

***Catholic Church and State Relations in French Education in the 19th Century: the struggle between Laïcité<sup>1</sup> and Religion.***  
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**Abstract**

This article traces the conflicts and compromises between the Catholic Church and the French state and the struggle for dominance in education between these two forces during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It explores their varying relations up to the law of separation in 1905. It also poses the question as to why a country traditionally wedded to Catholicism came to be ideologically opposed to it. Rather than inheriting an ideology opposed to religion per se, it is argued, the legacy from the French Revolution has been one of egalitarianism which has persisted. The Church during this period supported anti-revolutionary and reactionary political forces. This created hostility towards the Church and brought about huge popular support for anticlericalism.

Keywords: France; education; Catholic Church; equality; republicanism; ideology, *laïcité*

**Introduction**

*... While France remains predominantly Catholic at heart, a key ingredient of national identity lies in the revered principle of laïcité, and this has in fact emerged out of fierce struggles with the Catholic Church (Salton 2012, 135).*

Salton's paradox in the above quotation lies at the heart of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the secular state in France. The struggle between these two forces was played out most intensely during the 19th century following the French Revolution. This article sets out to analyse some of the most salient developments in the struggles, compromises and conflicts culminating in the separation which has survived ever since.

In 1789 the Revolution ended the monopoly of the Catholic Church in education in France. In 1905 the separation of the French state and the Catholic Church was formalized.<sup>2</sup> Between these dates there ensued a power struggle between these opposing forces. On the one side was a Church<sup>3</sup> loath to relinquish its authority in this domain having for centuries seen education as one of its key

missions: on the other, a state that was equally determined to uphold a central role in education.

### **Anti-religion or Anti-inequality?**

Alongside this is the question frequently posed as to why a country considered as 'the eldest daughter of the church' and on so many occasions the 'secular arm' of a crusading and bellicose Catholicism (Salton 2012, 135) found its way to become dechristianised, at least for a large proportion of its population. The responsibility for this is usually laid at the Revolution's door and certainly the dechristianizing campaigns of Year II was aimed at eradicating Catholic religious practices and religion itself and when churches were vandalised or destroyed, sacramental vessels were desecrated and even priests were killed (Tallet, 1991). This destructive campaign, albeit short-lived and more self-defeating than effective, had consequences for religious attitudes in the longer term.<sup>4</sup> Although Alexis de Tocqueville, one of the earliest and most incisive analysts of the Revolution, claimed that one of the first passions inflamed by the Revolution and the last to be extinguished was 'of an anti-religious nature' he goes on to say that the anti-religious campaign was 'merely incidental' to the programme of the Revolution (Tocqueville 1983, 5-6). The part of anti-religion, I believe, was more political and resulted from another deeper passion which emanated from a hatred of inequality. Tocqueville writes of:

*...the steady growth amongst the people of two ruling passions, not always simultaneous or having the same objectives. One of these, the more deeply rooted and long-standing, was an intense, indomitable hatred of inequality. This inequality forced itself on their attention, they saw signs of it at every turn; thus it is easy to understand why the French had for so many centuries felt a desire, inveterate and uncontrollable, utterly to destroy all such institutions as had survived from the Middle Ages and, having cleared the ground, to build up a new society in which men were as much alike and their status as equal as was possible, allowing for the innate differences between individuals. The other ruling passion, more recent and less deeply rooted, was a desire to live not only on an equal footing but also as free men (207-8).*

An ideology came to prominence during the Revolution which gave rise to a discourse of egalitarianism. This revolutionary ideology led to a significant change in public opinion not only during the period of the Revolution but has persisted ever since. The discourse of egalitarianism has similarly impacted on the French education system (Doyle, 2014). The revolutionary ideology was not completely new as it inherited much from eighteenth century philosophy, particularly from Enlightenment ideas. A major contribution from the latter to the revolutionary ideology was in its legacy of laying the basis for thought on secular rather than religious foundations and in the creation of secular institutions for its dissemination (Hamilton, 1992). There was also a blueprint for a system of state-controlled education including the eradication of the clerical monopoly, e.g. La Chalotais's plan in 1763 for national education (Moody, 1978).

