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# The Influence of Democracy on Religion in America

BY ALEXANDER CAUTERUCCI

“[It is because of] our nation’s close relationship with the Almighty [that] our rights come from God.” These are the words of President George W. Bush, the most powerful man in the world, and leader of a nation with no national religion.

Our rights come from God? In 1990, President George H. W. Bush, our current President’s father, (41) announced that he didn’t think that atheists were full citizens of the United States<sup>1</sup>. How can this be? This is a far contradiction to the advice of Thomas Jefferson to “question with boldness even the existence of a god.”<sup>2</sup> So Jefferson, a founding father, would most likely be just as outraged and baffled as I am. How did our nation arrive at this confused state? How did our once secular country find itself so plagued with enormous controversy over the conflicts between religion and democracy? It was not always like this. We will examine this issue more closely later, but first we must begin where the United States began, at a time when a distinction did not have to be made, so that we can understand how we evolved into this crippled state. Religion’s impact on America surpasses just their beliefs; churches, specifically have been responsible for establishing hospitals, nursing homes, schools, universities, childcare programs, concepts of human dignity, and most importantly the concept of democracy. We will begin with our founders and a very wise Frenchman Monsieur de Tocqueville.

The founders were careful to keep the nation free from an oppressive religion that dominated European nations. The Church had grown so overbearing in Europe that it had stifled the birth of individual liberties. Knowing full well of this danger, the founders did not mention God at all in the Constitution. Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States, and perhaps the most vocal of his beliefs on religion and democracy said of the matter:

believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God; that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship; that the legislative powers of the government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an

establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between church and State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore man to all of his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.<sup>3</sup>

Jefferson acted on his conviction that public funding not be spent on religion by refusing to build a church or have a professorship of divinity at the University of Virginia<sup>4</sup>. According to author Robert Tracinski, a member of The Ayn Rand Institute, The Center for the Advancement of Objectivism, “Jefferson knew that the protection of the citizens’ freedom—not the monitoring of their ‘relationship with the Almighty’—is the only proper concern of the government.” It was around this time, when America was maturing as a nation in its own right and developing its own identity, that a foreign ambassador recorded in great detail on this American Experiment.

Alexis de Tocqueville, a French observer of the American Experiment, witnessed this anomaly of a nation firm in its roots in democracy yet with branches moving freely without the restrictions of religion. Tocqueville, a French aristocrat, studied philosophy and law. Later, as a court official, he visited the United States under the pretenses of studying the American prison reforms, and carefully observed the unique American political system<sup>5</sup>. In 1835 he published the first part of *Democracy in America* regarding the importance of religion in a democracy. Tocqueville’s section titled *Influence of Democracy on Religion* offers his insight on the state of religion in a democratic environment.

Tocqueville believed that “the first political institution of American democracy is religion.” Religion, according to Tocqueville, established three critical elements of democracy: a sense of dignity, freedom, and universal equality for each person. Tocqueville noted this when he wrote, “I doubt whether man can ever support at the same time complete religious independence and entire political freedom.”<sup>6</sup> So in this contemporary time of supposed religious independence and political freedom we shall examine the validity of Tocqueville’s predictions and demonstrate whether they were in fact prophetic.

The influence of religion, however, is impossible to strip from a country, and it is because of this influence that religion slowly contaminated the purity of our great nation. The freedom of choice that this democracy granted its citizens diluted the oppression that religion was force feeding. Sadly, as religion infected our system it has blurred the distinction of what is right in the eyes of the law and what is right in the eyes of God. The need to make such a decision is evidence alone of how tightly religion and democracy are intertwined. Democracy is a machine fueled and empowered by the people it serves. Karl Marx, the 19<sup>th</sup> century “philosopher” whose ideas established socialism, called religion “the opium of the masses.” According to Marx, religion is an expression of material realities and economic injustice. Thus, problems in religion

are ultimately problems in society. Religion is not the disease, but merely a symptom of greater problems. It is a tool used by the oppressors to distract citizens from social inequality and exploitation<sup>7</sup>. The issues I will focus on will illustrate how the role of religion in a democracy has augmented into an enveloping conflict between respecting the doctrines of both religion and democracy.

