

Is *laïcité* the civil religion of France?
Blandine Chelini-Pont
Presented at Brigham Young University, March 2009

We would like to describe the “civil religion” of France in the same manner that Robert Bellah examined the phenomenon in his article “Civil Religion in America” (published in *Daedalus*, 1967, re-published in 2005.)

First, let us define our conception of “civil religion.” Civil Religion would be a combination of collective rituals that reveal a devotion to the unity of a nation and a national mythology made up of a diffusion of beliefs and representations that constitute the dominant mental attitudes of a society. It has its own unique history, its own mythical or providential origins and allows the population of a country to identify itself as such. It gives a national group the feeling of belonging, attachment and a common sense of pride.¹

From this definition, Robert Bellah considers civil religion a real religion, which he calls a “national faith.” The French intellectual Régis Debray believes that there is something more primitive and invincible, a state of very elaborate feelings of belonging, above that of civil religion. He claims that it exists in all human communities, large or small, and he calls it “the sacred” [*le sacré*]. The sacred “allows a group of individuals to live as a whole.” Debray defines this sacred as the indispensable “imaginary coagulant” in every social order. Commenting on his latest book, *Le moment fraternité* (Gallimard, 2009), he explains his idea that all human communities, atheist or not, have acts of sacrilege that are punishable by law. By using the anthropological term “invariant,” he claims “I can wander from Kazakhstan to the center of Paris. Yet even in a flat country you will find a high point, an enclosed part of land, a crypt or a tower. There is always a place of assembly, which creates a mythic reference point, event, hero or foundational myth that crystallizes an identity... The technological and economic world produces convergence, but this divergence calls for a contrary convergence through a sort of thermostat of belonging. One must think again of the sacred things, the memories even in our own sphere... Ethnologists do not exist only to study native Papuans.”²

French people today consider that *laïcité* (the distinctly French concept of laity) is what identifies them the most. They have a very simple idea of it: *laïcité* is education through secular learning and the complete privatization of religious practices. They also have a common attitude regarding it: they seek to defend it at all costs against any interior or exterior enemy.³

Is that enough to define a French “civil religion?” When French people have evoked or invoked *laïcité* over the last twenty years, it is easy enough to show that in this contemporary period *laïcité* fulfills the role of the French “civil religion.” But our hypothesis is that it is merely a temporary coincidence.

¹ Jean Baubérot, “civil religion covers a set of beliefs, symbols and institutionalized rites within a society that conceals its ultimate grounds from the social debate,” in “La *laïcité* en crise, une conquête toujours en devenir,” p. 53-4, *Informations sociales*, 2006, 131.8: 48-59.

² Interview in the newspaper *Le Point*, 26 February 2009, 77-8.

³ Survey BVA 2003, IPSOS 2005.

The French “civil religion” is much like a Russian nesting doll. This is not surprising. In the United States, according to a Robert Bellah article [cited hereafter], researchers have worked on this notion of American “civil religion” (Herbert, Sydney Mead, Russell E. Richey, Donald G. Jones). They believed that there is a great variety in the American civil religion. However, when compared with France, the American civil religion is a true rock, “like a central nave of a cathedral with many surrounding chapels” (Régis Debray). Civil religions certainly have multiple entrances. The French civil religion, if it exists, would have a difficult time revealing itself. It is complex, rich in roots of all kinds, and contradictory. It is like “a molecule with a lazy atom” (Debray). We propose that it is discernable in three different faces juxtaposed one with another: *Laïcité*, the Republic [*République*], and France. It is like a presentation of the French trinity, a small secular allusion to the Catholic heritage of this nation!

I. *Laïcité* as Contemporary Civil Religion

Laïcité is — as far as we’re concerned — the first and most recent level of French civil religion. It is easy to identify its make-up, to identify its founding heroes, texts, symbols, holidays and commemorations, and rituals. *Laïcité* was dogmatized in a key speech by President Jacques Chirac in January 2004.⁴ But in such a not-so-distant past, the 1970s, *laïcité* was not at all an object of such unanimity, and the difference of opinion regarding it was the object of a true political war in which the believing secularists [*croyants laïcs*] didn’t have either the last word or sufficient legitimacy for their conviction to represent the cornerstone of French identity. They were a part of the political scene. If we go even further back, the word didn’t even exist. If the habit was acquired, even among the most eminent intellectuals back to the philosophers of the French Enlightenment and the French Revolution,⁵ there is no trace in the writings and thoughts of the time of a developed and enforced “lay pact” [*pacte laïc*].⁶ The term appears for the first time in the 1880s.

Laïcité, for legal authors and sociologists, is a common term for designating a process of secularization that is both natural and voluntary. This secularization is one of a detachment of spiritual authority from the State, its institutions and from society itself: it comprises, therefore, several phenomena of disengagement including political, social, moral and even spiritual. It is entirely swallowed up by constitutional and legal evolutions.

It is also presented as the constitutional foundation of our political system, serving as the most reasonable vector for assuring the four principles that regulate religion in democracy: the absence of any official State religion (autonomy/separation from the State, civil law disassociated from religious norms, non-religious conception of public life and the citizen)

⁴ “*Laïcité is inscribed in our traditions. It is at the heart of our republican identity. It is with faith in the principle of laïcité, the cornerstone of the Republic, the beacon of our common values of respect, tolerance, dialogue, that I call upon all French men and women to unite. Laïcité is the pillar of the Constitution. These values are the ground our Nation’s identity. These values speak far and wide in the world. These are the values which make France.*” Speech delivered January 25 2003.

⁵

⁶

individual freedom of conscience, of belief and religion, the axiological neutrality of the State, and the organizational autonomy of churches/religions and the equality of religions and beliefs for individuals and for the collectivity (this includes the disassociation of one's identity as a citizen from religious identity.) Presented in this way, French *laïcité* is nothing extraordinary, and one finds these principles in many other countries.⁷

However we can easily see that this term in France today has a connotation that is not at all “*laïque*” but is closer to the sacred. Jean Baubérot acknowledges — in order to regret and denounce it — that French *laïcité* mixes constitutional principles, secularization **and** civil religion: “Concrete *laïcité* mixes laicization and ‘civil religion’,” he writes,⁸ a notion which Jeremy Gunn developed in his article “French Secularism as Utopia and Myth.”⁹ In fact, when French people today use the word *laïcité*, they don't have the image of good and worthy constitutional principles of a democratic nation, but a powerful founding myth, one of a liberating victory of reason against religion that brought about the birth of the rights of man.

A. The Beginning

a. The Revolution as necessary rupture

*A moment will therefore come to pass in which the sun will only shine upon free men, recognizing no other master than their own reason. Where tyrants, or slaves, priests and their stupid and hypocritical instruments, will only exist in stories and theatres. One will only have time to pity their victims and dupes. To discuss with horror their excess, in a useful vigilance. To decide how to recognize and suppress, under the weight of reason, the first seeds of superstition and tyranny, if ever they dared to reappear.*¹⁰ — Condorcet

Speaking of the *Declaration des droits de l'homme*, which, according to him, would not be “tablets from heaven,” the mathematician, philosopher and revolutionary Marquis de Condorcet could be considered through this text an icon of French secularism. He is abundantly cited. He represents the roots of a heroic time, that of the Enlightenment and French Revolution. Drawing upon a well-established historiographical tradition of an upheaval without precedent, it became certain that the French *Lumières* actively prepared the irreversible and liberating rupture of the Revolution, whose first fruits can be dated with the publication of the first volume of *l'Encyclopédie* in 1751.

Secularism — *laïcité* — would not be the ripe fruit of an inexorable revolution. It is a beginning. It is an intuition of French philosophers, who thought of the emancipation of humanity by

⁷ Jean Baubérot, “Transferts culturels et identité nationale dans la laïcité française,” *Diogenes*, 2007, no. 218: 18-27.

⁸ Jean Baubérot, “La laïcité en crise? Une conquête toujours en devenir,” *Informations sociales*, 2006/8, no. 136: 48-59.

⁹ T.J. Gunn, *Houston Law Review*, 42.1: 82-102.

