

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Despotism may be able to do without faith, but freedom cannot. . . . How could society escape destruction if, when political ties are relaxed, moral ties are not tightened? And what can be done with a people master of itself if it is not subject to God? (294)¹

The French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville was the greatest thinker to ponder the complex relationship between modern democracy, religion, and freedom. Tocqueville wrote during an era in which post-revolutionary France was making a bumpy and politically painful transition from aristocracy to democracy. A fierce battle between liberals and traditionalists regarding the merits of religion was then in progress, perpetuating the great rifts in society caused by the Revolution (15–18). Tocqueville expended considerable energy attempting to reconcile these two groups. The “spectacle” of their disunion, he lamented near the end of his life, “has weighed on my soul and oppressed it. . . . I feel this today as sharply as I did when young.” No thought “has been more present to my mind” (Tocqueville 1951–, 15(2): 206; my translation).

Tocqueville went to America with his friend Gustave de Beaumont in 1830 ostensibly to study the American prison system, but with the deeper purpose of "examining in detail and as scientifically as possible" all elements of American life (cited in Schleifer 1980, 3; Tocqueville 1860-1866, 5:412). He discovered shortly after his arrival that American religion supported freedom and was universally respected. Believing as he did that French liberals and traditionalists could both learn from America's example, he spent considerable time observing American religion on his journey and later placing his empirical observations in a broad theoretical framework.²

My main object in this book is to understand what Tocqueville learned from these efforts. How, for example, did he perceive the relationship between American democracy and Christianity? Did he consider this relationship troubled or harmonious? What factors, in his view, affected American Christianity's development and what was this religion's role in shaping our national character? What exactly did Tocqueville mean by calling religion the "first" of America's political institutions while praising religious disestablishment (292, 295)? Finally, if Christianity is essential to democratic freedom as Tocqueville suggests, how relevant to contemporary America are his recommendations for strengthening it?

Despite Tocqueville's acknowledged preeminence in American studies, most scholars mention him only in passing, if at all, when dealing with religion's role in American life (see, for example, Carter 1993).³ Those Tocquevillians who have treated his religious-political thought extensively have not related this thought to current issues. These are regrettable omissions. Although Tocqueville studied American religion with nineteenth-century Europeans in mind, his views on this subject may well be useful to us. He is the only great

political philosopher to deal comprehensively with the origin, development, character, and political significance of our country's predominant faith. Given his remarkable foresight, it should not surprise us if his thoughts on this subject shed considerable light on today's political problems.

Unfortunately, these problems abound. Americans in the twilight years of the twentieth century are enjoying little of the buoyant optimism which marked the end of the nineteenth century and even less of our revolutionary generation's sober self-confidence. There is a certain irony in this, since the liberal democratic principles which sparked the American revolution have recently triumphed over Marxism-Leninism just as they helped vanquish fascism and Naziism almost fifty years ago. Our victory in the Cold War signals the end of the only remaining theoretically grounded and globally based challenge to American principles.

Although this victory is a just cause for celebration and pride, a host of grave domestic problems have tarnished its lustre and seriously compromised our political health. The most visible of these are corruption in government, racial conflict, hardcore poverty, broken families, violent crime, and rampant drug use (see Bennett 1993).⁴ Less visible, but more serious, are the spiritual ills which impoverish our private and public lives. Although strong and prosperous as a nation, we seem less able as individuals to enjoy the personal satisfactions promised by our principles. We have also lost much of the trust, mutual respect, and sense of shared values which enable countries to weather unsettling social change and political controversy (Bellah et al. 1991, 3-4; Galston 1991, 6).

Much of the harshness of contemporary American politics may be attributed to an ongoing "culture war" which touches the lives of us all. The frontline battles

in this war involve policy matters such as abortion, welfare, health care, prayer in the public schools, affirmative action, and gay rights. As James Davison Hunter points out, however, these battles are mere skirmishes in a deeper conflict over different moral and metaphysical principles. At the heart of this conflict is a question of ultimate authority: What guide should we use to determine what is good and bad, true and untrue (Hunter 1991, 34, 42, 49, 119)?

Now, as in Tocqueville's time, traditionalists and liberals are adversaries (Hunter 1991, 46).⁵ Traditionalists blame the bulk of our problems on the moral failings of the American people and believe that only respect for an "external, definable, and transcendent" moral authority will restore our psychological and political health (Hunter 1991, 44). For most, this means allegiance to some form of biblical orthodoxy. The bulk of politically active traditionalists today are Protestant evangelicals. Their allies often include conservative Catholics and orthodox Jews whose sympathy with their moral commitments outweighs their antipathy toward fundamentalist theology (Hunter 1991, 45–47).