To first examine De Tocqueville’s claims we must understand his perspective and apply it to contemporary examples. According to de Tocqueville, “the chief concern of religion is to purify, to regulate, and to restrain the excessive and exclusive taste for well-being which men feel at periods of equality.”<sup>8</sup> This idealistic opinion on the purpose of religion is quite consistent with beliefs of de Toqueville’s era, and even the faithful would agree with this today. However, it is not that optimistic; religion’s role does not simply end here; it extends further, instilling fear into the faithful and establishing control over them. The incessant fear of damnation forever looms in the minds of the scrupulous. For all the hope religion grants all persons, both common and prominent, it was religion that branded the fear of an eternal nightmarish Hell to all those who “sin.” It is my intention to redefine what religion is to our contemporary society and evaluate what it has done to our once pure nation, and in doing so I will revise and amend what Toqueville failed to foresee.

Religion today, much like Tocqueville predicted, is in fact inseparable from most people. Contrary to what many would think, religion in America today is extremely powerful. A recent study held by The George H. Gallup International Institute for William Moss reveals that Americans’ concerns about society, democracy and the future are profoundly influenced and contingent upon their beliefs about God. The study found that 61% of Americans believe that a democracy would crumble without the widespread belief in God or a Supreme Being. It is also estimated that each month 60% of Americans attend their house of worship. Most Americans claim to believe in a God or universal spirit, and currently levels of attested religious belief are extremely high<sup>9</sup>. Most Americans also believe that their personal God watches over and judges them, as well as performs miracles and makes their presence known at times of need throughout one’s life. Formal education and industrialization are among the highest in the United States, but so are religious beliefs. However, in most other countries, as formal education increases, there is an inverse, and levels of religious beliefs are lower.

To understand how religion has endured throughout the past century, it is important to evaluate the trends and the progressive growth and decline of religion decade by decade. The most significant swings in religious life in the United States occurred during the last sixty to seventy years. Following the Second World War, there was a dramatic increase in church membership, attendance, Bible reading, donations to churches, and building of churches. This upswing was strong until the late 1950s and early 1960s when a decline in religious interest and involvement spread across the nation. The Princeton Religion Research Center Index recently showed that religious belief and practice in America was highest during the 1950s, prior to the social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, which raised doubt in religion and subsequently hurt most religious

institutions<sup>10</sup>. The study's figures identify the contemporary American religious numbers to be very similar to the 1930s and 1940s. According to George Gallup, Jr.

The religious liberty most Americans cherish and celebrate has enabled religion to flourish in many forms, and to become a profound shaper of the American character. Religious liberty has contributed vitality and vigor to the American outlook—an exuberance, a feeling that anything is possible—and often, the courage to bring about difficult but needed changes in society.<sup>10</sup>

Today the United States finds itself at a crossroads between pursuing future advancements through development of better technology and improved science while struggling to uphold and preserve our past and tradition. These two diverging paths are the source of America's trouble. Our society has become so enveloped by religion that we as a nation are once again restrained by conflicting beliefs. What Jefferson did not realize is that although there may not be one religion that dominates, there may, however, be individuals in power with a common religion that influences their decisions and the direction our country moves in. Tocqueville covered this threat in *Democracy in America* when he wrote: “the majority always commands belief,” and because of this they respect only that which “is not contrary to the faith.” It is this direction, guided by our elected officials and the visionaries of today, that will decide how much of our tradition will be abandoned to pay respect to others' beliefs, and what endeavors we will pursue without disrespecting or dishonoring the religion of others.

Religion has reemerged in our society as an inhibitor, which thwarts and blocks efforts of science in controversial issues. Science has become so sophisticated and complex that the common practices of doctors today, such as removing cancerous tumors and restarting stopped hearts, were acts that people believed only God could have performed a few decades ago. The United States has grown so rapidly in the field of medicine and biological research that the question of what is ethical quickly surfaces. Although it is right to question every decision made, discontinuing research and practices on the basis of religion alone is undoubtedly very wrong, and challenges the liberties that our Constitution grants us.

