

Edouard Laboulaye, Liberal and Romantic Catholic

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Edouard René Lefebvre de Laboulaye was in many ways a typical intellectual of the Third Republic: he was professor at the Collège de France, author of multi-volume tomes and dozens of journal articles on history and political philosophy, closely connected to the republican elite and inevitably dressed in a dark suit that was almost Quakerish in its austerity.¹ Laboulaye was France's foremost authority on the United States in the 1860s, heir to Alexis de Tocqueville's role as the interpreter of American democracy across the Atlantic. In his decades-long academic career, he published a series of books on history and politics, including a three-volume *Histoire des États Unis* and a translation of the works of the American Unitarian William Ellery Channing. He most famously expressed his appreciation for America with the Statue of Liberty, plans for which he initiated in 1865.

Unlike many academics of his generation, Laboulaye also dabbled in the literature of what we might call fantasy or science fiction. He created a fictional alter ego, the doctor René Lefebvre, one-time resident of the town of Paris, Massachusetts and of the insane asylum in Paris, France. The doctor is the hero of Laboulaye's 1863 novel called *Paris en Amérique*, in which a mesmerist transports the entire city of Paris to the state of Massachusetts. Laboulaye's novel suggests that the positivist academic owed intellectual debts to the romanticism of the early nineteenth century. Born in 1811, Laboulaye was a member of France's romantic generation of *enfants du siècle* whose consciousness was shaped by the task of assessing the legacy of the French Revolution. In addition to analyzing sources and writing meticulous footnotes, the stern professor imaginatively projected himself into his research: the fictional Dr Lefebvre initially expresses French

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¹ Walter D. Gray, *Interpreting American Democracy in France: The Career of Edouard Laboulaye, 1811-1883* (Newark, 1994), 31.

chauvinism and disdains New World naiveté but ultimately comes to appreciate the virtues of American society. In particular, the Americanized doctor of the end of the novel values the cohesiveness of his adopted community. The US Civil War, the climax of Laboulaye's novel, challenges the citizens of Paris, Massachusetts in many of the same ways that the Revolution challenged the French men and women of Laboulaye's parents' generation. In the role of Dr Lefebvre, Laboulaye could imagine and test possible responses to social and political crisis.

The Parisians of Massachusetts are able to preserve union and liberty in time of emergency, Dr Lefebvre learns, because of the intensity of their religious devotion. As devout believers, albeit members of a wide variety of congregations, the doctor's fellow citizens place the interests of the community above their own and thus ensure the survival of the Union. Re-visiting Paris in America today suggests ways for historians to re-evaluate the role of religion, especially Catholicism, in France's liberal tradition. Both Laboulaye and Lefebvre were Catholic and the emphasis on religion in the professor's work suggests he did not view liberalism and Catholicism as antithetical. Close attention to Laboulaye's writing – and especially to his romantic admiration for the fictional American Paris – indicates that he believed that Catholicism could play a role in reconciling the divisions in French culture and society that were the legacy of the Revolution.²

Laboulaye's private life is not well known and there is some dispute among historians about his own religious views. The Laboulaye archive remains in private hands, which is undoubtedly why there is only one scholarly biography, Walter D. Gray's *Interpreting American Democracy in France: The Career of Edouard Laboulaye, 1811-1883*, published in 1994. Gray, who had access to Laboulaye's papers, describes his subject as a devout Catholic. The statesman's papers included “dozens of calling cards left at his home by French bishops” who were grateful for Laboulaye's efforts in breaking the French state's monopoly over higher education – a Catholic cause *par excellence*.³ The *Semaine religieuse* of the diocese of Paris ran an obituary for him in 1883, praising “the eminent services [to the church] of a true liberal.”⁴ Both the obituary and the esteem of France's episcopacy indicate that Laboulaye was a practicing Catholic, certainly neither an atheist nor an anticlerical. Moreover, in his academic writing Laboulaye identified himself with French Catholicism: in an essay on Channing, for instance, he asserted that “we French Catholics” need to withhold initial, instinctively unfavorable assessments in order to understand the Protestant revival of the nineteenth century.⁵ His alter ego, Dr Lefebvre of *Paris en Amérique*, likewise identifies himself as a Catholic, and his encounter with a multi-confessional society is key to the novel.

