Alexis de Tocqueville

DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

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VOLUME I

LIBERTY FUND
Indianapolis
the Union to enjoy the power of a large republic and the security of a small one.

I find the second in the town institutions that, by moderating the despotism of the majority, give the people at the same time the taste for liberty and the art of being free.

The third is found in the constitution of the judicial power. I have shown how much the courts serve to correct the errors of democracy and how, without ever being able to stop the movements of the majority, they succeed in slowing and directing them.

Of the Influence of Mores on Maintaining the Democratic Republic in the United States

I said above that I considered the mores as one of the great general causes to which maintaining the democratic republic in the United States can be attributed.

I understand the expression mores here in the sense that the ancients attached to the word mores; I apply it not only to mores strictly speaking, which could be called habits of the heart, but to the different notions that men possess, to the diverse opinions that are current among them, and to the ensemble of ideas from which the habits of the mind are formed.*

So by this word I understand the whole moral and intellectual state of a people. My goal is not to draw a picture of American mores; I limit myself at this moment to trying to find out what among them is favorable for maintaining the political institutions.

Of Religion Considered as a Political Institution, How It Serves Powerfully to Maintain the Democratic Republic among the Americans[*]

North America populated by men who professed a democratic and republican Christianity.—Arrival of Catholics.—Why today Catholics form the most democratic and the most republican class.

Alongside each religion is found a political opinion that is joined to it by affinity. w

Allow the human spirit to follow its tendency, and it will regulate in a uniform way political society and the holy city; it will seek, if I dare say so, to harmonize earth with heaven.x

Most of English America was populated by men who, after escaping from the authority of the Pope, submitted to no religious supremacy; so they brought to the New World a Christianity that I cannot portray better than by calling it democratic and republican: this will singularly favor the establishment of the republic and of democracy in public affairs. From the onset, politics and religion found themselves in accord, and they have not ceased to be so since.

[*]. #I will examine in the second volume the state of religion in the United States, the sects, the religious mores. Here I am considering it only from the political point of view.

w. "Who could deny the fortunate influence of religion on mores and the influence of mores on the government of society?"

"The people see in religion the safeguard and the divine origin of liberty; the rich, the guarantee of their fortune and their life; the statesmen, the safeguard of society; the pioneer, something like his companion in the wilderness" (YTC, CVh, 3, p. 57).

x. In the margin in the first version: "#Despotism can do without religion, but not liberty. "

"Unanimity of statesmen on the utility of religion."
About fifty years ago Ireland began to pour a Catholic population into the United States. For its part, American Catholicism made converts. Today in the Union you find more than a million Christians who profess the truths of the Roman Church.

These Catholics show a great fidelity to the observances of their religion, and are full of ardor and zeal for their beliefs; however, they form the most republican and most democratic class that exists in the United States. This fact is a surprise at first glance, but reflection easily discloses the hidden causes.

[Christianity, even when it demands passive obedience in matters of dogma, is still of all religious doctrines the one most favorable to liberty, because it appeals only to the mind and heart of those whom it wants to bring into submission.] No religion has so disdained the use of physical force as the religion of Jesus Christ. Now, wherever physical force is not honored, tyranny cannot endure. Therefore you see that despotism has never been able to be established among Christians. It has always lived there from day to day and in a state of alarm. When we say that a Christian nation is enslaved, it is in comparison to a Christian people that we judge. If we compare it to an infidel people, the Christian nation would seem free to us.

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y. In the manuscript: “American Catholicism spread for its part by numerous conversions.”

z. In a first version of the drafts, this sentence is also found: “... wants to bring into subjection. If it loves to rule despotically over the will of man, it is after the will has by itself bent to its yoke. No religion...” (YTC, CVh, 3, p. 49).

a. Hervé de Tocqueville:

Édouard’s advice is to delete this piece up to the words among the different Christian doctrines.

I share his opinion concerning only the first paragraph. It is not useful and besides many claims can be challenged. The author says: no religion has so disdained the use of physical force as much as the religion of Jesus Christ. Someone will put forward the Albigensians, the Inquisition, the massacre of the Cévennes, etc. Later despotism has never been able to be established among Christians is found. Someone will reply by citing Spain since Philip II.

The paragraph on equality, which goes straight to the point and serves as a transition, must be kept here (YTC, CIIIb, 1, pp. 50–51).

