DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

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VOLUME 2
CHAPTER 5a

How, in the United States, Religion Knows
How to Make Use of Democratic Instincts

a. 1. I showed that dogmatic beliefs were necessary; the most necessary and the most desirable are dogmatic beliefs in the matter of religion. Reasons to believe.
   [In the margin: To change the title. Put one that places it more clearly under the rubric of ideas and operations of the mind.]

   1. Fixed ideas on God and human nature are necessary to all men and every day to each man, and it is found that there are only a few, if any, men who are capable by themselves of fixing their ideas on these matters. It is a science necessary to all at each moment and inaccessible to the greatest number. That is unique. So it is in these matters that there is the most to gain and the least to lose by having dogmatic beliefs.
   2. These beliefs particularly necessary to free peoples.
   3. Id. to democratic peoples.

   2. So I am led to seek humanly how religions could most easily assert themselves during the centuries of equality that we are entering.

       Development of this:

       1. Necessity that religions be based on the idea of a unique being imposing at the same time the same rules on each man.
       2. Necessity of extricating religion from forms, practices, figures, as men become more democratic.
       4. Necessity of trying to purify and regulate the love of well-being, without attempting to destroy it.
       5. Necessity of gaining the favor of the majority.

   3. All this proved by the example of America (YTC, CVf, pp. 6–7).

b. Twice there must be the question of religion in this book.

   1. The first principally in a separate chapter placed I think after the first in which I would examine philosophically the influence of democracy on religions.

   2. The second incidentally somewhere in the second volume where I would say more oratorically how it is indispensable in democracies in order to immaterialize man (Rubish, 1).


c. In the margin: “What is most important is not so much that they are correct, it is that they are clear and fixed.”
very perceptive, very subtle, very practiced are able with the help of a great deal of time and care to break through to such necessary truths.

Yet we see that these philosophers themselves are almost always surrounded by uncertainties; at each step the natural light that illumines them grows dark and threatens to go out, and despite all their efforts they still have been able to discover only a small number of contradictory notions, in the middle of which the human mind has drifted constantly for thousands of years, unable to grasp the truth firmly or even to find new errors. Such studies are far beyond the average capacity of men, and, even if most men were capable of devoting themselves to such studies, it is clear that they would not have the leisure to do so.

Fixed ideas about God and human nature are indispensable for the daily practice of their life, and this practice prevents them from being able to acquire those ideas.

That seems unique to me. Among the sciences, there are some, useful to the crowd, that are within its grasp; others are only accessible to a few persons and are not cultivated by the majority, which needs only the most remote of their applications. But the daily practice of this science is indispensable to all, even though its study is inaccessible to the greatest number.

General ideas relative to God and to human nature are, therefore, among all ideas, those most suitable to remove from the habitual action of individual reason, and for which there is the most to gain and the least to lose by recognizing an authority.

The first object, and one of the principal advantages of religions, is to provide for each of these primordial questions a clear, precise answer, intelligible to the crowd and very enduring.

There are very false and very absurd religions. You can say however that every religion that remains within the circle that I have just pointed out and that does not claim to go outside of it, as several have tried to do in order to stop the free development of the human mind in all directions, imposes a salutary yoke on the intellect; and it must be recognized that, if religion does not save men in the other world, it is at least very useful to their happiness and to their grandeur in this one.

This is above all true of men who live in free countries.

When religion is destroyed among a people, doubt takes hold of the highest portions of the intellect and half paralyzes all the others. Each person gets accustomed to having only confused and changing notions about the matters that most interest his fellows and himself. You defend your opinions badly or you abandon them, and, since you despair of being able, by yourself, to solve the greatest problems that human destiny presents, you are reduced like a coward to not thinking about them.

Such a state cannot fail to enervate souls; it slackens the motivating forces of will and prepares citizens for servitude.

Then not only does it happen that the latter allow their liberty to be taken, but they often give it up.

