

1c – That The Oppressed May Go Free

Virginia's Baptist's flooded the state assembly with petitions entreating lawmakers to guarantee religious equality. In 1776, they submitted their largest petition which was signed by 10,000 Baptists, Presbyterians, Quakers, Mennonites and other religious dissenters in the state, pressing for disestablishment of the tax-supported Church of England and asking that all religious denominations enjoy the same freedoms and privileges.

To the Honourable the President and House of Delegates

The Petition of the Dissenters from the
Ecclesiastical establishment in the
Commonwealth of Virginia

Humbly sheweth

That your Petitioners being in common with the other Inhabitants of this Commonwealth delivered from British Oppression rejoice in the Prospect of that having their Freedom secured and maintained to them and their posterity inviolate. The hopes of your petitioners have been raised and confirmed by the Declaration of your Honourable House with regard to equal Liberty. Equal Liberty! that invaluable blessing: which though it be the birth right of every good Member of the State has been what your Petitioners have been Deprived of, in that, by Taxation their property hath been wrested from them and given to those from whom they have received no equivalent.

Your Petitioners therefore having long groaned under the Burden of an Ecclesiastical Establishment beg leave to move your Honourable House that this as well as every other Yoke may be broken and that the Oppressed may go free: that so every religious Denomination being on a Level, Animosities may cease, and that Christian Forbearance, Love and Charity, may be practiced towards each other, while the Legislature interferes only to support them in their just Rights and equal privileges.

*This article is reprinted by from the Teaching Tolerance curriculum kit
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