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b. In the margin: “#Catholicism favors the spirit of equality in the manner of absolute power. It places one man beyond all rank and leaves all the others mingled together in the crowd.”

c. “Protestantism is the government of the middle classes applied to the religious world” (YTC, CVh, 2, p. 85).

d. Hervé de Tocqueville: “I would delete this sentence for three reasons: 1. It implies a sort of contradiction with the beginning of the chapter where the author attributes to Protestantism the clear and regular establishment of democracy. 2. The thought is little developed. 3. The sentence is not useful here” (YTC, CIIIb, 1, pp. 51–52).
Catholicism is like an absolute monarchy. Remove the prince, and conditions there are more equal than in republics. The Catholic priest has often come out of the sanctuary to enter into society as a power, and he has come to take a seat amid the social hierarchy; sometimes he then used his religious influence to assure the lasting existence of a political order of which he is part. Then you could see Catholics as partisans of aristocracy by spirit of religion.

But once priests are excluded or withdraw from government, as they are in the United States, there are no men who, by their beliefs, are more disposed than Catholics to carry the idea of equality of conditions into the political world.

So if Catholics in the United States are not strongly led by the nature of their beliefs toward democratic and republican opinions, at least they are not naturally against them, and their social position, as well as their small number, makes it a rule for them to embrace those opinions.

Most Catholics are poor, and they need all citizens to govern in order to reach the government themselves. Catholics are in the minority, and they need all rights to be respected in order to be assured of the free exercise of theirs. These two causes push them, even without their knowledge, toward political doctrines that they would perhaps adopt with less ardor if they were rich and predominant.

The Catholic clergy in the United States have not tried to struggle against this political tendency; they seek instead to justify it. Catholic priests in America have divided the intellectual world into two parts: in one, they left revealed dogmas, and there they submit without discussion; in the other, they put political truth, and there they think that God abandoned political truth to the free search of men. Thus, Catholics in the United States are simultaneously the most submissive faithful and the most independent citizens [that there are in the world].

So you can say that in the United States not a single religious doctrine shows itself hostile to democratic and republican institutions. All the clergy there use the same language; [and while American publicists make all the miseries of society flow from despotism and inequality of conditions, priests represent despotism and inequality of conditions as the most fertile sources of moral evil] opinions there are in agreement with laws, and only one current so to speak rules the human mind.

I was living for a short while in one of the largest cities of the Union when I was invited to attend a political meeting the goal of which was to come to the aid of the Poles, and to send them arms and money.

I found two or three thousand persons gathered in a vast room that had been prepared to receive them. Soon after, a priest, dressed in his ecclesiastical robes, came forward to the edge of the platform intended for the speakers. Those attending, after removing their hats, stood in silence, and he spoke in these terms:

God all-powerful! God of armies! Thou who sustained the hearts and guided the arms of our fathers when they upheld the sacred rights of their national independence; Thou who made them triumph over an odious oppression, and who granted to our people the benefits of peace and liberty; oh Lord! turn a favorable eye toward the other hemisphere; look with pity upon a heroic people who today struggle as we once did and for the defense of the same rights! Lord, who created all men on the same model, do not allow despotism to come to distort Thy work and to maintain inequality on earth. God all-powerful! watch over the destiny of the Poles, make them worthy to be free; may Thy wisdom rule in their councils, may
Thy strength be in their arms; spread terror among their enemies, divide
the powers that plot their ruin, and do not allow the injustice that the
world witnessed fifty years ago to be consummated today. Lord, who holds
in Thy powerful hand the hearts of peoples as well as those of men, raise
up allies for the sacred cause of right; make the French nation arise finally
and, emerging from the sleep in which its leaders hold it, come to fight
once again for the liberty of the world.

O Lord! never turn Thy face from us; allow us always to be the most
religious people, as well as the most free.

God all-powerful, grant our prayer today; save the Poles. We ask Thee
in the name of Thy beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the
cross for the salvation of all men. Amen.

The entire assembly repeated Amen with reverence.

Indirect Influence Exercised by Religious Beliefs
on Political Society in the United States

Morality of Christianity which is found in all sects.—
Influence of religion on the mores of Americans.—Respect
for the marriage bond.—How religion encloses the
imagination of the Americans within certain limits and
moderates among them the passion to innovate.—
Opinion of Americans on the political utility of religion.—
Their efforts to extend and assure its dominion.