When authority no longer exists in religious matters, any more than in political matters, men are soon frightened by the sight of this limitless independence. This perpetual agitation [<and this continual mutation>] of all things disturbs and exhausts them. Since everything shifts in the intellectual world, they at least want everything to be firm and stable in the material order, and, no longer able to recapture their ancient beliefs, they give themselves a master.

For me, I doubt that man can ever bear complete religious independence and full political liberty at the same time; and I am led to think that, if he does not have faith, he must serve, and, if he is free, he must believe.

I do not know, however, if this great utility of religions is not still more visible among peoples where conditions are equal, than among all others.

It must be recognized that equality, which introduces great advantages into the world, nevertheless suggests, as will be shown below, very dangerous instincts to men; it tends to isolate them from one another and to lead each one of them to be interested only in himself alone.

It opens their souls excessively to love of material enjoyments.

The greatest advantage of religions is to inspire entirely opposite instincts. There is no religion that does not place the object of the desires of men above and beyond the good things of the earth, and that does not naturally elevate his soul toward realms very superior to those of the senses. Nor is there any religion that does not impose on each man some duties toward the human species or in common with it, and that does not in this way drag him, from time to time, out of contem-
plation of himself. This is found in the most false and most dangerous
religions.

So religious peoples are naturally strong precisely in the places where
democratic peoples are weak; this makes very clear how important it is for
men to keep their religion while becoming equal.

I have neither the right nor the will to examine the supernatural means
that God uses to make a religious belief reach the heart of man. At this
moment I am envisaging religions only from a purely human viewpoint. I
am trying to find out how they can most easily retain their dominion in
the democratic centuries that we are entering.

I have shown how, in times of enlightenment and equality, the human
mind agreed to receive dogmatic beliefs only with difficulty and strongly
felt the need to do so only as regards religion [<and dogmatic beliefs are
readily adopted in the form of common opinions>]. This indicates first of
all that, in those centuries, religions must be more discreet than in all other
centuries in staying within the limits that are appropriate to them and must
not try to go beyond them; for, by wanting to extend their power beyond
religious matters, they risk no longer being believed in any matter. So they
must carefully draw the circle within which they claim to stop the human
mind, and beyond that circle they must leave the mind entirely free to be
abandoned to itself.

Mohammed made not only religious doctrines, but also political maxims,
civil and criminal laws, and scientific theories descend from heaven
and placed them in the Koran. The Gospel, in contrast, speaks only of the
general relationships of men with God and with each other. Beyond that,
it teaches nothing and requires no belief in anything. That alone, among

a thousand other reasons, is enough to show that the first of these two
religions cannot long dominate during times of enlightenment and de-
mocracy, whereas the second is destined to reign during these centuries as
in all others.

If I continue this same inquiry further, I find that for religions to be able,
humanly speaking, to persist in democratic centuries, they must not only
carefully stay within the circle of religious matters; their power also depends
great deal on the nature of the beliefs that they profess, on the external
forms that they adopt, and on the obligations that they impose.

What I said previously, that equality brings men to very general and very
vast ideas, must principally be understood in the matter of religion. Men
similar and equal easily understand the notion of a single God, imposing
on each one of them the same rules and granting them future happiness at
the same cost. The idea of the unity of the human race leads them con-
tantly to the idea of the unity of the Creator, while in contrast men very
separate from each other and strongly dissimilar readily come to make as
many divinities as there are peoples, castes, classes and families, and to mark
out a thousand particular roads for going to heaven.

