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TOCQUEVILLE ON NEW PROPHETS AND THE TYRANNY OF PUBLIC OPINION

Louis Midgley

Abstract: *Louis Midgley discusses the rise and fall in popularity of Alexis de Toqueville's unrivaled volumes entitled Democracy in America and the impressive renaissance of interest they have enjoyed since 1930. They were published at a time when Europe was looking for guiding principles to replace aristocratic governments with democratic regimes. Importantly, however, Toqueville also reflected broadly on the crucial roles of religion and family in sustaining the virtues necessary for stable democracies. Toqueville's arguments that faith in God and in immortality are essential for maintaining a strong society of a free people are more crucial than ever to Latter-day Saints and all those wishing to preserve democracy in America today.*

[Editor's Note: Part of our book chapter reprint series, this article is reprinted here as a service to the LDS community. Original pagination and page numbers have necessarily changed, otherwise the reprint has the same content as the original.

See Louis Midgley, "Tocqueville on New Prophets and the Tyranny of Public Opinion," in *"To Seek the Law of the Lord": Essays in Honor of John W. Welch*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2017), 171–88. Further information at <https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/to-seek-the-law-of-the-lord-essays-in-honor-of-john-w-welch-2/>.]

In 1831 Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859)¹ traveled in the United States for nine months, while only twenty six years old; he was presumably looking into the American prison systems, but he had a different agenda in mind. He came prepared to seek the guiding principles behind what he saw as the inevitable replacement for aristocratic/regal regimes. In 1835 and 1840 he published in French his observations “on democracy in America.” His two large volumes were eventually translated into English and published under the title *Democracy in America*.² This more than seven hundred page book was, with its author, at the time of his death, “famous in France, England, the United States, and even Germany.” Then it went into decline from about 1880 to 1930.³ Tocqueville’s book has subsequently steadily increased in popularity, especially drawing the careful attention of intellectual historians and philosophers, resulting in an enormous and steadily growing, often very sophisticated secondary and supporting literature.⁴ Why?

Among many other reasons, Tocqueville has much to say about the crucial role of religion in American in sustaining the virtues necessary to make democracy safe and civilized, rather than an affair of unruly individuals and factions contending for power. He began his examination of the sources of what he calls the necessary republican virtues or “habits of the heart,” and hence also the mores (or conventions and customs) that ground the American passion for equality, as well as a fondness for a civilized liberty. He does this in part by setting out the place of Puritan religiosity, which was anchored in the Bible, in what can be called the first, and original *religious founding* of America⁵ as distinguished from and contrasted with a later *republican founding* (with the fashioning of the Constitution in 1787); both of which he considers crucial to

1 For a fine introduction to his life and literary career, see Harvey Mansfield, *Tocqueville: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

2 Among several translations of *Democracy in America* into English, I recommend (and herein cite) the one by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). These translator/editors have provided an excellent “Editors’ Introduction” (see xvii–lxxxvi), which is worth the cost of the volume. Their translation takes the place of the earlier one by Tocqueville’s friend Henry Reeve (1847), and also by the later better one by George Lawrence (1966).

3 This according to Andre Jardin, his biographer. See *Tocqueville: A Biography*, trans. from French by Lydia Davis and Robert Hemenway (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988), 534.

4 A delightful survey of Tocqueville’s intellectual reputation and influence has been provided by Matthew Mancini in his *Alexis de Tocqueville and American Intellectuals: From His Times to Ours* (Lanham, MD: Bowman and Littlefield, 2006).

5 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 32–44.

understanding the dynamics of the new regime. He also focused much attention, as I will demonstrate, on the critical role of faith in God and immortality in grounding the American regime, as well as other potentially democratic (rather than the much older and now decaying aristocratic/regal) regimes.