Rather than aiming to eradicate religion, the revolutionaries set out to destroy the primary institutions of the *Ancien Régime*, in particular that of Church education. They therefore came into opposition with the Catholic Church which had predominant power in this area. The revolutionary egalitarian ideology clashed with traditional Catholic ideology which saw education as being primarily to form good Christians and to save souls and then to educate and instruct. Its mission was to disseminate the mysteries of Divine Revelation and this was the prerogative of the Church and any intervention by the state in this area could only be erroneous. On the other hand the Revolution's aim was to form good citizens and unify the nation around the values of liberty, equality and fraternity. Condorcet's framework for public education, more than any other during this period, sets out the theoretical basis for state education. For Condorcet, the Revolution represented a continuation of the progress of the human mind and the system of education should be guided by reason. He argues that Christianity and the Church had played a negative role by using the enlightenment acquired from the Greeks and Romans to dominate the ignorant people or to obscure it from them. Another theory elaborated to justify the secularization of education was that the transmission of thought was too vital to society especially in a

scientific age to be controlled by the Church and ought to be permanently taken out of its hands. There was also the importance of education as a tool for forming loyal citizens and patriots and allied to this the principle of national unity (Anderson, 1975).

These topics are notoriously sensitive and because of the polemical nature of the topic many historians are drawn to one side or the other. In view of this, it is important to stress that just as the Republicans were made up of different elements, similarly the Catholics had moderate, liberal and social Catholic strands as well as authoritarian and reactionary. The former came to the fore at different periods and supported the more democratic or moderate régimes. However, as Prost (1968) comments, the moderate influence among the clergy faded in times of crisis. In relation to the educational domain, Grace (2001) succinctly points to the complexity of the relationship:

*Church-State relations in educational policy and practice are not the meeting of two monoliths either in conflict or in alliance on specific questions. They are rather a more complex manoeuvring of interest groups located within both the structures of the state and the structures of the Church (490).*

It is fair, however, to say that, French Catholic hierarchy (in the main, monarchists) and clergy supported anti-revolutionary and reactionary parties, particularly in the time period under review. This was all the more the case as it was these parties from whom the Church had most to gain. For example, the Catholic Church rallied to the Bourbon legitimists (monarchists seeking to reimpose an authoritarian monarchy in the spirit of the *Ancien Régime*) during the Restoration period and afterwards. Thus on the political level antipathy towards the Catholic Church stemmed from the latter's support for the forces of reaction following the Revolution.

The French Revolution 1789-1799 abolished firstly the Absolutist state<sup>5</sup> and then the monarchy and the residual vestiges of a hierarchical feudal system, replacing the sovereignty of the king with the sovereignty of the people. The cataclysmic events of the Revolution led to monumental changes - from monarchy to

republic, from sovereignty of the king to sovereignty of the people and the overthrow of the aristocracy who gave up their privileges in a matter of weeks. This left an impact and a legacy that has persisted ever since. In the first three years of the Revolution the Church suffered three major setbacks which affected education. As early as June 1789 all seigneurial dues were abolished including the Church tithes which were a chief source of revenue for Church sponsored educational institutions. Secondly, Church property was nationalized in July 1790 which transformed the Catholic Church into a state department with clerics obliged to take an oath to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Finally all religious orders and congregations were abolished and their property confiscated in August 1792. Teaching orders, such as the Christian Brothers and the Ursulines emigrated and did not return until a consular decree in 1803.

The Revolution succeeded in destroying the monopoly of the Church in education and in dismantling the educational structure but not in replacing it – an accomplishment to be realised under Napoleon Bonaparte. It marked the beginning of the state taking centre-stage in the domain of education. The Directory, the last administration of the Revolutionary period, came to an end in 1799 following the November coup (18 Brumaire, Year VIII of the Republican calendar) engineered by Napoleon Bonaparte. It was succeeded by the Consulate presided over by a ‘triumvirate’, but the real authority and legislative power was in the hands of Napoleon, the First Consul. He created a unified and centralized system under his individual control and subsequently enthroned himself as Emperor of the French in May 1804.

### **Napoleon and Education**

In July 1801, Napoleon signed a Concordat with the Pope which put an end to the schism created during the revolution. According to this document, Catholicism was recognized not as the official religion of France but as “the religion of the great majority of French citizens” (Bruley 2004, 46-7) and the Protestant and Jewish religions were also acknowledged (as they had been under the Revolution). The Concordat facilitated the gradual return of the

Congregations. Under the consular decree of 1803, the Christian Brothers were authorized to resume their teaching and were incorporated into Napoleon's national system of education. State authorization was required for all religious orders under the Concordat. This was largely ignored by governments and in 1800 the majority of male religious orders were unauthorized, while the majority of female religious orders had been authorized (Moody, 1978). This situation left a large loophole that was available to exploit by hostile interests highlighting the sensitive political nature of Church and State relations.