¹⁰

exercising atheistic reason.¹¹ It is a voluntary rupture, an act of creation, that we owe to Montesquieu, Voltaire, d'Holbach, and other great philosophers, themselves contemporary of a philosophical edifice of great importance, that of Emmanuel Kant: to the observation that religion is the most powerful of the instruments of domination, their response was that the free man cannot accept being dominated by a religion that imposes itself on him.¹²

There is in the secular movement the certainty that secularism had been a victorious combat in a great struggle against a Catholic religious system, associated with an absolutist political system. Secularism had to be defended, as the revolutionaries defended themselves to change France, for secularism is the space of dearly captured freedom of conscience. Secularism is like the French Promised Land.¹³

The Revolution is the foundational act of “liberation,” of this exodus from Egypt in which the king of France plays the role of Pharaoh. It permits the creation of a citizen order, where religion is not a condition of belonging, where equality of the law touches all people and the political authority no longer emanates from God.

Never mind that the historians explain that, well before the Revolution, the Gallican French state had long claimed its independence and sovereignty.¹⁴ Never mind that the historians recall the history of civil religion set forth according to the propositions of Rousseau in the social contract (ch. 8, bk. 4: existence of God, immortality of the soul, remuneration of virtue and punishment of vice, exclusion of religious intolerance) behind the cult of the Supreme Being blessing the nation, to which the Republic submitted the population. Never mind that this attempt degenerated in persecution from the Catholic church which refused the civil constitution of the clergy and the different sermons of allegiance to the nation. Intolerance, in the secular myth, is on the side of the religious and monarchical reaction, not on the side of the triumphant revolution over the ancient order, because despite its failures, the Revolution allowed the end of a theocratic and unjust world. This is why in 1789, the bicentennial of the French Revolution was celebrated with great splendor and the parade of the 14th of July, organized as an immense, chic carnival by the creator Jean-Paul Goude.

b. *The Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*

Never mind either that the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme* was proclaimed under the aegis of the Supreme Being, and that the idea was proposed by La Fayette, returned from the United States. Never mind that this declaration was not applied in its entirety since its proclamation, that it would be removed from constitutional texts from different French political regimes until 1946. This declaration was put forth in August 1789, and it assures without forced juridical analysis in the minds of French people today, Liberty opposite of all powers and arbitraries, and Equality opposite of all the privileges of birth, health, race, religion, education, and money.

11

12

13

14 Philippe Nélidoff...

The historian Max Gallo also gives a very enlightening lecture on our current social situation by readdressing the belief of equality: “one of our national characteristics is the extreme susceptibility to inequality. There is a bit of sacred in each man. We have in our values the refusal of displayed inequality. The sensation of being inferior or of being treated as inferior is unacceptable. Is equality not the key word of our national motto? From Guadeloupe to president of a university (two very violent conflicts in the beginning of 2009), while passing by a workman, one hears the same words, ‘We are scorned! We want respect!’”¹⁵

“All French political discourse is founded on this opposition between empty stomachs and full stomachs which are considered to be rotting stomachs. The current financial crisis carries an extremely violent echo in France. When we say that millions were given to banks and that because of them, people are suffering, losing their jobs, living in poor conditions, all of this is unacceptable. In France, since the election of Sarkozy, he carries with him the infamy of this “fiscal gift” he apparently offered to the rich, the base of his electorate. This recalls to us the Revolutionary moment when the French were going hungry, and Marie Antoinette is said to have decried, “If they don’t have bread, let them eat cake!”

When what prevails is the idea that N. Sarkozy is protecting his well-off electorate and gives billions to the banks responsible for the current crisis, all of France descends into the streets.

B. Educational Laws of the Third Republic and the Birth of the Secular School [*L'école laïque*]

The existence of the public secular school is a second gem of the secular legend. This institution remains today, despite the deep crises from which it suffers, the living symbol and the heart of the imaginary secular Frenchman, a symbol so powerful that the Ministry of Education is at the top of the French State’s budget list. The weight of the education system isn’t simply a financial matter, but just as much a mental one. The French live according to the rhythm of the school calendar, which has replaced the traditional, religious calendar. The aggregate of economic activity is regulated by summer vacations from school (July to August) and the four periods of vacation which divide the year (November, December, February, April). The population lives according to the rhythm of back-to-school, a day of celebration day for families, and the end-of-year exam period. The tested subjects on the standardized national exam, called the Baccalaureat, notably subjects focused on philosophy are always the focus of very interested, meditative commentary. The education system is, par excellence, the point of socialization for all generation and its authority over the collective conscience remains strong. The notion of *laïcité* is largely tied to the school system, to such a degree, states Yves Bruley, that “public opinion is oftentimes tempted to conflate” the two.¹⁶

This public secular school is the result of a long academic battle, of which historians easily trace the contours.¹⁷ The idea that the State must organize a civil system of education for the population is older than the laws of the 1880s. The Guizot laws (1833) and those of Falloux (1850) had constructed the base for the public primary and secondary system, put into place by

15

16

17

the presence of the bishop in the Academy's councils.¹⁸ The education laws of minister Jules Ferry (16th of June 1881 and from 28th of March 1882), stripped the Catholic Church of this right of control, made attendance mandatory for male and female children from 7-13 years old, organized the free nature of public education and finally, erased and forbade religious education—the apprenticeship of Catholic truth—from the academic program in primary schools. One vacation day during the week, outside of school, was granted for this sort of activity.

What remains in the collective memory from all of these events: that there is a “spirit” in the public school that is an exceptional one, a secular spirit. What does it say?

1. Before the Jules Ferry laws, French children didn't have access to education. The new school system welcomed, since Ferry, all children without discrimination (a contemporary term, the older one being “without inequality”).
2. Public school does not profess any religion; this is the condition of its existence. One must remain vigilant and be wary of all religious hands attempting to toy with the system (Muslim today, Catholic in yesteryear).

In fact, the Catholic Church largely combated and criticized its exclusion, fought equally during the decade that preceded the Ferry laws in order to conserve or augment its influence on the educational system in general. The academic war was a reality in France, dividing itself into two camps, and had been at all once the engine of anti-clericalism for the adepts of the new order and also for the clericalism for the adepts of the true order, both Catholic and monarchist.¹⁹

The construction in the French imaginary of a struggle against the clerical enemy stems from this memory. The imaginary construction no longer concerns Catholics. Ever since the Debré law of 1959, the academic quarrel has mostly subsided in France. The Catholic schools had been integrated into the service of public education insomuch as they commit to give the same general curriculum and to respect the student's right of free conscience, which is to say, their right not to take religious classes. In exchange, the State covers the salaries of the free school's teachers.

- a. The profession of secular faith:

The Jules Ferry laws were presented and stayed in history as the supreme secular laws. There was, in the system reworked by these public school laws, a mobilization to instill the worldview of secular philosophers, of which the French today believe to be the direct carriers, insomuch that this vision has disappeared and the goals of the school system today have completely changed. However, even if the secular philosophy has disappeared in its ideological construction, even if the challenges of the public system are different, some certainties, alive and well, carry the vestiges of its message.

18

¹⁹ René Rémond, *Anti-clericalism in France from 1815 to our day*, Fayard, 1999, 420 p. Jean Sevillia recently wrote a book retracing the history of these events starting from the Catholic memory, Jean Sevillia, *When Catholics were outside the Law*, Paris Perrin, 2005, 325 p. See also the always remarkable work of Jacqueline Lalouette, *Free Thought in France 1848-1940*, Paris, Albin Michel, coll. “Library of Humanite”, 2001; *The anti-clerical republic*, Paris, Le Seuil, coll. “The historic Universe”, 2002; *Anti-clericalism and secularism, History of the Leftists in France*, under the direction of Jean-Jacques Becker and Gilles Candar, vol. 2, 20th century: to be proved by history, Paris, The Discovery, 2004, p. 645-665.

