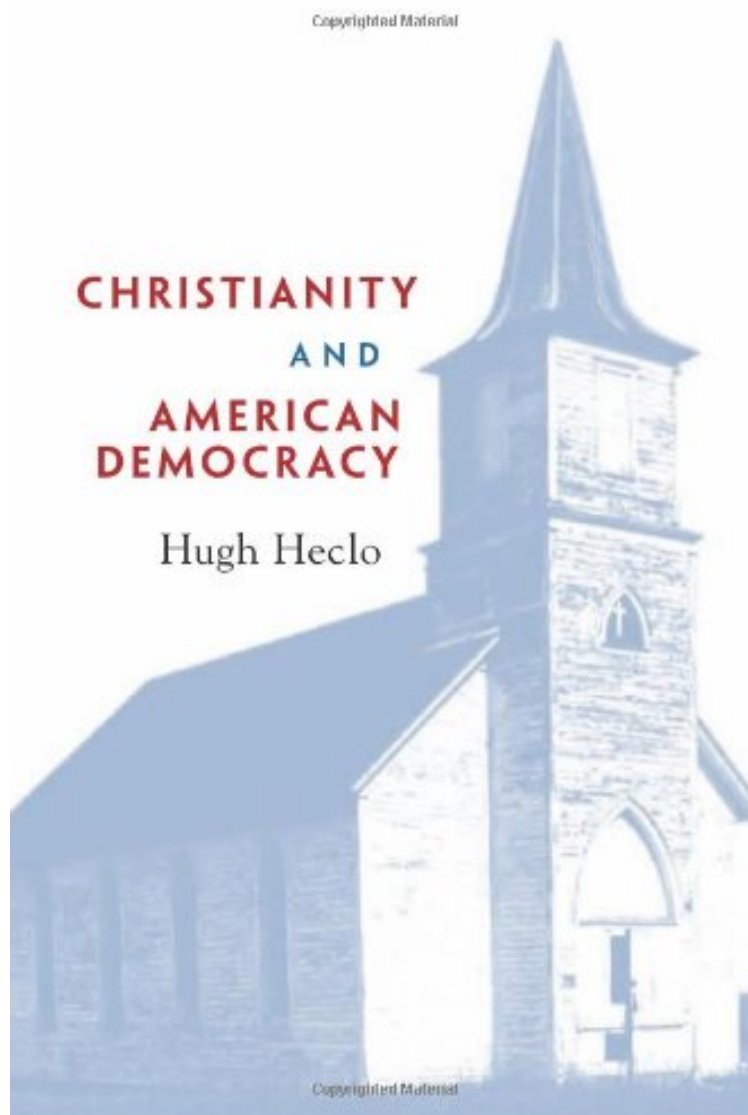


# Christianity and American Democracy (The Alexis de Tocqueville Lectures on American Politics)

*Hugh Hecla*

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**Hugh Hecla : Christianity and American Democracy (The Alexis de Tocqueville Lectures on American Politics)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Christianity and American Democracy (The Alexis de Tocqueville Lectures on American Politics):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Coherent questions and answers on a puzzling topic By Cultural ghost Obviously Christianity has something to do with America, but what about its democracy? Today most

commentary about this topic is either polemical or vapid. This book instead asks what did/does religion contribute to America's successful democracy. Non-Americans will appreciate the clarity of this book's presentation, which is intelligent but not too laden with academic jargon. Americans will probably find it most difficult, because it forces them to look around and inside, touching sentiments that all Americans have.