Tocqueville also stresses the role of solid, stable families in democratic regimes, and worried about their possible decline, especially if women ever come to shed the yoke that binds them in marriage, and hence also the decline of the “religious” instructions and moral indoctrination most often provided by mothers and wives in the home to restrain and civilize boys and men.⁶ In this and other ways he identifies the crucial role of women in generating and sustaining faith in both God and immortality. He also, as I will demonstrate, comments on the abundance of competing sects or what I call Protestant sectarian anarchy,⁷ as well as the place of the Roman Catholic Church in democratic societies.⁸

When he was young, Tocqueville seems to have encountered a literature that caused him to jettison at least his confessional attachment and thereafter he seems to have remained merely a nominal Roman Catholic.⁹ Whether or how exactly he believed in God are controversial questions that I will not directly address in this essay, though I will address some of his arguments for the utility of faith in God (and especially for concern about the important role belief in immortality of the soul must play in viable democratic regimes).¹⁰ The reason is, that whatever his own doubts and struggles might have been, he saw faith and also communities of believers (or churches), or what he also called “religion,” as a necessary foundation for a stable democratic regime. And he pictured or painted an ideal religious landscape in America as a sort of model the French (and others) should seek to emulate.¹¹

6 Ibid., 563–76.

7 Ibid., 278–88, 417–24, 504–06.

8 Ibid., 275–77, 282–92, 423–25.

9 For the usual account of at least his own confessional defection, see Jardin, *Tocqueville*, 61.

10 For my own effort to cautiously address these questions, see Louis Midgley, “The Utility of Faith Reconsidered,” in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 165–77.

11 France has, instead, become a profoundly secular regime, with matters of faith being strictly private matters. This long-standing secular establishment is currently being challenged by the growing presence of a large population with different degrees of attachment to varieties of Islamic cultural traditions and also faith.

A Caution for Latter-day Saints

Unfortunately, Tocqueville has at times been cited and “quoted” (and also misquoted) by those who have not read his famous book, but who sought to invoke his name and authority for various purposes. There is one famous quotation attributed to Tocqueville, and supposedly found in his *Democracy in America*, that is often quoted, with slight variations, as Tocqueville’s ultimate assessment of what makes America great. It is quoted for either or both devotional or partisan political purposes. It reads as follows:

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious harbors and her ample rivers, and it was not there; in her fertile fields and boundless prairies, and it was not there; in her rich mines and her vast world commerce, and it was not there. Not until I went to the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.¹²

This quotation, in several versions, has been quoted by many authors, including, unfortunately, some Latter-day Saints. It is, however, not found in any edition or translation of *Tocqueville’s Democracy in America*, or in his letters, notes or other publications.¹³ In addition, as useful as it may seem to those who quote this language, it does not reflect accurately his opinions of the place of religion in American society. There is, however, in Tocqueville’s notes, correspondence, and especially in his justly famous book on American mores and laws, and, what he considered the guiding principles of democratic regimes—including, as I will demonstrate, the passion for equality—that engages the question of faith in God, and hence “religion” in this special sense.

12 For the LDS audience, I have quoted the version found in W. Cleon Skousen, *The Five Thousand Year Leap*, 30 year anniversary edition, foreword by Glenn Beck (self-published on 13 March 2009), 17; https://archive.org/stream/The5000YearLeapByWClleonSkousen/5000-year-leap-the-by-w-cleon-skousen_djvu.txt. He quoted this same language in a number of his publications.

13 This frequent false attribution has been noted by John J. Pitney, currently Roy P. Crocker Professor of American Politics at Claremont McKenna College, in an article entitled “The Tocqueville Fraud,” *The Weekly Standard* #1 (November 12, 1995), 44–45, which can be accessed at <http://www.weeklystandard.com/print/the-tocqueville-fraud/article/8100>. See also #2 (“Missattributed”) at https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Alexis_de_Tocqueville.

When I was forced to read *Democracy in America* in French in graduate school, I found Tocqueville's remarks on what he called "religion" both interesting and instructive; I have never ceased to enjoy and learn from this remarkable book.¹⁴ I urge Latter-day Saints who are unfamiliar with Tocqueville or who have only heard of his famous book to examine his views, with special attention to his treatment of individual and social virtues, which he describes as habits that restrain somewhat the passion for instant gratification, and thereby make a democratic regime viable.