Napoleon's vision for the future of education in France under a highly unified and centralised system came into being with the laws of May 1806 and March 1808, which created the *Université de France*. The Imperial University was divided into 34 regional academies<sup>6</sup> (which are still in place in extended form today). The *Université* was unique to France with no institution like it in other countries. It operated at two levels: on the one hand it was an administration which ran the state schools and supervised private ones (at this level it went on to become the Ministry of Public Instruction in 1824); on the other hand it was a corporate body of state teachers in secondary and higher education (Anderson, 1975). The other important legacy of Napoleonic educational policy was the foundation of the *lycées*. These were fee-paying but also were to receive 20% of funds from the state. Napoleon's attitude towards the Church was ambiguous in that it represented a divergence between the social and political levels. He saw the Church as important for the maintenance of social order and saw religion as a vehicle for increasing this. He was complicit in the Church's role in education as long as it was happy to render to Napoleon what was Napoleon's and to God what was God's! However, he mistrusted the Church politically. Thus his compromises with the clergy were prompted by the dictates of social policy rather than any ideological sympathy and his religious policy in education was double-edged with the aims, on the one hand of controlling the church in the state and, on the other, of controlling the people in society. (Vaughan and Archer, 1971).

### **Re-entry of the Church in education**

Following the fall of Napoleon and throughout the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a movement of powers among the State, the Church and the *Université* with the state holding the balance of power and, depending on the regime, veering towards one or the other. In education this struggle was played out between the Church and the state school. Each regime, whether conservative, liberal or republican found it in its interests to maintain the centralised bureaucracy bequeathed by Napoleon I. The centralised education system was recognized as the most efficient means of promoting the hegemony of the state and its ruling class, that is, the bourgeoisie. As well as providing the state with technical experts, it played a major role in promoting a uniform national culture and identity and thereby fostering national unity (Green, 1990).

### **The Bourbon Restoration**

The Bourbons were returned to the throne between 1814 and 1830. During this period, the Catholic Church and its supporters sought to reassert its authority within a favorable regime which had confirmed with its charter in 1814 its position as the official religion of France. Therefore the monarchy would reestablish the alliance of throne and altar (Launay, 1988). The landed upper class which was politically legitimist, that is, in favour of Absolutism, was the Church's natural ally, and in opposition was an alliance of liberals and republicans. The bourgeoisie, which had grown in political and social prominence since the Revolution and wishing to guard against any resurgence of the aristocracy, supported the state schools particularly the lycée which prepared for careers within the state. However, the upper layers of this social class, particularly in the period after the revolution of 1848, vacillated between Church and state education.

### **The return of the Religious Orders**

The return of the former religious Orders and the creation of new ones were an important aspect of the religious restoration history. The 1816 ordonnance under the Bourbons, which called for the creation of one school per commune<sup>7</sup>, proved

propitious for the orders both male and female. While there was a lack of lay teachers these were available to fulfill this need. In 1830 there were 1,420 of the original Christian Brothers teaching 87,000 pupils in 380 schools mainly in large towns. Many of the new orders spread out to the countryside. As regards nuns, even in 1816 there were around 880 congregations (Launay, 1988). The orders of brothers and nuns gained the privilege, which from time to time was rescinded, to exchange the *brevet de capacité* (introduced as a teaching certificate in 1816) for the 'letter of obedience' from their order (Mayeur, 1981).<sup>8</sup> While all schools, both public and private were under the control of the *Université*, one institution that escaped this was the *petit séminaire*. There were several of these across the country and their stated role was for the preparation of young boys for the priesthood, although many of those who were educated there did not go on to become priests. They outnumbered the *lycées* (then called *collèges royaux*) by more than three-to-one (or by more than five-to-one if unauthorized schools are included (Ponteil 1966, 174).

The presence of the Jesuits in secondary education was another area of contention between Church and state. The order, reestablished by Pius VII in 1814 resumed their teaching activities in France without official recognition. With eight colleges in 1828, they taught a total of 2,200 pupils. They were criticised in many quarters for their negative influence in education and for the tendency to mobilize youth to their goal of state domination. [Finally they too became part of the *Université* after the *Loi Falloux*<sup>9</sup> until they were abolished under the Third Republic]. The hopes of the 'ultra-Catholics' to reconstruct a Christian monarchy and to subject the *Université* to ecclesiastical control came to an end with the revolution of 1830. These were replaced, partly through the liberal wing of the Church, with the aim of breaking the monopoly of the state over education and by a campaign for 'liberty of education' (Launay, 1988).

