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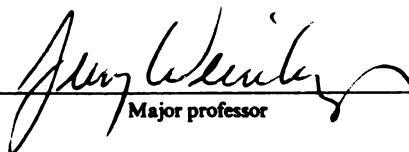
THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT OF
ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

presented by

Cynthia J. Hinckley

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in Political Science


Major professor

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THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE SOCIAL AND
POLITICAL THOUGHT OF ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

By

Cynthia J. Hinckley

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Political Science

1986

ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT OF ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

By

Cynthia J. Hinckley

Tocqueville observed that individualism and materialism, the twin effects of equality of conditions, were threats to the political and moral integrity of modern democracy. But in America, these dangers were moderated by religion, specifically Christianity. This dissertation examines Tocqueville's view of the nature of religious faith as it pertains to the future of liberal democracy.

Christianity was an antidote to equality of conditions because it could appeal from self-interest to a form of civic responsibility compatible with democracy. The promise of rewards in the next world provides impetus for restraint in this world. Tocqueville was at pains to show that the liberal democratic citizen in America is motivated not by naked self-interest but by "self-interest rightly understood."

Tocqueville's doctrine of self-interest rightly understood has led most commentators to conclude that Tocqueville's concern for religion was at the same time indifference to the content of religion. But Tocqueville was not indifferent to the content of

religion. It is often forgotten that he viewed Christianity as superior to other types of religions such as Islam and Hinduism. Tocqueville had some very specific things to say about the type of religion modern democracy required -- not only that it be a Christian religion but that it incorporate, or at least tolerate, some aspects of Protestantism. This is most apparent in his treatment of Catholicism, the success of which in modern times is dependent on the extent to which it resembles Protestantism more than traditional European Catholicism.

The common argument is that Tocqueville advocated myths, and not genuine revealed religions: The former serves self-interest; the latter transcends it. However, Tocqueville argued that the logic of self-interest rightly understood is precisely the heart of revealed religion as it occurs among common men. Only the few, such as Pascal or Montaigne, are capable of sounding the depths of divine truths. Organized religion, based on self-interest rightly understood translates the profound truths of religion into the language of the multitude. The religion of America is neither myth nor civil religion, rather, it is the happy coincidence of modern times and the eternal dialogue between God and man.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to my dissertation committee, not only for their assistance and guidance throughout the dissertation process, but also for their interest in my education: Joseph Schlesinger, Alan Grimes and Arthur Melzer have been generous with their talents. I have particularly benefited from the skillful instruction of Jerry Weinberger, who served as chair of my committee; I owe him more than I can express and properly thank him for.

Suzanne Hinckley, Sandra Oswalt, and Joseph Hinckley have supplied endless amounts of encouragement and support. Timothy DeWalt has been unselfish and gracious in making all the sacrifices that go with having a spouse absorbed in a dissertation project.

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Liberal democracy needs religion. Like any other political order, it depends on its ability to produce a certain type of citizenry. Consider the origins of the word democracy: demos meaning citizen body and kratos meaning rule, or power. Democracy as rule of the people suggests that the quality of rule in a democratic society depends on the type of people who live there. And the character of a people is to some degree determined by the opinions they hold on such matters as the existence of a deity and the possibility of life after death. It is not a coincidence that the greatest minds to ponder the problematic nature of political life have found it necessary to grapple with questions concerning the gods. Religion makes its mark on democratic politics through its command of the mind and soul of the citizen as ruler. Because it influences democracy indirectly, the importance of religion to democratic society is not always obvious.

Liberal democracy's dependence on religion is also obscured by the seemingly unresolvable tension between reason and revelation. Liberalism is the political

culmination of a tradition that celebrates the potential of reason to solve the problems that beset humanity. This confidence in the powers of the human intellect was not easily reconciled with the claims of revelation. Indeed, for the early liberals religion was responsible for the superstitions that had blocked the progress of reason.

Despite appearances, liberalism as the hope of the modern world requires religion. No one knew that better than Alexis de Tocqueville. When Tocqueville visited the United States in 1831, he was seeking to understand more than American politics. As he wrote to John Stuart Mill of his classic work on American democracy: "America was only the frame, my picture was Democracy."¹ He turned to the United States to glimpse the future of Europe, and the limitations and possibilities of this peculiarly modern form of democracy. He concluded that Americans have proven religion to be just as crucial to modern democracy as it had been to all previous regimes.

When Tocqueville writes of the influence of religion in America, he is really referring to the dominance of Christianity. Christian ideals guided the settling of the American wilderness, and continue to pervade American mores. He writes that Christianity commands "universal consent," and that "there is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America."² He

argued that Christianity not only shaped democracy, but holds the key to the eventual success or failure of democracy in the Western world.

For Tocqueville, the traditional liberal ends are the standards by which the success or failure of democracy are measured. Like liberals before him, such as the American Founders and John Locke, Tocqueville's priorities included civil peace, material prosperity, impartial government by law, recognition of fundamental human equality, and first and foremost, liberty. Tocqueville's conception of liberty is distinctively liberal - a liberty short of license and one that presupposes a distinction between the public and private spheres. Unlike some critics of liberalism, like Rousseau, Tocqueville thought that certain activities based on a consideration of private, as opposed to public, ends can be morally and politically good.³ This is not to say, however, that Tocqueville was in perfect agreement with all liberals that preceded him.

Tocqueville's views on Christianity separate him from other liberals like Hobbes and the philosophe school. While Tocqueville views Christianity as indispensable to the modern world, Hobbes and the philosophes saw it as a major obstacle to liberal goals such as civil peace and prosperity. This disagreement, however, is not as fundamental as it seems. Hobbes and the philosophes objected to the political turmoil

Christianity had wrought upon the world, primarily because of its claim of authority in temporal matters. Tocqueville, writing after the separation of church and state was an established fact in America, was actually benefitting from the work of these earlier liberals. Tocqueville was able to bring Christianity to bear on liberal ends only because liberals, starting with Hobbes, had transformed the relationship between religion and politics. Tocqueville and these earlier liberals agreed that the ends of government should be more narrowly construed than they were in ancient and medieval times, but could not have agreed on the compatibility of Christianity with these ends.

Conscience and the Liberal Tradition

It may strike the student of liberal democratic theory as odd that Tocqueville disagreed with Hobbes on a subject as important as religion. Tocqueville did accept Hobbes's premise that politics should be grounded in an understanding of human equality that acknowledges the corporeal neediness of the human condition. It may seem that their respective postures toward Christianity differ, because where Hobbes condemns Christianity for disrupting political life, Tocqueville stresses the importance of religion to politics. But their disagreement is not as deep-rooted as it may seem. Tocqueville was able to bring religion to the aid of liberalism only after Hobbes, among others, made religious conviction safe for politics.

For Hobbes, government comes into being to secure the lives of those who create it. Men come to civil society from the state of nature, where each has an equal natural right to preserve his life and therefore to anything that will help maintain his life. Hobbes characterizes natural right as a liberty, that is, a liberty to do anything one deems necessary for survival. Only the person living in a body is the proper judge of what that body requires, because the dire need others have to preserve their lives prevents them from putting someone else's interests before their own. Hobbes's state of nature turns into a state of war because of the

conflict that arises from everyone exercising their natural right to self-preservation.

Stemming from natural right are certain natural laws, or rules that suggest themselves as a means to survival. Hobbes defines a law of nature as a precept

or generall Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved.⁴

The first natural law is to seek peace whenever possible, and if not possible to use the advantages of war. Deriving from the first law of nature is the second law, which is to relinquish, when everyone else does, the freedom to act upon natural right. Natural right and peace are mutually exclusive; where men have all of the former they by definition have nothing of the latter. Natural law suggests that men in the state of nature agree to give up their power to enforce their natural right to a sovereign power. The sovereign would then be authorized to settle the controversy that made the state of nature unbearable. In equally submitting to the sovereign, they agree for the sake of peace to abide by the sovereign's political judgment instead of their own.

Hobbes argues that the power of the sovereign must be absolute. All natural rights that can be relinquished must be so for the safety of all; any one right can be exercised to the detriment of neighbors. In

other words, rights are a source of conflict. If citizens retained rights against one another they would have to concern themselves with protecting their ability to exercise their rights, which is the same as a state of war. Civil society is a refuge from the state of nature only after all claims of power that can be given up are transferred to a civil authority. For Hobbes, power divided is dangerous power.

At the root of "the disorders of the present time," Hobbes charges, is Christianity's claim of universality, or the belief that Christians are bound to obey a law that transcends the laws of any one sovereign state. The belief that men's loyalties are divided between a spiritual and a temporal authority undermines the purpose of civil society.

The insistence of a spiritual as well as a temporal authority undermines civil peace. According to Hobbes, "Men cannot serve two Masters...;" the commands of one sovereign are bound to conflict with the commands of the other.⁵ And when one of the authorities is believed to be God, then the conflict will be resolved in favor of conscience (eternal life) over any other concern, be it "the command even of his lawfull Soveraign (whether a Monarch, or a sovereign Assembly,) or the command of his Father."⁶ The sovereign cannot ensure civil peace when a whole host of antisocial behaviors can be justified by appeal to a higher law. Hobbes is galled, not only by

the claims of Cromwell and his followers, but by the frequent interference of Popes in the reign of legitimate rulers.⁷ To claim that the Bible commands a division of power is not to argue from Scripture, "but a wanton insulting over Princes, that came in fashion after the time the Popes were growne so secure of their greatnesse, as to contemne all Christian Kings; and Treading on the necks of Emperours, to mocke both them, and the Scripture..."⁸

To prevent civil society from relapsing into a civil war, the sovereign has to be recognized as the spiritual as well as the temporal authority. The sovereign must have the "power of giving greater rewards than Life; and of inflicting greater punishments , than Death" in order to maintain peace.⁹ Hobbes repeatedly points out that Moses was a civil sovereign as well as a prophet, and that such an arrangement appeals to God as well as to reason.¹⁰ He sets out to disprove the view that there is a Scriptural basis for a distinction between sacerdotal and civil authority by engaging in a long "battle of texts" with Cardinal Bellarmine. But more important for the present is his argument that the proper scope of civil authority can be discovered through reason. Using reason as his guide, Hobbes disarms the political claims of conscience.

Christian peoples should accept their sovereign as God's prophet, Hobbes argues, because it cannot be

determined if anyone else's claim to divine inspiration is a veiled attempt to grasp political power.

For he that pretends to teach men the way of so great felicity, pretends to govern them; that is to say, to rule, and reign over them; which is a thing, that all men naturally desire, and is therefore worthy to be suspected of Ambition and Imposture...¹¹

The sovereign, of course, already possesses the power that others seek, and, according to Hobbes, is the rightful head of the Church. In recognizing someone other than the sovereign as the spiritual head, the subjects can be bewitched into rebellion, which would "reduce all Order, Government, and Society, to the first Chaos of Violence, and Civill warre."¹²

By naming the sovereign as the religious head, Hobbes disposes of the obvious problem of opposition from an independent clergy. The sovereign can legitimately assume clerical duties such as baptism and ordination, or delegate these functions to one or an assembly of pastors.¹³ In either event, Hobbes insists that there be no doubt that the sovereign acts by direct authority of God. The clergy are to recognize their dependence on the sovereign, and to take heed of Hobbes's warning that St. Ambrose committed a capital crime in excommunicating Theodosius the Emperor.¹⁴ Any claims a religious head or body makes against the sovereign's rule should be treated as a form of insubordination or treason.

Having disposed of organized religious opposition,

Hobbes turns to subdue a more potentially dangerous source of strife - the individual conscience. He confronts the two circumstances under which the conscience is most likely to rebel against the sovereign: When Christian kings "erre in deducing a Consequence" from the precept that "Jesus is the Christ," or in other words, when they command something that strikes their citizens as blasphemous, and when the sovereign is an infidel. Hobbes denies the conscience grounds for rebellion in either case.

To challenge the sovereign on grounds of heresy is to attempt to give private opinion political substance. Yet the sovereign was created precisely to prevent men from acting on their private opinions, and to serve on behalf of the citizenry as the final arbiter of political matters. All have agreed to subordinate their private opinions to the judgment of the sovereign because there is no basis for judging one opinion better than the others in the state of nature, and it is far better to be subject to the arbitrary will of one than it is to be subject to the arbitrary will of everyone. By attending to the security of the commonwealth and rendering decisions on the good and the bad of politics, the sovereign is representing the will and interests of the citizenry. To assert that the sovereign is heretical is to insist that you know better than the sovereign what God's will is, and that your opinion of

God's will should prevail.¹⁵ According to Hobbes, reflection would reveal that your safety depends on others' abiding by the sovereign's judgment, and that their willingness to restrain from imposing their will on the collective depends on you doing the same. Anything less is a state of nature. Hobbes is urging his readers to tame the passion with which they hold their opinions by getting them to imagine what it would be like if everyone acted on their convictions.¹⁶ Even if conscience indicates heresy, reason discloses that private opinions must be kept private. But Hobbes knows that reason, or fear of death, is not enough to deter the most ardent of the faithful; fear of eternal damnation can overcome the fear of civil disruption that would result from the imposition of private claims in the public realm. Martyrs, in the interests of eternal salvation, have willingly faced probable death to advance political claims that, in their view, reflect divine will. Hobbes has to convince believers that they can follow the counsel of reason without jeopardizing their souls.

According to Hobbes, faith is required to enter the gates of heaven, and faith is "internall" and "invisible."¹⁷ No earthly authority can hope to govern the secret thoughts of subjects. Only God can judge the convictions of the heart, which is all that matters for purposes of eternal salvation. If the citizenry is

commanded by the sovereign to engage in a form of worship that they deem blasphemous, their outward compliance is not a sin, but "Civill Worship" as opposed to "Divine Worship."¹⁸ The difference between these two forms of worship is in the intention of the worshipper. Divine worship is an act of faith, where civil worship is whatever religious observances are commanded by the sovereign by threat of punishment. If the civil worship performed is offensive to God, the sin has been committed by the sovereign as the supreme earthly judge of right and wrong. The subjects who in their hearts conform to the spirit of God's law cannot sin by submitting to the mandates of their lawful sovereign. They are responsible only for their convictions, and not for the public standards of right and wrong. For Hobbes, therefore, there is no need to overthrow a sovereign who has committed a religious error; reason advises against it and conscience does not require it.

This same reasoning applies to sovereigns who are so unwise as to declare themselves infidels and ban religious observances. The subjects are free to believe what they want to, but can be justly punished by the sovereign for any public display of their faith. Subjects who follow the dictates of conscience against their sovereign "ought to expect their reward in Heaven..."¹⁹

For he that is not glad of any just occasion
of Martyrdome, has not the faith he

professeth, but pretends it onely, to set some colour upon his own contumacy.²⁰

Again, the subject will be held accountable only for private conviction, and not for the enforced convictions of the sovereign.

By making a distinction between private religious faith ("Naturall" religion) and the religion propagated by the sovereign ("Positive" religion), Hobbes frees subjects from the moral implications of politics. He argues that the public realm is not and should not be the domain of private consciences, which are nothing more than private judgments. To advance a political claim on the grounds of conscience is to defy reason, and possibly eternal salvation, since any private account of God's will could be mistaken.²¹ The only one who would suffer from a mistaken positive religion is the sovereign, which makes obeying the sovereign all the more attractive to subjects who must worry about both bodies and souls.

It is worthy of note that Hobbes's sovereign retains control over the general trappings of religion. After all, Hobbes could have made similar arguments for excluding conscience from political rule without constructing a civil religion. He could have maintained, one could argue, that the civil power is neutral with regard to various religious faiths, but not to any threat of civil peace or authority. This way, religious activity would be constrained from interfering

in politics. But such an argument would underestimate the danger that Hobbes thought religion posed to civil society. He felt he had to subdue the political claims of conscience, and then establish public control of religion to ensure the apolitical nature of conscience. Religion is too dangerous to be completely beyond state control because of the ever present threat of religious faith giving rise to heedless righteousness.

Liberals who followed Hobbes, most notably John Locke, agreed that private passions must be subdued but disagreed that a positive religion was necessary or effective to that end. Unlike Hobbes, Locke thought that the seditious impulse could be curbed by the love of property, or in other words, attachment to a political order that protects private property. Locke's political teaching, which is a modification of Hobbes's, draws attention to the political nature of property.

Locke's account of civil society, like Hobbes's, is preceded by a discussion of the state of nature. Men in the state of nature are equal, that is, equally subject to concerns of self-preservation. The desperate urge men have to preserve themselves is innate, or natural, and each are in a perfect state of freedom to pursue that end.