Science continues to defy religion every day. In fact, science is slowly corroding the belief of the young and raising both doubt and outrage across the nation. Ever since the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, the Theory of Evolution has become more and more convincing. Evolution is the transformation over a long period of time from one species to another, and is far more than merely a theory; it is a blatant contradiction to Creationism, the belief that God created man, and is far too controversial to be declared a fact. Today evolution is the central theory of biology, and is an invaluable tool for explaining the presence of millions of fossils and similar evidence, such as the fact that chimpanzee's DNA is 98% identical to humans, about the origins of life forms.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century Creationists have shunned the issue of evolution, totally rejecting it without considering the tremendous evidence that supports it. Enforcement of a Tennessee statute that prohibited teaching the theory of evolution in public school classrooms was addressed in the “Scopes Monkey Trial” of 1925. It was the court's intention to decide whether or not the First Amendment permitted states to ban teaching of a theory that contradicted religious beliefs. Finally, in 1968 the Court ruled in *Epperson vs. Arkansas* that such bans violate the Establishment Clause because their primary purpose is religious. This same rationale was used by the Court in the 1987 case of *Edwards vs. Aguillard* to remove a Louisiana law that mandated biology teachers who taught the theory of evolution to also discuss evidence supporting creation science, or Creationism.<sup>12</sup>

The issue was not settled then. For example, in 1999, the Kansas Board of Education voted to remove evolution from the list of subjects tested on state standardized tests, in effect encouraging local school boards to consider dropping or putting less emphasis on evolution. In 2000, Kansas voters responded to the proposed change by throwing out enough anti-evolution Board members to restore the old science standards. Even more recently, in 2002, the state of Ohio, which currently is considering changes in its science material, had similar conflicts over the issue of evolution being taught in schools.<sup>13</sup> Though the controversy over evolution is a matter that focuses our attention on the developments of the past, the decisions we are faced with today are what will initiate the developments of our future.

Within the past decade a major headlining issue is one over stem cells research, which reaches out to every citizen. Scientists, through the use of private funding, have found considerable evidence that undifferentiated stem cells, which come from human embryos, could be used to develop possibly every kind of tissue. The application of this technology could heal spinal cord injuries, Alzheimer's patients, juvenile diabetes - the possibilities are abounding. There is little controversy over the fact that stem cells do hold a tremendous amount of potential for developing cures and saving lives. However, it is the obtaining of such cells that has sparked the most outrage. The acquisition of such cells is considered by some as the “harvesting human life.” These human embryos are the remaining embryos of in vitro fertilization, used to help couples conceive who cannot do so on their own. Usually the remaining embryos are destroyed, but some are donated to labs for research. So why not, then, use these cells to save life rather than destroy them?

Religion has taught people to respect human life, and the question of when an embryo is considered life is asked. The religious, especially Christians, are the most outraged by this practice, believing it to be the destruction of human life, although the cells would otherwise be destroyed. The fear of cells being produced solely for the purpose of testing is what scares most.

On August 9, 2001 President George W. Bush formally commented on the issue and announced that government funding would be provided for 60 existing stem cell lines and \$250 million on researching the use of use of umbilical core placenta as a

source for stem cells, but no more funding on new stem cells from excess embryos. A council chaired by Dr. Leon Kass, a leading biomedical ethicist from the University of Chicago, was appointed by the President to recommend appropriate guidelines and regulations<sup>14</sup>. Many researchers in the field, however, assert that the remaining stem cell lines' quality is in too poor of a condition to produce substantial results. To circumvent the President's federal limits on stem cell research, voters agreed in California to create a \$3 billion fund to finance research on embryonic stem cells.<sup>15</sup> Other states have followed California's lead by developing similar programs.

Stem cell research and procedural application are issues that will remain feverishly contested for years to come, and many believe that the future of science will prosper from the breakthroughs of stem cell use. These cells could restore lives by healing injuries, and if nothing more, could inspire those who presently cannot be treated with the hope that one day their lives may be restored using stem cells. However, the conviction of those who oppose stem cell use believe the preservation of human life goes to be paramount, and due to religion and the imposed ethics that have tormented our nation with indecisiveness. Often not doing anything is more harmful than doing something, and this may be the case with stem cells

On the opposite side of the spectrum is the concern of destroying human life not for the use of science but for the practice of abortion. Abortion is a topic publicly condemned by the Catholic Church as well as many including George W. Bush who believes it to be morally wrong. Abortion was illegal in the United States until the Supreme Court's decision in the 1973 case *Roe vs. Wade*<sup>16</sup>. Realizing the danger of this decision being overturned, on April 25, 2004, over one million protesters gathered in the National Mall to show their support for abortion rights and to oppose President Bush's policies on women's health issues. Celebrities such as Whoopi Goldberg, Ashley Judd, Kathleen Turner, philanthropist Ted Turner, feminist icon Gloria Steinem, and former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright all proudly spoke to protest President Bush's prospective abortion policies<sup>17</sup>. President Bush seeks to cut government funding for family planning agencies that discuss abortion possibilities with patients. It is the rights that extend to all citizens that are threatened by the faith of a minority, who seek to curtail the American liberty of choice.

