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Revolutions, Empires, and Republics: Secularizing Nineteenth-Century French Education

ABSTRACT: *The debate over the role of church and state with regard to education has been ongoing for centuries. Using a chronological approach, this essay argues that the policies, reforms, and laws integrated into the French education system over the course of the nineteenth century reflected a growing conviction among government officials that a secularized education system would provide a stronger, more stable state.*

KEYWORDS: *modern history; France; Nicolas de Condorcet; Guizot Law (1833); Falloux Law (1851); Ferry Laws (1881-1882); Catholic Church; Napoleon III; Adolphe Thiers; education*

Introduction

In their 1991 study on elementary schooling in nineteenth-century France, Raymond Grew and Patrick J. Harrigan observe that "[e]ducation was debated [...] as an instrument of change that foretold the future, but the education offered then as now was remarkable for its retrospective quality and its dependence upon its own history."[1] State-controlled education was not a novel concept in France by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, the idea that the government should oversee the general outlines of education predated the Revolution of 1789. During the *ancien régime*, this title of control belonged to the Catholic Church which was responsible for coordinating the country's educational institutions; the state, meanwhile, only involved itself in matters of military and technical training. In post-Revolution France, the secularization of education was intended to minimize the influence of the church but also to make everyday citizens aware of their natural rights. The idea of a universal education emerged out of the Revolution, and it was realized a century later.

This essay is based on several types of source material. For the official perspective of the Catholic Church, it utilizes encyclicals (i.e., letters) from Pope Pius VI (r. 1775-1799) and Pope Gregory XVI (r. 1831-1846). To get a sense of the period's political debate on education, it references, for example, François Guizot's *Essai sur l'histoire et sur l'état actuel de l'instruction publique en France* (1816), as well as texts from government officials, such as Louis Napoleon's "Campaign Manifesto" (1848), Simon Jules's speech on "The Separation of Church and State" (1867), and Léon Gambetta's "Belleville Manifesto" (1869). Roger Price's collection, *Documents on the French Revolution of 1848*, provides additional letters and meeting dialogues. Decrees, laws, and edicts are used to understand the tension between the desired state of education and how it was viewed in everyday life: the Guizot Law (1833), Falloux Law (1851), and Ferry Laws (1881) in particular reflect the changing educational policies over the course of the nineteenth century.

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[1] Raymond Grew and Patrick J. Harrigan, *School, State, and Society: The Growth of Elementary Schooling in Nineteenth-Century France: A Quantitative Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 71.

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From the perspective of educational philosophy and pedagogy, Nicolas de Condorcet's *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Spirit* (1795) illustrates the growing conviction that the individual and the natural process of things would allow humans to progress.

The topic of education in nineteenth-century France has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Phyllis Stock-Morton's groundbreaking 1988 monograph *Moral Education for a Secular Society: The Development of Morale Laïque in Nineteenth-Century France* serves as the basis for the argument of this essay.[2] Meanwhile, Roger Price's work *The French Second Empire: An Anatomy of Political Power* (2001), Robert David Anderson's monograph *Education in France: 1848-1870* (1975), and the already mentioned co-authored study by Raymond Grew and Patrick J. Harrigan, *School, State, and Society: The Growth of Elementary Schooling in Nineteenth-Century France* (1991), provide much of the contextual information.[3] The latter portion of the nineteenth century, as well as the debate on education between the Catholic Church and the French state, has been the subject of scholarly articles by Patrick J. Harrigan, Ann Margaret Doyle, Efe Peker, Sheryl T. Kroen, Sharif Gemie, Mathew J. Burrows, and Gilbert Chaitin.[4] Peker, Burrows, and Chaitin focus on the Third Republic, Kroen concentrates on the Restoration, and the other authors analyze either different time periods, specific texts, or educational contents.