An important difference between Locke's state of nature and Hobbes's is the existence of a natural claim to property in that of the former. Everyone has

property in their body and anything they mix their labor with. The food men hunt and gather becomes theirs by virtue of the ownership of their bodies and the fruits of its labor, because labor is what confers value to otherwise worthless objects. Wheat, for instance, is of no use until it is harvested. Once harvested, "ninety-nine hundredths" of its value is due to the labor of whoever made it useful, and is therefore the rightful property of the laborer.

The state of nature is a state of poverty, first of all, because of spoilage. Most of the things that are useful for human life spoil. There is no incentive to work hard, or acquire more than one needs because goods that have perished are useless. Where there is no industry there is poverty. What was needed was an invention to allow men to dispose of surplus crops before they spoiled, thereby increasing the level of productivity which would in turn raise the standard of living.

That invention was money. Tired of the bartering system, where men exchanged perishable goods for other perishable goods, an agreement was made in the state of nature that scarce but durable things such as gold and silver would be taken in exchange for perishable goods. The introduction of money revolutionized property in the sense that it made the accumulation of wealth possible. No longer was the usefulness of wealth hampered by

spoilage. Once the possibility of wealth is established, Locke tells us, it is only natural that men would want to aggrandize their holdings. All human beings desire to preserve their lives, which means that they desire everything and anything that makes preservation easier. And since men can always imagine an easier life, money unleashed limitless desires, and, significantly, hastened the end of Locke's state of nature.

After the invention of money, inequalities of power arose from the inequality of wealth. Such inequalities are inevitable, Locke argues, because "different degrees of Industry were apt to give Men Possessions in different Proportions."²² For Locke, the inequality of wealth is justified because those who have the smaller share in this new era of productivity are much better off than they were in the original state of nature. He cites the American Indian, who is rich in land but does not enjoy one one-thousandth of the wealth that Englishmen do, as evidence that increased productivity is the key to a higher standard of living.²³ However, the incentive to increase productivity in the state of nature is undermined by the inability of men to protect their lives and property. War breaks out as a result of the rational response to danger, which is to attack before being attacked, making life in the state of nature difficult at best.

Locke's theory of property explains the necessity for the transition from the state of nature to civil society.

The great and chief end therefore, of Mens uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under Government, is the Preservation of their Property.²⁴

Property, which is to be understood broadly as life and that which is needed to sustain life, is unsafe in the state of nature because of the absence of an established, well-known law, and a judge with authority and power to settle all disputes according to that law. Reason suggests civil society as the logical relief from the inconveniences of the state of nature. By relinquishing to a civil authority their executive power, or power to freely enforce their right to self-preservation, men become politically equal through their mutual obligation to obey the laws. As in Hobbes's civil society, civil authority is a product of consent and was created to act in everyone's behalf by solving the political problems of the state of nature. Government comes into being to protect property, and its powers are limited by that end.

Property cannot be taken in Locke's society without the consent of the majority or their representatives. Locke insists that the majority will be willing to pay taxes in order to maintain a civil authority to protect their property. However, any tax that is claimed by the governmental authority without the consent of the

majority is an invasion of "the Fundamental Law of Property, and..(a subversion of) the end of Government."²⁵ On this point, Locke differs significantly from Hobbes. Hobbes claims that wealth is a social construction solely dependent on the grace of the sovereign. Locke, on the other hand, views labor and not civil society as the source of wealth. Civil society merely referees the pursuit of property and confers title of ownership in accordance with civil laws. For Locke, the powers of government should be limited with respect to the inviolability of property rights.

Locke elevates property to the end of government, not just to ensure a comfortable standard of living by encouraging industry, but to subdue the individual will to power. In a sense, Locke goes one step beyond Hobbes. Hobbes discourages rebellion by reminding citizens of their fear of death, and that civil society, no matter how troublesome, saves them from certain death in the state of nature. Locke encourages law-abidingness by emphasizing the advantages of citizenship, all of which stem from the security of property rights, which makes a comfortable life possible. Locke legitimizes and hence promotes the acquisitive spirit, knowing that the passion behind the ambition to rule can be diverted to the pursuit of economic gain. He tames private opinion by relying on

the deep-rooted, insatiable longing for material comforts that is part and parcel of the human condition. Locke's conviction that political authority could be insulated from pretensions to rule by the combination of representative government and the prospect of material well-being was so strong that he saw no need to maintain state control of religion. The religious threat to order is reduced to the same extent citizens are reminded of what they have to lose by upsetting the social order.

Locke argued that disestablishment itself would further reduce the religious threat to politics. A policy of toleration, Locke knew, would give rise to a potentially unlimited number of sects. He believed that a large number of churches would contribute to political stability. First of all, members of religions other than the magistrate's, observing the freedom they enjoy, will endeavor to protect the commonwealth that respects their right to worship.²⁶ Secondly, a potential tyrant who tries to use a church as a means to political power will incite the wrath of the other congregations.

...and all the several separate congregations, like so many guardians of the public peace, will watch one another, that nothing may be innovated or changed in the form of the government, because they can hope for nothing better than what they already enjoy; that is, an equal condition with their fellow-subjects under a just and moderate government.²⁷

Locke tries to transform the zeal for religious

persecution into a call for "peace and toleration" by convincing ecclesiastics that it is in their interest to abstain from politics.²⁸ Although Locke sets out to persuade church and state that they are better off separated, he did not seek to totally destroy the social influence of religion.

Like Tocqueville, Locke thought religion is essential to liberal society.

A good life, in which consists not the least part of religion and true piety, concerns also the civil government; and in it lies the safety both of men's souls and of the commonwealth.²⁹

It is noteworthy that Locke's first explanation of the "business of true religion" is "to the regulating of men's lives, according to the rules of virtue and piety."³⁰ Only later is eternal salvation mentioned as the "end of a religious society," in a definition he claims he is repeating.³¹ Locke's awareness of the social utility of religion is most evident in his discussions of the proper limits of toleration. Atheists are among those who should not be tolerated, Locke argues, because "Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist."³² Locke regarded religion as "the Foundation" or one of "the first Foundations" of virtue.³³ Liberalism can best secure rights when citizens have been morally educated to respect the rights of others.³⁴

Locke, like Tocqueville after him, depended on

Christianity to provide the moral fabric of liberalism.³⁵ These two thinkers were just as aware as Hobbes was of the political disruption religion was capable of, and although Hobbes did not agree with them on the merits of Christianity and disestablishment, he made their positions possible. Hobbes tamed the Christian conscience that Locke and Tocqueville depend on. Only after citizens were willing to check their private pretensions to rule could Locke and Tocqueville envision a "reasonable" Christianity. Also, unlike Hobbes, Locke and Tocqueville recognized the power of commerce in subduing potentially disruptive passions. Thus, on the same grounds and within the same tradition, Hobbes was trying to reduce the influence of Christianity while Locke and Tocqueville brought Christianity to bear on liberal ends.

NOTES

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, Memoir, Letters, and Remains of Alexis de Tocqueville, ed. Gustave de Beaumont, 2 vols. (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1862) 2:38 (Hereafter Memoir).

² Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. Henry Reeve, ed. Phillips Bradley, 2 vols. (New York: Kropf, 1966) 1:303 (Hereafter Democracy).

³ Arthur M. Melzer, "Rousseau and the Problem of Bourgeois Society," American Political Science Review, 74 no.4 (1980): 1018-1033.

⁴ Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. C.B. Macpherson (New York: Penguin Books, 1983) 189.

⁵ Hobbes 600.

⁶ Hobbes 609.

⁷ Hobbes 183, 600, 715.

⁸ Hobbes 642.

⁹ Hobbes 478.

¹⁰Hobbes 464-465, 480-481, 547, 643; 178.

¹¹Hobbes 466.

¹²Hobbes 469.

¹³Hobbes 570-571, 575-576.

¹⁴Hobbes 608.

¹⁵Hobbes 604-605.

¹⁶Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., "Hobbes and the Science of Indirect Government," American Political Science Review 65, no.1 (1971): 101.

¹⁷Hobbes 625.

¹⁸Hobbes 667.

¹⁹Hobbes 625.

²⁰Hobbes 625.

²¹Hobbes 366.

²²John Locke, Two Treatises of Government, ed. Peter Laslett (New York: New American Library, 1963) 343.

²³Locke, Two Treatises 340.

²⁴Locke, Two Treatises 395.

²⁵Locke, Two Treatises 408.

²⁶John Locke, A Letter Concerning Toleration, ed. Mario Montuori (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963.) 99.

²⁷Locke, Letter 99-101.

²⁸Locke, Letter 41.

²⁹Locke, Letter 79.

³⁰Locke, Letter 7.

³¹Locke, Letter 29.

³²Locke, Letter 93.

³³Quoted in Nathan Tarcov, Locke's Education for Liberty (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984.) 190.

³⁴Nathan Tarcov, "A "Non-Lockean" Locke and the

Character of Liberalism," Liberalism Reconsidered, ed. Douglas MacLean and Claudia Mills (Totowa: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983) 136.

³⁵John Locke, The Reasonableness of Christianity with A Discourse of Miracles and part of A Third Letter Concerning Toleration, ed. I.T. Ramsey (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1958) pp. 32, 34, 75.

For Tocqueville, Christianity is a remedy for what is often regarded a major weakness of liberal democracy: Some critics charge that in lowering the goals of politics, liberalism cannot justify civic virtue or foster moral greatness.¹ They argue that any political system that emphasizes rights to the extent liberal democracy does cannot sustain a foundation for duties. Why should a citizen, they ask, who thinks of his citizenship in terms of private gain (of protection, of wealth...) willingly make the personal sacrifices any regime must demand? Tocqueville was aware of these dangers to the political and moral well-being of liberal democracy. Along with other liberals, he was not insensitive to the need to develop these virtues, which he describes in all their glory in his account of aristocracy. Indeed, in his famous book Democracy in America, Tocqueville celebrates the extent to which American democracy preserves the type of virtue it and any society is dependent upon. Tocqueville credited the success of American democracy in this regard to Christianity, which nurtures, on a smaller scale, the

virtues he associates with aristocracy.

Christianity is important for Tocqueville because it tempers the modern passion for equality that, ironically, it gave birth to. He argues that the "unique trait" of Christianity was to introduce fundamental human equality.² The notion that all men are "brothers and equals" is a major departure from ancient philosophy.³ Indeed, Tocqueville suggests that the moderns have failed to come up with anything new. In a letter to Gobineau he asks his friend:

What is there really new in the works or in the discoveries of the modern moral philosophers? By modern I mean not merely those of the last fifty years but those who immediately preceded them, those who belong to that generation which had decisively broken with the Middle Ages. Did they really see the obligations of mankind in such a new light? Did they really discover new motives for human actions? Did they really establish new foundations, or even new explanations, for human duties? Have they placed the sanctions of moral laws elsewhere? Through the darkness all I think I can recognize is this: to me it is Christianity that seems to have accomplished the revolution - you may prefer the word change - in all the ideas that concern duties and rights; ideas which, after all, are the basic matter of all moral knowledge.⁴

For Tocqueville, equality in some form of democracy is destined to "triumph" around the world. He insists that a world shaped by equality is "a providential fact."⁵ This is not to say that Tocqueville denied that humans can have some control over their destiny.

Providence has not created mankind entirely independent or entirely free. It is true that around every man a fatal circle is

traced beyond which he cannot pass; but within the wide verge of that circle he is powerful and free; as it is with man, so with communities.⁶

Equality has determined the scope of modern politics, within which men can significantly exercise free will. Zetterbaum, a prominent Tocqueville scholar, argues that this "inevitability thesis" is a salutary myth, and that Tocqueville did not and could not have believed that men can be both free and not free.⁷ Tocqueville's point, however, was that although men cannot stem the tide of equality, they can determine its course. Humankind is not entirely free from nor completely enslaved to historical trends.

The nations of our time cannot prevent the conditions of men from becoming equal, but it depends upon themselves whether the principle of equality is to lead them to servitude or freedom, to knowledge or barbarism, to prosperity or wretchedness.⁸

This passage, which ends Democracy in America, brings to light Tocqueville's intention: to teach equal peoples the dire consequences that can result from unbridled equality. Equality, as this passage suggests, can have unhappy political and moral implications. Democratic peoples need to be aware of the threats to their political liberties as well as the threat to their souls.

The Problem of Equality

Tocqueville observed a type of equality in America he called l'égalité des conditions. This is translated as equality of conditions, and is often interpreted in the literature on Tocqueville as a reference to a large middle class. The French word condition, however, means more than a certain distribution of wealth. It has more to do with how citizens think of themselves and their potential relative to others - it is a psychological predisposition found wherever equality has taken root. This predisposition is to identify oneself, not with a particular rung on the social ladder, but as one "on the way up" the social ladder thanks to equality of opportunity. For Tocqueville, what characterizes Americans in general is not so much the degree of economic equality as their firm conviction that under the right circumstances they are equally likely as anyone else to break into the next economic rung of the ladder. This understanding of equality explains for Tocqueville why the poor do not constitute a self-identified class as such.

Equality unleashes an "excessive desire for well-being" in the hearts of equal citizens. Men can always imagine having more wealth, particularly in the absence of a class structure to limit their horizon. Tocqueville notes:

It is strange to see with what feverish ardor the Americans pursue their own welfare, and

to watch that vague dread that constantly torments them lest they should not have chosen the shortest path which may lead to it.⁹

Americans are "restless in the midst of abundance" and tortured by the thought of what they do not yet own. Americans are always in a hurry to find, acquire and enjoy "material comforts" before death comes between them and thousands of untasted pleasures.

Although equality removes class barriers to prosperity, it erects another that is just as formidable. Equality dictates that all have an equal right to pursue their insatiable desires. This implies overwhelming competition.

When men are nearly alike and all follow the same track, it is very difficult for any one individual to walk quickly and cleave a way through the dense throng that surrounds and presses on him.¹⁰

The more equal men are, the more "each man feels himself weaker in regard to all the rest."¹¹ In their furtive efforts to get ahead, Americans tend to resent those who appear more successful than they. The slightest differences in wealth are regarded with great envy.

By inclining men toward the pursuit of wealth and frustrating that pursuit at the same time, Tocqueville argued that democracy was in danger of cultivating a citizenry consumed by the desire for material comforts. Americans get caught in a vicious circle between their desire to be unequal (more prosperous than their neighbor) and their commitment to equality, or distaste

for those superior to them. "With their appetites piqued for what they cannot have, democratic men become "pre-occupied , caring for the slightest needs of the body and the trivial conveniences of life.""¹²

Thus democratic times have given birth to individualism, which is the impulse to withdraw from society at large. When individualism takes root in the mores, democrats focus their attention exclusively on pleasure, and humankind, to them, shrinks to their family and personal friends. For Tocqueville, individualism (l'individualisme) is quite different from selfishness (égoïsme). Selfishness, which dates back to the beginning of man, leads men to prefer themselves to anything else in the world. Individualism, wholly a product of modern times, is a "mature and peaceful" sentiment which disposes men to leave the world to fend for itself.¹³

A society consumed by individualism cannot maintain its political liberties. Democrats will always love equality more than liberty. Political liberty "bestows exalted pleasures from time to time upon a certain number of citizens," while the "charms of equality are every instant felt and are within the reach of all." Liberty requires more effort on its behalf than democrats would be willing to exert. Individualism breeds an annoyance with political participation, and a despot claiming to be a lover of equality would be more

than happy to take over the public affairs that no one else has time for. Democratic peoples would be favorably inclined to submit to such a despot.

The sovereign, being necessarily and incontestably above all the citizens, does not excite their envy, and each of him thinks that he strips his equals of the prerogative that he concedes to the crown.¹⁴

Tocqueville feared that democrats will prefer a Hobbesian understanding of equality ("equality in servitude") to the Lockean view of economic equality of opportunity as a safeguard to liberty ("inequality in freedom"). Thus democratic peoples would willingly turn over their liberty to a despot, and neglect "their chief business, which is to remain their own masters."¹⁵

One of Tocqueville's intentions in writing Democracy was to teach equal peoples how to avoid tyranny. This, however, was not his only or even most important intention. While writing the second volume of Democracy, Tocqueville wrote his cousin and good friend, Louis Kergorlay, that the theme (l'idée générale) of his book in progress is to show men how to escape tyranny and degeneracy (l'abâtardissement).¹⁶ It is important to note that Tocqueville again refers to a political problem, tyranny, and a moral one, degeneracy. He was concerned with the modern soul as well as with modern politics:

I have endeavored to point out, in another part of this work, the causes to which the maintenance of the political institutions of the Americans is attributable, and religion

appeared to be one of the most prominent among them. I am now treating of the Americans in an individual capacity, and I again observe that religion is not less useful to each citizen than to the whole state.¹⁷

Tocqueville follows this passage with a discussion of materialism.

