

Catholicism (Catholic Church):

In his correspondence with Gobineau, Tocqueville simultaneously affirms being of the Catholic religion — "the religion I profess" — and not having faith; but belonging to a religion and faith properly speaking belong to two different orders. Since the age of sixteen, Alexis had lost all belief in the dogmas of the Catholic Church and the foundations of Christianity: these truths of faith, starting with original sin, clashed with his reason. He is therefore of Catholic confession (or "profession") without sharing what grounds Catholicism (or Christianity).

In a letter from 1824 to Abbé Lesueur of which only a part remains (the rest having been cut out with scissors by his wife when she was preparing the edition of the *Complete Works* with Beaumont), the content is nevertheless known to us, in large part, by the answer made to Alexis by Abbé Lesueur on September 8, 1824: he affirms that he cannot subscribe to the dogmas that constitute the basis of the Creed, foremost among which is that of original sin.

During his voyage to the United States, he remains concerned about the situation of Catholicism in the country, and he evidently wishes for it to progress. During the brief stay he makes in Lower Canada, he notes with satisfaction the solidity and quality of a democratic Catholicism of resistance. After his trip to England, he evokes in a letter to Lord Radnor the situation of Catholicism in France since the Revolution, underscoring how its vitality is inversely proportional to the ties uniting it to political power; he also evokes how, under the July Monarchy (which was very reserved vis-à-vis the Church), the Lenten sermons preached by Lacordaire attracted a large crowd of young people to Notre-Dame de Paris.

But this interest would soon prove disappointing, and Tocqueville would be increasingly annoyed by the positions taken by the bishops—for example, when Mgr Robiou, Bishop of Coutances, criticized depositors at the savings bank. He is furious when Veuillot and the Catholic party relaunch, for purely polemical purposes, the dispute over education in 1842-43. At the same time, when he drafts a new law on the penitentiary system, he clashes once again with the Catholic hierarchy, this time in the person of Mgr Morichini, the apostolic nuncio, who denounces a Protestant practice in the prison system that Tocqueville wished to implement!

Finally, he is very hostile to the drift of the papacy when Pius IX steers the Catholic Church against the tide of History; in this, he is close to Lamennais and the early positions of Lacordaire, whose alignment with Rome constitutes, for him, an error and a fault: "I read Lacordaire's brochure, which seems to me to constitute a bad book and even, if I am not mistaken, a bad deed."

Tocqueville considers himself Catholic to maintain his affiliation to the religion in which he had been raised; his friend Corcelle considers him closer to Protestantism than to Catholicism, which, for him, is not truly a compliment. More than a Catholic, one must see in him an agnostic very attached to the values and the message of early Christianity, to the texts of the Gospel, and singularly the Beatitudes and the Epistle to the Galatians (3:28):

"I am not a believer (which I am far from saying to boast) but, unbeliever though I may be, I have never been able to prevent myself from feeling deep emotion while reading the Gospel," he writes to Gobineau on October 2, 1843.

