

ing how they should be permitted to hold office, by providing that "if the party shall profess to be a Jew, the declaration shall be of his belief in a future state of rewards and punishments."

Now if the amendment of the gentleman from Baltimore county (Mr. Ridgely) is adopted, there will be no provision whatever in our Constitution recognizing the fact that a party should be a believer in the Christian religion, or in a future state of rewards and punishments. Now, as we are a Christian people, as in the preamble of this bill of rights we express our gratitude to God for our civil and religious liberties; and having in succeeding articles recognized the existence of God, and of the Christian religion, we should make that also a test for office. I think the State can do no less than to that extent recognize the existence of God and implore his assistance.

Mr. RIDGELY. My friend from Somerset (Mr. Jones) has placed in my hands an amendment which I will adopt instead of the one I submitted, as it more fully expresses my views, and will, I think, meet the views expressed by the gentleman from Prince George's (Mr. Clarke).

Now, Mr. Chairman, it is not a fact that our Declaration of Rights, in the preamble, recognizes the Christian religion. The gentleman is mistaken. It recognizes the existence of Almighty God. And it is in the spirit of that recognition that I propose that this article in our bill of rights shall conform to the preamble. If the preamble had set out with an express acknowledgment of the Christian religion, then it would be perfectly consistent to carry that acknowledgment and recognition throughout the Declaration of Rights.

Mr. CLARKE. Article 26 recognizes the Christian religion by providing that a party to hold office shall declare his belief in the Christian religion; or, if a Jew, his belief in a future state of rewards and punishments.

Mr. RIDGELY. The position that the gentleman occupied was that the bill of rights set out with an expression of gratitude to Almighty God for the civil and religious privileges we enjoy. And the idea he desired to convey to this House was that that declaration should be preserved throughout this bill of rights, and that it would be in harmony with that declaration to have this article retain the declaration that we are a Christian people.

Now my theory is this: that we are a people who recognize the existence of a Supreme Being, the Almighty God, and of our just moral accountability to that Supreme Being. And to that extent it would be proper and just to preserve the idea in the Constitution throughout. The proposition which I have submitted is designed to

occupy the precise position which the Constitution of the United States occupies. It is the idea of some gentlemen that no religious test whatever should be required to qualify an individual to hold public office.

I profess Mr. Chairman, to have as high veneration for the Christian religion as any man has. I am a humble, perhaps a very unworthy member of a Christian religious community. But the opinions and sentiments which I entertain upon that subject do not prejudice me against those who differ with me in those religious sentiments. I believe that under our form of government every man who is an elector, who is qualified to be an elector under our Constitution, should also be regarded as having all the qualification which the Constitution ought to impose upon him in order to be one of the elected. In other words that there should be no difference between the qualifications of the elector and the qualifications of the elected. What I mean is this: in prescribing in your fundamental law what shall be the qualifications to entitle an individual to exercise the right of suffrage, no religious test is imposed; and, therefore, in prescribing the qualifications of an individual to entitle him to hold office, you should impose no religious qualification other than the general declaration of a belief in the existence of God, and a proper moral accountability to that God, either in this world or the world to come, for deeds done in this life.

This same proposition, but in a somewhat different form, was submitted in the Convention of 1850, of which I had the honor to be a member. It was then submitted in this form: that no person should be disqualified from any civil or political capacity on account of his religious belief. That was considered to be too general and comprehensive. But it was by virtue of that proposition that there was afterwards introduced into this Constitution this very idea of freeing witnesses in courts of justice, and jurors, from the disqualifications on account of religious belief, which formerly existed in England.

The idea which I desire to impress upon this House is, that in view of the great difference of religious opinions that exist in this State, and the earnestness and perfect honesty and sincerity with which those religious opinions are entertained, it would be neither wise, nor proper, nor just, on the part of this Convention, to impose such a stringent restriction upon our fellow citizens, as to require that they should all believe in the Christian religion in order to be qualified to hold office, or the modification proposed by the gentleman from Prince George's, (Mr. Clarke), a belief in a future state of rewards and punishments; although I should be unwilling to admit any provision into our Constitution which would admit