The limits religion imposes on our democracy do not only restrain the growth of science, but they oppress our growth as a more diverse society. Democracy has afforded citizens the right of choice, and with this choice people have found new veins of individuality from which to deviate from the rest of society, to find their own niche and individuality. Individuality is promoted by democracy, but assaulted by religion. Religion instead promotes conformity and submission to what is deemed right by the Church and by God. What is conservative and conventional is what is right according to religion. Today, in the United States, people are free to live as they choose to. They may exercise any right, hold any job, celebrate any religion, and practice any sexuality. Sexuality was not a concern of the founding fathers. However, the late twentieth century was an explosion of homosexual acceptance movements, blatantly in opposition to religion, and more specifically Christianity.

Today in the United States homosexuals may live as they choose to, but marriage remains illegal. In 2004, the eleven states of Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, Ohio, Oklahoma, North Dakota, Utah and Oregon voted on whether or not to ban same-sex marriages resulting in an overwhelmingly wide margin in each state banning the marriages. Robert Knight, director of the Culture and Family Institute believes that "the marriage issue was the great iceberg of this election... most people saw only the tip and didn't realize the great mass was affecting races all over the country, right up to the presidential contest."<sup>18</sup> The right of marriage is one that all heterosexual Americans are granted. They may marry whoever whenever they decide. The Constitution does not specify that this right is denied to homosexuals. However, gay marriages are not recognized by the government. The overwhelmingly decisive vote against permitting same-sex marriages is evidence enough of the American reticence influenced by religion. Americans' unwillingness to respect the lifestyles and values of others is what keeps our country divided. If two men pay their taxes, volunteer, drive the speed limit, and do not violate any laws, then why should they be punished because of their lifestyle? Why must homosexuals be excluded from the right to marry? Where in the Constitution, the basis of our laws, does it specify that homosexuals would not be granted this right? It is an outrage that homosexuals are so overtly discriminated against, and at the center of this injustice is religion.

Religion inevitably finds itself deeply embedded in politics as well. Due to the large struggle between ethics and morals in our country, religion, although not forced upon anyone, is impossible to divorce from politics. According to the *Sunday Herald*, "on one side is a traditional church-going Republican electorate, mostly of rural, mid-west and southern states whose conservative Christian values are shaped as much by the pulpit and prayer book as by factional politics. On the other side, the supposedly informed, internationally aware, secular democrats; the party of the urban Pacific and northeast Atlantic states."<sup>19</sup> The faith of citizens today has quickly become a goldmine for politicians who are vote-mongers.

Although many politicians are in fact very religious, the devoutly faithful are easy prey for politicians searching to catch and secure votes. According to social scientist Gerald De Maio, a trend exists between secular liberals and religious traditionalists. Apparently in every presidential election since 1992, about 70%-80% of the secular liberals vote for the democratic candidate, and about two-thirds of the religious traditionalist vote Republican. De Maio also claims that polls have shown that, "about a third saw evangelical Christians as a threat to democracy. More than half thought that they had too much political power. [He believes that] there is this feeling that 'religion in the public square is toxic'."<sup>20</sup>

Democracy in America has divided our nation between the religious and the non-religious and this is most clearly demonstrated in the realm of politics. The presidential election of 2004 divided the nation into the conservative traditional religious and the liberal religious. According to the *Sunday Herald*, "certainly Democrats realize they must now work out why they play so badly with voters for whom faith is an important

issue. Senator Blanche Lincoln, an Arkansas Democrat, says: ‘People are faced with so many problems they cling to faith and prayers. I don’t hesitate to express the importance of my faith. The Democrats have to get comfortable doing that.’”