An excessive love for physical comforts could lead men to long for nothing more than material goods. Tocqueville feared that men would lose their "sublimest faculties, and that while he is busied in improving all around him, he may at length degrade himself."¹⁸ The ability to rise above bodily concern and even show contempt for the body is what distinguishes humans from the brutes.¹⁹ As if the threat of degradation were not enough to alarm democratic peoples, Tocqueville adds the warning that men can lose themselves in physical gratification to the point where they could lose the art of producing that which gratifies them. Should this happen, men would enjoy their material comforts "like brutes, without discernment and without improvement."²⁰ Equality and the desires it engenders must be moderated if human dignity is to survive the age of equality.

Democracy and Aristocracy

In setting out to solve the problem equality poses for modernity, Tocqueville was not merely bowing to historical inevitability and trying to make the best of a less than promising situation. He indeed believed that societies grounded in equality are more just than aristocratic societies, which are presented as the alternative to democracy. In general, democracies are concerned with the "welfare of the greatest possible number." Although democratic peoples may be misguided as to what their good is, they would never intentionally oppress themselves.²¹ Aristocrats, however, are inclined to advance their class interests at the expense of the majority's interest.²² Tocqueville argued that there is no basis for assuming that some men are better than others because of nature or birth. He deplored Gobineau's theory, presented in his book Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines, that some races are inherently superior to others.²³ In a letter to Gobineau, Tocqueville bemusedly suggested that Gobineau would not willingly "offer (his) bare back in order to render personal confirmation of (his) principles."²⁴ Despite the fact that democratic laws "are almost always ineffective and inopportune," "the purpose of a democracy in its legislation is more useful to humanity than that of an aristocracy."²⁵

The fact that Tocqueville thought democracy to be

more just than aristocracy may seem obscured by his treatment of aristocracy. Instead of openly and repeatedly denouncing aristocracy as unjust, he takes every opportunity to point out its admirable qualities. Aristocracies are superior to democracies in their ability to cultivate refinement of manners and love of noble and beautiful things. The cultural achievements of aristocracy in the arts and letters are unparalleled in democracies, which are hard-pressed to produce a decent poet.²⁶ But upon closer inspection, it becomes apparent that there are theoretical and practical reasons why Tocqueville would not use Democracy as a forum to impeach aristocracy, and that his refusal to do so is part of his presentation of the type of democracy worth striving for.

On the practical level, Tocqueville would not want to alienate his audience, which consists both of aristocrats and ardent fans of equality. As Zetterbaum notes, Tocqueville was a statesman writing for statesmen.²⁷ Tocqueville wrote the following to Eugène Stoffels just after the first volume of Democracy was published:

I tried to diminish the ardor of (the Republican party), and without discouraging them, to show them the only road to take. I attempted to diminish the terrors of (the aristocrats), and to bend their will to the idea of an inevitable future in such a way that the one being less impetuous, and others offering less resistance, society could advance more perfectly toward the necessary realization of its destiny. Here is the

master idea of the work.²⁸

By making his proposals palatable to those with aristocratic leanings, he was increasing the probability they would come to be commonly accepted.

On the theoretical level, Tocqueville was pointing the way to a political form of equality that respects what is highest in human nature. Democracy, if it is to show proper regard for human dignity, is dependent on quasi-aristocratic virtue. Tocqueville is more than giving aristocracy its fair due by pointing to its admirable qualities; he is preserving a vision of virtues that must be imitated in order for a democracy to remain decent and just.

Aristocracies in their prime avoid the pitfalls of democracies. Aristocrats are not susceptible to individualism, but instead feel a strong sense of connectedness to both their ancestors and descendents, and their fellow citizens. Aristocratic families maintain the same station and often live in the same place for generations, so "all generations become, as it were, contemporaneous."²⁹ Unlike democrats, who forget their ancestors and rarely concern themselves with something as remote as their descendents, aristocrats feel that they know and love those who came before and those who will come after them, and willingly make personal sacrifices on their behalf. An aristocrat, because he is a member of a fixed class, likewise feels

a sense of fellowship with other citizens. He regards other aristocrats, who are permanently fixed beside him, as kindred - perhaps more so than the country at large. All classes in an aristocracy are conscious of classes above them (whose help they may need) and below them (whose co-operation they may claim).³⁰

Men living in aristocratic ages are therefore almost always closely attached to something placed out of their own sphere, and they are often disposed to forget themselves. It is true that in these ages the notion of human fellowship is faint and that men seldom think of sacrificing themselves for mankind; but they often sacrifice themselves for other men.³¹

Aristocracies nurture a sense of public-spiritedness that is superior to that of democracies. Men in aristocracies identify strongly with their motherland and fellow citizens, and this sentiment makes them better suited than democrats for "the prolonged endurance of the great storms that beset the political existence of nations."³² Democrats tend to be ill-suited for anything beyond "a sudden effort of remarkable vigor," because a prolonged effort would invite reflection and hence no "distinct view of what one is fighting for."³³ Tocqueville is not blind to the possibility that aristocrats may perform bold and brilliant deeds on behalf of their country to secure glory for themselves.³⁴ Even so, one does not risk life and fortune for approval from those one despises.

Aristocrats worthy of the name show contempt for

material comforts. Their apparent freedom from necessity is precisely what distinguishes them as fit for great and noble things. They do not object to work so much as working to obtain a profit.³⁵

Labor is honorable in itself when it is undertaken at the bidding of ambition or virtue.³⁶

Aristocrats take pride in the fact that they do not grovel before their bodily desires, but instead entertain ideas of "the dignity, the power, the greatness of man..(These opinions) facilitate the natural impulse of the mind to the highest regions of thought, and they naturally prepare it to conceive a sublime, almost divine love of truth."³⁷

Although aristocracies are much less likely than democracies to fall victim to the corrosive influence of individualism and materialism, Tocqueville does not prescribe aristocracy in any form for the modern world. Grounded in a mistaken understanding of human inequality, aristocracy violates the precepts of natural justice. Even if aristocracy is desirable, it is not possible in the age of equality. Tocqueville demonstrates this in his analysis of the only two groups in America he describes in aristocratic terms - the Indians and the slave owners in the South.

Tocqueville repeatedly describes the Indian as noble and courageous.³⁸ Like the aristocrat, the Indian exudes a freedom from bodily concerns, even when

confronted with the certain loss of his life.

We learn from President Jefferson (Notes on Virginia, p. 148), that among the Iroquois, when attacked by a superior force, aged men refused to fly, or to survive the destruction of their country; and they braved death like the ancient Romans when their capital was sacked by the Gauls. Further on (p. 150), he tells us that "there is no example of an Indian, who, having fallen into the hands of his enemies, begged for his life; on the contrary, the captive sought to obtain death at the hands of his conquerors by the use of insult and provocation."³⁹

Also similar to aristocratic sentiment is the disgust the Indian feels towards laboring for a living; "he considers the cares of industry as degrading occupations," and the life of the hunter and warrior the only one worth living.⁴⁰

The Indian, in the dreary solitudes of his woods, cherishes the same ideas, the same opinions, as the noble of the Middle Ages in his castle; and he needs to become a conqueror to complete the resemblance.⁴¹

The Indians are "doomed to perish," argued Tocqueville, because their aristocratic way of life is wholly incompatible with that of the Europeans, who are literally taking over the continent. The only alternatives the Indians have are to destroy the Europeans, or assimilate into their culture.⁴² Both are impossible. The greater number and superior weaponry of the Europeans would make them an easy victor in a war against the Indians.⁴³ In order to "become the equals" of the Europeans, the Indians would have to take up agriculture, and suffer, in their eyes, disgrace and

degradation.⁴⁴ The few tribes who submit to such a life only so far as their survival requires find themselves in futile competition with the Europeans, who are more acquainted than the Indians with the science of farming and the habits tillage require.⁴⁵ If the Indians were not so proud, independent, fiercely courageous and tied to tradition, in short, aristocratic, their culture could survive in a land re-shaped by the spirit of equality.

The slave owners in the South constitute the only other group in America that Tocqueville refers to aristocratic terms.

In the South of the United States the whole race of whites formed an aristocratic body headed by a certain number of privileged individuals, whose wealth was permanent and whose leisure was hereditary.⁴⁶

Both the Indians and the slave owners believed themselves to be inherently superior to other men, but the effect of such a belief on the moral character of each group was quite different. While the aristocratic sentiment of the Indians brought out the best in man, the same sentiment aroused in the slave owners the worst traits latent in human nature. The Indians resemble aristocracy at its finest and noblest hour, where the slave owners represent a corrupted aristocracy that has failed to justify its injustices by producing human greatness. Democracy, however, cannot harbor aristocracy in any form, good or bad.

Slavery, as well as an English heritage, explains the "social condition of the South."⁴⁷ Americans in the South, having slaves to perform menial labor, abhor the general idea of work. Slave owners are fond of "grandeur, luxury, and renown, of gayety, pleasure, and above all, of idleness; nothing obliges him to exert himself in order to subsist; and as he has no necessary occupations, he gives way to indolence and does not even attempt that would be useful."⁴⁸ Unlike his Northern neighbor, he is more interested in the pursuit of pleasure than in the pursuit of wealth, which explains why the North is more industrious, more prosperous, and more enlightened than the South.⁴⁹

Slavery, Tocqueville argued, threatens the Union, not because it gave the North and South different interests, "but because it has modified the character and changed the habits of the natives of the South."⁵⁰ Thinking of himself as a "domestic dictator," the Southerner tends to be "a haughty and hasty man, irascible, violent, ardent in his desires, impatient of obstacles, but easily discouraged if he cannot succeed upon his first attempt."⁵¹ He is not capable of the practical virtues necessary to bring prosperity to the South. Added to this is the cost of keeping slaves, who produce much less than a free laborer and who must be supported in their unproductive years of infancy and old age.⁵²

Thus, slavery prevents the whites not only from becoming opulent, but even from desiring to become so.⁵³

The North will continue to advance and flourish, Tocqueville predicts, widening the gap between it and the South. Herein lies the source of conflict:

It is difficult to imagine a durable union of a nation that is rich and strong with one that is poor and weak, even if it were proved that the strength and wealth of the one are not the causes of the weakness and poverty of the other. But union is still more difficult to maintain at a time when one party is losing strength and the other is gaining it.⁵⁴

The North, being the stronger and therefore likely victor in such a conflict, would have every economic incentive to abolish slavery in the South. Slavery threatens the Union indirectly, not by inflaming Northern passions against the cruelty of slavery, but through mores.⁵⁵

Tocqueville noted that the slave population, unlike the Indian population, is growing steadily.⁵⁶ Rather than perishing in isolation like the Indians are destined to, the fate of the blacks, he argued, is intertwined with that of the whites.⁵⁷ One thing is certain, one way or another slavery will be abolished.⁵⁸ A haughty disdain for hard work cannot survive in a land of industry. If the expense of slavery does not undermine the life the Southerner takes for granted, the tension from the growing disparity of wealth between the North and South will. While an idle aristocrat can

lounge in the protection of a fixed distribution of wealth, the slave owner will fall prey to an ever changing and ever expanding economic system.

As demonstrated by the fate of the Indians and the slave owners , aristocracy is fundamentally incompatible with democracy. Noble aristocrats, like the Indians, could not subordinate their honor to democratic ends. They could feel nothing less than repugnance towards the democratic way of life, which is characterized by mundaneness in the service of neediness. Only if they could secure their way of life by the force of arms could they escape moral destruction. The slave owners cannot comprehend democracy, not because it would keep them from performing great deeds, but because they are selfish and lazy. Their sense of superiority in no way benefits humanity, nor, ultimately, themselves. Their refusal to adapt to conditions of equality would, Tocqueville predicted, dissolve slavery - the very institution their status depends on. Neither extreme of aristocracy can survive in a democracy, nor a form somewhere in the middle, as demonstrated by the case of Indian tribes who took up farming.

Although Christianity is the source of equality, it is also the source of the aristocratic corrective to equality. Christianity influences democracy in a way aristocracy cannot. According to Tocqueville, the establishment of an aristocracy in America is not

possible or desirable, but he did think that something like aristocratic virtue could combat individualism and materialism in modern democracies. Tocqueville's praise of aristocracy is more than what pleasing his audience would require; he was portraying a type of nobility that the modern world must imitate to remain decent and just. Tocqueville turned to Christianity to inspire quasi-aristocratic virtue, that is, the impulse to rise above one's personal concerns and to love liberty and one's country.

The greatest advantage of religion is to inspire diametrically contrary principles. There is no religion that does not place the object of man's desires above and beyond the treasures of earth and that does not naturally raise his soul to regions far above those of senses. Nor is there any which does not impose on man some duties towards his kind and thus draw him at times from the contemplation of himself. This is found in the most false and dangerous religions.

Religious nations are therefore naturally strong on the very point on which democratic nations are weak; this shows of what importance it is for men to preserve their religion as their conditions become more equal.⁵⁹

Although democracy properly influenced by religion cannot inspire the same greatness of soul or degree of patriotism an aristocracy can, it can inspire enough of each to keep from sinking into tyranny and degeneracy. Democracy is "perhaps less elevated, but it is more just: and its justice constitutes its greatness and its beauty."⁶⁰

NOTES

¹ For a summary of the types of criticisms most often made of liberalism, see Rogers Smith, Liberalism and American Constitutional Law (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1985) 36-59.

² Alexis de Tocqueville, The European Revolution and Correspondence with Gobineau, ed. and trans. John Lukacs (Gloucester: Doubleday, 1968) 305. (Hereafter European Revolution.); see also Tocqueville, Democracy 1:5, 12; 2:15.

³ Tocqueville, European Revolution 305. See also 191, 205.

⁴ Tocqueville, European Revolution 190-1.

⁵ Tocqueville, Democracy 1:6.

⁶ Tocqueville, Democracy 2:334.

⁷ Marvin Zetterbaum, Tocqueville and the Problem of Democracy (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1967) 19.

⁸ Tocqueville, Democracy 2:334. see also 1:53.

⁹ Tocqueville, Democracy 2:136.

¹⁰ Tocqueville, Democracy 2:138.

¹¹ Tocqueville, Democracy 2:261.

¹² Stephen Baron, "Morality and Politics in Modern Life: Tocqueville and Solzhenitsyn on the

Importance of Religion to Liberty," Polity 14 (Spring, 1982): 400.

¹³Tocqueville, Democracy 2:98.

¹⁴Tocqueville, Democracy 2:295.

¹⁵Tocqueville, Democracy 2:141.

¹⁶Alexis de Tocqueville, Oeuvres Complète, ed. J.P. Mayer (Paris: Gallimard, 1951-) 13 no. 1:431. (Hereafter Oeuvres).

¹⁷Tocqueville, Democracy 2:143.

¹⁸Tocqueville, Democracy 2:144-45.

¹⁹Tocqueville, Democracy 2:148.

²⁰Tocqueville, Democracy 2:148.

²¹Tocqueville, Democracy 1:238.

²²Tocqueville, Democracy 1:240; see also 2:323.

²³Tocqueville, European Revolution, pp. 224, 227, 231, 291, 308.

²⁴Tocqueville, European Revolution 309.

²⁵Tocqueville, Democracy 1:238.

²⁶Tocqueville, Democracy 2:35, 1:315.

²⁷Zetterbaum 19.

²⁸Quoted in Zetterbaum, 21.

²⁹Tocqueville, Democracy 2:98.

³⁰Tocqueville, Democracy 2:99.

³¹Tocqueville, Democracy 2:99.

³²Tocqueville, Democracy 1:228.

³³Tocqueville, Democracy 1:229.

³⁴Tocqueville, Democracy 1:229.

- 35Tocqueville, Democracy 2:152.
- 36Tocqueville, Democracy 2:152.
- 37Tocqueville, Democracy 2:44.
- 38Tocqueville, Democracy 1:23, 334, 340, 344.
- 39Tocqueville, Democracy 1:23.
- 40Tocqueville, Democracy 1:343, 244, see ff13.
- 41Tocqueville, Democracy 1:344.
- 42Tocqueville, Democracy 1:342.
- 43Tocqueville, Democracy 1:342.
- 44Tocqueville, Democracy 1:343.
- 45Tocqueville, Democracy 1:348.
- 46Tocqueville, Democracy 1:366.
- 47Tocqueville, Democracy 1:30.
- 48Tocqueville, Democracy 1:395.
- 49Tocqueville, Democracy 1:364, 363, 368.
- 50Tocqueville, Democracy 1:394.
- 51Tocqueville, Democracy 1:394.
- 52Tocqueville, Democracy 1:363.
- 53Tocqueville, Democracy 1:364.
- 54Tocqueville, Democracy 1:401.
- 55Tocqueville, Democracy 1:395.
- 56Tocqueville, Democracy 1:371, 373, 377-8.
- 57Tocqueville, Democracy 1:356.

