



Dividing *La République indivisible*,
disuniting the United Kingdom: the problems of
religion and schools in France and the UK, 1980-95

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Dividing *La République indivisible*, disuniting the United Kingdom: the problems of religion and schools in France and the UK, 1980-95

Anne Corbett*

France is famous for being one of the modern world's few secular states. Religion has no place in any public institution, school or other: "La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale".¹ It reaffirms the rights and freedoms of Man and the Citizen consecrated by the *Declaration of Rights* of 1789 and the fundamental principles recognized by the laws of Republic (preamble to the 1946 Constitution, reaffirmed in the Constitution of 1958). Britain, in contrast, integrates the Church and the State in the person of the monarch. The present Queen is, in the formula of the British coinage *F.D. REG. D.F.*: "Queen by the Grace of God and Defender of the Faith." British schools reflect a constitutional situation which is the exact opposite of the French. In the days before the national curriculum existed, there was one compulsory subject on the school timetable: religious education (which should more accurately have been called religious instruction). This continues. Religious education is not part of the national curriculum, but it is obligatory and a model syllabus is provided to schools. The daily act of collective worship remains. As Michel Lemosse (1992) has pointed out, if we are allowed only three words to describe the characteristics of the British school system, one of them must be the word "Christian."

Yet if we think not in terms of dogma, but in terms of the constitutional position accorded to religion/secularity, then there are striking similarities between Britain and France.

Institutionally religion/secularity can be seen as the national unifying ethical principle. The challenge for both nations lies in balancing the democratic imperative of freedom of belief, and respect for difference, with the values which traditionally unite the nation. In addition, in both nations, the traditional unifying ethic has been subjected over the last generation to new hurdle.² The reason is not only a loss of faith, though that is important. As the comparison with France helps us to see, the ethic evolved in response to nation-building events in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Such an ethic now has to face the very different set of challenges of a modern multi-

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¹ Article 2 of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic, 1958.

² I borrow the thought which Alan Ryan develops in terms of the USA. See "Splitting Images," *Times Higher Educational Supplement* (31 March 1994).

ethnic society in which large groups do not share the history and the memory attached to the nation's formation.

In both Britain and France the schools, as institutions of socialisation, are thus in the front line on the issue as to whether, let alone how, they can promote a single ethical culture, in the face of religious difference, and of democratic respect for different identity.

The aim of this paper is to show how the two systems respond ideologically to the questions of religion and schools and why they have developed the way they have. We would not expect to find ideological similarities. There is a well-established tradition of comparative analysis of relations between State and society in Britain and France which shows up their historical and cultural differences (Ashford, Charlot, Hall, Hayward, Kepel, Le Galès and Thatcher, de la Serre and Lesquesne, Wiewiorka, etc.). These are apparent not only in the more conflictual relationships between State and citizen in France, and its legalistic administrative culture. More fundamental is the different concept of citizenship in which France traditionally demands adherence in public life to the values of the Republic — assimilation or insertion — whereas the British tradition has been pluralist, one of accommodation. There is also an immense weight of historical — but modifiable — values, which schools carry with them. Antoine Prost makes the point in the first words of a famous book (1968) where he cites Durkheim :

Lorsqu'on étudie la manière dont se sont formés et développés les systèmes d'éducation, on s'aperçoit qu'ils dépendent de la religion, de l'organisation politique, du degré de développement des sciences, de l'état de l'industrie, etc. Si on les détache de toutes ces causes historiques, ils deviennent incompréhensibles.

In other words you cannot isolate an educational system from the complexity of the society which created it and keeps it in being: 'les institutions scolaires sont des institutions sociales.'³ But common problems there now are, if we broaden the question of religion and schools and look at the contemporary social challenges to ethical values as traditionally formulated in France and Britain. Basically we can echo Patrick Weil and John Crowley in their Anglo-French study on integration (1994) who argue that in terms of policy *issues* "there is abundant Franco-British common ground behind the smoke of ideological battle." That does not stop us observing that for good and ill, there is still plenty of ideology around.