Liberals hold that private, rational judgment is the only final authority consistent with American principles and the best guide to happiness and truth. They blame our assorted ills on the inability of American political institutions to respond democratically to pressing economic and social needs, and would popularize government, expand individual rights, and above all, reduce economic inequality (Hunter 1991, 113–115). Liberals are generally skeptical of all orthodoxies and consider moral and religious diversity a positive good. Their numbers include avowed secularists as well as Christians, Jews, and Muslims who choose their own level of religious observance on the basis of personal experience and inclination (Hunter 1991, 45).

In recent years, a third, less powerful group, whose members I shall call religious functionalists, has sought to bridge the gap between these bitter opponents. Religious functionalists are liberals who think religion necessary to foster the mores that sustain freedom.⁶ In this respect, they differ from traditionalists who define freedom as righteous living, and from most of their fellow liberals who downplay the link between character and freedom's survival. They are an eclectic bunch, less connected to broad national constituencies than the other two groups, and more difficult to categorize in terms of their overall political and religious views. Some write as Christians who believe that Christian theology supports the principles of liberal democracy. Others, more reticent about their private beliefs, argue the political merits of Christianity strictly on utilitarian grounds.⁷

America's culture war is currently being fought on many fronts—the family, the churches, the schools and universities, the law, electoral politics, and, most important, the court of public opinion (Hunter 1991, 51). Here activists compete, using the weapons of modern technology to pull middle America toward their distinctive moral visions (Hunter 1991, 34, 43, 48). Victory in this competition brings with it the power to shape the “public culture” which orders our lives as citizens (Hunter 1991, 54). This accounts in part for the struggle's peculiar intensity and seeming intractability. At stake, as Hunter points out, is “*the meaning of America*, (his emphasis) who we have been in the past, who we are now, and perhaps most important, who we, as a nation, will aspire to become in the new millenium” (Hunter 1991, 50).

In this study, I analyze and critique Tocqueville's views on some key issues related to this conflict. The first concerns the role of Christianity in the American

founding; the second, the strength and nature of American Christianity today; and the third, the proper role of religion in a free society. I shall call these respectively the historical, the sociological, and the political dimensions of Tocqueville's understanding of American faith.

Needless to say, scholarly controversies surround all three issues. Although my primary goal in studying Tocqueville is to elucidate his thought, I also hope to contribute a Tocquevillian perspective to these disputes. In the rest of this chapter I shall discuss the various points of contention, briefly summarize Tocqueville's position on them, and orient the reader to the chapters to come.

Before proceeding to these matters, however, I must briefly address some preliminary problems relating to the nature and scope of my subject. Tocqueville was a practicing, if not a believing Catholic, and was highly pleased with the Catholic presence in Jacksonian America. His particular focus in *Democracy in America*, however, was on Protestantism, as mine will be in this analysis. Tocqueville believed that American religious mores were and would always be predominantly Protestant (288–290, 435, 640–642). Modern analysts tend to agree despite the fact that America has become much more religiously diverse since Tocqueville wrote. As George Kelly put it:

Although Roman Catholics are, by far, our largest single church . . . few who have lived their lives in the United States would doubt that dissenting Protestantism is the wellspring of our ethos. Despite distinctive Catholic and Jewish contributions to our political, professional, and intellectual life, America is most plausibly to be examined as a land of the avatars and the pathology of Protestantism (Kelly 1983, 207).

In this book, I shall frequently use the term “civil religion” when referring to American Christianity. Since

this usage is currently controversial, a few words about its appropriateness are in order. If religion may roughly be defined as a means through which human beings recognize and revere God, civil religion refers to a religion (or elements of religious belief and practice) which purports to be theocentric, but in fact is designed to serve secular, as opposed to transcendent or other-worldly ends. In 1967, Robert N. Bellah ignited a flurry of interest in civil religion by arguing that such a faith has existed in America since the early days of the Republic (Bellah 1974).⁸ Although he originally used the term to describe a nonsectarian creed which placed America in a theological framework (Bellah 1974, 29), he, as well as others, has referred to aspects of American Christianity itself as a civil religion (Bellah 1976, 57; Rouner 1986, 128; Zuckert 1986, 181–203).⁹

In the past few years, most participants in this debate have rejected the term “civil religion” for a variety of reasons.¹⁰ Some consider the idea of civil religion distasteful, if not politically dangerous, because the word “civil” conjures up an uncritical worship of America and her values (Moltmann 1986, 41–58). Although Bellah dissociated his use of the term from any simple patriotism or statism, he ultimately abandoned it because of these definitional controversies which, in his view, drew attention away from more substantive issues (Bellah 1989, 147).