I have just shown what the direct action of religion on politics was in the
United States. Its indirect action seems even more powerful to me, and it
is when religion is not speaking about liberty that it best teaches the Amer-
icans the art of being free.6

There is an innumerable multitude of sects in the United States. All
differ in the worship that must be given to the Creator, but all agree on the
duties of men toward one another. So each sect worships God in its way,
but all sects preach the same morality in the name of God. If it is very
useful to a man as an individual that his religion be true, it is not the same
for society. Society has nothing either to fear or to hope concerning the
other life; and what is most important for society is not so much that all
citizens profess the true religion but that they profess a religion. All the
sects in the United States are, moreover, within the great Christian unity,
and the morality of Christianity is the same everywhere. [In America
there are Catholics and Protestants, but Americans profess the Christian
religion.]

You are free to think that a certain number of Americans, in the worship
they give to God, follow their habits more than their convictions. In the
United States, moreover, the sovereign is religious, and consequently hy-
poocrisy must be common; but America is still the place in the world where
the Christian religion has most retained true power over souls; and nothing
shows better how useful and natural religion is to man, since the country
where today it exercises the most dominion is at the same time the most
enlightened and most free.

I said that American priests come down in a general way in favor of civil
liberty, without excepting even those who do not allow religious liberty;
you do not see them lend their support, however, to any political system
in particular. They take care to keep out of public affairs and do not get
mixed up in the schemes of the parties. So you cannot say that in the United
States religion exercises an influence on laws or on the detail of political
opinions, but it directs mores, and it is by regulating the family that it works
to regulate the State.

I do not doubt for an instant that the great severity of mores that is
noticed in the United States has its primary source in beliefs. Religion there
is often powerless to restrain the man amid the innumerable temptations
presented by fortune. It cannot moderate in him the ardor to grow rich that
comes to goad everyone, but it rules with sovereign power over the soul of
the woman, and it is the woman who shapes the mores.6 America is assured-
dly the country in the world in which the marriage bond is most respected,
and in which the highest and most sound idea of conjugal happiness has been conceived.

In Europe, nearly all of the disorders of society are born around the domestic hearth and not far from the marital bed. That is where men conceive scorn for natural bonds and permitted pleasures, taste for disorder, restlessness of heart, instability of desires. Agitated by the tumultuous passions that have often troubled his own dwelling, the European submits only with difficulty to the legislative powers of the State. When, coming from the agitation of the political world, the American returns to the bosom of his family, he immediately encounters the image of order and peace. There, all his pleasures are simple and natural, his joys innocent and tranquil; and as he achieves happiness by the regularity of life, he easily gets used to regulating his opinions as well as his tastes.\(^j\)

While the European seeks to escape his domestic sorrows by troubling society, the American draws from his home the love of order that he then carries into the affairs of the State.

In the United States, religion regulates not only mores; it extends its dominion even to the mind.

Among the Anglo-Americans, some profess Christian dogmas because they believe them; others, because they fear not appearing to believe them. So Christianity rules without obstacles, with the consent of all; as a result, as I have already said elsewhere, everything is certain and fixed in the moral world, while the political world seems abandoned to discussion and to the experiments of men. Thus the human mind never sees a limitless field before it; whatever its audacity, it feels from time to time that it must stop before insurmountable barriers. Before innovating, it is forced to accept certain primary givens, and to subject its boldest conceptions to certain forms that retard and stop it.

So the imagination of the Americans, in its greatest departures, has only a circumspect and uncertain movement; its ways are hampered and its

works incomplete. These habits of restraint are found in political society and singularly favor the tranquility of the people, as well as the continued existence of the institutions that the people have given themselves. Nature and circumstances had made out of the inhabitant of the United States an audacious man; it is easy to judge so when you see how he pursues fortune. If the mind of the Americans were free of all hindrances, you would soon find among them the boldest innovators and the most implacable logicians in the world. But the revolutionaries of America are obliged to profess publicly a certain respect for Christian morality and equity that does not allow them to violate laws easily when the laws are opposed to the execution of their designs; and if they could rise above their scruples, they would still feel checked by the scruples of their partisans. Until now no one has been found in the United States who has dared to advance this maxim: that everything is allowed in the interest of society. Impious maxim, that seems to have been invented in a century of liberty in order to legitimate all the tyrants to come. [In France a [illegible word] [man] seeks to justify this enormity by principles and facts, and he goes to take a seat in the councils of the prince.]