The paper describes the constitutional position in England⁴ and France, in relation to religion and schools, and the major events in France which have marked the development of that unifying ethical idea, including the three major *affaires* under the Mitterrand presidencies.⁵ It concludes with the question as to whether the consensus or, more appropriately the concordat,

³ Prost, p. 7.

⁴ Given that each component country of the UK has its own tradition and its own institutional arrangements, I hope I shall be forgiven for giving only the English example in the interests of clarity and brevity.

⁵ In an attempt to avoid overlap with other papers to the C.R.É.L.A. conference, this paper does not develop the history of the development of religious education and ethical teaching in the four constituent elements of the UK.

on what the French call "the religious wars" and the English "the religious question," has prepared either, or both, for the challenge of a decline in the influence of the Church and the presence of large non-Christian minorities in their midst.

The institutional position

Ideologically and institutionally, Britain and France are, as expected, poles apart, reflecting the different nature of citizenship, and of State-Society relations.

The British position is summed up on the first pages of *Circular 1/94* from the Department for Education (DFE) — as it was then :

All maintained schools must provide religious education and daily collective worship for all registered pupils and promote their spiritual, moral and cultural development. Local agreed RE [religious education] syllabuses [...] must in future reflect the fact that religious traditions in the country are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practice of other principal religions [...].

Collective worship [...] must be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character though not distinctive of any particular Christian denomination.

The parental right of withdrawal from RE and collective worship and the safeguards for teachers are unchanged.

Local bodies advise on RE and collective worship and recommend new RE syllabuses. They represent faith groups, teachers, the LEA and grant-maintained schools.

Information and inspection requirement apply to RE and collective worship.

In other words the British balance freedom of belief with adherence to national values by allowing parents to withdraw their children from RE and the compulsory act of worship. If sufficiently numerous, parents of a non-Christian faith can demand a locally agreed alternative. Since the 1988 Act, every local education authority has been obliged to establish a standing advisory council for religious education (SACRE). One of the standing conferences' duties is to consider applications from head teachers of the non-confessional (county) schools that the normal requirement for collective worship to be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character shall not apply to collective worship for some or all of the pupils at that particular school.

The circular draws on a tradition which dates from the *Education Act, 1944*, in terms of compulsory acts of worship and religious education. But it also reflects the social change brought about by immigration and by a hardening of attitudes by the government of Mrs Thatcher. It believed that insufficient attention was being paid by teachers to "the spiritual, moral and cultural aspects of pupils' development" as required under the *Education Reform Act 1988*. It was particularly concerned for the maintenance of the Christian tradition in schools. Baroness Cox, who led the successful lobby to amend the Act of 1988 to make specific the Christian nature of British society and schools, put the problem in the following forthright terms: "As a nation we are in danger of selling our spiritual birthright for a mess of secular pottage." She abhorred the fact that "many of our children are in schools where they are denied the experience of religious worship at all, and where teaching about Christianity has either been diluted to a multi-faith relativism

or has become little more than a secularised discussion of social and political issues.”

France, in contrast, has gloried in its secular tradition. In the *Education Framework Act* of 1989 which underpins the present French system, there is no reference to Christianity, collective worship, religious education or instruction, local inspiration for syllabuses, or to parental rights to withdraw their children from RE lessons. Suggestions for maintaining the catechism but allowing children to be withdrawn were dispatched in France as long ago as 1881 by Jules Ferry, ‘father’ of the French education system. If the government and institutions of France were secular (*laïc*), he said it was evident that public instruction, “first and most important of public services,” should be secular (*laïc*) too. Ever since the law of 1905 separating Church and State, the constitutional position has been — with the exception of the Vichy period — that, first, the state is secular, and, second, there is respect for freedom of belief provided that, in the immortal words of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen 1789*, “there is no disturbance of public order.” As far as education is concerned, the constitutional priority for publicly supported education is “equality” — that equality before the law which is at the base of citizenship — combined with the transmission of knowledge.