Scholarship on French education has focused heavily on the first half of the nineteenth century, but many of the key laws and policies arose only after the Revolution of 1848.[5] This essay argues that policies, reforms, and laws integrated into the French education system reflected a growing conviction among government officials that a secularized education system would provide a stronger, more stable French state; it proceeds chronologically and shows how the influence of the Catholic Church diminished as the nineteenth century proceeded toward a more secularized society.

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[2] Phyllis Stock-Morton, *Moral Education for a Secular Society: The Development of Morale Laïque in Nineteenth-Century France* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

[3] Roger Price, *The French Second Empire: An Anatomy of Political Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Robert David Anderson, *Education in France, 1848-1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); Grew and Harrigan, *School, State, and Society*.

[4] Patrick J. Harrigan, "French Catholics and Classical Education after the Falloux Law," *French Historical Studies* 8, no. 2 (1973): 255-278; Ann Margaret Doyle, "Catholic Church and State Relations in French Education in the Nineteenth Century: The Struggle between *Laïcité* and Religion," *International Studies in Catholic Education* 9, no. 1 (2017): 108-122; Efe Peker, "Bringing the State Back in Secularization: The Development of *Laïcité* in the French Third Republic (1875-1905)," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 58, no. 4 (2019): 813-832; Sheryl T. Kroen, "Revolutionizing Religious Politics during the Restoration," *French Historical Studies* 21, no. 1 (1998): 27-53; Sharif Gemie, "'A Danger to Society'? Teachers and Authority in France, 1833-1850," *French History* 2, no. 3 (1988): 264-287; Mathew J. Burrows, "Education and the Third Republic," *The Historical Journal* 28, no. 1 (March 1985): 249-260; Gilbert Chaitin, "'France Is My Mother': The Subject of Universal Education in the French Third Republic," *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 32, no. 1 (2005): 128-158.

[5] Stock-Morton, *Moral Education*.

I. The Spark after the Revolution

The idea for a universal education system arose from the French Revolution of 1789 and was articulated by Nicolas de Condorcet (1743-1794) who wrote the highly influential *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Spirit*, published posthumously in 1795.[6] In his *Sketch*, Condorcet argues that—in order to expand knowledge—the natural and social sciences would have to become the staple of French education. Condorcet's *Sketch* challenges readers to question their own morality, even in relation to Christian values.[7] Its author had been a supporter of the Revolution and become an activist for the reform of the educational system. For Condorcet, the Revolution was the continuation of the progress of the human mind and spirit. He believed that the education system should be guided by reason and not faith,[8] arguing that the Catholic 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."[9] Condorcet was a member of the "Committee of Public Instruction" (established 1791) but held no political affiliation, which, during the Revolution, could be either beneficial or detrimental. His work, as well as that of the "Committee," was instrumental in dismantling the Catholic Church's educational monopoly, but nothing concrete was offered—yet—to fill the vacuum thus created.

Enter Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821). Napoleon Bonaparte was a child of the Enlightenment, and the Enlightenment had provided its supporters with ideas on how information and thoughts should be transmitted. Supporters of the Enlightenment recognized the importance of education and argued that its care should not remain in the hands of the Catholic Church. Napoleon Bonaparte subscribed to the concept of Gallicanism, according to which the church in France should be subordinate to the French state, an idea that would come to be supported by much of the French bureaucracy in the nineteenth century.[10] 1801 saw the "first secular settlement"[11] in France, namely, the "Concordat" between Napoleon Bonaparte and Pope Pius VII (r. 1800-1823). On the basis of the "Concordat," the church and its clergy were now officials of the French state, making the appointment of bishops and archbishops, for example, the business of the state. In 1804, the French Ministry of Religions was formed, which allowed the state to oversee and fund all religious affairs.[12] Then, in 1808, Napoleon Bonaparte established the Imperial University of France, marking the culmination of

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[6] Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, trans. June Barraclough (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1955).

[7] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 95-98.

[8] Doyle, "Catholic Church," 109-110.

[9] Nicolas de Condorcet, quoted in Doyle, "Catholic Church," 110.

[10] Anderson, *Education in France*, 5.

