

Jefferson to the Members of the Baltimore Baptist Association

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE BALTIMORE BAPTIST ASSOCIATION.

WASHINGTON, October 17, 1808

I receive with great pleasure the friendly address of the Baltimore Baptist Association, and am sensible how much I am indebted to the kind dispositions which dictated it.

In our early struggles for liberty, religious freedom could not fail to become a primary object. All men felt the right, and a just animation to obtain it was exhibited by all. I was one only among the many who befriended its establishment, and am entitled but in common with others to a portion of that approbation which follows the fulfilment of a duty.

Excited by wrongs to reject a foreign government which directed our concerns according to its own interests, and not to ours, the principles which justified us were obvious to all understandings, they were imprinted in the breast of every human being; and Providence ever pleases to direct the issue of our contest in favor of that side where justice was. Since this happy separation, our nation has wisely avoided entangling itself in the system of European interests, has taken no side between its rival powers, attached itself to none of its ever-changing confederacies. Their peace is desirable; and you do me justice in saying that to preserve and secure this, has been the constant aim of my administration. The difficulties which involve it, however, are now at their ultimate term, and what will be their issue, time alone will disclose. But be it what it may, a recollection of our former vassalage in religion and civil government, will unite the zeal of every heart, and the energy of every hand, to preserve that independence in both which, under the favor of heaven, a disinterested devotion to the public cause first achieved, and a disinterested sacrifice of private interests will now maintain.

I am happy in your approbation of my reasons for determining to retire from a station in which the favor of my fellow citizens has so long continued and supported me: I return your kind prayers with supplications to the same almighty being for your future welfare and that of our beloved country.

Thomas Jefferson

Oct. 17, 08