You cannot deny that Christianity itself has not in some way been sub-

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d. "If God allowed me to lift the veil of the future, I would refuse to do so; I
would be afraid to see the human race in the hands of clerks and soldiers" (Rabbi, 1). The same
idea appears in another draft: "I would be afraid to see the entire society in the hands of
soldiers. A bureaucratic, military organization. The soldier and the clerk. Symbol of future
society" (YTC, CVa, p. 50). Cf. note a of p. 1245.

e. Toqueville explained in a letter to Richard Milnes (Lord Houghton), dated 29
May 1844:

You seem to me only like Lamartine to have come back from the Orient a bit more
Moslem than is suitable. I do not know why some distinguished minds show this
tendency today. For my part, I have experienced from my contact with Islam (you
know that through Algeria we touch each day on the institutions of Mohammed)
etirely opposite effects. As I got to know this religion better, I better understood
that from it above all comes the decadence that before our eyes more and more affects
the Moslem world. Had Mohammed committed only the mistake of intimately joining
a body of civil and political institutions to a religious belief, in a way to impose
on the first the immobility that is in the nature of the second, that would have been
enough to doom his followers in a given time at first to inferiority and then to ine-
"vitable ruin. The grandeur and holiness of Christianity is in contrast to have tried
to reign only in the natural sphere of religions, abandoning all the rest to the free
movements of the human mind.

With the kind permission of Trinity College, Cambridge (Houghton papers, 25/200).
jected to the influence exercised by the social and political state on religious beliefs.

At the moment when the Christian religion appeared on earth, Providence, which without doubt prepared the world for its coming, had gathered together a great part of the human species, like an immense flock under the scepter of the Caesars. The men who made up this multitude differed a great deal from one another, but they nevertheless had this point in common, they all obeyed the same laws; and each of them was so weak and so small in relation to the greatness of the prince, that they all seemed equal when compared to him.

It must be recognized that this new and particular state of humanity had to dispose men to receive the general truths that Christianity teaches, and it serves to explain the easy and rapid way in which it then penetrated the human mind.º

º. The history of religions clearly shows the truth of what I said above that general ideas come easily to the human mind only when a great number of men are placed in an analogous situation.

Since the object of religion is to regulate the relationships that should exist between man and the Creator, there is nothing that seems more natural than general ideas... until the Roman Empire, however, you saw almost as many religions and gods as peoples. The idea of a religious doctrine applicable to all men came only when nearly all men had been subjected in the same manner to the same power.

I would say something more as well. You can conceive that all men should adore the same God, without accepting that all men are equal in the eyes of God. Christianity says these two things. So it is not only based on a general idea but on a very democratic idea, which is an additional nuance. I believe that Christianity comes from God and that it is not a particular state of humanity that gave birth to it; but it is obvious that it had to find great opportunities for spreading at a period when nearly all the human species, like an immense flock, was mixed and mingled under the scepter of the Caesars, and when subjects, whoever they were, were so small in relation to the greatness of the prince, that when you came to compare them to him, the differences that could exist among them seemed nearly imperceptible.

# You wonder why nearly all the peoples of modern Europe present a physiognomy so similar? It is because the same revolution that occurs within each State among citizens, takes place within the interior of Europe among peoples. Europe forms more and more a democracy of nations; each nation (ed.) being nearly equal to the others by its enlightenment, its social state, its laws, it is not surprising that all envisage the

The counter-proof came about after the destruction of the Empire. The Roman world was then broken so to speak into a thousand pieces; each nation reverted to its original individuality. Soon, within the interior of these nations, ranks became infinitely graduated; races became marked; castes divided each nation into several [enemy] peoples. In the middle of this common effort that seemed to lead human societies to subdivide themselves into as many fragments as it was possible to imagine, Christianity did not lose sight of the principal general ideas that it had brought to light. But it seemed nonetheless to lend itself, as much as it could, to the new tendencies given birth by the splitting up of the human species. Men continued to adore only a single God, creator and sustainer of all things; but each people, each city, and so to speak each man believed in the ability to gain some separate privilege and to create particular protectors next to the sovereign master. Not able to divide Divinity, his agents at least were multiplied and enlarged beyond measure; the homage due to angels and saints became for most Christians a nearly idolatrous worship, and it could be feared at one time that the Christian religion was regressing toward the religions that it had vanquished.