It was not until the July Monarchy that the first important legislation relating to primary education occurred with the Guizot Law of 1833 under the eponymous Minister of Education. This decreed that every commune or group of communes

should have a primary school and every *department* or group of *départements* should have an *école normale primaire* for training primary teachers, and an *école primaire supérieure* in every commune over 6,000 inhabitants (Nique, 1999). The latter was an important initiative which allowed more able pupils to continue schooling for another three years and promoted social mobility. The law was a major landmark in French education in providing the country with its first primary education system under state control. The revolution of 1830, when the liberals were victors, gave hopes for the provision of a public educational system. The education law brought about a balance of power between the Church and the state. The Church had a monopoly in the primary sector and had got a foothold in public secondary education through the schools of the teaching orders of brothers, with the state holding the monopoly in the secondary sector and maintaining overall control through the *Université*. The Church wishing to strengthen its incipient power started to agitate against the monopoly of the *Université* and organised a campaign for *liberté d'enseignement*. The balance of power was to be tipped in favour of the Church with the passing of the *Loi Falloux* in 1850 (see below).

## **Liberalism within the Church during the July Monarchy 1830-1848**

The educational gains of the Church were undoubtedly achieved, as observed by historians, through an alliance with authoritarian regimes and the former aristocracy, who were politically legitimist. This conceals, however, the existence of a liberal movement within Catholicism. There existed a very complex relationship between the Church and liberalism, in particular during the liberal regime of Louis-Phillipe, the July Monarchy which followed the Revolution of 1830 until its demise in 1848. This complexity was increased by the existence of both a liberal movement within the Church and a conservative wing amongst the constitutional monarchists. The regime accepted clear liberal principles of constitutional and representative government. Its charter incorporated a clause promoting legislation in favour of freedom of education which was never enacted.

A vigorous campaign was launched against the monopoly petitioning fathers against the state's 'mastery over the education of youth' which was declaimed 'a despotism over souls'. Rather than calling for a bolstering of Church authority, it called for the rights of fathers to choose the education of their children. This movement was led by a priest named Lamennais who criticized the Church hierarchy for dancing to the tune of the state. His influence was growing among the young clerics and reached a peak in the early years of the July Monarchy. Condemned by the French Church hierarchy, he and two associates, Montalembert and Lacordaire, appealed to the Pope for approval of their programme for a newly rationalised church administration distinct from the state (Gould, 1999, 51). Pope Gregory XVII's response was clearly evident in his encyclical of 1832, *Mirari Vos* ('*Mirari Vos: Encyclical of Pope Gregory XVI on Liberalism and Religious Indifferentism*,' August 15, 1832, paragraph 8), which condemned all tenets of the Lamennais doctrine including religious toleration, freedom of conscience and freedom of publication. The Pope states that priests were 'forbidden by ancient canons to undertake ministry and to assume the tasks of teaching and preaching without the permission of their bishop. All those who

struggle against this established order, disturb the position of the Church'. After writing and speaking out against the Pope, Lamennais was excommunicated and broke with the Church. Thereafter the Church won back the dissenting movement whose reincorporation would strengthen the institution (Gould, 1999).

Lamennais's former followers, Montalembert and Lacordaire, rose to occupy key positions in the Church. Lacordaire delivered a series of lecture-sermons on Catholic Revival. Montalembert in 1844 set up the Electoral Committee for the Defense of Religious Freedom which was very successful in building up a following among the Catholic electorate. This organizational capacity was recognized by the government who saw it as a means to increase its own power among the electorate within a limited and elite franchise. Guizot's educational policy became more conservative and more conciliatory towards the Church. This alliance derailed any attempts at democratic educational reform. According to Gould:

The failure of the constitutional monarchy either to survive on its own terms or to develop more democratic institutions illustrates the consequences of an influential, anti-liberal clergy aligned with conservative political leaders (Gould 1999, 55).

The mix of religion and politics of the Catholic revivalists and on the other hand the forging of ties between republicans and left-leaning liberals who campaigned for democratic reforms would leave a strong mark on the political landscape ripening the climate for anti-clericalism.

The revolution of 1848 which ended the July Monarchy, brought back into prominence the ideals of the Revolutionary period, not least in the educational sphere where they were championed by the Second Republic's Minister of Education, Hippolyte Carnot. In favour of universal and common education and with a belief in the power of education to unify the nation, he set about preparing an education bill to bring about free and compulsory primary education. Carnot used the teachers to influence opinion in the election campaign of April 1848. At

the same time, there was a backlash by the propertied class alarmed by the revolutionary events and in education this was reflected in the struggle between the primary teachers and the parish priests. The latter were supported by the agitation of the Catholic Church in alliance with conservative politicians with aspirations to bring back the absolute monarchy. The elections returned a republican majority but this success was to be short-lived. Social tensions increased culminating in a working-class rising in June which was brutally suppressed. This resulted in a climate of conservatism with many pointing the finger of blame at primary teachers for propagating socialist doctrine. This excess of hostility, largely without foundation (Moody, 1978) against the latter and the concomitant volteface towards authoritarianism is epitomized in the speech of Thiers before the National Assembly.<sup>10</sup>