Is There a Connection with Joseph Smith?

Those Saints who have either heard about or have actually read his famous book can be forgiven for wondering if (or even hoping that) Tocqueville was aware of, or somehow even met, Joseph Smith. But, neither while he traveled in America, nor subsequently, did Tocqueville, it seems, become aware of Joseph Smith, or of the faith of Latter-day Saints. However, I will argue that his thoughtful observations on what can loosely be called "religion" set out an intriguing explanation of the hostility in a democratic regime towards a faith that rests directly on new divine special revelations and hence on prophets. His opinions on this matter should be of special interest to Latter-day Saints.

I will argue that Tocqueville's understanding of the latent causes of contention that a community with a belief in a divine mission will necessarily generate in a democratic regime helps explain the hostilities directed towards Joseph Smith when stories of the recovery of the Book of Mormon began to circulate even before its publication and which continue in both sectarian and secular circles even now. In addition, I will demonstrate that Tocqueville sets out an explanation for the struggle some Saints have to sustain faith in an authority outside of themselves, as they certainly must, if they are obedient to the covenants they have made with God.

I will also sketch a portion of Tocqueville's understanding of the dynamics of American religiosity, which I believe may assist Latter-day Saints in better understanding why Joseph Smith's founding a

14 My father loved Tocqueville's famous book, and often quoted from it when we discussed political and religious issues. I still own his heavily marked copy. I was able to free myself somewhat from his way of reading Tocqueville, when I was, under a stern professor, trying to learn to read French by translating his famous book. I was also asked to teach from that book in the course to which I was assigned at Brown University as part of my work on my PhD.

community on new divine revelations seems in crucial ways, whatever the seeming similarities, radically unlike the varieties of faith common in his and now also our own world. Tocqueville has, I believe, also provided arguments that may help the Saints identify, appreciate and resist some of the elements of the larger American ethos that fray and challenge the faith of the Saints, against which our scriptures and the prophetic voice continues to speak.

Religious Liberty and Sectarian Religiosity

In the 1830s, Tocqueville found America swarming with competing Protestant preachers and sects, since religion had become, as it continues now, a business in which anyone could engage by struggling for a share of the market. He sought to understand how the numerous versions of Christian faith in America were impacted by and also shaped mores. Hence, a striking feature of Tocqueville's famous book is the attention he gives to religion (that is, both churches and preachers), and also to the crucial role of faith in providing and sustaining the necessary moral foundations of a moderate, stable democratic regime. He saw this competitive sectarian proliferation flowing from freedom, but also heavily conditioned by equality. He also saw all Christian sects, as I will demonstrate, despite their many small differences, as filling a useful role by offering essentially similar moral messages, and thereby, he argued, moderating the lust and also limiting the means for acquiring material wealth, as well as focusing attention on the remote future and thereby somewhat restraining the powerful urge for instant gratification.

Tocqueville expected that in democratic regimes their underlying principles, which he demonstrated were liberty and equality, would eventually wear away and remove the traditional official links between Bishop and King, or Pope and Prince, and thus undercut established (tax supported) churches, which was then still the situation in the American regime.¹⁵ The kinds of intrusions and corruption of regal and aristocratic authority in matters of faith in God that were, beginning with Constantine (272–337 AD), once found everywhere in Europe, in the American democratic regime were being removed and replaced by a sanguine separation between civil authority and Christian faith. He very

15 What is not now often recognized is that quite a few of the States, when the Constitution was adopted, had established churches. We tend to think that the First Amendment enshrined our current understanding of the relationship of church and state. It merely prevented the establishment of a tax supported church for the United States, but it did not abolish establishments in the States. That came later.

much favored religious liberty and also the separation of ecclesiastical and civil authority—that is, what we now know as separation of “church and state,” which was an American invention. He also sought to discover what might prevent even faith in God from also being eroded by the same secularizing forces flowing from an ever growing and also more debased notion of equality. One thing that helps prevent this from happening, he argues, is that preachers find their own self-interest in striving to perpetuate faith. Preaching thus becomes a kind of competitive business driven by mercenary self-interest. He thought that this unintentionally ends up serving the larger good of the regime.