The *Education Framework Law* of July 1989 specifies (article 10) that secondary school pupils should enjoy freedom of information and freedom of expression in the name of respect for pluralism and the neutrality of the State. The circular of 12 december 1989, dealing with teachers’ obligations, underlines that the principle of *laïcité* within schools demands particular care from teachers and others not to make their own views apparent — religious, political or philosophical.

Rien n’est plus vulnérable qu’une conscience d’enfant [...] Guidée par l’esprit de libre examen, elle [l’École publique] a pour devoir de transmettre à l’élève les connaissances et des méthodes lui permettant d’exercer librement ces choix. L’École publique respecte de façon absolue la liberté des consciences des élèves.

Teachers who infringe these rules or cause offence to families are liable to immediate suspension. The circular explicitly forbids teachers and pupils to pressure on others to follow a line of belief, to proselytise or to make propaganda. The minister of the time, Lionel Jospin, ends with a message of support for the teaching profession who see the principles of *laïcité* and neutrality as part of the school’s *mission*: “Ensemble il nous appartient de faire vivre et comprendre l’idéal de la laïcité.”

In the words of an eminent authority, Claude Durand-Prinborgne (1992): “the Ministry of Education neither condemns nor favours any belief or opinion. Its responsibility is to observe three principles: the political and religious neutrality of the administration vis-à-vis the ‘administered’; neutrality in the management of the education system’s personnel and neutrality in the content of teaching.”

For others this is altogether too negative. No democrat could campaign today in the unequivocal spirit of La Chalotais, one of the first theorists of secular education, who wrote in 1760:

I claim for the nation an education which depends upon nothing but the State, because it belongs to it in essence, because the Nation has an

inalienable right to educate its members, because in the end the children of the State must be brought up to be members of the State.⁶

Nor would they campaign publicly in the anti-clerical manner of the ardent Republican Ferdinand Buisson, author of the *Dictionary of Pedagogy and Instruction at Primary Level*. In addressing the Radical congress of 1903 on the lines that “you do not bring up the Republicans in the way you bring up a Catholic” he put the ideal of *laïcité* thus:

To create a Catholic all you have to do is give him the truth in digestible form and tell him to swallow it. The master speaks, the faithful repeat [...] believe and obey, in blind faith and passive obedience [...] (loud applause). To form a Republican you need to take a human being, however small, however humble, a child, an adolescent, a young girl, someone totally uneducated, a worker exhausted by his toil and you give him the idea that he should think for himself, that he owes no one faith or obedience, that it is for him to search out truth and not to get it ready packaged from a master, a director or a boss either temporal or spiritual [...] (more applause).⁷

But Guy Coq, author of *Laïcité et République, le lien nécessaire* (the title is a programme in itself) exemplifies a 1990s version of *laïcité* as a set of positive values, not simply as tolerance or pluralism, but as a belief in principles which create a ‘coherent’ society. He writes in terms of a society in which there is not only freedom of belief, but a ‘free’ society. He recognises the paradox: “You can only have a free society on condition you bring people up to value that freedom.”⁸

The triumph of an idea

The development of what Buisson — less polemically — called “a secular spirit, a secular method and a secular doctrine” took time. It should not be surprising to learn that France took far longer than Britain to reach some kind of consensus on the place of Church and State. In Britain the first acts of toleration (towards Roman Catholics) emerged while the country was still the aristocratic government which followed the 1689 *Bill of Rights*. The extension of freedom of belief and worship to Catholics and later Non-conformists were issues of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as a securely Anglican majority felt gradually able to extend tolerance to the minority beliefs. In France, the anti-clerical battle for separation from the Church and for autonomy was at the base of France’s democratic struggle. Its legacy: a continuing vigilance on the subject of *laïcité*. This needs to be set out here.