58"Slavery, now confined to a single tract of the civilized earth, attacked by Christianity as unjust and by political economy as prejudicial, and now contrasted with democratic liberty and the intelligence of our age,

cannot survive." Democracy 1:381.

⁵⁹Tocqueville, Democracy 2:22.

⁶⁰Tocqueville, Democracy 2:333.

The numerous Christian sects in America were included in Tocqueville's analysis of "civil" associations: "those associations that are formed in civil life without reference to political objects."¹ Tocqueville was astonished at the number of moral and intellectual associations he found in America. Americans form associations not only to launch missionary endeavors, neighborhood improvements and commercial ventures, but also for purposes Tocqueville hadn't previously imagined the need to organize interested parties for.² Indeed, he thought it a joke when he first heard that a hundred thousand men had vowed publicly to abstain from liquor.³ He came to realize, however, that this was a typical case of an association assuming the same function as the nobility in an aristocracy.

By making a public vow of abstinence, these men, like "men of rank" in England, were attempting to influence public opinion by example.⁴ Where aristocrats have the social influence and visibility necessary to undertake such endeavors single-handedly,

democrats command power in numbers.⁵ In democratic nations, all the citizens are equally "independent and feeble," and "powerless if they do not learn voluntarily to help one another."⁶

Voluntary associations constitute the most important check on equality. The democratic impulse to withdraw into one's personal concerns is countered by the experience of association, where democrats learn beneficence and the art of cooperation.

Feelings and opinions are recruited, the heart is enlarged, and the human mind is developed only by the reciprocal influence of men upon one another. I have shown that these influences are almost null in democratic countries; they must therefore be artificially created, and this can only be accomplished by associations.⁷

Associations can inspire a type of moral aspiration and public-spiritedness that is reminiscent of the best aristocracy. In a democracy where the justice of equality is balanced by a conception of duty,

(t)he voluntary association of the citizens might then take the place of the individual authority of the nobles, and the community would be protected from tyranny and license.⁸

But a difficulty arises. Associations are most needed, yet least likely to form, in democratic nations where equality of conditions has eroded the belief that one can and should attempt to have a social impact. Citizens can be easily discouraged from associating by the realization that they must be very numerous to have any power. The weaker each feels the more futile

associations seem, and the more likely they are to believe that "the government ought to be rendered (more able and active) in order that society at large may execute what individuals can no longer accomplish."⁹ By not exercising their right to organize, democrats sink further into isolationism and closer to tyranny and disgrace. There is, however, one type of association that even the weak and enfeebled have incentive to join - moral associations. Democrats cannot easily ignore the possibility that they have souls that will outlive their bodies.

Tocqueville believed that all humans are predisposed to take refuge in religious beliefs. The probability of death looms in front of everyone and provides a natural basis for religious speculation.

Man alone, of all created beings, displays a natural contempt of existence, and yet a boundless desire to exist; he scorns life, but he dreads annihilation. These different feelings incessantly urge his soul to the contemplation of a future state, and religion directs his musings thither.¹⁰

Although humans cannot comfortably live with the uncertainty of existence after death, the problems of human destiny are too difficult for them to solve alone.¹¹ Great philosophers, despite their intellectual superiority, have "discovered as yet only a few conflicting notions" on the subject.¹² Even if the average intellect were capable of probing these questions, everyday life interferes with the leisure

time such an enterprise demands. Humans have everything to gain by placing faith in a moral authority, and Tocqueville reminds his readers of that fact by recounting Pascal's wager.¹³ Tocqueville's lesson is that religion is just as important to earthly felicity as it may be to eternal salvation.

For any religion to survive in a democracy it must respect the passion for well-being, which is "the prominent and indelible feature of democratic times."¹⁴ Any attempt to overturn such a "deep-seated" passion is doomed to failure. The most any religion can hope to do is to "purify" and to "regulate" the acquisitive spirit, because "(m)en cannot be cured of the love of riches, but they may be persuaded to enrich themselves by none but honest means."¹⁵ Likewise, the American clergy take care not to contradict this dominant passion. Their outright enthusiasm for productive industry and the liberty and public tranquility it requires led Tocqueville to comment that "it is often difficult to ascertain from their discourses whether the principal object of religion is to procure eternal felicity in the other world or prosperity in this."¹⁶

Religion in America not only tolerates and applauds self-interested passion, but appeals to it to promote moral ends. Tocqueville observed that the basis for morality in America is "self-interest rightly understood," that is, the belief that self-denial can be

in one's interest.

The American moralists do not profess that men ought to sacrifice themselves for their fellow creatures because it is noble to make such sacrifices, but they boldly aver that such sacrifices are as necessary to him who imposes them upon himself as to him for whose sake they are made.¹⁷

Aristocrats spoke of the beauty of forgetting oneself, and of doing virtuous acts to be virtuous rather than for the sake of reward.¹⁸ Equality, however, fosters a self-centeredness that cannot comprehend such lofty ideals as these. Democrats speak of the utility of virtue, and delight to point out how their private advantage is one with the common good.¹⁹ This is not to say that Tocqueville thought aristocrats were wholly unaware of the utility of virtue - this they studied in secret.²⁰ He did believe, though, that virtue in modern times must be grounded in self-interest, since "the age of implicit self-sacrifice and instinctive virtues is already flitting far away from us."²¹

I am not afraid to say that the principle of self-interest rightly understood appears to me the best suited of all philosophical theories to the wants of the men of our time, and that I regard it as their chief remaining security against themselves.²²

Applied to "religious matters," self-interest rightly understood combines the fundamental fact of modernity with the fundamental fact of human mortality: Eternal life is in everyone's interest. The promise of rewards in the next world provides impetus for restraint in this world. Accordingly, Tocqueville observed in the

religious devotion of Americans "something so indescribably tranquil, methodical, and deliberate that it would seem as if the head far more than the heart brought them to the foot of the alter."²³

Christianity offers a bargain, Tocqueville argues, that few Americans can refuse. Not only do they gain eternal life, but they do so at little cost to themselves. The restraints they impose on their self-interested passion become habits, which require little effort. So Americans at once pursue wealth in accordance with their self-interest, secure eternal life at little or no cost, and contribute to the moral stability of society.

Self-interest rightly understood anchors religious conviction in fears that are part of the human condition, and the detachment of religion from everyday politics insures its continuing influence. Equally important is the content of religion in America, which directly confronts individualism and materialism.

Individualism and Materialism

Religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must be regarded as the first of their political institutions; for if it does not impart a taste for freedom, it facilitates the use of it.²⁴

The above passage points to the two-pronged role of religion in Tocqueville's thought: Christianity in America combats individualism by stimulating a love of political freedom, and combats materialism by educating democrats of the proper use of that freedom. Underlying all of Tocqueville's work is an ardent love of liberty.²⁵ The purpose of Democracy in America, he never tired of explaining, was to elucidate the dangers to liberty inherent in modern society so as to mitigate them.²⁶ Nearing the end of his life, he wrote the following to Beaumont:

I have never been more profoundly convinced that (liberty) alone can give to human societies in general, and to the individuals who compose them in particular, all the prosperity and greatness of which our species is capable.²⁷

His passion for freedom equalled, and to some extent inspired, John Stuart Mill's love of liberty.²⁸ A brief comparison of their views on liberty is useful for shedding light on Tocqueville's conception of liberty and his preoccupation with preserving it.

Both Mill and Tocqueville define liberty in distinctively liberal terms, or, what is commonly called a "negative" conception of liberty.²⁹ That is to say

that liberty consists of the ability to act as one pleases, unimpeded by the will of others, in an area limited by the rights of others. The closest Tocqueville came to defining liberty was in an article that was translated by Mill for the Westminster Review:

According to the modern, the democratic, and, we venture to say, the only just notion of liberty, every man, being presumed to have received from nature the intelligence necessary for his own general guidance, is inherently entitled to be uncontrolled by his fellows in all that only concerns himself, and to regulate at his own will his own destiny.³⁰

Mill echoes this sentiment in his famous essay On Liberty:

The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it.³¹

It is not surprising, then, that Mill and Tocqueville's discussions of liberty are often discussions about political rights.³² Implicit in the notion of rights is a negative understanding of liberty; For instance, the liberal right to property is a freedom to accumulate or dispose of property as one sees fit as long as no one else's property rights are violated. Although Mill and Tocqueville were in fundamental agreement on the meaning of liberty, and, for that matter, that liberty needs to be informed by standards that are self-imposed by the individual as opposed to government, they appear to defend the necessity of freedom for different reasons.

For Mill, liberty is a means to an end. It is noteworthy that the epigram and dedication which begin On Liberty make no mention of liberty. The epigram informs the reader that the following argument is guided by "The absolute and essential importance of human development in its richest diversity."³³ Mill goes on to defend liberty as necessary for intellectual progress and the development of individuality, specifically, individual potential. Never once does Mill claim that liberty is an inalienable right. Instead, we learn over and over again that individual and social improvement depend on the maximum amount of liberty a social order can afford its members without collapsing into anarchy. Tocqueville never denies that liberty is useful for all types of advancement. His defense of liberty, however, is premised on the inseparability of virtue and freedom. Tocqueville says the following while writing of political rights in America:

After the general idea of virtue, I know of no higher principle than that of rights; or rather these two ideas are united in one. The idea of rights is simply that of virtue introduced into the political world.³⁴

In order to be virtuous one has to prefer the good to the bad, which also means that one must be free to choose between the good and the bad to be virtuous.

Freedom is, in truth, a sacred thing. There is only one thing else that better deserves the name: that is virtue. But then what is virtue if not the free choice of what is good.³⁵

For Tocqueville, morality cannot be separated from the possibility of free choice.

It would be reasonable to argue that for Tocqueville, like Mill, liberty is a means to an end. After all, freedom is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for virtue - one can freely choose the bad. But such an analysis of liberty in Tocqueville's thought would not do justice to the rhetorical purpose of his work. Freedom cannot be preserved in the modern world unless it is pursued as an end in itself. Not even the inducement of material rewards can prompt the passionate commitment that liberty requires to survive.³⁶

The man who asks of freedom anything other than itself is born to be a slave.³⁷

In the spirit of true statesmanship, Tocqueville is attempting to influence opinion by example. He reveres liberty in the same manner he exhorts others to.

One of the threats to liberty in the modern age is individualism. Unlike aristocratic peoples, democratic citizens feel isolated from each other and from their ancestors and descendants. Their inclination is to concern themselves with their private affairs and to leave public business to the state.³⁸ Democratic citizens are predisposed to augment the powers of the state for two reasons according to Tocqueville: Feeling weak and helpless as individuals, they "are willing to acknowledge that the power which represents the community has far more information and wisdom than any

of the members of that community; and that it is the duty, as well as the right, of that power to guide as well as govern each private citizen."³⁹ Also, their preoccupation with improving their own lot will make them even more sensitive to any existing social inequalities. Their greed and envy will lead them to concede powers to a central authority in the hopes of depriving their neighbors of a path to a privileged position.⁴⁰ Whether it be by way of neglect or envy, democrats consumed by a love of equality are all too willing to abdicate their political liberties.

For Tocqueville, the principle check of individualism in America is religion, where love of liberty is intertwined with Christianity.

The Americans combine the notions of Christianity and of liberty so intimately in their minds that it is impossible to make them conceive the one without the other; and with them this conviction does not spring from that barren, tradionary faith which seems to vegetate rather than to live in the soul.⁴¹

Tocqueville demonstrates this point by relating a speech similar to one he witnessed in Boston that was given by a priest to elicit support for the Poles and their struggle for independence:

Almighty God! the God of armies! Thou who didst strengthen the hearts and guide the arms of our fathers when they were fighting for the sacred rights of their national independence! Thou who didst make them triumph over a hateful oppression, and hast granted to our people the benefits of liberty and peace, turn, O Lord, a favorable eye upon the other hemisphere; pitifully look down

upon an heroic nation which is even now struggling as we did in the former time, and for the same rights. Thou, who didst create man in the same image, let not tyranny mar thy work and establish inequality upon the earth. Almighty God! do thou watch over the destiny of the Poles, and make them worthy to be free....

Lord, turn not thou thy face from us, and grant that we may always be the most religious, as well as the freest, people of the earth.⁴²

Unlike in France, where "the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom (are almost always) marching in opposite directions," religion and liberty in America are inseparable. This integration of religion and liberty can be traced to the Puritans. They believed that every nation owed its existence to a covenant between God and the community, which states that the community will obey His commandments.⁴³ Because England was violating its covenant with God, the Puritans were compelled to embark for the New World to establish a political order that would be the model for the rest of the world. They sought not only the freedom to worship as they pleased, but the opportunity to establish a political authority that would properly acknowledge the covenant between God and the community. Such a society would afford its members the purest type of liberty known to the world. Tocqueville approvingly recounts John Winthrop's definition of this highest form of liberty:

This liberty is the proper end and object of authority, and cannot subsist without it; and it is a liberty to that only which is good,

just, and honest.⁴⁴

Both the Puritans and the priest speaking on behalf of the Poles perceived an intimate connection between religious conviction and the liberty required for self-determination. In America, Tocqueville observed, "(l)iberty regards religion as its companion in all its battles and its triumphs, as the cradle of its infancy and the divine source of its claims."⁴⁵

Religion not only stimulates a love of liberty, but regulates the use thereof. Equality can be too compatible with materialism, which is the belief that "all perishes with the body."⁴⁶ When a taste for material comforts is combined with the perception that there can be no purpose to life higher than the pursuit and enjoyment of these comforts, then human aspiration is reduced to a "mad impatience" for wealth. Democracy could become nothing more than Socrates' city of pigs.⁴⁷

For Tocqueville, to become enslaved to one's desires is to deny an integral part of what it means to be human. The possibility of greatness, or virtue, is just as much a part of human life as the capacity for insatiable desires.⁴⁸

Whatever we do we cannot prevent men from having a body as well as a soul, as if an angel occupied the form of an animal..."⁴⁹

Tocqueville was far from insensitive to the beauty of the angel; Trying to convince Gobineau of the merits of Christianity, Tocqueville asks him, "Don't you see the

incomparable beauty of that rare, open struggle of the spirit against the ruling flesh?"⁵⁰ Tocqueville argues that this longing for the "eternal" can be suppressed or distorted, but never eradicated. He attributes the sudden bursts of spiritual fanaticism he witnessed in the United States to a revolt of the soul against tyranny of the body.

The soul has wants which must be satisfied; and whatever pains are taken to divert it from itself, it soon grows weary, restless, and disquieted amid the enjoyments of sense. If ever the faculties of the great majority of mankind were exclusively bent upon the pursuit of material objects, it might be anticipated that an amazing reaction would take place in the souls of some men.⁵¹

That "amazing reaction" is "religious insanity," which strikes, most likely, the souls of the men with the strongest yearning, and hence greatest capacity, for human excellence.

Christianity in America prevents the citizenry from sinking into the moral depravity of materialism. Americans know that it is in their interest to follow the two fundamental teachings of Christianity: to "love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor like yourself."⁵² Religion urges democrats to occasionally pry their attention from their petty affairs and to cast "a transient and distracted glance to heaven." For the sake of eternal salvation, democrats learn to moderate their acquisitive passions and to take an interest in their neighbor's welfare. This is not to say that

Christianity inspires the majority of democrats in America to lofty deeds.

The principle of self-interest rightly understood produces no great acts of self-sacrifice, but it suggests daily small acts of self denial. By itself it cannot suffice to make a man virtuous; but it disciplines a number of persons in habits of regularity, temperance, moderation, foresight, self-command; and if it does not lead men straight to virtue by the will, it gradually draws them in that direction by their habits. If the principle of interest rightly understood were to sway the whole moral world, extraordinary virtues would doubtless be more rare, but I think that gross depravity would then also be less common.⁵³

In a letter to Kergorlay, Tocqueville remarks that a decent materialism (matérialisme honnête) may be "all that one can expect, not of any particular man, but of the species in general."⁵⁴ Although great deeds will be more rare in democracies like the United States, they will not necessarily become extinct.

