

*Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself has said,*

“This is my own, my native land!”

*Whose heart hath ne’er within him burn’d,
As home his footsteps he hath turned,*

From wandering on a foreign strand!

If such there breathe, go, mark him well. . . .

[Sir Walter Scott, “The Lay of the Last Minstrel,” in *The Complete Poetical Works of Scott*, Cambridge Edition (Boston:Houghton Mifflin Co. [c.1900]), p. 40]

And then that great poem by Van Dyke, “America for Me”:

*‘Tis great to see the Old World and travel up and
down*

*Among the famous palaces and cities of renown,
To view the crumbly castles and statues of the kings;
But now I think I’ve seen enough of antiquated
things.*

*So it’s home again, and home again, America for
me,*

*I want a ship that’s westward bound, to plow the
rolling sea,*

*To the land of youth and freedom, beyond the ocean
bars,*

*Where the air is full of freedom and the flag is full
of stars.*

[Henry Van Dyke, “America for Me,” in *The Best Loved Poems of the American People* (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Co. [c. 1936]), p. 424]

Yes, I love this nation. To me it is not just another nation, not just a member of the family of nations. It is a great and glorious nation with a divine mission, brought into being under the inspiration of heaven. It is truly a land choice above all others. I thank God for the knowledge which we have regarding the prophetic history and the spiritual foundation of this great land of America.

When I contemplate the great events that have transpired here, going way back to the

days when our first parents were placed in the Garden of Eden, and recall that this garden was here in America, that it was here also where Adam met with a body of great high priests at Adam-ondi-Ahman shortly before his death and gave them his final blessing, and that to that same spot he is to return again to meet with the leaders of his people, his children—when I contemplate, my brothers and sisters, that here in this land will be established the New Jerusalem, that here in this land will Zion be built—when I contemplate that prophets of God anciently served here in this land, and that the resurrected Christ appeared to them—and when I contemplate that the greatest of all visions, the coming of God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, to the boy Prophet in our day, took place in this land, my heart fills with gratitude that I am privileged to live here, and that I have the honor and pleasure not only of serving in the Church but also of serving in the government of this great land. I consider it an honor and a privilege.

I am grateful for the Founding Fathers of this land and for the freedom they have vouchsafed to us. I am grateful that they recognized, as great leaders of this nation have always recognized, that the freedom which we enjoy did not originate with the Founding Fathers, that this glorious principle, this great boon of freedom and respect for the dignity of man, came as a gift from the Creator. The Founding Fathers, it is true, with superb genius welded together the safeguards of these freedoms. It was necessary, however, for them to turn to the scriptures, to religion, in order to have their great experiment make sense to them. And so our freedom is God-given. It antedates the Founding Fathers.

I am grateful that the God of heaven saw fit to put his stamp of approval upon the Constitution and to indicate that it had come into being through wise men whom he raised up unto this very purpose. He asked the Saints, even in the dark days of their persecution and

hardship, to continue to seek for redress from their enemies “according,” he said, “to the laws and constitution . . . which I have suffered [or caused] to be established, and should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh” (D&C 101 :77). And then he made this most impressive declaration: “And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood” (Ibid., 101:80).

It is gratifying that the constitutions in many of the other lands of our neighbors in the Americas are patterned very much after this divinely-appointed Constitution, which the God of heaven directed in the founding of this nation. It is not any wonder, therefore, that Joseph Smith, the Prophet—a truly great American—referring to the Constitution, said, “[It] is a glorious standard; it is founded in the wisdom of God. It is a heavenly banner” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 147).

President Brigham Young declared prophetically,

When the day comes in which the Kingdom of God will bear rule, the flag of the United States will proudly flutter unsullied on the flagstaff of liberty and equal rights, without a spot to sully its fair surface; the glorious flag our fathers have bequeathed to us will then be unfurled to the breeze by those who have power to hoist it aloft and defend its sanctity. [Journal of Discourses, 2:317]

But, continuing, President Young asks:

How long will it be before the words of the Prophet Joseph will be fulfilled? He said if the Constitution of the United States were saved at all it must be done by this people. It will not be many years before these words come to pass. [Ibid., 12:204]

These words were spoken April 8, 1868, over one hundred years ago.