In France the commitment of a government to secular education dates from the Revolution. This was primarily a move against the clergy, hitherto dominant. In passing we should note that the Revolution in taking over Jesuit school buildings adopted much of the Jesuit model including its discipline.⁹ As Prost has remarked more generally: “Derrière la querelle de contrôle idéologique de l’institution scolaire, on devine un accord très large sur ses

⁶ Quoted in Hayward, p. 206.

⁷ Quoted in Prost, p. 219.

⁸ Coq, p. 18.

⁹ Several of Paris’ grandest lycées have origins in Jesuit foundations.

finis et ses moyens.” In 1800, most French, however, still “wanted their children brought up in a religious tradition.”¹⁰ Napoleon was to put the teaching of religious precepts among the most important objectives of the primary school and guaranteed the Catholic church a place in the *lycées*. The Restoration monarchy continued the strategy of getting the clergy’s cooperation without ceding the power of the State. An order of 1816 put all primary teaching under the control of the Napoleonic, or Imperial, University while giving the clergy some place in educational administration. But a hard-line attempt in 1822, with a change in regime, to give the clergy the responsibility for all teaching was followed by counter-moves which deprived the Catholic Church of many of its tacit privileges. By the 1830s, the Church’s battle cry became “freedom of conscience for teachers.” The *loi Guizot* of 1831 marked one of the milestones on the long road to some kind of school peace. The clergy’s independence was established, while causing it to lose most of its influence within the University, the curriculum-setting and examination body.

In the 1840s the Catholic Church, though posing as the victim, was on the attack once more decrying the “horrible carnage d’âmes” operated by the University’s teachers on the young. On the other side, Jules Michelet and Edgar Quinet, professors at the *Collège de France*, began to develop the theme which was to have such resonance later. That is, if schooling were to be the national cement, then patriotism was to be the national religion. Hippolyte Carnot’s 1848 bill for compulsory non-religious primary schooling fell however in the backlash to the 1848 revolution which brought Louis Napoleon to power. The future Napoleon III’s ultra-conservative supporters persuaded him that such a system would be in the hands of *instituteurs* dedicated to propagating the dangerous doctrine of socialism instead of submission to the order wished on society by God. The *écoles normales*, the teacher training colleges, were the source of evil. The result was the *loi Falloux* of 1850, another monument of educational history.

Rediscovered in the very different circumstances of the 1990s, with Catholics fighting from a minority position, it is important to realise that at the time the aim of the *loi Falloux* was to extend the inspection rights of the Church over all schools and to allow it to develop its own system. At the same time it was not all what the ultras wished. It did not abolish the hated University. It strengthened the *communes* in their educational responsibilities. It even obliged the *communes* of more than 800 inhabitants to set up a school for girls. But as a compromise it failed. It inspired Victor Hugo to articulate the secular idea in terms which have gone down in French history. If France were to survive it was crucial that the young could be brought up as members of the same family despite the evident differences of faith and dogma. He called for “a place of meditation in which unity and peace shall be taught [...]. That place [...] is the *école laïque*.” As Prost puts it, “the *loi Falloux* marks the moment in which battle is joined between the clergy and the anti-clericals or *laïques*.”

Though the movement in favour of universal education took off during the 1860s (during the period when Victor Duruy, no friend of the Church, was minister of education (1863–1859) giving rise to great anxiety within the

¹⁰ This section draws heavily on Prost.

Catholic hierarchy) it took defeat in the Franco-Prussian war (1870) for “the school war” to flare up again (This was the moment the word *laïcité* was recognised by the lexicographer Littré). The secularly-minded republicans blamed defeat on an educational provision inferior to that of Prussians. They demanded free and compulsory schooling. For the Catholics, in contrast, France was beaten because she was no longer Christian.

