

A review

Earl Raab (ed.), *Religious Conflict in America: Studies in Problems Beyond Bigotry*

J. ALAN WINTER

Sociology Department, The University of Michigan

The quality of a collection of essays may be judged both by the quality of the individual essays which comprise it and by the degree to which the collection serves the purposes of the editor. The selections on religious conflict in America compiled by Raab are, for the most part, works of high quality. Moreover, they are arranged in a reasonably logical and coherent order. It is unfortunate, therefore, that Raab provides no explicit statement of his reasons for selecting any of the works included in *Religious Conflict in America*, nor of the purpose which the whole is to serve. However, his success as an editor can be judged in terms of his own statement concerning the nature of the problem in the lead essay of the collection. I would think Raab's editing successful to the extent that it facilitates one's understanding of the fundamental issues as he defines them and to the degree to which supplementary discussion of specific and concrete manifestations of general problems is provided.

It is Raab's belief that the "total bundle of religion-connected issues [poses] for the intergroup relations, as well as for the democratic dialogue in general . . . a stunningly sophisticated problem in the communication and negotiation of differences." The collection of essays compiled by Raab does much to facilitate the conduct of a democratic dialogue on religion-connected issues in America by placing the current church-state debate in the context of American history and institutions. Unfortunately, since so much

of the context of the debate on church-state relations in America concerns the peculiarities of our Constitution, the material on religious conflict in America teaches one little about religious conflicts in other nations, and no more about conflict processes in general.

Raab believes that the proper perspective for viewing church-state issues is threefold: one must understand the nature of interreligious differences and conflict in America; the constitutional and religious issues involved in maintaining a proper separation of church and state; and the workings of a democratic state in balancing the will of the majority and the rights of the minority. In short, one must understand American religions, the American state, and the relationship between them before he can put the current debate on church-state issues into its proper perspective.

The essays in the collection deal with only two of the three contexts of the church-state debate. There is no essay dealing with the problems of balancing majority opinion and minority rights. Raab is the only author to mention what he calls the "political issue of populism vs. constitutionalism."

The first ten of the twelve selections in the body of the book generally move, as Raab states, "from a treatment of the various aspects of interreligious differences and conflicts to the matter of religious-secular conflict in America, to a discussion of the church-state issue." The last of the essays, "America's Four Conspiracies" by John

Courtney Murray, is a plea for the beginning of democratic dialogue among Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and secularists in America. Murray also notes some of the difficulties which would be encountered in such a debate. "Our pluralistic society has," he comments, "received its structure through wars and the wars are still going on beneath a fragile structure of urbanity." The fragility of that structure is documented by the preceding essay, "Community conflict: Christmas observances in the public schools," which is based on a report by the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ). The report is an account of the furor and anti-semitism exhibited in a suburban Connecticut town following objections by the New Haven Jewish Community Council (JCC) to the practice of holding religious observances of Christmas and Hanukah in public schools. The New Haven JCC claimed the practice violated the constitutional ban against passage of laws "respecting an establishment of religion."

The Murray essay and the NCCJ report seem to me to be excellent aids to those who wish to take part in the communication and negotiation of religious differences. One, the Murray article, discusses some of the general characteristics of democratic debate and some of the general problems one encounters when attempting to establish such debate on religious matters among Americans. The other, the NCCJ report, is an account of the failure to establish such debate from which much can be learned—as the town leaders themselves found.

It is unfortunate, therefore, that the four essays which Raab regards as comprising the section on interreligious differences and conflict do not add to what one can learn from the Murray essay and the NCCJ report. The section deals only parenthetically with differences in doctrine and the consequences

of such differences. There is no mention of any specific instance of interreligious conflict.

The failure to discuss doctrinal differences and interreligious conflicts is especially disappointing. One cannot be expected to talk intelligently about differences he does not know exist. Nor can he negotiate wisely if he does not know which issues are most likely to inflame.

It may be, as Raab claims, that "For the most part, the imperatives of public morality deriving from American Christianity, Judaism and secular humanism have become a common stream. . . . It is not that there are really critical differences among the various religious groupings today as to the basic church-state principles themselves." Nevertheless, as Raab himself is quick to realize, ". . . differences in religious character, in institutional needs, in history and in status create different stresses on these principles and different interpretations of the kinds of balances which should be struck within them." The four essays in the section on interreligious differences and conflict do not aid one to understand and work for a reasonable balance among common principles. They do not discuss any of the factors which Raab cites as influencing differences in the interpretation of the common principles.

The four essays concentrate instead on differences in rates of church attendance, interfaith friendships, and interfaith marriages, and on differences in voting behavior. Moreover, none of the essays relates these differences to differences in religious character, doctrine, ritual, institutional needs, or history. There is, for example, no discussion of the dynamics of interfaith friendship or marriage such as is found in Mayer's *Jewish-Gentile Courtship* (1961).

There is only the barest sensitivity to

the concrete ways in which religion can serve as sources of alternative values within a society as large and complex as America's. There is, for example, no discussion of the notable cases, which Raab cites, "of theologically based antagonism of many Protestant groups to gambling and liquor; and the Catholic religious strictures against divorce and artificial birth control." Nor is there any comment on the fact that Catholics, Jews, and nontheists face what Raab calls "an obvious dilemma [in] that religious instruction in America's public schools was always bound to have a Protestant cast. . . ." A book which is to be useful to one dealing with religion-connected issues should at least discuss the more outstanding instances of conflict-laden differences.