Yes, we have a rich heritage, but may I remind you that nations oftentimes sow the seeds of their own destruction even while enjoying unprecedented prosperity, even before reaching the zenith or the peak of their power. I think history clearly indicates that this is often the case. When it appears that all is well, oftentimes the very seeds of destruction are sown, sometimes unwittingly. Most of the great civilizations of the world have not been conquered from without until they have destroyed themselves from within by sowing these seeds of destruction.

It is my conviction that God does now look with favor, and has looked with favor, upon this government, which he established by wise men. It is also my firm conviction that his protective hand is still over the United States of America. I know, too, that if we will keep the commandments of God—live as he has directed, and does now direct, through his prophets—we will continue to have his protecting hand over us. But we must be true to the eternal verities, the great Christian virtues which God has revealed. Then, and only then, will we be safe as a nation and as individuals. God grant that the faithfulness of the Latter-day Saints will provide the balance of power to save this nation in times of crisis.

Let Us Rededicate Ourselves

How many of you heard or saw the statement regarding some of these matters which our living prophet and his counselors gave us recently? It was presented over television and appeared in the Church section of the *Deseret News*. I quote a part of it. Said the First Presidency,

We urge members of the Church and all Americans to begin now to reflect more intently on the meaning and importance of the Constitution, and of adherence to its principles. . . .

In these challenging days, when there are so many influences which would divert us, there is a

need to rededicate ourselves to the lofty principles and practices of our Founding Fathers. [Church News, September 22, 1973, p. 3]

Let us not permit these admonitions of our living prophets to fall on deaf ears. Let us, as they direct, learn the meaning and importance of our God-ordained Constitution. Let us rededicate ourselves to the lofty principles and practices of those wise men whom God raised up to give us our priceless freedom. Our liberties, our salvation, our well-being as a church and as a nation depend upon it. This nation has a spiritual foundation—a prophetic history. Every true Latter-day Saint should love the United States of America—the most generous nation under heaven—the Lord’s base of operations in these last days. May we do all in our power to strengthen and safeguard this base and increase our freedom. This nation will, I feel sure, endure. It is God-ordained for a glorious purpose. We must never forget that the gospel message we bear to the world is to go forth to the world from this nation. And that gospel message can prosper only in an atmosphere of freedom. We must maintain and strengthen our freedom in this blessed land.

I have wished, as did President Franklin D. Richards, that

we could have a goodly number of substantial young men growing up in our midst who would become skilled and mighty in the law, and who could go into any of the courts and set forth the true principles of justice and equity in all cases. We need more of such men. We do not want men to become lawyers, turn infidels and live for nothing but the little money they can make. We want to raise up a corps of young men armed with the spirit of the gospel, clothed with the holy priesthood, who can tell the judges in high places what the law is. [Journal of Discourses, 26:102]

We have allowed our courts, through their anti-prayer, anti-God decisions, to outlaw in

the schools the positive belief of the truths contained in the Declaration of Independence, the very foundation of our nation.

I am so grateful for the establishment of our new J. Reuben Clark School of Law here on this campus. Here students can be taught the gospel truths, the eternal truths about laws and government. This school can wield a mighty influence for good throughout this great nation and this sick, messed-up world. It can send forth a group of faithful, courageous Latter-day Saint priesthood-patriots who are both able and anxious to do the Lord's will concerning

our political problems—men who really do understand the true meaning and importance of our Constitution, men who have dedicated themselves to the principles and practices of our Founding Fathers. But let each of us, whether we are in the field of law or not, strive to follow the counsel of our prophet. Therein is safety.

God bless you and all of us, and may God bless America and preserve our divine Constitution and the Republic which he established thereunder, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.