It seems clear to me that the more the barriers that separated nations within humanity and citizens within the interior of each people tend to disappear, the more the human mind heads as if by itself toward the idea of a single and omnipotent being, dispensing equally and in the same way the same laws to each man. So particularly in these centuries of democracy, it is important not to allow the homage given to secondary agents to be confused with the worship due only to the Creator.

[So you can foresee in advance that every religion in a democratic century that comes to establish intermediary powers between God and men and indicates certain standards of conduct to certain men will come to clash

same matters in the same way.º (Rubish, 1. Another version of the same passage exists in YTC, CVi, 1, pp. 85–87).

In the copy from CV, 1 (p. 86), next to the third paragraph, in the margin, you read: "Is the social state the result of ideas or are the ideas the result of the social state?"
with the irresistible tendencies of intelligence; it will not acquire authority or will lose the authority that it had acquired at a time when the social state suggested opposite notions.]

Another truth seems very clear to me; religions must attend less to external practices in democratic times than in all others.

I have shown, in relation to the philosophical method of the Americans, that nothing revolts the human mind more in times of equality than the idea of submitting to forms. Men who live during these times endure representations impatiently; symbols seem to them puerile artifices that you use to veil or keep from their eyes truths that it would be more natural to show them entirely naked and in full light of day; the trappings of ceremonies leave them cold, and they are naturally led to attach only a secondary importance to the details of worship.

Those who are charged with regulating the external form of religions in democratic centuries must pay close attention to these natural instincts of human intelligence, in order not to struggle needlessly against them.

I firmly believe in the necessity of forms.\(^g\) I know that they fix the human mind in the contemplation of abstract truths, and forms, by helping the mind to grasp those truths firmly, make it embrace them with fervor. I do not imagine that it is possible to maintain a religion without external practices, but on the other hand I think that, during the centuries we are entering, it would be particularly dangerous to multiply them inordinately; that instead they must be restricted and that you should retain only those that are absolutely necessary for the perpetuation of the dogma itself, which is the substance of religions,\(^1\) of which worship is only the form. A religion that would become more minutely detailed, more inflexible and more burdened by small observances at the same time that men are becoming more equal, would soon see itself reduced to a troop of passionate zealots in the middle of an unbelieving multitude.

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\(^g\) The manuscript says: "I do not deny the utility of forms." See note \(^{1}\) for p. 1270.

\(^1\) In all religions, there are ceremonies that are inherent in the very substance of belief and that must be carefully kept from changing in any way. That is seen particularly in Catholicism, where form and foundation are often so closely united that they are one.

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I know that some will not fail to object that religions, all having general and eternal truths as their object, cannot bend in this way to the changing instincts of each century, without losing the character of certitude in the eyes of men. I will answer here again that you must distinguish very carefully between the principal opinions that constitute a belief and that form what theologians call the articles of faith, and the incidental notions that are linked to them. Religions are obliged always to hold firm in the first, whatever the particular spirit of the times; but they must very carefully keep from binding themselves in the same way to the second, during centuries when everything changes position constantly and when the mind, accustomed to the moving spectacle of human affairs, reluctantly allows itself to be fixed. Immobility in external and secondary things does not seem to me a possibility for enduring except when civil society itself is immobile; everywhere else, I am led to believe that it is a danger.

We will see that, among all the passions to which equality gives birth or favors, there is one that it makes particularly intense and that it deposits at the same time in the heart of all men; it is the love of well-being. The taste for well-being forms like the salient and indelible feature of democratic ages.

It can be believed that a religion that undertook to destroy this fundamental passion would in the end be destroyed by it; if a religion wanted to drag men away entirely from the contemplation of the good things of this world in order to deliver them solely to the thought of those of the other, you can predict that souls would finally escape from its hands and go far from it to plunge into material and present pleasures alone.