[11] Peker, "Bringing the State Back," 818.

[12] Peker, "Bringing the State Back," 818.

decades-long debates concerning a national system of education. The university served as an institution that allowed the state to run the schools, and, in 1824, came under the control of the Ministry of Public Instruction.[13]

The Enlightenment push for a more secularized education system, one characterized by less ecclesiastical influence, is discussed by Phyllis Stock-Morton.[14] Stock-Morton draws particular attention to a 1792 speech by Condorcet, in which he states that the "Declaration [of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen] and the Constitution should be taught, not as having been ordained by heaven, but as developed out of basic principles dictated by nature and by reason."[15] Condorcet believed that education was crucial for any progress in society. He recognized that the Constitution of 1791 emphasized the freedom of religion, so he argued that "public institutions could not favor one over others, and morality based on reason alone would survive any change of beliefs which might take place in the course of life."[16] Thus, Condorcet concluded that any type of religious education was the responsibility of parents, not (religious) institutions.[17]

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church was watching the developments in France with increasing concern, as it saw its influence on French institutions, particularly the education system, dwindling. In 1791, Pope Pius VI (r. 1775-1799) issued his encyclical "Adeo Nota," in which he denounced the decrees of the French Assembly as contrary to religion and society.[18] "Adeo Nota" was the pontiff's response to the "Declaration of the Rights of the Man and of the Citizen" (1789) and the French Constitution of 1791 which, according to Stock-Morton, promoted a "civic education conforming to the spirit of the Revolution and no longer a purely religious education."[19] The Constitution of 1791 also provided public education for all citizens, and this education, at least initially, was meant to be free. The French statesman and diplomat, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord (1754-1838), was tasked with creating a report that would focus on the education system and how to better it. Talleyrand was considered a supporter of the Revolution and its anti-clerical revolutionaries. He realized that not everyone would see eye-to-eye on all issues, such as education, but he was hoping that most of France could at least find common ground in the area of ethics.[20]

After Napoleon Bonaparte's ouster in 1814, Louis XVIII restored the Bourbon dynasty with the Constitutional Charter of June 4, 1814, declaring that the French Revolution of 1789, along with Napoleon Bonaparte, should be forgotten. The

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[13] Anderson, *Education in France*, 5.

[14] Stock-Morton, *Moral Education*, 22-24.

[15] Nicolas de Condorcet, quoted in Stock-Morton, *Moral Education*, 23.

[16] Nicolas de Condorcet, quoted in Stock-Morton, *Moral Education*, 23-24.

[17] Stock-Morton, *Moral Education*, 23.

[18] Pope Pius VI, "Adeo Nota," April 23, 1791, online, accessed June 14, 2022.

[19] Stock-Morton, *Moral Education*, 22.

[20] Stock-Morton, *Moral Education*, 22.

subsequent period of the Bourbon Restoration (1814-1830) saw several attempts by the Catholic Church to reclaim its authority via France's Christian monarchy.[21] The Constitutional Charter of 1814 is the focus of Sheryl Kroen's 1998 article "Revolutionizing Religious Politics during the Restoration," in which she explains that the Bourbon Restoration sought to do away with any revolutionary violence and replace it with a Christian monarchy to regain the support of the French people.[22] Meanwhile, the church in France hoped to reestablish its status by renewing its alliance with the throne, and in this endeavor, it enjoyed the support of the upper class. The evidence shows that the Bourbon government tried to manipulate the public perception of their dynasty, particularly the perception of those who had supported the Revolution of 1789, in order to convert revolutionary citizens into orderly, Bourbon-supporting citizens. To do so, the Bourbon dynasty turned to education. By 1829, there were roughly 36,000 schools in France, and many of these had been established during the Restoration.[23] France would not see another educational expansion of this magnitude until the twentieth century.