Others see the term as an academic construct with little or no correspondence to American reality. They believe that the vast majority of Americans are traditional, God-fearing Christians who view civil religion, as Richard John Neuhaus put it, “as a threat to be resisted rather than a benefit to be embraced” (Neuhaus 1986, 103). While these scholars agree that a large number of Americans do share certain theological beliefs about their country, they consider these beliefs an

integral part of American Christianity or a Christian component of a national public philosophy (Mathisen 1989, 134; Neuhaus 1986, 99, 103–109; Wilson 1986, 111–123 esp. 122).

Many of these critics also object to the idea of Christianity as a civil religion strictly on definitional grounds. There are many versions of traditional Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, which differ from each other theologically and ecclesiastically. All of these, however, are theocentric, universal faiths that require belief in the supernatural and obedience to an external moral authority. Their chief purpose is to help human beings attain salvation rather than to strengthen or legitimate political orders, and their attachments to these orders are always subordinate and conditional. Indeed, giving primacy to earthly things at the expense of faith is considered idolatry, the primary evil in the biblical canon. Thus, to refer to these types of Christianity as civil religions, the argument goes, grossly misrepresents them. If, on the other hand, a refashioned version of Christianity no longer serves transcendent, transnational ends, it may be a civil religion, but it is not a genuine biblical faith (Herberg 1974, 86–87; Neuhaus 1986, 101–103).

These criticisms have some validity. To speak of American Christianity only as a civil religion is unjust to the faith and to the self-understanding of many Americans. It also oversimplifies, reducing a multifaceted phenomenon to one of its more salient parts. We shall therefore not equate the two. Instead, we shall use the term “civil religion” to refer to mainline Christianity, which Wade Clark Roof defines as “the dominant, culturally established religious faiths that are closely associated with prevailing social values and mores” (Roof 1983, 131). This excludes Protestant evangelicalism from the category as well as the conservative, Rome-oriented

branch of American Catholicism. It does include, however, the vast majority of American churches today as well as the vast majority of American churches Tocqueville observed and admired.¹¹

As Tocqueville will show us, mainline Christianity was and is qualitatively different from traditional Christianity in important respects. The key difference concerns the locus of moral authority. In contrast to the traditional faiths, our mainline faiths, for the most part, make the individual, rather than divine revelation, the ultimate arbiter of duty and truth. This shift makes them more anthropocentric than theocentric, and more compatible with secular than with biblical morality. Historically, these faiths strengthened our national character, contributed to our economic prosperity, and muted religious conflict in ways that traditional Christianity could never do. Although mainline American Christianity was originally otherworldly and theocentric, by Tocqueville's time it had been "civilized" in ways that made these political accomplishments possible. And it was no longer a genuine biblical faith.

RELIGION AND THE AMERICAN FOUNDING

Serious attempts to understand our nation's history usually start by examining our origins because, as most Americanists would agree, our founding decisively shaped our regime. The majority of these scholars trace our beginnings to a philosophical rather than to a religious tradition and point most frequently to the British philosopher John Locke as America's intellectual forebear.¹² According to this view, Locke's political thought as it appears in his *Two Treatises on Government* and *A Letter on Toleration* greatly influenced Thomas Jefferson and the Framers of the Constitution.

Jefferson set forth America's basic political principles in the Declaration of Independence, and the "Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom," so the argument goes, building on the idea that all human beings have an equal natural right to freedom. The Framers established a representative democracy based on these principles and designed the Constitution to protect freedom by fragmenting political and social power. With the adoption of the First Amendment, they formally relegated religion to the private sphere, thereby forever preventing it from hindering their secular aims.