Scholars do not, however, all accept Laboulaye's Catholicism or consider it relevant, and the most recent historian to analyze his contribution to French political thought, Helena Rosenblatt, asserts bluntly that “the few scholarly works devoted to

² Carol E. Harrison, *Romantic Catholics: France's Postrevolutionary Generation in Search of a Modern Faith* (Ithaca, 2014).

³ Sylvain Milbach, “La liberté d'enseignement secondaire (1839-1847): Jalons et perspectives,” in *Éducation et religion, XVIIIe-XXe siècles*, Christian Sorrel, ed. (Chambéry, 2006), 73-93; and Louis de Naurois, “L'Enseignement catholique au XIXe siècle: Aspects juridiques,” in *L'Enseignement catholique en France au XIXe et XXe siècles*, Gérard Cholvy and Nadine-Josette Chaline, ed. (Paris, 1995), 13-23.

⁴ Gray, *Interpreting American Democracy*, 127.

⁵ Edouard Laboulaye, “Channing et sa doctrine,” in *La Liberté religieuse*, 4th edn (1852; Paris; 1969), 212.

Laboulaye contain what can only be described as odd characterizations of the many religious references in his writings. Some have described him as a devout Catholic, clearly without much investigation.”⁶ Rosenblatt’s disbelief derives from the French historiographical tradition that identifies Catholicism as the opposite – even the negation – of the political traditions like liberalism and republicanism that emerged from the Revolution. Scholars steeped in the republicanism of the French university find it difficult to imagine that a defender of the progressive traditions of the Revolution under the Second Empire might also be a Catholic. This is the logic of “two Frances” – of inevitable conflict between a progressive republican tradition perpetually opposed to an atavistic Catholicism.⁷ That description of a modern France – republican or Godless, depending on the observer’s point of view – suited elements of both the Left and the Right, but it squeezed the middle and it erases the historiographical position of individuals like Laboulaye who aspired to be both Catholic and a citizen of a modern polity. Even Walter Gray, who accepts his Catholicism, finds it difficult to present a Laboulaye who is simultaneously a Catholic and an important figure in France’s liberal tradition. Gray tends to separate the two issues, reserving Laboulaye’s religiosity for the private life about which he was extremely reticent and locating his liberalism in his public life as an intellectual.

Paris en Amérique, however, suggests the inadequacy of this public/private strategy. In this novel, Laboulaye explicitly rejected any notion that religiosity should or could be relegated to a realm separate from that of politics. The novel argues that a republic depends on the private virtues that its citizens – women and children as well as men – learn in their churches and practice first in their homes. Although Laboulaye the republican scholar maintained a dignified silence about his private life that suggested that it was not relevant to his politics, his fictional alter ego did not hesitate to assert that faiths practiced in the family home were necessary foundations for democracy. The Catholic Dr Lefebvre learns that religious liberty and religious pluralism both contribute to the creation of a peaceful democratic society. Religious belief is a necessary constituent of, not an obstacle to, democracy.

When Dr Lefebvre wakes on the first morning of his life in America, his initial clue that he is no longer in Paris appears when a black servant draws the curtains to reveal three print shops and six newspaper offices. Confronted with this evidence of excessive free speech, the doctor concluded that he “was in America, unknown, alone, in a country without government, without armies, without police, in the midst of a savage, violent and cupiditous people.”⁸ The most bewildering aspect of this transformation is that the doctor is the only character aware that the city of Paris has crossed the Atlantic: his family, servants and neighbors have no idea that they have alternative selves occupying their proper places in France. The plot of the novel is a sort of Atlantic-world *Persian Letters* in which the doctor gradually abandons his native prejudices, recognizes the virtues of his host nation and eventually concedes that “a Parisian astray in this

⁶ Helena Rosenblatt, “On the Need for a Protestant Reformation: Constant, Sismondi, Guizot, and Laboulaye,” in *French Liberalism from Montesquieu to the Present Day*, Raf Geenens and Helena Rosenblatt, ed. (New York, 2012), 130.