Therefore, at the same time that the law allows the American people to do everything, religion prevents them from conceiving of everything and forbids them to dare everything.\(^k\)

So religion, which among the Americans never directly takes part in the government of society, must be considered as the first of their political institutions; for if it does not give them the taste for liberty, it singularly facilitates their use of it.

It is also from this point of view that the inhabitants of the United States themselves consider religious beliefs. I do not know if all Americans have faith in their religion, for who can read the recesses of the heart? But I am sure that they believe it necessary for maintaining republican institutions. This opinion does not belong to one class of citizens or to one party, but to the whole nation; you find it among all ranks.

In the United States, when a politician attacks a sect, it is not a reason

\(^j\) Basil Hall finds that Tocqueville exaggerated the domestic happiness of Americans (cf. the letter of Tocqueville to Basil Hall reproduced in note d for pp. 819–21 of the second volume).

\(^k\) In the margin: "#American liberty was born in the bosom of religion and is still sustained in its arms."
for even the partisans of that sect not to support him; but if he attacks all sects together, each one flees from him, and he remains alone.

While I was in America, a witness appeared before the assizes of the county of Chester (State of New York) and declared that he did not believe in the existence of God and in the immortality of the soul. The presiding judge refused to admit his oath, given, he said, that the witness had destroyed in advance any faith that could be given to his words. The newspapers reported the fact without comment.

Americans mix Christianity and liberty so completely in their mind that it is nearly impossible to make them conceive one without the other; and, among them, this is not one of those sterile beliefs that the past bequeaths to the present and that seem more to vegetate deep in the soul than to live.

I have seen Americans join together to send priests into the new states of the West and to found schools and churches there; they are afraid that religion may come to be lost in the middle of the woods, and that the people who are arising there may not be as free as those from whom they came. I met rich inhabitants of New England who abandoned the country of their birth with the goal of going to lay the foundations of Christianity and liberty on the banks of the Missouri or on the prairies of Illinois. This is how religious zeal in the United States constantly warms up at the hearth of patriotism. You think that these men act uniquely in consideration of the other life, but you are mistaken: eternity is only one of their concerns. If you question these missionaries of Christian civilization, you will be very surprised to hear them speak so often about the good things of this world and to find politicians where you thought to see only men of religion. “All the American republics stand together one with the others, they will say to you; if the republics of the West fell into anarchy or submitted to the yoke of despotism, the republican institutions that flourish on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean would be in great peril; so we have an interest that these new states are religious, in order that they allow us to remain free.”

Such are the opinions of the Americans; but their error is clear. For each day someone proves to me very learnedly that everything is good in America, except precisely this religious spirit that I admire; and I learn that the only thing missing from the liberty and happiness of the human species, on the other side of the Ocean, is to believe with Spinoza in the eternity of the world, and to uphold with Cabanis that the brain secretes thought. To that I have nothing to reply, in truth, if not that those who use this language have not been to America, and have not seen religious peoples any more than free peoples. So I will await their return.

[*For me, if something could make me despair of the destiny of Europe, it is to see the strange confusion that reigns there in minds. I see pious men who would like to suffocate liberty, as if liberty, this great privilege of man, was not a nearly holy thing. Further along, I see others who think to arrive at being free by attacking all beliefs, but I do not see any who seem to notice the tight and necessary knot that ties [v: the republic] religion to liberty.*]

There are men in France who consider republican institutions as the temporary instrument of their grandeur. They measure with their eyes the immense gap that separates their vices and their miseries from power and riches, and they would like to pile up ruins in this abyss in order to try to fill it. These men are to liberty what the free companies of the Middle Ages were to kings; they make war on their own behalf even when they wear his colors; the republic will always live long enough to pull them out of their present low position. I am not speaking to them. But there are others who

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3. Here are the words in which the New York Spectator of 23 August 1831 reports the fact:

The court of common pleas of Chester county (New York) a few days since rejected a witness who declared his disbelief in the existence of God. The presiding judge remarked that he had not before been aware that there was a man living who did not believe in the existence of God; that this belief constituted the sanction of all testimony in a court of justice and that he knew of no cause in a Christian country where a witness had been permitted to testify without such a belief.

m. In the margin: “*We would not give ourselves all these difficulties if a regulating force existed outside of society. But how to govern yourself [v: an entire people] without the existence [v: support] of beliefs and more?**

n. In place of Spinoza, the manuscript cites Voltaire.