Public Opinion and Subtle New Tyranny

With the ongoing and eventual collapse of the old aristocratic regimes with which Tocqueville begins his assessment of the American democratic regime, the now rather isolated “equal” and seemingly “free” social atoms turn away from both the traditional secular/political and/or ecclesiastical authorities. It is the passion for what easily becomes a ardent desire for equality that tends to place all authority in the individual, and hence not in princes or kings, nor in churchman or clergy, and also not in seers and prophets, and hence not ultimately in the divine.¹⁶ In addition, fads and fashions constitute the content of the opinions of isolated individuals. The reason is that in democratic times, and under the impact of an obsession with equality, each isolated individual becomes the judge of both human and divine things, but the individual, at the same time, Tocqueville argues, is at the mercy of the shifting sands of public opinion.¹⁷

Isolated, rootless individuals, liberated from traditional authorities, turn to the maelstrom of ever shifting and easily manipulated public opinion for the content and grounds of their beliefs. Hence the powerful opinion of the majority supplies individuals with a steady flow of ready-made opinions, thereby relieving them of the necessity of fashioning their own. This opens the way for what Tocqueville called the “tyranny of the majority.”¹⁸ This generates a soft and subtle, and also quite irresistible “moral empire of the majority.” This new dominant empire “is founded in part on the idea that there is more enlightenment in many men than

16 Tocqueville seems to have been the first author to identify what he called “individualism,” and hence a proud notion of self-reliance, rather than on higher powers including even God.

17 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 407.

18 Ibid., 181, 239–264.

in one alone.”¹⁹ Even in intellectual matters, such as pondering about the ultimate fate of the soul and the meaning of our lives, the majority exercises a tyranny. But this tyranny of the majority is merely a widely accepted opinion that is constantly in flux.

In democratic regimes, such as found in America, moral, political, religious, and even philosophical theories eventually come to rest on the shifting sands of public opinion and hence tend to become trendy fads and fashions. Religion in America is also impacted by this dynamic and thus is not a matter of an original divine special revelation such as found in the Bible, backed as it was beginning with Constantine by both established ecclesiastical and civil authority, than it is an expression of an uncritically accepted public opinion constantly manipulated by those often driven by mercenary motives. “Movements” tend to replace the authority of churches as centers and engines of public opinion. Hence, Tocqueville warns, that “in centuries of equality, one can foresee that faith in common opinion will become a sort of religion whose prophet will be the majority.”²⁰

For Tocqueville, the necessary uncritically accepted opinions on which a democratic regime must depend “are born in different manners and can change form and object; but one cannot make it so that there are no dogmatic beliefs, that is, opinions men receive on trust without discussing them.”²¹ Without such beliefs “there is no common action, and without common action men still exist, but a social body does not.”²² He thus holds that, despite the fickle, volatile shifting winds of public opinion, essentially uncritically accepted dogmatic beliefs are both necessary and also desirable.

By accepting some opinions on trust without discussion, one takes on a salutary bondage of the mind in both the moral realm and also in the life of the mind. We dance in our chains, but without even noticing their necessary restraints. These observations, according to Tocqueville, apply to the philosopher as well as humankind in general.²³ And even or especially in matters of faith, democratic citizens tend not to look to the heavens, but within the confines of public opinion for the final authority.