In recent years, a growing number of scholars have maintained that Christianity had the greatest influence on our founding. Some of these argue that the Framers themselves were religious and that their piety influenced their work.¹³ Others, however, contend that the Puritans founded America by establishing biblical principles as the basis of our political life.¹⁴ In their view, the most important of these principles was the idea of the covenant, or a communal agreement sanctioned by God. Puritan covenants, they maintain, were the major theoretical sources for American constitutionalism, shaping both our political institutions and our national character in a variety of ways.¹⁵

THE SECULARIZATION DEBATE

The scholarly dispute over the nature, strength, and direction of American religion today is generally known as the "secularization debate." Peter L. Berger defines secularization as the "process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols" (Berger 1967, 106). Those who believe that America has gradually become more secular give a variety of explanations which are not always mutually exclusive. Some contend that the

forces of modernity (e.g., science, technology, industrialization, and urbanization) are incompatible with biblical religion, and that America as the vanguard modern nation cannot sustain a vital Christian faith. A Marxist version of this argument holds that Christianity is a capitalist tool of oppression destined for oblivion as the masses become more politically aware (Wald 1987, 3–6). Finally, others believe that secularization resulted from the spread of enlightenment philosophy at the expense of biblical faith (Kristol 1991, 22).

Dissenters from this view generally fall into two groups. The first concedes that America has recently become more irreligious, but argues that this trend is neither as irreversible nor as pervasive as it once appeared (Berger 1983, 14). The second group, believing secularization a figment of the academic imagination, cites empirical evidence to show that Americans have been consistently religious at least since the early 1920s (Caplow et al. 1983, 36, 280; Gallup and Castelli 1989, 4; Greeley 1989 8, 116, 128; Wald 1987 7–10). As Neuhaus put it, “the democratic reality, even, if you will, the raw demographic reality, is that most Americans derive their values and visions from the biblical tradition” (Neuhaus 1984, 139).

A recent scientific study of American public opinion appears to support this contention. In their book, *The People's Religion: American Faith in the 90's*, George Gallup, Jr. and Jim Castelli report that over 90 percent of all Americans believe in God, 88 percent never doubted His existence, and 90 percent pray; 80 percent believe in miracles and divine reward and punishment; and a large majority claim church membership, believe in life after death, and respect the religious authority of the Bible, deeming it the literal or inspired word of God (Gallup and Castelli 1989, 4, 16, 45, 56, 60).

Data such as this has led Gallup and Castelli to conclude that the "degree of religious orthodoxy found among Americans is simply amazing." They continue:

A country in which such large proportions of the population believe in a personal God who will call them to Judgment Day to determine how they spend the after-life; in which so many believe that God has a plan for their lives and communicates with them; in which one-third report intense, life-changing religious experiences; in which so many worship Jesus Christ—such a nation cannot by any stretch of the imagination be described as secular in its core beliefs (Gallup and Castelli 1989, 90).

The "core beliefs" that shape a nation's character are, as Gallup and Castelli suggest, those opinions about God, human nature, the meaning of life, and the after-life that form the basis of almost every human action. If America's core beliefs are truly orthodox, that is if they derive from traditional Christianity, then Gallup and Castelli's evidence would seem to discredit the secularization theory.

There is other evidence in *The People's Religion*, however, which supports the proponents of this theory. We learn in the book, for example, that American religiosity though widespread, is largely superficial. It does not deeply affect the mores of most Americans, who tend to follow their own independent judgment rather than religious authority when dealing with life's problems. Moreover, a large number of nominal Christians neither attend church nor participate actively in congregational affairs. Finally, only a small number of Americans read the Bible frequently, or possess even the most rudimentary knowledge of their faith:

Fewer than half of all adults can name Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as the four Gospels of the New Testament, while many do not know that Jesus had twelve

disciples or that he was born in Bethlehem. In addition, a large majority of Americans believe that the Ten Commandments are still valid rules for living today, but they have a tough time recalling exactly what those rules are (Gallup and Castelli 1989 60, 21, 69, 90).

Gallup and Castelli fail to resolve this paradox, perhaps because they haven't sufficiently reflected on the nature of Christian orthodoxy. Virtually all forms of traditional Christianity require believers to know and to understand the central tenets of their faith, to submit unconditionally to God's will as revealed in Scripture, and to act on the basis of their religious commitments (Tipton 1983, 81, 82). If American Christians fail to meet these requirements, their degree of orthodoxy may be "simply amazing" but not in the way these writers suggest.

RELIGION AND AMERICAN POLITICAL LIFE

Protestant evangelicals believe, as did their Puritan ancestors, that America's founding was divinely inspired and that the Bible should ultimately rule our political life (Hunter 1991, 109–113). Some evangelicals reject religious disestablishment altogether in favor of a theocratic model of government based on Old Testament law (Hunter 1991, 262). Theocracy, they hope, will rid America of her present corruption and make her the moving force in a worldwide Christian revival (Wuthnow 1988, 396). More mainstream evangelicals would merely strengthen America's national character by selecting "godly" leadership and legalizing certain elements of biblical morality (Hunter 1991, 8, 112). Their model for American church-state relations is the informal establishment of Protestantism that existed in this country throughout most of the nineteenth century (Neuhaus 1984, 93).

