

Zachariah Johnson in the Virginia Ratification Convention, 25 June 1788

...We are also told, that religion is not secured—that religious tests are not required.— You will find that the exclusion of tests, will strongly tend to establish religious freedom. If tests were required—and if the church of England or any other were established, I might be excluded from any office under the Government, because my conscience might not permit me to take the test required. The diversity of opinions and variety of sects in the United States, have justly been reckoned a great security with respect to religious liberty. The difficulty of establishing an uniformity of religion in this country is immense.—The extent of the country is very great. The multiplicity of sects is very great likewise.—The people are not to be disarmed of their weapons—They are left in full possession of them. The Government is administered by the Representatives of the people voluntarily and freely chosen. Under these circumstances, should any one attempt to establish their own system, in prejudice of the rest, they would be universally detested and opposed, and easily frustrated. This is a principle which secures religious liberty most firmly.—The Government will depend on the assistance of the people in the day of distress. This is the case in all Governments. It never was otherwise. They object to this Government, because it is strong and energetic; and with respect to the rich and poor, that it will be favorable to the one and oppressive to the other. It is right it should be energetic. This does not shew that the poor shall be more oppressed than the rich. Let us examine it. If it admits that private and public justice should be done, it admits what is just. As to the indolent and fraudulent, nothing will reclaim these, but the hand of force and compulsion. Is there any thing in this Government which will shew that it will bear hardly and unequally on the honest and industrious part of the community? I think not. As to the mode of taxation, the proportion of each State being known, cannot be exceeded. And such proportion will be raised in the most equitable manner of the people, according to their ability. There is nothing to warrant a supposition that the poor will be equally taxed with the wealthy and opulent.

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