Building on these and similar related observations, Tocqueville thus observes that

19 Ibid., 236.

20 Ibid., 410.

21 Ibid., 407.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 408

Men who live in times of equality are therefore only with difficulty led to place the intellectual authority to which they submit outside of and above humanity. It is in themselves or in those like themselves that they ordinarily seek the sources of truth. That would be enough to prove that a new religion cannot be established in these centuries, and that all attempts to cause one to be born would be not only impious, but ridiculous and unreasonable. One can foresee that *democratic peoples will not readily believe in divine missions, that they will willingly laugh at new prophets, and that they will want to find the principal arbiter of their beliefs within the limits of humanity, not beyond it.*²⁴

This observation, if correct, may help us to understand the immense hostility faced by Joseph Smith and his followers that began in village newspapers even prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon. The reason behind this hostile, mocking attitude is that Americans, as well as others enthralled by the notion of equality as sameness, “will want to find the principal arbiter of their beliefs within the limits of humanity, and not beyond it.”²⁵ Tocqueville sees a sameness notion of equality as debased and also a threat to liberty of individuals who differ from the currently dominant fads and fashions of public opinion.

In democratic times, according to Tocqueville, mankind will strive to find the authority for *everything* in themselves (or those most like themselves). In addition, they will also form and sustain factions and hostile like-minded tribes. Hence they will also tend to spurn efforts to call them to the service of some authority genuinely beyond themselves such as seers and prophets. And, under such a debased sameness notion of equality, the majority (or those who presume to speak for it) will ultimately determine (or be believed to determine) both the dogmatic content and moral message of religious beliefs, including even those that are presumably believed to have come down from the heavens in some very remote past through divine special revelations, which long ago ceased. What remains is the Bible and its competing interpreters and interpretations, which everyone is entitled to appropriate as they will, and which shift from time to time with the popularity of advocates who generate movements. The tyranny of the majority is thus at work in what Tocqueville called the business of religion in democratic times.

24 Ibid., emphasis mine.

25 Ibid.

At this point in his argument, Tocqueville reintroduces the practical—that is, moral or ethical—links between self-interest (well understood) and faith in God. In order to serve her own best interests, particularly the passion for comfort and wealth, the democratic citizen must learn to postpone, dampen, restrain or redirect at least some of her immediate interests and appetites. “The principal business of religions,” he thus argues, and something that the religious industry in America does at least moderately well, given the lush garden of temptations, “is to purify, regulate, and restrain the too ardent and too exclusive taste for well-being that men in times of equality feel.”²⁶ “Religions supply the general habit of behaving with a view to the future. In this they are no less useful to happiness in this life than to felicity in the other. It is one of their greatest political aspects.”²⁷ Without the habit of sacrificing immediate advantage for greater future gratifications, even the passion for physical comforts will erode and hence cannot persist. Therefore, Tocqueville argues, “philosophers and those who govern ought constantly to apply themselves to moving back the object of human actions in the eyes of men; it is their great business.”²⁸

However, it would be a mistake, according to Tocqueville, for preachers to direct all attention to the future life beyond life. Why? Simply because the “taste for well-being forms the salient and indelible feature of democratic ages.” Any attempt to “destroy this mother passion” would eventually cause religion to destroy itself.²⁹ After describing “the principal business of religions” as the moderation of the “taste for well-being,” Tocqueville adds that preachers “would be wrong to try to subdue it entirely and to destroy it. They will not succeed in turning men away from love of wealth; but they can still persuade them to enrich themselves only by honest means.”³⁰ Preachers can succeed in their business only by restricting their encouragement to the more or less honest pursuit of worldly prosperity and pleasure and hence not to their eradication.

