

AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONALISM  
VOLUME II: RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES  
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Supplementary Material

Chapter 2: The Colonial Era – Individual Rights/Religion/Free Exercise

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Nathaniel Ward, *The Simple Cobler of Aggawam in America*<sup>1</sup>

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*Nathaniel Ward (1578–1652) was a leader of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the primary author of the Massachusetts Body of Liberties (1641). The liberty of conscience was not among the liberties Ward would have the colony protect. The Simple Cobler of Aggawam stated his reasons why a Christian state should not tolerate religious error. Consider the Massachusetts Body of Liberties when reading this selection. On what basis did Ward and other Puritans protect some liberties, but not religious liberty?*

...  
I dare take upon me, . . . as to proclaim to the world, in the name of our Colony, that all Familists, Antinomians, Anabaptists, and other Enthusiasts shall have free Liberty to keep away from us, and such as will come to be gone as fast as they can, the sooner the better.

... I dare aver, that God doth no where in his word tolerate Christian States, to give Tolerations to such adversaries of his Truth, if they have power in their hands to suppress them.

... We are very sorry to see such professed profaneness in English Professors, as industriously to lay their Religious foundations on the ruin of true Religion; which strictly binds every conscience to contend earnestly for the Truth: to preserve unity of spirit, Faith and Ordinances, to be all like minded, of one accord; every man to take his brother into his Christian care: . . . striving together for the faith of the Gospel, and by no means to permit Heresies or erroneous opinions. . . .

...  
Not to tolerate things merely indifferent to weak consciences, argues a conscience too strong: pressed uniformity in these, causes much disunity: To tolerate more than indifference, is not to deal indifferently with God. . . . Who hath to do to institute Religion but God. The power of all Religion and Ordinances, lies in their purity: their purity in their simplicity: then are mixtures pernicious. . . .

That State is wise, that will improve all pains and patience rather to compose, then tolerate differences in Religion. There is no divine Truth, but hath much Celestial fire in it from the Spirit of Truth: nor no irreligious untruth, without its proportion of Antifire from the spirit of Error to contradict it: the zeal of the one, the virulency of the other, must necessarily kindle Combustions. . . . They which divide in Religion, divide in God; they who divide in him, . . . where there is no reconciliation, without atonement; that is, without uniting in him, who is One, and in his Truth, which is also one.

...  
He that is willing to tolerate any Religion, or discrepant way of Religion, besides his own, unless it be in matters merely indifferent, either doubts of his own, or is not sincere in it.

...  
That State that will give Liberty of Conscience in matters of Religion, must give Liberty of Conscience and Conversation in their Moral Laws. . . .

Experience will teach Churches and Christians, that it is far better to live in a State united, though a little Corrupt, then in a State, whereof some Part is incorrupt, and all the rest divided.

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<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Ward, *The Simple Cobler of Aggawam in America* . . . , ed. David Pulsifer (Boston, MA: James Munroe and Company, 1843), 3–9.