In what if any sense should Tocqueville’s thought be considered Catholic? His own testimony about his faith is as follows. In *Democracy in America* (1833) he says “As a practicing Roman Catholic I was particularly close to the Catholic priests” in America. On the other hand, in an 1843 letter to Gobineau he responds thus to Gobineau’s disparagement of Christianity:

I must admit that I hold an opinion absolutely contrary to yours about Christianity . . . I am not a believer (something I am far from boasting of) but unbeliever that I am, I have never been able to repress a deep emotion when reading the Gospels.

Still, Tocqueville accepts Christian morality as “true” and in conformity with “nature.” He recounts that he had formerly had a strong faith but at age 16, as a result of reading the *philosophes*, he suffered a crisis of faith from which he never recovered. It appears that while he lost his *faith*, it never ceased to form his *morality*. I will argue it also formed his thought.

A strong case can be made that Tocqueville’s thought is more reflective of Catholic themes, and more sympathetic to Catholicism, than any other important non-Catholic thinker about American politics. His thought contains recognizably Catholic elements. “Recognizably Catholic” means at least four things.

First, he analyzes democracy from a primarily cultural perspective, comparing it to the older aristocratic and Christian cultures of Europe, and particularly France. We see in his praise of local institutions and decentralized government, a continuation of certain important themes in medieval Catholic thought. Along these lines his analysis resonates with the thought of his near contemporary, Orestes Brownson, just as it anticipates the principle of subsidiarity that we find in the Papal encyclicals of the twentieth century.

Second, he contends that democracy’s compatibility with liberty and greatness depends on its remaining religious: “Despotism may be able to do without religion, but freedom cannot” (294. cf. 444-49). He is far from endorsing a confessional state but is more hospitable to religion, and particularly to Catholicism, than to modern secularism.

Third, he goes out of his way to defend the compatibility of democracy and Catholicism against the then widespread assumption that democracy required Protestantism: “I think one is wrong in regarding the Catholic religion as a natural enemy of democracy. Rather, among the various Christian doctrines, Catholicism seems one of those most favorable to equality of conditions” (288).

Fourth, he suggests that the future of religious faith in the West lies with Catholicism: “Our grandchildren will tend more and more to be divided clearly between those who have completely abandoned Christianity and those who
have returned to the Church of Rome” (451). The foregoing considerations seem to me to justify Catholics in particular taking Tocqueville seriously as a guide to negotiating the intersections.

Holloway finds in Tocqueville the remarkable and novel thesis that “encouraging religious faith is the primary duty of the democratic statesman.” The primary duty. Although I had studied Tocqueville continuously for the better part of twenty years, and was familiar with his favorable estimate of religion’s political effects on democracy, I had never noticed his implication that democratic statesmen should foster religion at all, let alone that it was their leading duty. In part I had read Tocqueville merely sociologically, that is, as explaining how democracy managed to resist its philistine and materialist impulses. I had also assumed that Tocqueville followed such liberal political philosophers as Locke and American liberal thinkers as Jefferson, who thought that liberal governments required religion but doubted that they could effectively foster it without becoming oppressive. However, Holloway’s close analysis of pages 530-546 of Democracy in America has persuaded me that I assumed incorrectly.

On the other hand, while Tocqueville’s thought contains recognizably Catholic themes, and while, as Holloway correctly sees, he argues that the democratic statesman needs to foster religion, serious Catholics can hardly acquiesce in his apparent indifference to which religion the statesman should foster. Because he explicitly limits himself to “looking at religions from a human point of view” (445), “what is most important for it [society] is not that all citizens should profess the true religion but that they should profess religion” (290). One reason is that in the United States “all [sects] preach the same morality in the name of God.” A deeper reason is what backs that preaching: “most religions, are only general, simple, and practical means of teaching men that the soul is immortal.” The insistence on the soul's immortality is religion’s “greatest advantage” over both merely political propaganda and coercion. It also explains why religion is “more necessary [for democratic peoples] than for all others” (544), namely, it makes possible democracy’s relaxation of political rule: “how could society escape destruction if, when political ties are relaxed [by abandoning ‘monarchy’ or ‘despotism’], moral ties are not tightened” (294).

His prediction that Catholicism is the religious wave of the democratic future is only a sociological prediction. It does not appear to emerge from a conviction that Catholicism is any truer than those religions which will recede or disappear. That the political and social utility of religion is independent of its truth is a thought expected of Machiavelli and perhaps a secular social scientist. It is doubtful whether it is a thought proper to a pious man of any religion.

Tocqueville also appears, from the vantage point of the late 20th century, to have underestimated the potential conflict between democracy and religion, especially Catholicism. Since “all [sects] teach the same morality in the name of God” (290), democratic politics did not involve the most fundamental questions of how we should live together. Their politics did not divide over funda-

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mental moral ends. And to the extent that such divisions existed in society they were prevented from rising to the national level by the constitutionally limited powers of the national government. But the post-Tocquevillian, 19th-century moral conflict over slavery and Mormon polygamy showed democracy was not immune from a national politics involving disputed moral ends. Since 1940, but especially since Engle v. Vitale (1962) and Roe v. Wade (1973), that politics has perhaps reached an intensity unparalleled since the slavery controversy. It is unclear whether or not Tocqueville thinks religion is necessary to resolve these disputed moral ends. He certainly thinks it is necessary for preserving the moral self-restraint which makes democracy possible.

Jacques Maritain’s America
-by John Stack

Jacques Maritain’s Reflections on America was published almost forty years ago. It grew out of three seminars, collectively titled “random reflections on the American scene,” which he held at the University of Chicago in 1956 (7). He chose not to “treat of the topic ex professo” because he resolved to retain “the tone of informal, familiar, and desultory conversation” he had used originally (7). Such a tone is fitting for a work inspired by friendship for the Americans he had come to know and love (11).

Unlike his more philosophical books, Maritain here explicitly eschewed a systematic approach, and recognized that his “statements [are] susceptible of no demonstration” (12). He conceded that they “constitute neither an historical analysis nor any kind of complete picture, nor any kind of ‘explanation’ . . . They [are] incomplete, subjective, disconnected—random reflections” (12). His primary concern was not to discuss why things in America were the way they were, but to get under the skin of the American people, “deep in the American blood” to uncover their “spiritual identity” (51). His sounding of the American soul moved him to defend Americans of the mid-1950s against the familiar and characteristically European charge of “materialism” (18). Not only were Americans gradually overcoming materialism, Maritain argued, but they were actually more humane and less materialistic than their European counterparts who had reached the industrial stage (15).

This essay reviews Maritain’s friendly and hopeful contrast between the souls of Americans and the industrial system under which they live. It considers whether or not that contrast is still defensible “after forty years.” It also evaluates his recommendations for actualizing in America Christian economic and social principles.

I

One of Maritain’s two principal themes was the relation between the souls of