Keeping Faith Alive, and Moral Restraints in Place— the Utility of Religion for Immediate Political Purposes

Though not favoring a religious establishment (that is, a state church financed by taxes), which was the common feature of regal/aristocratic

26 Ibid., 422.

27 Ibid., 522; cf. 42–43.

28 Ibid., 523.

29 Ibid., 422.

30 Ibid.

regimes, Tocqueville prescribes a kind of bland civic religion in which the essential dogma is the immortality of the soul, which should, he insisted, become an uncritically accepted dogma. In his opinion, all the various American sects he encountered on his travels in America offered sufficiently similar moral teachings to fit this requirement. In order for such a teaching to be effective in countering what he describes as selfishness, individualism, materialism, and the urge for instant gratification run wild, he cautioned that “one must maintain Christianity within the new democracies at all cost.”³¹

“What means,” Tocqueville then asks, “therefore, remain to authority to bring men back toward spiritualist opinions or to keep them in religion that evokes them?”³² He grants that his recommendation is likely to do him harm in the eyes of politicians, but “the only efficacious means governments can use to put the dogma of the immortality of the soul in honor is to act every day as if they themselves believed it.” He added, that “it is only in conforming scrupulously to religious morality in great affairs that they can flatter themselves they are teaching citizens to know it, love it, and respect it in small ones.”³³ Elected officials (and those seeking public office) should model piety for the citizens of a democratic regime. Previously, in older regal or aristocratic regimes, both civil and ecclesiastical, the social distance between those at the top of the social heap and those beneath was so great that flagrant lapses in morality, and hence the real unfaith of regal or presumably aristocratic authority figures, did little or no real damage to the social fabric. In democratic regimes this is no longer the case. I must add that the moral lapses and failures of the rich and famous, including office seekers and holders—that is, celebrity figures—are now metaphorically shouted from the housetops by electronic news media and on the Internet. From Tocqueville’s perspective, this severely damages the social fabric and frays the moral foundations of democratic regimes.

These observations are set within the broad outlines of Tocqueville’s argument for the “utility of religion” in democratic regimes. Hence the following: “Most religions,” he argues,

are only general, simple, and practical means of teaching men the immortality of the soul. That is the greatest advantage that a democratic people derives from beliefs, and it is what renders them more necessary to such a people than to all others.

31 Ibid., 521.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

Therefore when any religion whatsoever has cast deep roots within a democracy, guard against shaking it; but rather preserve it carefully as the most precious inheritance from aristocratic centuries; do not seek to tear men from their old religious opinions to substitute new ones, for fear that, in the passage from one faith to another, the soul finding itself for a moment empty of belief, the love of material enjoyments will come to spread through it and fill it entirely.³⁴

Belief in immortality thus seems to be the ground for restraining the unchecked search for wealth and pleasure, as well as the sensual gratifications these are thought to entail. Belief in immortality, coupled to belief in an eventual divine judgment of deeds, provides a compelling reason for postponing gratification and restraining the violent passions here and now. There is little in any of this argument to suggest that the opinions advanced by philosophers or by law givers/legislators are, or need to be, simply true. Hence the following:

There are religions that are very false and very absurd; nevertheless one can say that every religion that remains within the circle I have just indicated and that does not claim to leave it ...imposes a salutary yoke on the intellect; and one must recognize that if it does not save men in the other world, it is at least very useful to their happiness and their greatness in this one.³⁵

Plato's dialogues contain accounts, Tocqueville correctly suggests, without providing any details, that he asserts counter demoralizing modern materialism—that is, what he calls egoism and individualism. He also grants that “it is not certain that Socrates and his school had decided opinions about what would happen to man in the other life.”³⁶ But what he calls “Platonic philosophy” seemingly included a belief in immortality, and this gives that philosophy the “sublime spark that distinguishes it.” What has this got to do with “Socrates and his school”? Why would Tocqueville introduce Socrates at this point in his argument? Could it be that Plato's dialogues include noble or sublime, though not necessarily true, *mythoi*, or even poetic *theologia*—that is, what Plato also even called “noble lies”? Be that as it may, such sublime teachings,

34 Ibid., 519; cf. 448.

35 Ibid., 418.

36 Ibid., 520.

according to Tocqueville, tend to counter materialism,³⁷ even if they are not strictly true.

Can the Faithful Accept the Argument for the Utility of Faith?