II. No Summer Break: The July Monarchy and Its Aftermath

Until the Third Republic (established 1870), every French government proved increasingly secular and anti-clerical with regard to public instruction reforms. As early as 1816, a French statesman by the name of François Guizot (1787-1874) had laid the groundwork for this when he published his *Essai sur l'histoire et sur l'état actuel de l'instruction publique en France*. In this essay, Guizot described the then current state of public instruction, ideas to improve it, and the two levels of education that needed reform, namely, primary and secondary education.[24]

It was not until the July Monarchy (1830-1848) that the first real legislation regarding education was passed. In 1832, François Guizot became Louis Philippe I's Minister of Public Education, and he was responsible for drafting the Guizot Law of 1833. This law required every commune to fund its own primary school and stipulated that every department and school would have a training program for primary teachers and school inspectors.[25] Guizot supported the idea of having schools for girls but not many during the July Monarchy favored this idea. Another important aspect of the law was that it set out to make teaching a more qualified profession. Guizot viewed teachers as "substitute parents" who embodied the virtues that parents might not have.[26] Until the passage of the Guizot Law, teaching had been part-time and without official authorization, but

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[21] Doyle, "Catholic Church," 112.

[22] Kroen, "Revolutionizing Religious Politics," 27-29.

[23] Grew and Harrigan, *School, State, and Society*, 31.

[24] François Guizot, *Essai sur l'histoire et sur l'état actuel de l'instruction publique en France* (Paris: Maradan, 1816).

[25] Doyle, "Catholic Church," 113.

[26] Gemie, "Danger to Society," 267.

this new law established a "rate of pay" and "conditions of service."[27] Under the Guizot Law, the state took control of the primary school system which had been under Catholic control since Napoleon Bonaparte's ouster (the secondary school system was already state-controlled at this time). While the law did not abolish any role of the church in education, it did reduce its influence,[28] which reflects Guizot's aspirations for a secularized system of public instruction. The Guizot Law established France as the first country with a state-controlled, secular primary education system. In a way, the Guizot Law was France's assertion of "human reason" in response to Pope Gregory XVI's 1832 encyclical "Mirari Vos: On Liberalism and Religious Indifferentism," which had stated that "[i]t is the proud, or rather foolish, men who examine the mysteries of faith which surpass all understanding with the faculties of the human mind, and rely on human reason which by the condition of man's nature, is weak and infirm."[29] But the pope was not easily silenced in the matter. In 1835, two years after the Guizot Law had been implemented, Gregory XVI issued his encyclical "Commissum Divinitus: On Church and State," in which he reiterated that the "power of teaching and governing in matters of religion, given by Christ to His Spouse [i.e., the Church], belongs to the priests and bishops."[30] There appears to be a subtle concession here, though, in the wording "teaching [...] in matters of religion," which could be construed as limiting the church's influence to religious instruction.

Issued just prior to the launching of the Second Republic (1848-1852), Louis Napoleon's "Campaign Manifesto" provides insight into how important a state-controlled education system—that included Catholic teachings—was considered to the creation of a more loyal French citizen.[31] However, the idea that a state-controlled Catholic-based education system could flourish was just that: a campaign idea. Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877), who would eventually become President of France (1871-1873) at the beginning of the Third Republic, opposed the idea of merging church and state for the purposes of education. At a meeting of conservative politicians on November 5, 1848, Thiers stated, "We cannot withstand the enthusiasm of a popular movement which is proof against all rational argument."[32] One month later, just before Louis Napoleon's election as President of France, Thiers wrote, "I believe him [Louis Napoleon] to be at least the equal of [Louis-Eugène] Cavaignac [i.e., another candidate for the presidency]

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27 Gemie, "Danger to Society," 267.

28 Robert L. Koepke, "Cooperation, Not Conflict: Curés and Primary School Inspectors in July Monarchy France, 1833-1848," *Church History* 64, no. 4 (1995): 594-609.

