

## Jefferson to John Adams

As Jefferson explained to John Adams, the Statute for Religious Freedom weakened the clergy's influence over the people's minds. For Jefferson, that was a good thing because he believed that clergymen, especially when supported by the state, were prone to tyranny and corruption. He also denounced what he called "artificial aristocracy," by which he meant a governing class who got their power through birth, not merit. Americans, he believed, should be governed instead by a "natural aristocracy" who rose to the top through their "virtue and talents."