The principal business of religions is to purify, to regulate and to limit the overly ardent and overly exclusive taste for well-being that men feel in times of equality; but I believe that religions would be wrong to try to overcome it entirely and to destroy it. Religions will not succeed in turning men away from love of riches; but they can still persuade them to enrich themselves only by honest means.\(^h\)

\(^h\) "I believe religious beliefs necessary for all democratic peoples, but I believe them necessary for the Americans more than for all others. In a society constituted like the American republics, the only non-material conceptions [v. the only non-material tastes] come from religion" (YTC, CVa, p. 3).
This leads me to a final consideration that, in a way, includes all the others. As men become more similar and more equal, it is more important for religions, while still keeping carefully out of the daily movement of affairs, not unnecessarily to go against generally accepted ideas and the permanent interests that rule the mass; for common opinion appears more and more as the first and most irresistible of powers; outside of it there is no support strong enough to allow resistance to its blows for long.\(^1\) That is no less true among a democratic people, subjected to a despot, than in a republic. In centuries of equality, kings often bring about obedience, but it is always the majority that brings about belief; so it is the majority that must be pleased in everything not contrary to faith.

[It would be wrong to attribute only to the Puritan origin of Americans the power that religion retains among them; there are many other causes as well. The object of what precedes was to make the reader better understand the principal ones.]\(^k\) I showed, in my first work, how American priests stand aside from public affairs. This is the most striking example, but not the only example, of self-restraint. In America, religion is a world apart where the priest reigns but which he is careful never to leave; within its limits, he leads\(^m\) minds; outside he leaves men to themselves and abandons them to the independence and to the instability that are appropriate to their nature and to the time. I have not seen a country where Christianity was less enveloped by forms, practices and images than in the United States, and where it presented more clear, more simple and more general ideas to the human mind. Although the Christians of America are divided into a multitude of sects, they all see their religion from this same perspective. This applies to Catholicism as well as to the other beliefs. There are no Catholic priests who show less taste for small individual observances, extraordinary and particular methods of gaining your salvation [indulgences, pilgrimages and relics], or who are attached more to the spirit of the law and less to its letter than the Catholic priests of the United States; nowhere is the doctrine of the Church that forbids giving the saints the worship that is reserved only for God taught more clearly and followed more. Still, the Catholics of America are very dutiful and very sincere.

Another remark is applicable to the clergy of all communions. American priests do not try to attract and fix the entire attention of man on the future life; they willingly abandon a part of his heart to the cares of the present; they seem to consider the good things of this world as important, though secondary matters. If they themselves do not participate in industry, they are at least interested in its progress and applaud it, and, while constantly pointing out the other world to the faithful man as the great object of his fears and of his hopes, they do not forbid him to seek well-being honestly in this one. Far from showing him how the two things are separate and opposite, they pay particular attention instead to finding in what place they touch and are connected.

All American priests know the intellectual dominion exercised by the majority and respect it. They support only necessary struggles against the majority. They do not get involved in party quarrels, but they willingly adopt the general opinions of their country and their time, and they go along without resistance with the current of sentiments and ideas that carries everything along around them. They try hard to correct their contemporaries, but do not separate from them. So public opinion is never their enemy; instead it sustains and protects them, and their beliefs reign simultaneously with the strengths that are their own and those that they borrow from the majority.

In this way, by respecting all the democratic instincts that are not contrary to it and by using several of those instincts to help itself, religion succeeds in struggling with advantage against the spirit of individual independence that is the most dangerous of all to religion.

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\(^1\) "In democratic centuries religion needs the majority, and to gain this majority its genius must not be contrary to the democratic genius" (Rubish, 1).

\(^k\) I have already pointed out two great causes for the power of religious beliefs in America:

1. The Puritan origin.
2. The separation of church and State.

These two causes are very powerful, but they are not democratic; the ones that remain for me are democratic (Rubish, 1).

\(^m\) The manuscript says: "he subjugates."