Christianity not only rescues equal peoples from degradation, but provides scope for disinterested virtue. Tocqueville observed that although self-interest rightly understood is the medium for religious sentiment in the "multitude," it is not the "sole motive of religious men."⁵⁵

It would be unjust to suppose that the patriotism and the zeal that every American displays for the welfare of his fellow citizens are wholly insincere. Although private interest directs the greater part of human actions in the United States as well as elsewhere, it does not regulate them all. I must say that I have often seen Americans make great and real sacrifices to the public

welfare;..."⁵⁶

Tocqueville refers to the Christian teaching that "men ought to benefit their fellow creatures for the love of God" as a "sublime expression." He implies that some democrats can be inspired to sacrifice their "personal interests" for the love of God, expecting "no other recompense than the pleasure of contemplating it."⁵⁷

There is no doubt that, for Tocqueville, modern democracy is dependent on its ability to produce virtuous citizens.⁵⁸ If democracy is to show proper regard for what is highest in human nature, then its citizens must be led by otherworldly concerns to either restrain worldly self-interest or to renounce it. Those who subscribe to self-interest rightly understood develop habits that contribute to the moral stability of society. Those few who are able to renounce self-interest in favor of lofty designs are needed to perpetuate and invigorate the moral climate democracy depends upon. Tocqueville appeals to "all the virtuous and enlightened men" of democracies to "raise the souls of their fellow citizens and keep them lifted up towards heaven."⁵⁹

It is necessary that all who feel an interest in the future destinies of democratic society should unite, and that all should make joint and continual efforts to diffuse the love of the infinite, lofty aspirations, and a love of pleasures not of earth.⁶⁰

Religious faith insures the compatibility of democratic

self-governance with human greatness; As Tocqueville remarks, "...what can be done with a people who are their own masters if they are not submissive to the Deity?"⁶¹

Lively and Zetterbaum, two of the major commentators on Tocqueville, maintain that Tocqueville's position on religion is untenable. Part of their argument is that Tocqueville emphasized the political utility of religion to the point of undermining the possibility of religious faith. His virtual indifference to the content of religion, they argue, is proof of his willingness to propogate "myths" that are socially useful. Lively writes that "It is only a short move from emphasizing the importance of the persuasive effects of a theory to viewing it solely from the point of view of those effects, and only a short move again to advocating social myths on the grounds of their social benefits. It is impossible to deny that Tocqueville made these moves when discussing religion."⁶² He concludes, as did Zetterbaum, that Tocqueville was making an "appeal for any system of religious belief no matter what its nature..."⁶³ The problem from their point of view is that the "myth" is an inadequate substitute for true religion.

Tocqueville was not, however, indifferent to the content of religion. It is often forgotten that he viewed Christianity as superior to other types of

religions. He did not argue or imply that modern society was in need of "any religion"⁶⁴ or "anything passing for religion."⁶⁵ Instead, he writes that "I am... convinced that Christianity must be maintained at any cost in the bosom of modern democracies."⁶⁶ Goldstein calls attention to Tocqueville's unequivocal statements that Christianity is the source of all public and private morality.⁶⁷ In a letter to Kergorlay he expresses his astonishment that a certain acquaintance of his could regard the Koran as "an advance upon the gospel," when in reality there is "no comparison between them."⁶⁸ - the religion of Mohammed "is the primary cause of the now visible decadence of the Islamic world"⁶⁹ where Christianity is an "admirable moral system."⁷⁰ Christianity is also an improvement over ancient Western polytheism, which Tocqueville describes as more absurd but less decadent than Mohammedanism.⁷¹ But Tocqueville reserves his harshest criticism for Hinduism, the cause, in his view, of the social stagnation of India.⁷² Its repudiation of human equality in favor of the caste system and reliance on moral precepts that are mostly "gross absurdities"⁷³ led Tocqueville to regard Hinduism as a "religion worth less than belief."⁷⁴

As evidence that Tocqueville was not concerned with the content of religion, Zetterbaum cites the passage where he states that it is better for citizens to believe that their souls "will pass into the carcass of

a hog than by believing that the soul of man is nothing at all."⁷⁵ Tocqueville's point, however, is not that metempsychosis is just as acceptable as any other religious belief, but that a belief in the immortality of the soul is indispensable to "man's greatness."⁷⁶ He is arguing that belief in the soul is so important that if he were forced to choose between metempsychosis and materialism, he would choose the former. Tocqueville presents this argument only after denigrating metempsychosis as "assuredly not more rational than...materialism."⁷⁷

The content of religion is very important to Tocqueville. For a religion to impart a taste for freedom and point the way to the noble use of freedom, it must show proper regard for freedom in general. Not all religions are compatible with the social order that Tocqueville has in mind. But Christianity as practiced in America does provide the type of moral climate that Tocqueville found so favorable to liberty. And that climate is largely attributable to the settlers of Massachusetts Bay Colony.

The Puritans

Tocqueville frequently lauded the happy coincidence of Puritanism and the American founding. The Puritans who settled New England, unlike settlers of most colonies, were educated, and led by an "intellectual craving" to forsake their comfortable homes in England to carve a new life out of the harsh American wilderness. They brought their families, talents, and "the best elements of order and morality" to the shores of the New World, Tocqueville writes, all for "the triumph of an idea:" to "live according to their own opinions and worship God in freedom."⁷⁸ They were destined to influence the whole confederation, like a "beacon lit upon a hill, which, after it has diffused its warmth immediately around it, also tinges the distant horizon with its glow."⁷⁹

Puritanism in America was just as much a political theory as a religious doctrine.⁸⁰ In accordance with Calvin's teachings, Puritans everywhere concerned themselves with the theory and practice of politics. Calvin believed that humans are alienated from God and from knowing God's will, and that the only way to properly serve Him is to reconstruct God's kingdom on earth. In this view, government has a divine mandate to promote strict observance of the Scriptures.⁸¹ It is not surprising, then, that the first act of the Puritans upon arrival to the New World was to form a political

society.⁸² As will be shown, the political principles and associated social principles embodied in Puritanism had left their indelible mark on the equality of conditions that Tocqueville observed. But it is also the case that the experience of settling New England left its imprint on the Puritan approach to faith and politics.

The Puritans, like other European groups arriving in the New World, found themselves in a condition of equality for two reasons: their common social origins and the difficulties entailed in clearing and living off the land. First, the Puritans were alike in many respects: they spoke the same language, worshipped the same God, faced the same odds of survival in the American wilderness, and most important, traced their origins to the middle-classes of England.⁸³ As Tocqueville remarks, "The happy and the powerful do not go into exile." Since the Puritans came from the same social class in England there was no basis to establish a social hierarchy in the New World.⁸⁴ Second, it quickly became apparent that nothing less than the inducement of ownership could prompt the individual efforts required to clear the land. This led to the parceling of land in portions small enough to be cleared by owners, but too small to sustain an owner and a tenant farmer.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the laws of inheritance that were adopted in America insured that upon the death

of the owner, the land would be divided amongst the heirs.⁸⁶ This endless division of land precluded a "true" aristocracy, which is characterized by the passing down of landed property, intact, from one generation to the next.⁸⁷ The stark equality the Puritans experienced in America, along with their conviction that obedience to God entails civic participation lent their political life a "thoroughly democratic and republican" character.⁸⁸

For Tocqueville, the laws adopted by the various New England colonies reflected the relative equality of the settlers.⁸⁹ Principles such as the participation by the people in rule, the free voting of taxes, the responsibility of political representatives, personal liberty and trial by jury were "imperfectly known" in Europe, but accepted without discussion in America.⁹⁰ These laws, as well as the equality they reflect, became so much a part of life in America that no subsequent Christian sect would dream nor dare to repudiate them. Indeed, the limits of religion in America are what distinguish it from religion elsewhere.

Tocqueville notes that no Christian sect in America counters "democratic and republican principles."⁹¹

The clergy of all the different sects there (in America) hold the same language; their opinions are in agreement with the laws, and the human mind flows onwards, so to speak, in one undivided current.⁹²

Religion in America is so tied up with notions of

political rights that it curbs revolutionary ambition. Tocqueville observed that the revolutionaries "are obliged to profess an ostensible respect for Christian morality and equity, which does not permit them to violate wantonly the laws that oppose their designs..."⁹³ In short, Christianity lends moral authority to the principles of modern constitutionalism.

Tocqueville attributes the permanence of Christianity in American mores to the religious nature of the American founding, and to the eventual separation of church and state. Tocqueville argued that religion powerfully contributes to political stability in America because it plays no direct part in rule, and therefore is not fatally tied to the rise and decline of ruling parties⁹⁴ The clergy take pride in their refusal to seek political office or openly favor candidates and causes.⁹⁵ Except for a few general principles, religion considers the political sphere to be separate and open to human experimentation.⁹⁶

Christianity in America is well-suited to check the vices of modern democracy. It developed free of a history of aristocracy and was in some ways shaped by equality of conditions.⁹⁷ But there is another aspect of Tocqueville's account of religion in America that is often overlooked: The religious consensus that Tocqueville described is Protestant in character. The political innovations that the Puritans introduced into

American culture were derived from the teachings of Calvin just as much as they were the result of circumstances surrounding the founding. Tocqueville had some very specific things to say about the type of religion that modern democracy required - not only that it be a Christian religion but that it incorporate, or at least tolerate, some aspects of Protestantism. This is most apparent in Tocqueville's treatment of Catholicism.

NOTES

- 1 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:106.
- 2 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:106.
- 3 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:109.
- 4 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:110.
- 5 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:107.
- 6 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:107.
- 7 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:108-109.
- 8 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:9.
- 9 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:108.
- 10 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:309. See also 1:313.
- 11 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:20-21.
- 12 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:20.
- 13 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:126.
- 14 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:26, 128-30.
- 15 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:26.
- 16 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:127. See also 2:27.
- 17 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:121-122.
- 18 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:121.
- 19 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:122.
- 20 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:121.
- 21 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:124.
- 22 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:123.

23 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:126.

24 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:305.

25 Tocqueville wrote the following in a letter to J. S. Mill: "I love liberty by taste, and equality by instinct and reason. These two passions, which so many people pretend to have, I believe I truly feel in myself, and I am ready to make great sacrifices for them." Quoted in Jack Lively, The Social and Political Thought of Alexis de Tocqueville (London: Clarendon Press, 1962) 18-19. See also Alexis de Tocqueville, The Old Régime and the French Revolution, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955) xii (Hereafter Old Régime) and Tocqueville, Democracy 1:246-247.

26 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:293, Tocqueville, Oeuvres 13 no. 1:431; see also J. S. Mill, Dissertations and Discussions, 2 vols. (London: Parker and Son, 1859) 2:56-57.

27 Quoted in Lively 12-13.

28 For the following comparison of liberty in Tocqueville and Mill's thought, I am indebted to Jack Lively's excellent discussion of this subject in Lively 1-22.

29 Cf. Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," Political Philosophy, ed. Anthony Quinton (London: Oxford UP, 1967) 141-148.

30 Quoted in Lively 12.

31 John Stuart Mill, On Liberty (Indianapolis and

New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1956) 16-17.

32 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:246-247, 2:295 and Mill, On Liberty 16, 91.

33 Mill, On Liberty xxviv.

34 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:244. The translation has been altered to retain Tocqueville's emphasis on rights as opposed to right. See Zetterbaum 39-40.

35 Quoted in Lively 13.

36 Tocqueville, Old Régime 168.

37 Tocqueville, Old Régime 169.

38 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:98, 293.

39 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:290.

40 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:295.

41 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:306. See also 1:43, 308; 2:6.

42 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:302-303. For another account of this meeting see George Wilson Pierson, Tocqueville in America (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959) 234-238.

43 Morgan 69. See also Alan P. Grimes, American Political Thought (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964) 24-25.

44 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:42. See also 1:44.

45 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:44.

46 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:145.

47 Plato, The Republic of Plato, trans. Allan Bloom (New York and London: Basic Books Inc., 1968)

369c-372e.

48 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:134.

49 Tocqueville, Memoir 1:304. Tocqueville uses this same metaphor in Tocqueville, Democracy 2:148.

50 Tocqueville, European Revolution 207.

51 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:134. See also 2:146-147.

52 Tocqueville, European Revolution 205. See also Tocqueville, Democracy 2:125.

53 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:123.

54 Tocqueville, Oeuvres 13 no. 1:389 and Tocqueville, Memoir 1:305.

55 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:126.

56 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:105; see also 1:122, 125, 142.

57 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:125-126.

58 Peter A. Lawler, "Tocqueville on Religion and Human Excellence," The Southeastern Political Review, 11 (Fall, 1983): 139-160.

59 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:145.

60 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:145.

61 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:307.

62 Lively 197.

63 Lively 197. See Zetterbaum 121.

64 Zetterbaum 121.

65 Zetterbaum 121.

66 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:147 (my emphasis).

67 Doris Goldstein, "Tocqueville's Concept of Citizenship," Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 108, no.1 (February, 1964) 51 (Hereafter "Citizenship.").

68 Tocqueville, Memoir 1:325.

69 Tocqueville, European Revolution 212.

70 Tocqueville, European Revolution 192.

71 Tocqueville, European Revolution 212.

72 Doris Goldstein, Trial of Faith: Religion and Politics in Tocqueville's Thought (New York: Elsevier North Holland Publishing Co., 1975) 113-117.

73 Quoted in Goldstein, Trial of Faith 114.

74 Goldstein, Trial of Faith 125.

75 Zetterbaum 119.

76 Zuckert 278-279.

77 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:146.

78 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:32.

79 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:31.

80 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:32, 40.

81 Michael Walzer, The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1965) 25-30. Edmund S. Morgan, The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1958) 18-19, 69-83.

82 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:35.

83 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:35.

84 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:28-29.

- 85 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:29.
- 86 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:48-49.
- 87 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:29, 48.
- 88 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:32, 40.
- 89 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:40.
- 90 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:39.
- 91 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:301.
- 92 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:302. See also 2:27.
- 93 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:305 (my emphasis).
- 94 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:308-314; 2:6, 23, 147.

See also Gustave de Beaumont and Alexis de Tocqueville, On the Penitentiary System in the United States and Its Application in France, trans. Francis Lieber (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1964) 122.

- 95 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:304, 309, 312; 2:27.
- 96 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:44; 2:27.
- 97 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:23. See also Tocqueville, European Revolution 192-194.

Of all the Christian sects in America that Tocqueville observed, the only one he singles out for special attention in the Democracy is Catholicism. Tocqueville believed that of all the countries in Europe, the "great social revolution" that culminated in modern democracy had made the most headway in France.¹ Given the need he felt modern democracies had for religion, his love of his homeland, and the profoundly Catholic nature of France, it is not surprising that he took a special interest in the plight of Catholicism in America. Tocqueville made it clear in a letter to Kergorlay that he wrote Democracy with France in mind.

Though I seldom mentioned France (in Democracy in America), I did not write a page without thinking of her, and placing her as it were before me.²

His analysis of Catholicism in America is guided by his concern for the future of France, and recognition of that fact is necessary to understand Tocqueville's treatment of Catholicism as it pertains to liberal democracy.

Tocqueville had cause for concern about the state of

religion in France. The French Revolution was an effort to dismantle the power of the Roman Catholic Church just as much as it was a revolt against oppressive rule. Not surprisingly, antireligious sentiment was running high during the Revolution.

One of the earliest enterprises of the revolutionary movement was a concerted attack on the Church, and among the many passions inflamed by it the first to be kindled and the last to be extinguished was of an anti-religious nature.³

Although Catholicism had been restored as the dominant faith at the time Tocqueville was writing, its authority had been weakened by its affiliation with the corrupt institutions of the ancien régime.⁴ If equality of conditions was destined to overtake France, then a religious influence to moderate equality would be just as necessary in France as it was in the United States. Tocqueville takes every opportunity to defend the Church against those who insist on the incompatibility of the Church with liberty, equality and fraternity.

The first chapter that Tocqueville devotes to religion is entitled "Religion Considered as a Political Institution Which Powerfully Contributes to the Maintenance of a Democratic Republic Among the Americans." In the beginning of this chapter, Tocqueville makes the unsurprising observation that "(t)he greatest part of British America was peopled by men who, after having shaken off the authority of the Pope, acknowledged no other religious supremacy..." What

follows, however, is a discussion of Catholicism that dominates the rest of the chapter. This should strike even the casual reader as odd in light of the fact that Tocqueville emphasized the significance of Puritan origins for the social state of America earlier in the volume. Furthermore, only about eight percent of the American population was Catholic at the time of Tocqueville's visit.⁵ It is highly unlikely that Tocqueville believed that such a small and relatively new group wielded the kind of influence suggested in the title of the chapter. Instead, Tocqueville is anxious to demonstrate to the French that Catholicism can be compatible with democracy.