⁷ Claude Langlois, “Catholics and Seculars,” in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, vol. 2, *Conflicts and Divisions*, ed. Pierre Nora and trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York, 1996), 109-43.

⁸ Dr René Lefebvre (Edouard Laboulaye), *Paris in America*, trans. Mary L. Booth (New York, 1863), 20.

glorious country of liberty stands in great need of going to school. He must learn everything, and forget everything.”⁹ Laboulaye, who in the 1870s edited Montesquieu’s complete works, makes Dr Lefebvre a sort of mirror image of Usbek, the Persian aristocrat who moves toward enlightenment via the disorientation of foreign travel.

Laboulaye describes his American alter ego as a blustering, chauvinistic Frenchman who considers respect for authority the most important moral and political principle. Dr Lefebvre enjoys his own patriarchal, professional and intellectual authority. He is fully prepared to concede the legitimacy of state authority, whatever form it may take, and he does not enquire too closely into its origins or its popular support. The humor of the novel derives from his cynical bemusement at American contrariness – the proliferation of newspapers is merely his first taste of a society that demands that authority justify itself. Although he initially insists that Americans will grow up to appreciate that proximity to power and pulling strings are the paths to success, his American neighbors, instead, convert him to their civic-mindedness. The plot of the novel involves taking the doctor’s ego down several pegs, but the comedy ultimately concludes with him achieving the status he believed should be his from the beginning. Elected Inspector of Streets and Roads and then Attorney General, he earns by the end of the novel the respect that he demanded as a matter of course at the outset.¹⁰

The prominence of religious sentiment in American life threatens to undermine the doctor’s patriarchal authority. His New England home is “a Babal, a den of all heresies,” instead of a “refuge” in which he, as head of household, establishes religious truth. His wife frequents the Episcopalian Church, his daughter is a Presbyterian and his son a Baptist, and they employ Quaker and Methodist servants.¹¹ Sambo, the black Methodist servant, outrages his employer by suggesting that Catholics “are like the heathens of Africa; they have *vaudous*.”¹² Susan, the doctor’s daughter, justifies her unchaperoned trips across town in religious terms: propriety matters much less to her than teaching Sunday school.¹³ Those members of the household from whom the doctor expects deference instead assert the autonomy of their consciences, and Dr Lefebvre is baffled that his family claims to love him even as they defy his expectations of obedience.

The religious pluralism that renders the doctor’s family life so perplexing characterizes all civic life, and there is no separating citizens’ religious beliefs from their civic engagement. The cityscape is so crowded with steeples that Dr Lefebvre jokes that “if the devil should lose his religion ... he would find it again” in Paris, Massachusetts.¹⁴ He visits Sunday schools, the hundred or more charity hospitals that different congregations have established in his community and even a Buddhist temple where a Chinese missionary explains that his work is morally equivalent to that of Christian missionaries in Peking.¹⁵ Citizens like the doctor’s family and servants routinely bring their religious beliefs into the public sphere, so that in his tour of the city’s congregations he hears denunciations of slavery, exhortations to charity and tee-totaling and

⁹ Lefebvre, *Paris in America*, 199.

¹⁰ Lefebvre, *Paris in America*, 215, 239.

¹¹ Lefebvre, *Paris in America*, 206.

¹² Lefebvre, *Paris in America*, 152.

¹³ Lefebvre, *Paris in America*, 254-59.

¹⁴ Lefebvre, *Paris in America*, 156.

¹⁵ Lefebvre, *Paris in America*, 164.

declarations of patriotic loyalty. Although they belong to many faiths, these new Parisians all ground their claims about rights and liberties in their faith.

Dr Lefebvre cannot imagine how a family or a society can function without a single religion: how can Americans so fervently embrace such different creeds and yet also embrace one another as family, friends, neighbors, colleagues and fellow citizens? He initially declares this pluralism impossible: "I am a Catholic in soul and mind, in the Church, in the State, in the family there should reign but a single law, but a single will. If need be, I will employ salutary rigor," he announces, "I will terrify my wife, I will threaten my children, I will dismiss my servants.... I am a Frenchman, long live unity!"¹⁶ Ultimately, he cannot sustain his claim that that he is "the only true Christian here," and he has to acknowledge that religion is "the common patrimony of believers."¹⁷ The Americans Dr Lefebvre meets are not savage, violent or cupiditous because they are such devout believers. Mrs. Lefebvre is un-terrifiable, and the children and servants go their own way, serene in their confidence that their father and master naturally respects their independent religious beliefs.