Secular theory, as an explanatory theory of history and a mobilizing ideology, is the work of philosopher Ferdinand Buisson. Buisson invented the term “*laïcité*.” His point of departure is a historical analysis to add to the long list of historical philosophies of the 19th century, started by Hegelian thought. Human societies would have incorporated some theocratic systems. Progressively, over the course of the centuries, the historic process carried the different institutions that emanate from social life (political, military, judicial, medical, academic) to free itself from the power and influence of religion and to regain their autonomy.

This process, enacted by the “slow work of the centuries” finds itself in different societies. When it reaches a certain threshold, it is possible to discuss secularism. According to Buisson, this threshold was reached in France by 1789, with the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the political events that accompanied it. There was a replacement of the divine sovereign right by the principle of the people’s sovereignty, the proclamation of free conscience and of equal rights by the dissociation between the citizenry and the professed religion.²⁰

But the French Revolution was an ephemeral period, because it was incomplete without the secular age. The true secularism is the threshold that the republicans of the 1880s must attain. The historic role of the Republicans is to establish secularism in French society. And principally in curing the schoolchildren of infectious religion. To break the influence of faith and the social structures of the Church is a scientific objective in the philosophy of Mr. Buisson, to the end of reaching the ideal age where society altogether attains freedom of conscience, material progress and prosperity.

b. Morality without God taught at school

A contemporary trace of the period of secular laws and of this long period where the institutors were trained and charged to transmit the secular faith, there remains to us a social project that quests for its betterment, that refuses to “regress”, that thinks that progress is always possible and collective. In this project, the question of religion is at once overdone (???) and dangerous. It carries the risk of shackling political progress of French society, its work to mold the collective mind to the freedom of thought, in short, to separate citizens from the project of national progress.

The strong reticence in the public sector towards religion comes from the pedagogical choice of Jules Ferry. Dutch, American and British solutions for public education, where one finds a common Christianity taught, held back the attention of its services in their relationship of proximity (dominance of Christianity) and distance (importance, in these countries, of Protestant culture) with the French situation. According to the proposals of Jules Ferry, it is precisely the different role of “lay” [*laïc*] that creates this distance: in a country impregnated by Protestant culture, the secular possesses a certain legitimacy to interpret the Bible after its own manner. The morality taught by the secular institutions of the protestant countries can therefore base itself on a deconfessionalized Christianity, with a Biblical base. In France, a religious morality is truly

“clerical” because the school master is secular [*laïc*] without any religious legitimacy.²¹ It is necessary, therefore, to think about the educational system, notably that of the common morality, without any reference to religion.

The solution found in France was the establishment of a “moral secularism,” not only “a-denominational” but also “a-religious,” which accentuated secularism as a proper view, by the reports of other countries.²² This moral became immersed more so with the German philosopher Emmanuel Kant than it did with the French Enlightenment or Auguste Comte’s positivism.²³ In practice, it differed from Christian morals in founding its principles on the practice of reason. It is from this aspect that the teaching-philosophers of the 3rd Republic consecrated their efforts in order to apply “morals as science” resulting from Kantianism.²⁴ However this teaching method was rather close to catholic morals (respect your elders, respect your parents, be giving, honest, etc) so the French who were still 70% rural and catholic did not take this as an unsupportable attack on their convictions.

c. Scientific progress and social improvement:

With the education laws, the autonomy of secular institutions of socialization departed from the belief in progress developing itself. Care for the body also began to escape from the clutches of the Catholic Church. The body became a rationalized object and “medicine” became a hegemonic site of hygiene and secularism, a space of authority, for it reconciled this idea that technical and scientific progress, in this case medical, engenders social and moral progress. Access to school offers hopes for social ascension. Medicine becomes “the science that comforts and saves.” The space of public services widens.

In the 20th century for example, a new space became “public” and progressive. This is the sphere of culture, with the creation of a Minister of Culture in 1959, a true symbolic and financial institution of “redistribution” of heritage and of artistic creation. This Minister had been preceded in the 1930s by attempts by Houses of Culture and other popular Theaters that saw great success. If was a visceral putting down of roots among the French since the distant period of public schools, it was certainly this one of learning, culture, art, medicine, are very common and everyone has a right to them. “The access to” by institutionalizing, promoting and *making these free*, are part of the occurrences opened by secular thought in France.

d. Promotion of girls and equality of the sexes

The movement towards secularism also included allowing girls a broader and more general education, for until this point many of them received a limited education in terms of what the boys were taught. We are not yet at the period of political equality (women did not have the right

²¹

²² P. Colin...

²³ J. Bonnet...

²⁴ Albert Bayet...

to vote in France before 1944), but the effort to provide a general and broad education in public primary schools is immediately given to children of both sexes, with the same content.

Jules Ferry was likewise at the origin of the creation, in secondary education, of the first public schools for girls. Between 1894 and 1899, close to 8,500 courses for educating girls were opened with women teachers, they themselves having been taught in normal schools for girls, the creation of which had become obligatory in each department by law on August 9, 1879. The role of women in secondary teaching nonetheless remained modest: in 1900, they represented less than 20% of teachers.

It was only in 1924, with the decree of “Léon Bérard,” that girls received the same secondary education as boys. The content of education from then on was the same for both sexes, though they remained separated. Thus, young women in high schools finally had the opportunity to take the baccalauréat exam, whereas before they had only been able to present themselves as coming from outside the system [*candidates libres*]. Yet, two years prior, the proclamation of October 23, 1922 had allowed candidates in the second half of their high school education to take classes in the boys schools when they were too small in number to justify the creation of a girls school. Likewise, the proclamation of June 21, 1923 authorized young girls to take courses in classes with male students preparing for school examinations where they were admitted. The said preparatory classes thus became mixed.

The movement for the equality of the sexes became, in stride with this promotion, another object of legitimizing the French schools. It showed concretely by *the imposition of coeducation in the education system in the 1960s*. In 1965, coeducation was extended to all the newly created elementary schools by the proclamation of June 15, 1965. Some of the texts of 1962 and 1968 reinforce the powers of the superintendents in the uniting of the boys’ and girl’s schools. At the end of the 1960s, nearly all the primary schools were mixed. In 1967 and 1968, the classes that were considered distinctly for boys and those for girls remained only biggest schools. In accordance with the decree of August 3, 1963, the Colleges of Secondary Education (CSE; *CES* in French) were mixed from their creation (reformed by “Capelle-Fouchet”), in order to face the explosion of staff the number of teachers, resulting from a growing demographic—this is the period of the baby boom—and of a growing social demand in favor of education. The coeducation remained in the high schools throughout the 1970s. the decree of application of December 28, 1976 of the lay stated “Haby” 9(-) of July 11, 1975 making coeducation obligatory in primary and secondary schools.

Today, the real number of students affected by non-coeducation is quite insignificant. No longer do any public establishments function in a separated fashion, with the notable exception of the education houses of young girls in the Legion of Honor, being around 1,000 students, and only around 200 non-coeducation establishments even exist within the private school sector, very often contracted outside of the government.

C. The Third Myth of Laïcité: The Law of 1905 and the Separation

2005 was a year of great jubilation for laïcité. The French love commemorations. The evocation-invocation of the past is a national pastime and is often official. Christened “the Centenary of Laïcité,” 2005 saw the law of 1905 celebrated with great pomp and circumstance. The general excitement led to the organization of a major conference that lasted for several days at the Institut de France. There were also thousands of events across France and over the entire year.²⁵