29 Pope Gregory XVI, "Mirari Vos," August 15, 1832, online, accessed June 14, 2022.

30 Pope Gregory XVI, "Commissum Divinitus," May 17, 1835, online, accessed June 14, 2022.

31 Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, "Louis Napoleon's Campaign Manifesto," November, 1848, online, accessed June 14, 2022.

32 Adolphe Thiers, quoted in Roger Price, *Documents on the French Revolution of 1848* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 114.

[...]. Without insisting that his nomination is the best, it appears to all of us, as the lesser evil."[33] Louis Napoleon won the election in 1848 by a landslide, largely due to the support of the peasant-class, but Thiers would eventually champion a completely secularized school system in the Third Republic.

Roger Price describes how Louis Napoleon's Minister of Public Instruction, Alfred de Falloux (1811-1886), promoted the idea that—to establish moral order—France had to revert to some form of Catholic teaching, albeit provided via the state.[34] Fallow drafted the Falloux Law, which consists of 85 articles and took effect on March 15, 1850.[35] This law facilitated the establishment of national standards, the reorganization of the institutions in charge of maintaining these standards,[36] and the founding of individual academies for each department that oversaw girls' schools, adult courses, and kindergarten. The Falloux Law was also instrumental in establishing an academic council that had to meet every three months, create lists of approved teachers, maintain a proper budget for schools, and review curriculum.[37] Although the Falloux Law afforded the church a certain role in the evolving education system, this role was only minimal and relegated to primary schools. The Superior Council of Public Instruction consisted of twenty-seven members and only four of these members were from the church.[38] In fact, the Falloux Law made no mention of the church, but it did state that any qualified Frenchman could establish a secondary school; the only requirement was five years of teaching experience.[39] The church was able to benefit from this part of the law because it had an abundance of well-trained clergy, and most of them had five years of teaching experience.[40] However, any school run by the church was subject to monitoring by a board of supervisors that consisted of only non-members of the church who usually had the interest of the state in mind.[41] In addition, the law merely gave the church minority representation on the Higher Council of Public Education.[42] Thus, the church had to adapt to the needs and demands of both state and society. Much of the curriculum was still evolving, but there was a larger scientific emphasis, and the church had trouble in this area as it was still referencing classical studies to teach modern-day science.[43]

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33 Adolphe Thiers, quoted in Price, *Documents*, 114.

34 Price, *French Second Empire*, 193-200.

35 Alfred de Falloux, "Loi Falloux," March 15, 1850, online, accessed June 14, 2022.

36 Grew and Harrigan, *School, State, and Society*, 95.

37 Grew and Harrigan, *School, State, and Society*, 95.

38 John K. Huckaby, "Roman Catholic Reaction to the Falloux Law," *French Historical Studies* 4, no. 2 (January 1965): 203-213, here 204.

39 Harrigan, "French Catholics," 255.

40 Harrigan, "French Catholics," 255.

41 Huckaby, "Roman Catholic Reaction," 205.

42 Harrigan, "French Catholics," 255.

43 Harrigan, "French Catholics," 256.

One year after the French *coup d'état* of 1851, Louis Napoleon declared himself Emperor Napoleon III. Patrick J. Harrigan's article, "Church, State, and Education in France from the Falloux to the Ferry Laws: A Reassessment," describes how the Falloux Law allowed for both the church and the state to operate schools with next to no interference from the Second Empire (1852-1870) and remained in place for three decades.[44] This shows that Louis Napoleon had little interest in education, at least not at the primary level.[45] His 1848 "Campaign Manifesto" had suggested otherwise, but it was just that: a campaign promise. In 1852, funding for primary education in the communes was abolished, due to growing pressure on the finance minister by Louis Napoleon himself; in addition, inspectors of these schools were removed and their reporting was suppressed.[46] For a brief period between 1852 and 1853, primary schooling was no longer free, but this only lasted a few months.