The final chapters of *Paris en Amérique* pose the ultimate challenge to America's multi-confessional society: Civil War. The response of the citizens of Paris, Massachusetts, convinces Dr Lefebvre that American society, like his family, will remain united in spite of differences among them. Laboulaye's Civil War is strangely unfamiliar: although he was an abolitionist, slavery is not central to his novel's war. The character Sambo occasions only a brief discussion of the evils of slavery: Dr Lefebvre observes that if "Jesus Christ died for these woolly heads," then southern slave-owners were indeed guilty of the crime of Cain, denying liberty to a brother. A French audience unfamiliar with the secession movement or with the organization of the Confederacy would learn very little from the novel. In Laboulaye's presentation, the war's significance is as a test of the cohesion of American society, and Parisians easily meet the challenge – even in time of war, they will love their neighbors above themselves. Citizens gather with "the fervor of a crusade" to send off their volunteers. The doctor's son and future son-in-law don gallant Zouave uniforms, and his wife and daughter offer prayers and encouragement as they valiantly hold back tears. The doctor himself answers the Zouaves' call and volunteers as their surgeon. At this moment he is a fully committed American, convinced that "this soil, opened and fructified by the Puritans, can bring forth naught but liberty."¹⁸

The outbreak of war marks the end of Dr Lefebvre's American adventure. Assured that the Union will survive, he has nothing left to learn. On the eve of battle, the mesmerist appears and returns Lefebvre and his fellow New England Parisians across the Atlantic. The doctor wakes up on April 2 in his bed in Paris, France, where there are no newspaper offices in his street and his wife and children tiptoe around his every whim.

The Civil War breaks out in a chapter titled "The Departure of the Volunteers," and the reference to François Rude's 1836 relief for the Arc de Triomphe suggests that Laboulaye imagined the American conflict as analogous to the French revolutionary wars. The Rude relief and the novel both celebrate a community's response to peril, and Laboulaye clearly found the analogy between Revolution and Civil War provocative.

¹⁶ Lefebvre, *Paris in America*, 153-54.

¹⁷ Lefebvre, *Paris in America*, 206.

¹⁸ Lefebvre, *Paris in America*, 300-02, 309.

Reckoning with the Revolution was the crucial task of Laboulaye's generation whose members, although they had no first-hand memories of the Revolution, nonetheless lived in a world in which it was omnipresent. In *Paris en Amérique*, the Civil War is an opportunity to re-consider France's response to its own formative crisis.

Like many post-revolutionary children of the century, Laboulaye was disturbed by the revolutionary celebration of the rights-bearing individual. An assembly of individuals, passing through the world in sovereign isolation, seemed profoundly dystopian to romantic *enfants du siècle*. A democracy composed of persons who valued their individual rights above their mutual obligations could only be violent. Society, he believed, required individuals to acknowledge their duties to and affection for one another. French society in the 1790s, romantics like Laboulaye believed, had failed this test, and the Terror was the consequence of that failure.

Unlike most fantasies involving supernatural travel through time or space, Laboulaye's novel moves an entire community, not just an individual, and in this respect Dr Lefebvre is very different from Usbek. In spite of his pointed critique of French license, Usbek eventually discovers the greatest abuses of power in his own home, the seraglio he left behind in Persia. In contrast, the hero of *Paris en Amérique* leaves behind his family and his Parisian neighbors and business associates only to find them again in New England. In Paris, Massachusetts, old ties are renewed and improved: his neighbors are more friendly, his colleagues more honest and his wife and children more loving. Dr Lefebvre is the only person aware that the French capital has relocated to Massachusetts, but his experience is not an ordeal that he faces alone. His family and friends go on about their lives with the doctor as an integral part of their community.