Two clauses of the First Amendment concern the relationship of government to religion: the Establishment clause and the Free Exercise Clause. Although the clauses were intended by the framers to serve common values, there is some tension between the two. For example, some people might suggest that providing a military chaplain for troops stationed overseas violates the Establishment Clause, while others might suggest that failing to provide a chaplain violates the Free Exercise Clause rights of the same troops.

At an absolute minimum, the Establishment Clause was intended to prohibit the federal government from declaring and financially supporting a national religion, such as existed in many other countries at the time of the nation’s founding. It is far less clear whether the Establishment Clause was also intended to prevent the federal government from supporting Christianity in general. Proponents of a narrow interpretation of the clause point out that the same First Congress that proposed the Bill of Rights also opened its legislative day with prayer and voted to apportion federal dollars to establish Christian mission in the Indian lands. Conversely, persons seeing a far broader meaning in the clause point to writings by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison suggesting the need to establish “a wall of separation” between church and state.<sup>21</sup>

The Establishment Clause remained unquestioned until 1947 when the Supreme Court saw the landmark case of *Everson v Board of Education*. Voting 5 to 4, the Court upheld a state law that reimbursed parents for the cost of busing their children to parochial schools. It was clear from the various opinions in *Everson* that if the state had reimbursed the parochial schools for the cost of providing the transportation, that it would have been found to violate the Establishment Clause. Although in his majority opinion Justice Black wrote of the “wall of separation” that the Constitution maintains between church and state, Black viewed the aid as serving the state’s secular interest in getting kids “safely and expeditiously” to schools. The case is noteworthy for its extensive discussion of the purposes of the Establishment Clause, and for the fact that all nine justices agree that the clause was intended to do far more than merely prohibit the establishment of a state religion.

Subsequent decisions make clear that a majority of justices on the Supreme Court view “the wall” separating church and state more as a shifting, porous barrier. Small factual differences in cases often produce different outcomes. For example, in 1948, the Court found that the practice of inviting religious instructors into public schools to give optional religious instruction violates the Establishment Clause. Then, in the 1952 case of *Zorach v Clauson*, the Court upheld the practice of giving public school students “release time” so that they could attend religious programs in churches in synagogues. Writing for the Court in *Zorach*, Justice Douglas said the Constitution does not require “callous indifference to religion.”<sup>22</sup>

In a lecture delivered at the Ford Hall Forum, on April 20, 1986, Leonard Peikoff addressed the concern of *Religion vs. America*. During Peikoff’s speech he quoted then congressman Jack Kemp on the matter of religion in America, he said:

Religious views lie at the heart of our political system. The inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are based on the belief that each individual is created by God and has a special value in His eyes... Without a common belief in the one God who created us, there could be no freedom and no recourse if a majority were to seek to abrogate the rights of the minority.<sup>23</sup> The congressman’s opinion is one shared by many, however, it is one that ostracizes all those citizens who do not share that same God, nor those who believe in no God at all.

Peikoff followed this quote by describing the how for many politicians who harbor this perspective or a similar one that it is “these men [who] are dedicated to implementing their religious creeds politically; they seem to make these creeds the governing factor in the realm of our personal relations, our clinics and hospitals, and the education of our youth. [These are the people who have] given the adherents of religion a prominence in setting the national agenda that they have not had in this country for generations.”<sup>23</sup>

“There was a flaw in the intellectual foundation of America from the start; the attempt to combine the Enlightenment approach in politics with the Judeo-Christian ethics. For a while, the later element was on the defensive, muted by the eighteenth-century spirit, so that America could gain a foothold, grow to maturity, and become great... by now, the distinctive ideas at the base of America have been largely forgotten or swept aside. They will not be brought back by an appeal to religion.” “There are many good people in the world who accept religion, and many of them hold some good ideas on social questions. I do not dispute that. But their religion is not the solution to our problem; it *is* the problem... Of course, religions must be left free; no philosophic viewpoint, right or wrong, should be interfered with by the state. I do say, however, that it is time for patriots to take a stand—to name publicly what America does depend on, and why that is not Judaism or Christianity... It is time to tell people the unvarnished truth: to stand up for man’s mind and this earth, and against any version of mysticism or religion. It is time to tell people: ‘You must choose between unreason and America. You cannot have both. Take your pick.’”<sup>24</sup> Although audacious and highly offensive to the faithful, Peikoff introduces a reality that America faces today. This reality being that the United States has shifted between the two poles of religion and secularism, both being beneficial and detrimental depending on the perspective. It is necessary for the United States to function in a manner between the two poles, a balance between the two opposing sides, in an effort to appease most citizens. Religion in America has become entangled with the beliefs and values of Americans.

