

## Act of Toleration, May, 1689

*A second important change ushered in by the Glorious Revolution was embodied in the Toleration Act, passed in May, 1689. It built on James II's Declaration of Toleration (1687), by allowing freedom of worship to all Protestant Non-Conformists, i.e., to non-Anglicans. This act was passed partly because William of Orange, as a non-Anglican Calvinist himself, encouraged it, and partly because Parliament sought wider support for its installation of a new king. However, the Act's religious toleration was very limited by modern standards: it granted no freedom of worship to Catholics, Jews, atheists, or non-Trinitarian Protestants (e.g. Unitarians). Moreover, some provisions of the Test Act of 1673 remained in force, so that only Anglicans could serve in Parliament and hold other high offices. Nonetheless, this act marks the waning of the era of religious wars and the beginnings of religious toleration as a prevailing legal principle in Britain and its colonies.*

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[1] Forasmuch as some ease to scrupulous consciences in the exercise of religion may be an effectual means to unite their Majesties Protestant subjects in interest and affection:

[2] Be it enacted by the King's and Queen's most excellent majesties, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and the Commons, in this present Parliament assembled and by the authority of the same, that: [various previous statutes] that required all those who did not have reasonable excuses to [attend] their parish church, chapel, or other usual place where the common prayer is used..., nor any other law or statute of this realm made against papists or popish recusants, except [for two recent statutes], shall be construed to extend to any person or persons dissenting from the Church of England who shall take the oaths mentioned in a statute made this present Parliament..., and who shall make and subscribe the declaration mentioned in a [recent] statute, entitled, *An act to prevent papists from sitting in either house of Parliament*. These oaths and declaration the justices of peace at the general sessions of the peace [i.e., county courts], are hereby required to administer to such persons as shall offer themselves to make and subscribe the same, and thereof to keep a register...

[3] And be it further enacted...that all persons already convicted or prosecuted [under] the aforesaid statutes, who shall take the said oaths...and make and subscribe the declaration aforesaid..., shall be thenceforth discharged from all the penalties...thereby incurred.

[12] And be it further enacted...that every justice of the peace may at any time require any person that goes to any meeting for exercise of religion, to make and subscribe the declaration aforesaid, and also to take the said oaths or declaration of fidelity hereinafter mentioned. [But if anyone refuses], the justice of the peace is hereby required to commit such person to prison...

[13] And...be it enacted...that every person who shall make and subscribe the aforesaid declaration, will also [make] this declaration of fidelity: "I do solemnly declare before God and the world, that I will be true and faithful to King William and Queen Mary; and...that no foreign prince, person, prelate, state, or potentate, hath or ought to have, any power, jurisdiction, superiority, pre-eminence, or authority ecclesiastical or spiritual within this realm." And [every such person] shall subscribe a profession of their Christian belief in these words: "I profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus

Christ His eternal Son, the true God, and in the Holy Spirit, one God blessed for evermore, and do acknowledge the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by divine inspiration.” Those who make these oaths and declarations will be exempted from the penalties proscribed by the above statutes...

[14] Provided always...that in case any person shall refuse to take the said oaths..., such person shall not be admitted to make and subscribe the two declarations aforesaid..., unless such person can...produce two sufficient Protestant witnesses to testify upon oath that they believe him to be a Protestant dissenter...

[16] Provided always...that all the laws made and provided for the frequenting of divine service on the Lord's Day commonly called Sunday shall be still in force, and executed against all persons that offend against the said laws...

[17] Provided always...that neither this act, nor any clause, article, or thing herein contained, shall extend or be construed to extend to give any ease, benefit or advantage to any papist or popish recusant whatsoever, or any person that shall deny in his preaching or writing the doctrine of the blessed Trinity, as it is declared in the aforesaid articles of religion.

[19] Provided always, that no congregation or assembly for religious worship shall be permitted or allowed by this act, until the place of such meeting shall be certified to the bishop of the diocese, or to the archdeacon of that archdeaconry, or to the justices of the peace.