

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

2 Well aware that the opinions and belief of men depend not on their own will, but follow involuntary-
3 -ily the evidence proposed to their minds; that Almighty God hath created the mind free, and
4 manifested his supreme will that free it shall remain by making it altogether insusceptible of
5 restraint: That all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burthens, or by civil inca-
6 -pacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the holy
7 author of our religion, who being Lord both of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on
8 either, as was in his Almighty power to do, but to extend it by its influence on reason alone: That the impious
9 presumption of legislators and rulers, civil as well as ecclesiastical, who, being themselves but fallible and unin-
10 -spired men, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions and modes of think-
11 -ing as the only true and infallible, and as such endeavoring to impose them on others, hath established and
12 maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world, and through all time: That to compel a man
13 to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and
14 tyrannical: that even the forcing him to support this or that teacher of his own religious persuasion, is
15 depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular pastor whose morals he
16 would make his pattern, and whose powers he feels most persuasive to righteousness, and is withdrawing from
17 the Ministry those temporary rewards which, proceeding from an approbation of their personal conduct, are
18 an additional incitement to earnest and unremitting labours for the instruction of mankind: That our civil
19 rights have no dependance on our religious opinions, any more than our opinions in physics or geometry:
20 That therefore the proscribing any citizen as unworthy the public confidence by laying upon him an
21 incapacity of being called to offices of trust and emolument, unless he profess or renounce this or that religious
22 opinion, is depriving him injuriously of those privileges and advantages to which, in common with his fellow
23 citizens, he has a natural right: That it tends also to corrupt the principles of that very religion it is meant
24 to encourage, by bribing, with a monopoly of worldly honours and emoluments, those who will externally
25 profess and conform to it: That though indeed these are criminal who do not withstand such temptation,
26 yet neither are those innocent who lay the bait in their way: That the opinions of men are not the object of
27 civil government, nor under its jurisdiction: That to suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the
28 field of opinion, and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles on supposition of their ill tendency

is a dangerous falacy, which at once destroys all religious liberty; because he being of course Judge of that tendency will make his opinions 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 diminish, 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 be hereafter passed to repeal the present or to narrow its operation, such act will be an infringement of natural right.