

William Cushing: Undelivered Speech, c. 4 February 1788

That mankind have certain important rights, as well as that they are bound to certain important duties wch. are as it were their Counterpart *reason incontestibly dictates: no reasonable man will deny*—The point is—What are those rights & how are they to be secured?

Among them some are said to be unalienable, that is—such as no man can, consistent with his duty to God & himself, give up or make over to Another, but must, in the nature of things, exercise them himself & be accountable for the right use of them. Such are the rights of conscience, of thinking & judging in religious matters & of conducting Oneself towards his maker as his own particular reason directs him, without Controll, any further than that under this pretence he shall not be *permitted led* to infringe the undoubted right of others.

Mankind however in all Ages, & even pious & well meaning men, have been ~~from a certain false zeal,~~ very prone to violate this sacred right, to Set up persecution & intolerance & shedding rivers of blood, as the proper methods of reforming the world & ~~inspiring~~ communicating the true principles of piety.

This Country may boast of having gone as far, I suppose further than any other Country upon Earth in putting an end to that absurd practice, having established Religious freedom as one main pillar of government in all their new Constitutions & abolished all governmental preferences of Sects or persuasions.

If we exceed our Ancestors in Liberality of Sentiment, it will ~~may~~ be well a ~~question~~ if we do not fall as much short of them in Strictness of piety & morality in other Respects.—

As Catholicism & liberality of Sentiment abound, we ought to be upon our guard lest we fall into a Contrary Extreme. Some men have been so liberal in thinking as to Religion as to Shake off all Religion, & while they have labored to Set up heathen above Christian Morals, have shown themselves destitute of all morality, at least the essential points of it—; making a disposition to forgive injuries no part of a man's duty. Thus subverting an essential ingredient in the great principle of benevolence, ~~which is to prevent men from continuing to butcher one another as long as man remains upon Earth,~~ tending to prevent those dangerous revengeful retaliations which produce perpetual wars & slaughter of the human species, nationally & individual.

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