It is the foundation of the Third Republic (1880) which marks the birth of the strategy to separate Church and State as a way of reuniting the country and giving the nation stable government. As put by Jules Ferry, the minister and statesman behind the legislation to make education compulsory and secular, secularisation was not necessarily hostile to the Church but rather a sharing out of competences. The most famous of the *lois Ferry* (1881) made primary education secular, free and obligatory. A law of 1882 made schools premises secular — that is to say clergy lost the right to set foot in schools. A law of 1886 required education personnel to respect the secular nature of public schooling. The Catholic hierarchy was unconvinced: how could moral precepts be taught, except through the Church? The effect of the 1886 law was to reinforce the rights accorded to the Church by the *loi Falloux*: it precipitated the creation of a confessional — private — sector. In terms of later developments this was another significant stage. The republicans had effectively won the battle for public schooling to be secular. The Church had the right to set up its own schools.

It would be an error to think that the schools run by the *communes* — the elementary schools of the Republic — were value-free. It was not for nothing that the *instituteurs* were known as the *hussards de la République* — the Republic’s light cavalry — inculcating that sense of patriotism and citizenship so evident in the famous textbook of “Republican values” by G. Bruno: *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants*. In the wake of the Franco-Prussian defeat, inculcating a sense of patriotism was widely agreed to be necessary in moderate Catholic camps too. Prost points out that, in a number of areas of France, the change to secular schooling was initially uncontentious. Either, as in the Loiret, schools became secular without controversy. Or, as in the Doubs, there was a consensus that crucifixes did not have to be immediately taken off the walls. Where there were two school systems, as in Brittany and the Aveyron, the 1880s confrontations were, says Prost, “cold war” style: to each its own rites, its own families. But after 1886, there were significant divisions within the Republican camp. Heralding a 1980s quarrel, they split as to whether secularisation meant a large degree of tolerance for a sector with another set of beliefs, or whether the State should be trying to achieve a monopoly with a single school system. The same Doubs which initially did not bother to take its crucifixes off classroom walls had, by 1905, become strongly anti-clerical. The proponents of the *école unique* held pedagogical conferences on Fridays and put meat on the menu to unmask visceral Catholics.

The French law of 1905 separating the Church and the State was a legislative solution on secular and religious schooling — contemporary with the English 1902 Act which drew back from Church-State confrontation. But that did not mean that the Catholic question was dead and buried. Before the issue burst onto the scene during François Mitterrand’s two presidencies, there were to be major political battles during the 1950s as to whether the

confessional schools should be entitled to public funds, as against the hard line secular position that all schools should be secular. This was the period of the *loi Barangé* (1951), and the *loi Debré* (1959). Not surprisingly, during a period of right wing government, the proponents of the *école unique* were sidelined. The compromise worked out under the *loi Debré* was that confessional schools should indeed be entitled to public funds. But there was quite a *quid pro quo*. Funds would be available to individual schools which demonstrated that they were carrying out a function which was in the public interest: i.e. that they should teach to the national curriculum and should sign a contract to that effect. At the same time the law recognised, somewhat contradictorily, that such schools should keep their *caractère propre*. Hard line Catholics and hard line *laïcs* were opposed to any kind of contract. The first wanted recognition of a Catholic system. The second wanted a single secular system — the *école unique*. The contractual arrangement was the classic middle way.

The Debré solution was in some senses akin to the compromise settlement operated in England and Wales with the Anglican and Catholic churches under the Education Act 1944: a deal between Church and State which recognised the existence of an overtly confessional sector alongside public provision. But ideologically and institutionally the French solution remained very different from the English settlement around *voluntary schools* as either *aided* or *controlled*. They were — which is linguistically confusing — simply the “private schools under contract.” There exists the status of *contrat simple* at primary level by which the teachers are remunerated from public funds though the teachers themselves remain *du droit privé* and *un contrat d’association* — the “normal” situation for Catholic and Jewish schools — by which public funding is used to pay teachers’ salaries and most other maintenance costs. But there was no question in France, back in the 1950s, of a “dual system” in the British manner. The church schools were not even a sector. The State was seen to deal with them individually.