I think that the Catholic religion has erroneously been regarded as the natural enemy of democracy. Among the various sects of Christians, Catholicism seems to me, on the contrary, to be one of the most favorable to equality of condition among men.⁶

This same theme carries over into his work on the French Revolution, where he attempts to convince the French that the Church was attacked because of its political role in French society and not because of any flaws in her doctrine.⁷ Tocqueville is seeking to reconcile France and religion, and his analysis of the nature of religious faith in a democracy points to the reason why he thought that only Catholicism could thrive in France.

Deprived of family tradition and of a class identity, democrats tend to turn to their own judgment as the source of their opinions and beliefs. Tocqueville

describes the philosophic method of Americans in the following terms:

To evade the bondage of system and habit, of family maxims, class opinions, and, in some degree, of national prejudices; to accept tradition only as a means of information, and existing facts only as a lesson to be used in doing otherwise and doing better; to seek the reason of things for oneself, and in oneself alone; to tend to results without being bound to means, and to strike through the form to the substance..."⁸

Tocqueville believed that this type of philosophic individualism was more pronounced in France because of the recent Revolution.⁹ Over and above the independence of mind fostered by a belief in equality, the French Revolution, like any revolution, threw "doubts over commonly received ideas." A people experiencing a revolution "mistrust the judgment of one another, and...seek the light of truth nowhere but in themselves." Tocqueville concludes that philosophic individualism is greatest in nations where equality of conditions is establishing itself after a social upheaval, which is an accurate description of France at the time Tocqueville was writing.¹⁰

During times such as post-Revolutionary France, it would be practically impossible to introduce a new religion. Such an attempt, Tocqueville argues, would be "not only impious, but absurd and irrational."

It may be foreseen that a democratic people will not easily give credence to divine missions; that they will laugh at modern prophets; and that they will seek to discover the chief arbiter of their belief within, and

not beyond, the limits of their kind.¹¹

The only type of religion that could maintain authority when the very nature of authority is under attack is a religion whose origins are shrouded in the mists of time. Even then, if it is a faith that is unknown to a democracy, its credibility will be suspect. This explains Tocqueville's exhortations to nurture any religion that has "struck its roots deep into a democracy" and to regard it as "the most precious bequest of aristocratic ages."¹² Not only would a new religion run into resistance, but any effect it would have would likely be to inspire religious skepticism rather than converts. Tocqueville worries that in the process of conversion, the soul would not progress beyond the point where it is "stripped of all belief."¹³ Once a religious conviction has been overthrown, the possibility of religious faith is necessarily called into question.

If religion were to save France from equality, it would have to be Catholicism. Although the roots of Catholicism in France had been damaged, they had not been destroyed. In the interests of promoting a religious influence, it would be better to restore the credibility of the Catholic Church than to hazard the risks associated with introducing a new religion. But to say that the Catholic religion is the only religion that could save modern France from disgrace is not the

same as saying that Catholicism is the one best suited to do so. Indeed, tensions between Catholicism and liberal democratic principles are implicit in Tocqueville's treatment of these two subjects. This points to a deeper level of Tocqueville's intention: He worked to restore the influence of Catholicism, and to restore it in such a manner that it could be made safe for liberal democracy. Hence the special attention Catholicism receives in Democracy.¹⁴ Catholicism in America, which does not counter democratic and republican principles, could be used as a model for France.

Catholicism and Equality

Tocqueville believed that equality of conditions, the distinguishing feature of modern democracy, fosters a love of commerce and industry.¹⁵ Certainly the United States was a case in point. Although it is true that Tocqueville sought to moderate the commercial spirit of democrats, he did not seek to extinguish it. Commercial activity, when regulated by such things as religious mores, is politically beneficial. One advantage of a commercial society is that it ensures "the greatest enjoyment and...avoid(s) the most misery to each of the individuals who compose it..."¹⁶ In a passage that could have come from Locke, Tocqueville argues that the presence of a propertied middle-class discourages the majority from plundering the wealth of the rich, saving them from "the general impoverishment which (would) ensue" if the rich were eliminated.¹⁷ A business-minded nation may not be brilliant and glorious, but it will be prosperous -- and there is justice in prosperity.

Commercial activity can also be a good preparation for freedom.¹⁸ A people who are politically free must have incentive for self-restraint if the bare requirements of political life, such as public order, are to be met. Planning one's estate requires foresight and frugality.

(Material) pursuits...cannot prosper without strictly regular habits and a long routine of petty uniform acts. The stronger the passion is, the more regular are these habits and the

more uniform are these acts.¹⁹

The prospect of fortune encourages a commercial people to acquire habits that contribute to political stability. For instance, the habit of obeying the law in general can grow from obedience to laws that protect private property. The prospect of wealth explains for Tocqueville why revolutions will become more rare in modern times: The effort and discipline that are expended on behalf of one's present and future fortune would be wasted in the event of a revolution. A revolutionary would not be able to inflame the multitude with a passion for great changes.

To his vehemence they secretly oppose their inertia, to his revolutionary tendencies their conservative interests, their homely tastes to his adventurous passions, their good sense to the flights of his genius, to his poetry their prose.²⁰

For Tocqueville, the Americans are an example of a people who are bold, but bold within limits that protect their opportunities for enterprise.²¹ In America, "the ambition of power yields to the less refined and less dangerous desire for well-being."²² Tocqueville was not insensitive to the social utility of what is often called capitalistic or bourgeois instincts.

If I had been born in an aristocratic age, in the midst of a nation where the hereditary wealth of some and the irremediable penury of others equally diverted men from the idea of bettering their condition and held the soul, as it were, in a state of torpor, fixed on the contemplation of another world, I should then wish that it were possible for me to rouse that people to

a sense of their wants; I should seek to discover more rapid and easy means for satisfying the fresh desires that I might have awakened; and, directing the most strenuous efforts of the citizens to physical pursuits, I should endeavor to stimulate them to promote their own well-being.²³

The Church of Rome, however, does not share Tocqueville's enthusiasm for the enterprising spirit.

Tocqueville must have been aware of the fact that, generally speaking, Catholic orthodoxy disapproves of material success. For the Catholic, all human activity, including economic activity, either furthers or hinders one's chances of securing eternal salvation. No actions are indifferent to this end, and therefore none should be performed without the glorification of God in mind.²⁴ This includes labor. Having to labor is a consequence of original sin, the cause of the fall of human beings from the state of grace. Labor is even honorable insofar as it maintains the body and hence the possibility of efforts to redeem the soul. In this view, working to obtain goods should be secondary to and limited by the more important end of being worthy of God's grace. The proper pursuit of material goods is limited by need, or more specifically, what the body needs to facilitate the spiritual growth of the soul.²⁵ Pursuing material goods may be unlawful, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, under three conditions:

(F)irst on the part of the object of solicitude, that is, if we seek temporal things as an end...Secondly...through too much earnestness in endeavouring to obtain

temporal things, the result being that man is drawn away from spiritual things which ought to be the chief object of his search...Thirdly, through overmuch fear, when, to wit, a man fears to lack necessary things if he does what he ought to do.²⁶

Among the economic incentives that the Church regards as signs of "avarice, sensuality, or pride, and therefore necessarily to be condemned" are the desire to improve one's social position and to secure for one's children a better life than their parents knew.²⁷ In other words, the same instincts that equality fosters and that Tocqueville (qualifiedly) applauds are regarded by the Church as sinful. Accordingly, the Church's first official comment on the modern age was made by Pope Pius IX in his famous Syllabus of Errors, where he declared it a "damnable error" to assert that "the Roman Pontiff can and should reconcile himself with progress, liberalism and modern civilization."²⁸

This is not to say that the Church unreservedly condemns the wealthy. Indeed, many of her saints were rich. At issue is not wealth per se but instead how one views the accumulation of wealth and how one spends it. Bound up in the Church's understanding of wealth is the notion that those who have more than they need have a duty to aid the poor.²⁹

Your plenty at the present time should supply their need so that their surplus may one day supply your need, with equality as the result.³⁰

As long as the rich become so without pursuing wealth as

an end, and as long as they spend it on the less fortunate, their social position is not cause for eternal damnation. But these conditions are a tall order for mere mortals, and the Church's pessimism in this regard is underscored by her emphasis on Jesus's warning that "It is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."³¹

These two strands - the belief that humans need a limited amount of property for salvation and that they have a correlative duty to aid the poor - have characterized Catholic social teaching from Aquinas to the present day.³² In 1891, Pope Leo XIII restated this position in his encyclical Rerum Novarum, which was the first systematic statement of the Church's position on the "social question" posed by liberalism and industrialization. Although the encyclical was written after Tocqueville's death, it reflected convictions that the Church had held for centuries and applied them to modern times. The Rerum Novarum is useful for determining the Church's reaction to the same state of affairs that Tocqueville observed.

In the Rerum, Leo XIII charted what came to be called the Catholic "middle way," which is a position critical of both liberalism and socialism. Because of the Catholic tradition favoring limited government and private property, Leo XIII rejected socialism as

contrary to natural justice and civil peace.³³ His defense of private property, however, stops short of the classical liberal claim that the prospect of increased property holdings can be a foundation for freedom and therefore a good thing.

Whoever has received from the Divine bounty a large share of blessings, whether they be external and corporal, or gifts of the mind, has received them for the purpose of using them for perfecting his own nature, and, at the same time, that he may employ them, as the minister of God's Providence, for the benefit of others.³⁴

Pope Pius XI, writing forty years later in commemoration of the Rerum Novarum, was more blunt than Leo XIII in his hostility to the liberal premise of economic liberty as a basic component of freedom.

Just as the unity of human society cannot be built upon "class" conflict, so the proper ordering of economic affairs cannot be left to the free play of rugged competition. From this source, as from a polluted spring, have proceeded all the errors of the "individualistic" school.³⁵

Catholic orthodoxy has always regarded material wealth and the desire for material prosperity with grave suspicion. Protestant thinkers, although in agreement with the Catholic view that wealth should not be pursued as an end in itself, did not find worldly prosperity as embarrassing as the Roman Catholic Church has.

Protestantism and Equality

In Protestant thought, the act of laboring takes on a new importance. Rather than something to be endured to the point where the soul can seek salvation, labor becomes "the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume."³⁶ It was Luther first, and then Calvin who developed the notion of a calling. In his classic discussion of this point, Weber defines a calling as "a religious conception, that of a task set by God..."³⁷ A calling is one's vocation, which is performed in service of God, one's community and one's family, in that order. By earnestly dedicating themselves to their calling, followers of Calvin were proving their chosenness by God by exercising a self-discipline that was to be their means of triumph over worldly temptation. Industry became a virtue, an end in itself.³⁸ The Catholic notion of good works gave way to an understanding of the work ethic, where the former emphasizes the efficacy of individual deeds, the latter requires continued labor in a calling.³⁹

As the Puritans soon found out, material prosperity is not an uncommon result of such a dedication to hard work. Indeed, worldly success came to be sign of Divine approbation. The Puritans had no objections to amassing wealth as long as it was wholly incidental to the glorification of God through labor. This is not to suggest that Calvinists were more sympathetic than

Catholics towards the human passion for comfort; they were not. But unlike the Catholics, Calvinists believed worldly prosperity to be a sign of salvation rather than a hindrance to it. This explains the radically different viewpoints of the Catholics and the Calvinists towards the poor: Catholicism not only maintains that charity is a primary virtue, but that the poor have a special place in the heart of Christ.⁴⁰ Calvinists, however, were suspicious of the poor, particularly the poor who could not find work. Their poverty was seen as proof of their unwillingness to dedicate themselves to a calling, and therefore proof of their ungodliness.⁴¹ For these reasons Calvinism, and more generally Protestantism, is easily reconciled with the uneven distribution of wealth that is so repugnant to the Catholic Church.

Tocqueville knew that Catholicism and Protestantism were not equally amenable to what he regarded as the best type of liberal democracy. Every religion, he thought, has a "political opinion" which is "connected with it by affinity."⁴² In his notebook he kept while in America, Tocqueville states that Catholicism does not necessarily lead to the "democratic spirit."⁴³ By his own description of the Catholic faith, Catholicism is more compatible with democratic tyranny than the kind of liberal democracy he admired in America.

Catholicism is like an absolute monarchy; if the sovereign be removed, all the other

classes of society are more equal than in republics.⁴⁴

Just as the "priest alone rises above the rank of his flock, and all below him are equal," so is a democratic despot "incontestably above all the citizens," who stand in equal dependence to their master. The decline of a democracy, according to Tocqueville, would start with the allure the centralization of power holds for democrats. Likewise, he argues that democrats are drawn to Catholicism because it is "single and uniform."

It is evident that all the naturally religious minds among the Protestants, the men of strong and serious opinions, disgusted by the vagueness of Protestantism, yet ardently desirous to have a faith, give up in despair the search after truth, and submit to the yoke of authority. They throw off, with pleasure, the heavy burden of reason, and they become Catholics.⁴⁵

Religious powers not radiating from a common center are naturally repugnant to their minds...⁴⁶

The "political opinion" linked to Catholicism is an understanding of equality that Tocqueville was warning the modern world against - "equality in servitude."⁴⁷ Protestantism, on the other hand, is linked to a political understanding of equality that can countenance the social inequality that results from free commercial activity.

If Catholicism predisposes the faithful to obedience, it certainly does not prepare them for inequality; but the contrary may be said of Protestantism, which generally tends to make men independent more than to render them equal.⁴⁸

Although Tocqueville recognized a tension between Catholicism and decent government, he did not think the two were wholly irreconcilable. Indeed, the future of France depended on the possibility of Catholicism coexisting with democratic and republican principles as it does in America.

This account of Catholicism in Tocqueville's thought differs significantly from the prevailing view in the scholarship on Tocqueville. Most commentators argue that Tocqueville thought Catholicism is "fundamentally compatible" with and hence good for modern democracy, so much so, according to some, that he predicted that Americans would increasingly convert to Catholicism.⁴⁹ Certainly Tocqueville believed that there was a connection between the Catholic faith and the spirit of equality that animates modern democracy - Catholicism gave birth to equality. But he also believed that equality in its modern form could host moral and political servitude or freedom and human excellence, and that Catholicism is more consistent with the former than the latter. Tocqueville never says that it is a good thing that democrats are easily charmed by the unitary nature of the Catholic Church. If anything, the attraction of democrats to a centralized religious authority would signal their openness to the centralization of political authority. As for the argument that Tocqueville predicted that Americans would

increasingly become Catholic: First of all, he was aware of the massive immigration of Catholics to America during the time he visited, which would at least partly explain his statement that America is "the country in which the Roman Catholic religion makes most progress."⁵⁰ Secondly, the following passage has been repeatedly and mistakenly cited as evidence that Tocqueville thought that Catholicism is more compatible with American liberal democracy than Protestantism, and that Americans will tend to become either Catholics or atheists.

But I am inclined to believe...that our posterity will tend more and more to a division into only two parts, some relinquishing Christianity entirely and others returning to the Church of Rome.⁵¹

Tocqueville is not referring to Americans in the passage but to "our posterity" (*nos neveux*) - the descendants of the French people. It is important to recall that Tocqueville was writing for a French audience. The fact that his thoughts had shifted to France is evident from the paragraph preceding the passage in question, where he insists that if the Catholic Church could disentangle itself from "the political animosities to which it has given rise," then it could demonstrate its ability to coexist with modern political principles.⁵² According to Tocqueville, this was already the case in America.⁵³ He was thinking of France, where the Catholic Church had been tied to secular powers and with dire

consequences.⁵⁴ Tocqueville sought to reconcile French Catholicism with modernity, taking his bearings from the example of religion in America.

Making Catholicism Safe for Democracy

In making his recommendations for the modernization of the Catholic religion, Tocqueville urged the Church to disavow, not only its ties to secular authority, but any claims that Catholicism cannot admit a separation of church and state.

(At the time of the French Revolution,) the Church was, if not the most oppressive, the chief of all the powers in the land, and though neither her vocation nor her nature called for this, co-operated with the secular authority, often condoning vices in it that in other spheres she would have reprobated.⁵⁵

In order for Catholicism in France to regain and maintain some semblance of its former moral authority, it must separate itself from everyday politics. Only when the Church can convince the French people that it is not a front for the ancien régime will it find wholehearted acceptance, and only by insulating itself from the vicissitudes of the political realm will it maintain authority.

Through his description of Catholicism in America, Tocqueville suggests modifications of Catholic doctrine and ritual that would make it more amenable to equality of conditions in France. The careful reader will notice that Tocqueville is encouraging the Church to de-emphasize those aspects of Catholicism that contradict the commercial spirit in particular, and modern democracy in general. According to Tocqueville, for any religion to have an impact in modern times it

must come to terms with the modern temperament. The more conditions become equal, the more important it is for religion to never needlessly "run counter to the ideas that generally prevail or to the permanent interests that exist in the mass of the people."⁵⁶ Public opinion is so powerful in democracies that no religion could survive without its support.⁵⁷ Likewise, the clergy in America preach with an eye to majority opinion.