Laboulaye's preoccupation with the conditions for a cohesive society in the wake of revolutionary upheaval locates him in the complex world of French liberalism – an area of research that has recently experienced significant development as historians and political theorists assert that France did, in fact, produce a liberal tradition. French liberals, unlike their English counterparts, had to come to terms with their nation's previous, sometimes unhappy, experience with a regime based in liberty – that is, they were deeply concerned with the lessons of the past as well as with ambitions for the future. Laboulaye's interest in the ties that connect individuals to one another – family, association, religion – reflected his concern with creating a political order in which liberty did not lead to egotistical isolation.

Although recent scholarship on French liberalism has abandoned earlier notions that liberals instinctively mistrusted religion, it has rarely extended as far as Catholicism.¹⁹ Religiosity of a non-confessional, abstract variety and Protestantism have both attracted scholarly attention, but the consensus remains that Catholicism could not be liberal – that it was necessarily atavistic, could not come to terms with the post-revolutionary world, and therefore had nothing to contribute to liberal thought. However useful religious faith in general might be to society, reactionary French Catholicism could not accept a democratic or pluralistic social order.

Yet Laboulaye organized the plot of *Paris en Amérique* around Dr Lefebvre's recognition that he could live peacefully and productively as a Catholic among believers

¹⁹ Rosenblatt, "On the Need for a Protestant Reformation." The major exception is Lucien Jaume, *L'Individu effacé ou le paradoxe du libéralisme français* (Paris, 1997), and see also Alan Kahan's recent remarks on Tocqueville in *Alexis de Tocqueville* (New York, 2010), 53-54.

of different sorts. Laboulaye's alter ego ends up acknowledging that he can be a good Catholic without being an absolutist of any kind: he does not need to exert authority over his family or over his community in order to maintain his beliefs. Although he meets many admirable Protestants of various denominations, he does not convert. Nor does he adopt an instrumental view of religion that focuses on its social and political utility rather than its theological content. In fact, *Paris en Amérique* explicitly criticizes the Napoleonic solution of four established faiths. A state that supports multiple, mutually exclusive beliefs clearly demonstrates "only equal indifference and like contempt" for them all, and no believing citizen could respect such a hypocritical, pagan state.²⁰ Only by remaining aloof from all confessions could the state appropriately demonstrate its regard for religion.

In his insistence on the state's religious neutrality, Laboulaye was very much in accord with the generation of young Catholics who hoped that a revitalized church would offer a path to a society in which individuals enjoyed the liberties of citizenship without neglecting their responsibilities to one another. In the aftermath of revolution, many young Catholics believed that reviving their ancient faith might help modern individuals find a secure place in a changing world. This Catholic romanticism emphasized the liturgy and rites of the church as a means of anchoring individuals in society, and it shaped Laboulaye's approach to the United States. The last words of volume one of his *Histoire des États Unis* are "God and Liberty" – Voltaire's blessing for Benjamin Franklin's grandson, but also the slogan on the masthead of *L'Avenir*, a radical French Catholic newspaper published by Félicité de Lamennais and his collaborators in 1830 that called for the separation of church and state.²¹ Laboulaye, like the editorial staff of *L'Avenir*, believed that the future of Catholicism lay not in recreating an Old Regime alliance of throne and altar, but rather in abandoning ties with the obviously vulnerable state and turning to the Catholic faithful instead. American churches, including the American Catholic Church, successfully relied on the fervor of their congregations and in that sense were models for the French church.²²

By the 1860s, however, the optimism of the romantic generation was waning, and Catholics like Laboulaye felt increasingly squeezed between anticlerical liberalism on the one hand and the intransigence of the Roman church on the other. Fearing social disorder in 1848, many Catholics had thrown their support behind Bonaparte. They had, Laboulaye felt, sold their liberty cheaply in exchange for the Second Empire's support for Catholic schools and the presence of French troops in Rome propping up the temporal power of the papacy against the Piedmontese unification of Italy, which Napoleon III also supported. Nostalgic for the church-state relations of the Old Regime, they had accepted the Bonapartist state's weak simulacrum and failed to recognize that Napoleon III's support for Catholic causes would never be more than strategic. Laboulaye was also aware that the hierarchy in Rome increasingly disapproved of his view that Catholics should participate fully as citizens in a modern polity. Pius IX, whom liberals had welcomed when he ascended to the papacy in 1846, embraced conservatism following the revolutions of 1848 and had begun cracking down on Catholics who expressed their

²⁰ Lefebvre, *Paris in America*, 196.