Despite this exuberance, historians take great care to explain the long maturation process that led to the separation of the State and of religious organizations in France,²⁶ the importance of the Concordat of 1801 [by which Napoleon established an agreement between the French state and the Catholic church, recognizing the latter as the church of most French citizen and providing for bishops to be appointed as state employees; the law of 1905 officially ended this agreement], the non-French origins of the 1905 law and its borrowings from English philosophy and the American system; despite the fact that historians show us the useful and pacifying effects this act of severing us from previous obligations permitted, our collective memory has made of the 1905 law the glorious act of “Separation” that extracted/tore the State from the Catholic church and laid down a truth that each and everyone shares: that religion is a private affair. The public sphere and services in France are declared “lay” [*laïques*]. The manner in which the law is presented by historians is still contentious, divided between those who lay out its genesis as an intense battle carried on by anti-clericals against the Catholic church, and those who see in it an intelligent and constructive element of the nineteenth-century “Conflict of the Two Frances: the Republican and the Catholic. The idea of a maturation of this phenomenon, of a blossoming system that evolves with history, which has been defended by Jean Baubérot and his pacified pedagogy of laïcité’s thresholds, is in reality groundless. Before 1905, French schools were secular; with the 1905 law, the State becomes secular. This is the logic of spontaneous generation. Henri Pena-Ruiz, whose book adopts throughout it a rather militant tone, speaks, when designating the period which precedes 1905, of the “concordat regression.” Pena-Ruiz derives from the concordat’s existence the categorical conclusion: “The State is therefore not secular [before 1905],” although he denies, as Jacqueline Lalouette points out, that this problem was divisive for nineteenth-century politicians and continues to this day to provoke disputes for historians and legal scholars.²⁷

²⁵I myself contributed to the celebrations by organizing meetings on the theme “One Hundred Years of Laïcité, pathways for the future,” at the Academy of Aix-Marseille, one of the largest academies of its kind in France. These meetings are accessible online [<http://mediamed.mmsh.univ-aix.fr/chaine.aspx?id=15.>]

²⁶ See Jean-Pierre Chantin and Daniel Moulinet, eds., *La séparation de 1905. Les hommes et les lieux*, Paris, Éditions de l’Atelier, 2005, 271 pp.; Jean-Michel Ducomte, *1905 : quand l’État se séparait des Églises*, Toulouse, Milan, “Les Essentiels,” 2005, 59 pp.; Jean-Marie Mayeur, *La séparation des Églises et de l’État*, Paris, Éditions de l’Atelier, 2005, 255 pp., 3rd edition, revised; Jean-Paul Scot, “L’État chez lui, l’Église chez elle,” in *Comprendre la loi de 1905*, Paris, Le Seuil, “Points,” 398 pp.; Jean Baubérot, *Laïcité 1905-2005, entre passion et raison*, Paris, Le Seuil, “La Couleur des idées,” 2004, 286 pp.; Paul Airiau, *Cent ans de laïcité française. 1905-2005*, Paris, Presses de la Renaissance, 2005, 288 pp.; Yves Tripiet, *La laïcité, ses prémices et son évolution depuis 1905 (le cas breton)*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2003, 183 pp.; Jacqueline Lalouette, *La séparation des Églises et de l’État. Genèse et développement d’une idée. 1789-1905*, Paris, Le Seuil, “L’Univers historique,” 2005, 453 pp.; Emile Poulat, *Notre Laïcité publique*, Paris, Berg international, 2003, 412 pp.

²⁷ Jacqueline Lalouette, “Laïcité et Séparation des Églises et de l’État, esquisse d’un bilan historiographique,” (2003-2005), *Revue historique*, CCCXIV/4, (pp. 849- 870), p. 856.

D. The Fourth Myth: The 2004 Law on the Headscarf and the Defense of the Equality of the Sexes

One might be brought to imagine having gone back on time to the period where the artist Caran d'Ache was drawing sketches of the Dreyfus Affair... Everything else being equal, to talk about the headscarf in the fall of 1989 had the same effect as did the question of the innocence or guilt of captain Dreyfus a century earlier: even in the most united of groups, the subject aroused such discord, such an inability to understand each other, because no one could listen to each other.²⁸

The Centenary of the 1905 Law held in 2005 had undoubtedly the same pomp, because it followed on the heels of the infamous *affaire du voile*, which further entrenched France in its secular mythology. The *affaire du voile* was the Dreyfus affair of the 5th Republic. There was an enemy to be fought and a just cause. It lasted fifteen years and reached its apogee in 2003. The enemy was the Muslim religious fanaticism that invading republican space, the just cause was that of oppressed Muslim girls. Jean Baubérot insists that the unanimity that surrounds the “cornerstone of *laïcité*,” the French-exception-*laïcité*, has only been invoked since 1990, soon after the first “affair” having to do with the wearing of the headscarf at public school by Muslim students occurred [in 1989]. Before then, Mexico or even the United States had been considered by French militants of *laïcité* as countries even more secular than France. Indeed, up until the middle of the 1980s, *laïcité* was still only an issue of left-wing political militancy for a society that had not yet properly put it into practice. The conflict would crystallize around the schools and the “regression” that was seen in the public or state subsidies given to private schools under the 1959 Debray Law. Given that the majority of these schools were catholic, the upholders of *laïcité* wanted to proclaim the end of the system and the integration of catholic schools into a unified public system. In sum, “*Laïcité*” was not yet constitutive of a consensual French identity, despite the fact that in 1946 (4th Republic) and in 1958 (with the 5th Republic) the Constitution had pronounced that France was a “secular...Republic” [*République...laïque*].

Laïcité was a distinctive element of a leftist identity and, in his *Mémoires* (2005), Michel Rocard indicates repeatedly that *laïcité* was invoked, in the 1960s and 70s, by his political friends in order to block an alliance between socialists and left-leaning catholics. Jacqueline Lalouette explains that as for her, in the 1960s and 70s, *laïcité* had become a sort of hobby-horse/pet-peeve for sectarian minds.²⁹ Martine Barthélémy confirms this point of view: “the history of *laïcité* made of it a value of the left, associated with anticlericalism, if not a frank hostility towards religion. It constituted the lynchpin of the attitudinal systems of left wing militants, detached from Catholicism, particularly among teachers. These militants intend to protect the public schools from any religious influence, to cultivate values of public service and to emphasize above all the primacy of the role of the State in social change.³⁰ *Laïcité* is thus a “partisan code

²⁸ Françoise Gaspart and Fahrad Khosrokhavar, *Le foulard et la République*, Paris, La Découverte, 1995, p 11-12.

²⁹ Jacqueline Lalouette, op. cit., p. 870.

³⁰ Françoise Subileau, “Les militants socialistes et la *laïcité*,” in Jean Baudouin, Philippe Portier, eds., *La laïcité, une valeur d'aujourd'hui: Contestations et renégociations du modèle français*, Rennes, Presses

of of political interpretation: it is less a constituted doctrine than a system of organization and of political perception, a code that interprets and explains a vision of the world.”³¹

Thus, by the grace of the 1980s, *laïcité* loses its colors of national squabbles. Militancy for or against the private school disappears. The hand changes in 1989, the year which saw the Berlin Wall fall, the *fatwa* of Khomeiny against Salman Rushdie, and, in France, the first “affair” over headscarves. Socially, the big question progressively came to be articulated thus: “is Islam compatible with *laïcité*?” Jean Baubérot: “From that moment on, *laïcité* (and, ultimately, catho-*laïcité*” [Trans: *catho-laïcité*, playing off of “catho-licity”]), invoked by both the left and the right, played the role of a French ‘civil republican religion’, without having the same content as the rousseauist civil religion of the Revolution [of 1789], while assuming an comparable function.”³²

Finally, if we follow the analysis given by Claire de Galember,³³ the secular consensus today does not result from the appeasement of the conflicts between catholics and left-wing secular culture, a sort of “accepted” *laïcité* taking the place of a “radicalized” one. A *laïcité* having finally become in the eyes of catholics themselves “a point of convergence and uniting.”³⁴ If such had been the case the term “*laïcité*” would have disappeared or would have been transformed into a dispassionate and clear definition of French constitutional principles in the international debate over religions in democracies. There, in fact, concrete *laïcité* is more open than the national myth which has been reactivated. The headscarf has provoked a reaction of fear, of a “nativist” [indigenous?] type, in the face of immigration, of religious and identity-oriented claims made by Muslims, in the face of terrorism, in the face of the deterritorialization and the cultural crumbling of populations, a fear provoked by the real disarray of the French regarding their identity definitions.

