

Reverend Daniel Shute in the Massachusetts Ratification Convention Debates, 31 January 1788, A.M.

...<In the conversation on Thursday, on the sixth article, which provides, that “no religious test shall ever be required, as a qualification to any office.” &c. several gentlemen urged, that it was a departure from the principles of our fore-fathers, who came here for the preservation of their religion; and that as it would admit deists, atheists, &c. into the general government, and people being apt to imitate the examples of the *Court*, these principles will be disseminated, and of course a corruption of morals ensue.—Gentlemen on the other side applauded the liberality of the clause—and represented in striking colours the impropriety and almost impiety of the requisition of a test, as practised in Great-Britain and elsewhere—In this conversation, the following is the substance of the observations of the>

Rev. Mr. SHUTE. Mr. President—To object to the latter part of the paragraph under consideration, which excludes a religious test, is, I am sensible, very popular; for the most of men, some how, are rigidly tenacious of their own sentiments in religion, and disposed to impose them upon others as the *standard* of truth. If in my sentiments, upon the point in view, I should differ from some in this honourable body, I only wish from them the exercise of that candour, with which true religion is adapted to inspire the honest and well-disposed mind.

To establish a religious test as a qualification for offices in the proposed Federal Constitution, appears to me, sir, would be attended with injurious consequences to some individuals, and with no advantage to the *whole*.

By the injurious consequences to individuals, I mean, that some, who in every other respect, are qualified to fill some important post in government, will be excluded by their not being able to stand the religious test—which I take to be a privation of part of their civil rights.

Nor is there to me any conceivable advantage, sir, that would result to the *whole* from such a test. Unprincipled and dishonest men will not hesitate to subscribe to *any thing*, that may open the way for their advancement, and put them into a situation the better to execute their base and iniquitous designs. Honest men alone, therefore, however well qualified to serve the publick, would be excluded by it, and their country be deprived of the benefit of their abilities.

In this great and extensive empire, there is and will be a great variety of sentiments in religion among its inhabitants. Upon the plan of a religious test, the question I think must be, who shall be excluded from national trusts? Whatever answer bigotry may suggest, the dictates of candour and equity, I conceive, will be *none*.

Far from limiting my charity and confidence to men of my own denomination in religion, I suppose, and I believe, sir, that there are worthy characters among men of every other denomination—among the Quakers—the Baptists—the Church of England—the Papists—and even among those who have no other guide, in the way to virtue and heaven, than the dictates of natural religion.

I must therefore think, sir, that the proposed plan of government, in this particular, is wisely constructed: That as all have an equal claim to the blessings of the government under which they live, and which they support, so none should be excluded from them for being of any particular denomination in religion.

The presumption is, that the eyes of the people will be upon the faithful in the land, and from a regard to their own safety, will chuse for their rulers, men of known abilities—of known probity—of good moral characters. The apostle Peter tells us, that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is *acceptable* to him—And I know of no reason, why men of such a character, in a community, of whatever denomination in religion, *cæteris paribus*, with other suitable qualifications, should not be *acceptable* to the people, and why they may not be employed, by them, with safety and advantage in the important offices of government.—The exclusion of a religious test in the proposed Constitution, therefore, clearly appears to me, sir, to be in favour of its adoption.

Colonel JONES (*Bristol*) thought, that the rulers ought to believe in God or Christ—and that however a test may be prostituted in England, yet he thought if our publick men were to be of those who had a good standing in the church, it would be happy for the United States—and that a person could not be a good man without being a good Christian.

The conversation on the Constitution by paragraphs being ended, Mr. PARSONS moved, *that this Convention do assent to and ratify this Constitution.*

Mr. NEAL rose and said, that as the Constitution at large was now under consideration, he would just remark, that the article which respected the Africans was the one which lay on his mind—and unless his objections to that were removed, it must, how much soever he liked the other parts of the Constitution, be a sufficient reason for him to give his negative to it.

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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