

John Locke A Letter concerning Toleration (1689)

Web Version: http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/amendI_religions10.html

...God has [n]ever given any such authority to one man over another, as to compel any one to his religion. . . For no man can, if he would, conform his faith to the dictates of another. All the life and power of true religion consist in the inward and full persuasion of the mind; and faith is not faith without believing. Whatever profession we make, to whatever outward worship we conform, if we are not fully satisfied in our own mind that the one is true . . . such profession and such practice, far from being any furtherance, are indeed great obstacles to our salvation. For in this manner . . . we add unto the number of our other sins those also of hypocrisy, and contempt of his Divine

. . . true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind . . . it cannot be compelled to the belief of anything by outward force. Confiscation of estate, imprisonment, torments, nothing of that nature can have any such efficacy as to make men change the inward judgment that they have framed of things.

It may indeed be alleged that the magistrate may make use of arguments . . . but it is one thing to persuade, another to command; one thing to press with arguments, another with penalties . . . the magistrate's power extends not to the establishing of any articles of faith, or forms of worship, by the force of his laws. For laws are of no force at all without penalties, and penalties in this case are absolutely impertinent, because they are not proper to convince the mind . . . penalties are no way capable to produce such belief. It is only light and evidence that can work a change in men's opinions; and that light can in no manner proceed from corporal sufferings, or any other outward penalties.

. . . what hope is there that more men would be led into it if they had no other rule to follow but the religion of the court . . .

. . . all the power of civil government relates only to men's civil interests, is confined to the care of the things of this world, and hath nothing to do with the world to come.

. . . A church, then, I take to be a voluntary society of men, joining themselves together of their own accord in order to the public worshipping of God in such manner as they judge acceptable . . . it is a free and voluntary society.

Nobody is born a member of any church; otherwise the religion of parents would descend unto children by the same right of inheritance as their temporal estates . . . No man by nature is bound unto any particular church or sect, but every one joins himself voluntarily to that society in which he believes he has found that profession and worship which is truly acceptable to God.

. . . why should it not [a person not also] be as free for him to go out as it was to enter?

. . . no private person has any right in any manner to prejudice another person in his civil enjoyments because he is of another church or religion . . . No violence nor injury is to be offered him, whether he be Christian or Pagan . . . If any man err from the right way, it is his own misfortune . . .

. . . the civil government can give no new right to the church, nor the church to the civil government . . . therefore peace, equity, and friendship are always mutually to be observed by particular churches, in the same manner as by private persons, without any pretence of superiority or jurisdiction over one another.

. . . The care, therefore, of every man's soul belongs unto himself, and is to be left unto himself. But what if he neglect the care of his soul? I answer: What if he neglect the care of his health or of his estate, which things are nearer related to the government of the magistrate than the other? . . . No man can be forced to be rich or healthful whether he will or no.

. . . I cannot be saved by a religion that I distrust, and by a worship that I abhor . . . In vain, therefore, do princes compel their subjects to come into their church communion, under pretence of saving their souls. If they believe, they will come of their own accord; if they believe not, their coming will nothing avail them . . . when all is done, they must be left to their own consciences.