²¹ On *L'Avenir*, see Harrison, *Romantic Catholics*, chap. 3.

²² Edouard Laboulaye, *Histoire des États Unis depuis les premiers essais de colonisation jusqu'à l'adoption de la constitution fédérale, 1620-1789*, 3 vols, 3rd edn (Paris, 1868), 1:216.

belief that the church should promote liberty. Shortly after the publication of *Paris en Amérique* he reprimanded Charles de Montalembert, France's most prominent liberal Catholic, and in 1864 the Syllabus of Errors detailed the church's implacable opposition to any compromise with liberal values.²³ The combination of Catholic devotion and civic activism that Laboulaye created for Dr Lefebvre seemed nearly as fantastic as the novel's premise.

Laboulaye's admiration for William Ellery Channing derived in part from the latter's role in creating a vibrant and distinctively American church that did not need to rely on state support – a model, if an increasingly unlikely one, for the French Catholic Church. Channing had guided the Massachusetts church through its own disestablishment and re-infused it with a romantic fervor that Laboulaye found appealing.²⁴ Channing's Unitarianism flourished without state support because it infused individual lives with transcendent significance. Channing had convinced his parishioners that the era of Puritan rule was over and that they had nothing to fear in opening Massachusetts to religious pluralism because the strength of their community of faith lay in bonds among members, not in the patronage of the state. Laboulaye re-located Paris to New England precisely because of his admiration for the sons of the Puritans who had successfully negotiated their transition to a modern regime of constitutional liberty.²⁵

Paris en Amérique illustrates Laboulaye's conviction that citizens' deeply felt piety rather than their membership in a moralizing institutional church undergirded freedom. This was a view that Laboulaye also found in Channing, who was willing to abandon the church as constituted by dogma in favor of an open communion defined by Christians' mutual charitable sentiments.²⁶ The discipline of an established church might make individuals more governable, but sincere devotion to God makes them capable of governing themselves. In Paris, Massachusetts, family, church, society and even state are all voluntary institutions whose members freely accept obligations to one another. "America," Dr Lefebvre concludes, "is only a confederation of sovereign churches and parishes" in which "religion has made the man and the citizen in its image; a free church has given birth to a free society."²⁷ This freedom allows the members of the Lefebvre family and the citizens of Paris to practice different faiths yet still love and esteem one another.

Laboulaye's interest in America continued through the Civil War and beyond. In addition to publishing *Paris en Amérique*, he promoted the Union cause from his chair at the Collège de France and in the Paris press because "in America as everywhere else, France can only be allied to liberty."²⁸ The survival of the Union at a great cost, including especially the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, spurred Laboulaye to imagine a monument commemorating France and America's joint commitment to freedom. Famously, the Statue of Liberty was born at Laboulaye's dining room table in an 1865 gathering, just months after the Civil War ended. Among the guests was Frédéric-

²³ Marguerite Castillon de Perron, *Montalembert et l'Europe de son temps* (Paris, 2009), pt. 4, chap. 1; and Harrison, *Romantic Catholics*, 267-68.

²⁴ Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-61* (Cambridge, 1970), chap. 6.

²⁵ Laboulaye, *Histoire*, 1: 219-22.

²⁶ Laboulaye, "Channing," 220.

²⁷ Lefebvre, *Paris in America*, 185.

²⁸ Quoted by Gray, *Interpreting American Democracy*, 84.