Is it possible, from a faithful Latter-day Saint perspective, to entertain and appreciate Tocqueville's efforts to defend what he calls "religion" (here understood as faith in God and immortality) by stressing its utility for individual and social well-being, and hence also as a kind of "cement" that holds communities together and generates deeds designed to further some as yet distant even common good? The control of both the violent passions and the desire for instant gratification, and the willingness to seek the common and more remote higher good all fit snugly within the faith of the Saints. Faith and faithfulness, and hence sanctification, have utility here and now, as well as in a remote then and there. The Saints, drawing upon their scriptures often entertain moral imperatives similar to those Tocqueville set out as useful for those living in democratic regimes (or in any other possible regime). For example, our scriptures indicate that faithful obedience to covenants leads to a proper prosperity, while those who are disobedient are, sometimes both here and now, and also ultimately then and there, cut off from the presence of God, until or unless they turn or return in faith and faithfulness to God, which is always hopefully a possibility. And the work of the Holy Spirit is to purge, cleans, perfect, and hence sanctify those who seek the Lord, thereby making them genuine Saints — that is, Holy Ones.³⁸

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ In biblical Greek, the noun *hagios* means "holy," so that Saints are those who genuinely follow the Holy One of Israel we know as Jesus the Christ. And hence genuine Saints are those who seek with the help of the Holy Spirit to be sanctified. The biblical Greek word *hagiosmos* is rendered in English as "sanctification," which means to be separated for God and hence also from sinful ways. Jesus Christ has made that possible. And sanctification is therefore seen as the necessary requirement for an ultimate justification of the genuinely faithful when they face a final judgment of their works/deeds. The faithful, by relying on the mercy of a loving, gracious God, must have sought sanctification with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the very existence of Latter-day Saints challenges the received Protestant opinion that sinners are justified by "faith alone." Both Eastern Orthodox (Greek Christianity) and Roman Catholic (Latin Christianity) are more at home with the need for sanctification than are most versions of Protestantism. And both Orthodox and Catholic Christianity are more insistent that sanctification (and Sainthood) are both necessary and possible. Those influenced by Greek Christianity insist that the purpose of our mortal existence is *theosis* (deification). Roman Catholics face a post-mortal purgatory if they did not become Saints here below. Both their sins and disposition to sin must be purged so that

The Saints need not object to Tocqueville's effort to indicate that faith is useful here and now. However, those who see Joseph Smith as a genuine seer and prophet, and the Book of Mormon as both a genuine history and hence also the Word of God, must insist that the faith they embrace has an ultimate dimension—that it is simply true. And hence they must hope—one of the Christian virtues—that ultimately obedience yields a firm place in the Kingdom of God, and hence the fullness of life beginning partially here and now and more fully then and there.

Tocqueville argued that “religion” somewhat restrains the dominant, unruly and especially violent passions unleashed in democratic ages. “In men, the angel teaches the brute the art of satisfying itself.”³⁹ Unfaith unravels this salutary teaching and loosens the moral restraints imposed by faith. But for Latter-day Saints, who remember and keep the covenants they have made with God, with the attendant blessing for obedience and constant awareness of the cursing for disobedience, the necessary moral restraints are firmly in place. It is also true, again following Tocqueville's argument, that what tends to elevate, enlarge, and expand the soul in turn enables it to better succeed, even in those undertakings that are not the primary concern of the soul. In an effort to please God, one must struggle to allow God to enter and enhance one's own soul through sanctification by becoming a genuine Saint. And, by so doing, human beings also acquire the “habits of the heart”—those virtues that suppress the abundance of petty, passing desires in order to satisfy the great longing that looks toward a glorious remote future beyond the grave in our life after life. A portion of this larger understanding is what grounds Tocqueville's insistence on the utility of belief in the immortality of the soul.

In addition, Tocqueville's struggle to make a large place for religion in a democratic society can be understood as something like the endeavor of certain philosophers to show a certain deference to the opinions on which society rests, and hence especially to religious opinions, for merely practical or political reasons, even when they themselves are skeptical about all opinions. This leaves the door open for fruitful common endeavors in efforts to attain the common good and welfare of others who do not believe in divine special revelation, but who are in desperate

they can be genuine partakers of the divine nature as far as that is possible for human beings.

