

Denatus , Virginia *Independent Chronicle*, 11 June 1788

To the Members of the Virginia Federal Convention, collectively, and individually.

Gentlemen, Happy in the enjoyment of my own reflections, the tranquility of my neighbours, and the peace and prosperity of every good man, I pass a great part of my time in solitude. At these periods, the fœderal constitution, with the criticisms of the wise upon it, made their appearance. Considering the work itself, I could not bring it within my view. To me, the commentators have bewildered the subject, and hid it from my mind, in impenetrable obscurity. After reading it three times carefully, I formed an opinion, which I still retain, and which, daily, sinks deeper into my belief. That opinion I now lay before you, in hopes that some thought of mine, may be worthy of observation and contribute to the general good...

...As I have, I will continue to give my opinion as the constitution of a free people ought to be formed in the best possible manner for the happiness of them, and their posterity, it ought to contain some mode, rivited through its very essence, for the present and succeeding ages, to be educated in the principles of morality, religion, jurisprudence, and the art of war. This is a duty which the framers of a constitution owe to posterity.—For the neglect of which, by men so famed for wisdom, very few excuses indeed, can be admissable—The first, or second article of the said constitution, ought to contain something to this effect—That as soon as possible, academies shall be established at every proper place throughout the United States for the education of youth in morality; the principles of the christian religion without regard to any sect, but pure and unadulterated as left by its divine author and his apostles: The principles of natural, civil, and common law, and of our constitution: And the art of defending and conquering nations in battle, either by land or sea—These academies to be regulated from time to time by Congress, and their establishment to be perpetual. As man is an accountable being, to his creator and to his fellow-creatures, the study of morality would enable him to act consistent with his duty to society, and the study of religion, with his duty to God. I will venture to affirm, that was this mode established we would have fewer law suits, less backbiting, slander, and mean observations, more industry, justice and real happiness, than at present. Says a pious writer, “be careful not to neglect religion in the education of your children, in vain will you endeavour to conduct them by any other path: If they are dear to you, if from them you expect to receive credit or comfort from religion must be derived their happiness and your own.” Another elegant writer observes nearly in the same manner, speaking to a father of his son. “Teach him science, and his life will be useful. Teach him religion and his death will be happy.”

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