F. Contesting the Secular Myth/Myth of *Laïcité* as a Perennial Civil Religion

The recent unanimity of *laïcité* is contested, by reality first and then by legal scholars, sociologists and historians.

a. The legitimacy crisis of secular institutions:

Universitaires de Rennes, 2001, p. 171-183 ; Martine Barthélemy and Françoise Subileau, « Le militantisme laïque. Deux cas d'école », in Jean- Marie Donegani, Sophie Duchesne, Florence Haegel, eds., *Aux frontières des attitudes. Entre le politique et le religieux. Textes en hommage à Guy Michelat*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2002, p. 69-84.

³¹ Françoise Subileau, qtd by Martine Barthélemy and Guy Michelat, “Dimensions de la *laïcité* dans la France d'aujourd'hui,” *Revue française de Science Politique*, 2007/5, vol. 57, pp. 649-698.

³² Jean Baubérot, “Transferts culturels et identité nationale dans la *laïcité* française,” op. cit., p. 24.

³³ Claire de Galember edited an issue of the journal *Droit et Société*, 2008, 1, no. 68, devoted solely to “the veil in court” [*voile en procès*]. Her contribution (pp. 11-31) is quite remarkable. See also the contribution from John Bowen, an anthropologist who undertakes to explain the law's adoption by situating it within the *longue durée* of the history of *laïcité*.

³⁴ See Émile Poulat, *Liberté laïcité. La guerre des deux France et le principe de la modernité*, Paris, Cerf/Cujas, 1987, p. 199-202.

The institutions of socialization (schools, medicine) which founded *laïcité* are in a crisis. We are witnessing, today, a crisis of secular [*séculières*] institutions of socialization in modern societies. Scientific and technical progress has ceased to be correlated with social and moral progress, because of the problems it leads to in terms of mass culture, the environment, and biotechnology. In the 20th century, the moral foundation of *laïcité* placed strong emphasis on the transcendent moral duty to contribute to progress (in all its forms, including moral ones) in the public sphere, while holding different religious and philosophical convictions to the private sphere. In our day, through mass media and publicity, the implicit morality equates to the obligation for each to be an autonomous individual, to be a “fully realized self” [*l’accomplissement de soi*]. To build one’s own personal itinerary takes precedent over shared responsibility, over the duty to improve society. Moreover, the vision of progress has become ambivalent and institutions which “shaped” or “formed” [*cadraient*] the individual in the public sphere can hardly undertake this role any more. What has developed is an “everyone-for-himself” mentality...for to construct and preserve one’s “self” becomes the difficult responsibility of the individual.

In addition, schools no longer serve to help people up the “social ladder” and violence has become normal in some of them. The health care system [*la médecine*] is perceived as being ambivalent and, significantly, the European Charter on Fundamental Rights (2000) gives it strict limitations (article 3) in the name of “human dignity.” The demand for the “right to die in dignity,” without having a death prolonged by burdensome medical interventions, is slowly replacing the wish to extend a hope for life.

The attitude of confidence in and deference towards institutions is yielding its place to a consumerist relationship (coming and going between public and private schools; increase in the attraction of alternative medicines) and to a growing demand for rights even within institutions (“student rights,” “patient rights”).

b. Mixing of public and private spheres

In the 19th century, the dissociation of citizenship and religious affiliation was a given, even if moral education was officially carried out by secondary groups such as “official religions” [*cultes reconnus*], and or if the dissociation between the public and private sphere wasn’t an everyday reality for rural or small town France. In the 20th century, the private sphere grew in relevance to the point where, today, the line between private and public is incredibly attenuated. Mass media (television, internet) now invade those spaces where private life once reigned (household dwellings). In this context, myriad demands for recognition are clamoring for the power to express personal convictions (and their respective behaviors) in what had been a neutralized public sphere. Validating an identity tied to a religion or a culture allows individuals from minority groups [*individus minoritaires*] to constitute their own traits, to resist a standardization of behaviors, to identify with a particular collective history, since the lack a common collective history to share in.

The contemporary individual may also seek out personal mixtures of different religions, convictions, cultures, methods for managing one’s intimate life, therapies, and so forth, from which his personal identity is the result. Changes to everyday life also make it more difficult to distinguish between public and private. For example, the noon-time meals are often eaten out of

the home, and when one eats “at home,” it’s often processed food. Eating habits, which used to be more or less private, become a public issue. The public sphere has to accommodate these behaviors. Thus, French school cafeterias offer a variety of meats if pork is among them.

The debate today has to do with the threshold of reasonable accommodation, with the difficulties of living together publicly that may result from the coexistence of different behaviors. France, which was for a long time a rather homogeneous society in religious terms, is confronting, without much wavering, the challenges that come with religious and minority demands for recognition.

c. Secularizing the secular [*Laïciser la laïcité*]

Researchers denounce the sanctification of *laïcité* as an obstacle to the future and a waste of energy. A more scientific and dispassionate perspective—on the order of what Jean Baubérot wants—of *laïcité* emptied of its symbolic charge, would help in practicing the accommodations necessary for the evolution of French society. Worse yet, refusing to secularize the idea of *laïcité* leads the opposite of the desired results, that is, preserving national identity.³⁵ National identity has never been so strong since the headscarf was forbidden in French schools. The problem is much deeper and it carries with it the discrepancy between the memory and the social reality of France.

In everyday things, the evolution of jurisprudence and of social practices comprises much more than the discourse of *laïcité* lets on, the respect for religious freedom, for denominational pluralism, and for the equal treatment of religions. From this point of view, all of the most recent texts, for example on the role of religion in hospitals, handle with great delicacy the reconciliation of respect for the neutrality of public service, with the principle of welcoming and indiscriminate care and that of the religious freedom of hospitalized persons.³⁶

To act with an excessive sense of *laïcité*, in France, discriminating against or without the perspective of immigrants or disenfranchised segments of society, does not appear to be a good solution. Thus, a bill proposed in 2003 by socialist senators and militants for *laïcité*, Michel Charasse and Guy Penne, sought to create a public form of civic worship for *laïcité* and human

³⁵ Pierre Kahn, “Is *laïcité* a value?” *Spirale – Revue de Recherches en Éducation*, 2007, no. 39, 29-37.

³⁶ **Circular no. DHOS/G/2005/57 of 2 Feb 2005 relative to *laïcité* in health care establishments**, effective immediately (circulaire synthesizing texts, rulings, and jurisprudence).

— **Circular no. DHOS/P1/ 2006/538 of 20 Dec 2006 relative to chaplains in establishments** mentioned in article 2 of law no. 86-33 of 9 Jan 1986 bearing on statutory positions relative to public hospitals (*idem*).

- **Charter of hospitalized patients** of 2 March 2006, coming out of the Circular DHOS/E1/DGS/SD1B.sd4A/2006/90 relative to the rights of hospitalized persons.

- **Charter on *Laïcité* in Public Services**, no 52 09/ Sg of 13 April 2007, enacted by the Prime Minister and proposed by the Upper Council. (To be posted in closed public services — hospitals, prisons, military installations — and in other public services sectors — Welfare centers, etc. — and to be submitted to those receiving assistance, at appropriate times, ie, when voting cards are distributed, at the initial training for civil servants, at the beginning of a new school year, when immigrants are processed given French citizenship).

rights. Article 1 would establish a republican sponsorship. During a ceremony at the *mairie*, a civic official would have offered the gift of a copy of the Déclaration des droits de l'homme to the "newborn" in order to mark his adherence to the civil faith. Article 2 provided for a celebratory rite for the PACS (the civil Pact of solidary, which as an alternative marital union recognizes and protects couples and is open to homosexuals). Article 3 would allow a family or close friends of a deceased person to honor his memory through a civil ceremony. Article 4 established a special ceremony for naturalization. As for Article 6, it prohibited government officials as such from participating in any form of worship, in addition to prohibiting any functionary from making a public display of religious belief by any external sign.

