INTRODUCTION

This paper is limited to a consideration of what the religious condition of America will be in the year 2000 as it will relate to political power. There are several possible relations which may prevail in twenty-four years, the three most extreme being:

1. Official abolition or control of religion by an all powerful state (as in Russia)
2. Complete control of the state by religion (as in Europe and elsewhere in the past)
3. The withering away of both church and state so that men would live in uncoerced, idyllic brotherhood (the Communist dream)

In an explosive atomic age, it cannot be said that these extreme possibilities are unreal, but the odds against them are too great for serious consideration in this paper. Other more probable possibilities are that:

1. Levels of freedom and tolerance will continue to grow and encourage pluralism of religion and nonreligion privately supported but protected by sovereign law.
2. Ecumenical brotherhood tolerant of diversity of religious interpretation will unite Americans in a civilized society giving little heed to fundamentalistic “narrowness.” “Civil religion” will play a large role.
3. State support of “major faiths,” or one major religion, and tolerant protection of others, as long seen in several European countries, will become the norm.
4. The state will provide both support and protection for all religions and see that none receives unfair advantage over others.
5. Traditional religion will gradually fade away in a secularized society where philosophy or civil religion will prevail tolerating pockets of vestigial religion as small groups of “fundamentalists” hold out against secularism.

Each of these possibilities (or combinations of them) seems realistic, but trends in public opinion and in legal decisions suggest that the first, second, or fourth is most likely to prevail. Ten years ago the first would seem to be ascendant, but recent movements toward governmental support of religion suggest that the fourth may yet prevail. Pluralistic developments could evolve to the second alternative, but desire for personal freedom and belief in equal rights are too highly prized, and ethnocentrism is too strong to permit either this alternative, or

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