III. The Regime to Rule Them All: The Third Republic

Throughout the nineteenth century, Catholics and anti-clerical activists fought many of their battles on the field of education.[47] Even under the Third Republic (established 1870), most French schools began their days with prayer and often taught some form of Catholic history.[48] By the same token, leaders during the Third Republic supported the concept that modern state-building was directly linked to secularization.[49] How teachers would connect religious teachings to society, and how the church could serve society instead of the other way around, were topics of considerable debate. The Third Republic benefitted from the backing of the French bourgeoisie, mainly because the bourgeoisie had developed a disdain for Napoleon III's Second Empire and its collaboration with the Catholic Church to gain more support from the peasantry.[50]

During the Third Republic, the curriculum was among the most hotly debated topics regarding education. Non-supporters of the Third Republic blamed the lack of a classical curriculum for the weakening of the military and the country's reduced diplomatic standing, while supporters praised the more scientific curriculum as the "source of French cultural superiority."[51] Most of the scientific curriculum was implemented in the secondary schools. The church had tried to create its own curriculum after the passing of the Falloux Law, and when that failed, it inserted anti-secularist rhetoric into its curriculum and eliminated secular

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[44] Patrick J. Harrigan, "Church, State, and Education in France from the Falloux to the Ferry Laws: A Reassessment," *Canadian Journal of History* 36, no. 1 (2001): 51-84, here 51-60.

[45] Anderson, *Education in France*, 80-81.

[46] Anderson, *Education in France*, 81.

[47] Grew and Harrigan, *School, State, and Society*, 91.

[48] Grew and Harrigan, *School, State, and Society*, 92.

[49] Peker, "Bringing the State Back," 817.

[50] Peker, "Bringing the State Back," 819.

[51] Harrigan, "French Catholics," 256.

texts as much as possible. This move garnered support from radical conservatives, but not enough to effect the change the church had hoped for.[52]

In 1871, Adolphe Thiers became the second President of France and first President of the Third Republic (1871-1873). Thiers had rejected the Guizot Law of 1833 because it neither included girls' schools, nor female teachers and their training.[53] According to George Chaitin's 2005 article "'France Is My Mother': The Subject of Universal Education in the French Third Republic," the new political leaders, particularly Adolphe Thiers and Jules Simon, believed that a secularized education system would ensure the Third Republic's power for years to come by creating citizens who would be loyal to the Republic and not the church.[54]

Jules Simon (1814-1896) was a member of Adolphe Thiers's first presidential cabinet and in charge of the portfolio of Education. In 1867, Simon had delivered a speech on "The Separation of Church and State" to the legislative body of the Second Empire, in which he had described the then current state of relations between the two and had declared that France should be a secular state.[55] Thiers, Simon, and other members of the Third Republic's first presidential cabinet shared a political ideology that aspired toward a secularized education system and society in order to transform the identity of the nation through public instruction. Their ideological consensus is evident from a speech on "Educational Equality" delivered by Jules Ferry in 1870; Ferry shared these views and would carry them into the 1880s when he became Minister of Public Instruction.[56]

Another prominent voice on the subject was Léon Gambetta (1838-1882), at times Thiers's political opponent, but instrumental in establishing the Third Republic. Gambetta helped rally the supporters of the Third Republic by arguing in favor of "detaching wisely, but firmly, the ties that bind the church to the state."[57] In 1869, one year before Napoleon III's ouster and the end of the Second Empire, Gambetta had made a speech against the emperor and the Second Empire, declaring that there must be a "separation of church and state" and a "free, compulsory, secular primary education."[58] This speech would later be called the "Belleville Manifesto," and it embodied much of what the Third Republic would be able to accomplish for French education.

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[52] Harrigan, "French Catholics," 258.

[53] Gemie, "Danger to Society," 267.

[54] Chaitin, "France Is My Mother," 128-130.

[55] Jules Simon, *La séparation de l'Église et de l'État: Discours prononcé au corps législatif dans la séance du 3 décembre 1867* (Versailles: Imprimerie Cerf, 1867).