*I have heretofore fought the clergy, not through any hostility for religious ideas, but uniquely because I believed it to be the enemy of the dynasty that I contributed to founding and to which I have remained faithful. The grounds for this have gone, I no longer distrust nor oppose the clergy and I ask for its support. As for the University, I have been its defender, I have been its admirer, I have seen that it was one of the glories of the country. But the revolution of February has opened my eyes, I have seen that the University is infected by socialism. It is especially so amongst the primary teachers who are now the most terrible scourge of our country. (Declaration of 29th June 1849, cited in Launay, 1988, p. 58). (Translation by the author of this article.)*

The firing of Carnot from the ministry was made a condition of the support of the conservative right for the candidacy of Louis-Napoleon for presidency. Thus Carnot's education bill was suppressed and replaced by the *Loi Falloux* in 1850. The Bill was presented on 18<sup>th</sup> June 1849 and was voted into law on 15<sup>th</sup> March 1850. This followed intense negotiations between the opposing parties about the place and role of the Church in education. It has been hailed as a major turning point of the century for education, tipping the balance in favour of the Church. In fact, what was conceived of as a compromise position between the *Université* and the Church, was in practice to mark a rapid and inexorable rise in Catholic education (Prost 1968). What also resulted was an entrenched division between

secularists and the Church which was not aided by the sacking from their posts of around 4,000 primary teachers (Prost, op. cit.). This would greatly advance the recruitment of Republicans, initially under the banner of non-political organizations such as the *Ligue de L'Enseignement* and the Freemasons (Gould, 1999).

Two important changes under the *Loi Falloux* was the abolition of the higher primary schools, but more positively, the extension of primary schooling for girls. The law obliged all communes with populations over 800 to set up separate girls' schools. This usually meant a transfer from a lay mixed school to a girls' school run by nuns, who could benefit from the 'letter of obedience' from their superior which allowed them to teach without having the state's award of the *brevet*. Similarly private primary schools for boys could be set up and benefit from the concession of replacing the *brevet* by an apprenticeship of three years which facilitated the Christian Brothers. The law by allowing anyone with five years' teaching experience and a baccalauréate to open a private secondary school, gave rise to an expansion of Catholic schools in this sector. This allowed the expansion of the bishop's *petits séminaires*, which were able to develop into full secondary schools, as well as the return of the Jesuits into the secondary arena. These Catholic schools were thus in a position to rival the *lycées*. Another area of secondary education affected by the law was the Municipal Colleges which because of the political influence of the Catholic Church in local politics saw a decrease in numbers and their replacement by Diocesan Colleges run by the bishops. As well private religious schools made substantial gains against private lay schools which saw a large decrease in their numbers after 1854 – the year since when statistics were available. The success of Catholic schooling was not only due to the work of the Church but also due to the support of the 'notables' either by favouring them in certain municipalities or even due to the pressure exerted on tenant farmers by landowners to send their children to the 'right' school (Prost, 1968).

## **The Third Republic and the institution of the Republican School**

The Third Republic was born out of the fall of the Second Empire following military defeat by the Prussians in 1870. The early period was one of compromise and the republic was governed by men who had a weak attachment to republican principles. Yet for all its weaknesses and compromises the Republic saw democratic institutions taking root. For example, universal manhood suffrage had been introduced in 1848, curtailed in 1850 briefly and reintroduced in 1851 and this was of crucial importance (Nord, 1995). A republican majority was returned in 1876 following an attempted political 'coup' in 1876 by the government composed of right-wing republicans, monarchists and Bonapartists to dissolve the democratically elected Chamber of Deputies. Following this a government could only rule which had the support of a majority of republicans in the Chamber (Gildea, 1996).

The Third Republic is associated with the setting up during the 1880s of the Republican School which was 'free, compulsory and secular'. Following the French defeat against the Prussians the new state looked to education as a means of insuring the cohesion and unity of its citizens and rising above the ideological divisions of the past (Mayeur, 1981). The republicans recognized the powerful capacity of the school for maintaining and consolidating the newly born Republic. This brought them to collide ideologically with the Church. They were concerned by the continual growth of Catholic education since 1850 in secondary education where it threatened to equal the state school and by its recent incursion into higher education. This concern was increased by suspicions, fuelled by propaganda in the Catholic Right wing press - which inordinately influenced the younger clergy - that these schools were tied to the reactionary Right. A series of statistical surveys were undertaken between 1879 and 1881 which confirmed many of their fears (Moody, 1978). The imperative of setting up a Republican School providing equality of educational access to all children was

to be undertaken without delay as well as ensuring that each *département* had an *école normale* for training its teachers together with two *écoles normales supérieures* to train the teachers in the latter institution.