Liberals have dominated the American church-state debate for the past several decades, although their power has waned considerably in recent years. In addition to arguing for a secular founding, they oppose all public aid to religion, no matter how general, on the grounds that it violates the rights of the irreligious. This "strict separationist" position currently informs the Supreme Court's interpretation of the First Amendment's Establishment Clause. The state, according to this view, "can do nothing which involves governmental support of religion or which is favorable to the cultivation of religious interests" (cited in O'Brien 1991, 644). Although some strict separationists defend this principle on religious grounds, most view it as the best means for ridding public life of all Christian influence (Neuhaus 1992, 13-17).

As we have seen, religious functionalists take a middle position, arguing that while America's ultimate purpose is to promote freedom, religion is a vital means to this end. I shall set forth their general argument in some detail because, as we shall see, it comes closest to approximating Tocqueville's view of religion's proper political role. The nerve of this argument is that only religion can foster the mores needed to insure that free institutions function properly. These include the character-strengthening virtues which indirectly guard freedom as well as certain beliefs regarding the sanctity of rights which protect freedom directly. Religion, according to this argument, also gives freedom a positive dimension reminding us of our social duties and our spiritual needs. Finally, it teaches that the poor, the marginal, and the vulnerable require protection and respect (see Neuhaus, 1984, 21, 75-76, 92-93, 118, 140).

Although religious functionalists disagree over the extent to which Christianity informed our founding, most view the late eighteenth-century Founders as allies in their fight to legitimize a political role for American

religion today. Thus their writings often contain classic statements by these men that link America's political health to widespread religious belief (see, for example, Galston 1991, 264).

One of the most frequently cited of these appears in George Washington's Farewell Address. "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity," Washington (or Hamilton) wrote, "Religion and morality are indispensable supports. . . . 'Tis substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government" (Washington 1940, 229). Another favorite is a famous passage from Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Despite his skepticism toward revealed religion, Jefferson wrote that the only security for the "liberties of a nation" is "a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God" (Jefferson 1944, 278).

Richard John Neuhaus makes a strong contemporary argument for religious functionalism in his recent book, *The Naked Public Square*. Neuhaus links America's moral-political crisis to fundamentalist and liberal errors regarding the proper role of religion in our public life. His first quarrel is with those Protestant evangelicals who would impose their faith on the country at large. Neuhaus strongly opposes their irrationality, their intolerance, and their authoritarian theological claims. "Whatever may be the alternatives to secularistic views of American society," he writes, "they cannot be permitted to violate the imperatives of pluralism or to undo the great constitutional achievement represented by the 'free exercise' and 'no establishment' clauses of the First Amendment" (Neuhaus 1984, 8, 36-37, 52; Neuhaus 1986, 107).

Neuhaus' chief adversaries, though, are the liberals who would remove religion entirely from our public life. Their goal, as he interprets it, is to establish a "naked

public square" where policies are discussed and implemented without reference to faith. Neuhaus thinks this goal is chimerical because, in the last analysis, policy is always based on "moral judgments of an ultimate nature" (Neuhaus 1984, 82). Rather than cleansing American politics of faith, today's liberals, he maintains, have merely replaced its Christian foundations with secular humanism, an *ersatz* religion which strips life of transcendent meaning. According to Neuhaus, secular humanism has contributed significantly to our current moral crisis by detaching the public understanding of freedom from its traditional religious restraints. Its long-term tendency is to promote totalitarianism, both by removing religion as a check to the state's ambitions and by creating a spiritual void which feeds these ambitions (Neuhaus 1984, 24-25, 80, 82, 86-87; see also Carter 1993, 34-39, 51-56).

Neuhaus wants to restore religion to its once prominent instrumental role in American public life. His first goal is to engage American churches and synagogues in a dialogue which would reconstruct a national public philosophy based on our common religious values. This public philosophy would be rationally defensible and inclusive despite its particularistic religious roots (Neuhaus 1986, 98-110, esp. 105-109). His second goal is to reinstitute the non-preferential government support and encouragement for religion which existed for most of our history. Thus, he backs a variety of policies currently proscribed by the Supreme Court including government aid to religious education and the display of religious symbols in public places (Neuhaus 1984, 148, 152; Neuhaus 1990, 64-65; Neuhaus 1992, 13-18).