Even if this bill appeared to be particularly extravagant, some of its propositions have lingered. This was apparent in the 2007 reaffirmation of the neutrality of public services and the distribution of a Charter on Laïcité in all State offices, particularly in hospitals, a new space threatened by religious exchange. This was also apparent in the creation of a veritable naturalization ceremony, found in the law of 26 November 2003 relative to the regulation of immigration. The processes for giving French nationality have since become a significant stake in the symbolic construction of identity. Not only have procedure been reinforced, but they are backed by a vigilance with respect to new citizens sharing the values of laïcité or republican values. Thus, the Conseil d'État has twice validated the ability to refuse naturalization on the grounds of "value incompatibility": its decree of 27 June 2008 confirmed a previous one from 2005 withholding French citizenship to a thirty-two year old Moroccan woman married to a French national, because her burka was "incompatible with the essential values of the French community."³⁷ For Jean Baubérot, this decision equates to « a civil religion decree; it's more a religious decision than one of laïcité. This is republican civil religion, not laïcité.»

II. The Republic as a Civil Religion

Twice in the preceding lines we have alluded to the "values of the Republic." Laïcité is not the sole civil religion of France, and, as I've indicated, it's not as unanimous a civil religion as it might seem. Would the Republic do better? It is also a particular religion. According to the

³⁷ « Aux termes de l'article 21. 4 du code civil, le gouvernement peut s'opposer par décret en Conseil d'Etat pour défaut d'assimilation autre que linguistique à l'acquisition de la nationalité française par le conjoint étranger dans un délai d'un an... », « aux termes de l'article 32 du décret du 30 décembre 1993, relatif aux déclarations de nationalité, aux décisions de naturalisation, de réintégration de perte, de déchéance, et de retrait de la nationalité française « lorsque le gouvernement veut s'opposer par décret du Conseil d'Etat, pour indignité ou défaut d'assimilation autre que linguistique, à l'acquisition de la nationalité française, le ministre chargé des naturalisations notifie les motifs de fait », considérant qu'il ressort des pièces du dossier que si Mme M. possède une bonne maîtrise du français, elle a cependant adopté une pratique radicale de sa religion, incompatible avec les valeurs essentielles de la communauté française et notamment le principe d'égalité des sexes, qu'elle ne remplit pas le condition d'assimilation posé par l'article 21-4 précité du code civil... Mme M. n'est pas fondée à demander l'annulation du décret du 16 mai 2005 lui refusant l'acquisition de la nationalité française », Arrêt Conseil d'Etat, n°286798, 27 juin 2008, Mme M.

studies of Robert Bellah,³⁸ it seems that this republican civil religion can be of two typical types: to invoke a “reality above the norms that the Republic claims to embody” (the American civil religion belongs to this type) or “to be nothing more than the Republic itself,” sanctified (which is the case for the French civil religion).

In this way in 1980, Robert Bellah believes that the Republic is the very object of French civil religion. He is not wrong, though he’s not completely right either. Even richer than *laïcité* as a federating myth, the Republic can be considered as the object of a civil religion that widens the restricted circle of *laïcité*’s religion.

A. A Legendary History

a. A Providential Republic

A strange combination, a secret alchemy has melted into the collective French consciousness of history and national myth. This is the lesson we learn from Suzanne Citron’s study, *Le Mythe national, l’histoire de France revisitée* [“The National Myth, The History of France Revisited”]. For this historian and many others, the Republic lives as a legend that began with the great 19th-century historian Jules Michelet, the great inspirer. Suzanne Citron presents excerpts from primary school manuals, starting with their mother text, the “Petit Lavisserie,” whose style and method is also found in manuals from the 1960s. This “anthology of the French at school” has only been slightly modified. Of course, there are few today who were taught directly from the “Petit Lavisserie” manual (or from one of its imitators.) But we have preserved the permanence, in filigree, of this mother text up to the last revision of elementary schools in 2002, in which Citron points out the apparently uncorrupted “lavissien” character.

The “search for France” reveals a stratified construction that stems from an original starting point, Frankish memory. The *Grandes Chroniques de France* (Grand Chronicles of France) from the 13th century are at the origin of this legendary memory. By rewriting and rearranging ancient stories of the Franks, the historiographer monks of Saint-Denis, great servants to the Capetian kings, celebrated their dynasties as the legitimate heirs of Charlemagne, Clovis and their Trojan ancestors. ** The knowledge of this prestigious past created, among a small elite group of readers, the image of a France inseparable from the king who incarnated it, at the same time as the royal religion, diffused and exalted by the Church, shaped a popular love for a king marked by the seal of God and consecrated for his coronation. The *Grandes Chroniques* would be summarized in the “abridged history of France” in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The Revolution substituted the nation for the king by transferring to it the absolutism formally concentrated in the monarchy. The liberal historians of the 19th century integrated the story of the “*ancien régime*” as the core of the nation’s story. In the story of the kings, they readjust the

** Translator’s Note:

250 BC Celtic tribes inhabit Gaul. E.g., Gallic tribe the Parisii settle around modern-day Paris.

58-52 BC Julius Caesar carries on the conquest of Gaul; in 52, the Gallic chief Vercingetorix surrenders.

486 BC Clovis commands Frankish tribes (Germanic) in France; Merovingian line starts.

751- Carolingian line; associated with Charlemagne.

987- Capetian line: begins with Huguès Capet’s coronation in Paris in 987.

³⁸ R. Bellah, *Varieties of civil Religions*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1980.

segment of the Gaulish origins, a recent myth, by placing it before that of the Franks, then place the revolutionary explosion afterwards. Then the republican historians at the end of the century created the great synthesis of “France from its origins to our day.” That history started with “Gaul,” always an object of legend. Modern France was latent in this Gaul and in the first two dynasties (Merovingian then Carolingian), and then it was “made” by the Capetian kings. The Revolution pronounced the rights of man, confirmed an exceptional destiny prefigured by the spreading of French culture during the 17th and 18th centuries: in this version France became the messenger of humanity. Several decades still had to pass before the Revolution was finally accomplished by the institutionalization of the Republic. Such is, briefly stated, the providential history of the Third Republic.

b. An indivisible nation

In reality, the word nation in the sense that we hear it today is an invention of the French Revolution and its more recent internalization through the school system of the Third Republic (1871-1940). In the process of human history, and according to the modalities that I obviously do not have time to develop, the French Revolution crystallized a concept and a new geopolitical reality: the State-nation-territory. The word nation until then designated an ethnic, cultural entity or a group of people with common ancestors, a common genealogy marked by a language, religion and customs. The Revolution crystallized a political idea of nation in gestation in the preceding decades. It emerged as a new historical object when the *députés* of the *Etats généraux* proclaimed themselves the *Assemblée nationale* on July 21, 1789. This *assemblée* incarnated sovereignty. This power, exercised in the name of the nation, was thought of as an absolute. The nation itself was proclaimed one and indivisible, in the inverted image of the king, by *deputés* whose political culture was inherited from absolute monarchy. In the First Constitution of 1791 royalty was indivisible. National sovereignty was as well. In 1792, the Republic would be proclaimed one and indivisible. But the kingdom, meaning the collection of the territories conquered by the monarchy, was also declared indivisible. It would be defended against invaders. In the name of liberty, its victories would lead to a logic of territorial conquest inherited from the monarchical tradition. Thus emerged a new historical reality: the Nation-State [*l'Etat-nation-territoire*].

