

Massachusetts Ratification Convention Debates, 31 January 1787

Colonel Jones said, that one of his principal objections, was the omission of a religious test.

Rev. Mr. Payson. Mr. President—After what has been observed relating to a religious test by gentlemen of acknowledged abilities, I did not expect it would again be mentioned, as an objection to the proposed Constitution, that such a test was not required as a qualification for office. Such were the abilities and integrity of the gentlemen who constructed the Constitution, as not to admit of the presumption that they would have betrayed so much vanity as to attempt to erect bulwarks and barriers to the throne of God. Relying on the candour of this Convention, I shall take the liberty to express my sentiments on the nature of a religious test, and shall endeavour to do it in such propositions as will meet the approbation of every mind.

The great object of religion being God supreme, and the seat of religion in man being the heart or conscience, *i.e.* the reason God has given us, employed on our moral actions, in their most important consequences, as related to the tribunal of God, hence I infer, that God alone is the God of the conscience, and consequently, attempts to erect human tribunals for the consciences of men, are impious encroachments upon the prerogatives of God. Upon these principles had there been a religious test, as a qualification for office, it would, in my opinion, have been a great blemish to the instrument.

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