All the American clergy know and respect the intellectual supremacy exercised by the majority; they never sustain any but necessary conflicts with it.⁵⁸

The concessions that Tocqueville implies the Church of France must make to democracy are big ones, as the nature of Catholicism in America attests.

First of all, the Church needs to harness hagiolatry, which conflicts with the democratic propensity for general ideas. Because democrats can accept as truth only what they investigate for themselves, they avail themselves of general ideas, which "enable the human mind to pass a rapid judgment on a great many objects at once."⁵⁹

...thus it is that the craving to discover general laws in everything, to include a great number of objects under the same formula, and to explain a mass of facts by a single cause becomes an ardent and sometimes an undiscerning passion in the human mind.⁶⁰

Democrats tend to think that "all the truths that are applicable to himself appear to him equally and

similarly applicable to each of his fellow citizens and fellow men."⁶¹ This way of thinking extends into the nature of their religious beliefs.⁶²

Men who are similar and equal in the world readily conceive the idea of the one God, governing every man by the same laws and granting to every man future happiness on the same conditions.⁶³

This view of an impartial Deity collides with the Catholic belief that "secondary agents," specifically saints, can secure special Providential consideration for individuals who properly request it. The proposition that there may be "a thousand private roads to heaven" is offensive to the democratic sense of fairness. Equal men find it hard to countenance the thought that the Deity, the Maker of the universe, would stoop to the level of showing partiality for some because of their heavenly connections. Tocqueville goes so far as to imply that the idea of sainthood was a corruption of Christianity brought on by the shattering of the Roman Empire into "a thousand fragments."⁶⁴ Each society sought to rebuild its identity and to "win the favor of an especial protector near the throne of grace."⁶⁵

Unable to subdivide the Deity, they multiplied and unduly enhanced the importance of his agents. The homage due to saints and angels became an almost idolatrous worship...⁶⁶

Accordingly, Tocqueville argues that it is "particularly important not to allow the homage paid to secondary

agents to be confused with the worship due to the Creator alone."⁶⁷ Such confusion does not exist in America, he approvingly notes, where the stricture against improper worship of saints is "clearly inculcated" and "generally followed."⁶⁸ By emphasizing what is not due to the saints, Tocqueville is eliminating a source of conflict between Catholicism and modernity to the extent that the status of the saints in Catholic dogma is reduced. He could not expect or even hope that the Church would repudiate its teachings regarding sainthood. But he did hope to convince the French Church to follow the example of American Catholicism, and downplay the importance of the saints to eternal salvation.

Tocqueville also argued that modern religions would need to keep the ritual formalities simple and few in number. Since democrats are compelled to rely on their own judgment for their opinions, they insist on a clear view of the object they are trying to discern. This leads them to regard forms as "useless and inconvenient veils placed between them and the truth."⁶⁹ They have little patience for elaborate rituals, and any religion that was inflexible on this point would "soon find itself limited to a band of fanatic zealots in the midst of a skeptical multitude."⁷⁰ Again, America is the model.

There are no Roman Catholic priests who show less taste for the minute individual

observances, for extraordinary or peculiar means of salvation, or who cling more to the spirit and less to the letter of the law than the Roman Catholic priests of the United States.⁷¹

Tocqueville acknowledges that in Catholicism, "the doctrine and the form are frequently so closely united as to form but one point of belief; nothing in these ceremonies should be changed."⁷² All other rituals should be trimmed so as to bring French Catholicism in line with its American counterpart and the spirit of equality.

Most important, the Catholic Church must respect the passion for well-being. For Tocqueville, any religion that would seek to overthrow such a "deep-seated" passion as the love of wealth in democratic times "would in the end be destroyed by it; and if it attempted to wean men entirely from the contemplation of the good things of this world in order to devote their faculties exclusively to the thought of another, it may be foreseen that the minds of men would at length escape its grasp, to plunge into the exclusive enjoyment of present and material pleasures."⁷³ He goes on to argue that the most any religion can hope to do in such times is "to purify, to regulate, and to restrain" the love of material comforts.

Men cannot be cured of the love of riches, but they may be persuaded to enrich themselves by none but honest means.⁷⁴

All of the clergy in America, Tocqueville observed, have

learned this lesson well. There the clergy "do not attempt to draw or to fix all the thoughts of man upon the life to come; they are willing to surrender a portion of his heart to the cares of the present, seeming to consider the goods of this world as important, though secondary, objects."⁷⁵ Although they take no part in "productive labor," they are enthusiastic about its progress.

...and while they never cease to point to the other world as the great object of the hopes and fears of the believer, they do not forbid him honestly to court prosperity in this (one).⁷⁶

By relaxing the stricture against earning more than what survival requires, the Church in America was ensuring its survival by showing necessary regard for "the intellectual supremacy exercised by the majority."

Tocqueville's advice to the Church of France is implicit in his description of Catholicism in America.

Thus it is that by respecting all democratic tendencies not absolutely contrary to herself and by making use of several of them for her own purposes, religion sustains a successful struggle (in America) with that spirit of individual independence which is her most dangerous opponent.⁷⁷

According to Tocqueville's analysis, in order for the Church to coexist harmoniously with modern equality, it will have to retreat from some of its central tenets. These modifications, it should be noted, serve to minimize the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism. The doctrines that Tocqueville suggests

the Church de-emphasize are the ones that irritate Protestants the most: the belief in saints, the emphasis on ritual, and the general disapproval of worldly success and the motives it requires. If the example of Catholicism in America can be taken for Tocqueville's prescription for the Church in France, then the success of Catholicism in modern times is dependent on the extent to which it resembles Protestantism more than traditional European Catholicism.

According to Tocqueville's account, the felicitous cooperation between religion and politics in America is due to the religious legacy of the Puritan settlers - a legacy that is Protestant. It is the case that the development of Protestantism in America was affected by equality of conditions. But it is equally clear that Protestantism is the religion that is most healthy in equality of conditions. Referring to the Puritans, Tocqueville remarks that they "brought with them" to the New World "a form of Christianity which I cannot better describe than by styling it a democratic and republican religion."⁷⁸ Puritanism was good for democracy even before it arrived in America. Given Tocqueville's remarks on religions other than Protestantism, it is doubtful that he believed America would have become a

commercial republic if it had been founded by non-Protestants. Catholicism is a case in point.⁷⁹ Tocqueville reports that American Catholics respect the republican and democratic principles fostered by Puritanism, although they do so because of their social ranking (most are poor) and minority status, and not because of their consistency with Catholic orthodoxy.⁸⁰ Tocqueville surmises that Catholics would support these principles "with less zeal if they were rich and preponderant."⁸¹ Similarly, Tocqueville never commends a non-Christian religion for its compatibility with democratic principles.

At least part of the reason that Tocqueville prescribed Christianity to the modern world is that the Western world was already predominately Christian and the introduction of new religions would be largely unsuccessful. However, Tocqueville's preference for one type of Christianity suggests that he indeed paid close attention to the content of religion. Lively and Zetterbaum argue that he is advocating a very general and vague religion for democratic society, one that is "pared down to simple and uniform generalizations about God and human nature."⁸² As this chapter shows, Tocqueville did believe that religion must respect certain boundaries if it is to survive in a democracy. But these boundaries designate the minimum, and not sum total, of the religion or religions Tocqueville has in

mind. According to Tocqueville, all the Christian sects in America meet these minimum requirements. He has no need to discuss the myriad differences between the Protestant sects because he is considering religion from a "purely human point of view."⁸³ Tocqueville discusses only those aspects of religion that democratic society needs and depends on. Anything beyond these requirements is left to the discretion of the worshipper. Tocqueville does not go further than recommending a religion that is largely Protestant because his task does not require him to. To narrow the list of acceptable religions any further would be to introduce considerations other than those of social utility, such as prophecy, which is something Tocqueville bluntly denies he is willing to do. Tocqueville describes the model democratic religion only to the point that democratic society needs him to, and does not rule out the possibility of further elaborations. Indeed, full-blown religions that have incorporated his guidelines are exactly what he has in mind.

NOTES

- 1 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:7. See Tocqueville, Memoir 1:296.
- 2 Tocqueville, Memoir 1:342. See Cushing Strout, "Tocqueville's Duality: Describing America and Thinking of Europe," American Quarterly XXI, no.1 (Spring, 1969).
- 3 Tocqueville, Old Régime 5.
- 4 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:12, 314. See Tocqueville, Old Régime 6-7.
- 5 Tocqueville, Democracy
- 6 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:300. See Tocqueville, Old Régime 7.
- 7 Tocqueville, Old Régime 6.
- 8 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:3.
- 9 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:6-7.
- 10 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:7.
- 11 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:9.
- 12 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:145.
- 13 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:145.
- 14 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:300-303, 2:29-30.
- 15 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:154.
- 16 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:253.
- 17 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:214-215.

18 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:254.

19 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:229.

20 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:255.

21 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:255.

22 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:163.

23 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:144.

24 Amintore Fanfani, Catholicism, Protestantism and Capitalism (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) 121.

25 Fanfani 128-129. R. H. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: A Historical Study (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952) 31-36.

26 Aquinas, Summa Theologica II-II, q.55, art 6.
Quoted in Fanfani 128-129.

27 Fanfani 129.

28 Quoted in Renzo Bianchi, Liberalism and Its Critics (Northfield: College City Press) 53.

29 Fanfani 126.

30 2 Corinthians 8:14.

31 Mark 10:25. See also Pope Leo XIII, Rerum Novarum in Seven Great Encyclicals (Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1963) 10-11 (Hereafter Encyclicals).

32 For a summary of Catholic social teaching see Franz H. Mueller, "The Church and the Social Question," in The Challenge of Mater et Magistra, eds. Joseph N. Moody and Justus George Lawler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963) 13-154; Michael Novak, The Spirit of

Democratic Capitalism (New York: Touchstone Edition, 1983) 242-250; Bianchi 52-76. For a current statement of the Church's position on the "social question" see the "Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation," excerpts of which were published in The New York Times, 4-6-86, 10A.

33 Encyclicals 2-3, 6-7.

34 Encyclicals 11.

35 Encyclicals 149.

36 Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958) 80.

37 Weber 79.

38 Weber 62.

39 Walzer 211.

40 Matthew 5:3-6; Tawney 260-261.

41 Walzer 217-219.

42 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:300.

43 Alexis de Tocqueville, Journey to America, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J.P. Mayer (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1959) 150 (Hereafter Journey).

44 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:301.

45 Tocqueville, Memoir 1:294.

46 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:29.

47 Tocqueville, Memoir 2:328. See Tocqueville, Democracy 2:97.

48 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:301.

⁴⁹ Joachim Wach, "The Role of Religion in the Social Philosophy of Alexis de Tocqueville," Journal of the History of Ideas VII, no.1 (Jan. 1946): 77, 84; Catherine Zuckert, "Not by Preaching: Tocqueville on the Role of Religion in American Democracy," The Review of Politics 42(April 1981): 260n3; Maxime Leroy, "Leroy on Tocqueville" in Political Thought in Perspective, ed. William Ebenstein (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1957): 480; Lawler 145; Lively 189. John Koritansky, "Two Forms of the Love of Equality in Tocqueville's Practical Teaching for Democracy," Polity 6, no.4(1974): 497. Koritansky recognizes Tocqueville's critical stance towards Catholicism, but concludes that Tocqueville thought that the Church can be compatible with freedom only in America, because of the unique continental advantages found there. Goldstein parenthetically suggests that Tocqueville had to come to terms with the fact that it is Protestantism and not Catholicism that is the "source of, and a guarantee for, American democracy." Goldstein, "Citizenship" 40.

⁵⁰ Tocqueville, Democracy 2:29; Pierson 43. For an account of the immigration of European Catholics in the early nineteenth century and the religious prejudice they faced see John Tracy Ellis, American Catholicism (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1969) 41-83.

- 51 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:30.
- 52 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:29.
- 53 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:300-302, 312.
- 54 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:12, 314; Tocqueville, Old Régime 6-7; Beaumont 122.
- 55 Tocqueville, Old Régime 151.
- 56 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:26.
- 57 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:26; 1:254-270.
- 58 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:27.
- 59 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:13, 16-17.
- 60 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:15.
- 61 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:15.
- 62 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:23.
- 63 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:23. See 2:24.
- 64 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:24. See Lively 193-194.
- 65 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:24.
- 66 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:24.
- 67 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:24.
- 68 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:27.
- 69 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:4. See 2:325-326. For a contemporary statement of the democratic dislike of forms see Harvey Mansfield, Jr., "The Forms and Formalities of Liberty," The Public Interest n.70 (Winter, 1983): 121-131.
- 70 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:25.
- 71 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:27.

72 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:25n.1.

73 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:26. See also 2:97.

74 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:26.

75 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:27.

76 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:27. See 2:126-127.

77 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:28.

78 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:300.

79 It is a source of embarrassment to conservative Catholics such as Michael Novak that Catholic countries are very slow to develop capitalistic economies and democratic institutions. See Novak 249.

80 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:301. See Tocqueville, Journey 150.

81 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:301.

82 Zetterbaum 120. See Lively 197.

83 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:22.

Tocqueville thought that the quality of modern democracy depended on established religions such as those he encountered during his visit to America. His assessment of religion and democracy, however, is often judged an insufficient attempt to reconcile the demands of democracy with revealed religion. At issue is the political utility of religious faith. His critics argue that genuine belief requires more than a conviction that religion is socially useful. Indeed, a religion understood to be socially useful is not and cannot be more than a "species" of religion as opposed to genuine religion.¹ As Manent puts it, "la difficulté centrale de l'interprétation tocquevillienne des rapports de la démocratie et de la religion" is that "La religion des Américains perd de son utilité à proportion qu'ils s'attachent à elle en raison de cette utilité." ² The vast majority of the scholarship on religion in Tocqueville's thought is divided between those who remonstrate him for being a hypocrite, that is, for advocating intellectual liberty and myths at the same time³, and those who sympathize with his attempt to

establish a democratic "civil religion."⁴ Both camps share the assumption that Tocqueville is encouraging belief in something less than a traditional and organized religion. Although Tocqueville did think there were two types of religion, his understanding of the nature of religious faith does not countenance myth-making.

Most commonly, religious faith is expressed through organized, established religions. The religious zeal that Tocqueville observed in America was not only Christian in spirit but sectarian in form. For Tocqueville, Americans embrace Christian morality according to the tenets of their professed faith. From a social standpoint, the details of their religious belief are less important than the fact that they are Christians.⁵ Happily for Americans, their various sects share the general precepts that Tocqueville found so important for democracy. Americans learn of the truth of these precepts through participation in worship at whatever Christian church they attend.⁶ They are believers in the usual sense of the term; Tocqueville writes that America is a religious nation and he means it.⁷ He remarks that Christianity maintains its hold on the public mind in America as "not only that of a philosophical doctrine which has been adopted upon inquiry, but of a religion which is believed (croit) without discussion."⁸ It is not inconceivable that one

could believe one's religion to be true and socially beneficial. This analysis sheds light on the following oft-cited passage:

If it be of the highest importance to man, as an individual, that his religion should be true, it is not so to society. Society has no future life to hope for or to fear; and provided the citizens profess religion, the peculiar tenets of that religion are of little importance to its interests.⁹

As this passage indicates, believers concern themselves first and foremost with religious truth. The "innumerable" Christian sects in America, which are the subject of the paragraph the above passage appears in, all believe their religion to be the true religion and not salutary myths. However, society has no need to determine which religion is true - particularly American society, since all the sects "are comprised within the great unity of Christianity..."¹⁰ Far from interfering with liberty, Tocqueville is protecting freedom of conscience. The Western world is Christian already and has nothing further to gain by favoring one form of Christianity over others. Society does not need true religion, but the individual does.

As we saw in Chapter Three, Tocqueville believed that all men have need of dogmatic belief in religious matters. Fear of death fosters a desire for immortality, which is the natural basis for religion. In hopes of eternal salvation men abide by a religious creed that they regard as sanctioned by the Deity, which

is a line of reasoning that Tocqueville called self-interest rightly understood. An important assumption behind the myth thesis is that the principle of self-interest rightly understood, as Tocqueville observed it in America, is a "species" of religion as opposed to genuine religion.¹¹ Genuine religion, so the argument goes, transcends any consideration of self-interest.¹² Americans do not have genuine faith because of the self-interested calculations that fuel their belief.