Thus a century after the Revolution the ideal of free, compulsory and secular education came to fruition. Jules Ferry is most associated with the laws of the 1880s, while that of Paul Bert was also important in their formulation. Foreseeing that certain parts of the legislation would be contentious and risked being defeated, Ferry broke it up into different bills. As anticipated, the ideological debate in the two houses – the Chamber and the Senate – was fierce. Ferry's defense of secularization of public education was based on the freedom of conscience principle. He also argued that his secularism was anti-clerical rather than anti-religious<sup>11</sup> declaiming: 'Yes, the policy is anticlerical, but against religion, never, never'. His struggle was against the political power of the church and its ability to destabilize the state. It was the secularizing aspects of these laws which were most contentious.

The Law of 18 March 1880 forbade anyone belonging to a non-authorized order to direct or teach in any public or private school. As the senate did not accept this Bill two decrees on 28<sup>th</sup> March demanded the expulsion of the Jesuits and within three months any Order that had not gained authorization. The Orders were further curtailed by the law of 1881 which abolished the privilege of the *Lettre d'obédience* and were required to gain the *Brévet de Capacité* within three years except in exceptional cases. This would merely cause an inconvenience as by 1886, 90% of brothers and 70% of nuns had met this requirement (Prost, 1968). Having legislated for free primary schooling in the earlier law of 1880, the Law of 28 March 1882 enforced obligation for all children between six and thirteen. The same law provided for the main provisions for secularism. The first article substituted 'moral and civic education' for the traditional 'moral and religious education' thus abolishing the teaching of religious instruction. It further decreed that one day apart from Sunday would be free to allow parents, if they

wished, to provide religious instruction for their children. Article 16 of the Law reserved teaching in public schools exclusively for lay teachers. Ferry also imposed neutrality on teachers with regard to religion; otherwise teachers were expected to be partisans of republicanism (Mayeur, 1981).

Mindful of the necessity of caution with regard to the religious susceptibilities, Ferry's application of the secular laws was pragmatic. His solution to the contentious issue of the crucifix in the school was a pertinent example. Ferry addressed a circular of the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1882 asking that there should be no religious emblems in new or renovated premises, but in other cases the wish of the locality should be adhered to (Prost, 1968). Following the Law of 1886 the public schools held by religious orders passed to the state but as soon as a religious public school closed, a private school was set up to take its place. Between 1878 and 1901, the numbers of pupils in the private Catholic schools rose from 623,000 to 1,257,000 (Prost, *ibid*). Despite the severe terms of the decrees closing down the unauthorized Orders the latter found ways around them. Most dioceses set up school works committees which were responsible for collection of funds for building new premises (Launay, 1988).

Adrien Dansette, the liberal Catholic historian, chronicles the sustained efforts and diplomatic actions of Pope Leo XIII, in the aftermath of the secular education laws. Leo XIII set about healing the seismic rift between the Church and the Republic. Recognizing that the Republicans, having received a mandate from the French electorate five times in fifteen years, would dominate the political landscape for years to come, he reiterated the Church's traditional support for legitimate government and called on the French bishops to adopt a more conciliatory attitude towards the government going as far as attempting to wean the French Church politically away from the monarchists. This policy, referred to as *ralliement*<sup>12</sup>, was largely unsuccessful with regard to the French Church hierarchy, who denounced the government and called for a repeal of the laws secularizing education, despite some of them as well as a section of social

Catholic youth, veering towards *ralliément*. It nevertheless gained a delay in the government's full-scale implementation of the aforesaid legislation (Dansette, 1961).

The '*modus vivendi*' of the 1890s between Church and State was to be shattered towards the end of the century. The Dreyfus Affair <sup>13</sup> had embittered republicans against the Church which was viewed as grouped alongside the army in the anti-Dreyfus (i.e. reactionary) camp. A variety of elements led to a worsening of the relationship. In addition to a hardening of Church and state relations in France, there was the presence in Rome of the incumbent Pope whose lack of skills in diplomacy was in direct contrast to his predecessor's strength in that area. Pope Pius X's rigorous concern with matters of Catholic doctrine, however, was matched by a French Premier, Combes, who had an equally strong attachment to secularism and hostility to Catholicism (Dansette, 1961). An uncongenial configuration of conditions aided by intransigence on either side resulted in the separation of Church and State in France which has remained in place ever since. Two events are noteworthy here. Firstly the law on associations of 1901 as proposed by the Prime Minister, Waldeck-Rousseau, had the aim of legitimating the situation of the religious orders. His successor, Combes, interpreted the law in a rigid way and closed down those schools which had not sought authorization, while refusing it to those who had. Teaching by any religious order was forbidden and all such schools were to close within 10 years. The outcome of this was that many religious orders opened secular private schools (Prost, 1968). Secondly, due to the papacy's refusal to accept certain bishops nominated by the French state, the latter broke off diplomatic relations with the Holy See. Finally because the radical government of the *Bloc des Gauches* which formed a coalition with the socialists was firmly wedded to removing the influence of the Church in politics and in education for good, the Law of Separation was voted in December 1905. Its first article ensured freedom of conscience and guaranteed freedom of worship for all. Article 2 stated: 'The Republic neither acknowledges, nor pays for nor subsidises any form of worship'.

