

Tocqueville's Optimism for Catholicism:

Alexis de Tocqueville, a Frenchman and a Catholic, visited the United States of America in 1831 for approximately eleven months. During his visit, he went to the first Catholic basilica, *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, in the autumn of the same year. When he returned to France, his native land, he wrote a book entitled: *Democracy in America*.

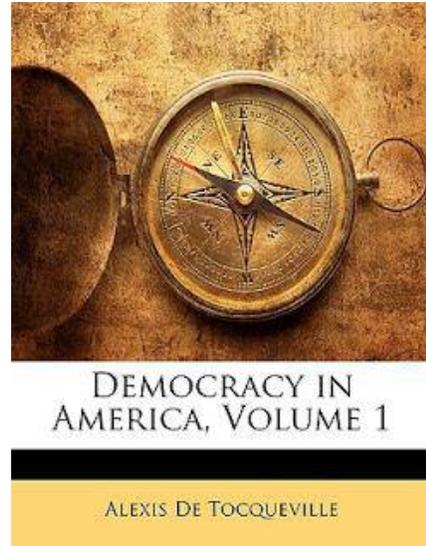
Being well versed in history and in the Catholic Faith, Tocqueville accurately foresaw the challenges American democracy would face. He even predicted that Christianity in America would tend towards one of two destinies. "Our posterity," he said, "will tend more and more to a single division in two parts- some relinquishing Christianity entirely, and others returning to the bosom of the Catholic Church."

Indeed, he seemed to think that Catholicism was not only the most compatible with democracy, out of all the Christian churches, but it would be the last viable option for Christians in an unchristian America.

An excerpt from *Democracy in America*, 1831-32:

"Amongst the various sects of Christianity, Catholicism seems to me to be one of those which are most favorable to the equality of conditions. In the Catholic Church, the religious community is composed of only two elements, the priests and the people. The priest alone rises above the rank of his flock, all below him are equal. On doctrinal points the Catholic faith places all human capacities upon the same level; it subjects the wise and the ignorant, the man of genius and the vulgar crowd, to the details of the same creed; it imposes the same observances upon the rich and needy, it inflicts the same austerities upon the strong and the weak, it listens to no compromise with mortal man, but, reducing all the human race to one standard, it confounds all the distinctions of society at the foot of the same altar, even as they are confounded in the sight of God. If Catholicism predisposes the faithful to obedience, it certainly does not prepare them for inequality; but the contrary may be said of Protestantism, which generally tends to make men independent, more than to render them equal.

America is the most democratic country in the world and at the same time it is the country in which the Roman Catholic religion makes the most progress. Men living in democratic ages are very prone to shake off all religious authority; but if they consent to subject to themselves to any authority of this kind, they choose that it should be single and uniform. Religious powers not radiating from a common center are naturally repugnant to their minds... The men of our day are naturally disposed to believe; but as soon as they any religion, they immediately find in



themselves a latent desire which urges them unconsciously towards Catholicism. Many of the doctrines and the practices of the Roman Catholic Church astonish them; but they feel a secret admiration for its discipline, its great unity attracts them...our posterity will tend more and more to a single division in two parts- some relinquishing Christianity entirely, and others returning to the bosom of the Catholic Church."