

Theophilus Parsons in the Massachusetts Ratification Convention Debates, 23 January 1788

...It has been objected, that the Constitution provides no religious test by oath, and we may have in power unprincipled men, atheists and pagans. No man can wish more ardently than I do, that all our publick offices may be filled by men who fear God and hate wickedness; but it must remain with the electors to give the government this security—an oath will not do it: Will an unprincipled man be entangled by an oath? Will an atheist or a pagan dread the vengeance of the christian's God, a being in his opinion the creature of fancy and credulity? It is a solecism in expression. No man is so illiberal as to wish the confining places of honour or profit to any one sect of christians: But what security is it to government, that every publick officer shall swear that he is a christian? For what will then be called Christianity? One man will declare that the christian religion is only an illumination of natural religion, and that he is a christian; another christian will assert, that all men must be happy hereafter in spite of themselves; a third christian reverses the image, and declares, that let a man do all he can, he will certainly be punished in another world; and a fourth will tell us, that if a man use any force for the common defence, he violates every principle of Christianity. Sir, the only evidence we can have of the sincerity and excellency of a man's religion, is a good life—and I trust that such evidence will be required of every candidate by every elector. That man who acts an honest part to his neighbour, will most probably conduct honourably towards the publick.

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