While Protestant and Jewish leaders accepted the separation, the reaction of Pius X was hostile. In the papal encyclical, *Vehementer Nos* in 1906 he wrote:

*By virtue of the supreme authority that God has conferred on me, I condemn the law voted in France on the separation of Church and State as deeply injurious to God and I denounce it and condemn it as severely dangerous for the dignity of this apostolic seat, for myself, for the clergy and for the entirety of French Catholics (Cited in Scot, 2004: 296, in Salton, 2012: 144).*

This tone of denunciation and condemnation was to prove 'severely dangerous' for the French Church, which because of a refusal to form associations - a condition of the legislation - led to their losing control of Church property (Dansette, 1961).

As a result the Catholic Church in France was greatly impoverished by the 1905 Law which removed any state subsidization but it also created the opportunity of new possibilities of action provided by the new freedom (Launay, 1988). Over the following decades the Church became more social and popular with a softened attitude towards the Republic. Diplomatic relations with the Vatican were resumed in 1921 and Pope Pius XI gave his approval to associations in 1924. This benign attitude did not, however, spill over into education with the two school systems either ignoring or opposing each other (Launay, 1988). Thus the *querelle scolaire* would continue up to the liberation of 1945.

## **Conclusion**

The development of Catholic education during the 19<sup>th</sup> century had changing dynamics with the Church, its dominance diminished at the beginning, then starting to rise and reach its zenith between 1850 and 1870 and descending to its lowest point towards the end of the century. The fortunes of the republicans and secularists also waxed and waned, from their first taste of power during the Revolution at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and their diminishing fortunes during a large part of the following one. Yet the republican ideology persisted albeit lying dormant, and for much of the period after 1850 illegal and driven underground.

This all changed under the Third Republic and after an unsteady beginning, Republicans received electoral majorities repeatedly for the rest of the period under review. They set themselves the immense task of unifying the country split between republicans, liberals and monarchists. The school was seen as the most important tool for inculcating republican norms and for uniting the country and, importantly, educational policy would be founded on a secular liberal ethic (Moody, 1978). This quotation from Nord (1995) underlines the vitality of this activity.

*Republicans invited the nation to participate in a range of activities that encouraged beliefs and habits supportive of a democratic public life. The idea was to shape a particular kind of citizen: a conscientious human being who revered the philosophes and the revolutionaries of 1789, who valued liberty, laicity and the riches afforded by literacy and a vital associational life. With such citizens, elections might be won and democratic institutions made to work, but the citizens had to come first (191).*

The contrast between a climate after 1850 whereby Catholic schooling by the religious orders was portrayed as the one true good for society and that of forty years later which viewed these schools as dangerous and demanded their destruction. was stark. One reason put forward for this has to do with modernization in the intervening period which saw vast technological advances in transport and communication networks, the opening up of employment including that of women, compulsory military service, commercial exchange etc which changed the lives of ordinary peasants, then comprising 60-70% of the population (Gildea, 1996). It was also the case that by 1880, for large swathes of the population, Catholicism was more a custom than a belief and this applied, for the most part, to all but the traditionally strong Catholic areas in the north-west from Brittany to the Vendée; in the north from coastal Normandy to the Belgian border; in the east from Alsace and Lorraine to Savoy, and in a large part of the Massif Central (Dansette, 1961). More than anything, perhaps, it was universal manhood suffrage which changed the political climate in France. This was of crucial importance as the popular vote had the power to change what had been a

country dominated by the old elite of notables to one which was more amenable to popular needs (Nord, 1995). By 1876 popular voters, peasantry and working class, no longer coerced at the ballot box and more conscious of its usefulness returned a republican majority which was decisive.