Although religion is clearly vital to Americans, and its importance has surfaced during events and issues discussed earlier, still one must question how religion has changed during the last half century. During the last fifty years alone, America has evolved into a more diverse and highly advanced society, but many Americans may be oblivious to how religion's currents have changed. Curious of how religion has changed in the eyes of those who hold religion closest in their lives, I questioned those who personally have devoted their lives to God. When speaking to Sister Carol Ward, a Dominican Nun for the Catholic Church and Catholic School Principal in south central Los Angeles, I sought answers to more fully understand how religion, at least in Catholicism, has changed in America. According to Sister Ward, during the past few decades religion has become more individualized. Formerly religion had a more primary focus on unity and "brought the family together," yet today fewer people practice and of those who do it is not always their family who accompanies them<sup>25</sup>. Sister Ward's own personal values and beliefs have in fact been molded by her faith and agreed that her own opinions do not deviate much from the positions of the Church.

When asked about issues such stem cell research and same-sex marriages, Ward adamantly spoke against them, believing that both violated God's respect for man. Although steadfast in her beliefs, I was discouraged by how closed-minded one could be. How a school principal would be so unwilling, so inhibited by her faith to accept new ideas and concepts, to explore that which contradicts and confuses to better understand. During the last half century the Catholic Church announced its belief in the evidence of evolution and that there was in fact the possibility of both the creation of God and the creation of evolution. Like any great body invested by with the faith and beliefs of billions, religious institutions such as the Catholic Church must be prudent in their official statements, to not abandon God but to understand and accept that religion must grow with intellect to survive.

Eager for a more inspiring opinion, I spoke with a colleague of Sister Ward, Sister Renia Perea. Sister Perea shared her opinion that religion has in fact changed greatly and adopted a far too powerful role in the lives of some. She emphasized that it is important to be religious but dangerous to permit religion to oppress your beliefs. Often people are willing to accept ideas while their religious convictions persuade them to reject such ideas. Perea believes that it is God who endowed man with self-identity, and the ability to think independently.<sup>26</sup> This trait of man is what enables us to question and seek answers. This skill is how we as people, as a society push on for greater meaning. Our insatiable thirst for knowledge and answers, to question and pursue what is possible, is not what counters the wish of God and religion, but what affirms our beliefs in such higher power entities.

The similarity between all of these issues is that in each of them both religion and democracy influence them, and although it is ultimately democracy that makes the decisions in our country, it is religion that backs the choices that people make. Tocqueville knew almost two centuries ago that people and religion could not be divorced. It was the conviction of the framers of the United States to segregate religion from

government, but it is the people who constitute a government. This is the paradox: how to remove religion from a system so completely entangled with it. Earlier I described religion as infecting our government, Karl Marx called it the "opiate of the people," but in reality religion *is* the people. No matter how you classify one's beliefs, most include the same common doctrines, or at least values. People's values in the United States do not deviate much from one another. Most people value the concept of family, hard work, compassion, and so forth. What religion has become is a security blanket for America; comforting society when it feels threatened or scared of the uncertain future. Religion serves America today as a checkpoint, for safety, to ensure that we do not progress too quickly and do not lose our identity and values in doing so.

The issues examined, such as the right for same-sex marriages, the right to have an abortion, the right to reject the beliefs of Creationism, etc., are all the product of democracy. It is through democracy that choice emerges, and with choice we may discover the unknown and question the validity of the known. It is through democracy that we as a nation identify ourselves, our values, and our convictions. Democracy exposes people to new ideas, both radical and conservative, and introduces possibility. It is the frontier of possibility that we chase dreams and pursue answers, we search for potential and exploit it to the fullest. Religion, however, is primarily established on its doctrines, its beliefs, the thoughts and words dating back centuries, and has little flexibility in accepting new ideas and thoughts.

