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About the Freedom of Religion

James Madison Speech: Virginia Convention 12 June 1788 (excerpt)

. . . The honorable member has introduced the subject of religion. — Religion is not guarded— There is no Bill of Rights declaring that religion should be secure. — Is a Bill of Rights a security for religion? Would the Bill of Rights in this State exempt the people from paying for the support of one particular sect, if such sect were exclusively established by law? If there were a majority of one sect, a Bill of Rights would be a poor protection for liberty. Happily for the States, they enjoy the utmost freedom of religion. This freedom arises from that multiplicity of sects, which pervades America, and which is the best and only security for religious liberty in any society. For where there is such a variety of sects, there cannot be a majority of any one sect to oppress and persecute the rest. Fortunately for this Commonwealth, a majority of the people are decidedly against any exclusive establishment—I believe it to be so in the other States. There is not a shadow of right in the General Government to intermeddle with religion. — Its least interference with it would be a most flagrant usurpation. — I can appeal to my uniform conduct on this subject, that I have warmly supported religious freedom. — It is better that this security should be depended upon from the General Legislature, than from one particular State. A particular State might concur in one religious project. — But the United States abound in such a vast variety of sects, that it is a strong security against religious persecution, and is sufficient to authorise a conclusion, that no one sect will ever be able to out number or depress the rest. . . .

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