Anticlericalism was a strong factor among the peasantry (not including the staunchly Catholic areas mentioned above) and this provided a swell of support for republicanism and the Republican School. According to Gould (1999) the Church had been a substantial landholder in France prior to the Revolution and this caused a deep-seated animosity to the Church. The working class supported the democratic reforms of the Republic which provided legitimacy for workers aspirations and the promise of what could be achieved through class struggle and political alliances. As well as this, popular voters tended to distrust the Church which, albeit with individual exceptions, represented authoritarianism and supported throughout the century the forces of reaction such as Bourbons, monarchists and Bonapartists. At a fundamental level the teacher had become more useful to the peasantry than the priest, because as well as teaching reading, writing and arithmetic, he gave advice on taxes, farming and even fertilizer (Weber, 1976). It was this cohesive feature of anticlericalism which allowed the socialists, under the leadership of Jean Jaurès, to unite with the radical republicans. Jaurès's strategy was to divide the middle class and force those who opposed clericalism to unite around the working class and thus pave the way to socialism (Hodge, 1994). While this proved successful prior to 1914, the strategy of anti-clericalism was not sufficient after the war for uniting the various social classes. One reason for this was to do with bitterness towards the elites who had propelled them into war, but an important reason was to do with the active part the clergy played in defending the *patrie*. Around 45,000 French priests and members of religious orders were mobilized and 5,000 never returned (Dansette, 1961). After the war the clergy found a new place within the national community.

*Laïcité* along with equality remains at the heart of the French educational system. It is the relationship between these two ideals inherited from the Revolution which brought it into conflict with the Church during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. It is suggested here that it was the hatred of inequality rather than of religion which, for historical reasons, was responsible for this antagonism. It was directed towards the Church in as much as it supported and aligned itself with those political forces intent on rolling back the social gains won since the Revolution.

On a pragmatic level, relations between Catholic education and the state in France today are based on independence and mutual respect. Since the Debré Law of 1959 Catholic schools and other private educators benefit from state subsidisation by means of a contract of association. Government statistics show that in 2011-12 17% of French pupils were educated in private schools of which 97% were Catholic. (MEN, 2015). Catholic schools now compete with state schools on the basis of excellence rather than ideology and are rivals in terms of baccalauréat results or success in achieving places in prestigious preparatory schools for entrance to the *Grandes Ecoles* (Derycke, 2006). This implies that the relationship between these two institutions is much changed from the ultra-divisive *guerre scolaire* which pertained throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## Notes

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1. *Laïcité* is the French variant of secularism. In more precise terms it signifies both separation between the state and religion and neutrality regarding different religions thus guaranteeing freedom of religion and conscience.
  2. The Law of 9<sup>th</sup> December 1905 on the 'Separation of the Churches and the State' referred to the Protestant and Jewish faiths as well as Catholicism.
  3. This article deals with the relationship between the Catholic Church and the French state and all references to the 'Church' will refer exclusively to the Catholic Church.

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4. In the short term the dechristianising campaign aroused hostility and led to much resistance in many areas. The policy of elimination of the priesthood led to a situation where certain priestly functions were frequently assumed by the laity. These and other practices, it has been suggested, led to a general laicisation of religion and affected attitudes to religion in the long-term (Tallett, 1991:22).
  5. The Absolute state was a form of government where the monarch e.g. Louis XVI, had unrestricted power over the state and its people.
  6. Each Académie is under the authority of a *Recteur*, nominated by the Minister of Education. It is generally named after the town where the Rectorat is based, for example, *Académie* of Rennes, Nantes, Toulouse etc.
  7. The *commune* is the lowest level of administrative division in France.
  8. The *lettre d'obédience* refers to an order given to a member of a Congregation by his/her superior to teach in a primary school.
  9. The Loi Falloux was the Education Act of 15 March 1850. For further elaboration please see pages 12-13.
  10. Marie Joseph Louis Adolphe Thiers participated at ministerial level in the regimes of the July Monarchy, Second Republic, Second Empire and the Third Republic. He succeeded in siding with liberal, conservative and republican factions. He is most negatively remembered for his violent suppression of the Paris Commune in 1870 and positively for his successful unification of monarchists, Orléanists and republicans to form the Third Republic in 1871.
  11. 'Anticlerical' differs from 'antireligious' in that the former is in opposition to the power and influence of the Church and its clergy in public and political life, whereas the latter is in opposition to religion itself.
  12. '*Ralliement*' refers to a policy of reconciliation between the Church and the French Republic and exemplified under the papacy of Pope Leo XIII.
  13. Alfred Dreyfus was a Jewish artillery captain who was court-martialed in 1894 for treason and sentenced to life deportation on the basis of evidence later found to be a forgery. The 'affair' gained huge political notoriety with the charge of racism levelled at Dreyfus's accusers. It came to represent great symbolical importance and divided the country into pro- and anti-Dreyfusards.

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### **Notes on Contributor**

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