

First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, 1791

I - Freedom of Speech, Press, Religion and Petition

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Paths to the First Amendment

- I. BACKGROUND: OLD WORLD MODELS AND COLONIAL EVOLUTION
 - A. Religious Establishments in the Old World: England, France, and the Netherlands as Alternative Models
 - B. Religious Establishments in Colonial North America: A Motley Assortment of Practices
 - C. The Triumph of Practicality over Ideology
 - D. The Religious Cacophony of Eighteenth-Century America

Religious Cacophony: The Great Awakening

D.^r SQUINTUM'S EXALTATION or the REFORMATION.



"Pope's Day" Parade, Boston, 18th Century



Jefferson, Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom

A BILL for establishing RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, *printed for the consideration of the* PEOPLE.

WELL wares that the opinions and belief of men depend not on their own will, but follow inevitably the evidence proposed to their minds, that Almighty God hath created the mind free, and manifested his Supreme will that free it shall remain, by making it altogether insusceptible of restraint: That all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or honours, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, who being Lord both of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was in his Almighty power to do, but to extend it by its influence on reason alone: That the impious presumption of legislators and rulers, civil as well as ecclesiastical, who, being themselves but fallible and uninspired men, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions and modes of thinking, as the only true and infallible, and as such, endeavouring to impose them on others, hath established and maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world, and through all time: That to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical: That even the forcing him to support this or that teacher of his own religious profession, is depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular pastor whose morals he would make his pattern, and whose prayers he feels most persuasive to righteousness, and is withdrawing from the Ministry those temporal rewards which, proceeding from an approbation of their personal conduct, are an additional incitement to earnest and unintermitting labour for the instruction of mankind: That the civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions, any more than on our opinions in physics or geometry: That therefore the professing any citizen as unworthy the public confidence, by laying upon him an incapacity of being called to offices of trust and emolument, unless he profess or renounce this or that religious opinion, is depriving him injuriously of those privileges and advantages to which, in common with his fellow citizens he has a natural right: That it tends also to corrupt the principles of that very religion it is meant to encourage, by holding with a monopoly of worldly honours and emoluments, those who will externally profess and conform to it: That though indeed these are criminal who do not wishfuld each interpretation, yet neither are those innocent who lay the law in their way: That the opinions of men are not the object of civil government, nor under its jurisdiction: That to suffer the civil Magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion, and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles on supposition of their ill tendency, is a dangerous fallacy, which at once destroys all religious liberty: because he being of course Judge of that tendency will unite his own opinions with the rule of judgment, and approve or condemn the sentiments of others only as they shall square with, or differ from his own: That it is time enough for the rightful purposes of civil government for its officers to interfere when principles break out into overt acts against peace and good order: And finally, that truth is great and will prevail if left to herself; that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict, unless by human interposition, disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate; errors ceasing to be dangerous when it is permitted freely to contradict them.

WE the General Assembly of Virginia do enact, that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious Worship place or Ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief, but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise disqualify, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.

AND though we well know that this Assembly, elected by the people for the ordinary purposes of legislation only, have no power to restrain the acts of succeeding Assemblies, constituted with powers equal to our own, and that therefore to declare this act irrevocable would be of no effect in law; yet we are free to declare, and do declare, that the rights hereby asserted are of the natural rights of mankind, and that if any act shall hereafter be passed to repeal the present, or to narrow its operation, such act will be an infringement of natural right.

The Path Beyond the First Amendment

- I. Disestablishment in the States:
Connecticut and Massachusetts and the
Problem of Internal Dissent
- II. A Christian Nation in an Agnostic State
- III. Turbulence, Proliferation, and Conflict
within the Christian Nation of the Early
Republic – Immigration, Ethnic Diversity,
and Political Disarray

Thomas Nast, 1876