B. Symbols of the French Republic

All these symbols, like the day of commemoration of the 14th of July, were established by the Third Republic in its founding period.

a. The flag

It seems eternal. It has, however, taken some time to come to a consensus. The national emblem of the Fifth Republic, the tri-colored flag, was born during the French Revolution. It consists of the colors of the king (white) and the city of Paris (blue and red.) Today, the tri-colored flag floats above all public buildings and it is deployed in most official ceremonies both civil and military. During the first days of the French Revolution, the three colors are, first of all, brought together in a two-colored cockade using the traditional colors of Paris, blue and red. On July 17, Louis XVI arrived in Paris to recognize the new National Guard. He wore the blue and red cockade to which it seems Lafayette, commander of the Guard, had added the royal white. The

Law of 27 Pluviôse, year II (February 15, 1794 on the Roman calendar) made the tri-colored flag the national symbol by specifying, according to the painter David's recommendation, that the blue should be attached to the pole. The 19th Century saw the confrontation of the white of the royalist legitimists and the three colors inherited from the Revolution. The white flag was brought back under the Restoration, but Louis-Philippe opted for the tri-colored flag and placed it above the symbol of the Gaul rooster. During the Revolution of 1848, even though the tri-colored flag was adopted by the provisional government, it was the red flag that was raised by the people on the barricades as a sign of revolt. Under the Third Republic, a consensus on the three colors was progressively established. Since 1880, the display of army flags during the celebration of the 14th of July is a moment of great patriotic sentiment. Even though the Count of Chambord, a claimant of the French throne, never accepted the tri-colored flag, the Royalists eventually rallied to it during World War I. The constitutions of 1946 and 1958 (article 2) made the tri-colored flag the national emblem of the Republic. Today, the French flag is visible on public buildings. It is raised during national commemorations and is honored by a specific ceremony. When the President of the Republic appears publically, the French flag is often placed behind him. Depending on the circumstances, the European flag or the flag of another nation is also displayed.

b. The motto Liberty – Equality – Brotherhood :

As a heritage from the French Enlightenment, the motto “Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood” was used for the first time during the French Revolution. After being used often it was finally adopted by the Third Republic. It is written in the Constitution of 1958 and is part of our national heritage today.

Associated by Fénelon at the end of the 17th Century, the notions of liberty, equality and brotherhood were more widespread during the French Enlightenment. During the French Revolution, “Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood” was one of the many mottos used. In a speech on the organization of the National Guard in December 1790, Robespierre recommended that the words “The French People” and “Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood” be inscribed on the uniforms and the flags, but his idea was not accepted. Since 1793, Parisians and those in other cities who imitated them, painted the fronts of their homes with the following words: “Unity, indivisibility of the Republic; Liberty, Equality or Death.” However they were soon required to erase the last part of the phrase because it was too closely associated with the Reign of Terror.

Like many of the revolutionary symbols, the motto fell into disuse under the Empire. It reappeared during the Revolution of 1848 through a religious dimension: priests were celebrating the Brotherhood of Christ and blessed the trees of liberty which were then planted. When the Constitution of 1848 was written, the motto “Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood” was defined as a “principle” of the Republic.

Ignored by the Second Empire, it was eventually adopted under the Third Republic. It still had, however, a few opponents including the partisans of the Republic: solidarity was sometimes preferred over equality which implied a social leveling and that the Christian connotation of brotherhood did not create unanimity.

The motto was rewritten on the front of public buildings for the 14th of July 1880. It was a part of the constitutions of 1946 and 1958 and is still today a part of our national heritage. It is found on widely distributed objects such as coins and stamps.

c. Marianne

Even though the Constitution of 1958 privileged the tri-color flag as the national emblem, Marianne also incarnated the French Republic. The first representations of a woman in a Phrygian bonnet, allegory of Liberty and the Republic, appeared during the Revolution. The origin of the name Marianne is not known for sure. As a very common name during the 18th Century Marie-Anne represented the people. However, the counter-revolutionaries also called themselves the Republic. As a symbol of liberty, the Phrygian bonnet was worn by the freed slaves in Greece and Rome. A similar sort of bonnet was worn also by sailors and galley slaves of the Mediterranean and had been adopted by the revolutionaries from the Midi. Under the Third Republic, the statues and especially the busts of Marianne multiplied especially in the *mairies* or town halls. Several types of representation developed, depending on preferences for her revolutionary character or her more wise characteristics. The Phrygian bonnet was sometimes considered too seditious and was replaced by a tiara or a crown. Today, Marianne is represented by the faces of famous actresses. She is also on objects of mass distribution like postage stamps.

d. Minor symbols: The seal of the Republic and the Gaul rooster

C. The day of commemoration: The 14th of July

The day of the Revolution in Paris became a national holiday. The 14th of July today represents the solemnity of military parades and the conviviality of balls and fireworks. Although the day is generally associated with the taking of the Bastille, the 14th of July 1789, it is the celebration of the Federation (July 14, 1790) which has been commemorated in France for over a century.

a. The taking of the Bastille

In the first few months of the French Revolution, Paris was in a state of great unrest. In the spring of 1789, the *Etats Généraux* refused to dissolve and transformed themselves into the *Assemblée nationale* (National Assembly). In July, King Louis XVI brought in new troops and got rid of Necker, the popular minister. On the morning of July 14, the people of Paris carried arms to *Invalides* then moved towards an old royal fortress, the Bastille. After a bloody firefight, they freed the prisoners that were locked inside. The taking of the Bastille became the first victory of the people Paris against a symbol of the *ancien régime*. The building was demolished in the following months. The “celebration of the Federation,” July 14, 1790, lavishly celebrated the first anniversary of the insurrection. In Paris on the Champ de Mars, a mass was conducted by Talleyrand upon the altar of the homeland.

b. The national holiday

Shortly afterwards, the commemoration of July 14, 1789 was abandoned until the Third Republic, notably Gambetta, wanted to celebrate the foundations of the regime. On recommendation of the *député* (representative) of the Seine, Benjamin Raspail, the law of July 6, 1880 made July 14th the national holiday of the Republic.

The accent was placed from the beginning on the patriotic and military character of the revolt in order to prove the recovery of France after its defeat in 1870. All the *communes*, or regions of France, were involved. The celebration started with a torch parade on the evening of the 13th. The next day, church bells announced the parade, followed by a meal, spectacles and games. Balls and fireworks ended the day. After the austerity of World War I, the 14th of July 1919 was a great celebration of victory. In the same spirit, July 14, 1945 was preceded by three days of civic celebrations.

c. *The 14th of July today*

The 14th of July has always been popular. In Paris, the traditional military parade along the Champs-Élysées is meticulously prepared. Balls and illuminations or fireworks happen everywhere in France. The presidents of the Fifth Republic have sometimes modified the proceedings of the day in order to return to the tradition of revolutionary Paris. From 1974 to 1979, the parade route varied. Since 1980, the Champs-Élysées has been re-designated as the parade site. July 14th, 1989 was a special celebration of the bicentennial of the French Revolution. Many foreign heads of state participated, especially by watching “la Marseillaise,” a spectacle by Jean-Paul Goude. In 1994, German soldiers of the Eurocorps participated in the parade on the Champs-Élysées as a symbol of reconciliation. Since Jacques Chirac, young people from all over France and members of the military have been invited to the reception that is traditionally held in the Palais de l’Élysée after the parade.

C. The Contested Republic

1. Crisis of the political
2. The competition with European citizenship
3. Coexistence of affiliations in globalization
4. Crisis of the transmission of the Republic’s history

The status of history in France is in fact paradoxical. On the one hand, there is the legend, the national mythology consecrated by schools, a chronological succession organized around great events and grand persons that shapes the history of the Republic. On the other, there are studies, research that leads, on particular points, to new perspectives and raises an objective, distanced and critical look on previous ones already in order.³⁹ A history, “new” or different, poses questions, proposes solutions, dispersed and discontinuous of course, but which, if one thinks about it, calls into question the representation of the past that schools, for a century, has been transmitted to the French and integrated as “collective memory.” A desire to go beyond the legendary history that keeps French society from identifying itself.

³⁹ See *Les cahiers Jean Jaurès*, nos. 169-170, 2003, *Enjeux et usages d’une histoire critique de la République*, 92pp.

Among historians, the expression “national novel” has become a commonplace. François Dosse, in *Les Courants historiques en France* [“Historical Currents in France”], has explored attempts to “call into question the national novel.”⁴⁰ More recently, the phrase “the national novel” has been used in gatherings among historians, in seminars for trainers and teachers, and on the national radio show “The Fabric(ation) of History” in the series France-Culture [similar to National Public Radio shows].⁴¹ The “colonial fracture” as an inheritance of the past was the object of a collective study.⁴² And in the last two years, a “war of memories” has popularized claims made by groups who call themselves the bearers of the covered or hidden past [*occulté*]. The idea that “the history of France” was not entirely History has broken its silence. The creation of a Ministry of Immigration, Integration of National Identity, and of Codevelopment, by Nicolas Sarkozy, who had announced it during the presidential election campaign, has provoked concern. Some speeches by the president, perceived to be manipulative of the past, have caused much critical questioning. At that time, eight historians from the Scientific Council from the National City of the History of Immigration (CNHI), resigned in protest.⁴³ When schools returned to session in the fall of 2007, the decision by the Ministry of Education to have students read a letter by Guy Môquet, a young communist resistant in WWII writing to his parents the day before his execution by the Germans, caused a media storm about this story and history in general.