o. In the manuscript: “. . . ruins and riches and they would like to throw the republic down like a narrow passageway and flying bridge over the abyss.”
see in the republic a permanent and tranquil state, a necessary end toward which ideas and mores lead modern societies each day, and who would sincerely like to prepare men to be free. When these men attack religious beliefs, they follow their passions and not their interests. Despotism can do without faith, but not liberty. Religion is much more necessary in the republic that they advocate than in the monarchy that they attack, and in democratic republics more than in all others. How could society fail to perish if, while the political bond grows loose, the moral bond does not become tighter? And what to do with a people master of itself, if it is not subject to God?

Of the Principal Causes That Make Religion Powerful in Americaq

Care that the Americans have taken to separate Church and State.—Laws, public opinion, the efforts of priests themselves, work toward this result.—To this cause must be attributed the power that religion exercises on souls in the United States.—Why.—What is today the natural state of man in

p. In an initial plan of the work:

Religious society./
Nomenclature of the various sects.—From Catholicism to the sect that is furthest from it.
Quakers, Methodists.—Point out what is antisocial in the doctrine of Quakers, Unitarians.
Relations among the sects.
Freedom of worship.—Toleration: in the legal respect; with respect to mores. Catholicism.
Place of religion in the political order and its degree of influence on American society (YTC, CVh, i, pp. 26–27).

Several ideas of this part are roughed out in a letter from Tocqueville to Chabrol dated 26 October 1831. Tocqueville answers certain questions that Louis Bouchiré had asked him concerning religion in the United States (YTC, Bla2).

This passage is not without many similarities to "Note on the religious movement in the United States" by Gustave de Beaumont, very particularly to part III, "Relations of religions with the State" (Marie, II, pp. 213–29).

The philosophers of the XVIIIth century explained the gradual weakening of beliefs in a very simple way. Religious zeal, they said, must fade as liberty and enlightenment increase. It is unfortunate that facts do not agree with this theory.q

There is such a European population whose disbelief is equaled only by its brutishness and ignorance, while in America you see one of the most free and most enlightened peoples in the world fulfill with ardor all the external duties of religion.

When I arrived in the United States, it was the religious aspect of the country that first struck my eyes. As I prolonged my journey, I noticed the great political consequences that flowed from these new facts.

I had seen among us the spirit of religion and the spirit of liberty march almost always in opposite directions. Here, I found them intimately joined the one to the other: they reigned together over the same soil.

Each day I felt my desire to know the cause of this phenomenon increase.

To find it out, I asked the faithful of all communions; I sought, above all, the company of priests who are the keepers of the different faiths and who have a personal interest in their continued existence. The religion I

q. I have heard it said in Europe that it was very unfortunate that these poor Americans had religion. When you have been in the United States, conviction that religion is more useful in republics than in monarchies, and in democratic republics more than anywhere else. Disastrous misunderstanding in France. Despotism powers of Europe favor religion./

As for these cut-throats, liberty is the greatest gift of God, it is the republicans, I have nothing to say to them . . . but the others . . . may they know that liberty is an almost holy thing [v: what distinguishes us from beasts] (YTC, CVh, 3, p. 57).

r. The manuscript says: "... you see the most free and most enlightened . . ." Hervé de Tocqueville: "Isn’t the expression a bit exaggerated?" (YTC, III, p. 44).

s. Several times Tocqueville uses the same expression in the book while referring to other aspects that attracted his attention, for example, the activity that reigns in the United States.
profess brought me particularly close to the Catholic clergy, and I did not delay in striking up a sort of intimacy with several of its members. I told each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts. I found that all of these men differed among themselves only on the details; but all attributed the peaceful dominion that religion exercises in their country principally to the complete separation of Church and State. I am not afraid to assert that, during my visit in America, I did not meet a single man, priest or laymen, who did not agree on this point.

This led me to examine more attentively than I had done until then the position that American priests occupy in political society. I realized with surprise that they fill no public position. I did not see a single one of them in the administration, and I discovered that they were not even represented within the assemblies.

The law, in several states, had closed a political career to them; opinion, in all the others.

