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About the Freedom of Religion

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Boston, *Independent Chronicle*, 6 December 1787 (excerpt)

. . . Those among us who cannot entirely approve the *new* Constitution as it is called, are of opinion, in order that any form may be well administered, and thus be made a blessing to the people, that there ought to be at least, an express reservation of certain inherent unalienable rights, which it would be equally sacrilegious for the people to *give away*, as for the government to *invade*. If the rights of conscience, for instance, are not sacredly reserved to the people, what security will there be, in case the government should have in their heads a predilection for any *one* sect in religion? what will hinder the civil power from erecting a national system of religion, and committing the law to a set of lordly priests, reaching, as the great Dr. *Mayhew* expressed it, from the desk to the skies?¹ An *Hierarchy* which has ever been the grand engine in the hand of civil tyranny; and tyrants in return will afford them opportunity enough to vent their rage on *stubborn hereticks*, by *wholesome severities*, as they were called by national religionists, in a country which has long boasted its freedom. It was doubtless for the peace of *that* nation, that there should be an *uniformity* in religion, and for the same *wise* and *good* reason, the act of uniformity remains *in force* to these enlightened times.

1. In his published writings and sermons, Jonathan Mayhew (1720–1766), a prominent Boston Congregational minister, often attacked the Anglican clergy as a danger to American liberties, thereby contributing to the defeat of the attempt to establish an episcopacy in America.

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