Modern times: 1981–96

British observers tend to be surprised to see the question of secular and religious schooling back on the agenda with the election of François Mitterrand.¹¹ But given the historical background it is easy to see why the proponents of the *école laïque* thought there was still some unfinished business, and why they viewed Mitterrand’s election as a chance to reverse the right wing *loi Debré*. They had Mitterrand’s possibly unreflected commitment to “un grand service public et laïc unifié” (GSPLU), i.e. a single education system (Favier/Martin Rolland). What happened then is familiar. The minister of education, Alain Savary, had been negotiating with the Catholic hierarchy apparently successfully in the period 1981–early 1984 on the basis that the Church should recognise an obligation to work in harmony with public sector schools if it wished to expect public funding. Savary

¹¹ See the British press, including the *Times Educational Supplement*, 1982–83 for coverage of the Savary bill.

argued that this was a way of improving educational provision as a whole, since some of the measures proposed would have led to greater autonomy for all schools. As Savary (1985) himself pointed out this left the Church in an ambiguous position: was its primary aim evangelisation or responding to "consumer demand." But the Savary strategy was not to the taste of those with a traditional view of *laïcité* who refused to support the idea of a public sector ready to co-operate with the Catholics. It also angered many Catholics.

From the end of 1983, positions hardened starting with rallies of the heads of the Catholic establishment on one side, and the secular campaigners of the CNAL on the other. In spring 1984, there were five demonstrations in favour of the private sector (the theme of liberty being stolen from the left) in France's largest provincial towns. In March 1984, there was a rally of 400 000 persons at Versailles for the *école libre*. In June, after the presentation of Savary's proposals to Parliament, there were a million out in the Paris streets. The government resigned. Savary was replaced by Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who concluded a deal which returned the private sector under contract to the position it had under the *loi Debré* (Coq). It was the end of the anti-clerical dream. The left had to resign itself to what in effect was, in the view of Guy Coq — a practising Catholic who supports the public schools — effectively a dual system.

In 1993, by what Coq calls a curious kind of symmetry with the socialists' first years in power, the incoming right wing government of Edouard Balladur also thought it could make a move on religious education to please its supporters. Where the left had tried to institute a totally secular system, Balladur's minister of education, François Bayrou, went back further in the 19th century to resurrect and improve on the *Loi Falloux* which had limited to ten per cent the potential public funding of Catholic schools. Bayrou's aim in early 1993 was to give the private sector under contract potential parity with the public sector schools. It was an attempt to destroy the legitimacy of the Republican secular tradition. It too failed. A public which had not appreciated the possible suppression of Catholic schools in 1984 did not appreciate in 1993 the challenge to the secular base of the public school system.

The third — and less "Franco-French" — issue concerning religion and schools to erupt under the Mitterrand presidencies was that of the Muslim scarves. It was in the autumn of 1989 that the principal of a *collège* in Creil, a dormitory town to the north of Paris, refused to admit to classes three girls who ignored the school's request that they should take off their "scarf" or veil. The principal maintained this was not an anti-Muslim campaign, but part of a continuing effort to persuade the pupils of all faiths, including Jews and Catholics, not to wear signs which identified their religious belief. But within two or three weeks the affair of the Muslim scarves, or veils, or *tchadors*, had become front page news and the subject of at least one debate in the National Assembly, in which the minister of education Lionel Jospin was forced to take stand. In extremis, Jospin called the *Conseil d'État* to pronounce. The "affair of the scarves" was widely compared to the Dreyfus affair in terms of the ideological passions it uncovered — the place of secular education, the place of Islam, the women's rights and not least the identity of France (Beriss). One result was the Council of State judgement leaving the question of apparel relatively ambiguous but focusing on the absolute need to

respect the rules of neutrality: no pressurising, no proselytising, no propaganda. A second was the Jospin circular cited above, encouraging school-based negotiation while remaining firm on the secular principle.