When finally I found out what the mind of the clergy itself was, I noticed that most of its members seemed to remove themselves voluntarily from power, and to take a kind of professional pride in remaining apart from it. I heard them anathematize ambition and bad faith, whatever the political opinions that ambition and bad faith carefully used to cover themselves. But I learned, by listening to them, that men cannot be blameworthy in the eyes of God because of these very opinions, when the opinions are sincere, and that there is no more sin in being wrong in matters of government than in being mistaken about the way in which your dwelling must be built or your furrow must be plowed.

I saw them separate themselves with care from all parties, and flee contact with all the ardor of personal interest.

These facts succeeded in proving to me that I had been told the truth. Then I wanted to go back from facts to causes. I asked myself how it could happen that by diminishing the apparent strength of a religion, you

4. Unless you give this name to the functions that many among them occupy in schools. Most education is confined to the clergy.

5. See the Constitution of New York, art. 7, ¶4.

Id. of North Carolina, art. 31.
Id. of Virginia.
Id. of South Carolina, art. 1, ¶23.
Id. of Kentucky, art. 2, ¶26.
Id. of Tennessee, art. 8, ¶1.
Id. of Louisiana, art. 2, ¶22.

The article of the Constitution of New York is formulated as follows:

And whereas the ministers of the gospel are, by their profession, dedicated to the service of God and the care of souls, and ought not to be diverted from the great duties of their function; therefore, no minister of the gospel, or priest of any denomination whatsoever, shall, at any time hereafter, under any presence or description whatever, be eligible to, or capable of holding, any civil or military office or place within this State.
came to increase its true power, and I believed that it was not impossible to find out.

Never will the short space of sixty years enclose all of the imagination of man; the incomplete joys of this world will never be enough for his heart. Among all beings, man alone shows a natural distaste for existence and an immense desire to exist; he scorns life and fears nothingness. These different instincts constantly push his soul toward the contemplation of another world, and it is religion that leads him there. So religion is only a particular form of hope, and it is as natural to the human heart as hope itself. It is by a type of mental aberration and with the help of a kind of moral violence exercised over their own nature, that men remove themselves from religious beliefs; an irresistible inclination brings them back to beliefs. Unbelief is an accident; faith alone is the permanent state of humanity.

So by considering religion only from a human viewpoint, you can say that all religions draw from man himself an element of strength that they can never lack, because it is due to one of the constituent principles of human nature.

I know that there are times when religion can add to this influence, which is its own, the artificial power of laws and the support of the physical powers that lead society. We have seen religions, intimately united with

the governments of the earth, dominate souls by terror and by faith at the same time; but when a religion contracts such an alliance, I am not afraid to say, it acts as a man could: it sacrifices the future with the present in mind, and by obtaining a power that is not its due, it puts its legitimate power at risk.

When a religion seeks to found its dominion only on the desire for immortality that equally torments the hearts of all men, it can aim for universality; but when it comes to unite with a government, it must adopt maxims that are applicable only to certain peoples. Therefore, by allying itself to a political power, religion increases its power over some and loses the hope of reigning over all.

As long as a religion relies only on the sentiments that console all miseries, it can attract the heart of the human species. Mingled with the bitter passions of this world, religion is sometimes constrained to defend allies that have offered interest rather than love; and it must reject as adversaries men who often still love it, even as they fight those men with whom religion is united. So religion cannot share the material strength of those who govern without burdening itself with a portion of the hatreds caused by those who govern.

The political powers that appear most established have as a guarantee of their continued existence only the opinions of a generation, the interests of a century, often the life of a man. A law can modify the social state that seems most definitive and most firm, and with it everything changes.

The powers of society are all more or less fleeting, just as our years upon the earth; they rapidly follow one another, like the various cares of life; and you have never seen a government that relied on an invariable disposition of the human heart and that was able to base itself on an immortal interest.

As long as a religion finds its strength in the sentiments, the instincts, the passions that are reproduced in the same way in all periods of history, it defies the effort of time, or at least it can be destroyed only by another religion. [Political powers can do nothing against it.] But when religion wants to rely on the interests of this world, it becomes almost as fragile as all the powers of the earth. Alone, religion can hope for immortality; tied

u. What touches me more than the miracles and the prophecies is the very character of Christianity. There is the greatest sign of its divine origin. Give honor to all the religious codes of the world, you will see that they necessarily apply to a certain country, to certain mores, to a particular social state or people. I do not examine the proofs of these religions, and I say that they are false, because they are not made for all times and for all men. But Christianity seems universal and immortal like the human species./

The influence that religion exercises over mores in the United States must not be exaggerated; it is not sufficient to make a virtuous people, but an orderly one./

Its action on the women. It is the women who make mores.