I would also think it useful to discuss problems which arise when one steps outside the "common stream" of American moral and religious philosophies. A discussion of the treatment afforded Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists, the Amish, and atheists would quickly illumine the practical limits of American religious tolerance. What is the justification, if any, of a proposal to exclude atheists from the coverage of civil rights legislation? On the other hand, studies of the workings of the National Conference of Christian and Jews, of the ecumenical movement within American Protestantism, and of recent attempts by Catholics to reach a rapprochement with Protestants might uncover important insights into the conduct of the debate among religious groups.

The section on interreligious differences and conflicts suffers, then, from a failure to discuss any specific instances in which attempts were made to solve problems stemming from religious differences. The second section of the book, which purportedly deals with the "matter of religious-secular

conflict in America" similarly fails to discuss any specific conflict between religious beliefs and practices, on the one hand, and secular institutions and needs, on the other. The section does not even discuss possible causes of specific conflicts.

All four contributors to the section on religious-secular conflict agree that religious institutions and beliefs should do battle with the evils wrought by the secular institutions of man and help to alleviate the effects of these evils. The matter of the religious responsibility for the secular order is dealt with at some length by theologians of the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish faiths. The differences in their treatment of the topic is itself a useful example of differences in the stress and interpretation placed on common principles.

In any event, those writers who comment on the current state of American religion agree that it is not as it should be. However, only one author, Herberg, discusses possible reasons for the failure. He sees the main causes as stemming from the parishioners rather than from the ministers or the churches. Herberg claims that the other-directed man of our time cannot make sense of the religion of the prophets. "The very notion of being 'singled-out,' of standing 'over against' the world is," he claims, "deeply repugnant to one for whom well-being means conformity and adjustment."

I believe, however, that one can gain a greater understanding of the nature of religious-secular conflict by studying the manner in which religious organizations respond to secular pressures when contemplating taking a stand on a moral issue. It may be, as Herberg claims, that in America "it is not man who serves God, but God who is mobilized and made to serve man and his purposes—whether these purposes be economic prosperity, free enterprises,

social reform, democracy, happiness, security, or 'peace of mind.'” If such is the case, it is as much the fault of the religious leaders as it is of their followers. Religious leaders often fail to work to implement their own sermons. They have often failed in the South (see Pettigrew and Campbell, 1959); in labor strife (Pope, 1942); and in the everyday affairs of a small town (Vidich and Bensman, 1960). Of course, not every minister, priest, or rabbi has failed. It would be instructive to read about the differences between those who have succeeded, or at least tried, and those who have not. If there is a conflict between religious and secular institutions it should be reflected most strongly by those most deeply involved. It is they who have had the task of striking the balance between the often contradictory demands of God and Mammon. An examination of their deeds may reveal what is involved in dealing with the differences between secular and religious institutions in America. Unfortunately, Raab's selections on religious-secular conflict contain no such discussion.

The last of Raab's three sections deals with the more or less specific issue of the relationship between organized religion and the state. The central issue in this section is the discussion of what is, or ought to be, meant by the constitutional ban on "laws respecting an establishment of religion; or the free exercise thereof."

Two law school professors, Leo Pfeffer and Wilber G. Katz, provide much of the legal and historical background of the Supreme Court rulings on recent cases involving interpretation of the First Amendment provision just cited. Excerpts from both majority and minority opinions on important Supreme Court cases are included in Raab's collection. Intelligent participation in current and future discussions of

church-state relations in America requires a knowledge of these decisions and of their background. Their inclusion in the Raab volume adds much to its usefulness.

The section on church-state relations has one serious defect. It is a bit too much concerned with abstract and past problems and not enough with some concrete and possibly future bones of contention.

"We are," the Supreme Court has said, "a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being." Yet, as the Court has recognized, "The place of religion in our society [was] achieved through a long tradition of reliance on the home, the church and the inviolable citadel of the human heart and mind. . . . it is not within the power of government to invade that citadel." It remains to be seen just what is to be considered an invasion of the "citadel of the human heart and mind." Justice Stewart has listed some official and legal practices which might be so regarded in the future. These include references to God in our national anthem, in our pledge of allegiance, in official ceremonies, and on our coins. It should be remembered that the Constitution does not once refer to God. It may someday be ruled that our anthem, our pledge, our ceremonies, and our coins need not refer to God either. Whatever the eventual resolution of these specific issues of church-state relations, there is sure to be much discussion of constitutional principles. "But," as Raab observes, "'church-state questions,' under the pressure of . . . other tensions in American life, cannot be understood nor perhaps dealt with forever in a legalistic vacuum. If 'balances' are to be struck, they will be struck under these pressures."

The collection of essays on *Religious Conflict in America* begins with an excellent overview of the religious and secular

pressures which bear on the resolution of church-state questions. It is unfortunate that only two of the eight contributions dealing with nonlegal aspects of the conflict speak to points raised by Raab. However, the two that do are well worth reading, as are the four which deal with the legal aspects of the conflict. All in all, it cannot be gainsaid that Raab has put together a collection of essays which will be of great help to those Americans who wish to engage in the difficult task of conducting a democratic civil debate of religious differences with a view towards establishing not tolerance, but understanding.

REFERENCES

- MAYER, JOHN E. *Jewish-Gentile Courtship*. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1961.
- PETTIGREW, THOMAS F., and ERNEST Q. CAMPBELL. *Christians in Moral Crisis*. Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1959.
- POPE, LISTON. *Millhands and Preachers*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942.
- RAAB, EARL (ed.). *Religious Conflict in America: Studies in Problems Beyond Bigotry*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday (Anchor), 1964.
- VIDICH, A. J., and J. BENSMAN. *Small Town in Mass Society*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday (Anchor), 1960.