The impact of these cases on French public opinion was very different. The issue of the private sector confessional schools underlined that France had moved on from the turn-of-the-century “war”. Indeed the public regarded the Catholic sector as primarily offering choice, to the point where, as pointed out earlier, the Catholic hierarchy may find itself caught in a trap as to whether its aims are primarily evangelical or whether it sees its most important role as in offering all parents an alternative to the public sector. Once the Muslim issue had hit the headlines, France has been divided into two camps as to whether these girls (and the others who followed) ought to be excluded for infringing secular rules or whether the schools could be relied on to integrate them into Republican values. These may have been welcome news to fundamentalists on both sides, but it has not been to many others. For example, it has brought a step nearer the moment when a government will have to pronounce on why it does not want Muslim schools, an issue which up to now has scarcely figured as a political issue.

But where researchers have been able to investigate the motivations of those concerned we can see the complexity of the issues and the overlap between points of view. In the case of the Catholic schools, a very large proportion of parents had used them at some point during their children’s schooling, far more than accounted by the sixteen per cent of pupils enrolled at any one time. In the case of the scarves it has been shown that the girls who insisted on wearing them were not as presented in headlines apprentice terrorists, or the unwilling victims of fathers and brothers. Among those who spoke to researchers were highly educated girls who used the scarf as a strategy for negotiating their access to the modern world, while still reassuring their families. For others it was to demonstrate a pride in their double identity — French and Muslim, citizen and believer (Gaspard and Khosrokhavar). But the evidence of other researchers (Costa-Lascoux) of a hard line Muslim hostility to Enlightenment philosophy — e.g. refusing to read Voltaire — is however both a new problem and in France an old one, working back to the nineteenth century Church-State “war” as to what the nation wanted of its schools (Corbett and Moon).

Conclusions

What we can say, in conclusion, is all these cases are as much a challenge to unifying ethical tradition in France as parallel cases have been in Britain to government and educational establishment. They do not take the same form as in Britain for historical and cultural reasons. But just as the British are having to reflect on Christianity and multi-faith approaches, so the French are being invited to rethink the secular Republican “universalist” tradition in schools in the light of changing views about Catholicism and the presence of Muslim families. We have quoted advocates of the view that *laïcité* is a modern value (Coq). In opposition is the line that “la République n’éduquera plus” (Nique and Lelièvre). Their argument: that the Ferry settlement was so much a product of its time that it is inappropriate to try and resurrect it today.

A more general question remains to be answered in both Britain and France. If the traditional models are in crisis, can we yet say that we can see the outlines of a new model? This would be the logical outcome of new historical circumstances represented by the decline of the Church as an institution and the existence of multicultural societies. But logic is a scarce commodity when values are at stake. It is not difficult to agree with the principle enunciated by Wieviorka (1996), speaking of integration, that hard-line stances risk strengthening community-based responses. France needs, he suggests, a double democratic strategy. The French need to be more informed about the diversity of their society. They also need to be more determined not to drop the "universal values" but to find a way of reconciling them with the respect for difference:

Ce qui importe c'est que l'horizon des acteurs concernés soit le souci de concilier les valeurs universelles et le respect des particularismes [...] Ce qui est fastidieux peut prendre beaucoup de temps, mobiliser beaucoup d'énergie, mais vaut mieux qu'un universalisme abstrait, incantatoire et répressif ou un communautarisme facteur de haine, de violence ou de négation de la personne.

Interestingly for the argument of this paper something of the same concern about balancing particular cultural identities and a national tradition is being advocated in the US by a leading philosopher. As Ryan summarises Richard Rorty, professor of humanities at the University of Virginia, "the existence of cultural diversity (a brute fact about American society) ought not to get in the way of old-fashioned liberalism nor ought it to dilute a fairly old fashioned American patriotism." In Britain the calls for an "insistent civic culture" are also on the increase (Mount) suggesting the presence of a body of opinion which does not think the problems raised can be resolved by simply modifying RE.

But whether anything will come of this, we have to wait and see. Similar social trends in Britain and France do not necessarily herald similar policy solutions.

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