I said that democracy was the form of government in which it was most desirable that the people be happy; it is also the one in which it is most desirable that the people be moral and for the same reason.

I would not hesitate to say, because I write in an irreligious century, that in the United States religion is the first of political institutions. And I even add that I am that much less afraid to say so because of this reason (YTC, CVb 3, p. 58).
to ephemeral powers, it follows their fortune, and often falls with the passions of the day that sustain those powers.

So by uniting with different political powers, religion can only contract an onerous alliance. It does not need their help to live, and by serving them it can die.

The danger that I have just pointed out exists at all times, but it is not always as visible.

There are centuries when governments appear immortal, and others when you would say that the existence of society is more fragile than that of a man.

Certain constitutions keep citizens in a sort of lethargic sleep, and others deliver them to a feverish agitation.

When governments seem so strong and laws so stable, men do not notice the danger that religion can run by uniting with power.

When governments prove to be so weak and laws so changeable, the peril strikes all eyes, but then there is often no more time to escape. So you must learn to see it from afar.

To the extent that a nation assumes a democratic social state and you see societies lean toward the republic, it becomes more and more dangerous to unite religion with authority; for the time is coming when power will pass from hand to hand, when political theories will succeed one another, when men, laws, constitutions themselves will disappear or change each day, and not for a time, but constantly. Agitation and instability stem from the nature of democratic republics, as immobility and sleep form the law of absolute monarchies.

If the Americans, who change the head of State every four years, who every two years choose new legislators, and replace provincial administrators every year; if the Americans, who have delivered the political world to the experiments of innovators, had not placed their religion somewhere outside of the political world, to what could they cling in the ebb and flow of human opinions? Amid the struggle of parties, where would the respect be that religion is due? What would become of its immortality when everything perishes around it?

American priests have seen this truth before anyone else, and they model their conduct on it. They have seen that religious influence had to be renounced, if they wanted to acquire a political power, and they preferred to lose the support of power than to share its vicissitudes.

In America, religion is perhaps less powerful than it has been in certain times and among certain peoples, but its influence is more durable. It has reduced itself to its own forces that no one can take away from it; it acts only within a single circle, but it covers it entirely and predominates within it without effort.

In Europe I hear voices that are raised on all sides; people deplore the absence of beliefs and ask how to give religion something of its former power.

It seems to me that we must first try attentively to find out what should be, today, the natural state of men in matters of religion. Then, knowing what we are able to hope and what we have to fear, we will see clearly the goal toward which our efforts must tend.

Two great dangers menace the existence of religions: schisms and indifference.

During centuries of fervor, men sometimes happen to abandon their religion, but they escape its yoke only to submit to the yoke of another religion. Faith changes objects; it does not die. The old religion then excites fervent love or implacable hatred in all hearts; some leave it with anger, others follow it with a new ardor: beliefs differ, irreligion is unknown.

But it is not the same when a religious belief is silently undermined by doctrines that I will call negative, because while asserting the falsity of one religion they establish the truth of no other.

Then prodigious revolutions take place in the human spirit, without man seeming to aid the revolutions with his passions and without suspecting them, so to speak. You see men who allow, as if by forgetfulness, the object of their most cherished hopes to escape. Carried along by an imperceptible current against which they do not have the courage to strug-

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v. In the manuscript: "... you see governments lean and rush toward the republic."

Hervé de Tocqueville: "The words and rush, which are meaningless, must be struck out; you could put and are carried toward" (YTC, CIIIb, t. p. 46).
in order to rise above common opinion. Carried away by this very effort, they no longer know precisely where they should stop. Since they have seen that, in their country, the first use that man made of independence has been to attack religion, they fear their contemporaries and withdraw with terror from the liberty that the former pursue. Since unbelief appears to them as something new, they include in the same hatred everything that is new. So they are at war with their century and their country, and in each of the opinions that are professed there they see a necessary enemy of faith.

Such should not be today the natural state of man in matters of religion.

An accidental and particular cause is found among us that prevents the human spirit from following its inclination and pushes it beyond the limits at which it should naturally stop.