For example, the ignorance surrounding the late persistence of slavery and on colonial realities.⁴⁴

Another example: the responsibility of the republican government in the Dreyfus affair, in which a Jewish officer having a name with German connotations, was accused of treason.

Another: the relative ignorance regarding the Republic’s responsibility in the establishment of, and collaboration under, the Vichy regime, as a French state, particularly with regards to the state’s involvement in the deportation and extermination of 80,000 Jews from or residing in France.⁴⁵

Another: ignorance regarding the violence of decolonization and silence regarding the Algerian War.⁴⁶ Today, there is an inability in republican discourse to account for racially mixture of its

⁴⁰ Christian Delacroix, François Dosse, Patrick Garcia, *Les Courants historiques de la France, XIX^e-XX^e siècles*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1999, p. 236.

⁴¹

⁴²

⁴³ Gérard Noiriel, *A quoi sert « l’identité nationale » ?*, Marseille, Agone, 2007. Voir aussi le site du CVUH, <http://cvuh.free.fr/>.

⁴⁴ Serge Daget, *La Traite des Noirs*, Ouest-France université, 1990. Récemment : Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Les traites négrières. Essai d’histoire globale*, Paris, Gallimard, 2004.

⁴⁵ Starting with a foundational study by Robert Paxton, *La France de Vichy*, Paris, Seuil, 1972, French researchers, starting with François Bédarida and Jean-Pierre Azéma, have yet to stop examining this topic: Bédarida-Azéma, *Le Syndrome de Vichy 1944-198...* d’Henry Rousso, Paris, Seuil, 1987; Gérard Noiriel : *Immigration, antisémitisme et racisme en France (xix^e -xx^e siècle)*, *Discours publics, humiliations privées*, Paris, Fayard, 2007, p. 477. Cf. also Marc Olivier Baruch, *Servir l’État français*, Paris, Fayard, 1997.

⁴⁶ An extensive bibliography. See first the anthology edited by Mohamed Harbi and Benjamin Stora, *La Guerre d’Algérie 1954-2004, la fin de l’amnésie*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 2004. Also, the work edited by

society, notably its immigrant population drawn from its former Empire, an inability to construct a republican memory in which France's past can be shared by those who live in it today. This has led to the creation of virulent protest- and identity-based memories.

This explains how even when celebrating sporting exploits of a multi-racial France, the image of which is the national soccer team (cf. the 1998 World Cup), support for the players of this team can be violently called into question. There is the case of the 2001 France-Algeria match at the Stade de France venue in Saint-Denis [a working-class sector on the northern edge of Paris that has a large immigrant population], where mocking whistling against the national anthem of the Marseillaise were followed by angry screaming and shouting whenever the French players had the ball. The crowd rushed onto the field with Algerian flags because the French team was winning. Objects were hurled at the presidential box, hurting a minister. The President of the Republic, Jacques Chirac, who was in attendance, left the stadium as soon as the whistling started. Another example: the France-Morocco match in November 2007, whistling also disrupted the Marseillaise anthem and French players, and the stadium was covered with Moroccan flags. Third example: the France-Tunisia match in October 2008 saw the same disturbances.

III. Eternal France

Finally, the Republic as a national religion does not appear to us more solid than laïcité. Would Robert Bellah be wrong when he stops his analysis of French civil religion at the sanctification of the Republic? Could one not advance the idea that there remains a last level of the French sacred, yet even more profound, not uprootable, the holy of holies, which is related to the American model, a "certain idea of France," as General de Gaulle called it? Is it at that level that the French of old and young layers of society make communion, this "reality that overlooks the norms that the Republic claims to embody" as Robert Bellah defines American civil religion?

Nous arrive here at the deepest level of French mythology. However, it is not because it's the deepest that it is the most operative et will find itself the most effective in overcoming problems of French identity today. But the myth of France is at least what allows the inhabitants of this country to have communion with their affiliation [appartenance] and this time, with the outside.

A. The Matrices of France

- a. The State: sovereign and administrative
- b. Grandeur (military power, territorial conquests, Empire)
- c. Providential man in the face of the People (historical syntheses: 1st and 2nd Empire, 5th Republic)
- d. The French Language and Culture

In 1880, the 3rd Republic was in place, France is still 70% rural, sewn with villages centered on themselves, the majority non Francophone. The Fathers of the Republic will inculcate this

France of the countryside, of villages, of diverse dialects and customs, their idea of a unitary nation, indivisible, abstract, at the same time as they will push for adhesion to the republican regime, as they think and embody it. Alongside obligatory military service for men, it is first the schools that are charged with fashioning national identity, creating new Frenchmen, patriotic and respectful of the new order.

The Fathers of the Republic were super-patriots, profoundly injured by the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. Like every liberal and republican elite in the 19th century, they bore a haughty, messianic image of France in their minds. “France is superior as a dogma and as a religion,” was a chapter title in the famous historian Jules Michelet’s little book *Le Peuple* [“The People”] (1847). Cosmopolitan, carriers of a secondary and university “culture,” they sincerely thought that this culture was superior to that of country folk and later to those of the colonies. It was necessary to civilize the “barbarians,” by nationalizing them.

The schools would be called upon to make French the little peasants who speak *patois* French [*françiser*]. It was indispensable, in their thinking, to entrust to the schools the mission of teaching a common language. But the founders of the republican schools, obsessed by the idea of unity and full of pride for the French language, which had been the language of 18th-century European courts, added to that linguistic mission the task of eradicating the other languages spoken in the Republic — Breton, Corsican, Basque, Occitan, Flemish. They reprised a mission set by the revolutionaries noted in the report of the Abby Grégoire, but which had never been set in motion.

Certain regional languages died, such as Provençal, while others on the frontiers resisted, such as Corsican, Breton, Alsatian, Creole. What remains of the *francisization* of the population is, today, the remarkable difficulty the French have in speaking a foreign language [TRANS note: !]. The relationship of the French to their language, to its proper pronunciation, its refined use in public speaking and writing, was a relationship that was properly sacred.

e. Great Men

f. *Art de vivre* (food culture, fashion, architectural styles, tourism)

B. Love of Country (with respect to its defense):

a. Patriotic education under the 3rd Republic (1871-1940)

The requirement to teach history in secular schools had as its purpose to pass on a love of country, by means of a representation of the past centered uniquely on France. *Le Petit Lavisse* was an exemplary manual of the republican school system which would serve to tell the national story well into the 1960s; its construction of the past was destined to stir up patriotism. Figures who were part mythic, symbolized heroism and patriotic sacrifice: Vercingétorix, Joan of arc, the little Barat (a revolutionary child murdered by the reactionary populous of the Vendée region), and the soldiers of the Great War. France has no beginning, it is inscribed in a past so distant, so legendary, pre-embodied in a Gaul that is mysteriously always already there. “Our country was once called Gaul, its inhabitants the Gauls...” In this manner, France — the hexagonal territory — acquires a sacred dimension, the construction of which is no longer the

result of conquests but a fact of manifest destiny. From this perspective, the loss of Alsace-Moselle was a sacrilege. Algerian soil on the north African coast, once declared part of France, also became the object of a bitter struggle, and not merely a symbolic one.

The recompositions of patriotism and of French grandeur

1. The Resistance
2. Military and Nuclear Independence
3. Cultural politics and the voice of multilateralism

Commemorations

1. The Great War and November 11th: a French Memorial Day for the war's dead
2. The Resistance and May 8th

The Fortunes and Misfortunes of this Legend:

1. International politics (Villepin/Sarkozy and his politics of civilization, his Mediterranean Union)
2. The eradication of regional and colonial memories
3. Cultural and educational exclusion
4. The Crisis of Legitimacy of the French State