

Margaret Winthrop, pregnant at the time her husband wrote this, joined him in 1631. Tragically, the baby died en route.

**Roger Williams to the Town of Providence, Rhode Island
& Cotton Mather to His Uncle John Cotton**

Although many of the first pilgrims were exceedingly intolerant of faiths different from their own, one of the earliest settlers, Roger Williams, actually subscribed to the idea of religious freedom. Williams was banished from the Massachusetts Bay by the revered minister John Cotton Sr. for suggesting that there be a separation of civil and religious authority and that they break from the Church of England. Moving to Rhode Island, Williams ultimately created a sanctuary for people of varying faiths, including Jews. In the early to mid-1650s, the citizens of Providence found themselves in a quarrel as to whether it was possible to respect religious differences and also to maintain shared laws and order. In the following letter to the town of Providence, Williams concedes it is an immense issue but nevertheless offers his views on reconciling religious freedom with the need for common laws.

To the Town of Providence,

1655

That ever I should speak or write a tittle, that tends to such an infinite liberty of conscience, is a mistake, and which I have ever disclaimed and abhorred. To prevent such mistakes, I shall at present only propose this case: There goes many a ship to sea, with many hundred souls in one ship, whose weal and woe is common, and is a true picture of a commonwealth, or a human combination or society. It hath fallen out sometimes, that both Papists and Protestants, Jews and Turks, may be embarked in one ship; upon which supposal I affirm, that all the liberty of conscience, that ever I pleaded for, turns upon these two hinges—that none of the Papists, Protestants, Jews, or Turks be forced to come to the ship's prayers or worship, nor compelled from their own particular

prayers or worship, if they practice any. I further add, that I never denied, that notwithstanding this liberty, the commander of this ship ought to command the ship's course, yea, and also command that justice, peace, and sobriety be kept and practiced, both among the seamen and all the passengers. If any of the seamen refuse to perform their services, or passengers to pay their freight; if any refuse to help, in person or purse, towards the common charges or defence; if any refuse to obey the common laws and orders of the ship, concerning their common peace or preservation; if any shall mutiny and rise up against their commanders and officers; if any should preach or write that there ought to be no commanders or officers, because all are equal in Christ, therefore no masters nor officers, no laws or orders, nor corrections nor punishments; I say, never denied, but in such cases, whatever is pretended, the commander or commanders may judge, resist, compel, and punish such transgressors, according to their deserts and merits. This if seriously and honestly minded, may, if it so please the Father of Lights, let in some light to such as willingly shut not their eyes.

I remain studious of your common peace and liberty.

Roger Williams

The passing of Roger Williams's antagonist, John Cotton Sr., in 1652 by no means stemmed the tide of religious persecution in the colonies. Cotton Mather, the grandson of John Cotton Sr. and Richard Mather, rose to eminence by publicly denouncing those he believed were undermining the old Puritan ways with inferior and "blasphemous" religions. In 1692 Mather struck his most notorious blow in defense of his own faith when he fanned the flames of suspicion against women he thought to be witches. In the following letter to his uncle, John Cotton Jr., Mather expresses enthusiasm for the demise of a small band of witches and reflects on a recent earthquake in Jamaica.