I am profoundly persuaded that this particular and accidental cause is the intimate union of politics and religion.

w. Hervé de Tocqueville:

Here are two thoughts that do not seem correct to me. Why would people be carried beyond truth because, to do good, they had the courage to defy prejudice? Then, you will never find faithful people foolish enough to believe that unbelief is something new. This paragraph is to review: The author has not arrived at the true cause of the estrangement of the clergy and of pious persons from free institutions. You must seek it in the memory of the persecutions that religion suffered as soon as the word liberty resounded in France, and in the fear that the persecutions are repeating. The impression was so strong that it is not erased and that pious persons believe that the aegis of an absolute power is necessary in order for priests to be out of danger and for religion to be able to resist philosophical intolerance. The author can link this thought well to earlier ones, for he speaks on page 71 of men without religion who persecute those who believe with all the fervor of proselytism.

Édouard de Tocqueville: “I agree with father. You must absolutely mention the memories of ’93 as a powerful cause of the antipathy of the French clergy for liberal ideas” (YT, CIII, 1, pp. 46-48). The sentence “Since they have seen . . . pursue” was added following the comments of the family.

x. As for me, I cannot believe that the evil is as great or as profound as is supposed.

Never will the religious instinct perish in man, and what can better satisfy it than the religion of Jesus (ed.)? Christianity is not defeated, it is only bowed down. Formerly religion (v: Christianity) allowed itself to be mingled with the powers of the earth, and today I see it as though buried very much alive under their debris.
Unbelievers in Europe pursue Christians as political enemies, rather than as religious adversaries; they hate faith as the opinion of a party much more than as a mistaken belief; and in the priest they reject the representative of God less than the friend of power.

In Europe, Christianity allowed itself to be intimately united with the powers of the earth. Today these powers are falling and Christianity is as though buried beneath their debris. It is a living thing that someone wanted to bind to the dead: cut the ties that hold it and it will rise again.

I do not know what must be done to give Christianity in Europe the energy of youth. God alone would be able to do so; but at least it depends on men to leave to faith the use of all of the forces that it still retains.

How the Enlightenment, Habits, and Practical Experience of the Americans Contribute to the Success of Democratic Institutions

*What must be understood by the enlightenment of the American people.— The human mind has received a less profound cultivation in the United States than in Europe.—But no one has remained in ignorance.—Why.—Rapidity with which thought circulates in the half-empty states of the West.—* How practical experience serves Americans even more than literary knowledge.

In a thousand places in this work I have pointed out to readers what influence the enlightenment and habits of the Americans exercised on main-

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So let us try to extricate it; it still has enough strength to rise again, but not to lift the weight that overwhells it. The Christian religion in Europe resembles an old man whose shoulders are loaded down with a heavy burden; he walks painfully across the obstacles in the road. He bends under the weight; his limbs are heavy, his breathing is labored. He walks only with difficulty and at each step you would say he was about to die (YTC, CVh, 4. p. 67; a nearly identical fragment is found in YTC, CVh, 4, pp. 31–32).

taining their political institutions. So now, few new things remain for me to say.

Until now America has had only a very small number of notable writers; it does not have any great historians and does not have one poet. Its inhabitants see literature strictly understood with a kind of disfavor; and a third-rank city in Europe publishes more literary works each year than the twenty-four states of the Union taken together.

The American mind withdraws from general ideas; it does not turn toward theoretical discoveries. Politics itself and industry cannot lead it there. In the United States, new laws are made constantly; but great writers are still not found to seek out the general principles of laws.

The Americans have experts on the law and legal commentators; they lack writers on public affairs; and in politics, they give the world examples rather than lessons.

It is the same for the mechanical arts.

In America, the inventions of Europe are applied with sagacity, and after perfecting them, they are marvelously adapted to the needs of the country. Men there are industrious, but they do not cultivate the science of industry. You find good workers and few inventors there. Fulton[†] peddled his genius for a long time among foreign peoples before being able to devote it to his country. [So in America you find none of those great intellectual centers from which fire and light burst forth at the same time [as in Europe]. I do not know if perhaps we should thank heaven. America already carries an immense weight in the destinies of the world; and per-

— See chapters XIII and XIV of the first part of the second volume.

[†]. # Say a word about Livingston. He is more of a moralist.

[†]. # He is the one who applied steam to navigation. He offered his secret to Bonaparte who, after an examination, declared the thing absurd and impractical. As we know, one of the weaknesses of Bonaparte [this extraordinary man] was to want to pass judgment at first sight on matters that were foreign to him. Despite his prodigious perspicacity, too frequently he happened to be mistaken.