Neuhaus talks mostly about the public rather than the private dimensions of American religiosity because he thinks that the religious mores of the American people

are orthodox and strong (Neuhaus 1984, 113). In this respect, he parts company with other religious functionalists who accept the secularization theory (see, for example, Kristol 1991).¹⁶ This issue of Christianity's popular strength is obviously of great concern to all parties interested in defining religion's public role. If popular Christianity is weak, those favoring such a role must revitalize it before all else, while those opposing it need only stay the course. If popular Christianity is strong, however, the first group can focus on changing public policy as Neuhaus suggests, while the second group must redouble its efforts at popular enlightenment.

TOCQUEVILLE'S VIEWS

Tocqueville considered the Puritans America's founders, thereby supporting those scholars who claim that Christianity decisively influenced the nature of our regime. His case for a Puritan founding rests on the premise that the Puritans shaped our national character and that character is more vital than even the best written constitution to the maintenance of freedom.

While Tocqueville regarded America as the most Christian country in the world in the 1830s, he was an early proponent of the secularization theory, at least as it applies to the West. Tocqueville considered democracy responsible for secularization as well as for modernization and the spread of enlightenment philosophy. Although he occasionally suggested that democracy is hospitable to biblical faith, that Christianity is wholly democratic in principle, and that God himself set the democratic revolution in motion, his final judgment was that equality had a corrosive effect on religion. While he admired American Christianity, he concluded that religion had less influence on America's national character

in the 1830s than certain secular moral principles based on self-interest.

This judgment made Tocqueville quite guarded about the future of American Christianity and its long-term ability to contribute to our country's political health. In the end he feared that democratic skepticism would deepen the widespread doubt and indifference already visible in the 1830s and would lead Americans to embrace materialist philosophies hostile to freedom.

Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America* in part to teach democratic statesmen and moralists how to make religion serve the cause of freedom in a predominantly secular age. His emphasis on religion's political importance made him a religious functionalist or as he called himself, a "liberal of a new kind" (Tocqueville 1860–1866, 5: 431; my translation). As a liberal, he opposed all forms of biblical orthodoxy, considering them hostile in principle to freedom. He also, however, rejected the prevailing liberal view that free, democratic societies can easily survive without some type of widespread religious belief.

Although a practicing Catholic, Tocqueville was part of a French philosophical tradition that sought to replace traditional Christianity with a freedom-oriented civil religion. Building on the thought of Montesquieu and Rousseau, Tocqueville developed a reasonable form of Christianity which he considered more suitable for modern democracy than the prevailing orthodoxies. Tocqueville believed that America of the 1830s had already incorporated certain elements of this civil creed into its mores and that America's religious political arrangements could serve in important respects as a model for France.

At the same time, however, he prepared his readers for a future in which Christianity might be too weak to be politically useful. To this end he set forth a multifaceted secular strategy for preserving freedom which

complemented his argument for civil religion.

The next three chapters of this book set forth the theoretical framework within which Tocqueville makes his case. Chapter 2 discusses Tocqueville's overall approach to religion, focusing on his personal religious beliefs, their bearing on his political thought, and his stature as a political philosopher. Chapter 3 examines Tocqueville's civil version of Christianity in detail, paying special attention to its democratic components and its intellectual roots. Chapter 4 explores Tocqueville's views on how statesmen can use religion to promote freedom and why French statesmen failed in this regard.

Chapters 5 through 8 deal directly with Tocqueville's thoughts on American religion and politics. Chapter 5 discusses his analysis of America's Puritan founding and the various factors that transformed traditional American Protestantism into a civil religion. Chapter 6 discusses Tocqueville's understanding of how democracy threatens freedom and how religion protected it in Jacksonian America. Chapter 7 examines the weaknesses of American religion during this time and what it consequently failed to do for the cause of freedom. Chapter 8 discusses the grounds for Tocqueville's pessimism regarding American religion's future and the tasks he sets for American statesmen and moralists in light of this pessimism.

Chapter 9 evaluates Tocqueville's overall analysis, paying special attention to those parts which bear on our current moral-political difficulties. I argue that despite its flaws, this analysis is an indispensable guide to understanding and addressing these difficulties. I conclude by suggesting that popular belief in a "civil" version of Christianity properly attuned to current needs can better serve the cause of freedom than either widespread religious orthodoxy or the widespread absence of faith.