This view is only partially correct and consequently very misleading. Americans as a people are not capable of genuine belief. But Americans are no less capable of genuine belief than any other people. It takes the rare intellect of a Pascal or a Montaigne to sound the depths of divine truths and thus to appreciate them solely for what they are. Such knowledge of the divine comes at a high price even to great minds. Pascal, for instance, renounced every consideration of self-interest "to rally all the powers of his mind...for the better discovery of the most hidden things of the Creator."¹³ The amount of effort he had to expend was so extraordinary that it wore out his body; he died of old age before he was forty.¹⁴ Only the very few are capable of genuine belief. The rest of humanity has no choice but to accept religious dogma on faith, summoning as much belief as one can for that which one can never know.

Unable to partake of the highest form of religion, the greater part of humanity turns to organized religion for spiritual direction. They cannot solve the riddles of human destiny alone, but they cannot escape their fear of mortality.¹⁵ This is why Tocqueville defines religion as "another form of hope...(that is) no less natural to the human heart than hope itself."¹⁶ Most Americans, like most people, hope to find immortality through organized religion. It is important to note that for Tocqueville "The founders of almost all religions have held to the same language," which is the logic of self-interest rightly understood.¹⁷ This necessarily implies that most believers are drawn to their faith by the prospect of rewards in the next world. The religion of the Americans is not a salutary myth or a civil religion, but religion for the many, which is organized religion as we know it and that for Tocqueville is a species of genuine religion, or religion for the few.

This analysis of Tocqueville's views on religion is born out in an exchange that took place between Kergorlay and Tocqueville in 1837, which is worth quoting at length. Kergorlay writes the following from Berlin:

As limited to my narrow observations as I am, and wanting to use this scrap of paper, I revert to the topic of women. And I beg you to tell me whether or not American women and English women have uniformly in all social ranks, an external affectation of passiveness

and a kind of prudishness of style which makes a woman say to me: "my neck hurts" when she has a sore throat, and when a woman is pregnant, one says: "she is expecting." Finally, does proper etiquette demand in those countries that a woman doesn't look like it even when she is in an impressionable state caused by any feeling, be it the most honest, the most chaste. The woman appears to absolutely ignore the fact that she has a throat, a stomach etc.? All these things are obligatory in Berlin, mainly in the fashionable society which has, as you know, ideas very different from ours on what truly good manners consist of. I would like to know whether they are the general and necessary fruits of Protestantism, as I am inclined to believe. It seems to me that Protestantism has eliminated good-heartedness and naivety in all places where it establishes itself; furthermore, I believe that naivety is one of the most fecund sources of imagination and intellectual achievement. Don't you think as I am inclined to do, that Deism, which is improperly called "natural religion" etc., is more naturally in agreement with good manners and naivety than Protestantism, and is then more favorable from this point of view (let alone many others) to the development of the faculties of the mind?¹⁸

Tocqueville responds:

You ask me, if in America and England I find the same prudery and affectation which so justly disgust you in Berlin. Yes; and especially in England, where it is easier to enter a woman's bedroom in order to make love to her than for any other purpose. Still I must say, that in those two countries, where the affectation of virtue and propriety is carried by women to an absurd extent, there is more real virtue than with us. Is this the case in Berlin? The discovery of this good result made me indulgent towards the accompanying evil, though I naturally have not much indulgence in the matter, and at last I thought that all that external and conventional parade of propriety was, perhaps, to female virtue, what an established worship is to religion - a form which powerful minds, whether for good or for evil, break through, but which serves as a

protecting barrier to the weak and ordinary. So I thought that all the pretence of modesty, and rules of affected delicacy, which are unnecessary for a really virtuous woman, may perhaps be of use to the majority. As to your remark upon Protestantism, I am much inclined to share your opinion. But it is a subject that one cannot discuss fasting as I am.¹⁹

Tocqueville only partly agrees with Kergorlay's views on Protestantism. Protestantism as an organized religion is a type of form; something to be distinguished from genuine (or as Kergorlay writes, natural) religion. Kergorlay shows the same impatience with forms that Tocqueville describes in Democracy as concomitant with a belief in equality: To say that a woman is "expecting" rather than "pregnant" is for Kergorlay to be needlessly abstract and ambiguous about an incontrovertible fact of female biology. Like modern democrats, Kergorlay regards such abstraction as "puerile artifices used to conceal or to set off truths that should more naturally be bared to the light of day..."²⁰ Protestantism is a form itself which begets the use of forms in social life. For Kergorlay, the removal of forms would promote clear-sighted intellectual progress, which springs from unfettered naïveté. Protestantism distorts naïveté wherever it is the established religion, as demonstrated in Berlin. If the women of Berlin were free from Protestantism they would also be free from the need to appear unflappable in public. Kergorlay prefers Deism, which dispenses

with the need for revelation in favor of the light of reason. Regretting the pejorative connotation associated with Deism as a natural religion, he suggests that it is superior to Protestantism in that it stimulates the intellect, whereas Protestantism obstructs the path of reason.

Tocqueville agrees that Protestantism is a form, but disagrees that forms are useless. The "weak and ordinary" cannot come to religious conviction through reason. They need to rely on the spiritual direction provided by an organized religion. Just as women who lack in feminine virtue can imitate the truly virtuous by relying on social standards of propriety, so can the average worshipper attain some semblance of genuine religion through an established church. Tocqueville avoids a direct confrontation with his cousin. He disagrees with Kergorlay on the usefulness of forms, which include Protestantism, but does not pursue his disagreement beyond qualified approval; he writes that he is "much inclined to share" Kergorlay's opinion (je suis très tenté d'être de ton avis) - a far from unequivocal endorsement. But Tocqueville cannot pursue the disagreement any further. It would offend God. His reference to fasting implies that it would be impious to continue his line of reasoning. Judging from the tenor of Tocqueville's correspondence with Kergorlay, it is more likely that he feared jeopardizing his relationship

with his cousin than with God. Tocqueville and Kergorlay had developed differing opinions on political matters over the years, and Tocqueville consistently expresses his concern that their political differences will interfere with their friendship. The letter which ends with this fasting comment deals at length with this concern.²¹ Regardless of his reasons for playing down his disagreement with Kergorlay, it is clear from the passages cited that their differences are more than superficial.

Tocqueville's references to religion for the many and the few are not limited to his correspondence. The most notable passage on this point in Democracy can be found in one of his chapters on religion:

Among the sciences there are some that are useful to the mass of mankind and are within its reach; others can be approached only by the few and are not cultivated by the many, who require nothing beyond their more remote applications: but the daily practice of the science I speak of (religion) is indispensable to all, although the study of it is inaccessible to the greater number.²²

This does not mean, however, that since the many cannot be genuine believers they necessarily are believers in myths in the form of organized religions. Tocqueville's comment that "Most religions are only general, simple, and practical means of teaching men the doctrine of the immortality of the soul"²³ is not a declaration that most religions are phony. Instead, it points to the fact that organized religions are eternal truths

rendered intelligible to the crowd. For Tocqueville, the essential truths are Christian truths and the various Christian sects are various means of relating these truths. Established religion may not be the highest form of religion, but unlike genuine religion, it links the many to the divine.

The many and the few need Christianity in order to be free. Tocqueville consistently maintained that political liberty can thrive only among the enlightened. The enlightened includes those who have knowledge of the proper limits and divine origins of freedom. Religion imparts the type of knowledge that Tocqueville thought necessary to liberty.²⁴

...in America religion is the road to knowledge, and the observance of the divine laws leads man to civil freedom.²⁵

Christianity teaches that "civil liberty affords a noble exercise to the faculties of man..."²⁶ The Puritans could acknowledge their choseness only after liberating themselves from Charles I. According to Tocqueville, Americans felt the need to establish Christianity in the Western frontier to educate the settlers to the merits of free institutions.²⁷ A Christian education is invaluable to modern democracy because it lends legitimacy to liberal goals such as freedom, which provides scope for greatness, and aids in the

preservation of freedom by preventing a free society from collapsing into anarchy or despotism. Both of these are brought on by the failure of citizens to properly appreciate liberty. Christianity supplies moral ties where the political ties have been relaxed, thereby preventing anarchy.²⁸ It combats despotism by reminding the faithful that their freedom is a gift from God and therefore something to be taken seriously and used wisely. Tocqueville holds out little hope for liberty in democracies where religion has lost its sway. Speculating on whether man can support "religious independence" and "political freedom" at the same time, he writes that "if faith be wanting in him, he must be subject; and if he be free, he must believe."²⁹

NOTES

- 1 Zetterbaum 147. See Lively 197.
- 2 Pierre Manent, Tocqueville et la nature de la démocratie (Paris: Julliard, 1982) 129.
- 3 Zetterbaum 147, Lively 197.
- 4 Koritansky 146; Alfred Balitzer, "Some Thoughts About Civil Religion," Journal of Church and State 16 (Winter, 1974): 31-50.
- 5 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:303.
- 6 Tocqueville, Memoir 1:293-294 and Democracy 2:143.
- 7 Cf. Tocqueville, Democracy 1:303-308.
- 8 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:6.
- 9 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:303.
- 10 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:303.
- 11 Cf. Zetterbaum 111, Lively 199-200.
- 12 Cf. Zetterbaum 123, Lively 198-199.
- 13 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:44.
- 14 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:44.
- 15 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:301.
- 16 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:309-310.
- 17 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:125 (my emphasis). See also Tocqueville, European Revolution 206.

18 Tocqueville, Oeuvres 13 no.1: 439-440.

Translated with the assistance of Mamadou Gueyè.

19 Tocqueville, Memoir 1:316-317.

20 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:25.

21 Tocqueville, Memoir 1:315-316 and Oeuvres 13
no.1: 445.

22 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:21.

23 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:145.

24 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:12, 2:22.

25 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:41.

26 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:44.

27 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:306-307.

28 Tocqueville, Democracy 1:307.

29 Tocqueville, Democracy 2:22.

CONCLUSION

Tocqueville, like Locke before him, recognized the extent to which liberal democracy needs Christianity. This view could not have been shared by earlier liberals. Liberalism was in part a reaction to the political havoc caused by medieval Christianity, which, from the early liberals point of view, had plunged the Western world into an ever-deepening abyss between moral obligation and civic duty. The universal religion established a new type of a commonwealth that encompassed all political societies. Just as authority was divided between the spiritual and temporal domain, so were the loyalties of men divided between their duties to God and their duties to their country. Not only was human loyalty divided, Hobbes argued, but divided unfairly. The claims of the spiritual authority were much more powerful than that of the temporal authority. In the event of having to make a hard choice between the conflicting demands of each, reasonable men would be foolish to fear punishment from the king more than eternal damnation. This explained for Hobbes why age of Christianity had born witness to centuries of

religious wars. Hobbes knew and respected the power of religion and even made use of it to bolster the rule of the sovereign. But Christianity as Hobbes knew it had to be rendered politically impotent if civil society was to serve the lower but rational goal of human preservation.

Hobbes was successful, to a remarkable degree, in convincing the modern liberal citizen that it is inappropriate and undesirable to insist that one's opinion should prevail the public realm. Commonplace remarks such as "But, that's only my opinion" testify to a willingness to consider one's opinion as no more worthy than someone else's. This line of thinking extends to religious beliefs. Americans, for instance, generally disapprove of any attempts to link public policy with the preferences of any particular Christian sect or group of sects. Even the groups who are willing to impose their version of morality on the public try to do so within the established constitutional framework. Part of the reason for this is Hobbes's success in releasing the conscience from moral responsibility for the political actions of representatives. Those with the greatest urge to impose their religious views on public policy confine such attempts within the boundaries of established democratic procedures, such as electing or appealing to like-minded representatives, as opposed to overthrowing the state in the name of moral

obligation. Once the conscience was convinced to respect social order, later liberals were able to build on the social benefits of Christianity.

Following Hobbes's lead, Locke and Tocqueville agreed that private passions had to be restrained, but they did not agree that state control of religion was desirable or necessary. Where Hobbes thought religion too dangerous to be outside the reach of the sovereign, Locke and Tocqueville thought that Christianity (as transformed by Hobbes) could serve liberal ends best if it were freed from the auspices of the state. Their confidence in disestablishment was fortified by their confidence in the pursuit of property as a diversion from the pursuit of political power. Thanks to Hobbes's taming of the conscience and the human desire for bodily comfort, Locke and Tocqueville were able to rely on Christianity to develop a dimension of liberalism they felt Hobbes had neglected, or at least left underdeveloped.

Hobbes revolutionized political thought with the notion that the need for self-preservation renders all men politically equal. The notion that men are fundamentally equal became a premise of the liberal tradition and an indisputable fact. But Tocqueville emphasized that liberalism should also concern itself with freedom and human dignity. Equality threatens to exhalt the well-being of the individual at the expense

of the common good and any notion of human greatness through individualism and materialism. These threats to the moral and political integrity of democracy are not enough to prompt Tocqueville to call for a halt to the democratic revolution. Tocqueville knows that it is impossible to prevent democracy from shaping modern politics. Democracy leaves no room for its predecessor, aristocracy. As the examples of the American Indians and slave owners show, no form of aristocracy can survive in a democracy. For all the advantages of aristocracy, among them its inhospitality to materialism and individualism, Tocqueville would not have returned it to its former glory if he could have. Democracy is more just than aristocracy. Aristocracy necessarily sacrifices the many for the few. Democracy does not necessarily sacrifice the few for the many. Democracy can provide scope for the great and for what is highest in the many as long as it is informed by Christianity.

In America, Tocqueville observed that the Christian sects, like other voluntary associations, combat individualism and materialism. Through participation in groups Americans learn to contemplate matters beyond their personal welfare and the enjoyment of creature comforts. Their views become enlarged as they consider such things as the public good and God's will. Associations require incentive to join before they can work their charms. In this regard, moral associations

have an advantage over other types of associations. Men can more easily ignore the public good than they can the inevitability of death. Fear of death and the hope of life after death is part of what it means to be a human being. Incentive to turn to religion is natural to man and consistent with the urgings of equality. Equality encourages men to become self-interested, and nothing could be more in their interest than eternal salvation. This notion of self-interest rightly understood has led to some confusion in the scholarship on Tocqueville.

Tocqueville has been wrongly accused of prescribing myths in a clumsy attempt at social engineering. The argument commonly made is that belief rooted in self-interest cannot be belief in traditional organized religion, which transcends self-interest. Yet Tocqueville takes every opportunity to remind the reader that religion is indispensable to modern democracy. Therefore, the argument concludes, Tocqueville was advocating myths that are socially beneficial. His emphasis on the social utility of faith is evidence that he was indifferent to the content of religion: his only concern is that something like religion inculcates the right habits. Almost all of the commentators on Tocqueville agree that he was encouraging myth-making; they disagree as to whether such efforts are commendable, and whether such efforts can be successful.

Tocqueville was not, however, indifferent to the

content of religion. For Tocqueville, Christianity as a form of worship is superior to other types of religion. As evidenced by its influence in America, it shows proper regard for human equality and liberty, unlike other types of religions such as Islam and Hinduism. Not only did Tocqueville declare a preference for Christianity, but he implicitly suggests that liberal democracy can benefit most from a religion that is Protestant in character, or one that at least tolerates some aspects of Protestantism. This is evident in his treatment of Catholicism. The belief in saints, intolerance of the commercial spirit and excessive ritual are very specific things that Tocqueville declares to be inconsistent with the spirit of liberal democracy. In order to maintain its influence in modern times, Catholicism needs to retreat from those doctrines that collide with liberal democratic sentiment, to the effect of looking more like Protestantism. Not only did Tocqueville specify Christianity as the hope of liberal democracy, he did so in a manner that took nothing away from Christianity as a revealed religion.

Americans believe their religion to be true and socially necessary. Tocqueville gives no indication that social and individual calculations play a larger role in religious faith in America than elsewhere. Americans may not be disinterested believers, but neither are most people. His references to religions as

a form and as a way of teaching men about the immortality of the soul are not references to a civil religion or a myth, but to his belief that organized religions are not the highest form of religion. Organized religions serve the spiritual needs of the many, who are unable to experience the highest form of religion. They translate the eternal for the multitude. Scholars have mistaken the distinction between genuine religion and organized religion for a distinction between organized religion and civil (mythical) religion. For Tocqueville, religious faith is not a matter of genuinely believing or not believing at all; instead it is a matter of believing as much as one is capable of. This explains how Tocqueville can refer to Americans as religious and as self-interested regarding religious matters: Americans are religious to the extent that they are capable of religious faith. Tocqueville never thought that belief in the social utility of religion could substitute for faith. His message is that liberal democracy needs religion, that is, citizens who believe their religion to be true.

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