Auguste Bartholdi, a sculptor whose ambition to build a modern colossus became part of Laboulaye's project to erect a monument to liberty. A statue built by French and American efforts would be a reminder of the "sympathy" between the nations; it would celebrate the survival of American liberty. It would also, Laboulaye and his colleagues hoped, remind French subjects of the Emperor Napoleon III of the peril of their own.²⁹

Like Laboulaye's scholarly work and his fanciful novel, *Liberty enlightening the world*, as the Statue of Liberty was originally titled, argued that modern political liberty rested on religious faith, freely expressed. The robed female figure echoes the French Revolution's allegories of liberty, including Eugène Delacroix's 1830 *Liberty leading the people*. She does not wear a Phrygian cap, however, and her radiant crown and the torch that she holds aloft directly evoke images of Faith, as Marvin Trachtenberg observed in his study of the statue.³⁰ The tablet that she carries, inscribed with the date of American independence, similarly appears in Catholic iconography where Scripture gives faith its power to illuminate. The Liberty of New York harbor is simultaneously a political and a religious figure, a combination that echoes Laboulaye's scholarly and fictional writing about America.



Figure 1 (Left) Cesare Ripa, "Fede cattolica," *Iconologia* (1613). © Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries.

Figure 2 (Right) Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, "Liberty Enlightening the World" (1886). © Library of Congress.

²⁹ Yasmin Sabrina Khan, *Enlightening the World: The Creation of the Statue of Liberty* (Ithaca, 2010).

³⁰ Marvin Trachtenberg, *The Statue of Liberty* (London, 1976), 70.

Traces of the Statue of Liberty – or, more accurately, its negative image – appear in the final chapters of *Paris en Amérique*. When Dr Lefebvre returns to France, public statues immediately remind him of French failure to embrace liberty. Once again relocated in Europe, Paris is in the midst of Baron Haussmann’s renovation that created the city of wide avenues and vistas punctuated by monuments that we know today. This new Paris threatens to engulf all of France: the city’s grand boulevards will run all the way to the English Channel and the Mediterranean, leveling everything so that “nothing may impede the right line.” All of France will become Paris, and centralization will reign supreme. In this nightmare scenario to which the doctor returns, massive statues will stand at France’s frontiers, where Paris’s arteries begin: Glory and Victory, both over 120 feet tall, will lead the way to Valor, War and Conquest. “Immensity in uniformity,” a Haussmann-like figure brags to the now-Americanized doctor, will pulverize citizens’ rights before the totalizing ambition of the state.³¹ While Liberty rises out of the water and watches benevolently over the city from her island perch, the belligerent colossi of the new Paris command strategic intersections and threaten Parisians’ freedom. Poor Dr Lefebvre, beside himself at these urban “improvements,” is diagnosed as suffering the incurable “*folie de liberté*” – the madness of liberty – and confined to an asylum.³²

Laboulaye’s fascination with America locates him in what Maurizio Isabella has recently described as the nineteenth century’s “liberal international.” In spite of liberalism’s association with the nation-state, Isabella argues, transnational experiences and conversations were an important reservoir for liberal thought.³³ Religious belief and its relationship to the practice of citizenship were central to such dialogues and the appropriate relationship among individuals, churches and states was a concern that liberals of many nations shared. Not uncommonly that transnational liberal conversation reached anticlerical conclusions, determining that devout Catholics, in particular, were not entirely fit for citizenship.³⁴ Anticlericalism was not, however, liberalism’s only option. Analyzing Laboulaye’s romantic Catholicism adds a different kind of religious experience to the questions with which members of the liberal international grappled: Catholicism, which was nothing if not an a-national religion, could nonetheless contribute to the establishment of modern liberal nation-states. If we restore romantic Catholicism to the space between the two Frances, other nineteenth-century figures, like Laboulaye, may well make more sense. The work of individuals like the painter Eugène Delacroix, with his many religious commissions, and the founders of French Orientalism Silvestre de Sacy and Eugène Boré, for instance, may appear more interesting and significant when they are no longer forced into an awkward Left/Right, republican/clerical dichotomy. Certainly Laboulaye benefits from this treatment, and this exercise in re-conceiving his work helps us deconstruct the two Frances rather than reifying their conflict as an analytical category.

³¹ Lefebvre, *Paris in America*, 336-37.

³² Lefebvre, *Paris in America*, 373.

³³ Maurizio Isabella, *The Risorgimento in Exile: Italian Emigrés and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era* (New York, 2009).

³⁴ Timothy Verhoeven, *Transatlantic Anti-Catholicism: France and the United States in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 2010).