

William Lancaster in the North Carolina Ratification Convention (Hillsborough), Wednesday, 30 July 1788

Mr. LANCASTER. Mr. Chairman, it is of the utmost importance to decide this great question with candor and deliberation. Every part of this Constitution has been elucidated. It hath been asserted, by several worthy gentlemen, that it is the most excellent Constitution that ever was formed. I could wish to be of that opinion if it were so...

...As to a religious test, had the article which excludes it provided none but what had been in the states heretofore, I would not have objected to it. It would secure religion. Religious liberty ought to be provided for. I acquiesce with the gentleman, who spoke, on this point, my sentiments better than I could have done myself. For my part, in reviewing the qualifications necessary for a President, I did not suppose that the pope could occupy the President's chair. But let us remember that we form a government for millions not yet in existence. I have not the art of divination. In the course of four or five hundred years, I do not know how it will work. This is most certain, that Papists may occupy that chair, and Mahometans may take it. I see nothing against it. There is a disqualification, I believe, in every state in the Union--it ought to be so in this system. It is said that all power not given is retained. I find they thought proper to insert negative clauses in the Constitution, restraining the general government from the exercise of certain powers. These were unnecessary if the doctrine be true, that every thing not given is retained. From the insertion of these we may conclude the doctrine to be fallacious. Mr. Lancaster then observed, that he would disapprove of the Constitution as it then stood. His own feelings, and his duty to his constituents, induced him to do so. Some people; he said, thought a delegate might act independently of the people. He thought otherwise, and that every delegate was bound by their instructions, and if he did any thing repugnant to their wishes, he betrayed his trust, He thought himself bound by the voice of the people, whatever other gentlemen might think. He would cheerfully agree to adopt, if he thought it would be of general utility; but as he thought it would have a contrary effect, and as he believed a great majority of the people were against it, he would oppose its adoption.

Jonathan Elliot, ed., *The Debates in the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution*, Volume 4, Washington, D.C., 1836, p.215. From Library of Congress, *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875*. (Accessed 8/19/11)