

(No. 22.)



1858.

T A S M A N I A.

P E T I T I O N

FROM MORVEN IN FAVOUR OF STATE AID TO RELIGION.

Presented by Mr. Wedge, and ordered by the Council to be printed, 29 September, 1858.



To the Honorable the Legislative Council of Tasmania.

WE, the undersigned inhabitants of Morven and its vicinity, hear with regret that attempts are being made to induce your Honorable House to discontinue the Allowances hitherto granted to Ministers of Religion in this Colony.

Without entering into the doctrinal question as to whether State Aid to Religion is warranted by Scripture (for on this point it is to be presumed that the Government which granted, and the Ecclesiastical bodies who received it, are substantially agreed), your Petitioners would most respectfully submit that, on principles of expediency, the withdrawal of such aid would be prejudicial to the best interests of the community.

Your Petitioners would respectfully state as the grounds of their opinion,—

1. That from the social condition of this Colony, coeval indeed with its first settlement, it is universally admitted that, notwithstanding the recent introduction of free Immigrants, the great majority are still indifferent, if not opposed, to the regular and faithful administration of the ordinances of religion: consequently, if the maintenance of public worship be made dependent upon the voluntary contributions of the people, the many, for whose benefit these ordinances have been hitherto instituted and upheld, would probably contribute little or nothing towards their support, while the few who really value them, both on their own account and the Divine sanction attaching to them, would be saddled with the whole of the cost.

2. That it would not be fair or just to the religious members of the community to throw such a burden upon them, while the irreligious and the indifferent would be entitled in law to a total exemption—an exemption of which, there can be little doubt, they would not fail to avail themselves. It would be tantamount to a *tax* (voluntary indeed, but not on that account the less imperative) upon the religious *few* for the benefit of the irreligious many.

3. That, if the Bill now on the table of the Honorable House of Assembly become law, your Petitioners believe that one-half, probably two-thirds, of the present country charges would be permanently vacated. This, even in a moral and fiscal point of view, notwithstanding the admitted inefficiency of some of the present Incumbents, would be most disastrous.

4. That many of the Ministers now receiving aid from Government were induced to leave their native land, and to relinquish appointments there, on assurances given to them by the authorities, both at home and in the Colony, that the allowances at present granted to them would be permanent; and that under these circumstances, now that they are old and grey-headed, and with families to provide for, it would be an act of heartless cruelty to deprive them of emoluments to the payment of which the good faith of both the Imperial and Colonial Governments is directly pledged. In proof of this faith being really pledged, your Petitioners respectfully refer to the Colonial Church Act, and various Despatches from the Secretaries of State, especially one from Lord John Russell, in reference thereto.

5. That the charge of £15,000 upon the Land Fund of such a Colony as Tasmania is altogether too trifling to be taken into account when compared with the risk of jeopardising the moral and religious status of the community.

6. That the said charge upon the Land Fund having been expressly reserved by the Crown, as one of the conditions upon which Free Institutions were granted to the Colony, it would be ungenerous and unmanly to take the benefit, and then to repudiate the obligation with which it was accompanied.

On these grounds your Petitioners most respectfully beg your Honorable House not to pass any Bill having for its object the abolition of State Aid to Religion.

And, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

[Here follow 153 Signatures.]

JAMES BARNARD,
GOVERNMENT PRINTER, TASMANIA.