De Tocqueville was accurate in his realization that man cannot be separated from his religion and would be readily scared without the aid of religion. Democracy has heralded the revolution of science, and with science has come unimaginable possibilities that carry with them innumerable questions over what should and should not be pursued. Science and technology have advanced far more rapidly than society has been ready for. Questions have been raised that neither people nor religion is prepared to answer. Therefore we as a society inherit this responsibility, and must first become acclimated with our current position before we commit ourselves to issues that we are not prepared for. The relationship between religion and democracy has produced a unique synthesis that can both paralyze and catalyze movements in America as we have learned. However, it will be the balance of this marriage of two governing institutions, one of choice and one of faith that will decide the direction that America will travel, the questions we will encounter, and the achievements we will celebrate in the future.

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A large majority of Americans feel that religion is losing influence in public life, according to a 2019 Pew Research Center survey. While some say this is a good thing, many more view it as a negative development, reflecting the broad tendency of Americans to see religion as a positive force in society. At the same time, U.S. adults are resoundingly clear in their belief that religious institutions should stay out of politics. The survey, part of an ongoing effort by the Center to explore the role of trust, facts and democracy in American society, was designed to gauge the public's views about many aspects of religion's role in public life, as well as asking how much U.S. adults trust clergy to provide various kinds of guidance, what messages Americans receive from their religion is compatible with democracy (if the public and religious spheres are kept separately). Moreover, Durkheim ([1912] 2001) focuses on religion as a factor able to detailed evidence on religion influencing politics in Latin America. Driessen (2010:56). notes that: "once the core autonomy prerequisites [of democracy] have been fulfilled" more on the influence on social beliefs and, hence, behaviors. Religion in the United States is diverse, with Christianity and specifically Protestantism being the majority religion, although declining at rapid pace. Various religious faiths have flourished within the United States. Just over 40% of Americans report that religion plays a very important role in their lives, a proportion unique among developed countries. Freedom of religion in the United States is guaranteed in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

This made American colonists by far the most educated people in the world. The ideas of philosophers like Locke and Voltaire were known and discussed (although most Americans would not know the philosophers' names, much less who said what). Revolutionary ideas (such as the concept that rulers rule by the consent of the ruled) flourished in America. A big part of the problem was that the British ruling class never understood that; they truly thought that a small show of force would make the American colonist act sensibly (that is, that they would shut up and do as they were told). Alexis de Tocqueville was the French author of *Democracy in America* (1835), perhaps the best, and certainly the most widely-quoted book ever written about the United States. He was unusual for his time in many ways. One way in which he stood out in nineteenth-century France was his attitude towards religion. Many religious conservatives wanted to preserve a national religion with a special role in the state, and did not think that a secular democracy in which faith would be left to a citizen's private choice would serve that goal. On the other side, many on the nineteenth-century French left thought that Catholicism had to be fought in order to establish real democracy. In contrast, Tocqueville stood out as a friend of religion who was also a friend of freedom. American democracy owes its birth to the influence of a specific form of Christianity: English Puritanism. The Pilgrims, he holds, laid the essential groundwork for America's experiment in self-government. America grew from a specific "point of departure," a political and social state that conditions all that comes after it.[7] This point of departure was provided by the northern settlements. As the author of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville is concerned not with the salvation of souls but with the preservation of a decent political order. Such an order depends, however, on the preservation of commonly held religious beliefs. Here Tocqueville especially emphasizes religion's contribution to sustaining public morality. With its companion volume on religion and society, this second volume of *Evangelicals and Democracy in America* offers the most complete examination yet of the social circumstances and political influence of the millions of Americans who are white evangelical Protestants. Understanding their history and prospects for the future is essential to forming a comprehensive picture of America today.

Table of Contents. Title Page, Copyright. "Let Americans deal with American problems," may be good advice. But, I have spent over 10 years of my life in the United States, so I feel entitled to a few questions that have brewed over the past few years. Fair advice, young lady! But, not today. Prior to starting University in America, I had no interest in politics of my country of nationality or America. I didn't see a reason to care about many things; ignorance was bliss. The constant references to slavery and its continued impact on a first-world nation like America did not make sense till I read "Copper Sun" by Sharon Draper, but that's a story for another article. Nevertheless, I learned, from that book, the power of a well-written narrative over statistics. Again, I digress.