39 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 521.

need of our love and assistance because we are or should be concerned about the human soul.

One cannot, it seems, separate passages on religion in *Democracy in America* from the larger context of Tocqueville's analysis and preserve the integrity of his arguments. His own uneasiness with those skeptics who mock the traditional beliefs echoes something that reaches back at least to Plato, and hence to philosophy in its original form, at least according to one way of reading the existing original texts. Even the concerns Plato seems to set out in the *Laws* about believers in divine beings who intervene in human affairs—who like atheists—were said by the interlocutors in that dialogue to be dangerous to a well-ordered regime—is also found in Tocqueville's consternation over the possibility in democratic times of a genuinely prophetic new faith turning up. And hence his insistence that if such a faith, as it did in 1830 with the publication of the Book of Mormon, were to appear in America, it would be mocked and scolded. The Saints may just be stuck with condescension and mockery from those whose own dogmatic beliefs do not have a place for the opening of the heavens to divine things. Such a faith, if Tocqueville (and the tradition in which he writes) are even close to being right, would be challenging and unsettling for the larger community in which even completing sects rest on a variety of settled, competing dogmas. This may also help to explain why princes, kings and emperors, as well as often ecclesiastical authorities, both sought to control or dominate each other.

If Tocqueville is even close to being right on these matters, both democratic peoples and those heavily impacted by the ethos of democratic regimes “will not readily believe in divine missions,” and “they will willingly laugh at new prophets, and that they will want to find the principal arbiter of their beliefs within the limits of humanity, not beyond it.”⁴⁰ In addition, modern prophets may also be seen in some subtle ways as disturbing or even challenging some of the dominant democratic ethos resting on vacillating public opinion. The reason is that new revelations may challenge the social cement of traditional dogmatic beliefs—the sentiments and opinions on which both aristocratic and democratic societies at least in part must necessarily rest. They may even challenge the moral substance of society, including both its older and traditional creedal form, or its currently more fashionable, novel secular contents.

40 Ibid., 408

Concluding Remarks

From Tocqueville's perspective, it is enough for the democratic citizen to assume that she has control of her own beliefs and is the master of her world—even though she is obviously in a kind of “salutary bondage” to dogmatic beliefs—simply because she accepts the most important opinions on trust in what are actually the ever shifting sands of public opinion. In democratic times humans become obsessed with and demand novelty—they see every shift in public opinion as moral progress. They are enthralled with the latest fads and fashions in virtually everything, including opinions even about divine things.

Tocqueville seems to have held that only God, or at least faith in God and immortality, can save people in a democratic regime from the inevitable sour fruit of the passions unleashed by the hunger for a leveling and debased equality, joined to the thirst for unrestrained and then uncivil liberty. If I understand Tocqueville correctly, then I certainly agree that only God can save us from the wreckage generated by our violent passions. But for my belief to be more than yet another opinion involving both the past and the future, that I have chosen as a narcotic or that I have merely been steered into or have administered to myself, it must be simply true. But faith and hence also faithfulness now faces the fashionable opinion that no truths can possibly transcend the situation and conditions of their production and current popularity, and that no knowledge at all touched by history can rest on a secure foundation. The end result for those who laugh at modern prophets is an inevitable enervating despair over the question of a genuinely saving truth.

In addition, as I have shown, even preachers must not, according to Tocqueville, confront the passions of the citizen directly, but only indirectly, cautiously and mildly; they must appear to show that religious beliefs and demands are fully compatible with self-interest well understood and thereby allow a large place for the somewhat modified egoism essential to (and characteristic of) the emerging democratic ethos. However, this seems to indicate that there are no really effective restraints on the passions and appetites of democratic peoples because whatever restraints that might actually flow from religion are themselves subject to the same debasements as the human soul itself. Only God can save us.

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