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Outstanding -- Should Required for All Christians  
By David M. Dougherty  
This book is a collection of five lectures or essays on the partnership of Christianity and democratic forces in the American republic. The first, "Christianity and Democracy in America," by Hugh Hecló is by far the most important and longest (144 pages.) Mary Bane contributed 23 pages on "Democracy and Catholic Christianity in America" in the weakest of the essays. That is followed by Michael Kazin, "Pluralism is Hard Work -- and the Work is Never Done" (18 pages), Alan Wolfe, "Whose Christianity? Whose Democracy?" (14 pages), and finally Hecló again with "Reconsidering Christianity and American Democracy" (34 pages.) Simply put, the first essay would be enough by itself to rate five stars. Hecló initially dwells on De Tocqueville's seminal observations on the American citizenry and their republic, but his view is limited by his Deist background and the fact that he was, well, French. The United States did not have an official state religion as in all European countries (France was Roman Catholic), and Christianity, that is, Protestant Christianity, in America was highly supportive of democratic institutions even when those institutions did not support Christianity. Latitudinarianism was the norm, and even Roman Catholics in America before the coming of the Catholic Irish in the 1840s freely espoused latitudinarianism and their own independence from Rome. Democracy was workable in the U.S. because of its "moral calculus": that is republican government requires virtuous citizens to be effective, virtue requires morality, and morality required religion and a responsibility to a high power than oneself. If anyone wants to look at the current U.S. political situation under attack by Progressives, there is the answer why Progressivism does not and will not work. As defined in the U.S., freedom was not the absence of controls, but rather self-control from a combination of individual sovereignty and moral responsibility. On that basis, democracy was not workable in Europe with its legal system based not in the people, but being ordained by a King, Emperor or supreme religious authority and imposed on their subjects. The U.S. functioned under Common Law (some say Natural Law), direct from God to the people who then elect representatives to administer their law, while Europe functioned under Civil Law from God to King and imposed on the subjects. Further, in the U.S., a shared religion or theology was not required -- only a shared morality. That was something new in history and has not proven to be exportable to other cultures. Almost unique in the annals of history, the U.S. has experienced no religious wars. The U.S.'s historical outlook is strange (maybe incomprehensible) to foreigners because the establishment of the U.S. republic was seen by its citizens as beginning the "New Age" prophesized in the Bible. The U.S. was therefore an exceptional nation divinely inspired to bring democracy and freedom to the entire world. Belief in the "Common Man" (and Common Law) made the American Protestant an autonomous individual with his liberty ensured by his own conscience. That contrasted sharply with the European idea, still prevalent today, of the individual adhering to precepts and orders passed down from some supreme authority, and even his religious beliefs being determined by dogma emanating from Church authorities. This problem is addressed weakly in the second essay, namely can a Roman Catholic be a full functioning member in a republic which relies on individual morality and responsibility? The experiment in the U.S. with Roman Catholicism has been mixed, with Catholics forming authoritarian political machines in large cities (Nancy Pelosi's family controlled one of these), and replacing individual self-control with control by Church doctrine. The stress on individual morality and self-control is loosened as an individual drifts from Protestant Christianity into other religions or atheism. The citizen then becomes more easily self-centered, and subject to no judgments by himself or others. In our current time the idea of being non-judgmental has gained popularity, with the resulting loss of morality, virtue, and activity as a useful citizen. The increase of secularization, especially in American schools, has brought about a steep decline in citizenship as a result of its de-emphasizing religion and its moral and charitable structures. I could go on and on with the various points and issues raised by these provocative and informative essays, but the reader gets the idea, I'm sure. Christianity needs to make no apology for its involvement in American democracy, and indeed, our representative republic couldn't have been formed or lived so long without it. What the future will bring under the stunning force of secular Progressivism, only the future can tell. This work is highly recommended, especially to those Christians under attack today for "clinging to their God, their guns, etc." Personal self-control and responsibility is not yet completely dead, nor does anyone have to apologize for it.

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Refreshing  
By cdandrea  
Hecló's is a vital and thoughtful voice added to the American discussion -- dealing with a subject, in this case, that the academic machine is typically all too eager to ignore. The book's insights are brisk, well-shaped, and many-layered.

Christianity, not religion in general, has been important for American democracy. With this bold thesis, Hugh Hecló offers a panoramic view of how Christianity and democracy have shaped each other. Hecló shows that amid deeply felt religious differences, a Protestant colonial society gradually convinced itself of the truly Christian reasons for, as well as the enlightened political advantages of, religious liberty. By the mid-twentieth century, American democracy and Christianity appeared locked in a mutual embrace. But it was a problematic union vulnerable to fundamental challenge

in the Sixties. Despite the subsequent rise of the religious right and glib talk of a conservative Republican theocracy, Hecllo sees a longer-term, reciprocal estrangement between Christianity and American democracy. Responding to his challenging argument, Mary Jo Bane, Michael Kazin, and Alan Wolfe criticize, qualify, and amend it. Hecllo's rejoinder suggests why both secularists and Christians should worry about a coming rupture between the Christian and democratic faiths. The result is a lively debate about a momentous tension in American public life.

In this compelling volume, Hugh Hecllo is exceedingly precise on what he takes Christianity and democracy to mean; on what Alexis de Tocqueville thought about the two; and on why he feels the successful American confluence of Christianity and democracy has been under grave threat since the 1960s. The admirable precision of Hecllo's argument elicits, in turn, admirably precise rejoinders from three distinguished scholars. The result is a very fine book on a very important subject. (Mark A. Noll, University of Notre Dame, author of *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*) Hecllo makes a strong case for the importance of Christianity in the shaping of American democracy. (E. J. Eisenach *Choice* 2007-11-01) Hugh Hecllo offers an elegant and thoughtful essay in *Christianity and American Democracy*, together with responses by two political scientists and a historian. Hecllo argues that not only does American democracy have a Christianity problem, but Christianity has a democracy problem. There is an inherent tension between religious commitment and political allegiance and reconciling them is always a fudge of some kind. Hecllo rehearses, lucidly and economically, the history of America's different modes of fudging the issue. He documents the input of Christian ideas into the development of the democratic concept of the individual. Hugh Hecllo's book shows clearly that America's culture wars are just a specific case of the general problem of religion in democratic pluralist polities. (Bernice Martin *Times Literary Supplement* 2008-04-16) Let me say it straight out: Hugh Hecllo's *Christianity and American Democracy* is one of the most suggestive books on religion and the public square to have appeared in some years. (Richard John Neuhaus *First Things* 2007-10-01) [A] deeply engaging book. Hecllo's book performs a valuable service. (Thomas E. Schneider *Claremont of Books* 2008-06-01) About the Author: Hugh Hecllo is Robinson Professor of Public Affairs, George Mason University. Mary Jo Bane is Thornton Bradshaw Professor of Public Policy and Management at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Michael Kazin is Professor of History, Georgetown University. Alan Wolfe is Director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life and Professor of Political Science, Boston College. Theda Skocpol is Victor S. Thomas Professor of Government and Sociology at Harvard University. Her previous works include the prize-winning *States and Social Revolutions*.