

Week 3 Documents – The American Revolution

It has been said by a celebrated writer in politics that but two things were worth contending for Religion and Liberty. For the latter we are at present nobly exerting ourselves through all this extensive continent and surely no one whose bosom feels the patriot glow in behalf of civil liberty can remain torpid to the more ennobling flame of RELIGIOUS FREEDOM.

The free exercise of private judgment and the unalienable rights of conscience are of too high a rank and dignity to be subjected to the decrees of councils or the imperfect laws of fallible legislators. The merciful Father of mankind is the alone Lord of conscience. Establishments may be enabled to confer worldly distinctions and secular importance. They may make hypocrites but cannot create Christians. They have been reared by craft or power but liberty never flourished perfectly under their control. That liberty virtue and public happiness can be supported without them this flourishing province is a glorious testimony and a view of it would be sufficient to invalidate all the most elaborate arguments ever adduced in support of them. Happy in the enjoyment of these undoubted rights and conscious of their high import every lover of mankind must be desirous as far as opportunity offers of extending and securing the enjoyment of these inestimable blessings.

. . . It may now be asked, What is the liberty desired? The answer is as the kingdom of Christ is not of this world and religion is a concern between God and the soul with which no human authority can intermeddle consistently with the principles of Christianity and according to the dictates of Protestantism we claim and expect the liberty of worshipping God according to our consciences not being obliged to support a ministry we cannot attend whilst we demean ourselves as faithful subjects. These we have an undoubted right to as men as Christians and by charter as inhabitants of Massachusetts Bay.

Petition of the Warren Baptist Association to the Continental Congress October, 1774

“Because experience witnesseth that ecclesiastical establishments, instead of maintaining the purity and efficacy of Religion, have had a contrary operation. During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution. Enquire of the Teachers of Christianity for the ages in which it appeared in its greatest lustre; those of every sect, point to the ages prior to its incorporation with Civil policy. Propose a restoration of this primitive State in which its Teachers depended on the voluntary rewards of their flocks, many of them predict its downfall. On which Side ought their testimony to have greatest weight, when for or when against their interest?”

Madison’s Memorial and Remonstrance.

“... *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 by temporal punishments, or burthens, 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 of both body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either.”

Jefferson's Bill for Religious Freedom

There are instances of, I would say, an almost astonishing Providence in our favor; our success has staggered our enemies, and almost given faith to infidels; so we may truly say it is not our own arm which has saved us.

The hand of Heaven appears to have led us on to be, perhaps, humble instruments and means in the great providential dispensation, which is completing. Thus by the beneficence of Providence, we shall behold our empire arising, founded on justice and the voluntary consent of the people, and giving full scope to the exercise of those faculties and rights which most ennoble our species

Samuel Adams 1776

"The advice of those who do not find freedom of conscience to take up arms, that they ought to be helpful to those who are in need and distressed circumstances, we receive with cheerfulness towards all men, of what station they may be, it being our principle to feed the hungry, and give the thirsty drink. We have dedicated ourselves to serve all men, in everything that can be helpful to the preservation of men's lives, but we find no freedom in giving or doing, or assisting in any thing by which men's lives are destroyed or hurt. We beg the patience of all those who believe we err in this point.

"We are always ready, according to Christ's command to Peter, to pay the tribute, that we may offend no man; and so we are willing to pay taxes, and to render unto Caesar those things that are Caesar's, and to God those things that are God's, although we think ourselves very weak to give God his due honour, he being a spirit and life, and we only dust and ashes.

"We are also willing to be subject to the higher powers, and to give in the manner Paul directs us: 'For he beareth the sword not in vain, for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.'

"This testimony we lay down before our worthy Assembly, and all other persons in Government, letting them know that we are thankful as abovementioned, and that we are not at liberty, in conscience, to take up arms to conquer our enemies, but rather to pray to God, who has power in heaven and earth, for us and them.

Mennonite Statement 1775