[56] Jules Ferry, "De l'égalité d'éducation: Conférence prononcée à Paris, à la salle Molière, le 10 avril 1870," in *Discours et Opinions de Jules Ferry*, vol. 1, ed. Paul Robiquet (Paris: Armand Colin et Compagnie, 1893), 287-289.

[57] Léon Gambetta, quoted in Peker, "Bringing the State Back," 820.

[58] Léon Gambetta, "The Belleville Manifesto," 1869, online, accessed June 14, 2022.

Yet another influential voice was Octave Gréard (1828-1904) who, during the Third Republic, became the inspector of all academic institutions in Paris.[59] Gréard had been educated during the Second Republic and had subsequently served as a teacher in Metz, Versailles, and Paris. He is credited with helping to improve the conditions of primary schools, and more importantly, the overall quality of education. He also helped to implement a full monitorial system, according to which older children who were further along in their education would help monitor younger, less educated children.[60] This became one of the most commonly used pedagogical methods in all of France and could be viewed as the nineteenth-century equivalent of modern-day teacher's assistants or aides. Gréard also reformed the educational tiers—based on elementary, middle, and higher divisions of education—which, in turn, helped him with the desired reduction of class sizes. The reorganization was a success, and the only two subjects now taught on all educational tiers were geography and history.[61]

During the Third Republic, teachers became increasingly interested in more specialized forms of education. School libraries received more funding and attention and were now viewed as an essential part of the educational process. According to the data, 100,000 books were available in school libraries in 1881; by 1907, the number had grown to over 400,000 books.[62] The establishment of universal, free education also facilitated funding at the local level. Thus, if school growth appears slow during the Third Republic, this can be attributed to the increasing availability of schools in less populated areas.

The Ferry Laws of 1881 and 1882 stipulated that primary education was to become completely free, mandatory, and secular for both boys and girls. Taken together, the two laws consisted of 18 articles,[63] and they became the basis of France's secularized education for the next seventy or more years. From 1829 to 1837, the number of students in France had doubled, and it would double again from 1837 to the end of the nineteenth century.[64] The Third Republic ensured that no charges for education would be placed on families in both the large cities and the country's rural areas. Soon Catholic schools, too, stopped charging for education, and poorer families received additional assistance via scholarships for their children.[65] In sum, the Third Republic accomplished more in the area of education than the revolutions of 1789 or 1848 or, for that matter, any other regime during the nineteenth century.[66]

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[59] Anderson, *Education in France*, 154.

[60] Anderson, *Education in France*, 156.

[61] Anderson, *Education in France*, 157.

[62] Grew and Harrigan, *School, State, and Society*, 46.

[63] Jules Ferry, "Lois Jules Ferry," March 28, 1882, online, accessed June 14, 2022.

[64] Grew and Harrigan, *School, State, and Society*, 56.

[65] Grew and Harrigan, *School, State, and Society*, 56.

[66] Burrows, "Education and the Third Republic," 251-252.

Conclusion

In 1854, the American educator Henry Barnard (1811-1900) wrote, "There is nothing in the history of modern civilization more truly sublime than the establishment of the present Law of primary instruction in France."[67] This essay has shown that the policies, reforms, and laws integrated into the French education system over the course of the nineteenth century reflected a growing conviction among government officials that a secularized education system would ultimately provide a stronger, more stable state. The Third Republic did not just see the culmination of this development in terms of legislation and innovation, but was also its chief beneficiary because it lasted for seventy years and only collapsed when France was overrun by Nazi Germany in the summer of 1940. While this essay has confined itself to the nineteenth century, it would be worthwhile to analyze data that show the impact of these educational reforms in the early decades of the twentieth century, particularly during the period's major crisis, namely, World War I. For much of the time considered here, secularization and modernization seem to have gone hand in hand, but—as every French election shows—the debate over education is far from over.

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[67] Henry Barnard, *National Education in Europe: Being an Account of the Organization, Administration, Instruction, and Statistics of Public Schools of Different Grades in the Principal States* (New York: Charles B. Norton, 1854), 382.